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Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature

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**Gale Contextual Encyclopedia
of World Literature**

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<i>Alfonsina Storni</i>	1504
<i>August Strindberg</i>	1508
<i>Rosemary Sutcliff</i>	1512
<i>Jonathan Swift</i>	1515
<i>Algernon Charles Swinburne</i>	1518
<i>John Millington Synge</i>	1522
<i>Wisława Szymborska</i>	1526
T-V	
<i>Rabindranath Tagore</i>	1531
<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i>	1535
<i>William Makepeace Thackeray</i>	1539
<i>Dylan Thomas</i>	1543
<i>J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	1546

<i>Leo Tolstoy</i>	1549
<i>Michel Tournier</i>	1553
<i>Georg Trakl</i>	1556
<i>Tomas Tranströmer</i>	1559
<i>Michel Tremblay</i>	1563
<i>Anthony Trollope</i>	1566
<i>Leon Trotsky</i>	1570
<i>Marina Tsvetaeva</i>	1574
<i>Tu Fu</i>	1577
<i>Ivan Turgenev</i>	1580
<i>Amos Tutuola</i>	1583
<i>Tristan Tzara</i>	1587
<i>Miguel de Unamuno</i>	1590
<i>Sigrid Undset</i>	1593
<i>Luisa Valenzuela</i>	1597
<i>Paul Valéry</i>	1600
<i>W. D. Valgardson</i>	1603
<i>César Vallejo</i>	1606
<i>Mario Vargas Llosa</i>	1610
<i>Vergil</i>	1613
<i>Paul Verlaine</i>	1616
<i>Jules Verne</i>	1620
<i>Alfred de Vigny</i>	1624
<i>Elio Vittorini</i>	1627
<i>Voltaire</i>	1630
<i>Andrei Voznesensky</i>	1634
W-Z	
<i>Derek Walcott</i>	1637
<i>Edmund Waller</i>	1641
<i>Hugh Walpole</i>	1644
<i>Evelyn Waugh</i>	1648
<i>John Webster</i>	1651
<i>Simone Weil</i>	1654
<i>H. G. Wells</i>	1658
<i>Rebecca West</i>	1662
<i>Patrick White</i>	1665

<i>Elie Wiesel</i>	1669
<i>James Alfred Wight</i>	1672
<i>Oscar Wilde</i>	1672
<i>Charles Williams</i>	1677
<i>Emlyn Williams</i>	1680
<i>Raymond Williams</i>	1684
<i>Angus Wilson</i>	1688
<i>Colin Wilson</i>	1691
<i>Jeanette Winterson</i>	1694
<i>P. G. Wodehouse</i>	1697
<i>Virginia Woolf</i>	1701
<i>William Wordsworth</i>	1705
<i>Judith Wright</i>	1708
<i>William Wycherley</i>	1711
<i>Gao Xingjian</i>	1714
<i>Lu Xun</i>	1718
<i>Koizumi Yakumo</i>	1721
<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	1722
<i>A. B. Yehoshua</i>	1725
<i>Yevgeny Yevtushenko</i>	1729
<i>Charlotte Yonge</i>	1732
<i>Marguerite Yourcenar</i>	1735
<i>Tao Yuanming</i>	1739
<i>Émile Zola</i>	1739
<i>Mikhail Zoshchenko</i>	1742
Glossary of Literary Terms	xxvii
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Introduction

How to Use This Book

The *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature* is a resource for students who seek information beyond the simple biographical details of an author's life or a brief overview of the author's major works. This book is designed to offer a comprehensive view of how an author's work fits within the context of the author's life, historical events, and the literary world. This allows for a greater understanding of both the author's work and the cultural and historical environment in which it was created.

The *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature* is divided into entries, each focused on a particular writer who has made significant contributions to world literature. In some cases, these individuals may be known primarily for contributions outside the realm of literature. Karl Marx and Mohandas Gandhi, for example, are two figures famous for their political activism; in another realm, Jean Cocteau and Pier Paolo Pasolini are two writers better known in modern times for their groundbreaking work in film. However, all of these figures have, aside from their other accomplishments, created significant works of literature that have stood the test of time and affected readers beyond the borders of their own cultures.

This book is best used not just to locate the facts of a writer's life and work, but as a way to understand the social, literary, and historical environment in which the writer lived and created. By understanding the context of the writer's work, you are more likely to recognize key themes and stylistic traits as elements of larger trends in the literary world, as well as understand the impact of historical events from a new and unique perspective.

Sections Found within Each Entry in This Book

Each entry in this book is divided into three main parts: Works in Biographical and Historical Context; Works in Literary Context; and Works in Critical Context. These sections are discussed below.

In addition, each entry includes: a Key Facts section, containing birth/death date information as well as a list of major works; a Responses to Literature section, containing discussion and writing activities related to the author in question; a Further Reading

section that includes bibliographic citations as well as reputable sources of additional material about the author in the form of books, periodicals, or Web sites; a Literary and Historical Contemporaries sidebar, listing several famous contemporaries of the author; and a Common Human Experience sidebar, offering examples of other literary or artistic works that share themes or techniques with those by the subject of the entry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context In this section, you will find information about how events and concerns in the author's life helped to shape the author's work. For example, Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's experiences in a Soviet labor camp led him to write *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), while his experiences battling cancer inspired his novel *Cancer Ward* (1968). This section also includes information on historical events or trends that had an effect on the author. For example, the scientific and technological advancements of the nineteenth century greatly influenced the subject matter of the works of Jules Verne, which primarily focused on "fanciful" scientific achievements such as a journey to the moon.

Works in Literary Context In this section, you will find information about how the author's work fits within the context of the body of literature as a whole. This may include a description of a stylistic trait exhibited in the author's writing; for example, the literary technique known as "stream of consciousness" is a defining characteristic of much of the fiction of Virginia Woolf, and information on the technique—as well as examples of how the author used it—can be found in her entry. This section may also include a discussion of the writer's work as it exists within a specific genre, such as Gothic fiction or Surrealist poetry. Finally, the Works in Literary Context section may contain information of specific themes commonly found in the author's work. The writings of Aimé Césaire, for example, frequently address the theme of race relations in colonial regions.

Works in Critical Context In this section, you will find a survey of critical and popular opinion related to the author and the author's most important works. The emphasis is on contemporary opinions, or those formed by readers and critics at the time the author's work was first published. In some cases, critical or popular opinion from the time of publication may not be available; this may be due to the passage of time, as with some ancient Greek and Roman authors, or due to the writer's lack of fame during his or her own lifetime. This section also includes information on how critical or popular opinion on an author has changed over time. Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, for example, have been taken to task by some modern critics for their depictions of race in their most highly regarded works. Some authors popular during their own time, such as Samuel Richardson, have fallen from favor among modern readers, while others virtually unknown during their lifetimes have become part of the classic literary canon.

Other Information Contained in This Book

In addition to the entries for individual authors, this book also contains a chronology that indicates some major historical events related to the development of world literature. At the end of the book, you will find a glossary of terms—primarily literary and historical in nature—that are used in various entries throughout the book, along with a brief explanation of each term.

Advisory Board

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Chronology

This chronology contains a brief overview of some of the major events in the history of world literature. This includes the development of technologies and tools that advanced the writing and publishing process, as well as some significant historical events that had an impact on the development of literature.

2100 BCE–499 CE

c. 2100 BCE

The earliest existing fragments of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, widely recognized as the first epic documented in written form, are recorded on clay tablets by ancient Sumerians.

c. 1600 BCE

The first known example of a literary story documented on papyrus, a durable paper-like material made from the fibrous stem of the papyrus plant, is written by ancient Egyptians.

c. 1050 BCE

The Phoenician alphabet, the first widely used alphabetic writing system in the world, is developed from older scripts that included Egyptian hieroglyphics.

c. 850 BCE

Homer, credited as the author of the first ancient Greek epics in written form, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is believed to have lived.

472 BCE

Aeschylus's play *The Persians*, the oldest surviving example of an ancient Greek tragedy, was first performed.

425 BCE

The Acharnians, a play by Aristophanes and the oldest surviving example of ancient Greek comedy, is first performed.

c. 190 BCE

The production of parchment, a writing surface derived from animal skin, is refined into an easily produced method in the ancient Greek city of Pergamum, effectively ending the dominance of papyrus.

c. 300 CE

Kâlidâsa, Indian playwright and one of the foremost literary figures of the Sanskrit language, is believed to have lived.

397 CE

Augustine of Hippo, a North African bishop, begins publication of his *Confessions*, generally regarded as the first autobiography and the first example of confessional literature.

500–1499

c. 794

The first paper mill begins operation in Baghdad, in modern-day Iraq. Over the course of several centuries, wood pulp-based paper replaces parchment as the dominant writing surface throughout the world.

868

The *Diamond Sutra* is published in China; printed using woodblock printing methods, this publication is the oldest known printed book in existence.

1021

The Tale of Genji, a Japanese work attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, is published. The work becomes a landmark in Japanese literature

and is often cited as one of the earliest books to resemble the modern novel.

- 1048 Omar Khayyam, a Persian mathematician and poet, is born. His poetic works are later collected—along with some works of suspect attribution—in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a key work of Persian literature.
- c. 1220 Snorri Sturluson creates the first comprehensive written collection of Norse mythology with the completion of the *Prose Edda*.
- 1265 Italian poet Dante Alighieri, creator of the epic known as *The Divine Comedy*, is born.
- 1439 German metalworker Johann Gutenberg creates the first functional printing press, resulting in the ability to mass-produce copies of literature easily and cheaply instead of by hand.

1500–1799

- 1558 Queen Elizabeth I assumes the throne of England, marking the beginning of the Elizabethan Age, a period of forty-five years during which significant advancements in English poetry and drama occurred.
- 1564 William Shakespeare, generally acknowledged by modern readers as the greatest dramatist in the history of the English language, is born.
- 1605 The first volume of *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes is published. Written in Spanish, *Don Quixote* is widely considered to be the first modern novel.
- 1649 The Puritan-led British Commonwealth Parliament, in control after the overthrow of the British monarchy, bans theatrical productions throughout England due to the purported indecency of dramatic works. The ban would last until 1680, and would be followed by an explosion of theatrical development during the period known as the Restoration.
- 1719 *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe is published; this book is often regarded as the first true novel of the English language.
- 1798 *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, a poetic collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is pub-

lished, marking for many the beginning of the Romantic movement in English literature.

1800–Today

- 1856 Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* is published in serial form, leading to an obscenity trial over its contents. *Madame Bovary* is considered by many to be the key work that launched the Realism movement in literature.
- 1857 Novelist Charles Dickens founds *All the Year Round*, one of many inexpensive British serial magazines that make literature available to virtually all levels of social class; *All the Year Round* subsequently features the first publication of the Dickens novels *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.
- 1873 Production begins on the first commercially successful typewriter by E. Remington and Sons, which will allow writers to produce work substantially more quickly and more neatly than writing by hand.
- 1922 James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" are both published, defining for many the Modernist literary movement.
- 1924 André Breton publishes his *Surrealist Manifesto*, launching an avant-garde literary and artistic movement characterized by a celebration of the irrational.
- 1932 Joseph Stalin, dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union, decrees that socialist realism—an artistic style in which the working class and government leaders are praised—is the only government-approved art style. Writers and artists who create controversial works are censored and placed into labor camps; a secret distribution system known as *samizdat* is created to preserve and share censored works among dissenting intellectuals.
- 1950 Eugène Ionesco's play *The Bald Soprano* debuts in Paris, launching the theatrical movement known as Theater of the Absurd.
- 1992 The World Wide Web, an interlinking structure designed by Sir Tim Berners-Lee for viewing cross-referenced multimedia documents from any location through data transfer, is officially released.

A

🗨️ Kobo Abe

BORN: 1924, Tokyo

DIED: 1993, Tokyo

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Woman in the Dunes (1962)

The Face of Another (1964)

The Ruined Map (1973)

The Ark Sakura (1984)

Overview

An important figure in contemporary Japanese literature, Kobo Abe attracted an international audience for novels exploring the alienation and loss of identity experienced by many in Japanese society after World War II. Abe's novels, plays, and screenplays drew from developments in Western avant-garde literature rather than from Japanese sources. His work was successful abroad and often translated into English and other languages. His fiction is rich in allegory and metaphysical implications, employing an intriguing combination of detailed realism and bizarre, nightmarish fantasy. He was also a noted theater director and photographer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood in Manchuria

Kimifusa Abe was born in Tokyo, Japan, on March 7, 1924. When he was an infant, his father took the family to Manchuria, in northern China, where he served as a doctor in the city of Mukden. Japan captured Manchuria in 1931, going on to attack mainland China in 1937. Growing up in a foreign country occupied by Japanese forces gave Abe a certain ambivalence about his Japanese identity. Displaced from his home country, disgusted by

militant nationalism and by the conduct of the occupying army, he changed his name from Kimifusa to Kobo, a more Chinese-sounding rendering. He had already discovered the sense of alienation that would pervade his creative work.

Postwar Japan As a young man, Abe attended a private high school in Tokyo. He was a voracious reader, preferring works by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Jaspers and literature by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, and Franz Kafka. In 1943, at the height of World War II and following his parents' insistence, Abe entered the medical school at Tokyo University. Yet he took no pleasure in preparing for a medical career; the stress was so intense that at one point he checked himself into a mental hospital. Abe began to experiment in writing poetry and fiction as the war was ending. His first novel, *The Road Sign at the End of the Road*, was published in 1948, the same year he earned his MD degree. Encouraged by his literary success, he never practiced medicine. Some critics believe Abe's scientific studies may have developed his abilities to describe situations, and even emotions, with detached precision.

In the troubled years following Japan's military defeat in World War II, Abe joined a group of avant-garde writers and intellectuals attempting to reassert humanistic values through art. Under the influence of Hanada Kiyoteru, Abe became interested in European surrealism and Marxism and how to combine them. He soon became known for his fiction. He won prizes for his short story "Red Cocoon" (1950) and his novel *The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma* (1951). The latter work typifies Abe's thematic obsessions; its narrator loses the ability to communicate with other people. His popularity grew quickly.

Abe was the first major Japanese writer to present avant-garde narratives of urban alienation, in keeping with Japan's rapid postwar urbanization. Some traditional Japanese artists remained committed to a more pastoral vision of the nation, which had largely disappeared by the early 1950s, when the American occupation ended. The



Kobo Abe Abe, Kobo, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic weapons also hovered over postwar Japanese culture. Apocalyptic fears drive the absurdist plot of *Inter Ice Age Four* (1959), a science fiction novel set in a futuristic Japan threatened by melting polar ice caps.

Lost Identities Abe garnered international acclaim for *The Woman in the Dunes* (1962). Both as a novel and as a 1965 film by the celebrated director Hiroshi Teshigahara, a hit at the Cannes Film Festival, this work remains one of the most widely appreciated pieces from postwar Japan. The Kafkaesque novel relates the nightmarish experiences of a teacher and amateur entomologist, Niki Jumpei, who is enslaved by a group of people living beneath a huge sand dune, including one fascinating widow who is determined to keep him with her. At first, Jumpei seeks to regain his freedom, but he gradually finds meaning in his new circumstances and rejects an opportunity to escape. The shifting sands that constantly endanger this community constitute a metaphor expressing Abe's sense of the puzzle of human existence.

The Woman in the Dunes fully explores a central theme of Abe's fiction: the obliteration of identity. The theme recurs in his next three novels. *The Face of Another* (1964) uses motifs from detective fiction to tell the story of a man who wears a mask to cover disfiguring scars. In

his new guise, the protagonist, who seems to lose his identity, manages to seduce his own wife. *The Ruined Map* (1967) carries the detective genre to an outrageous conclusion: the hunter and the hunted merge as a detective who gradually assumes the identity of the man he has been hired to locate. Teshigahara directed films of both stories from screen adaptations by Abe.

Like *Woman in the Dunes*, *The Box Man* (1973) advances a narrative through a striking metaphor. The narrator of this work casts off his ordinary, middle-class existence to live in a cardboard box, which he equips with enough items to sustain his daily life. Free from the constraints of society, the narrator invents his own idyllic life.

Visual Theater Kobo Abe was also a notable playwright. His early stage works showed the influence of Marxism and existentialism. His most successful work for the theater, *Friends* (1967), critiques Japanese communal values, which Abe sees as stifling individual creativity. The "family" that invades the apartment of the hapless protagonist manages to take over and eradicate him over the course of the play. In 1973 Abe began his own theater group, the Kobo Abe Studio, which produced many of his best-known dramas. His wife, artist Machi Abe, prepared many of the stage designs for these plays. Many of these productions emphasized movement rather than dialogue, as Abe attempted to create a theatrical style to express surrealistic images visually.

Abe's novel *Secret Rendezvous* (1977) emphasizes setting—a cavernous hospital—rather than character. Searching for his wife at the facility, a shoe salesman discovers that the hospital is run by an assortment of psychopaths, sexual deviants, and grotesque beasts. The novel presents the reader with a puzzle, but no solution. Abe took seven years to write *The Ark Sakura* (1984), a farcical version of the story of Noah's ark. Mole, the protagonist, has decided to load a few people into an ark, for protection from an impending nuclear holocaust. His vision of a postapocalyptic society inside the ark is thwarted by three confidence men he has enlisted as crew members and by the invasion of street gangs and cantankerous elderly people. Abe's dark humor conveys troubling ideas about nuclear war, old age, and those on the margins of society. Abe died of heart failure on January 22, 1993, in a Tokyo hospital.

Works in Literary Context

Because of his alienation from Japanese culture, Kobo Abe remained aloof from classical Japanese literature. His work is far removed from the aesthetic vision and strategies of older Japanese writers such as Kawabata Yasunari, or of traditional cultural forms such as Noh theater. Instead, his literary influences are primarily Western. Among them are Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Poe, and Lewis Carroll. Abe recalls reciting the stories of Poe, one of his earliest inspirations, to his high school classmates in

Manchuria. When he ran out of Poe stories, he began making up his own.

Objective Style The objectivity of Abe's style resembles that of other writers who were also trained in medicine, such as Russian playwright Anton Chekhov or the Japanese Meiji writer Mori Ogai. Although their works read quite differently and are composed with vastly different aims, these writers resemble each other in the cool dissection of their perspectives. William Currie, in *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel*, finds Abe's stress on concrete and specific details to be a culturally Japanese trait.

Urban Loneliness Despite the obvious differences of tone and design among Abe's novels—from science fiction to detective stories to biblical allegory—they all display his consistent thematic concerns of alienation and loss of identity. In addition, they all betray the author's concern with the impersonal, isolating features of the urban landscape. In a 1973 interview, Abe claimed that loneliness, although a universal phenomenon, "is a new theme for the Japanese. The reason is that the concept of loneliness appeared in the urban mode of life." Abe perceived, and loathed, the growth of futuristic megacities; his Japan is an urban, not a rural, nation, and his cities are futuristic, claustrophobic, and labyrinthine.

Ambassador to the Absurd During his lifetime, Abe was the foremost Japanese exponent of avant-garde, absurdist literature. With the development of another generation of Japanese writers such as Haruki Murakami, whose vision of contemporary life bears similarities to Abe's view of the human condition, Abe's work may foretell a broad new Japanese sensibility.

Works in Critical Context

Kobo Abe achieved critical and popular success fairly early in his career; *Woman in the Dunes*, the novel and film, brought him to worldwide attention. Several of his novels were translated into English in the 1960s. Although some of his books earned better reviews than others, Abe remained perhaps the most "translatable" Japanese writer of his generation.

Japanese and Overseas Reception Abe's critical reception, both in Japan and abroad, has sometimes been ambiguous. For some Japanese readers, Abe sheds too much of the Japanese literary tradition and no longer seems to mirror their perceptions of their culture. Abe himself, who proclaimed his lack of strong ties to his home country, seemed to support this notion. His work shares this unattached vision with that of many other postwar writers around the world, such as Samuel Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Abe expresses a strong conviction that the parochial is irrelevant as modern culture develops. The universality of his concerns, and the absence of notably Japanese cultural markers in his writing, may be the key to his international reputation, in the opinion of critics such as Hisaaki Yamanouchi, author of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Abe's famous contemporaries include:

Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998): Japanese filmmaker; his films *The Seven Samurai* and *Rashomon* are among the most famous works of world cinema.

Tadeusz Rozewicz (1921–): Polish poet and dramatist whose works defy literary conventions.

Truman Capote (1924–1984): American author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood*.

Yukio Mishima (1925–1970): Japanese author and playwright who committed ritual suicide in a political stunt.

Harold Pinter (1930–): British playwright whose works were produced by Kobo Abe Studio; Pinter won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005.

Kenzaburo Oe (1935–): Japanese novelist influenced by existentialism and concerned with social justice; Oe won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994.

The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature. On the other hand, some Western critics, seeking some special Japanese quality in works they read in translation, come away disappointed with reading Abe's work.

The Woman in the Dunes When *The Woman in the Dunes* was first published in English, it was recognized as unique if not entirely successful. Stanley Kauffmann, writing for the *New York Review of Books*, stated that because of the book's structure, "Unless the author is able to keep us concentrated on the present moment with interest of character and richness of texture, we become impatient. This is too often true of Abe's book." Writing for *Saturday Review*, Earl Miner agreed that the book requires a delicate balance to work, but noted that "the tone and meaning are well sustained." Armando Martins Janiera, in his *Japanese and Western Literature*, called it "a novel of exceptional force."

Responses to Literature

1. Explore Abe's vision of the city; how does he use urban settings to reinforce a message or convey a mood?
2. Several of Abe's works center on a startling image, such as the cardboard box that becomes the home of the Box Man. Write an extended analysis of a single image from one of Abe's prose works and its meaning.
3. Some critics contend that Abe's writing is intentionally universal, rather than embedded in a specific

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Woman in the Dunes, *The Box Man*, and other works by Kobo Abe exemplify the mind-bending possibilities of the absurdist genre, a mixture of satire, shock, and surrealism. Here are some other great works of literary absurdity:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a children's book by Lewis Carroll. Alice falls down the rabbit hole into hilarious adventures that make this an enduring landmark of nonsense literature: "Curiouser and curiouser!"

"The Metamorphosis" (1912), a short story by Franz Kafka. The classic work of absurdist fiction that begins: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin."

Catch-22 (1961), a novel by Joseph Heller. This black comedy, ranked as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century, provides a blistering satire of the insanity of military and bureaucratic logic.

Bus Stop (1983), a play by Gao Xingjian. A group of people waits for a bus—for years—in this absurdist play by the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1998), a novel by Haruki Murakami. The protagonist of this novel loses his cat, his job, and his wife; to find them, he must delve into the modern soul of Japan and the legacy of its conquest of Manchuria. Written by the leading Japanese novelist of the generation after Abe.

culture. What do you think is notably Japanese about his work?

4. Alienation is a major theme in Abe's work and a major theme of twentieth-century literature in general. Use Abe's writing as a source for constructing a detailed interpretation of what "alienation" means.

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Chinua Achebe

BORN: 1930, Ogidi, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian, African

GENRE: Novels, poetry, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Things Fall Apart (1958)

No Longer at Ease (1960)

Arrow of God (1964)

A Man of the People (1966)

Anthills of the Savannah (1987)

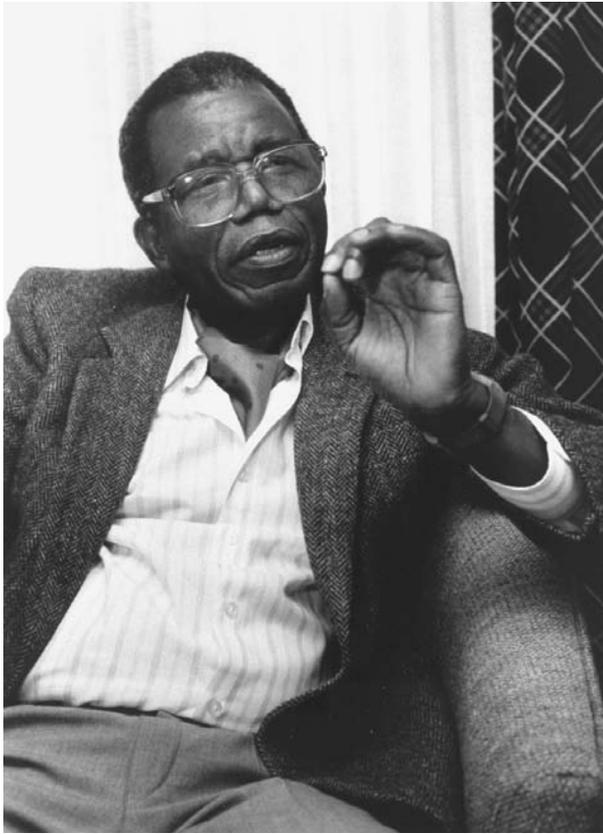
Overview

Chinua Achebe, whose work has been published in some fifty languages, is among the founders of contemporary Nigerian literature. Achebe, an ethnic Igbo, writes in English, but alters it to reflect native Nigerian languages. He does this to develop an appreciation for African culture in those unfamiliar with it. Although he has also written poetry, short stories, and essays—both literary and political—Achebe is best known for his novels, in which he offers a close and balanced examination of contemporary Africa and the historical forces that have shaped it.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in a Colony Pushing for Its Independence

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born on November 16, 1930, in the village of Ogidi in eastern Nigeria to Janet Iloegbunam Achebe and Isaiah Okafor Achebe. At the time, Nigeria was a British colony, and Western educational and economic models dominated. Achebe's father taught religion for the Church Missionary Society. Chinua Achebe was eight when he began to learn English and fourteen when he went to the Government College at Umuahia in



Chinua Achebe *Achebe, Chinua, 1988, photograph. AP Images.*

southeastern Nigeria, considered one of the best schools in West Africa. He enrolled in 1948 at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, intending to study medicine, but soon switched to English literary studies. Achebe rejected the British name “Albert” and took his indigenous name “Chinua” in 1948, a time of growing Nigerian nationalism and increased pressure on Great Britain to grant the colony independence. He contributed stories, essays, and sketches to the *University Herald*, which were later published in *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972).

After graduating, Achebe taught for a year and then began a twelve-year career as a producer for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1957, he went to London to attend the British Broadcasting Corporation Staff School. One of his teachers there was the British novelist and literary critic Gilbert Phelps, who recommended *Things Fall Apart* for publication.

Achebe was appointed director of the Voice of Nigeria (external broadcasting) by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1961. That same year, on September 10, he married Christie Chinwe Okoli. They would have four children.

Nigerian Literary Renaissance *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is an account of colonial history from the point of

view of the colonized rather than the colonizer: The perspective is African instead of Eurocentric, something highly unusual in English-language literature. The novel explores the philosophical principles of an African community, which is self-governing at the outset of the story.

The novel was published early in the Nigerian literary renaissance, two years before Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. The timing of the novel’s release helped ensure its success: While Nigerians looked forward with excitement and optimism to the political freedom they would attain after more than a half century of British colonial rule, Achebe understood the need to show his countrymen the strength of their own cultures to assist in the task of nation building, a strength greatly diminished by the imposition of an alien culture.

Achebe’s second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), is set in modern Nigeria in the days immediately before independence from British colonial rule. It reveals the changes to Nigerian society that result from foreign intervention—the extent to which things have fallen apart. The main character’s experiences testify to the oppressive weight of doubt, guilt, and regret that the colonial experience has created.

Achebe returns to the past in *Arrow of God* (1964). He evokes a world rich in the complexities of daily domestic, social, political, and religious living further complicated by the now-institutionalized religious and political rules that the colonial force had introduced into Igbo society. The novel is a meditation on the nature and uses of power, and on the responsibility of the person who wields it.

Although the consequences of the loss of predictable political power at the village level can bring personal tragedy, at the national level the consequences are more widespread and longer lasting. It is to this latter reality that Achebe turns in his fourth novel, *A Man of the People* (1966), which is set in the postcolonial period in an independent African country. The governance of the country is, nominally, in the hands of the people, and it is the quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership that concern Achebe.

Nigerian Civil War and Politics Publication of *A Man of the People* coincided almost exactly with the first military coup d’état in Nigeria, sparked by ethnic tensions between differing populations in the southern and northern parts of Nigeria. The worsening political situation led to the persecution of the Igbo people, which resulted in a series of massacres. Achebe resigned from his job with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation after these acts of violence and returned to his homeland.

The Eastern Region declared itself an independent state, called Biafra, in 1967, shortly after a thirty-month civil war began. Throughout the war Achebe traveled widely on Biafran affairs to Europe and North America. There was neither time nor inclination to write long fiction during this period. Rather, Achebe produced most of the poems in the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Achebe's famous contemporaries include:

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o** (1938–): Kenyan novelist who argues that African writers should write in their native languages, not English, in order to rebuild the African literary tradition.
- Vaclav Havel** (1936–): Czech playwright who helped lead the Velvet Revolution that ended communism in Czechoslovakia; elected the first president of the Czech Republic (1989).
- V. S. Naipaul** (1932–): British novelist and travel writer of Indian and Trinidadian descent, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (2001), and knighted by Queen Elizabeth II (1990).
- Kofi Atta Annan** (1938–): Ghanaian diplomat and seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations; co-recipient (with the United Nations) of the Nobel Peace Prize (2001).
- Bernard Kouchner** (1939–): French physician who cofounded Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Biafra during its brief independence.
- Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf** (1938–): President of Liberia; the first elected female head of state in Africa.

volume *Beware, Soul Brother, and Other Poems* (1971; later revised, enlarged, and republished in the United States as *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems*, 1973).

Thirteen of Achebe's short stories, collected as *Girls at War and Other Stories*, were published in 1972. In 1975 Achebe published a volume of fifteen essays, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, written between 1962 and 1973, on various literary and political subjects.

In 1983, in the face of an impending federal election, he published *The Trouble with Nigeria*. The final chapter, "The Example of Aminu Kano," comments on the qualities of the ideal leader for Nigeria in Achebe's view, and praises Muslim politician Aminu Kano. Kano died before the election, and Achebe was asked to become a presidential candidate. Instead he became the deputy national president, an honorary title. Before the election was held, however, the military intervened, resulting in a coup. It has been suggested that Achebe's words in part prompted this action.

In 1986 Achebe was awarded the Nigerian National Merit Award for the second time. In his acceptance speech he acknowledged that literature is central in the quest to achieve the goal of creating a modern Nigeria.

Later Work Emphasizing West African Traditions Achebe confirmed his place as the leading African

novelist with the publication of *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). One of Achebe's primary interests in the novel is the way in which Nigeria's oral tradition, devalued by European colonizers and considered inferior to the tradition of written literature in Europe, is withering. This novel is set in the fictional West African country of Kangan, which resembles Nigeria. Achebe aims at reclaiming the art of storytelling in a society in which oral wisdom is in danger of dying out because of the increasing development of modern technocratic society. The communal and public act of storytelling also is yielding to the private form of the printed word. *Anthills of the Savannah* reveals that the two distinct forms of communication can meet and assist in closing the gap between the educated and the uneducated, so that the story is capable of fulfilling its traditional role. In this way, Achebe seems to be suggesting that Nigeria can make economic and social progress in the modern world without abandoning its cultural heritage in favor of European models. *Anthills of the Savannah* was well received and earned Achebe a nomination for the prestigious Booker Prize.

Achebe's next book, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965–1987* (1988), essays and speeches written over a period of twenty-three years, is perceived in many ways to be a logical extension of ideas in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In this collection, however, he is not addressing the way Africans view themselves, but rather how Africa is viewed by the outside world. The central theme is the destructive impact of racism that is inherent to Western traditional attitudes regarding Africa.

Still Writing and Working Despite Injury In 1990, only weeks after attending a celebration for his sixtieth birthday, Achebe was paralyzed in an accident in Nigeria. Despite this, he has continued to publish, teach, and appear in public. He moved to the United States for therapy and has lived there, "a reluctant refugee," according to Oluwole Adujare in an *African News Service* review, during a dark time of Nigerian dictatorship.

At Achebe's seventieth birthday celebration at Bard College, Wole Soyinka commented that "Achebe never hesitates to lay blame for the woes of the African continent squarely where it belongs." In 2007 he was awarded the Man Booker International Prize for fiction.

Works in Literary Context

Africa, as an exotic place filled with "unknowable" people, has figured prominently in European literature and in the European imagination. Achebe has distinguished himself as a writer by presenting Africa from an African perspective and by pointing out the ways in which European cultural prejudices have affected not only the way Africa and Africans have been portrayed in literature and popular culture, but how Africa and Africans have been treated by imperial powers.

The Decision to Write in English In order to recognize the virtues of precolonial Nigeria, chronicle the

ongoing impact of colonialism on native cultures, and expose present-day corruption, Achebe had to clearly communicate these concerns first to his fellow countrymen but also to those outside his country. Instead of writing in his native language, Achebe judged the best channel for these messages to be English, the language of colonialism. He did so because he wished to repossess the power of description from those, like Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and H. Rider Haggard, who had, as he said, secured “an absolute power over narrative” that cast Africans as beasts, savages, and idiots. Achebe views the English language not as an enemy, “but as a tool.”

Reclaiming the Oral Tradition Since the 1950s, Nigeria has witnessed “the flourishing of a new literature which has drawn sustenance both from traditional oral literature and from the present and rapidly changing society,” writes Margaret Laurence. As she maintains, “Chinua Achebe’s careful and confident craftsmanship, his firm grasp of his material and his ability to create memorable and living characters place him among the best novelists now writing in any country in the English language.”

“Proverbs are cherished by Achebe’s people as . . . the treasure boxes of their cultural heritage,” explains Adrian A. Roscoe. “When they disappear or fall into disuse . . . it is a sign that a particular tradition, or indeed a whole way of life, is passing away.” Achebe’s use of proverbs also has an artistic aim, as Bernth Lindfors suggests. “Proverbs can serve as keys to an understanding of his novels because he uses them not merely to add touches of local color but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflict, and to focus on the values of the society.”

Works in Critical Context

Achebe’s five novels to date follow some one hundred years of Igbo civilization. Europeans have not yet penetrated Umuofia, the setting of the first novel, when it begins. Over the course of the novels, colonial rule is established, significant change takes place, and the character of the community—its values and freedoms—are substantially and irrevocably altered. They therefore form an imaginative history of a segment of a major group of people in what eventually became Nigeria, as seen from the perspective of a Christian Igboman.

Anthony Daniels wrote of Achebe’s novels in the *Spectator*, “In spare prose of great elegance, without any technical distraction, he has been able to illuminate two emotionally irreconcilable facets of modern African life: the humiliations visited on Africans by colonialism, and the . . . worthlessness of what replaced colonial rule.” Set in this historical context, the novels develop the theme of what happens to a society when change outside distorts and blocks the natural change from within and offer, as Eustace Palmer observed, “a powerful presentation of the beauty, strength, and validity of traditional life and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The diversity found on the planet Earth is truly astounding and comprises a vast array of unique traditions, languages, customs, and beliefs. While this diversity can be an endless opportunity for learning and tolerance, it is often the seed of mistrust, discrimination, and hatred. Here are some titles that deal with oppression and prejudice.

Dia’s Story Cloth (1992), by Dia Cha. Memoir of growing up in a Hmong family that struggles to maintain ties to their culture once they are removed from Cambodia, their native land.

Shame (1997), by Tasalina Nasarina. This novel examines the consequences of Muslim retaliation to the destruction of a mosque in Ayodhya, India, by Hindu extremists in 1992.

Once Were Warriors (1990), by Alan Duff. The Hekes are a modern-day Maori family living in a slum in Auckland, New Zealand. They are torn between their native culture and the Pakeha (white) world in which they are forced to live.

Le Père Goriot (Father Goriot) (1834), by Honoré de Balzac. Set in the new middle-class industrial life of France following the Napoleonic Wars, a brutal climate of early capitalism pervades society; money and power are everything, and love is merely a means to an end.

A Bend in the River (1979), by V. S. Naipaul. In this novel about a Muslim Indian trader in early postcolonial Zaire, the clash of cultures, mistrust, and anxiety are clear signs of Africa’s colonial past.

Pilgrims in Aztlán (1974), by Miguel Méndez. Written in Spanish, in a style that reflects the author’s native Mexican oral tradition, the stories in this complex and dense novel speak out for the growing silences in his traditions.

values and the disruptiveness of change.” Even as he resists the rootless visions of postmodernist globalization, Achebe does not appeal for a return to the ways of the past.

Things Fall Apart “In 1964 . . . *Things Fall Apart* became the first novel by an African writer to be included in the required syllabus for African secondary school students throughout the English-speaking portions of the continent,” writes Charles R. Larson. Later in the 1960s, the novel “became recognized by African and non-African literary critics as the first ‘classic’ in English from tropical Africa,” he adds.

Ghanaian writer and critic Kofi Awoonor writes: “Achebe’s thematic construction and dramatisation of the conflict in *Things Fall Apart* utilises the ‘chi’ concept—‘chi’ being the dominating ambiguous force in the life of an

individual. The structure of the novel is firmly based in the principles that are derived from this piece of Igbo ontological evidence. Okonkwo's life and actions seem to be prescribed by those immutable laws inherent in the 'chi' concept. It is the one significant principle that determines the rhythm and tragic grandeur of the novel. Okonkwo's rise and fall are seen in the significant way in which he challenges his 'chi' to battle."

Arrow of God The artistry displayed in *Arrow of God* has drawn a great deal of attention, adding to the esteem in which Achebe is held. Charles Miller commented that Achebe's "approach to the written word is completely unencumbered with verbiage. He never strives for the exalted phrase, he never once raises his voice; even in the most emotion-charged passages the tone is absolutely unruffled, the control impeccable." He concludes, "It is a measure of Achebe's creative gift that he has no need whatever for prose fireworks to light the flame of his intense drama."

"With remarkable unity of the word with the deed, the character, the time and the place, Chinua Achebe creates in these two novels [*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*] a coherent picture of coherence being lost, of the tragic consequences" of European colonialism, suggested Robert McDowell in a special issue of *Studies in Black Literature* dedicated to Achebe's work. "There is an artistic unity of all things in these books, which is rare anywhere in modern English fiction."

Anthills of the Savannah Larson states, "No other novel in many years has bitten to the core, swallowed and regurgitated contemporary Africa's miseries and expectations as profoundly as *Anthills of the Savannah*."

Nadine Gordimer commented in the *New York Times Book Review* that *Anthills of the Savannah* is "a work in which twenty-two years of harsh experience, intellectual growth, self-criticism, deepening understanding and mustered discipline of skill open wide a subject to which Mr. Achebe is now magnificently equal." It is a return to the themes of independent Africa informing Achebe's earlier novels but it gives the most significant role to women, who invent a new kind of storytelling, offering a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel. "This is a study of how power corrupts itself and by doing so begins to die," wrote *Observer* contributor and fellow Nigerian Ben Okri. "It is also about dissent, and love."

Responses to Literature

1. Colonialism is defined by *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* as "control by one power over a dependent area or people." How would the definition change if it read "control by one power over *another* area or people?" Which definition do you think Achebe would be more in agreement with?
2. Certain social movements choose to use negative or pejorative terms as terms of pride. But these words can still be hurtful if spoken by an outsider. Can language and words really be reclaimed, or should one reject the language used by the colonizer or oppressor?
3. Research a common American idiom or expression. Write an essay discussing its obvious meaning, as well as what its literal meaning implies about American culture. How would you explain it to someone unfamiliar with American culture?
4. Africa is sometimes seen by Westerners as one country with one culture. In fact, Africa is the name of the continent, and it is made up of forty-eight countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, cultures, and languages. Research three writers from different African countries, and write an essay examining the similarities and differences in their outlooks. What, if anything, do they have in common, apart from the experience of colonization?

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Peter Ackroyd

BORN: 1949, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

- The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983)
- T. S. Eliot: A Life* (1984)
- Hawksmoor* (1985)
- The Life of Thomas More* (1998)
- London: The Biography* (2000)



Peter Ackroyd David Levenson / Getty Images

Overview

Considered an accomplished, versatile writer, Peter Ackroyd has authored works ranging from poems to novels, criticism to biography. Ackroyd came to literary prominence as a biographer, and his well-received volumes on literary giants T. S. Eliot and Charles Dickens were complemented by his novels that frequently fictionalize the lives of famous historical personalities, such as Oscar Wilde and Thomas Chatterton. In addition to fusing history and fiction, Ackroyd's novels also consider the nature of time and art, often involving the protagonist in situations that transcend time and space.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Working-class Upbringing Peter Ackroyd was born in Paddington Hospital on October 5, 1949, the only son of Graham Ackroyd and Audrey Whiteside. His parents separated a short time after his birth, and he settled with his mother in East Acton, where he lived in a council house near Wormwood Scrubs jail until the age of seventeen. Very little is known about Graham Ackroyd. Audrey Whiteside worked as a personnel officer for a firm that made metal boxes. Their son was educated by Benedictine monks at Saint Benedict's School in the

Borough of Ealing, on the western edge of Greater London, at the end of the District Line on the London underground railway system. His interest in the geography of London began at an early age. As he told Francis Gilbert in 1999, "My grandmother would often take me into the city and show me things like the Old Curiosity Shop in Portsmouth Street, Holborn—which isn't actually the original shop that Dickens based his novel upon. This was something I found out when I was researching my biography of Dickens."

Difficult Transition to Life at Cambridge In 1968, Ackroyd enrolled at Clare College, Cambridge, where he took a degree in English in 1971. As a working-class student funded by a local authority grant, Ackroyd found the transition to Cambridge life difficult at first. According to Gilbert, Ackroyd tried to disguise his London accent when he arrived at the university: "I spent hours trying to get certain vowel sounds right. I still sometimes get them wrong and slip into Cockney." After graduation, Ackroyd was awarded a Mellon Fellowship at Yale University, where he spent two years doing graduate work. He returned to England in 1973 as literary editor of *The Spectator*, a right-wing weekly political magazine. In 1978, he became joint managing editor at *The Spectator*, a post he held until 1982, when he resigned to write full time. By then he had completed one novel, *The Great Fire of London* (1982), an interpolation of historical and present day narratives.

Ackroyd used the pattern he established in *The Great Fire of London* (1982) for a number of his later novels, including *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993). This strategy proved successful and *Hawksmoor* won both the Whitbread Novel Award and the *Guardian* Fiction Prize. Likewise, *Chatterton* (1987) is a complex exploration of forgery.

Career as a Novelist Ackroyd's other novels include *First Light* (1989), a creative distillation of English history; *English Music* (1992), which views English history through the lens of myths and traditions; *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), which explores the lesser seen aspects of London's history. The book employs a dual narrative form, told in turns by Matthew Palmer, a contemporary researcher, and John Dee, the Elizabethan alchemist, both inhabitants of the same house in Clerkenwell; *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) combines murder with the arena of a Victorian music hall; and in *Milton in America* (1996), Ackroyd creates "New Milton," a Puritan community founded and governed by a poet.

A Private Life Ackroyd is reticent about the details of his private life, but it is known that for many years he shared a house with his partner, Brian Kuhn. After Ackroyd won several lucrative literary prizes, he and Kuhn moved in 1990 to a cottage in Lyme Regis and then, in 1993, to a large house in north Devon, with a swimming pool, lake, and park. When Kuhn died from an

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ackroyd's famous contemporaries include:

- Karen Tei Yamashita** (1951–): Japanese-American author whose works emphasize the necessity of multicultural communities in a globalized age.
- Mo Yan** (1955–): Chinese novelist whose work has frequently been banned by the Chinese government.
- Bob Marley** (1945–1981): Jamaican singer and songwriter whose songs include “I Shot the Sherriff,” “Jamming,” and “One Love.”
- Mikhail Baryshnikov** (1948–): Russian-born ballet dancer, often cited as one of the best of the twentieth century.
- Wolfgang Puck** (1949–): Austrian chef and restaurant owner.
- Alan Rickman** (1946–): Winner of a number of acting awards, this English actor plays Severus Snape in the *Harry Potter* films.

AIDS-related illness in 1994, Ackroyd sold his Devon property and moved back to London.

Expansion into Other Genres Ackroyd's other literary efforts include poetry, short stories, literary criticism, a variety of non-fiction works, and a play. *London: The Biography* (2000) was awarded the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature. *The Collection: Journalism, Reviews, Essays, Short Stories, Lectures* (2001) collates essays on literature and film. *Illustrated London* (2003) was short-listed for the 2003 British Book Awards Illustrated Book of the Year. Ackroyd's most recent book about London is *Thames: Sacred River* (2007). Ackroyd's first play, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* (2000), was directed by Patrick Garland and *Dickens: Public Life and Private Passion* (2002) was accompanied by a three-part BBC TV series. *The Plato Papers* (1999) is set 2000 years in the future where the citizens of London remember a dark historical era, 1500–2300 C.E.. *The Clerkenwell Tales*, a story of adventure and suspense set in the late medieval world, was published in 2003, followed by *The Lambs of London*, in 2004, and *The Fall of Troy* (2006). Most recently, Ackroyd has published *Poe: A Life Cut Short* (2008).

Peter Ackroyd continues to write from his home in London.

Works in Literary Context

In his fiction, Ackroyd focuses upon the interaction between artifice and reality. He emphasizes the ways in which contemporary art and life are profoundly influenced by events and creations of the past. Often described as pastiches—collages of literary elements—Ackroyd's novels

blend historical and invented material, parody, multiple narratives, and self-reflexive techniques to explore the lives and writings of such noted personages as Oscar Wilde, Nicholas Hawksmoor, and Thomas Chatterton.

The Great Fire of London: A Paradigm for Understanding Ackroyd's Writing Many of the elements of Ackroyd's later fiction are present in his first published novel, *The Great Fire of London*: the intersection of past and present, the detailed London urban setting, strong echoes of the works of Dickens, a talent for mimicry, and a concern with recording everyday speech. *The Great Fire of London* was respectfully reviewed as a good Dickensian pastiche, but it did not generate the level of excitement that greeted Ackroyd's more-mature novels.

There is an element of deception in the title of Ackroyd's novels, especially as the first four, *The Great Fire of London*, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, *Hawksmoor*, and *Chatterton* could be the titles of historical or biographical studies rather than works of fiction. The fire in *The Great Fire of London* is not that of 1666, an event referred to in *Hawksmoor*, but an apocalyptic fictional one that begins with the burning of a film set for a screen adaptation of *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) by Charles Dickens. As if to substantiate his theoretical point that writing emerges from other writing rather than from life, Ackroyd draws on Dickens's novel in many ways, thus emphasizing the fictionality of his own fictional world, however realistic it may appear in some respects. Indeed, Ackroyd's novel is centrally concerned with the human drive to create fictions in life as well as in art. The short opening section of *The Great Fire of London*, “the story so far,” outlines the plot of *Little Dorrit* and ends: “although it could not be described as a true story, certain events have certain consequences”—including, of course, the writing of Ackroyd's novel. Dickens's eponymous heroine and the novel itself feature prominently in the minds of many of Ackroyd's characters. The setting of much of *Little Dorrit*, the Marshalsea Prison, also provides a link between the two novels because its site is visited by several of Ackroyd's characters. With its panorama of London in the 1980s from left-wing activists to gay bars, *The Great Fire of London* is at least as much a London novel as *Little Dorrit*. Ackroyd's narrative structure, in which several strands begin in parallel and gradually intertwine and coalesce, is itself derived from Dickens's methods and techniques, especially in his later novels such as *Little Dorrit*.

Mock Biography Ackroyd's second novel, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983), is his first mock autobiography. The book is presented as a journal that Oscar Wilde kept secretly between his arrival in Paris after being released from Reading Gaol, where he had served a sentence of hard labor for acts of gross indecency, and his death on November 30, 1900. The novel is a richly

imaginative blend of recorded fact and Wildean epigrams, demonstrating Ackroyd's ability to enter into the language and mindset of his historical subject.

Works in Critical Context

By the time Ackroyd published his first novel in 1982, he was already well known in the literary world as a poet, critic, literary theorist, and cultural historian. He was published first as a poet; his first book, *London Lickpenny*, prompted a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer to deem him "a delicate and insistent stylist" whose words "[make] not only an odd poetry, but a poetry out of the oddness of the world." Since his debut as a novelist, he has further enhanced his reputation as a non-fiction writer, first with his award-winning biography of T.S. Eliot and more recently with his imaginatively daring biography of Charles Dickens. Glen M. Johnson, explains that "as his career has developed, Ackroyd has sought 'a new way to interanimate' biography and fiction." Before the appearance of his first novel, it seemed that his writing career was likely to develop in the fields of literary criticism and biography, but with five novels in quick succession between 1982 and 1989 he established himself as one of the most gifted and imaginative English novelists to have emerged during the recent past. Critical opinion differs about whether his strikingly original talent is taking the right direction, but there is little disagreement about his potential.

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, a novel purporting to be Wilde's autobiography, was supposedly written during the final months of Wilde's life when he was living in Paris, where he had fled in self-imposed exile after serving two years in a British prison for indecency. Many critics praised Ackroyd's duplication of Wilde's own writing style and commended the work for its compelling insights into the notorious Irish writer. Toronto *Globe and Mail* critic William French, for instance, commented that Ackroyd "does an uncanny job of assuming Wilde's persona." Similarly, London *Times* reviewer Mary Cosh, who called Ackroyd's novel "a brilliant testament in its own right," lauded Ackroyd for fashioning a well-rounded portrait of Wilde. Cosh writes, "Not only does Peter Ackroyd exert a masterly command of language and ideas that credibly evokes Wilde's sharp wit in epigram or paradox, but he captures the raw vulnerability of the man isolated behind his mask." Although the novel sustains a voice approximating that of the Irish playwright for nearly two hundred pages, some critics assert that Ackroyd's Wilde never quite matches the epigrammatic wit of the original. Writing for *TLS: The Times Literary Supplement* (April 28, 1989), critic Claude Rawson estimated that the fictional Wilde "strikes me as being about 70 per cent convincing to knowing readers and probably more to others." Andrew Hislop, also writing in *TLS*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ackroyd is often classed as historical fiction. Many authors and filmmakers have worked on historical fiction. Here are some recent examples:

The Other Boleyn Girl (2001), a novel by author Philippa Gregory. This work concerns itself with the sister of Anne Boleyn, Mary Boleyn, and analyzes the treatment of women in sixteenth-century England.

Marie Antoinette (2006), a film directed by Sofia Coppola. In this work, Coppola attempts to humanize the reviled historical figure Marie Antoinette by portraying the loneliness of her life as a French queen.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (2007), a film directed by Andrew Dominik. Based on the actual assassination of Jesse James by Robert Ford, this work (adapted from a novel of the same name) imagines a fictional relationship between the two men, and in so doing, offers a painful portrayal of fame and infamy.

(April 15, 1983) went further to claim that *The Last Testament* was "consummate ventriloquism, so Wildean that it was easy to forget that it was make-believe and the result of research, hard work and a brilliant ear."

T. S. Eliot: A Life When *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* was published in 1983, Ackroyd was already working on the biography *T. S. Eliot: A Life*. In researching the poet's life, Ackroyd encountered imposing obstacles: he was forbidden by Eliot's estate from quoting Eliot's correspondence and unpublished verse, and he was allowed only minimum citations of the published poetry. Critics generally agreed, however, that Ackroyd nonetheless produced a worthwhile account of the modernist poet. As A. Walton Litz writes in the *New York Times Book Review*, "Given all these restrictions, Peter Ackroyd has written as good a biography as we have any right to expect. He has assimilated most of the available evidence and used it judiciously." Rosemary Dinnage of the *New York Review of Books*, also praised Ackroyd's difficult feat, observing that he "illuminates Eliot's poetry and criticism more acutely than many a ponderous academic volume." And *Newsweek's* Paul Gray contended that Ackroyd's biography "does more than make the best of a difficult situation; it offers the most detailed portrait yet of an enigmatic and thoroughly peculiar genius." In the end, Ackroyd acknowledged to *Contemporary Authors* that his inability to quote Eliot's letters or work made for a better book because "I had to be much more inventive about how I brought him to life," *T. S. Eliot: A Life* won both the Whitbread Biography Award and the Heinemann Award.

Responses to Literature

1. How does Ackroyd's use of historical figures and details differ from other authors of historical fiction? Do you believe that these distinctions justify Ackroyd's insistence that he does not write historical fiction? Why or why not? In your response, make sure to cite specific examples from your chosen texts.
2. Read Ackroyd's *The Great Fire of London* and Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. It has been argued that Ackroyd's text is a kind of continuation of the Dickens novel. After having read both, why do you think Ackroyd featured *Little Dorrit* so prominently in his own novel? Would the novel stand without all the references to the Dickens text? Support your response with passages from each novel.
3. Give historical fiction a shot. Choose an important historical person or event, research it—using the library and the Internet—and then write a short story or film that incorporates both historical fact and imaginary elements. Then, in a short essay, describe the choices you made and your experience of writing historical fiction.
4. Using the Internet and the library, research the life and writings of Oscar Wilde. Then, read Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. Some feel Ackroyd truly captures the voice of Wilde in this text, while others are not so sure. After having researched Oscar Wilde and having read Ackroyd's novel, how well do you think Ackroyd represents his main character—in terms of voice and character?

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☒ Douglas Adams

BORN: 1952, Cambridge, England

DIED: 2001, Santa Barbara, California, USA

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (1979)

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe (1980)

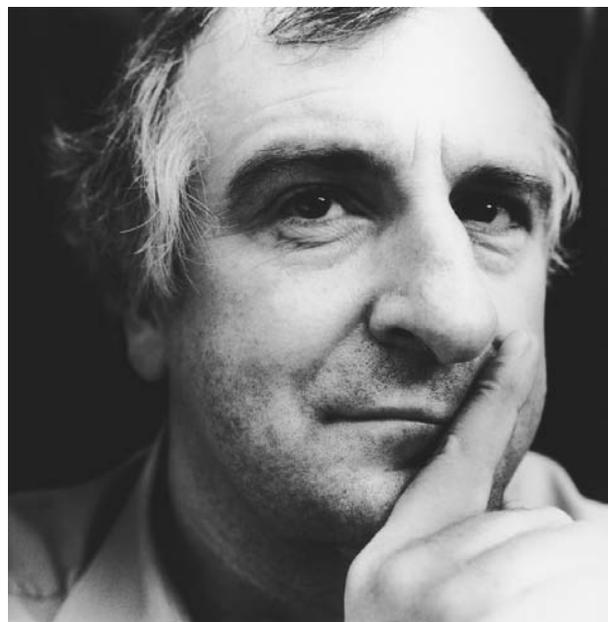
Life, the Universe and Everything (1982)

So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (1984)

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (1987)

Overview

Douglas Adams is best known for the series of interrelated books that began with his popular first novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979). Mixing deadpan humor, black comedy, and satire, these works use elements from the science fiction genre to portray a chaotic universe populated by such entities as chattering objects and bizarre alien creatures with ridiculous names. Originally written as a series of radio scripts broadcast on British Radio, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has proved immensely popular, generating a theater production, a television series, audio recordings, and four sequels to the novel. Although some critics label Adams a science fiction writer, Adams has asserted that he is a "comedy writer" who merely uses "the devices of science



Douglas Adams Steve Pyke / Getty Images

fiction to send up everything else. The rest of the world . . . is a better subject to take than just science fiction.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Footlights Revue and Doctor Who Douglas Noel Adams was born in Cambridge on March 11, 1952, the son of Christopher Douglas Adams and Jane Dora Donovan Adams. He was educated at Brentwood School in Essex and then at St. John’s College, Cambridge. At Cambridge, Adams was a member of the Footlights revue group. Following in the tradition of previous members who had gone on to develop such shows as *Beyond the Fringe* and *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, Adams eventually formed his own revue group, Adam Smith Adams, for which he wrote, performed, and sometimes directed shows produced in London and Cambridge and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Adams’s work belongs to a peculiarly English (and particularly Oxford and Cambridge) tradition of student comedy. Like “Oxbridge” satire—which has been criticized for focusing on parody, pastiche, and self-conscious cleverness while rarely entering into the realm of politics—Adams’s comic novels are indebted to satirical sketch writing and undergraduate humor, while avoiding direct treatment of political controversy.

On graduating from Cambridge in 1974, Adams began to write for radio and television. During 1978–1980 he was script editor for the science fiction series *Doctor Who* and wrote several episodes of the cult show. Traces of its influence may be found in Adams’s fiction. Like Adams’s *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, *Doctor Who* addresses, in a futuristic setting, anxieties about contemporary science, technology, and culture. Like the scripts of *Doctor Who*, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* series plays with obscure scientific language and flirts with the dangers of technology, opposing the ordinariness of daily life against the extraordinary possibilities of technology.

The Hitchhiker’s Guide *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* had its origins as a series for BBC radio, first broadcast in 1978. After a trip across Europe, inspired by the format of practical travel guides such as *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Europe* by Ken Welsh, Adams set out to write a guide to the mysteries of the galaxy. With the reassuringly familiar voice of Peter Jones, a BBC radio celebrity, as “The Book,” the radio series was self-consciously comic.

In 1979 Adams reworked the radio script as a novel. In *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, the “Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council” has scheduled the planet Earth for demolition in order to build a “hyperspatial express route.” After this wholesale destruction of the Earth in the opening pages of the text, Adams went on to create a range of new worlds, all of which are used to parody the vagaries of twentieth-century Britain, just as Jonathan Swift satirized eighteenth-century England in

his works. Adams wrote four sequels, creating a five-book series that was originally—and later, with tongue in cheek—promoted as a trilogy: *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980), *Life, the Universe, and Everything* (1982), *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* (1984), and *Mostly Harmless* (1992). The third novel was originally conceived by Adams as a film idea for the character of Doctor Who prior to working on that show as a script editor.

Popular Success and a New Franchise *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* and its sequels became huge successes, spawning a 1979 theatrical performance directed by Ken Campbell and a television production in 1981, as well as a record album and a computer game. The reassuring “Don’t Panic”—emblazoned on the cover of “The Book”—became a familiar catchphrase and appeared on badges. The influence of the original series remains apparent in several radio and television imitations—among them the cult British television-comedy series *Red Dwarf*—as well as in contemporary television and radio commercials that replicate the reassuring and all-knowing voice of “The Book” and employ versions of Adams’s creative space-alien creatures.

Adams was also the author of two parodic detective novels, *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* (1987) and *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* (1988), both located in a world that bears a marked resemblance to the landscapes of Adams’s childhood and student years at Cambridge. *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* was heavily influenced by two *Doctor Who* episodes written a decade earlier by Adams, with several plot elements borrowed from the original episodes and used in the novel. Once again, Adams used a traditional form of popular fiction to address the preoccupations of the contemporary world. Like Arthur Dent, the protagonist of the *Hitchhiker* series, Dirk Gently attempts, in a frustratingly inconsequential world, to tie up all the loose ends of the mysteries of life.

Champion of the Environment In 1985, Adams took an assignment to travel to various locations around the world in the company of a zoologist, documenting a search for specimens of the world’s most endangered species. This resulted in both the radio series and the nonfiction book *Last Chance to See* (1990). Although the book was not as commercially successful as his novels, Adams referred to the book as one of the most rewarding projects on which he had ever worked. This reflects a common theme in Adams’s work regarding the double-edged sword of technology, which can provide great advancements for humanity but also lead to destruction of the natural world.

Adams found it very difficult to write and once had to be confined to a hotel room by his publisher to make him finish a novel. “I would never sit down and write for pleasure because it’s too much like hard work,” he told the *Times of London*, so the pleasure his work continues

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Adams's famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): British Conservative prime minister from 1979 to 1990, nicknamed “The Iron Lady” for her hard-line stance against trade unions and the Soviet Union.

Monty Python's Flying Circus: a British comedy troupe consisting of Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, John Cleese, and Michael Palin. Starting out on BBC television in 1969, Monty Python went on to produce comedy albums, movies, books, and a musical, all featuring their distinctive brand of absurd, often surrealistic humor.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989): Leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that deposed the U.S.-backed government and installed an anti-West theology.

Ken Kesey (1935–2001): an American novelist and counterculture guru who pioneered the use of psychedelic drugs and influenced the hippie movement of the late 1960s.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007): American novelist especially popular during the 1960s, whose works blend science fiction, contemporary politics, and black comedy.

to give thousands of readers is the more admirable. He had moved to Santa Barbara, California, and was working on the script for a movie adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when he died unexpectedly in 2001 at the age of forty-nine. The script was finished by Karey Kirkpatrick, and the film was released in 2005 with a dedication to Adams. Unfinished written work and other papers, essays, and speeches have been collected in *The Salmon of Doubt* (2002).

Works in Literary Context

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy pokes fun at the pomposities and incomprehensibility of computer experts and government departments. It hit a contemporary nerve in offering a hero who is as baffled by scientific language as is most of the audience; yet, it also helped to familiarize people, particularly the British, with the language of the digital organization and retrieval of data.

Fear of Change Having originated as a radio series in the year before Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* may, in retrospect, be seen as haunted by a fear of change and infused by a sense that the individual can no longer rely on the social order for protection. Arthur Dent, a new home-

owner, is unable to protect his investment; no benign council can save his house; and there is no state support to help him to cope with the end of the world. Like the heroine of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Arthur is swept into an illogical new world with an eccentric and alien guide: Ford Prefect, who becomes his hitchhiking companion, serves as the equivalent of Alice's White Rabbit. Unlike Alice, however, Arthur has been whisked away in an alien spacecraft, and while Alice finally returns to her cozy Victorian world, all that is familiar to Dent has been destroyed. Although he is allowed to return to an earlier version of Earth in later volumes, it can never be the same again. The forces of change that were so evident in the late 1970s do not allow Arthur, or the reader, any sense of stability.

Unlikely “Buddies” The central relationship between Arthur Dent, the innocent abroad, and Ford Prefect, alien being and Arthur's great chum, is the one reassuring constant of the series and also one of its great strengths. In the mold of the buddy movies of the late 1960s and the 1970s the most important relationship in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series is between Arthur and Ford. Their relationship celebrates male bonding while marginalizing heterosexual romance. Arthur does not have an important relationship with a woman until the fourth volume of the series, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*. As in many motion pictures of the 1970s and early 1980s, Adams dealt with the impact of the contemporary feminist movement by almost entirely excluding women from his fiction.

Another endearing figure in Arthur's alien universe is Marvin, a depressive android who, once again, serves to combine aspects of the strange and the familiar. A reworking of the gloomy Eeyore (the donkey of A. A. Milne's 1926 book *Winnie-the-Pooh*), Marvin is afflicted by paranoia and melancholy, a deskilled worker whose superhuman intelligence is rarely utilized by the fellow travelers he regards as his inferiors. This gloomy representation of an intelligent mind wasted on the banal tasks asked of him addressed the fears and fantasies of a generation of 1980s British graduates, many of whom were facing unemployment and a great number of whom were among Adams's readership.

The Meaning of Life In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series, Adams flirted with such big philosophical questions as the meaning of life, the search for absolute answers in a relativistic world, and the potentiality of new technologies. He consistently set up these issues as serious problems but rarely followed through with any rigor. While the jokiness of the first radio series and novel had an engaging charm, in subsequent volumes this tone was too insubstantial to carry the philosophical weight Adams suggested. Adams intelligently set up the real problems faced by contemporary British society, but rather than

seriously pursue them, he chose to evade them with archness and witty dismissiveness. Indeed, the quest for answers and philosophical enlightenment is portrayed throughout the series as somewhat futile. Adrift in an alien and alienated galaxy, Arthur and Ford Prefect's most pressing question is, "Where shall we have dinner?" and the Restaurant at the End of the Universe is enough of an answer for them.

Works in Critical Context

Initially, reviewers praised *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, pleased to have found a book that attempted to be humorous and was, for the most part, successful. "This hilarious and irrepressibly clever book is one of the best pieces of humor to be produced this year," applauded Rosemary Herbert in *Library Journal*.

Because science fiction is a genre that often takes itself too seriously, critics have tended to take *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its sequels as a breath of fresh air. Lisa Tuttle, writing in the *Washington Post*, compared the book's relationship to traditional science fiction novels and concluded that "it's extremely funny—a rare and precious conjunction in a field where what usually passes as humor is a bad pun at the end of a dull story."

As the series of books progressed and came to be known as The Hitchhiker Trilogy (even after the publication of the fourth and fifth novels), reviewers found it more and more resistible. John Clute, who reviewed *The Hitchhiker's Guide* for the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, acknowledged that the book was a joy. He also gave recognition to the less clever elements that it involved: "Given its music-hall premises, the tone of Hitchhiker is sometimes damagingly sophomoric, and there is a constant taint of collegiate wit in the naming of silly names and the descriptions of silly alcoholic beverages." He went on to praise the novel as "one of the genre's rare genuinely funny books," but the elements that he pointed out tended to become more obvious to reviewers as they appeared in one book after the next.

Losing the element of surprise did not stop Adams from producing the series' fourth and fifth installments, and though reviewers, taking the series for granted, did not express further delight, there has been growing respect for Adams's growth as a novelist. While the first book in the series was appreciated for what it was not—a traditional science fiction comedy—Adams's later works have been praised for their characterization and plotting.

Toronto Globe and Mail reviewer H. J. Kirchoff maintained that *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* "is Adams's best novel. That is, his characters are more fully delineated . . . , the settings more credible and the plot more . . . well, linear."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Douglas Adams was far from the first author to use fantastic travel to other worlds and dimensions as a means of pointing out our own society's foibles.

Gulliver's Travels (1826), a satire by Jonathan Swift. Swift applied his sharp wit to this "travelogue" of an innocent abroad in strange and unheard-of countries.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a novel by Lewis Carroll. What started as a story told to pass the time on a boat trip turned into a novel that plays with nonsense, logic, and morality lessons in a baffling and surreal fantasy land.

Other Worlds (first published in two parts, 1657 and 1662), fantasy stories by Cyrano de Bergerac. The real-life seventeenth-century swashbuckler wrote a series of fantastic stories describing his fictional journeys to the Moon and Sun and his encounters with the creatures who lived there.

Responses to Literature

1. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* summarizes the whole Earth with only two words: "mostly harmless." Write up an extended entry for a guidebook that will explain your town in detail to people from other planets.
2. Write a poem that you think might have been written by Paula Nancy Millstone Jennings of Greenbridge, Essex, England, whose work is identified in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as the worst in the universe. Explain the elements of your poem that you think make it so terrifyingly awful.
3. Suppose that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is right in saying that humans are not in control of Earth, but wrong in believing that either mice or dolphins are the most intelligent animals on the planet. Which animals do you think might actually be an intelligent species from another world, controlling human behavior wordlessly? Why do you think so?
4. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* satirizes the British generation of young people who came of age in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was British prime minister. In your library or on the Web, research the often-harsh social and economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, who was called "The Iron Lady." Does knowing about the unemployment, union-breaking, and conservative social policies of the time add or detract from your enjoyment of Adams's nonpolitical novels? How? Do you believe

then that the novels are political satires after all? The era that produced Adams's novels, also produced such British punk rock groups as the Sex Pistols. How do you account for this? What comparisons can you make between the two? Can you find comparisons between the popular music you listen to and the politics and entertainment literature of your time?

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Richard Adams

BORN: 1920, Newbury, Berkshire, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Watership Down (1974)

Shardik (1974)

The Girl in a Swing (1980)

Tales from Watership Down (1996)

Overview

Although he is the author of seven full-length novels, Richard Adams has a reputation based almost solely on his first novel, *Watership Down*. A former civil servant in the Department of the Environment, Adams wrote *Watership Down* to introduce his daughters to literature by presenting them with the rules and principles of the adult novel. At the same time, the novel allows Adams to criticize humanity through a civilization of rabbits, asserting that nature is being destroyed by human technology. This environmental focus caught public attention in the 1970s when people were experiencing a new ecological awareness that the natural world was under threat. By using his rabbits to examine social organization, Adams presents the essential elements of a successful society: cooperation, courage, honor, religious faith, and respect.



Richard Adams Adams, Richard, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Idyllic Beginnings and World War II Richard George Adams was born in Newbury, Berkshire, on May 9, 1920, the fourth child of a country doctor, Evelyn George Beadon Adams, and Lilian Rosa Adams. Nine or more years younger than his siblings, Adams played alone with imaginary friends for company, taking refuge in the shrubbery, a favorite retreat. The connection between the natural world and refuge was made when he was young, as was the habit of creating imaginary worlds. Adams looks back on his childhood as a golden age, a lost rural paradise.

This idyll ended abruptly when Adams, almost nine, was sent away to boarding school, where students were class-conscious and pretentious. The system of privileges and the severe discipline at the school instilled in Adams a respect for authority and established hierarchies. As a result, the realities of the English class system can be found in much of his work.

Adams's modern-history studies at Worcester College, Oxford, were interrupted by World War II, and he joined an airborne company of the Royal Army Service Corps. He returned to Oxford to finish his degree course in 1946. He graduated in 1948 and then entered the Home Civil Service as an assistant principal that same year. In 1949 he married Barbara Elizabeth Acland, with whom he had two daughters.

From Oral Tradition to Published Writing To pass the time during a July 1966 car trip, Adams began telling his daughters the story of two rabbits. When the girls asked him to finish the story and write it down, Adams relied on his knowledge of natural history, both from personal observation and from R. M. Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit*, a nonfiction work considered a definitive source on rabbits. Combining a biological realism with a flair for mythmaking, Adams created *Watership Down*.

Watership Down was rejected seven times by various publishing houses and literary agents because of its length and difficulty for younger readers. It was finally accepted by a small-firm publisher, Rex Collings. Almost immediately, Adams was compared with Kenneth Grahame, George Orwell, and J. R. R. Tolkien. The novel won both the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Award for 1972. When Collings was unable to meet the sudden demand for the book, he sold the paperback rights to Puffin. Its 1973 edition prompted a second wave of critical acclaim, and it sold well, topping the children's paperback best seller list and the *New York Times* best seller list for months.

Career Shift With the enormous financial success of his first novel and the imminent publication of *Shardik*, his second, Adams gave up his civil service career. Since *Shardik* followed one of the greatest publishing phenomena of the century, publisher Allen Lane mounted a major national publishing campaign to promote it. In spite of this publicity, the novel did not have an entirely favorable critical reception. However, critical disapproval did not affect sales. *Shardik* was reprinted, topped the best seller list, and was, by 2002, still selling well in new edition.

Animal Rights In England, the animal rights movement had its origins in an 1822 law intended to prevent cruelty to farm animals such as cattle and sheep. After the law was passed, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) was developed as a way to enforce the law by having inspectors investigate claims of cruelty. The RSPCA grew in strength throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and additional laws were passed to provide broader protection for animals, including regulations regarding animal testing and experimentation. This movement reached new levels in England in the 1970s with the publication of Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation*, as well as the formation of the activist (but officially nonviolent) animal-rights group known as the Animal Liberation Front.

In 1977 Adams published his third full-length novel, *The Plague Dogs*, a diatribe against experimentation on animals that is also a satiric attack on tabloid journalism, the press as a whole, and government bureaucracy. In 1978, Adams's activism to prevent animal cruelty led him to tour Great Britain, Canada, and the United States in a campaign protesting the fur trade in Newfoundland; he was also instrumental in lobbying the British government

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Adams's famous contemporaries include:

Isaac Asimov (1920–1992): Asimov was a Russian-born American author and professor of biochemistry who was best known for his popular science fiction.

Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein (1920–2002): This South African anti-apartheid activist, once a political prisoner, was honored for his tireless efforts to bring democracy to South Africa.

Adele Faccio (1920–2007): This Italian politician was the founder of the Information Centre on Sterilisation and Abortion.

Henry J. Heimlich (1920–): Heimlich was an American physician debatably known as the inventor of the Heimlich Maneuver and who was controversially regarded for his advocacy of using malaria to treat the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

William M. Gaines (1922–1992): Son of the creator and publisher of the very first comic books, Gaines himself published a number of comic book series and eventually became the publisher of *Mad Magazine*.

Alice Walker (1944–): Author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Color Purple* (1982), Walker is known for her environmental and animal-rights activism.

to require importers of sealskin products to name the country of origin. In 1980 Adams was made president of the RSPCA; however, he and three vice presidents resigned from the society two years later in order to pursue the cause of animal rights in demonstrations and protests.

Continued Success In 1983 Adams moved to Hampshire, England. There he completed his fifth novel, *Maia*, a return to the fantasy setting of the Beklan Empire, but set twenty years before the events in *Shardik*. It is an immense work with eighty-four characters, many of whom have long, unfamiliar names. In 1996 Adams returned to the setting and protagonists of his first and greatest success and published *Tales from Watership Down*.

Works in Literary Context

The process by which Adams works is not one of invention so much as it is of discovery. In Adams's view, the story already exists in the unconscious mind, and he is merely uncovering what has already been learned as myth.

The Heroic Epic Considered a brilliant work of originality and scope, *Watership Down* is recognized as a modern classic that blurs the distinction between juvenile and adult literature. Because of the animal protagonists and the mythic settings at the center of *Watership Down* and other

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other writers who have also personified animals in folktales or myths:

Animal Farm (1945), a novel by George Orwell. In this satirical allegory, farm animals assume the roles of Bolshevik revolutionaries who plot to take over the human-run farmstead.

Charlotte's Web (1952), a novel by E. B. White. Charlotte the barn spider and Wilbur the pig have a friendship that endures life's many changes through the years.

The Wind in the Willows (1908), a novel by Kenneth Grahame. This pastoral adventure, with its anthropomorphized animal characters, is also a mystical, mythical morality tale.

works, Adams is often perceived primarily as a writer of anthropomorphic fantasy. Yet *Watership Down* offers readers of all ages entry into the world of rabbits, a civilization complete with its own history, language, mythology, and government that parallels the world of man.

In several of Adams's books, the prevailing theme is the universality of the myth-driven folktale, and Adams owes much to mythologist Joseph Campbell's theories. The impact of Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* on Adams is observable throughout *Watership Down*. Certainly, the standard path of the mythological hero—separation, initiation, and return with some kind of gain for the community—drives the narrative structure of *Watership Down*. Hazel, the novel's main character, takes a small band of refugees on a hazardous quest through the English countryside to find a new home after a visionary senses the destruction of their warren by a developer. When Adams breaks the heroic narrative, it is to introduce tales about El-ahrairah, folk hero of the rabbits, and these stories explain the origins, characteristics, and beliefs that influence the behavior of Hazel and his band of refugees. Throughout the novel, the rabbits exhibit characteristics of traditional epic heroes.

Myth from the Unconscious Mind Apart from its powerful story, the most important feature of *Shardik* is its depiction of deep mythic levels that originate in the unconscious mind. In the early 1950s, Adams began a three-year study of Jungian analysis and learned, among other ideas, the importance of dreams and their connections with the unconscious. To achieve psychological wholeness, Jung theorized, one must believe in the existence of the collective unconscious, within which lie the archetypes from dream, myth, and folktale. Adams's study of Jungian analysis led him to create mythic figures that awaken the minds of his readers.

Adams has said that complete episodes of *Shardik* came to him in dreams.

Adams used a metaphor of an unbroken web to represent his image for the universality of folktales, where the archetypes of dreams and folktales are connected. In Jung's theories, this web figure is the collective unconscious made visible, a gossamer sphere encircling the world. After the storyteller reaches up and draws down the web while he tells his story, it springs back to encircle the world again.

Works in Critical Context

Some critics claim that the literary establishment of Britain has not accepted Adams: "Probably no other contemporary novelist suffers from so much condescension or critical dismissal from so many literary intellectuals," said Phillip Vine in *Words*. The extent of this neglect seems exaggerated, since Adams has been made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and has lunched with Queen Elizabeth II. In any case, Adams's faithful reading public ignores these critics, and his books are often listed among the best-selling fantasy and children's literature of all time.

Watership Down *New York Review of Books* critic Jane Adam Smith wrote that *Watership Down* "appears at a time when we are becoming increasingly skeptical of our species' ability to live its life decently. . . . In as much as Mr. Adams has a message for his readers, I'd say it is to make them more sensitive to the complex balance of nature, more aware of the needs and ways of other species (and the effect of human actions on them), more mindful that we are creatures too, and must live in harmony with the others who share our world." Voicing the general sentiment of critics, Selena Hastings wrote that *Watership Down* is "A beautifully written and intensely moving story, the work of an extraordinary imagination."

Alison Lurie, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, felt that *Watership Down* was successful "because it celebrated qualities many serious novelists are currently afraid or embarrassed to write about. The heroes and heroines of most contemporary novels . . . are sad, bumbling failures; hysterical combatants in the sex war; or self-deceptive men and women of ill will. What a relief to read of characters who have honor and courage and dignity, who will risk their lives for others, whose love for their families and friends and community is enduring and effective—even if they look like Flopsy, Mopsy, and Benjamin Bunny." Others attribute the novel's sensation to increased environmental concerns, the growth of the animal-rights movement, and a multigenerational appeal to both the conservative middle class and the student subculture. Some critics have mused that perhaps the deeper reason for *Watership Down*'s appeal lies in its universal expression of mankind's need for refuge.

Despite critical praise and public acceptance, *Watership Down* has had its share of critics. In a review for the *National Review*, D. Keith Mano challenged accolades

for the novel's original premise. "This bunny squad could be a John Wayne platoon of GIs," Mano maintained. "*Watership Down* is pleasant enough, but it has about the same intellectual firepower as *Dumbo*." He continued, "If Hazel and Bigwig and Dandelion were men, they'd make very commonplace characters." Mano concluded that *Watership Down* "is an okay book; well enough written. But it is grossly overrated."

Shardik *Shardik* did not receive as much acclaim as *Watership Down*. The novel is set in a mythical country and time; the natives worship a giant bear, Shardik. Lurie commented that, like *Watership Down*, *Shardik* can be viewed as "an allegory and history of the relationship of human beings to the physical world." However, she judged *Shardik* to be more than an ecological allegory; the novel is really a study of how human beings choose and follow their gods. "The great bear," Lurie maintained, "is not really a magical being. . . . All that he does is within the range of normal animal behavior; only to those who believe in him does it seem symbolical, an Act of God. Because of this belief, however, lives are changed utterly. . . and society is brought a little nearer to civilized humanism." Lurie noted that in *Shardik*, "belief causes men to act cruelly and destructively as well as nobly; the bear is a kind of test which brings out hidden strengths and weaknesses, even in those who do not believe in him."

As with *Watership Down*, critical praise for *Shardik* was not unanimous. Webster Schott noted in the *Washington Post Book World*: "There are few of the usual reasons for reading fiction in *Shardik*. We learn nothing about ourselves here; Adams's people belong with Snow White. . . . The novel is a fake antique, a sexless, humorless, dull facsimile of an epic without historical or psychological relevance." John Skow of the *Times* wrote that Adams "spins out his romance entertainingly, but without dealing seriously with. . . belief and its perversion, of authority and its corruption. Good as he is at nature walks, Adams does not venture far into the forests of the mind."

Responses to Literature

1. A major theme for Adams concerns environmentalism—both as a philosophy and a movement with a focus on conserving and improving the environment. Investigate the history of environmentalism. In your survey, identify what major environmental issues were emphasized in each decade, and consider how they have or have not changed today.
2. Study the functions of the Department of the Environment in at least four different countries—choose from Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, The Philippines, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Analyze how each of your chosen countries contributes to the environmental movement as we know it today.
3. Just as the rabbits of Sandleford Warren do in *Watership Down*, work in a group to choose a problem that affects you in your personal life, your social life, your community life, or your home life. Your group is the task force and its objective is to create a plan of action for a solution to eliminate or alleviate the problem.

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❏ Aeschylus

BORN: 524 BCE, Eleusis, Greece

DIED: 456 BCE, Gela, Italy

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Persians (472 BCE)

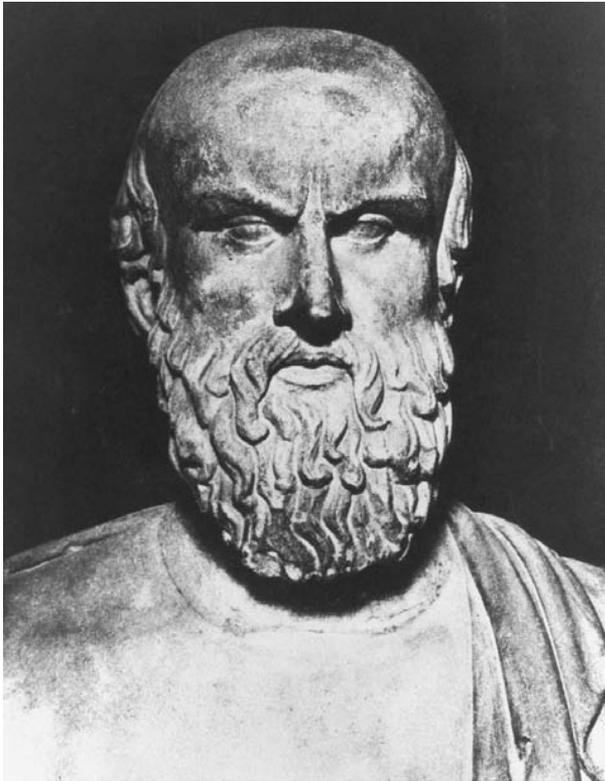
Seven Against Thebes (467 BCE)

Oresteia (458 BCE)

Prometheus Bound (unknown)

Overview

Considered the founder of Greek tragedy, Aeschylus is said to have set the paradigm for the entire genre in Western literature. His tragedies, exemplified by such seminal works as *Prometheus Bound* and the *Oresteia* trilogy, are widely praised as thoughtful and profoundly moving translations of tremendous feelings into the sublime language of poetry.



Aeschylus Aeschylus, photograph. AP Images.

Unfortunately, only seven plays of Aeschylus have survived intact.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Noble Family Aeschylus, the son of Euphorion, was born in 524 BCE, of a noble family with Athenian citizenship in the deme, or village, of Eleusis. Not far from the growing city of Athens, Eleusis was sacred to the two goddesses of grain, Demeter and her daughter Persephone. It was also the center for the Eleusinian Mysteries, a principal mystery religion in ancient Greece. In 534, about ten years before Aeschylus was born, the Athenian dictator Peisistratus transferred the cult center of Dionysus Eleuthereus (“of Eleutheræ,” a village on the border of Attica) to downtown Athens, just south of the Acropolis. Here Peisistratus instituted an annual festival, the Great or City Dionysia, which included public performances where songs and dances by a chorus alternated with solo recitations by a poet. In each performance, poet and chorus explored themes from the Greek myths. Before the end of the century the satyr play, a mythological farce, was added to the festival, and tragedians competed for a prize for the best play. Aeschylus began competing in 498, but did not win his first victory at the City Dionysia until 484. The success he enjoyed as a playwright for most of the fifth century was won after years

of failure. Aeschylus married and had two sons, Euphorion and Euaeon, both of whom became tragic poets.

The Battle of Marathon When Aeschylus was a young man, the armies of the Persian Empire—based in the region now known as Iran—were advancing across the city-states of Greece toward Athens. The Persians had already conquered regions to the east of Attica—where Athens and Eleusis were located—and with the superior numbers of the Persian forces, many were expecting all of Greece to become yet another territory of the Persian Empire. Aeschylus, along with thousands of other Greeks, gathered at the Plain of Marathon on the eastern coast of Attica to fend off the Persian army. Ancient sources state that the Persian soldiers were anywhere from two hundred thousand to six hundred thousand in number, though modern estimates have been much lower. The Greek forces were certainly outnumbered; however, through skillful maneuvering on the battlefield, they drove the Persian armies back to the sea with only about two hundred soldiers lost. According to some accounts, one of those lost was Aeschylus’s brother Kynaigeirus. The battle was considered a decisive victory for the Greeks, and it inspired Aeschylus to write a play titled *Persians*.

Persecution Aeschylus’s plays, often noted for their religious and theological themes, concentrate on the great Panhellenic gods, with Zeus as ruler over Hermes, Apollo, Aphrodite, and Athena. Ancient authors thought it significant that Eleusis, where Aeschylus was born, was the religious center for the Eleusinian Mysteries, a mystery religion of great importance in ancient Greece. This religion was one that prohibited its followers from revealing its teachings and its rituals. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle relates that Aeschylus was impeached for revealing the secrets of the Mysteries but pleaded ignorance. In the third century CE, Christian writer Clement of Alexandria interpreted Aristotle’s point to mean that, despite his Eleusinian origins, Aeschylus was never initiated into the Mysteries. His plays confirm the idea that his religious commitments were Olympian and Hellenic, not local.

According to Heracleides of Pontus, a pupil of Aristotle, the playwright was alleged to have revealed secrets of the Mysteries in his play *Prometheus Bound*; the audience of the play tried to stone Aeschylus, and the playwright took refuge. Aeschylus was later acquitted.

Reminiscences Although little more is known or verifiable about Aeschylus’s personal life, some reminiscences of Aeschylus have survived. Ion of Chios, a younger tragedian, recorded in his *Visits* that he watched a boxing match at the Isthmian Games with Aeschylus, and that one boxer received a terrible blow that made the crowd roar. “You see the importance of practice,” said Aeschylus, nudging him. “The one who was hit is silent, but the spectators cry out.” Ion may also be the source for Aeschylus’s comment that his plays were “slices of fish

from Homer's great feasts." Aristotle's pupil Chamaeleon reports a story that Sophocles told Aeschylus: "Even if you write what is appropriate, you do not know what you are doing when you compose." The second-century CE author Athenaeus connected this remark with the story that Aeschylus composed while drunk, a story that sounds as if it might be "biographical fiction"—biographical information that is created from popular stories about a figure but that lack credibility.

Works in Literary Context

Given that Aeschylus wrote during the formative period of Greek theater and that no older dramas have survived, it is difficult to assess just how important Aeschylus was to the development of Greek tragedies for his contemporaries. However, Aristotle, writing a little over a century after Aeschylus's death, vouched for his importance in the history of the theater. Further, his continuing influence on composers and playwrights up to and including the twentieth century vindicates the important role attributed to Aeschylus in the development not only of tragedies but also of opera.

Aeschylus's Drama: His Innovations Although Aeschylus is the first playwright whose work has survived, he was not the first Athenian playwright. Much can never be resolved about the origins and earliest form of Greek tragedy, but it is widely accepted that tragedies were first performed at the festival of the Great Dionysia in about 534 BCE. This was several years before Aeschylus was born. What form such tragedies took is also largely a matter of conjecture but Aristotle was later to credit Aeschylus with introducing a second actor. If nothing else this confirms that previous tragedy had been performed by a single actor with a chorus and that Aeschylus's first work was of this nature. Aristotle goes on to state that Sophocles was the originator of the third actor and Aeschylus has clearly accepted the development by the time of the *Oresteia* in 458 BCE.

The importance of using more than one actor in a play may not be immediately apparent, but consider the effects one can achieve with multiple actors on stage at the same time. With only a single actor, a character can only have as his or her audience the chorus or the actual audience in attendance. However, when a playwright adds additional actors to a play, he or she is able to show the interaction between characters in order to attain higher levels of irony and tension, as audiences will inevitably be forced to evaluate the goodness or badness of each character. When a third character is added to a play, the possibilities continue to expand, for with three actors it is possible, for instance, for one to be hiding and listening to the other two without their knowing it. Consider the famous scene from *Hamlet* in which Hamlet is speaking with his mother in her bedroom while Polonius listens in. In this moment, the scheming of Hamlet's uncle and mother come to a head and Hamlet's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aeschylus's famous contemporaries include:

Sophocles (496–406 BCE): Greek playwright whose most famous works focus on the life of Oedipus, including *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.

Darius (549–485 BCE): Persian king who attempted to assert his rule over Athens in 490 BCE. His attempt was soundly thwarted.

Xerxes (519–465 BCE): Persian king and successor of Darius. Like his predecessor, Xerxes tried to invade Greece. Xerxes's attempt on Greece is retold, in part, in the 2006 film *300*.

Tarquin the Proud (?–496 BCE): Last king of Rome. Upon his deposition, Rome turned into a republic, by many accounts the first of its kind, with elected officials, rather than dictators chosen based on their ancestry.

Pythagoras (c. 572–c. 490 BCE): Greek mathematician. Not only was Pythagoras important in introducing mathematics as a subject of study, his work, including the Pythagorean Theorem, is still a cornerstone of modern mathematics.

Gautama Siddhartha (563–483 BCE): A spiritual leader in India better known simply as the Buddha.

Confucius (551–479 BCE): Chinese philosopher and writer whose wisdom can be found codified in the *Analects*.

madness is confirmed when he strikes Polonius dead, supposedly thinking he is slaying a rat running around behind the curtains of his mother's window. This climactic moment in Shakespeare's play would be impossible without Aeschylus's innovations.

Because Aeschylus was writing for the Greek theater in its formative stages, he is also credited with having introduced many features that became associated with the traditional Greek theater. Among these were the rich costumes, decorated cothurni (a kind of footwear), solemn dances, and possibly elaborate stage machinery.

Legacy The ninety plays that Aeschylus wrote were performed frequently after his death, and the tragic drama remained a living tradition in the hands of his successors, Sophocles and Euripides. Tragedy also exerted a decisive influence on the development of literary criticism: Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* (405 BCE) is devoted to comparing and contrasting the tragic art of Aeschylus and Euripides, and both the literary form and specific tragedies were analyzed in Aristotle's profoundly influential treatise, *Poetics* (late fourth century BCE). Later, imitations of Greek tragedy written in the first century CE by the Roman playwright Seneca exerted a powerful influence on the development of European theater during the Renaissance.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aeschylus's play *Persians* deals with the historical figure Xerxes and how his hubris—extreme confidence—leads to his ultimate demise. Arrogance has long been one of the key subjects of literature and art. Aeschylus himself was undoubtedly familiar with Homer's *Iliad*, the primary events in which are set in motion by the hubris of Agamemnon and Achilles, two soldiers who battle over women and fame. Here are some other works that have hubris as their focus:

Macbeth (c. 1603), a play by William Shakespeare. In this play, one can understand Macbeth's fateful and murderous ambition as cultivated by his hubris—his supreme pride.

Moby-Dick (1851), a novel by Herman Melville. The unforgettable Captain Ahab pursues the white whale Moby-Dick to the point of self-destruction in Melville's classic.

Absalom, Absalom (1936), a novel by William Faulkner. Thomas Sutpen attempts to create a dynasty for himself in this Southern gothic novel.

Citizen Kane (1941), a film by Orson Welles. Welles wrote, directed, and starred in this film about the rise of fictional publishing magnate Charles Foster Kane.

Tragedy's uniting of music and drama became the guiding inspiration in the creation of opera, and Aeschylus's work provided a model for major compositions by Richard Wagner.

Works in Critical Context

Aeschylus's work earned him a number of awards, and after his *Persians* was performed, Hieron, dictator of Gela and leader of the Greeks in Sicily, invited Aeschylus to stage the play in Gela. He also later commissioned Aeschylus to write *Aetnean Women* to celebrate the refounding of the city of Etna. In other words, Aeschylus did not labor in obscurity but was honored by the critics of his time. His impact on theater is still felt today, and his *Oresteia* is still considered a great companion piece for Homer's *Iliad*, the inspiration for Aeschylus's trilogy.

Persians Aeschylus uses in this play, although not for the first time, two actors in addition to the chorus and its leader. The original addition of a second actor in the Greek theater was attributed to Aeschylus by Aristotle, who had made a survey of early drama for his *Poetics*. The second actor, by increasing opportunities for contrast and conflict, was essential for the development from choral performance to drama. The costumes ranged from impressive outfits for the chorus, Queen Mother, and Darius to Xerxes' torn rags. The play builds from sus-

pense to resolution. The emotions range from fear to pity. Greek literary critics from Gorgias to Aristotle saw this range of emotions as typical of tragedy. When the play was first performed at the Dionysia in 472 BCE, it won first prize. The play remained popular in the decades after the author's death—Aristophanes even mentions it in one of his most famous plays—and the fact that it is one of the few plays of Aeschylus to survive to modern times is an indication of the regard in which it was held.

Oresteia In 458 BCE, Aeschylus produced the *Oresteia*, which is the only surviving Greek trilogy and probably the playwright's last work. *Oresteia* includes the plays *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*, and the lost satyr play *Proteus*. As both poetry and drama, the *Oresteia* is generally held to be Aeschylus's masterpiece and one of the greatest works of world literature. Its themes are presented with a power of poetry and a theatrical verve and creativity that are unprecedented. The chorus of the Furies in *Eumenides* was remembered for generations. The third actor and a new stage set are used with startling originality and impact to underline the plays' themes. These four plays of Aeschylus are the first plays that were written for the set on which tragedy was performed for the rest of the fifth century.

Responses to Literature

1. In classical as well as contemporary literature, hubris is a common theme. Can you think of a figure from the real world who exhibits hubris? Who is this person? In what ways does he or she exhibit hubris?
2. Read one of Shakespeare's plays. Take one of the scenes in which a number of characters are present and crucial to the effect of the scene. Now, in order to understand the importance of Aeschylus's innovation of using more than one actor in a play, try to rewrite this scene for just one actor.
3. The concept of "biographical fiction" is important, especially when considering the lives of the ancients. Because little is known for certain about ancient figures, what we do know about them often comes in the form of stories based on some small, known fact about the figure. These stories, often false or fantastical, are called "biographical fiction," and there are a good number of these stories floating around about Aeschylus. In order to understand how biographical fiction works, do a little research on a historical figure and then write a scene in which this figure interacts with his mother. Make sure to utilize some of the facts that you know about the figure.
4. Compare Homer's representation of Agamemnon in the *Iliad* with Aeschylus's representation in *Agamemnon*. What are some of the key differences? What are some of the key similarities?

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S. Y. Agnon

BORN: 1888, *Buczacz, Galicia, Austria-Hungary*

DIED: 1970, *Tel Aviv, Israel*

NATIONALITY: *Israeli, Polish*

GENRE: *Fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bridal Canopy (1931)

A Simple Story (1935)

A Guest for the Night (1939)

The Day before Yesterday (1945)

Overview

S. Y. Agnon is the most distinguished author in the modern Hebrew language and a major prose writer of the twentieth century. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966. His work blends authentic Jewish heritage with European sources to comment upon the disintegration of community and spirituality in the modern world. Agnon is virtually unknown outside Israel,

mostly because his Hebrew prose, loaded with intricate wordplay and echoes of biblical and historical texts, is notoriously difficult to translate. Within the Jewish state, his standing is akin to that of William Shakespeare in England.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Fleeing the Pogroms Agnon was born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes in 1888 in the shtetl (Jewish village) of Buczacz, in Galicia, now part of Ukraine but then belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father, an ordained rabbi and a fur trader by profession, was a Hasidic Jew who encouraged his son to study the Bible, the Talmud, and rabbinic texts. From his mother, he acquired knowledge of German language and literature, which enabled him to read European writers in translation. When Shmuel was eight, he decided to become a poet, and at age fifteen he published his first poem in Yiddish.

While Shmuel led a sheltered childhood in the shtetl, his youth was a time of turmoil for Jews. The pogroms (persecutions) in Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 led many to migrate westward into Europe. A smaller stream migrated into Palestine (now Israel), where the Zionist movement hoped to create a Jewish homeland. In 1907, at age nineteen, the budding writer moved to Palestine as part of the great wave of immigration known as the Second Aliyah. He became first secretary of the Jewish court at Jaffa. There he encountered the contradictory confluence of Jewish tradition and cosmopolitan Western culture that would become the focus of his writing. In 1908 he published his first story, “Agunot” (Forsaken Wives), in the journal *Ha-Omer*. With a slight modification to the title, he assumed his pen name—Agnon.

To Germany Agnon published his first novella, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, in 1912. Several literary specialists noticed this work; Arthur Rupin, a major figure in the Zionist movement, urged the aspiring writer to broaden his horizons in Berlin. In 1913 Agnon traveled to Germany, where he lived for eleven years. Fluent in German, he gave Hebrew lessons and worked for a publisher of Jewish books, all the while writing fiction.

In Berlin, Agnon met businessman Zalman Schocken, who admired the young author and became his financial patron. Schocken gave Agnon a regular stipend, permitting him to live comfortably free from financial worries and to concentrate on his writing. Schocken promised to find Agnon a publisher and redeemed his promise by becoming one himself. While in Germany, Agnon’s chief work was on Hasidic folklore and legend, his tales capturing the spirit and flavor of a way of life deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

Home to Jerusalem In 1916, during World War I, Agnon was summoned for a medical checkup and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Agnon's famous contemporaries include:

Martin Buber (1878–1965): An Austrian Jewish philosopher-theologian and associate of Agnon, Buber collaborated with Agnon on an anthology of Hasidic stories.

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): This Russian poet and novelist was the author of *Doctor Zhivago*.

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940): A Russian novelist and playwright whose satirical novel *The Master and Margarita* circulated underground in the Soviet Union.

Isaac Babel (1894–1940): A Russian Jewish playwright and short-story writer, Babel is noted for his stories of the Jews in Odessa and his novel *Red Cavalry*.

Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991): This Polish American author wrote in Yiddish. His stories deal with conflicts between traditional faith and modernism.

David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973): The leader of the Zionist movement and first prime minister of Israel (1948–1953, 1955–1963).

possible conscription into the Austrian army. Horrified by the possibility of going to war, he chain-smoked and ingested a large number of pills, managing to get sick enough to avoid the draft. He remained in Berlin through the end of the war. In 1920 he met and married Esther Marx, a young woman from an affluent orthodox family. The couple had two children in Germany and remained together for fifty years.

In 1924 Agnon's home in Hamburg burned down. Everything he owned went up in flames, including his library of four thousand books and the manuscript of an autobiographical novel. The disaster had a lasting impact on Agnon, who saw the fire as an omen. Convinced that his exile had grown too long, he returned to Palestine and settled in Jerusalem. But five years later, his home was wrecked and much of his library again destroyed during the Arab riots of 1929. Fond of connecting his own life story to the annals of Jewish history, he likened these two events to the obliteration of the two temples. The feeling of homelessness, of losing one's dwelling, or simply not having a house where one can lodge, is a strong current in Agnon's work, serving as a metaphor for the precarious situation of the Jew.

Agnon settled permanently just outside Jerusalem and spent the next forty years writing in his small library-turned-office. He wrote by hand, standing at a polished wood podium. Although he had written in Yiddish as a youth, Agnon wrote his major works in Hebrew, the ancient holy tongue that had been revived in the late nineteenth century after centuries of being unspoken.

Unlike other pioneers of Jewish secular fiction, such as Sholom Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer, Agnon chose Hebrew as an outgrowth of his Zionist beliefs; he was writing for a future nation that would be located in the Middle East. The city of Jerusalem became not just Agnon's home but the central axis of his fiction, a symbol of stability and continuity in Jewish life.

Major Works The next years proved to be productive for Agnon. He dramatized the conflict between Jewish tradition and modernity in short stories, dozens of which were published in the Hebrew daily *Ha'aretz*, and novels. His first acclaimed novel, *The Bridal Canopy* (1931), concerns a Hasidic rabbi who travels through nineteenth-century Galicia seeking a dowry for his daughters. This folk epic also portrays the decline of religious life through a protagonist whose devotion to God is obtrusively at odds with his secular surroundings. *A Simple Story*, his 1935 novel is anything but simple; it is a social treatise juxtaposing Jewish middle-class mores with European modernist ideas of religious and sexual freedom. Its hero, the classic schlemiel (chump) Hirshl, enters into an arranged marriage at the behest of his overbearing mother, but his obsessive love for his cousin Blume drives him to mental collapse.

Agnon's talent was at its peak in *A Guest for the Night* (1939), a nightmarish account of the decline of European Jewry after World War I, as related by an unnamed narrator returning to his native town. This work was inspired by Agnon's visit to his birthplace in the mid-1930s. World War I had shattered the old faith and traditions, and on the horizon loomed the still greater menace of World War II. Another major achievement, *The Day before Yesterday* (1945), is based on Agnon's experiences in Palestine before World War I. Set in Palestine during the Second Aliyah, the story is a bleak and critical appraisal of the Zionist endeavor that reveals the gap between lofty ideals and the dark realities of human nature.

The dreams of Agnon and the Zionists came to fruition with the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. The writer evacuated his home during the Arab-Israeli War that broke out when Israel declared its independence, returning after the end of hostilities. Annually, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism, hundreds of thousands of synagogue congregants recite the Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel, which Agnon cowrote with chief rabbis Yitzhak Herzog and Ben Zion Uziel.

Agnon wrote until the end of his life, despite steadily declining health. After he was diagnosed with a heart condition in 1951, he began to sit while working. His reputation was such that when he complained to the city council about traffic noise on his street, the municipality closed the street to cars, while a sign hanging at the head of the street proclaimed to all passersby: "No cars are to enter. Agnon is writing." In 1966 Agnon received the Nobel Prize, along with the German poet and dramatist Nelly Sachs. He died in 1970. His daughter, Emuna Yaron, subsequently

collected and released many of his unpublished works, including the novel *Shira* (1971), which he had worked on for twenty-five years but left unfinished, and which she edited according to his instructions.

Works in Literary Context

Agnon was widely read and was conversant with European novelists; for example, he exalted the virtues of Gustave Flaubert. His prose is crossed with references to Scandinavian, Russian, German, and French literature. The episodic, picaresque style of *The Bridal Canopy* has brought comparisons to Cervantes's classic novel *Don Quixote*. Critics also frequently compare Agnon to Franz Kafka; both possessed the ability to create menacing psychic dreamscapes, and they share the qualities of irony and alienation, though Agnon insisted that he never read Kafka's work.

Agnon and the Jewish Canon As Agnon claimed in accepting the Nobel Prize, his major source of literary influence was the canon of Jewish literature. The Torah (Jewish Bible), Talmud, Mishnah, and commentaries by Hebrew poets and philosophers such as Moses Maimonides all suffuse his writing. In his book *Tradition and Trauma: Studies in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, critic David Patterson wrote, "The first impressions of apparent simplicity soon give way to a realization of the overtones, references and allusions arising from the author's complete familiarity with the whole vast corpus of Hebrew literature. The ancient vocabulary of Hebrew is pregnant with associations of all kinds, and the skillful juxtaposition of words and phrases can be made to yield a variety of nuances." These nuances, found in every passage of Agnon's stories, make his prose a formidable challenge for translators.

A Folk Modernist More than any other writer, Agnon advanced the idea of creating not only a new literature in Hebrew but a new culture synthesizing eastern European traditions and modern Israeli norms. While living in Germany, Agnon noted the sharp contrast between rural, traditional Jews emigrating from the shtetls and the more cosmopolitan, secular German Jews. As a writer, he could neither discard the religious tradition of Judaism nor shun the realities of modern secular life. He knew that for Jews to negotiate the twentieth century, both would be necessary. Sensing the alien aspects of European culture, he initiated a return to Jewish folk material, to the Hebrew language, and to the ancient sources. His deceptively simple, ironic prose reads as though it had been written long ago. While his stories often have the quality of folk literature, they also incorporate modern literary devices such as shifting viewpoints, nonlinear narratives, and the intermingling of fantasy and reality.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The stories and novels of S. Y. Agnon chronicle an eventful period in Jewish history, from the murderous pogroms to the founding of Israel. The following works of fiction also open a window onto the European Jewish past:

"Bontshe the Silent" (1894), a short story by I. L. Peretz. In this classic Yiddish story, a poor, pious Jew suffers, dies, and goes to heaven, where angels agree to grant his greatest wish: a warm buttered roll every morning.

"Tevey the Dairyman" (1911), a short story by Sholom Aleichem. The stories of Tevey, his wife Golde, and the daughters they try to marry off inspired the famous Broadway (and movie) musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Breakdown and Bereavement (1914), a novel by Yosef Haim Brenner. A harrowing novel about the challenges faced by Zionist pioneers, this work was by an author whose encouragement was important in Agnon's early career.

Exodus (1958), a novel by Leon Uris. This historical novel about the founding of Israel was a huge best seller in the United States.

Mister Mani (1990), a novel by A. B. Yehoshua. In this acclaimed Israeli novel, six generations of a family pass along domestic secrets against the backdrop of a century of Jewish history.

Works in Critical Context

Agnon is widely regarded as the most accomplished author of fiction to have written in Hebrew. He is such a venerated figure in Israel that since 1985, his image has appeared on the fifty-shekel banknote. In 2002, when the National Yiddish Book Centre listed their one hundred greatest works of modern Jewish literature, three of Agnon's novels occupied the fourth, fifth, and sixth places. In addition, his novels and stories appear frequently as compulsory reading in Israeli schools. Yet, outside Israel, very few readers have even heard of him.

The Problem of Translation The difficulty of getting across in English the full flavor and profundity of Agnon's prose is certainly a major reason why he has not received the broad, lasting international appreciation given to other modernist giants, despite the Nobel Prize. Commentators have attributed much of the subtlety and complexity of his writing to the Hebrew language itself and its capacity to construct a web of associations. English-speaking literary scholars frequently debate whether translation can sufficiently convey the art of prose written in other languages. In Agnon's case, that question has often taken center stage. Noted American author Cynthia Ozick observed, "For decades, Agnon scholars (and

Agnon is a literary industry) have insisted that it is no use trying to get at Agnon in any language other than the original.” Indeed, his nuances and dense layers of allusion challenge even Hebrew readers.

Little Known in the West Many scholars of Jewish literature have tackled Agnon. Haim Be’er, who wrote a book on the author in 1992, said, “Agnon is the centre of our cultural discourse. His work is the most frequent subject of Hebrew literary research.” Little of his work was translated into English until late in his life. The illustrious American critic Edmund Wilson praised Agnon in 1956, calling publicly for him to be given the Nobel Prize, largely on the strength of *The Day before Yesterday*. The publication in English of *Betrothed, & Edo and Enam: Two Tales* in the summer of 1966 coincided with a wave of international critical acclaim for his earlier work that contributed to his winning the prize. Afterward, more of his works were translated; his short fiction was showcased in a volume titled *A Book That Was Lost, and Other Stories* (1995).

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library resources and the Internet, research the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a short essay, explain how its values are reflected in the fiction of S. Y. Agnon.
2. Read several of Agnon’s short stories and focus on the theme of community. How does Agnon convey what is special about the Jewish community? Why is the community in danger of disintegration?
3. Read the short story “Pisces” from *A Book That Was Lost, and Other Stories*. Discuss how Agnon’s use of magic realism, folklore, humor, and irony contribute to the story.
4. *Agunot* is the term applied to women who have been abandoned by their husbands and are left in a state of limbo since they cannot remarry. Based on the story “Agunot,” why do you think Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes took the pen name Agnon?

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Chingiz Aitmatov

BORN: 1928, *Sheker*, Kirghiz Republic, USSR (now Kyrgyzstan)

DIED: 2008, *Nürnberg*, Germany

NATIONALITY: *Kirghiz*

GENRE: *Fiction, drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

Tales of the Mountains and Steppes (1963)

Farewell, Gul’sary! (1966)

The White Ship (1970)

The Ascent of Mt. Fuji (1973)

The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years (1981)

Overview

A prominent literary figure in the former Soviet Union and present-day Russian Federation, Chingiz Aitmatov has helped to bring the history and traditions of the Kirghiz and Kazakh peoples to world attention. His prose blends legend, myth, and realistic detail to depict the struggles of traditional cultures caught up in the rapid changes of modernization. Critical of Soviet society, but not a dissident, Aitmatov remained in the USSR and even rose to important posts in the government of Mikhail



Chingiz Aitmatov Igor Gavrilov / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Gorbachev. The innovative style of his stories and novels helped break down the rigidities of socialist realism, and opened the way for more stylistic experimentation and creativity in Russian prose.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Literate Kirghiz The first author from the Central Asian region of Kirghizia (now Kyrgyzstan) to earn international recognition, Chingiz Torekulovich Aitmatov was born in the mountain village of Sheker on December 12, 1928. His parents were highly educated and bilingual; consequently, Aitmatov grew up with a strong knowledge of the Russian classics as well as the folklore of his native culture. During the Stalinist purge of the Communist Party in 1937, when Aitmatov was nine years old, his father, a regional party official, and two uncles were arrested and shot on charges of “bourgeois nationalism.” Subsequently, his aunt and grandmother taught him the oral legends and traditions of the Kirghiz people, who had no written language of their own until the late 1920s.

World War II erupted before Aitmatov entered his teens. In 1941, he left school to contribute to the war effort. One of the few literate persons in his village, he became a tax collector and secretary of the village soviet

(or council). After the war, he attended a veterinary school in Kazakhstan, earning a degree in animal husbandry in 1953. Over the next dozen years, he worked as a livestock specialist while pursuing a literary career.

Aitmatov published his first story in 1952. He translated other stories from Kirghiz into Russian, then began writing in the latter language. These early pieces helped him gain entrance into the prestigious Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. After graduation in 1958, he returned home to work as a correspondent for the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and continued to write fiction.

A Critical Yet Loyal Communist The 1959 publication of his novella *Jamila* in the liberal journal *Novi mir* brought Aitmatov international recognition. The story shows some distance from the official model of socialist realism that all Soviet authors were expected to follow. The heroine abandons her husband from an arranged marriage to be with her true love, a war deserter and thief. Aitmatov presents her actions in a positive light. Kirghiz critics denounced the work as demeaning and unrepresentative of their culture, but it was widely translated and published abroad.

Aitmatov joined the Communist Party in 1959. He soon became an influential public figure, serving on the editorial boards of important publications, including *Novi mir*, as well as being a member of the Soviet Writers’ Union. One of Aitmatov’s singular achievements is that he remained a party member in good standing despite the critical perspective on Soviet life that appears in much of his writing. The government of Nikita Khrushchev awarded Aitmatov the Lenin Prize in 1963 for his collection *Tales of the Mountains and Steppes*, which reprints several stories, including *Jamila*.

Aitmatov was decorated again with the State Prize for Literature for his novella *Farewell, Gul’sary!* (1966). This work draws parallels between the lives of an elderly Kirghiz peasant, Tanabai, and the racehorse he formerly owned, Gul’sary. Tanabai’s reminiscences reveal how the indifference and corruption of local Communist Party bosses caused suffering to both man and animal.

The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years Three of Aitmatov’s most popular stories appeared in the 1970s. These stories, presented from a child’s perspective, blend traditional myth and Soviet reality. In *The White Ship* (1970), an orphan raised on the traditional values of his grandfather is unable to accept the evils of contemporary Soviet life and kills himself. *The Cranes Fly Early* (1975) is semiautobiographical, concerning a group of boys taken from school during World War II to help with the war effort. “Piebald Dog Running along the Shore” (1977) takes place in the Soviet Far East among the minority Nivkh peoples; the exotic locale, details of the traditional culture, and the compelling plot of a boy’s initiation into manhood that goes terribly wrong, were enormously appealing to the Soviet public. Critics attacked the tragic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aitmatov's famous contemporaries include:

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): This Russian dissident author exposed the extent of Stalin's labor-camp system.

Günter Grass (1927–): This Polish-German novelist was one of the most controversial authors to emerge out of Germany after World War II. He is best known for his trilogy of novels that graphically capture the reactions of German citizens to the rise of Nazism and the horrors of war.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Márquez, a Colombian novelist, is best known for his magical realist masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Mexico's foremost contemporary novelist, Fuentes often intertwines myth, legend, and history to examine his country's roots and discover the essence of modern Mexican society.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Achebe is a Nigerian author whose novel *Things Fall Apart* was a breakthrough for African literature.

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996): Brodsky, a Russian-born poet, was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972 for his political views.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–): Gorbachev was the last head of state of the USSR (1985–1991); his reforms led to the breakdown of Soviet Communism.

tone of these stories, but the stories sealed Aitmatov's popularity with readers.

One of Aitmatov's more daring and well-known works is *The Ascent of Mount Fuji* (1973), a play he coauthored with dramatist Kaltai Mukhamedzhanov. This drama caused a sensation at its 1973 Moscow premiere because it openly treats the delicate subject of Soviet suppression of dissidents. Four old schoolmates meet on a mountaintop to renew their friendship but find they must confront the absence of a fifth friend, Sabur: he had denounced the government and was sent to a concentration camp. One of the four friends condemns Sabur for treason, while the other three remain silent. This psychological study of betrayal and silence was not published in the Soviet Union. In 1988, Aitmatov wrote the screenplay for a movie version.

Aitmatov's first full-length novel, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years* (1981), is much wider in scope than his prior work. Its three major subplots interweave elements of Kirghiz folklore, Soviet history, and science fiction. In the first subplot, a Kazhak elder reminisces as he travels to a sacred cemetery to give his friend a ritual burial. In the second, a former Russian soldier is persecuted for writing his memoirs of World War II. In the

third, astronauts on a joint Soviet American space mission discover an advanced civilization on another planet but are prevented from returning to Earth by their own governments, which fear the cultural effects of this contact. This complex work, touching on issues of intellectual freedom and cultural identity, is open to numerous thematic interpretations.

Political Work and Later Career *The Place of the Skull* (1986), Aitmatov's second novel, appeared in the early days of Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as Soviet leader, as Gorbachev unrolled his reform policy called *glasnost* (openness). Like many works of that time, Aitmatov's novel focuses on the moral and social problems of the Soviet Union, especially drug trafficking, bureaucratic corruption, and the destruction of nature. Using a Russian rather than a Kirghiz or Kazhak as his main character, Aitmatov argues that Russians have also been cut off from their spirituality and cultural heritage.

Aitmatov became a member of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and an adviser to Gorbachev. His political and diplomatic career continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991; he served as Russian ambassador to Luxembourg and later resided in Brussels as Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His son, Askar Aitmatov, became the foreign minister of Kyrgyzstan in 2002.

As Aitmatov became more involved with politics, his literary output declined both in quantity and quality. He published no fiction between the story collection *The Mark of Cassandra* (1995) and the novel *When Mountains Crumble* (2007). Aitmatov suffered kidney failure in May 2008 and reportedly fell into a coma; he died on June 10, 2008, in Germany.

Works in Literary Context

Chingiz Aitmatov's bilingual education exposed him to the classics of Russian literature, as well as the rich indigenous traditions of his own culture. His ability to write with a dual consciousness, connected to his own minority culture while capable of relating to the concerns of the dominant Russian culture, may in part account for his literary success.

Stretching Socialist Realism Aitmatov lost his father in Stalin's purges and clearly understood the repressive techniques the Communist regime applied toward artists, such as the requirement to write in the mode of socialist realism. Socialist realism was the term applied to literature that furthered the ideals and aims of the socialist Soviet government, while avoiding direct criticism of the government or dwelling on otherwise "frivolous" subjects. Since art was considered a resource of society, just like food or lumber, it was subject to government approval and distribution. Yet even Aitmatov's early works depart from the tenets of the genre, and his mature stories and novels deal with sensitive topics such as government corruption, the threat to traditional cultures and languages, and even Stalin's concentration camps. A Communist himself,

Aitmatov depicted characters committed to fulfilling socialist ideals under adverse conditions. This tactic allowed him to engage controversial subjects and include unpleasant details of Soviet reality within the framework of socialist realism.

Folklore and Animal Life Aitmatov's style of drawing heavily on folklore and parables to present his ideas may be one reason his writings have not put him in disfavor with his government and party. Almost all of his stories and novels refer to a myth or folktale. Aitmatov resituates aspects of indigenous tradition into the reality of Soviet, and now Russian, society. *Farewell, Gul'sary!* represents this quality. The tale is strongly reminiscent of old oral epics that emphasize horses and horseback riding. As Gul'sary and his master contemplate their shared past, Aitmatov illustrates the interwoven destinies of man and animal, the concordance of man and nature so vital to the Kirghiz oral heritage. His novels *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* and *The Place of the Skull* both use animals to underscore the fate of the human characters. Other stories depict nature and children as innocent victims of a ruthless modern society.

The Mankurt The overriding theme of Aitmatov's fiction is the consequences that result when a group neglects its history and ancestral culture. He has even encapsulated the thrust of this social perspective in a single word: *mankurt*. The term derives from a Turkish myth, which Aitmatov relates to great effect in *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*. According to legend, foreign invaders would strap a camel hide onto a prisoner's head, which would painfully squeeze his skull and turn him into a *mankurt*—a mindless, obedient slave stripped of all memory. This myth becomes a potent symbol of the novel's underlying message. Today, in Turkey and the former Soviet republics, *mankurt* is used as a derogatory reference to people who embrace Western, or Russian, culture at the expense of their own national or linguistic identities. This addition to the political lexicon symbolizes Aitmatov's contribution to Russian and Central Asian life.

Works in Critical Context

Aitmatov accomplished a rare feat in Soviet cultural life: he developed a devoted following within the USSR and was decorated rather than censored by the state. In 1963, he received the Lenin Prize for literature, the highest honor the Soviet Union could bestow on an author, and he twice won the State Prize for literature (1966, 1983). This official recognition did not buy his silence; instead, it afforded him a measure of security that enabled him to take more risks. Later, he became almost a symbol of Gorbachev's liberal reforms and increased recognition of cultural diversity within the Soviet Union.

The White Ship In *The White Ship*, Aitmatov depicts the suicide of a seven-year-old boy who becomes despondent after witnessing the brutal slaying and consumption of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chingiz Aitmatov writes in a unique style blending traditional folklore and modern themes. The works below represent other modern attempts to draw upon the folk traditions of a variety of cultures.

The Bridal Canopy (1931), a novel by S. Y. Agnon. This folk epic, about a wandering rabbi seeking a dowry for his daughters, celebrates a disappearing Jewish culture with many vignettes filled with Jewish lore.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952), a novel by Amos Tutuola. This Nigerian adventure yarn is told in a style resembling indigenous oral traditions, but with curious modern embellishments such as a "television-handed goddess."

The Lost Steps (1953), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. The protagonist of this novel travels from New York into the Amazonian jungle: as he progresses, time seems to move backward.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958), a play by Derek Walcott. This folk-drama celebrates Caribbean storytelling and carnival, while subtly exploring the social consequences of colonialism.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1964), a film directed by Sergei Parajanov. This hallucinatory masterwork of cinema contains many folkloric images revealing the ancient culture of the Carpathian Mountains.

a rare deer. Some Soviet readers were offended by the pessimism of the story, and the outcry against it prompted the author to defend his artistic integrity in the *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Countering suggested changes in the tale, Aitmatov was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating: "I had a choice, either to write or not to write the story. And if to write it, then only as I did." The author also asserted that evil is inexorable and, lacking the capacity to overcome the adult evil surrounding him, the boy had to sacrifice his life or his childhood ideals.

As Rosemarie Keiffer explained in *Books Abroad*, Aitmatov intended to provoke thought by allowing the young protagonist to take his own life: "The boy's fate is aimed at elucidating certain human faults: Who has been faithful to the most positive of childhood dreams? Who has measured up to the moral aspirations of adolescence? Who has remained truthful in his relations with children? Aitmatov does not pretend here to teach men how to live up to their most cherished and human ideals, only to prick their consciences with the disparities between those ideals and the realities of most people's lives."

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library resources and the Internet, research Kyrgyzstan and its culture. How does the

work of Aitmatov reflect traditional life in Kyrgyzstan?

2. Does Aitmatov fit your understanding of a socialist realist writer? Citing one or more of his works, explore his contribution to this literary genre.
3. Look closely at the use of folklore in one or more Aitmatov stories. In a group discussion, explain how he uses folklore to make statements about the present day, or the relationship between past and present.
4. Write about the role of animals in Aitmatov's fiction.
5. What is the overall message of Aitmatov's novella, *Jamila*? What is Aitmatov's view toward tradition and modernism?

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Bella Akhmadulina

BORN: 1937, Moscow

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The String (1962)

Fever, and Other Poems (1969)

Music Lessons (1969)

Dreams of Georgia (1977)

Seashore (1991)

Overview

Considered one of the foremost contemporary Russian poets, Bella Akhmadulina's poetry reflects the challenges of creating literature under a repressive Communist regime. Also a noted translator of poems, especially from Georgian, she favors traditional forms and introspective topics. Born in Moscow the same year that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin conducted purge trials of Soviet officials he believed to be disloyal, Bella Akhmadulina attended the A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature in the mid-1950s. She was married first to the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, then to the writer Yuri Nagibin, before marrying the artist Boris Messerer in 1974.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Collections Lauded by Critics Akhmadulina, a member of the "new wave" writers who were influenced by Western ideology, began to publish poetry in the early 1960s. During this period, the Soviet Union was engaged in the Cold War with the United States while a still-repressive Communist regime ensured Soviet society operated under many government-mandated restrictions. Though Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev attempted to correct the excesses of his predecessor, Stalin, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was only limited intellectual freedom.

Akhmadulina's first two collections, *String* (1962) and *Music Lessons* (1968), contain what many critics regard as her finest poems. "Fever" and "Tale of the Rain," two of Akhmadulina's most celebrated early poems, convey her belief that creativity has a liberating effect on individuals yet leads to scorn and alienation from society.

In other noted poems from these volumes, Akhmadulina pays tribute to such literary predecessors as Anna Akhmatova, Mariana Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov, and Alexander Pushkin. In the poem "I Swear," she vows to destroy the social forces that drove Tsvetaeva to commit suicide in the city of Yelabuga in 1941.

A Dry Spell Akhmadulina wrote very little in the 1960s and 1970s. Her works after "Tale of the Rain" explore the themes of sickness, insomnia, and suffering over her inability to write in an atmosphere of muteness, shadows, and darkness. The Soviet regime of this period was more repressive as Khrushchev had been overthrown by a conspiracy of Communist party leaders and replaced by more hard-line Communists. Dissenting members of the intelligentsia were often targeted by the new leadership's campaigns. In the mid-1970s, however, Akhmadulina's poems again began to appear regularly in the press and in a number of collections. In these poems some of



Bella Akhmadulina (left), sitting with Voznessenski, Tvardovski, and Zolina Akhmadulina, Bella, photograph. AP Images.

her old themes and images reappear, but new ones also gradually emerge.

Added Theme of Spirituality In her recent works, Akhmadulina returns to her main themes: her love of foreign lands—especially the country of Georgia; evocations of the past through visions of the specific Russian poets who influenced her; and the joys and rewards of friendship. While they always showed a profound sense of integrity and morality, her poems now are acquiring an even deeper spiritual cast. Almost Romantic in tone, Akhmadulina's poems find God and virtue in nature. Throughout her career, she has been able to transform the mundane into the whimsical, the sublime, and the wonderful. By the early 2000s, her poems had become more mature and reflective.

Works in Literary Context

While traditional in form, Akhmadulina's poetry is distinguished by her wit, emotional intensity, and inventive use of rhyme, syntax, and imagery. Consistency of formal devices, as well as symbolism, is also evident in Akhmadulina's poetry. The metrics of her poems are not distin-

guished by any new experimental forms. Rather, she gives freshness and variety to the traditional forms. Akhmadulina's early verse is characterized by her exuberant use of extended metaphors that impart a sense of wonder to ordinary objects and events. Her later poems often express melancholy or pensive moods and examine such subjects as aging and the loss of creative powers.

Flowers For Akhmadulina, flowers have always represented poems. In her early lyrics, they grow in greenhouses, protected from the elements. As she becomes more daring as a poet, she finds herself more often in gardens where the flowers grow in the open air. Flowers act simultaneously as the source of inspiration as well as its result—the poems themselves. One entire volume is called *The Garden* (1987) because each poem is a flower lying within its pages.

Love Akhmadulina's love poems share a recurrent symbolism. She finds refuge from her alienation from the crowd either in poetry or with her lover. In most cases, the man she loves shares her inspiration. Where most poets look to love for inspiration, Akhmadulina looks to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Akhmadulina's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): Communist ruler of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953, responsible for rapid industrialization and also many deaths from famine and executions.

Rudolfo Anaya (1937–): Mexican American author best known for writing *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997): Russian poet who helped start the “author’s song” genre of bardlike musical performance.

Madeleine Albright (1937–): First woman to become United States secretary of state in 1996. She was nominated by President Bill Clinton and unanimously confirmed by the United States Senate before being sworn in on January 23, 1997.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933–): Akhmadulina’s ex-husband, a Russian poet who was one of the first to denounce Stalinism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Akhmadulina’s poems refer to the process of writing poetry. This technique of calling attention to the form itself is a common writing device, which works to get the reader or viewer to focus on the artistic endeavor as well as the content. Here are some other works that detail the creative process in the work itself.

Tristram Shandy (1759), a novel by Laurence Sterne. The title character attempts to tell his life story, but is so meandering that this novel becomes more about the futility of telling one’s life story.

Pale Fire (1962), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. A fictional editor publishes and comments on a poem by the fictional poet John Shade, which takes the form of this fictional novel.

Adaptation (2002), a film directed by Spike Jonze. In this movie, a screenwriter is writing a script about a book which is too complicated to be turned into a script.

inspiration for love. An excellent illustration of this symbiotic relationship between love and inspiration is the poem “December,” in which the speaker and her lover are building a snowman, and a crowd gathers around them to watch their actions.

Friendship The constant need to be alone with friends is more prevalent in her later poetry. In “I think: how stupid I have been” (1967) she is to meet friends at six o’clock in a café. Because her watch is fast, she arrives before the others. While she is waiting she enumerates their good qualities and finally comes to the conclusion that she is “afraid to be alone.” Akhmadulina also seeks the company of friends when she can no longer endure the futility of trying to write. Akhmadulina’s search for solace in the company of friends is a logical result of her predicament—especially since poetry and lovers often are not there when she needs them.

Influence on Other Writers As part of the “new wave” of writers, Akhmadulina is considered an important Russian poet and perhaps one of the most popular Russian woman poets of her generation. Her influence can be seen on the poets from her country who followed her literary tradition.

Works in Critical Context

Akhmadulina’s distinctive poetic voice, lively style, and original use of themes have been praised by critics. They also commend her witty use of metaphor to comment on society and the natural world and her ability to create and sustain her personal perspective in her poems. In addition, her stylistic and thematic variety is held in high regard.

Fever, and Other Poems Writing of *Fever, and Other Poems*, Rosemary Neiswender notes that Akhmadulina’s “frequent subject [is] the soul in the winter of its discontent. No socialist realist, she is preoccupied with the symbolic ague of our age (‘Fever’), the spiritual dichotomy between the Russian North and Georgian South (‘Longing for Lermontov’), and the martyrdoms of her great predecessors (poems to Tsvetaeva, Pushkin, Pasternak).”

Elaine Feinstein writes that “at her finest Akhmadulina combines a fierce, comic invention with her most passionate utterance: she turns her wit upon herself (as in ‘Fever’), or upon the complacent materialism of the worldly (as in ‘A Tale about Rain’).”

Yevgeny Yevtushenko wrote in the foreword to *Fever, and Other Poems* that she is “endowed with an amazing poetic ear” and was recognized as “a queen of rhyme” even while in school. He criticized what he called “the poverty of content” of her earliest published work, attributing this to her mastery of form before a mature range of experience and expression had ripened. But he added: “The Rubicon is crossed and she will never betray her vow to Tsvetaeva to kill Yelabuga.”

Responses to Literature

1. Akhmadulina claims she doesn’t write political poems, but can you find evidence to the contrary in her earlier poems?

2. Track the changes in two of her favorite symbols, flowers and dogs, over the years of her poetry.
3. Which do you think Akhmadulina values more, love or friendship? Give evidence citing a few of her poems in *Fever, and Other Poems*.
4. Akhmadulina celebrates the Georgian countryside in many of her poems. What in particular does she seem to like about this place?
5. Akhmadulina owes much of her expression to Russian writers like Pasternak and Pushkin, Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva. What do these writers have in common, stylistically?

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Anna Akhmatova

BORN: 1889, Bol'shoi Fontan, Russia

DIED: 1966, Domodedovo, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, prose, translation

MAJOR WORKS:

Evening (1912)

Requiem: A Cycle of Poems (1964)



Anna Akhmatova *Akhmatova, Anna, 1918, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.*

Overview

Over the course of a poetic career of nearly sixty years, Soviet poet Anna Akhmatova (Anna Andreevna Gorenko) led a literary movement, had her work banned in her own country, survived political and social unrest, and became a symbol of creative survival against tremendous odds. Described as the "tragic queen" of Russian poetry and considered among the country's most significant poets, she remains a beautiful and sad symbol of twentieth-century upheaval.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Mentor and a Pen Name Anna Andreevna Gorenko was born in Bol'shoi Fontan in Russia on June 11, 1889, the third of six children to an aristocratic family in a wealthy suburb of St. Petersburg. After an education at girls' schools, she enrolled in the Department of Law at Kiev College in 1907, but her interest in literature and writing soon overtook her legal studies.

As a teenager, Gorenko began to write poems, receiving advice from poet Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev, whom

she had met in 1903. Gumilev spent years courting Gorenko, and although she was not initially interested in a relationship with him, she did let him read her poetry. Subsequently, he edited her first poem, “On his hand are lots of shining rings,” which appeared in a Russian magazine in 1907 under her real name. Her father objected to the publication of her poems under his name, so Gorenko took on the pen name Anna Akhmatova.

Marriage and Bohemian Life Akhmatova eventually agreed to marry Gumilev in 1910. While on honeymoon with Gumilev in Paris, Akhmatova met an artist who would influence her greatly. Amedeo Modigliani was an unknown painter at the time. He became her correspondent and friend, accompanying her during her repeat visit to Paris in 1911 and even sketching her in the nude.

While she was discovering Paris with her new friend, Akhmatova’s husband was gaining recognition as the leader of a new literary movement: Acmeism. The group, whose name came from the Greek word *acme* (pinnacle), opposed Symbolism, a literary movement characterized by a belief in mysticism, and metaphorical language. Instead of dealing with the mysteries of the “divine world,” Acmeists focused on the material, or visible, world. The Acmeists (who included Gumilev, Sergei Mitrofanovich Gorodetsky, Mandel’shtam, Vladimir Ivanovich Narbut, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zenkevich, and eventually Akhmatova) preferred to express themselves directly through images instead of symbols. Though Gumilev did not take Akhmatova’s poetry seriously at first, he eventually found that her verse fit well with Acmeist principles.

The years 1911–1912 were productive for Akhmatova in more ways than one: 1911 brought the publication of more of her poems in Russian magazines; her collection *Evening* (1912) was published, which brought her immediate fame; and she gave birth to her only son, Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, on September 18, 1912. Not ready to give up her bohemian lifestyle, Akhmatova left her son with her mother-in-law and returned to St. Petersburg.

By 1914, Akhmatova had become a leading figure in St. Petersburg’s literary circle. Known for her great beauty and charisma, she charmed and attracted several admirers and built up a beautiful but sad persona that enchanted the city. Along with other literary figures, she read her poetry at the Stray Dog cabaret, a smoky basement where she could show off her beautiful figure and her free-wheeling charm. She was to meet several lovers there, including composer Artur Sergeevich Lur’e and poet Vladimir Kazimirovich Shileiko, who would later become her second husband. Though she showed no outward sign of regret for her affairs or her abandonment of her son, Akhmatova’s early bohemian poems deal with themes of guilt, sin, and repentance.

War and Revolution But Akhmatova and her friends could not ignore the changes that were taking place in Russian society. World War I came to Russia,

and with it the closure of the Stray Dog, which had become a symbol of the free and fun prewar years. Akhmatova turned her poetic attentions from love to politics as she foreshadowed hard times to come. After the 1917 Revolution, in which the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian government in an effort to improve workers’ rights, many of Akhmatova’s friends fled Russia and advised her to come along. However, Akhmatova stayed in Russia, divorcing her husband, marrying Shileiko, and moving to the Sheremet’ev (“Fountain House”) Palace. Akhmatova’s residence at the Fountain House carried on a long literary tradition of housing poets and authors there, including influential nineteenth-century figures such as Sergeevich Pushkin and Petr Andreevich Viazemsky.

Though the Revolution threatened the political future of Russia, it created a temporary period of creative freedom for Russia’s artists and poets. Energized, Akhmatova wrote new poetry that focused on her commitment to her Russian homeland and her refusal to emigrate along with her friends. But Akhmatova had made a real sacrifice by staying in Russia after the Revolution. She lived in an unheated apartment with Shileiko, who by now had become distant and unhappy with Akhmatova, and began to lament the prerevolutionary days. Her ex-husband, Gumilev, was a direct casualty of the new regime: an anti-Communist, he was arrested and executed for his “monarchist” views in 1920.

Banned Akhmatova, whose poetry lived in a past she could not recapture, found herself in opposition to the Bolshevik regime. Critics began to describe her work as “anachronistic,” and her traditional approach to poetry was endangered when her work was banned by the government in 1925. Akhmatova had never made a living doing anything but writing and found herself without an income. However, she was embraced by the literary community, who continued to admire her work and supported her through hard financial times. Akhmatova’s admirers commissioned her to translate poetry and write works of literary scholarship, including a series of important essays on Pushkin.

Akhmatova divorced Shileiko in 1926 and moved in with Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin, a poet and avant-garde art historian she first met in 1914. Though she never married Punin, she considered him to be her third husband and lived with his family in the Fountain House, the same palace where she had lived at the beginning of her failed marriage with Shileiko. Over the course of her time in the palace, she would live with Punin’s family members in cramped and shabby quarters that symbolized Russia’s increasingly cramped and noisy communal life.

Requiem Life in Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg) wasn’t just cramped—it was plagued with uncertainty and fear. Akhmatova faced arrest and interrogation for her writing, which had to be done in secret. However, she found a way to keep working. While composing

Requiem: A Cycle of Poems (1964), her long narrative poem, she whispered the words line by line to her friends, who memorized them before she burned the paper on which they had been composed. This protected her and her friends, who passed the long poem to one another under threat of search and arrest.

Akhmatova wrote the bitter, tragic *Requiem* in response to her son's imprisonment. Now a historian, her son spent over twenty years in forced labor camps because of his father and mother's "counterrevolutionary" activities. Moved by the collective experience of torture and murder during the Soviet purges, Akhmatova used folk songs and traditional Russian imagery to express the breakdown of self and society.

The government finally gave Akhmatova permission to publish a new volume of poems in 1940. Akhmatova regained her place in the public consciousness during the terrifying siege of Leningrad, in which German troops attempted to starve the city out, leading to the deaths of 1.5 million civilians. During this time, Akhmatova and other intellectuals participated in a series of radio broadcasts devoted to the arts. Even after her evacuation to Uzbekistan in late 1941, Akhmatova's poems found an audience in Russia, and she became a symbol of Russian patriotism, the culture of the past, and the tragedy of war.

Tragedy and Sacrifice Life seemed to be improving for Akhmatova with her return to Leningrad and the end of World War II. She was allowed to publish *Izbrannoe* (*Selected Poems*) and her son was released from prison. However, she had to break off her engagement to Vladimir Georgievich Garshin, a doctor she had met before the war, when she got in trouble with the government once again, this time over her 1946 visits with influential exiled philosopher Isaiah Berlin. Andrei Zhdanov, who was in charge of cultural policy in Josef Stalin's government, criticized her work and called her "half whore, half nun." Akhmatova's work was immediately rebanned and destroyed, and she was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers. This amounted to a death sentence by starvation, since only union members could get food ration cards. As a final blow, her son was rearrested and sent back to prison in 1949.

Encouraged by her friends to cooperate with the government, Akhmatova decided to trade her literary reputation for her son's freedom. She wrote twelve patriotic poems praising Stalinism, advocating Communism, and celebrating her "happy life" in the Soviet Union. However, even Stalin was not convinced by this desperate attempt, and her sacrifice was in vain. These insincere poems may have compromised her reputation, but they did not free her son.

Devastated, Akhmatova threw herself into work on her masterpiece, *Poem without a Hero* (1960). A long narrative poem that acts as a funeral lament, *Poem without a Hero* explores the past, exposing Russia's collective guilt. Complex in structure and filled with complicated

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Akhmatova's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Soviet dictator who led one of the most repressive regimes in modern history.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): Jazz-Age writer and poet known for her witty remarks on American urban life.

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): Russian poet and writer who was forbidden to publish his poems and novels within Russia.

Alexandra Fyodorovna (1872–1918): Last Tsaritsa of the Russian Empire; died under mysterious circumstances after the Russian Revolution.

Robert Frost (1872–1963): American poet known for his poetry about rural New England.

allusions and references, the poem still fascinates modern critics.

Akhmatova lived to experience a "thaw" in Soviet politics after Stalin's death in 1953. Though her work was still censored, she was allowed to publish throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and her son was released from prison in 1956. She acted as a patroness to young poets, including Joseph Brodsky, during this time, and was allowed to leave the country in 1965 to accept literary prizes abroad. Though she gained recognition by the Russian government as one of the most important Russian poets, she never saw *Requiem* published in Russia during her lifetime. She died on March 5, 1966, after suffering a heart attack.

Works in Literary Context

Akhmatova was influenced by Russian writers such as Sergeevich Pushkin and Boris Pasternak and by artists in other media, such as Amedeo Modigliani. However, it can be argued that the turbulent events of her lifetime were the biggest influence on her tragic and bitter body of work.

Prerevolutionary Russia Akhmatova's work often refers to the prerevolutionary Russia of her childhood. This Russia is characterized by carefree manners and dignified traditions. In poems like "Midnight Verses," she fondly recalls the artistic, genteel society of her youth. Akhmatova also uses the Russia of the past as a contrast to modern violence in her masterpieces, *Requiem* and *Poem without a Hero*.

Women and Love Akhmatova's poems were all written from a distinctly female perspective, showing the many moods of a woman. Her exploration of love and femininity occurred primarily in her early work, which

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Imprisonment, exile, and government repression are common themes in Anna Akhmatova's poems. Here are a few works of other authors that reflect similar themes:

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1897), by Oscar Wilde, was written after Wilde's time served in a British jail for homosexuality.

Life Is Beautiful (1997), a film directed by Roberto Benigni, follows the imprisonment of an Italian Jew and his son during the Holocaust of World War II.

Children of Men (2006), a film directed by Alfonso Cuarón, deals with a repressive world in which humans are no longer able to reproduce.

draws upon the sights and sounds of avant-garde St. Petersburg to explore the idea of unrequited love and feminine guilt.

The Urban Environment Akhmatova's poetry is primarily concerned with urban subjects, exploring at length her fondness of the St. Petersburg of the past and her hatred of the Stalinist Leningrad. Her focus on urban life fit in well with the Acmeist movement, which preferred to explore urban themes instead of complex metaphors about nature and divinity.

Exiled and Oppressed Contemporaries Akhmatova was not alone in facing repression and threats from the Stalinist government. In fact, Soviet Russia's strict laws forced many of the country's best writers either into exile or "underground." Akhmatova's own work was passed along by memory and the original manuscripts burned. This places her alongside other Russian writers such as Boris Pasternak, whose masterpiece, *Dr. Zhivago*, had to be smuggled abroad to find publication; Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote his greatest works in exile; and Marina Tsvetaeva, who was unable to publish work in Russia after her return from exile.

Patronage and Literary Influence Later in life, Akhmatova acted as a patroness to younger poets like Joseph Brodsky. The young poets who visited her at her dacha in Komoravo during the last years of her life continued her literary heritage and worked to have her poems published abroad. In addition, Akhmatova corresponded and visited with literary figures abroad such as Robert Frost.

Works in Critical Context

Akhmatova's central position in Russian poetry was acknowledged throughout her career, earning her nicknames such as "Queen of the Neva" and "Soul of the

Silver Age." However, her critical reception varied. Though her first collection of poetry brought her fame and good reviews, her move into more serious poetry dealing with Russian patriotism and the past earned her criticism for "living in the past" and failing to praise the new Soviet government. As a result, her work was banned in Russia. However, these critics were motivated by political reasons, and it is hard to piece together an accurate view of her works' critical reception during her lifetime. Akhmatova did live to see critical success and recognition during her lifetime; in a 1965 essay, professor Ihor Levitsky stated, "She is a master craftsman whose art consists in infallibly joining together words in such a way as to insure their greatest possible emotional impact on the reader." He adds, "Her verse is the direct expression, the very substance of emotion, not just a metaphoric rendering of it." In more modern times, Akhmatova has taken a place at the forefront of Russian poetry alongside writers like Pushkin and Brodsky. Michael Klimenko summed up the power and passion of her work when he remarked, "everything she wrote bears the stamp of finely-chiseled, most intimate, aesthetic and emotional experience."

Responses to Literature

1. Akhmatova was not allowed to publish through much of her lifetime because her poetry and lifestyle stood in opposition to the Soviet government. Are there circumstances when this kind of censorship might be justified? What about in times of war? Are there any limitations a government is justified in imposing on writers when it is threatened externally or internally by its own citizens?
2. A number of American and European writers and artists became Communists or were sympathetic to the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s. Given the repression Akhmatova and her comrades faced, how can you account for this? What ideas or circumstances made Communism an attractive ideology to Western writers and artists?
3. During World War II and the Siege of Leningrad, Akhmatova became a symbol of Russian courage and patriotism. What other historic, nonmilitary figures have come to symbolize their countries during wartime or times of national stress?
4. Censorship and government repression affected the fate of Akhmatova's poetry within her own country. What other literary figures have been affected by censorship and repression? Using the library and the Internet, write a paper on two or three literary figures who wrote while imprisoned for their personal beliefs or in exile from their country.
5. Hoping to save her son from a second term of imprisonment, Akhmatova chose to publish pro-Stalin poetry. Do you think this compromised

Akhmatova's literary integrity? Why or why not? Write a personal narrative about a time you felt pressured to make a choice between compromising your values and helping someone else.

- Among the poets Akhmatova mentored was Joseph Brodsky. Brodsky was exiled from the Soviet Union and spent the last part of his life in the United States, where for a time he served as Poet Laureate. Using the library or the Internet, research Brodsky's career in the United States and write a profile of him and his importance to American poetry.

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Claribel Alegria

BORN: 1924, Estelí, Nicaragua

NATIONALITY: Nicaraguan

GENRE: Poems, novels

MAJOR WORKS:

Ring of Silence (1948)

The Talisman (1977)

I Survive (1978)

Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution—a Political Chronicle, 1855–1979 (1982)

They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation (1983)



Claribel Alegria. Alegria, Claribel, photograph. AP / Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Poet and novelist Claribel Alegria is a major voice in the struggle for social change and freedom in Latin America. An outspoken advocate for women in her native Nicaragua and in El Salvador, Alegria addresses the challenges faced by Central Americans through both poetry and "emergency letters." Exiled from Nicaragua as a child, her own dramatic life forms a backdrop for her narratives and poems, which focus on poverty, civil rights, and justice for women.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Exile Alegria's struggle for civil rights began in her own childhood. Born on May 12, 1924, as Clara Isabel Alegria Vides in Estelí, Nicaragua, she moved to El Salvador along with her parents when her father, Daniel Alegria, was exiled for his political views on the American occupation of Nicaragua and his support of revolutionary forces. The family moved to El Salvador, the homeland of Ana María Vides, Alegria's mother. Vides belonged to a wealthy coffee family and had grown up in a privileged environment. When Alegria was only seven

years old, she and her family witnessed the horrors of the peasant uprising known as *La matanza* or “The massacre,” in which thousands of lower-class Salvadorans and indigenous Pipil Indians fought back against a military seizure of the government which was supported by United States aid. After the rebellion was quashed, the remaining rebels were invited by the government to a mass pardon that proved instead to be an ambush; anywhere from ten thousand to forty thousand citizens were killed by government forces. This event greatly influenced Alegría’s views on Latin American politics and United States influence in Latin America, as shown in her later work.

An American Education Alegría had access to a large library and began to explore writing early in her life. After reading poets like Santa Teresa d’Avila and Rómulo Gallegos, Alegría decided she, too, wanted to write poetry. She was further inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*, which convinced her that her passion was in the written word. However, this career choice stood in opposition to what was expected of an elite Salvadoran girl, so she went to the United States to study at the George Washington University in 1943. As a student, she met her mentor, the Spanish poet and Nobel Prize winner Juan Ramón Jiménez, who taught Alegría discipline and oversaw her early work. His open criticisms were sometimes hard to bear, but he pushed Alegría to produce work she could be proud of.

During her time in Washington, Alegría met Darwin Flakoll. Their marriage in 1947 began a lifelong partnership that would include writing, family bonds, and residence in six countries. The expatriates met and collaborated with several writers and poets, but Alegría had her own aspirations. *Ring of Silence (Anillo de silencio)* (1948), Alegría’s first book of poetry, was published in 1948. José Vasconcelos, a Mexican poet and philosopher who wrote the book’s prologue, suggested that Alegría adopt the pen name of Claribel Alegría.

With a new name and a new husband to support her, Alegría embarked on a literary career that included narrative fiction (*Three Stories*, originally titled *Tres Cuentos*, 1958;) and a family career that included four children (Maya was born in 1949, followed by twins Patricia and Karen in 1950, and Erik in 1954). Flakoll was in the U.S. Foreign Service, which meant he had to move often: the family would live in Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Paris over the course of the next several years.

Cuban Revolution and Remembering the Past The year 1959 marked a major milestone in Alegría’s life and career when the Cuban Revolution sparked a new interest in Latin American politics. Inspired by the Cubans’ rejection of United States interference and impressed by the political and social change that followed, Alegría felt a new hope for Central America’s future. Her poetry became political, taking on topics such as the economic situation of Latin American women. She

also began to identify with the growing community of Latin American writers inspired by events in Cuba.

During her time in Paris between 1962 and 1966, Alegría became increasingly obsessed with Latin American politics and literature. Her friend, Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, encouraged her to write a novel based on her memories of the 1932 peasant uprising in El Salvador. The events behind the novel were hard for Alegría to relive, and she decided to write the book along with her husband in their first fictional collaboration. *Ashes of Izalco (Cenizas de Izalco)* was published in 1966 to critical acclaim.

The book, which is one of the first by a Salvadoran writer to face the country’s violent past of peasant uprisings and government brutality, dealt with themes of mothers and daughters, the lazy and insensitive elite class, political repression, and foreign intervention that would echo throughout Alegría’s later work. While researching the book, Alegría was surprised to find that the Salvadoran government had destroyed many newspapers and archives containing information about its bloody past. Not only did she relive her childhood memories when writing the book, but she was horrified to find that the past was being misrepresented in her adoptive country.

Alegría’s family did not like the portrayal of elite life as shallow, and they burned almost every single copy of the first edition. As a consequence, *Ashes of Izalco* was not widely read in El Salvador until ten years later, when the Salvadoran government accidentally included it in a print run of Salvadoran authors.

A Focus on Social Issues Alegría did not shy away from strong and violent themes in the work that followed. While living in Majorca, Spain, she published several volumes of poetry and *The Talisman (El detén)*, a 1977 novella dealing with violent sexual abuse. The subject matter of this book reflects Alegría’s growing concern with women’s issues, pointing to a new era of Salvadoran fiction that was less focused on technique and experimentation and more focused on social issues of the day.

Social issues would continue to obsess Alegría, who won the prestigious Casa de las Americas Prize for *I Survive (Sobrevivo)*, a volume of poetry she published in 1978. *I Survive* dealt with political and social issues in her homeland, with Alegría acting as a witness and a voice for the oppressed in her poems about torture, imperialism, and human suffering.

Return to Nicaragua In 1979, the Sandinista rebels gained power in Nicaragua. Alegría returned to her home country for the first time since she was a baby. Delighted at the end of her political and personal exile, Alegría set out to document the Sandinista revolution through *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution—a Political Chronicle, 1855–1979 (Nicaragua: La revolución sandinista—una crónica política, 1855–1979)* (1982). The book was a five-hundred page collection of testimony and history and represented another collaboration between Alegría

and Flakoll, who spent six months traveling through Nicaragua and even longer writing the book.

While she was in Paris writing the book in 1980, another milestone occurred. Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in El Salvador. Alegria had been scheduled to do a reading at the Sorbonne, but at her husband's encouragement she spoke out against Romero's assassination and the existence of death squads in El Salvador. Her words made it dangerous for her to return to El Salvador, and she was even advised to avoid the country when her mother died in 1982.

Now in unofficial exile from her adoptive country, Alegria would become more interested in the idea of testimony throughout the 1980s. Not content to write specific stories, she preferred to document the struggle of an entire group of oppressed people, such as Salvadoran girls and political prisoners. She collaborated with her husband on two such books: *They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation* (*No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en lucha*, 1983) and *Breaking the Silence: Resistance and Struggle in Salvadoran Prisons* (*Para romper el silencio: Resistencia y lucha en las cárceles salvadoreñas*, 1984).

Though she has been exiled from two countries, shunned by her own family, and devastated by personal losses, Alegria's body of work has survived along with its author. As more of her novels and poetry become available in translation, Alegria is finally enjoying international renown and critical acclaim. Alegria continues to speak out against oppressive social regimes and violence against women, and her list of publications continues to grow.

Works in Literary Context

As a child, Alegria was inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke, poets of the Spanish Golden Age such as Santa Teresa d'Avila and San Juan de la Cruz, and Latin American writers including Rómulo Gallegos and Gabriela Mistral. During her lifetime, Alegria edited and collaborated with a number of significant Latin American writers and poets, among them Juan Ramón Jiménez, Carlos Martínez Morelo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortázar.

Imperialism and Occupation Alegria saw the effects of U.S. imperialism and occupation during her own lifetime and was an outspoken critic of foreign manipulation of Latin American politics in her poetry and prose. As a rebellion against what she saw as foreign occupation of her native lands, Alegria often used native myths and early Central American history as part of her narrative structure in books like *Ashes of Izalco*.

Social Justice For Alegria, a commitment to social justice is a writer's duty. Alegria believes that writers must take sides. To illustrate that point, she has come down firmly on the side of Central America's oppressed and tortured citizens, from Salvadoran women in *They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Alegria's famous contemporaries include:

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Colombian novelist, political activist, and Nobel Prize winner known for his magical realism.

Jean Rhys (1890–1979): Caribbean novelist who rethought traditional literature with her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

Fidel Castro (1926–): President of Cuba until 2008 and central figure of the Cuban Revolution.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American author famous for her epic novels about the African American experience.

Maria Callas (1923–1977): Famous Greek-American operatic soprano known for her dramatic interpretations.

National Liberation to political prisoners in *Breaking the Silence: Resistance and Struggle in Salvadoran Prisons*. Alegria has described her poetry and prose after 1965 as *letras de emergencia* ("emergency letters"), impassioned works that touch on political and social strife in her home region.

Women and Feminism Alegria has always identified as a feminist writer, and much of her work concerns the plight of Latin American women. In books like *Ashes of Izalco*, she uses mother-daughter relationships to illustrate the conflicts of Latin American society. Alegria's portraits of women are examples of the ways in which Latin American society restricts women's freedoms and rights; for example, *Ashes of Izalco* deals with a woman who must come to terms with the social restraints that have affected her mother and herself. Alegria has also addressed issues like sexual abuse in *El detén* and continues to speak out against anti-woman policies in South and Central America.

Works in Critical Context

Though Alegria has had a lengthy and distinguished career, her work has been little known outside of Latin America. However, an increasing number of translations and renewed interest in Latin American writers points to a new age in criticism of Alegria's work.

Critics have taken note of Alegria's use of testimony and her attempts to give voice to those who have no political means of expression. Teresa Longo calls Alegria's writing "a poetic reconstruction of places torn apart by injustice and repression," noting that Alegria writes in a dual role as writer and activist. English-speaking critics also paid major critical attention to *Saudade/Sorrow*, hailing it as sad, but "neither sentimental nor confessional."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Part of Alegría's mission as a writer is to awaken readers to political and social injustice in the world and inspire actions with her stories and poems. Here are a few works that have produced similar effects:

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe is a political novel that influenced American attitudes toward slavery and is thought by many to have helped bring on the Civil War.

Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids (2004), a film directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, is a documentary about prostitutes' children living in the red light district of Calcutta, India.

The Country Between Us (1982) by Carolyn Forché is a book of poetry that centers on human rights issues during the civil war in El Salvador. Forché was able to travel to El Salvador as a human rights worker after translating Alegría's work and winning a Guggenheim Fellowship. The book includes the prose poem "The Colonel."

An Inconvenient Truth (2006), a documentary film presented by former vice president Al Gore and directed by Davis Guggenheim, deals with the coming effects of global warming.

As more of Alegría's work is translated and brought to the attention of the Western world, the critical landscape will grow and evolve. Until then, Alegría will remain part of the first generation of Latin American writers to challenge their governments and re-create their history through words.

Responses to Literature

1. Alegría's works use the mother-daughter relationship to answer important questions about society, culture, and feminism. Can you think of three Western novels or films that deal with similar questions through their female protagonists?
2. Alegría was influenced by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the social changes in Cuba that followed. Yet soon after, Cuban president Fidel Castro turned Cuba into a Stalinist dictatorship and imprisoned writers who dissented against his regime. How does this affect your reading of Alegría's works? Are her passionate cries against violent human rights abuses in Latin America compromised when she overlooks the repression of Communist regimes?
3. Alegría is a feminist who also writes about historic economic injustices in Latin America. Are the two concerns ever contradictory? Examine the sexual

politics in Alegría's works and see whether she ties together economic injustice and sexual politics or whether she separates the two themes.

4. Alegría and her husband, Darwin Flakoll, shared a great artistic tradition of collaboration between a husband and wife. Using your library and the Internet, write an essay on another couple who collaborated together on a film, piece of music, or work of fiction.
5. Alegría believes that writers should take sides and never be neutral. Do you agree? Why or why not? Should a writer be an observer or an active participant in history? Write a paper that reflects your personal opinions about a writer's role in society.

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Vicente Aleixandre

BORN: 1898, Seville, Spain

DIED: 1984, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

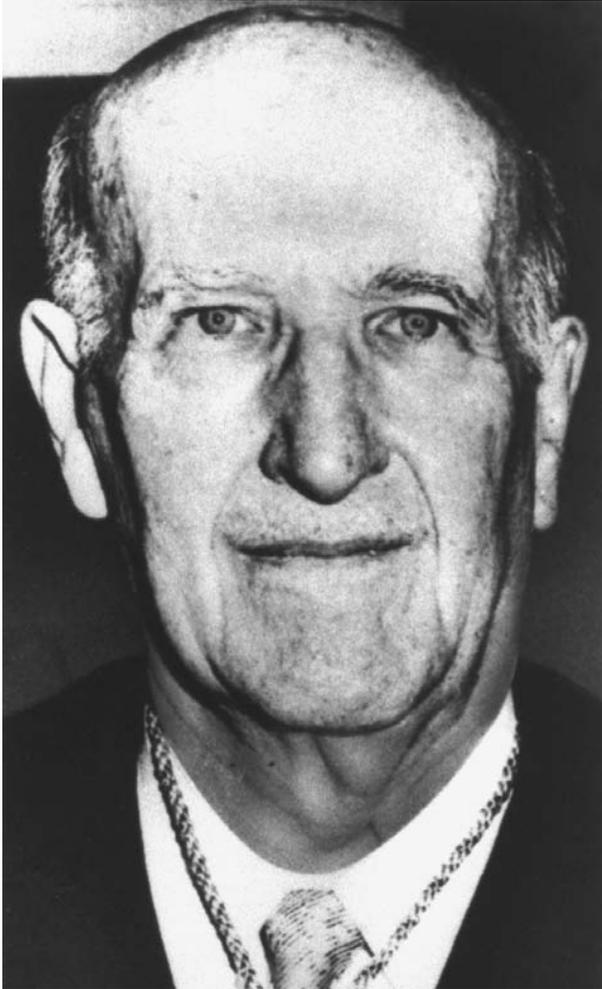
Ambito (1928)

Destruction or Love (1935)

Shadow of Paradise (1944)

Overview

Vicente Aleixandre is recognized by critics and by the newer generation of Spanish poets as an influential voice. He was awarded the 1977 Nobel Prize for Literature for "a creative poetic writing which illuminates man's condition in the cosmos and in present-day society, at the same time



Aleixandre Vicente Aleixandre, Vicente, 1975, photograph. AP Images.

representing the great renewal of the traditions of Spanish poetry between the wars,” as the citation read. At the time of the awarding of the Nobel Prize, however, Aleixandre’s name was little known outside Spanish literary circles.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Vicente Aleixandre Merlo was born in Seville, Spain, on April 26, 1898, to Cirilo and Elvira Merlo Aleixandre. When he was eleven, his family moved to Madrid, Spain, where he later received degrees in law and business administration. In 1919, after graduating from the university, he began to teach at the School of Business. For a while he devoted himself to his profession and wrote on economic subjects. He never married or had children.

Focused on Poetry Amidst Life-Long Illness In 1925, Aleixandre contracted tuberculosis, beginning a series of illnesses that plagued him for the rest of his life. His health eventually forced him to abandon his career,

and he began to concentrate on writing poetry. In 1926, a few of his friends sent some of his poems to a literary journal. They were published that same year, and his first book of poems, *Ambito*, came out in 1928.

Around the same time, Aleixandre began to associate with Pedro Salinas, Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, and other poets based in Madrid. This association developed into the innovative literary movement referred to as the Generation of 1927. Writers in this group reacted against what they saw as the provincialism of Spanish literature. They advocated poetry as a means of discovering and exploring the relationship between external reality and the poet’s internal world, and, while they rejected sentimentality, love was a dominant theme.

Created Poetry in a Tumultuous Atmosphere It was during this time Aleixandre created his major work of surrealist poetry, *Earth Passion*. Unfortunately for the poet, in the late 1920s Spain was on the verge of tremendous upheaval and civil war that would overshadow his literary achievement. The Spanish king abdicated in favor of a republic. The republic lasted for five years, but Spain remained split by conflict in every part of society. In July 1936, a military uprising threw the country into a civil war that lasted for three years. While Nationalist leader General Francisco Franco had enough control to establish a military dictatorship in October 1936, the fighting between the Republicans and the Nationalists continued and proved brutal. Many of the world’s leading intellectuals and artists sympathized with the Republicans and volunteered for service with them, but despite their efforts, Franco was victorious. He was Spain’s military dictator for forty years.

Although *Earth Passion* was finished in 1929, it remained practically unknown until 1946, by which time Aleixandre was established as the most representative member of his generation still living in Spain. Many members of Spain’s artistic community left the country when the civil war began or shortly thereafter. Only a few copies of the 1935 Mexican first edition reached Spain before the civil war, and consequently, in spite of its revolutionary nature, the book did not have any noticeable influence on the literary developments of the period it represents so well. Had it been published immediately after Aleixandre finished writing it, *Earth Passion* would likely have become one of the major surrealist books in Spanish literature.

Civil War Affects Output During the three years of the civil war, Aleixandre wrote sparingly, although he contributed war poems to some publications that supported the government. By the end of the war, Federico García Lorca was dead. Luis Cernuda, Guillén, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and many other poets and writers had left Spain. Unlike other surviving poets of the generation, however, Aleixandre did not leave Spain after the war. He lived, during Franco’s time in power, the interior exile of an intellectual who was opposed to the reigning political dictatorship. His works were banned in the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aleixandre's famous contemporaries include:

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): Spanish surrealist artist and filmmaker; well-known for his painting *The Persistence of Memory*.

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): authoritarian leader of Spain from 1939 to 1975; pursued a policy of neutrality during World War II, although he helped Nazi Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union.

Jorge Guillén (1893–1984): Spanish poet and one of the Generation of 1927; lived in exile in the United States after 1938.

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): Spanish poet and playwright. One of the Generation of 1927, García Lorca was murdered during the Spanish Civil War, his body dumped into an unmarked grave. His work was banned in Spain by Franco's regime until 1953.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and Communist politician; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

postwar years due to his antifascist beliefs and his independence from the official regime.

Postwar Poems Look Outward *Shadow of Paradise* (1944; English translation, 1987), Aleixandre's first collection following the civil war, is a transitional volume leading to the second phase of his career. Although poems in the middle period, which include those from *The Heart's History* (1954) and *In a Vast Domain* (1962), share with earlier ones a nostalgia for the lost union between humanity and nature, a dramatic shift in focus is evident.

Whereas previously Aleixandre had looked inside the individual, rejecting historical and social reality, he now reached outward, emphasizing connections between the self and the surrounding world and projecting a universal compassion for humanity with these volumes. Surreal imagery and irrationalist techniques gave way to a simpler, more direct approach in which the affirmation of love clearly predominates.

Emphasized Theory and Contemplation Some of Aleixandre's most important theoretical texts are from the 1950s and include *Some Characteristics of the New Spanish Poetry* (1955) and the notes to the anthology *Mis poemas mejores*. His point of view on poetics became a guiding principle among Spanish poets.

Toward the end of the 1960s, Aleixandre abandoned most of the elements that characterize his realistic work. A more meditative attitude set the tone of his later poems.

Returned to Poetic Roots Aleixandre's final period, which produced *Poems of Consummation* (1968) and *Dialogues of Knowledge* (1974), is characterized by a return to the structural and metaphysical complexity of his early work. By this time, Spanish society was undergoing another transition, as Franco died in 1975, and Spain temporarily returned to monarchy. King Juan Carlos I wanted his country to become a democracy, and by 1977, Spain had its first democratic parliamentary elections.

When Aleixandre received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1977, ill health prevented him from attending the ceremony, and the award had little effect on his life. The initial media exposure did not lead to increased critical attention, particularly outside Spain, and he did not write much more. He died of kidney failure and shock from intestinal hemorrhage on December 14, 1984, in Madrid, Spain.

Works in Literary Context

Vicente Aleixandre's poetry evolved in line with the main transformations in Spanish lyric poetry. He had a clear understanding of the historical character of all artistic creation, and his own writing reflects his recognition of what was essential in the main currents of Spanish poetic art at different historical moments.

Surrealism and Organic Descriptions Surrealism, which began in France in the 1920s, can be defined as the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or surprising imagery in art or literature by means of unnatural combinations. The surrealists tried to combine unconscious and conscious experiences, in a reaction against complete rationalism. Aleixandre frequently relied on surreal imagery in his poetry, even in later years when the surrealist movement had waned. Much of the imagery he used was based on nature and organic objects, revealing his respect for and love of nature and the idea that humankind was cutting itself off from its unity with the natural and spiritual world, to its own detriment.

A Wide Swath of Spanish History Aleixandre's life covered a period of Spanish literary history that extends from the masterly Generation of 1898 to the developments of the 1980s, including a period of poetry similar to the politicized social poetry preferred in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. As a young man, he was involved in a group of poets including—besides García Lorca and Neruda—Luis Cernuda, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, and Miguel Hernández.

As a mature writer, Aleixandre was a mentor and guide to the younger generations searching for a poetic inheritance after the civil war. The younger generation saw in Aleixandre a connecting link with the older, pre-civil war poets who had died or were living in exile. He was seen as a model by those who began to write during the first years of dictatorship: he represented the continuity of literary excellence in postwar Spain.

Works in Critical Context

While Aleixandre had been popular with critics in Spain for many years, his Nobel Prize brought his work to the attention of a wider critical audience. His poems are regarded as structurally complex and carefully crafted, perhaps too hard for a general audience to fully appreciate. Critics acknowledged, however, that Aleixandre played a vital role in the evolution of Spanish-language poetry.

Importance of the Subconscious Many critics, and Aleixandre himself, have noted Sigmund Freud's influence on his exploration of the hidden passions and driving forces that operate beneath the surface of the mind. Lewis Hyde, one of Aleixandre's noted translators, observed that a desire to explore "the strong undertow beneath the accelerating tide of rationalism" connects Freud, surrealism, and Aleixandre's early poetry. Of Aleixandre's poems Hyde says: "[They] are not an affirmation. They are not working out of a full and nourishing surreality, but away from the reality at hand. That . . . is part of their tension—they are the reflective mind trying to think its way out of coherence and precision."

Later Works Deemed Significant Carlos Bousoño, the foremost scholar of Aleixandre's work, considers *Poems of Consummation* and *Dialogues of Knowledge* "possibly the two most intense books of a life rich in masterpieces." Of the latter volume, Bousoño states, "Aleixandre inaugurates in [*Dialogues of Knowledge*] a poetry of deaf and majestic slowness, spoken in the lowest chords, which I believe to be without precedent in our literature."

The analysis and evaluation of Aleixandre's contribution to Spanish and universal literature is an ongoing process; as critical readings enhance with time the quality of his art, Aleixandre's poetry is becoming an essential component of Spanish culture.

Responses to Literature

1. Surrealism tries to integrate the conscious experience with the unconscious. Surrealist works are often described as "dreamlike." Do you agree with this description? Why or why not? Compare examples of Aleixandre's descriptions with some examples from your own dreams, if possible.
2. Aleixandre was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he is still not a very familiar name to English-speaking readers. Do you think learning a language besides English should be required in American schools? Even if English is a common language for international business, do Americans miss out on other cultures by not being familiar with other languages?
3. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer who refused to leave her country during a regime she was opposed to. Write an essay comparing and con-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aleixandre was famous for his use of surrealistic imagery in his poems. Here are some other surrealist works:

Alphaville (1965), directed by Jean-Luc Goddard. This movie, based on poems by the French surrealist Paul Éluard, combines science fiction and the style of 1940s Hollywood crime movies in its story of a secret agent in a futuristic dictatorship.

The Collected Poems (2002), by Federico García Lorca. This Spanish-English bilingual edition includes newly discovered works, as well as revised translations of well-known poems.

Haunted House (1930), by Pierre Reverdy. One of André Breton's favorite books, this long prose poem is now available in a 2007 English translation by the well-known poet John Ashbery.

Selected Poems of René Char (1992), by René Char. This bilingual volume includes English translations of the French surrealist's work by nineteen poets and writers, ranging from William Carlos Williams to James Wright.

The Surrealist Manifesto (1924), by André Breton. This work by the French poet, one of surrealism's founders, outlines and defines surrealism, clearly stating that it should belong to everyone, not just artists.

trasting Gordimer's and Aleixandre's reasons for staying in their countries and the reaction they received.

4. Aleixandre was a lawyer and economist before he became a poet. Read the article "The Remnants of a Lost & Forgotten Library: On Finding the Lawyer Poets" by James R. Elkins at <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/lstf/30-1-2/elkins.html>, and write an essay responding to what Elkins says.

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Isabel Allende

BORN: 1942, Lima, Peru

NATIONALITY: Chilean; Peruvian

GENRE: Novels, short stories, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The House of the Spirits (1982)

Of Love and Shadows (1984)

Daughter of Fortune (1999)

Inés of My Soul (2006)

Overview

Chilean writer Isabel Allende is valued not only as a commentator on the turbulent nature of Latin American society but also as an author of powerful, humanistic fiction. Some scholars have even placed her among the ranks of those South American writers—Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, among others—who rose to prominence during the 1960s surge of interest in Latin American literature. As Alexander Coleman has asserted, “Allende is the first woman to join what has heretofore been an exclusive male club of Latin American novelists. Not that she is the first contemporary female writer from Latin America . . . but she is the first woman to approach on the same scale as the others the tormented patriarchal world of traditional Hispanic society.”



Isabel Allende Allende, Isabel, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Turbulent Times Allende was born in Lima, Peru, where her father served as a diplomatic representative of Chile. Although Allende's contact with her father ceased following her parents' divorce, she remained close to his family—particularly Salvador Allende, her godfather and her father's cousin, who served as president of Chile from 1970 to 1973. As a child in Santiago, Chile, Allende lived with her maternal grandparents, who would later serve as models for Esteban and Clara Trueba, the patriarch and matriarch of the family whose history Allende chronicled in her first and best-known novel, *The House of the Spirits* (*La casa de los espíritus*) (1982). After spending her adolescence in Bolivia, Europe, and the Middle East with her mother and diplomat stepfather, Allende settled in Chile and became a journalist. Her life changed abruptly in 1973 when a military coup, led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, resulted in the assassination of Salvador Allende and the overthrow of his socialist government. While she remained in Chile for several months following the takeover, Allende's efforts to assist the opposition of the new regime ultimately jeopardized her safety. As Allende said in a *Publishers Weekly* interview quoted in *Contemporary Authors*, “I realized that everything was possible—that violence was a dimension that was always around you.”

Allende and her family fled Chile for Venezuela, where she wrote for the newspaper *El Nacional*. Less work came her way than in her native country, and she found herself with a lot of time for thought. She used it to take stock of her own life and of the history of her own culture. One of the fruits of her reflections was a long and ultimately unmailed letter she wrote to her ailing grandfather in Chile, chronicling the long and complicated history of her own family. That letter, fictionalized and heavily elaborated, grew into Allende's first novel, *The House of the Spirits*.

Coming to America *The House of the Spirits* was translated into English in 1985 and began to gain wide attention in the United States; translated into other languages as well, it became a best seller in several European countries. Allende won several new-author awards and was brought to the United States for a promotional tour as *Of Love and Shadows* (*De amor y de sombra*, 1984), her second novel set in Chile during the dictatorship of Pinochet, was released. After giving a reading in San Jose, California, Allende met a U.S. lawyer, William Gordon; the two later married, and Allende continues to make her home in northern California.

After a decade of novels that received a lukewarm reception, Allende returned to the epic sweep of her debut in the late 1990s. Her novels *Daughter of Fortune* (*Hija de la fortuna*, 1999) and *Portrait in Sepia* (*Retrato en sepia*, 2000) featured characters who had appeared or been mentioned in *The House of the Spirits*. Allende once

again structured her stories to encompass the experiences of several generations, this time capturing the cultural interchange that has linked the western United States with Latin American countries. About *Daughter of Fortune*, *Publishers Weekly* noted that “Allende expands her geographical boundaries in this sprawling, engrossing historical novel flavored by four cultures—English, Chilean, Chinese, and American—and set during the 1849 California Gold Rush.”

Daughter of Fortune landed on best-seller lists and brought Allende an important rush of popular U.S. acceptance and a virtual guarantee of substantial future sales—it was named a “pick” by the nationwide book club headed by talk-show host Oprah Winfrey. Allende was the first Hispanic author Winfrey had ever selected. Continuing to create new examples in her series of strong female characters, Allende remains in the process of redefining, for the general U.S. reading public as well as for Spanish-language readers, the image of Latin American fiction.

Works in Literary Context

Many of Allende’s books are noted for their feminine perspective, dramatic qualities of romance and struggle, and the magical realism genre often found in Latin American literature. Allende has shared many memories, both real and fictional, with her readers. She has examined political issues, related stories of her “interesting” childhood, enthralled readers with magical ideas, and shared the beauties of her homeland. The large topical span of Allende’s writings makes it difficult to classify the author as a particular type.

Strength of Character Allende’s family members included a number of politicians and diplomats. While she received a strong education in private schools, the beginning of Allende’s growth into a novelist can be marked by the personal and public tragedy she suffered when her godfather Salvador Allende was assassinated in a coup in Chile. The strength she had to muster in her private life can be seen in the characters she has created, especially the female ones.

Allende’s female characters survive hardships—imprisonment, starvation, the loss of loved ones—but never lose their spirit or ability to love others. In reference to *The House of the Spirits*, Philip Howard contended in the *Times of London*, “It is a remarkable achievement to make the old monster lovable not just to his wife, daughter, and granddaughter, and the other women in his life, but also to the reader.” Although much of her writing includes political approaches similar to that of other Latin American writers, it also contains “an original feminist argument that suggests [a] women’s monopoly on powers that oppose the violent ‘paternalism’ from which countries like Chile continue to suffer,” according to *Chicago Tribune* contributor Bruce Allen. Alberto Manguel likewise considered important Allende’s “depiction

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Allende’s famous contemporaries include:

Cormac McCarthy (1933–): McCarthy is an American novelist whose work often emphasizes the interactions of Mexican and American culture.

Daniel Alarcón (1977–): This Peruvian short-story writer and novelist is considered one of the leading figures in contemporary literature.

Esther “Eppie” Pauline Friedman Lederer (better known as Ann Landers) (1918–2002): A popular American journalist, Landers was one of the best known advice columnists of her time.

Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986): O’Keeffe was an American painter renowned for her paintings of New Mexico landscapes and her erotic depictions of flowers.

of woman as a colonial object,” as he wrote in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*.

Magical Realism Magical realism as a literary style typically demonstrates a strong narrative drive in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and inexplicable. It has been suggested that Allende uses magical realism both to jostle the reader out of preconceived understandings of events and to allow herself the opportunity to reinterpret these events from a woman’s perspective. In the tradition of writers of magical realism, such as Gabriel García Márquez, Allende often blends elements of realism and fantasy in her works to examine the tumultuous social and political heritage of South America. She frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her family to emphasize the role of personal memory as a record of the violence and repression that characterizes much of Latin American history.

Despite her recurring use of moral and political themes, Allende maintains that she does not intend to create political fiction. “I write about the things I care about,” she has stated; “poverty, inequality, and social problems are part of politics, and that’s what I write about. . . . I just can’t write in an ivory tower, distant from what’s happening in the real world and from the reality of my continent. So the politics just steps in, in spite of myself.”

Works in Critical Context

Allende’s fiction as a whole has received mixed reviews. While some commentators regard her works as derivative or melodramatic, most commend her polished technique, including the lushly detailed prose and compelling images that subtly convey her moral and political themes. Some debate has ensued, however, over whether she

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Allende's novels often feature strong women prevailing in chaotic and violent times. Other works featuring such figures include:

Medea (431 BCE), a play by Euripides. In this classic Greek drama, Medea is the spurned wife of legendary hero Jason. She wreaks a horrible vengeance on Jason and, unusually for a Greek play, gets away with it.

Gone with the Wind (1936), a novel by Margaret Mitchell. Resourceful Southern belle Scarlett O'Hara is forced to rebuild her life in the aftermath of the American Civil War in this classic novel.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. Winner of multiple prizes, this science fiction novel is set in a fictional future theocracy in which women have lost all civil rights.

Beloved (1987), a novel by Toni Morrison. The story of Sethe, an escaped slave, and her daughter as they attempt to come to terms with the violent legacy of slavery.

successfully combines her political ideas with the fantastic elements in her fiction. Much critical analysis of Allende's work has been devoted to her feminist perspective as well, and her depiction of the patriarchal society of Latin America has been applauded, although some critics charge that her portrayals of Latin males are frequently stereotypically macho and that she at times resorts to other clichés about Hispanics.

The House of the Spirits Following three generations of the Trueba family and their domestic and political conflicts, *The House of the Spirits* "is a novel of peace and reconciliation, in spite of the fact that it tells of bloody, tragic events," claimed *New York Times Book Review* contributor Alexander Coleman. "The author has accomplished this not only by plumbing her memory for the familial and political textures of the continent, but also by turning practically every major Latin American novel on its head," the critic continued.

Allende's grand scope and use of fantastic elements and characters have led many critics to compare *The House of the Spirits* specifically to Nobel Prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). "Allende has her own distinctive voice, however," noted a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer; "while her prose lacks the incandescent brilliance of the master's, it has a whimsical charm, besides being clearer, more accessible and more explicit about the contemporary situation in South America." In contrast, *Village Voice* contributor Enrique Fernandez believed that "only the dullest reader

can fail to be distracted by the shameless cloning from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." "Allende is very much under the influence of Gabriel García Márquez, but she is scarcely an imitator," remarked *Washington Post Book World* critic Jonathan Yardley, concluding that "she is most certainly a novelist in her own right and, for a first novelist, a startlingly skillful, confident one."

While *The House of the Spirits* contains some of the magical realism so characteristic of late-twentieth-century Latin American fiction, it is counterbalanced by the political realities that Allende recounts. *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer Antony Beevor stated that whereas the early chapters of *The House of the Spirits* seem "to belong firmly in the school of magical realism," a closer reading "suggests that Isabel Allende's tongue is lightly in her cheek. It soon becomes clear that she has taken the genre to flip it over," the critic elaborated. "The metaphorical house, the themes of time and power, the *machista* violence and the unstoppable merry-go-round of history: all of these are reworked and then examined from the other side—from a woman's perspective." Other critics, however, faulted Allende for trying to combine the magical and the political. Richard Eder of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* felt that the author "rarely manages to integrate her magic and her message," while *Nation* contributor Paul West wrote that the political story is "the book Allende probably wanted to write, and would have had she not felt obliged to toe the line of magical realism." But others maintained that the contrast between the fantastic and political segments is effective, as Harriet Waugh of the *Spectator* explained: "[The] magic gradually dies away as a terrible political reality engulfs the people of the country. Ghosts, the gift of foretelling the future and the ability to make the pepper and salt cellars move around the dining-room table cannot survive terror, mass-murder and torture."

Eva Luna "Fears that Isabel Allende might be a 'one-book' writer, that her first... success would be her only one, ought to be quashed by *Eva Luna*," asserted Abigail E. Lee in the *Times Literary Supplement*. "The eponymous protagonist and narrator of this, her third novel, has an engaging personality, a motley collection of interesting acquaintances and an interesting angle on political upheavals in the unnamed Latin-American republic in which she lives." "In *Eva Luna*, Allende moves between the personal and the political, between realism and fantasy, weaving two exotic coming-of-age stories—Eva Luna's and Rolf Carle's—into the turbulent coming of age of her unnamed South American country," Elizabeth Benedict summarized in Chicago's *Tribune Books*. Switching between the stories of the two protagonists, *Eva Luna* is "filled with a multitude of characters and tales," recounted *Washington Post Book World* contributor Alan Ryan. Allende's work is "a remarkable novel," the critic elaborated, "one in which a cascade of stories tumbles out before the reader, stories vivid and passionate and human enough to engage, in their own right, all the reader's attention and sympathy."

Inés of My Soul In her 2006 novel, *Inés of My Soul* (*Inés del alma mía*), Allende blends history and feminism to tell the story of Inés Suarez, often called the mother of Chile. This sixteenth-century historical figure was born in a poor Spanish village in 1509 and made a life for herself in the New World, becoming the mistress of the Chilean governor and helping to battle Native Americans who besieged the capital of Santiago. As a *Kirkus Reviews* critic noted, Inés Suarez’s life “was full of daring, intrigue and passionate romance.” However, for this same critic Allende’s novel missed much of that adventure, devolving instead into “turgid and detached homework masquerading as epic.” Similarly, Jennifer Reese, writing in *Entertainment Weekly*, thought that Allende’s novel was a “bodice ripper” that “turn[s] a truly extraordinary life story into a forgettable, easy-reading romp.” A more positive assessment was delivered by a *Publishers Weekly* contributor who noted: “Allende crafts a swift, thrilling epic, packed with fierce battles and passionate romance.” Likewise, Amber Haq, writing in *Newsweek International*, termed *Inés of My Soul* “a powerfully evocative narrative,” and concluded: “Allende inspires women everywhere with the true story of one who wouldn’t be tamed, who knew her own power and lived to taste its glory.” *New York Times Book Review* critic Maggie Galehouse felt that “Allende succeeds in resurrecting a woman from history and endowing her with the gravitas of a hero.”

Responses to Literature

1. How does Allende’s depiction of women compare with female characters in other Latin American novels? Do her female characters ring true?
2. Read a novel by another writer known for a style of magical realism. How does Allende’s use of magical realism differ from that of the author you chose? Do you believe, as some critics do, that Allende’s use of magical realism is satirical? Why or why not?
3. Read Allende’s *Zorro* (2005). How does Allende’s portrayal of Zorro differ from Antonio Banderas’s portrayal of Zorro in the movies *The Mask of Zorro* and *The Legend of Zorro*? What factors account for the differences?

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📖 Jorge Amado

BORN: 1912, Itabuna, Bahia, Brazil

DIED: 2001, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

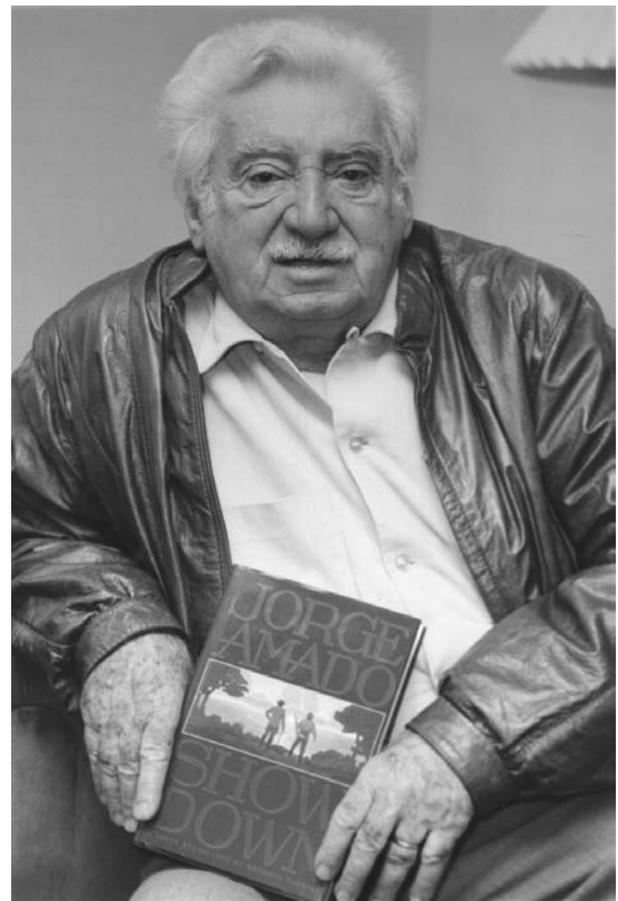
Cacao (1933)

The Violent Land (1943)

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands (1966)

Overview

Jorge Amado is an internationally acclaimed author whose novels have been translated into more than forty languages. The majority of his works are set in the Bahia region of northeastern Brazil and reveal the author’s fascination with the rich cultural heritage of Bahia’s inhabitants, most of whom are of mixed European,



Jorge Amado Amado, Jorge, photograph. AP Images.

African, and native Indian ancestry. Amado's later writings, which have made him a best-selling author worldwide, are more expansive and less overtly political, tempering social criticism with satire, ironic humor, and raucous comedy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Lessons from Poverty Amado was born the son of immigrant farmers on a cacao plantation in Southern Bahia. When he was old enough to work, he spent his summer holidays toiling in the cacao groves with other area laborers. These early episodes among Brazil's impoverished proved an invaluable learning experience for Amado and provided a foundation for much of his writing.

Brazil in the Early Twentieth Century Following a global economic crisis that had shattered the coffee industry and forced an unprecedented number of Brazilians into poverty, Brazil's 1930 presidential election was rife with revolution. When the liberal challenger Getulio Vargas met with apparent defeat, he headed an armed rebellion against the state—gaining control of civilian and military establishments, dissolving the congress, and issuing a decree of absolute power for his government. Initially, the overthrow of the old order produced a renaissance of sorts among Brazil's writers. Vargas had championed achievement and reform, and the writers were quick to adopt this spirit of social renewal. The new critical literature of Brazil lay bare the squalor of its lower classes and offered solutions for a nation restless for change.

Amado in Prison Amado's early novels—often termed works of social protest—were published amid these turbulent times. *Carnival Land* (1931), *Sweat* (1934), and *Cacao* (1933), all depict a destitute and violent Brazil and offer answers to many of the prevailing social problems. Amado was not alone in his attempts to affect social change. As nationwide impatience with the economic plight grew, Vargas' support waned. Several political factions—notably the Communist party and the fascist *Integralistas*—began to exert a marked influence among Brazilians. In 1935, a short-lived rebellion broke out, and Vargas subsequently declared martial law. Communists and other labeled seditionists were hunted down relentlessly, and a censorship department was created to suppress all forms of dissent. Amado's inflammatory early novels, though given little regard by critics, attracted the suspicious eye of the Vargas regime. Amado was imprisoned as a member of the Communist Party in 1935, exiled on several later occasions, and, in 1937 following a national ban, two thousand of his books were burned in a plaza by the Brazilian military.

Refined Techniques Increase Literary Acclaim The Vargas crackdown did not silence the writers' call for reform so much as alter the form of protest. Starting

with Amado's 1935 book *Jubiaba*, Amado began to display a greater concern for technique, often cloaking social themes within psychological studies. This new style found its greatest success in *The Violent Land*. Published in 1942, *The Violent Land* depicts the brutal land-battles that ensue when two neighboring estates rush for the last, precious cacao groves in northern Brazil.

In 1958, with the publication of *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*, Amado's writing took another significant shift. As in his earlier work, the lower classes of Brazil's Bahia region continued to dominate Amado's novels. Beginning with *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*, however, the examination of their afflictions gave way to romantic and humorous themes.

Amado's next novel, *Os pastores da noite* (1964; translated as *Shepherds of the Night*, 1967), is divided into three distinct episodes that take place in the poorest neighborhoods of Salvador. The book deals with characters from the lowest classes who have in common their misery and hopes for a better future. In January 1965, Amado traveled to Paris, where he stayed three months to finish his novel, *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* (1966; translated as *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*, 1969), which became a social phenomenon in Brazil and achieved enormous international success. It tells the story of Flor, a young Bahian woman, who is married to Vadinho, a great lover but an incorrigible drunk and rogue. *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* was adapted for cinema and theater. A motion picture, directed by Luís Carlos Barreto and starring Brazilian star Sônia Braga, was released in Latin America, Europe, and the United States in 1976. There was also a Hollywood remake, *Kiss Me Goodbye* (1982), directed by Robert Mulligan and starring Sally Field, James Caan, and Jeff Bridges. A musical adaptation appeared on Broadway in 1979, and in 1997, TV Globo produced a miniseries based on the novel.

Criticism from Feminists The highly anticipated *Tenda dos milagres* (translated as *Tent of Miracles*, 1971) was published in 1969. A motion picture based on the novel, directed by Néelson Pereira dos Santos, premiered in 1977. Amado received a prize from the Instituto Italo-Latino Americano (Italian Institute of Latin America) in 1976. Amado's next two novels, *Tereza Batista cansada de Guerra* (1972; translated as *Tereza Batista: Home from the Wars*, 1975) and *Tieta do Agreste: pastora de cabras* (1977; translated as *Tieta the Goat Girl*, 1979), have young promiscuous girls turned prostitutes as protagonists. These works attracted criticism from academics, especially feminists, who began to describe Amado as a misogynist who exploits his female protagonists by always reducing them to male fantasies, making them champions of the only two skills that seem to be available to them: sex and cooking.

Childhood Memoirs In 1979, *Farda, fardão, camisola de dormer* (translated as *Pen, Sword, Camisole*, 1985)

was published. This novel, set during World War II, is another example of Amado's preference for multiple complex narrative voices. The novel offers a glance at an aspect of the writer's life since Amado had been a member of the Academy of Letters since 1961. By 1981, Amado's prolific and successful literary career had stretched over fifty years. He celebrated this landmark with the publication of his childhood memoirs, *O menino grapiúna* (1981, *The Coastal Child*) and several works for children, including *O gato malhado e a andorinha Sinhá* (1976; translated as *The Swallow and the Tomcat*, 1982)

Brazilian Cocoa Wars In 1984, Amado returned to an old favorite theme of his, that of the cocoa wars in northeast Brazil at the turn of the century. *Tocaia Grande* (1984, *The Big Ambush*; translated as *Showdown*, 1988), like *Terras do sem fim*, is a frontier novel with picaresque and fantastic elements. The publication of *Tocaia Grande* preceded long-awaited political change in Brazil. In 1985, a civilian government returned, ending a prolonged series of military dictatorships. The opening of the Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado (Jorge Amado Foundation's House) in Salvador da Bahia in 1987 confirmed Amado's place as a Brazilian institution.

Insights into the Author's Personal Life *O sumiço da santa: uma história de feitiçaria* (1988, *The Saint's Disappearance: A Magic Tale*; translated as *The War of the Saints*, 1995) was written in Paris between the summer of 1987 and the summer of 1988. Two books printed in the early 1990s provided many insights on the novelist's personal life. In 1990, Amado published a series of interviews with his French translator and dear friend Alice Raillard, *Conversando com Alice Raillard* (*Conversations with Alice Raillard*). The publication of *Navegação de cabotagem: apontamentos para um livro de memórias que jamais escreverei* (1992, *Coastal Navigation: Notes for a Book of Memoirs That I Will Never Write*) tells the author's life story in a series of journal entries that do not appear in chronological order. These memoirs feature many amusing anecdotes that marked the novelist's life.

Three National Days of Mourning After 1998, Amado spent most of his time in his house, surrounded by family and friends. Somewhat weakened by heart problems that resulted in several hospitalizations and surgeries, the beloved Brazilian writer continued to receive prizes and honors. On August 6, 2001, shortly before his eighty-ninth birthday, the novelist was rushed to a hospital in Salvador, where he died of a heart attack. Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso declared three days of national mourning, and thousands of people filed past the novelist's open casket on the day of his funeral. Following his demands, Amado was cremated, and his ashes were spread around a mango tree in the garden adjoining his house.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amado's famous contemporaries include:

- Ivan Goff** (1910–1999): Australian screenwriter whose works include the 1970s TV series *Charlie's Angels*.
- L. Ron Hubbard** (1911–1986): American science-fiction writer and founder of the Church of Scientology.
- Wallace Stegner** (1909–1993): American short-story, novel, and history writer whose novel *Angle of Repose* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1972.
- Akira Kurosawa** (1910–1998): Japanese film director whose career spanned a fifty-year period of activity.
- Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008): American religious leader and fifteenth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who served in office from 1995 until his death in 2008.
- Walter Sisulu** (1912–2003): South African anti-apartheid activist and member of the American National Congress.

Works in Literary Context

Amado was widely known as the writer of the people. Most of his books deal with the struggles and exploitation of working class Brazilians. Amado's characters are a mixture of good and bad, bloody killers and good-hearted villains, street kids and workers, prostitutes and circus owners, landlords and political leaders, musicians, poets, and religious men. Amado's works share an emphasis on Brazilian popular culture and folklore, including representative elements such as *Carnaval* and the Afro-Brazilian religious cult of *candomblé*—a type of African spirit worship brought by slaves to Brazil in the 1550s. As such, Amado's work demonstrates characteristics both of social realism and magical realism, and as his career developed, there is an increasing mixture of these seemingly incongruous elements.

Social Realism Amado's first three novels, *Carnival Land*, *Cacao*, and *Sweat*, are generally faulted for being excessively pedantic in expressing communist solutions to social problems. Nonetheless, *Jubiaba* (1935), Amado's fourth novel, is regarded as his first artistic success. In this work, set in Salvador, Amado details a young black man's struggle against social injustice, infusing the story with elements of Brazilian and African folk traditions. *Jubiaba* was Amado's earliest attempt to capture the multi-ethnic spirit of Brazil's capital city, an endeavor that evolved into a prominent feature of his artistry.

Magical Realism Although Amado never completely abandoned social realism, his later work incorporated elements of magical realism. In this style of writing, magical occurrences are common and are considered

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The idealism Amado expresses in his early work was intended to effect social change in Brazil. Essentially, Amado promoted a communist ideal as a solution to the social problems he depicted in his first novels, and he has, indeed, been charged with using the art form of the novel as a mere vehicle for his political agenda. Because art has a powerful way of moving people emotionally and intellectually, it is not uncommon to find in works of art a political undercurrent. Here are a few more examples of works that use artistic forums to express political and social ideals:

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This anti-slavery work had such a large impact that it intensified the sectional conflict, which preceded the American Civil War.

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This work describes the negative effects of socialism and is punctuated by a spirited speech in defense of capitalism delivered by the novel's hero, John Galt.

Happy Feet (2006), an animated film directed by George Miller. This work brings to light the problems that arise from irresponsible waste management policies.

commonplace by both the narrator of these tales and the characters who are affected by these magical events. Amado's *Shepherds of the Night* (1964) deals with characters from the lowest classes who have in common their misery and hopes for a better future: vagabonds, drunks, cheaters, prostitutes, rogues, and scoundrels. Amado sees ritual as a possible solution for social discrepancies and makes use of magic realism to demonstrate his point. Indeed, according to Amado, the gathering and inclusion of people of different races and social backgrounds in a deeply rooted cultural and religious cult show that all Brazilians can take their destinies into their own hands and solve their problems.

Amado's use of magical realism may, in fact, be a precursor to Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez's use of the popular technique in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. After the success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, magical realism gained popularity in South and Central America, so much so that many of the major literary works to come from these lands in the past fifty years or so have included the technique. Amado, it seems, was a little before his time.

Works in Critical Context

The critical debate surrounding Amado makes it clear that his works have left few people unmoved. Although Amado has detractors, his exceptional national and inter-

national fame and his personal accomplishments, including an array of prestigious awards and honors, speak for his importance in Brazilian literary history. Speaking to the power of Amado's writing, Fred P. Ellison writes: "In the works of this most controversial of modern Brazilian writer, unevenness is the salient characteristic. Amado seems to write solely by instinct. Of conscious art intellectually arrived at, the result of reflection and high craftsmanship, there is relatively little. Yet his novels have a mysterious power to sweep the reader along. Serious defects in artistry are overcome by the novelist's ability to weave a story, to construct vivid scenes, and to create fascinating characters."

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands Like most of Amado's later novels, *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* blends elements of burlesque with the surreal. Critic David Gallagher granted credit for the success of this strange brew to Amado's convincing characters. "*Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* is a remarkable novel for the coolness with which the author is able to impose his extraordinary characters on us," Gallagher wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*. "Like them, we learn to take exoticism and magic in our stride." A *Time* magazine critic charged *Dona Flor* with overblown sentimentalism, calling the book "a love letter to Bahia." The reviewer claimed that Amado "romanticizes his Bahians into virile lovers, darkly sensual *morenas* [women], whores and neighbors, all larger than life. . . . In lavishing details of color, touch and taste, Amado so ignores the canons of construction that at times he seems embarked on little more than an engaging shaggy-dog story." Gallagher held a similar opinion of Amado's prose: "It is a pity that Amado mars his achievement by often writing flatly, without discipline or tension. His refreshing exuberance is diminished by the novel's almost aggressive repetitiveness. Cut to half its size, it would have been a better book."

Responses to Literature

1. Amado's early work is marked by its promotion of communistic ideals. Read one of the early novels from Amado's career—*Cacao*, for example—and discuss its attempt to effect social change. How does it fashion its argument? Which argument seems to be the most effective? Why? Cite specific passages to support your response.
2. What role does magical realism play in *Shepherds of the Night*? Why do you think Amado chose to use elements of magical realism in this text?
3. Amado's work is often deprecated as being extremely vulgar and concerned with the down-and-out figures in Brazil, like "whores." Amado himself was unconcerned with this criticism, even though it arguably kept him from receiving wider critical acclaim. Perhaps, as some scholars suggest, literature that is more

“refined” receives more critical acclaim than literature that is more popular in tone, language, and content. In your opinion, what accounts for this disparity between what is prized by critics and what is prized by the public?

4. After having read an Amado text or two that incorporates magical realism, give the technique a shot. Write a short story or take one you’ve already written, and like a magician, sprinkle a little magic onto the text. Then, in a short essay, discuss how these changes alter the overall effect of the story.

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☒ Yehuda Amichai

BORN: 1924, Würzburg, Germany

DIED: 2000, Jerusalem, Israel

NATIONALITY: German, Israeli

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

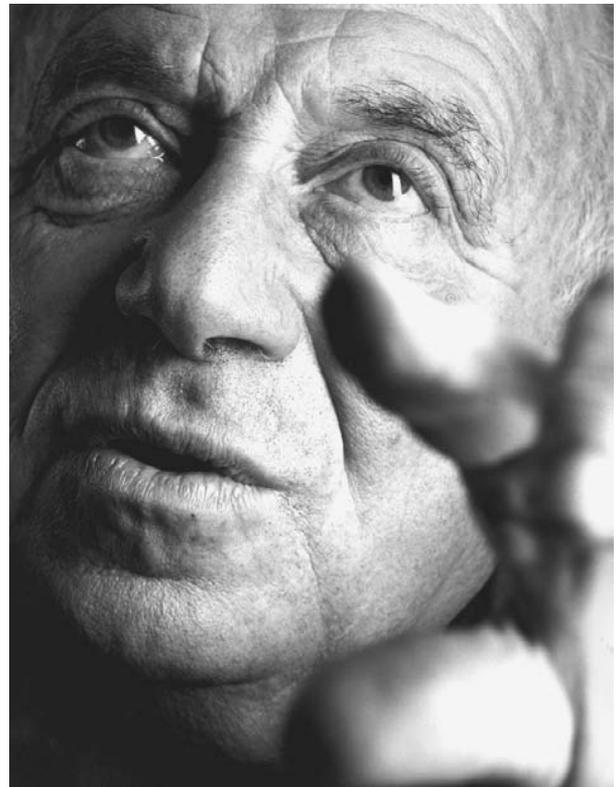
Not of This Time, Not of This Place (1963)

Open Closed Open (1998)

Two Hopes Apart

Overview

An influential member of Israel’s first literary generation, Yehuda Amichai synthesizes in his poetry the biblical rhythms and imagery of ancient Hebrew with modern Hebraic colloquialisms to try to make sense of the displacement and alienation experienced by many Jews escaping genocide in Europe for perpetual war in Israel.



Yehuda Amichai Amichai, Yehuda, photograph by John Reeves. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Youth Spent in War Yehuda Amichai was born in Würzburg, Germany in 1924. Twelve years later, during the Nazification of Germany that led up to World War II (1939–1945), he emigrated with his parents to Palestine, then a British protectorate in the Middle East. Although his family avoided the horrors of Nazi Germany, Amichai lost many friends and relatives in concentration camps, a loss that haunted him throughout his life. He served in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army in North Africa during World War II, one of around five thousand Palestinian Jews to do so. After Allied victory in the war, the United Nations created the state of Israel in 1947, establishing it as a Jewish homeland—in large part as a response to the Holocaust, in which over 6 million Jews were slaughtered in Nazi camps throughout Germany and German-occupied territories in Europe. Amichai then served with Israeli defense forces during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which controversially expanded Israel’s territory after a combined attack from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon was repulsed. These experiences, along with witnessing and soldiering in Israel’s other wars of the mid-twentieth century, strongly influenced Amichai’s work; many of his poems and short

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amichai's famous contemporaries include:

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970): An Israeli novelist whose works examine the conflict between traditional Jewish culture and the contemporary world, Agnon was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966 jointly with German poet Nelly Sachs.

Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962): Known as the “architect of the Holocaust” during World War II, this German Nazi was captured by Israeli agents in Argentina, convicted of crimes against humanity and war crimes by an Israeli court, and executed.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): A Jewish-American poet and cofounder of the Beatnik school of writing, Ginsberg remains well known for his long poem “Howl,” which was initially banned for its explicit language and frank references to homosexuality.

Amos Oz (1939–): An Israeli novelist and writer, Oz argues for a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Nelly Sachs (1891–1970): A Jewish German poet known for her lyrical, mournful work, Sachs was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966 jointly with Israeli novelist Shmuel Yosef Agnon.

stories revolve around themes associated with war and its aftermath.

Contemporary Poetry for a Contemporary World

Amichai received his degree from Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1955 and began teaching biblical and Hebrew literature in high schools. He published his first book of poetry in 1955 as well, *Now and in Other Days*, which was revolutionary for its use of colloquial Hebrew. His 1958 collection, *Two Hopes Apart*, established him as a major Israeli poet. He was one of the first poets writing in Hebrew to use images of tanks, airplanes, and other technology in his poetry, reflecting his belief that contemporary poetry should embrace the contemporary world.

Negotiating Identity After the Holocaust Amichai first gained the notice of British and American audiences with the English translations of *Amen* (1977) and *Time* (1978), two volumes of poetry Amichai translated with the English poet Ted Hughes. Both books address the spiritual and political concerns of the Jewish people. Amichai's deep and ongoing engagement with history and its impact on individual lives is evident in much of his poetry and in his 1963 novel, *Not of This Time, Not of This Place*. In this book, a Jewish archeologist is torn between returning to the German town where he grew

up—like the author himself—and staying in Jerusalem to carry out his extramarital affair. The novel is generally considered a seminal work of Israeli Holocaust literature, investigating two options for living with the knowledge of Nazi genocide: Negotiate with the consequences of the past or deny it.

Turning to the Tanakh Later in his life, Amichai turned more and more to Hebrew scriptures as a route to understanding himself and the world, focusing on matters both internal and external. In *Great Tranquillity: Questions and Answers* (1983), Amichai addresses Israel's troubled political history and its paradoxical desert landscape, which is both arid and rich with promise. “Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela” is a sequence of fifty-seven poems in which Amichai analyzes his Jewish identity by comparing his life story with legends of a wandering medieval rabbi. Published separately in book-length form as *Travels* in 1986, this work also appears in his *Selected Poetry* (1986), a compilation of verse from ten volumes published over a thirty-year period.

In *Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm with Fingers* (1991), Amichai again draws from the Tanakh, the holy text of Judaism, to illustrate the individual's struggle with history. And the very late *Open Closed Open* (1998) is widely seen as Amichai's masterpiece. The twenty-five linked poems in this collection examine human nature and universal concerns through the lens of the Jewish spiritual tradition and Israel's justified fears about the future. At the time of publishing, the Oslo Peace Process begun in 1993 had helped Israel achieve a limited peace with its separatist Palestinian minority—after years of religiously inflected civil war and tension—but Amichai's concerns about a future for Israel were prescient. As a result of the failure of that peace process in 2000, Israeli-Palestinian hostilities flared back up, and remained yet to be resolved still in 2008.

Over the course of a lifetime concerned with negotiation of identity in the presence of others, the effort to understand the self as a part of society and of culture, Amichai married twice, and had three children. Although nominated numerous times for the Nobel Prize in Literature, he never won. Amichai died of cancer on September 22, 2000, in Jerusalem, Israel, and was buried there.

Works in Literary Context

Negotiating with the Traditions of Judaism

Yehuda Amichai's artistic life was in nearly every way a negotiation of his Jewish identity, of the traditions to which he was heir, and of the world and regional politics that shaped his options for being and for writing. Throughout his career, Amichai had frequent recourse to a rich and varied Jewish literary tradition, and attempted to synthesize the stylistic and conceptual offerings of that tradition with the colloquial Hebrew spoken in Israel, as well as with the ever-shifting and often

threatening circumstances surrounding the modern Israeli state.

British and American Influences Serving in the British Army during World War II exposed Amichai to British and American poetry, and the influence of the Irish poet Dylan Thomas and the British-American poet W. H. Auden can be seen in his early work. “[German poet Rainer Maria] Rilke,” writes Robert Alter, “is another informing presence for him, occasionally in matters of style—he has written vaguely Rilkesque elegies—but perhaps more as a model for using a language of here and now as an instrument to catch the glimmerings of a metaphysical beyond.” Edward Hirsch agreed, writing for the *New York Times Book Review* that Amichai’s early work was “influenced by W. H. Auden . . . and by such poets as [English Metaphysical] John Donne and [Welsh Metaphysical] George Herbert.” Hirsch contrasts that with his later work, finding “a sparer and more informal poet whose colloquial free verse rhythms seem modeled, perhaps, on [American modernist poet] William Carlos Williams and whose profuse imagery and lightning-flash analogies may be compared to Deep Imagism.”

Works in Critical Context

Yehuda Amichai is generally considered one of the most important poets of his generation of Israeli writers, focusing as he does on Israelis’ painful and often ambivalent feelings about their post-Holocaust and postliberation existence. His poetry is widely praised by an international audience for its spare, honest exploration of emotions many people find too painful to face. But Amichai is not without his detractors. Some critics find his work simplistic and missing a crucial core philosophy, since Amichai, like many of his peers, does not align himself with one specific political view. Nonetheless, Amichai’s work is admired overall for the strong, if sometimes sorrowful and confused, passion it displays. Though his poetry is sometimes described as lacking a comprehensive philosophical system because of his seemingly simple observations and syntax, it is his ability to infuse ordinary moments with extraordinary metaphysical meaning that first drew international attention to his work.

In an online review for the *East Bay Express*, Stephen Kessler notes that Amichai has “long been one of the planet’s preeminent poets. . . . Jewish down to the bones, his humanity is broadly universal, obsessed as Amichai [was] with time and death, war and peace, love and memory, joy and suffering.” And *New Republic* essayist and American poet C. K. Williams finds in Amichai’s work “the shrewdest and most solid of poetic intelligences.”

Open Closed Open According to C. K. Williams, *Open Closed Open* “comprises a sustained outburst of inspiration, and it has a . . . complicated relation to wisdom and to matters of the spirit.” Williams continues: “To sojourn with Amichai in the vast, rugged, sympa-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Yehuda Amichai’s poems and short stories revolve around war and its aftermath. Here are some other works that deal with this theme.

The Country Between Us (1981), a collection of poetry by Carolyn Forché. The poems in this collection focus on the situation in El Salvador during the 1970s, when the country was ruled by the military and government-linked death squads terrorized its citizens.

“Death Fugue” (1944), a poem by Paul Celan. This poem by the German Jewish poet memorializes the Nazi death camps of World War II. Celan struggled with continuing to write in German after the Nazi atrocities.

Maus (1992), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. This Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel tells of the author’s father’s experience surviving the Holocaust and the war’s effects on his family today.

War Requiem (1989), a film directed by Derek Jarman.

This movie, based on Benjamin Britten’s 1962 composition of the same name, which incorporates World War I soldier and poet Wilfred Owen’s work with the Latin mass for the dead, stars Laurence Olivier in his last performance.

thetic domain of his imagination is to be given leave to linger in one of those privileged moments when we are in a confidential and confident engagement with our own spirits. . . .”

Daniel Weissbord writes, “This poet’s work, in its expansiveness and humanity, enriches all its readers and has been crucial in enabling the new literature of Israel to engage in a creative dialogue with the entire problematic and paradoxical history of the Jewish people.” Amichai, in short, might be termed a poet of universal Jewishness; in his own complex negotiation with Jewish identity after the Holocaust, he wrote works that speak to all people in all times.

Responses to Literature

1. Yehuda Amichai wrote in Hebrew, which was then translated into English for British and American audiences. How well do you think literature, especially poetry, can be translated? What are some problems that might occur when translating poetry into another language?
2. Choose a song or poem you like. Write a prose “translation” of its meaning. Do you feel that you were able to translate the nuances of the original? Explain the differences between the two.

3. Amichai's work has been criticized by some because he does not align himself with one particular political point of view. Do you think that it is easier for writers to succeed if their work expresses clearly defined beliefs or belief systems? In what ways would that benefit the writer, and in what ways might it hurt the writer's success?
4. Amichai believed that he never won the Nobel Prize because of his political views. Should a writer's personal politics matter when we judge his or her art, or just the quality of the art? What about a musician or actor? If these realms seem different to you, why is that?
5. When crimes against humanity occur, as in the Holocaust, they are often denied even as they are happening. The horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, for example, were virtually unknown to the rest of the world until they were confirmed by advancing Allied troops. Research the Museum Mapping Initiative (www.ushmm.org/maps). The Initiative has teamed up with Google Earth to show satellite images of areas in which genocide is currently alleged to be taking place. Write an essay analyzing the impact this immediate, objective information might have on nations' decisions about whether to intervene for the public good.

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☒ Kingsley Amis

BORN: 1922, London, England

DIED: 1995, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction; poetry; criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Lucky Jim (1954)

The James Bond Dossier (1965)

The Anti-Death League (1966)

The Old Devils (1985)

Overview

Although an eclectic man of letters, Kingsley Amis was best known as a prolific novelist who, in the words of Blake Morrison in the *Times Literary Supplement*, had the "ability to go on surprising us." He won critical acclaim in 1954 with the publication of his first novel, *Lucky Jim*. After producing three other humorous works, Amis was quickly characterized as a comic novelist writing in the tradition of P. G. Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh. Critics ranked him among the foremost of the "Angry Young Men," a school of British writers who disdained post-World War II British society throughout the 1950s.



Kingsley Amis. Amis, Kingsley, photograph by Jerry Bauer. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

William D. Montalbano of the *Los Angeles Times* stated that “Amis rejected the label as ‘a very boring journalistic phrase.’” Following his early works, however, Amis produced a spate of novels that differed radically in genre and seriousness of theme. He kept “experimenting with ways of confounding the reader who hopes for a single focus,” claimed William Hutchings in the *Critical Quarterly*, though Clancy Sigal suggested in the *National Review* that Amis simply had “the virtue, rare in England, of refusing to accept an imposed definition of what a Serious Writer ought to write about.” His place in British literature was recognized in 1986, when his seventeenth novel, *The Old Devils*, won the Booker Prize, Britain’s highest literary award. In 1990, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Middle-Class Boy to Oxford Man An only child, Amis enjoyed a comfortable but dull relationship with his Baptist, Conservative, lower-middle-class parents, William Robert and Rosa Lucas Amis. Recalling his father, an office worker, as “the most English human being I have ever known,” Amis added that boredom rather than hostility was his chief response to his father’s company.

School was more rewarding than family life. Amis attended Norbury College, where at the age of eleven he had his first story, “The Sacred Rhino of Uganda,” published in the school magazine. He then entered the City of London School, where he remained until 1941 as a scholarship student. Amis writes enthusiastically about his years at this excellent day school, recalling the broad range of social strata from which its students were drawn and its humane spirit of tolerance: “I have never in my life known a community where factions of any kind were less in evidence, where differences of class, upbringing, income group and religion counted for so little.” Academic standards were high, and Amis, specializing first in classics and then in English, maintained a level that earned him a scholarship to St. John’s College, Oxford. Although Amis became acquainted with members of the upper class, his middle-class roots instilled in him a skepticism of the pretense found among the wealthy and well-heeled; this clash of classes later became the fodder for some of his most popular works.

While Amis was in school, England entered World War II as one of the Allied nations battling against Nazi Germany’s advance across western Europe. Amis was called for military service when he was twenty and served three years in the army (in France, Belgium, and West Germany), having been commissioned because, he says, “an Oxford man was likely to be enough of a ‘gentleman’ to do all right as an officer.” Late in 1945, at the age of twenty-three, he returned to St. John’s where he earned a first-class degree in 1947 but failed to win a research degree when his thesis (“Poets and Their Public, 1850–

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amis’s famous contemporaries include:

Robertson Davies (1913–1995): A preeminent Canadian novelist whose work often deals with religion and metaphysics while interweaving theatrical elements with traditional novel forms.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): This U.S. president’s time in office was marred by the Watergate scandal, which eventually forced Nixon to resign to avoid being impeached.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): This Spanish artist worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics. Although his work largely transcends barriers, he is often associated with the cubist art movement.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): This British novelist is known for the breadth of his work, which includes westerns, political thrillers, travelogues, and religious novels.

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): Prolific Swedish director, whose works include more than sixty films and more than one hundred plays.

1900”) was rejected. He married Hilary A. Bardwell in 1948 and took a post as lecturer in English at the University College of Swansea in Wales.

Teacher, Husband, Father, Writer During the next half-dozen years, Amis labored to clarify his roles as teacher, husband, father (two of his three children were born during this time), and writer. His traditionally structured, colloquial, and wittily antiromantic poems began to appear in anthologies, and he occasionally read his works on John Wain’s distinguished BBC poetry program, *First Reading*. A collection of his poems, *A Frame of Mind* (1953), helped to associate him in the public mind with Wain, Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, and Robert Conquest as part of a concerted dissent from tradition known as The Movement, a label whose validity each of them denied.

Although Amis continued to write and edit collections of poetry, his most significant work was his prose fiction. Also during these years, he was beginning his first major work, *Lucky Jim*, a novel about a lower-middle-class man who becomes a professor of a subject he dislikes and finds himself surrounded by upper-class colleagues he despises. The germ of the novel was the result of a brief encounter with faculty in the Senior Common Room at Leicester University, which Amis attended in 1946. “Christ,” Amis recalls saying, “someone ought to do something about that lot.” In 1951, he began “to do

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Amis's Jim Dixon has been deemed an antihero by author and critic Anthony Burgess. An antihero is a figure in a text who participates in shady dealings or immoral acts but who, due to the presentation of the author, appears to be a sympathetic—indeed, heroic—figure. Antiheroes became popular when the poet Lord Byron featured them in his poems. For instance, *Don Juan* describes the amorous flings of a sexually irresponsible man; yet the reader cannot help but root for Don Juan and against the husbands of his lovers. Since Byron, the antihero has been used to great effect in both literature and film. Here are some examples:

3:10 to Yuma (2007), a film directed by James Mangold.

This adaptation of an Elmore Leonard short story depicts Ben Wade, a thief and gang leader in the Old West. As the movie proceeds, the viewer comes to understand and appreciate Ben Wade, even though it is also clear that he is a hardened criminal.

Batman (1939–), a comic book series by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. At first glance, Batman might appear to be an unmitigated positive hero, but upon closer examination, one sees that the questions surrounding Batman and his dark and mysterious past suggest a shady side to his character.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In this novel, the most sympathetic character is Raskolnikov, a young man who murders a pawnbroker for no good reason.

something”: he finished his manuscript a year later and saw it published at the outset of 1954.

A Mixed Bag At the outset of his career, Amis wrote, “We are in for a golden age of satire.” In his best fiction, Amis validates his prophecy, deftly deflating pretension while expressing a genial affection for humanity. Later, however, misanthropy darkened Amis’s comic sense without deepening his moral or psychological insight. Often, he seemed unable to decide whether his hero is admirable or despicable, or whether to celebrate or mourn the descent of man and society.

Works in Literary Context

More than fifty years after the turbulence attending the publication of his overwhelmingly popular first novel, *Lucky Jim* (1954), Kingsley Amis remains a controversial figure in English letters. Many find him an affable and entertaining novelist whose heroes are engagingly antic mimes. Behind the mild lunacy and benign irreverence, others discern in Amis’s fiction a profound concern with serious moral problems. Fellow novelists such as Anthony

Burgess, Anthony Powell, V. S. Pritchett, and C. P. Snow have praised him. He has been lauded by critics as the successor to the satiric genius of Evelyn Waugh; as a dissenting realist in the tradition of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding; as a diverting wit like P. G. Wodehouse or Peter DeVries; and has even been paradoxically labeled an “antiliberal, antigenteel, antimoralist . . . left conservative,” like Norman Mailer.

Angry Young Man? Early in his career, Amis became associated with a group of writers known as “Angry Young Men.” What linked these writers, who established a loose consortium, was less their anger (though all could pout and rage) than a shared class origin (lower or middle class, but not upper) and unsettled social and cultural values. They suffered the benefits of the post–World War II welfare state without grace or gratitude. Although the Labour Party government made possible their attendance at Oxford or Cambridge, they resisted what they identified as an obligation to embrace—in the name of culture and progress—what Richard Hoggart called the “shiny barbarism” of the middle class. *Lucky Jim* became the archetypal antihero of the Angry Young Men.

Nonetheless, in spite of all the journalistic declarations in the late 1950s about “Angry Young Men,” a rebellion Amis supposedly led, he never was or claimed to be iconoclastic about society. Rather, the novels, whatever the setting, demonstrated an acceptance, no matter how ironic or grudging, of the social status quo. As such, Amis’s work must be considered a predecessor in tone of the entire body of Philip Roth’s work. American novelist Roth often utilizes a young, angry narrator, but the source of this narrator’s anger is not merely a desire to escape his past and upbringing but to come to terms with it in light of his own individual personality and its relationship to the culture and society in which he was raised. A similar theme is evident in the later writer Tobias Wolff. However, Wolff employs a far less emphatic and demonstrative tone—though no less a pained one—in order to portray the desire of his characters to achieve social mobility and to attain happiness despite their upbringing.

Works in Critical Context

Writing in the Christmas 1955 issue of the *London Sunday Times*, Somerset Maugham described Jim Dixon, the young academic hero of *Lucky Jim* (which had, ironically, just won the Somerset Maugham Award for fiction), and his ilk as “white collar proletariat [who] do not go to the university to acquire culture, but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it. . . . They are mean, malicious, envious. . . . Charity, kindness, generosity are qualities which they hold in contempt. They are scum.” In 1970, Q. D. Leavis accused Amis of targeting as “the consistent objects of [his] animus,” the “only bastions against barbarism: the university lecturer, the librarian,

the grammar school master, the learned societies, the social worker.”

Despite the strong reaction of writers like Maugham, *Lucky Jim* received a largely positive response from critics. The same, however, cannot be said of much of Amis’s later work, which was generally condemned as either inferior to or derivative of Amis’s debut novel.

Lucky Jim Jim Dixon, the protagonist of *Lucky Jim*, is, according to Anthony Burgess in *The Novel Now*, “the most popular antihero of our time.” Though a junior lecturer at a provincial university, Jim has no desire to be an intellectual—or a “gentleman”—because of his profound, almost physical, hatred of the social and cultural affectations of university life. This characteristic of Jim’s has led several critics to conclude that he is a philistine, and, moreover, that beneath the comic effects, Amis was really attacking culture and was himself a philistine. Brigid Brophy, for example, wrote in *Don’t Never Forget: Collected Views and Reviews* that the “apex of philistinism” is reached “when Jim hears a tune by the composer whom either he or Mr. Amis . . . thinks of as ‘filthy Mozart.’”

Ralph Caplan, however, claimed in Charles Shapiro’s *Contemporary British Novelists* that *Lucky Jim* “never [promises] anything more than unmitigated pleasure and insight, and these it keeps on delivering. The book [is] not promise but fulfillment, a commodity we confront too seldom to know how to behave when it is achieved. This seems to be true particularly when the achievement is comic. Have we forgotten how to take humor straight? Unable to exit laughing, the contemporary reader looks over his shoulder for Something More. The trouble is that by now he knows how to find it.”

More of the Same? Critics generally saw the three novels that followed *Lucky Jim* as variations on the theme of appealing to common sense and denouncing affectation. Discussing *Lucky Jim*, *That Uncertain Feeling*, *I Like It Here*, and *Take a Girl Like You* in the *Hudson Review*, James P. Degnan stated: “In the comically outraged voice of his angry young heroes—e.g., Jim Dixon of *Lucky Jim* and John Lewis of *That Uncertain Feeling*—Amis [lampoons] what C. P. Snow . . . labeled the ‘traditional culture,’ the ‘culture of the literary intellectuals,’ of the ‘gentleman’s world.’”

The heroes in these four novels are in fact so much alike that Brigid Brophy charged Amis with “rewriting much the same novel under different titles and with different names for the characters.” Degnan, however, defends the similarity: “In place of the sensitive soul as hero, Amis creates in his early novels a hero radically new to serious contemporary fiction: a middle-class hero who is also an intellectual, an intellectual who is unabashedly middle-brow. He is a hero . . . whose chief virtues, as he expresses them, are: ‘politeness, friendly interest, ordinary concern

and a good natured willingness to be imposed upon. . . .’ Suspicious of all pretentiousness, of all heroic posturing, the Amis hero . . . voices all that is best of the ‘lower middle-class, of the non-gentlemanly’ conscience.”

Responses to Literature

1. Research the word *cynic*. Based on your experience with Amis’s work, especially *Lucky Jim*, do you think that Amis can accurately be described as a cynic? Explain your thinking in a short essay.
2. Compare Amis’s representation of Jim Dixon with Dostoyevsky’s representation of Raskolnikov. What do you see as some of the differences and similarities between these two antiheroes? Consider their backgrounds, social status, and motivations. Based on these readings, what do you make of antiheroes in novels? (What is appealing about them, what is not?)
3. The concept of the antihero can be extended into other areas of the creative arts, such as in music and art itself. What could that type of antihero represent? What would the profile be like? Provide contemporary examples of the antihero in each area of the arts. Support your examples.

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❏ Mulk Raj Anand

BORN: 1905, Peshawar, India

DIED: 2004, Pune, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Untouchable (1935)

The Coolie (1936)

Across the Black Waters (1940)

Overview

Throughout his novels and nonfiction writing, Mulk Raj Anand chronicled the life of early- and mid-twentieth-century India and acted as a spokesman not only for the downtrodden, but also for a new social order that would grant equal opportunity to all.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Embraced Nationalist Beliefs Anand was born in Peshawar, Punjab, India, on December 12, 1905, to Lal Chand (a coppersmith and soldier in the British Indian army) and Ishwar (Kaur) Anand. In India, a caste system had been in place for several thousand years until the beginnings of its demise in the mid-twentieth century. A caste system is a somewhat hierarchical social order with social, economic, and religious distinctions, and a person is born into a particular caste and remains in the caste until death. Anand's family was part of the Kshatriya caste, second in rank and social prestige only to the highest-ranking Brahmins. Anand attended the University of Punjab, where he graduated with honors in 1924. While a student, he became actively involved in the Indian nationalist concerns, as the country sought its independence from its longtime colonial ruler, Great Britain.

Influenced by European Experiences Anand enrolled at the University of London in 1925 for a doctoral degree in philosophy. By the time he completed his studies in 1935, he had developed intimate relationships with prominent English writers and critics. Anand's deep immersion in European intellectual thought and his direct involvement in English politics helped him to understand the British mindset, especially in relation to its response to India's nationalistic desires. Afterward, Anand studied at Cambridge University, then fought against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. He was one of many foreigners who went to Spain to fight the fascists led by General Francisco Franco, but Franco remained in power there for the next four decades. However, Anand's fight against fascism likely influenced his later work.

Addressed Societal Wrongs in Early Novels Returning to Great Britain after his time in Spain, Anand would remain there for much of the next decade as he launched

his writing career. As a writer Anand's career can be divided into two stages parallel to Indian history: the Anand of the colonial period, who steadily critiqued class exploitation, the caste system, colonialism, imperialism, fascism, and racism; and the Anand of the postindependence era, who spread his energies and interests into several directions that became available with the new aspirations of India as an independent state.

Untouchable (1935) was Anand's first novel. Someone who is "untouchable" in traditional Indian society is at the bottom of the caste system of social classes and is restricted from interacting with people of higher castes. Anand's novel portrays Bakha, an untouchable, as a true human being. This novel set the stage for the type of social protest writing for which Anand would become famous. The book stems largely from a childhood incident in which an injured Anand was carried back to his house by an untouchable, only to watch his mother reprimand the untouchable for laying his hands upon her son.

Next came *The Coolie* (1936), then *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). The former condemned capitalism, while the latter was about exploitation of Indian workers by a British-owned tea company. These novels depicted India's underclass as Anand witnessed it, without giving them much hope.

Continued Focus on India As Britain became engulfed in World War II, Anand was employed by the BBC's film division in London from 1939 to 1945. He worked as a broadcaster and scriptwriter, while continuing to work on his own novels, which remained focused on India's ongoing internal struggles. In 1939, Anand also married his first wife, Kathleen Van Gelder, an actress.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Anand wrote his *Village* trilogy: *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). These novels deal with the three stages of growth of Lal Singh, a peasant's son, as he struggles against the societal forces keeping him pinned at the bottom of Indian society in the midst of the stormy struggle for India's independence and the various sociopolitical events that faced Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

Embraced Civil Disobedience In 1942, Anand became enthralled with Mohandas Gandhi's Quit India movement, a call for mass civil disobedience against the British colonizers and their government. His next novel, *The Big Heart* (1944), again touched on the tensions in India. It portrays laborers from the community of coppersmiths who are threatened with displacement from their hereditary profession. It also replicates the fierce conflict that took place in Europe between modernity and tradition.

Returned to India After World War II ended, Anand journeyed back to India in 1946 and remained there for several decades. While working on his writing, he also was a lecturer at various Indian universities from 1948 until the late 1960s. Anand wrote *Private Life of an Indian Prince* in 1948, the year India gained independence from Britain and

started a trend. India was one of the first of many Asian and African colonies to gain its independence from European colonizers in the years after World War II. This novel, published in 1953, chronicled one prince's experience at having his kingdom absorbed into the Indian Union.

Focused on Self in Autobiographical Novels Anand's personal life was also being transformed as India worked through its early days of independence. He divorced his first wife in 1948 and married Shirin Vajifdar, a classical dancer, in 1949. Anand's life also became the focus of his writings. The first of a seven-title autobiographical novel series called "Seven Ages of Man," a novel about Anand's childhood entitled *Seven Summers* (1951), was not published in the United States until 1973. Of the planned seven novels, Anand completed four.

Over the years, Anand was lauded for his work as he affected change in India through his writings and employment. Anand died of pneumonia in Pune, India, on September 28, 2004, at the age of ninety-nine.

Works in Literary Context

Rejecting the ideas of disinterestedness and escapism in art and aloofness and alienation of the artist in society, Anand boldly embraced British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's idea of the poet as the "unacknowledged legislator of mankind." Believing in the whole man and in his ability to reconstruct a new, progressive social order, and admiring the humanity of Mohandas Gandhi, poet and musician Rabindranath Tagore, and philosopher and politician Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Anand stressed the recognition of human dignity as a directional force in human relationships as well as the importance of hope and realism in his works.

Humanism One of Anand's key themes in his work is the idea that all people are deserving of dignity and basic liberties. This reflects the concept of humanism, or the belief that all people—regardless of culture or social class—are capable of operating by a universal moral code in which all are treated equally. This point of view is expressed in his sympathetic portrayal of Bakha in *Untouchable*, as well as his depiction of coppersmiths in *The Big Heart*. Anand counted on the humanistic notion that people of all cultures could relate to universal ideas about fairness and equality in his work.

Hope and Realism Hope and realism are elements introduced in Anand's *Village* trilogy. *The Village* is a realistic portrayal of village life. *Across the Black Waters* is a representation of Lal Singh and his friends' experiences of fighting against the Germans in France during World War I. The first and only fictional account of the use of Indian troops in World War I, the story raises the moral issue of the deployment of Indian troops in a British war and reflects Anand's own experiences fighting against fascists in the Spanish Civil War. *The Sword and the Sickle* is a sociopolitical novel that combines two major con-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Anand's famous contemporaries include:

B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956): Born into the untouchable caste, Ambedkar fought against the caste system; he became a well-respected lawyer and helped draw up the Indian Constitution.

E. M. Forster (1879–1970): English writer and member of the Bloomsbury literary group in London who wrote the introduction to *Untouchable*; his novel *A Passage to India* was one of the first to address British mistreatment of Indians under colonial rule.

Indira Gandhi (1917–1984): Prime minister of India for four terms (1966–1977, 1980–1984); assassinated while in office by two bodyguards, who were political radicals.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Indian political leader and a key leader of the Indian independence movement, famous for his philosophy of nonviolent resistance; assassinated by Hindu extremists.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): First prime minister of India after its independence from Great Britain, from 1947–1964, and father of Indira Gandhi; worked closely with Mohandas Gandhi during the Indian independence movement.

cerns: the social problem of the eviction of peasants by landlords, and the political problem of national freedom.

Through his writings, Anand helped establish the basic forms and themes of Indian literature written in English. Because of his subject matter and realism, especially in his early novels, many critics believe that his influence on contemporary South Asian literature is similar to that of nineteenth-century novelists Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola on European letters of the time.

Works in Critical Context

Most critics agree that Mulk Raj Anand is among India's foremost writers. His depictions of the underclass ring true, as do his other portrayals of Indian people. "Anand's achievement in the first two novels of the *Trilogy*," remarks Meenakshi Mukherjee, "has not been surpassed by an Indo-Anglican novelist."

However, Anand has been faulted for his shallow descriptions of others, notably the British. Anand also has been criticized for being too propagandist in his calls for social equality via Marxism. Most critics concede that both the characterizations in Anand's later works and his social statements are more evenhanded than those of his earlier ones.

Untouchable Anand earned high praise for his first novel, *Untouchable*, upon its publication in 1935. Novelist E. M. Forster, in his foreword for the book, writes,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mulk Raj Anand was a progressive and unswerving advocate of those at the bottom of society—the oppressed, the victimized, and the dispossessed. Here are some other works that advocate for those who are often ignored:

A Child Called "It" (1995), by Dave Pelzer. This nonfiction memoir tells of the author's surviving a childhood of abuse by his alcoholic mother.

Nervous Conditions (2004), by Tsitsi Dangarembga. This novel, set in 1960s Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), follows an African girl as she grows up and struggles with traditional women's roles and traditional culture versus Western culture. It was the first English-language novel published by a black Zimbabwean woman.

Oliver Twist (1838), by Charles Dickens. In this novel, an orphan boy must try to survive on his own in Victorian London and gets involved with a group of criminals.

Woman at Point Zero (1979), by Nawal El Saadawi. This novel by the Egyptian feminist and physician tells of the life of an Egyptian prostitute who is in jail for murder.

"I Am Joaquin" (1967), by Rodolfo Gonzales. This epic poem by the influential Mexican American political activist calls for a new understanding of what "Chicano" means.

"Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it." Saros Cowasjee, in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, writes: "The novel is not only a powerful social tract but also a remarkable technical feat. The action takes place within the compass of a single day, but the author manages to build round his hero Bakha . . . a spiritual crisis of such breadth that it seems to embrace the whole of India."

Responses to Literature

1. Read Anand's novel *Untouchable*. What are some techniques he uses to depict the squalid and unfair conditions in which Bakha lives and works? In your opinion, are these effective techniques? Provide examples from the text.
2. Though Anand was a supporter of basic human rights for all, he was a member of a relatively high social class by birth. Do you think Anand could have published *Untouchable* if he actually was an untouchable in Indian society? Do you think his experience as a member of a higher social class influenced his ability to write objectively about those living in the lower classes?
3. Compare Anand's *Untouchable* to E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. How do the two books

portray Indian society differently? Provide examples from each book to illustrate your points.

4. India's caste system is less enforced today than in the past, but it still makes itself felt. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research the Indian caste system and write an essay comparing and contrasting it to racial segregation in the United States before the civil rights movement. Be sure to use specific examples in your essay.

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Hans Christian Andersen

BORN: 1805, Odense, Denmark

DIED: 1875, Rolighed, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Children's literature, fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

"The Little Mermaid" (1837)

"The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837)

"The Ugly Duckling" (1843)

"The Snow Queen" (1845)

Hans Christian Andersen *Imagno / Getty Images*

Overview

Danish author Hans Christian Andersen is perhaps the foremost writer of fairy tales in world literature. Known for such stories as “The Little Mermaid,” “The Steadfast Tin Soldier,” and “The Ugly Duckling,” he expanded the scope of the fairy tale genre by creating original stories drawn from a wealth of folklore and personal experience.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Impoverished Childhood Enhanced by Imagination The story of Andersen’s life is one of unparalleled social and artistic success, rising as he did from the lowest and poorest layer of society to achieve not only the acceptance but the utter devotion of the highest social groups, the artistic elite and royal houses of many European countries. Outwardly, his story was a tremendous success, but he achieved it at great personal and psychological cost.

Andersen’s childhood experiences greatly influenced his literary perspective and are reflected in his fairy tales.

He was born in Odense, Denmark, to a poor shoemaker and his superstitious, uneducated wife. Andersen’s father, in keeping with the spirit of the eighteenth century, declared himself to be a freethinker and, much to his wife’s dismay, insisted on regarding Jesus as a great man but not the son of God. As an adult, his son also accepted this understanding of who Jesus was.

Andersen’s father did not enjoy being a cobbler and encouraged his son to aspire to a better life by telling him glamorous stories about the theater and opera and by sending him to school at an early age. The elder Andersen also encouraged his son’s vivid imagination, reading to the boy from the comedies of Ludvig Holberg, *The Arabian Nights*, and the fairy tales of Jean de La Fontaine. He also built his son a puppet theater. Andersen was a shy child so instead of playing with other children, he wrote puppet dramas and designed costumes for his characters.

Lost Father Amidst Tumultuous Era in Danish History Andersen’s father died in 1816, before the boy turned eleven, two years after serving as a soldier. At the time, Denmark was involved in the Napoleonic Wars, siding with the French led by Napoleon Bonaparte against various European countries including Great Britain. In 1801 and again in 1807, Copenhagen came under British attack. In the second, decisive battle, the English armada shelled Copenhagen and captured the Danish navy, thus ending a half century of progress and middle-class prosperity built on overseas trade. As a result of the wars, Andersen’s childhood years were marked by great catastrophes in Denmark and the beginning of a lengthy economic recession. Oddly enough, however, this period was followed by a cultural explosion known as the Golden Age of Denmark—an age in which Andersen figured prominently.

Encouraged as a Writer In 1819, three years after his father’s death, Andersen moved to Copenhagen to pursue an acting career. As a young boy without references, he was denied admittance to the Royal Theater and was rejected by Copenhagen’s opera company. However, Jonas Collin, a director of the Royal Theater, was impressed by the promise Andersen showed as a writer. Collin took Andersen into his home, sent him to grammar school, and supported him until he passed the entrance exams to the University of Copenhagen. He was Andersen’s confidant, critic, and friend, and Andersen remained closely connected to the Collin family throughout his life.

Andersen began writing in the 1830s. Thanks to the enthusiastic response to his work, the author received a government grant with a yearly stipend. The grant, combined with the earnings from his writings, gave him a solid financial basis, and his income grew steadily during the following years. As he began writing his fairy tales, he drew on the fantasy world he created as a child to deal with his difficult childhood and early adulthood.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hans Christian Andersen's famous contemporaries include:

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): English politician and novelist. Disraeli was prime minister twice, overseeing Britain's colonization of India. He also found time to write ten novels and numerous nonfiction works.

John Quincy Adams (1767–1848): Sixth president of the United States. He was most effective as a politician and diplomat before and after his presidency. Adams secured Florida from Spanish rule and he promoted the Monroe Doctrine, which was designed to keep Europe from colonizing or interfering with any more territory in the Americas.

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887): American poet most famous for her poem "The New Colossus," inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . ."

George du Maurier (1834–1896): English novelist and illustrator. Du Maurier's novels, including his famous *Trilby*, are social satires that are often based on his time as an art student in Paris. Du Maurier illustrated many of the most popular novels of his day and drew famous caricatures in *Punch* magazine.

Wilhelm Raabe (1831–1910): German novelist noted for his pessimistic realism and bitter irony. His later novels are highly experimental in their time structures and narrative.

Josh Billings (1818–1885): American auctioneer, real estate agent, and essayist. His humorous writings used deliberately bad spelling and grammar, and his numerous collections of sayings and observations were popular throughout the century.

Found Success with Fairy Tales In 1839, Andersen's fairy tales began appearing in German translations, and their popularity among readers was quickly ensured. Throughout the 1840s, Andersen's reputation in Europe grew rapidly and he traveled extensively. By 1843, when he made a trip that took him to Germany, Belgium, and France, Andersen was able to enjoy his celebrity. He also consorted on equal footing with such writers and artists as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Alphonse de Lamartine, Henrick Heine (exiled by then), and sculptor Pierre-Jean David in Paris. While Andersen's career soared, Denmark edged closer to war and eventually became engulfed in the Three Years' War (1848–1851), a conflict between the Danes and the German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein over who should control the duchies.

During this time period, Andersen's fairy tales were no longer labeled "for children" and he was fully in

control of his narrative form. He published such beloved stories as "The Ugly Duckling" in 1843 and "The Snow Queen" in 1845, and, by the end of the decade, his collected works began appearing in German. A similar edition in Danish would appear in the early 1850s. Andersen also published the first illustrated book in Denmark in 1849, a collection of his fairy tales with drawings by Vilhelm Pedersen. In addition, Andersen published his autobiography, *The True Story of My Life*, in 1847, and another novel, *The Two Baronesses*, in 1848.

Shades of Real Life in Best-Loved Stories Of all his stories, Andersen's semiautobiographical sketches are considered his most enduring. Stories like "The Little Mermaid," "The Nightingale," and "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" reflect in part Andersen's own unrequited love affairs in varying degrees of melancholy and satire. "The Ugly Duckling," the story of a homely cygnet who becomes the most beautiful of all swans, is probably Andersen's best-loved and most popular work of this type. Just as the snubbed duckling becomes a beautiful swan, so did the lonely cobbler's son become the pride of Denmark and its international literary representative.

More Open Society After the death of Danish King Christian VIII in 1848, Denmark abolished absolute rule and adopted a constitution in 1849. A new era in Danish history was dawning, which included more modernization and openness, and it affected what Andersen wrote. He became the "house playwright" at the new Casino theater in Copenhagen—the first private theater in the city—and saw a number of his plays staged there in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Andersen also published a poetic travel book, *Pictures of Sweden* (1851), as well as more fairy tales. After 1855 and until he stopped publishing in the early 1870s, however, he insisted on calling his fairy tales "stories" as well to distance them from the fairy tale genre and its link to Romanticism. His later, often more experimental, tales included "The Auntie Toothache" (1872) and "The Flea and the Professor" (1873).

Resided with Melchior Family Until End of Life After an illness, Andersen died in August 1875 at the summer residence of the wealthy Melchior family. The estate, known as Rolighed (Tranquility), was located in Osterbro, which is today part of Copenhagen. For many years, Andersen had been a permanent guest of the Melchior family. The cause of death was determined to be liver cancer.

Works in Literary Context

During his lifetime, Andersen was well-known in both Europe and the United States for his novels, fairy tales, and stories, as well as for his literary travel books and autobiography. Today, he is known the world over for his fairy tales, which are particularly popular in China and Japan, and many of his works have been translated into more than 150 languages. Nevertheless, his worldwide

acclaim is based largely on the mistaken perception that he is primarily a children's author. Many people now find it surprising that Andersen was recognized by his contemporaries as an author of adult fiction, with an adult sensibility inherent in his fairy tales and stories.

Melding the Supernatural and the Realistic Andersen himself divided his original tales into two distinct classes: "eventyr" and "historier." The "eventyr" are fairy tales in which a supernatural element contributes to the outcome of the narrative. "The Little Mermaid," for example, is set in a kingdom beneath the sea and tells the story of a mermaid who drinks a magical potion brewed by a sea witch in hopes that she will be metamorphosed into a human.

Andersen's "historier" are stories that do not employ a supernatural element. Frequently, the "historier" starkly portray poverty and suffering, leaving readers disturbed when good is not necessarily rewarded at a story's conclusion. The "historier" also often reveal their author's strong moral and religious attitudes: Andersen had a childlike faith in God and perceived death as a reward for a difficult life.

This perception is perhaps most vividly portrayed in "The Little Match Girl," a grim story in which an impoverished child dies from exposure on Christmas Eve when no one will buy her matches. The child is finally freed from her suffering when her deceased grandmother arrives to lead her to heaven. Although many of Andersen's "historier" and fairy tales end unhappily, most critics concur that his underlying attitude in his stories is positive.

Traditional Folktale Influences Andersen won a place in the literary world because he revitalized children's literature by creating a fairy-tale form and narrative style that was all his own, but there were many forerunners to the fairy-tale side of his literary production. The long tradition of folktales includes *A Thousand and One Nights* (first mentioned in the ninth century), which stood on the bookshelf of his impoverished childhood home. Andersen also heard folktales recounted by the poor women of Odense and he later renewed acquaintance with these stories by reading *Child and Household Tales* (1812–1815) by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In addition, Andersen was influenced by German and Danish folktale writers such as Ludwig Tieck, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and B. S. Ingemann.

But unlike so many other folktale authors, Andersen's deeply original style was fully developed from the start. While the Grimm brothers (Jacob and Wilhelm) refined and polished the folktales they had collected to achieve a normalized prose style without any particularly significant characteristics, Andersen took the opposite approach. He created a style and narrative voice that largely stayed close to colloquial speech and thus held a lively appeal for children (though he was never writing exclusively for them). His groundbreaking contribution is

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Children's tales from times past are often more disturbing, violent, or horrific than their modern equivalents. They were created largely as cautionary tales, meant to provide lessons to young readers about how to behave properly. Here are some other works that focus on lessons for children:

Slovenly Peter (1845) by Heinrich Hoffmann. This collection of tales instructs children in the punishments that await improper behavior; in one, for example, a girl named Pauline plays with matches and ends up burning to death.

The Adventures of Pinocchio (1883) by Carlo Collodi. This novel about the virtues of telling the truth is far darker than modern adaptations. The kind Blue Fairy of the Disney version is the ghost of a dead child in the original, and early in the book Pinocchio smashes the Talking Cricket with a hammer and kills it.

Tales of Mother Goose (1697) by Charles Perrault. French author Perrault's book, filled with moral tales intended for children, includes many of the most enduring fairy tales of our time, such as "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Little Red Riding Hood." However, the level of violence in these stories is not downplayed as it is in more modern adaptations.

that he neither addresses children as adults nor talks down to them, as was the custom in literature at the time. On principle, he chose his perspective from below, from the children's level, and thereby seemed to show a solidarity with his audience.

Works in Critical Context

In general, Andersen's works have been consistently well received. Georg Brandes, one of the first prominent critics to recognize Andersen's literary significance, especially commended Andersen's use of conversational language, which he claimed distinguished the author from other children's writers and prevented his stories from becoming outdated. Later, such Danish critics as Elias Bredsdorff and Erik Haugaard praised the uncluttered structure of Andersen's tales. Some twentieth-century commentators have considered Andersen's work maudlin and overly disturbing for small children. Nevertheless, he is usually recognized as a consummate storyteller who distilled his vision of humanity into a simple format that has proved universally popular.

Fairy Tales By 1835, when his *Fairy Tales* (*Eventyr* in Danish) was published, Andersen was well-known in Denmark for other travel books, plays, and a novel, *The*

Improvisatore; or, Life in Italy (1845). However, early critical reception of *Fairy Tales* was generally negative. At first, Andersen agreed with his detractors, calling his tales *smaatning*, or trifles. However, he soon realized that these short works were the perfect outlet for his messages to the world, so he continued to write stories in this vein. Andersen also discovered that his tales commanded his greatest audience and could bring him the international fame he craved. His popularity increased in Europe and America, and he traveled extensively throughout Germany, Holland, and England.

As well-known as he was around the world, critics in Denmark often did not recognize or acknowledge Andersen's talent. Both those who addressed him in private and those who wrote publicly failed to see the originality of his language and often reproached him for not being able to write "proper Danish." They attributed his inability to his having so much faith in his own talent that he did not wish to submit to any kind of serious studies or to learn from the great classical authors. Even his old friend Edvard Collin, who assisted him by copying out and proofing his manuscripts, repeated the criticism in the book he published after the author's death, *Hans Christian Andersen and the Collin Family* (1882). He also stated that Andersen regrettably lacked the desire or ability for any kind of rigorous study.

Responses to Literature

1. Andersen's critics often stated that his work was not sophisticated enough to reach the level of art. Yet his work was and is very popular with readers around the world, especially children. What do you think are the most important characteristics that identify a work of literature as art? Using these criteria, do Hans Christian Andersen's tales qualify as art?
2. Read Andersen's first published story, "The Tinder Box." How is his upbringing and cultural background reflected in this story? In what ways is the author's young life similar to the soldier's life in his story?
3. Like many tales for children, Andersen's stories usually contain an instructional message for readers meant to help them lead successful lives. These are similar to the "morals" found at the end of Aesop's fables but may not be stated as explicitly. Pick one of Andersen's fairy tales and explain the message or messages found within it. Provide specific details from the story to support your explanation.
4. Select one of the many retellings, edited versions, or dramatizations of Andersen's stories and compare it carefully to the original. What do the changes reveal about the difference between our time and place and Andersen's? What do they reveal about the changing concepts of children?

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Ivo Andric

BORN: 1892, Dolac, Bosnia

DIED: 1975, Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia)

NATIONALITY: Croatian, Yugoslavian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bridge on the Drina (1945)

The Woman from Sarajevo (1945)

"The Vizier's Elephant," (1947)

The Damned Yard (1954)

Overview

Ivo Andric's international importance as a major twentieth-century European writer was acknowledged in 1961, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Andric focuses his attention on his native Bosnia because it represents a particularly varied concentration of Eastern and Western cultures: Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, a large Muslim community, Jews, and gypsies. Andric's lifetime covers a period of exceptional violence in Europe. While this experience is implicit in his works, it is not often treated directly.



Ivo Andrić Andrić, Ivo, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up Poor in Bosnia Ivo Andrić was born Ivan Andrić on October 9, 1892, in Dolac, a small town in central Bosnia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His parents were Ivan Antun Andrić, a copper-smith, and Katarina Andrić, both Catholics. The family moved to Sarajevo soon after Andrić's birth. When his father died of tuberculosis in 1894, his impoverished mother moved with her only child to Visegrad, a town on the Drina River. Andrić completed elementary school in Visegrad and high school in Sarajevo. He attended universities in Zagreb in Croatia, Vienna in Austria, and Kraków in Poland, where he began publishing poetry. He took part in radical nationalistic activities, and one of his acquaintances was Gavrilo Princip, who was to fire the shots that killed Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in 1914, sparking World War I.

Imprisonment, Illness, and Commitment to Writing Andrić was arrested by the Austrians in 1914 as a member of the revolutionary group Young Bosnia, which favored an independent Slavic state, and spent three years in prison. While in prison Andrić realized that he should express his commitment to political, moral, and social issues through his writing. He was released in 1917

because of poor health and a lack of evidence against him. In prison he wrote his first work, a book of prose poems titled *Ex Ponto* (1918, *From the Bridge*), followed two years later by a similar volume, *Nemiri* (1919, *Unrest*).

After his release from prison, Andrić went to Zagreb. He was seriously ill and spent long spells in the hospital, but with the end of World War I he shared in the euphoria of the creation of Yugoslavia, the new “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,” as it was called. In 1920 he entered the diplomatic service, and was posted to several European cities over the course of his career in Italy, Hungary, France, and Spain.

Prizewinning Short Stories In his first short story, “The Journey of Ali Džerzelez” (1920; first English publication, 1968), Andrić raises the question of the meaning of human existence amid evil and suffering, a theme that he repeats in many of his works. A legendary Bosnian figure and a hero of popular Muslim ballads, Alija moves between reality and dream, action and futility. Andrić's *Pripovetke* (Short Stories), his first collections, published in 1924, 1931, and 1936, were awarded prizes.

Increased Literary Output during World War II When World War II began, Andrić was an ambassador in Berlin. Because he disagreed with the Yugoslav government's decision to join Adolf Hitler's tripartite pact—an alliance between Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and Fascist Italy—he resigned in March of 1941, ending his diplomatic career. Hitler invaded and captured Yugoslavia in less than two weeks. Andrić spent the entire Nazi occupation in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (today Serbia). These four years, despite the surrounding death and destruction, were the most productive in Andrić's literary career. He completed three novels and published them in 1945, the first postwar Yugoslav publications after the victory over the Germans.

The best known of these novels, *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), brings together several individual stories set in Visegrad, his childhood home, to give a chronicle of certain periods of the town's history, linked by the central symbol of the bridge. Perhaps his most important work, it is an encompassing saga covering the history of Bosnia between 1566 and 1914. However, Andrić wrote the novel not as history but as a chronicle of life in Bosnia and of characters of several generations.

While *The Bridge on the Drina* takes a broad view of the life of a community through time, *Bosnian Story* (1948) (also known as *Bosnian Chronicle* and *The Days of the Consuls*) focus on a seven-year period in the history of the town of Travnik, the seat of the vizier in Bosnia, where French and Austrian consuls served from 1807 to 1814. This novel emphasizes the divisions between sections of the community: Muslims, Christians (Catholic and Orthodox), and Jews. Self-imposed isolation is the subject of Andrić's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Andric's famous contemporaries include:

Haile Selassie (1892–1975): Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974; widely credited with establishing a stable modern state, Selassie died in unclear circumstances while under house arrest after being overthrown by a military coup.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950): American poet and the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry; well known for her lyrical poetic style and unconventional life.

Josip Tito (1892–1980): Leader of Yugoslavia from 1944 until his death, after being named President for Life in the 1974 constitution; a Communist, he was instrumental in the revolt against Nazi rule that began in 1941.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973): English writer, poet, and Anglo-Saxon scholar best known for *The Hobbit* and his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of fantasy novels.

Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941): Highly respected Russian poet known for her lyric and narrative work.

third wartime novel, *The Woman from Sarajevo* (1945); it is the portrait of a miser dedicated with religious zeal to her obsession with saving and mending.

Postwar Work In Andric's novella *The Damned Yard* (1954), the prison yard suggests that the only escape from the constraints imposed by society and circumstances of birth is through the imagination, the deep human need for stories and storytelling. It provides the capacity to formulate experience, to connect with other peoples and generations in order to begin to understand one's life. This is considered one of the best of his post-World War II works.

Achieving International Recognition With the end of World War II and the Communists' successful revolution, the second, socialist Yugoslavia came into being. Andric participated fully in the intellectual and cultural life of his country, accepting various public positions and devoting himself especially to improving educational opportunities for all. Winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961 had an enormous effect upon Andric the man and the artist. As he was the only South Slav writer to have received this prestigious award, it was highly gratifying for him. The outpouring of congratulations and respect attested that he now truly belonged to world literature.

Andric continued to work until 1974, when he became seriously ill. He died, after a long struggle, on March 13, 1975. His funeral was attended by some ten thousand citizens of Belgrade.

Works in Literary Context

Parallels have been drawn between Andric's work and that of Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James. He was an avid reader and himself spoke of a sense of affinity with a wide variety of writers from Albert Camus and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Marcus Aurelius.

The Individual Amid the Epic The epic proportions of *The Bridge on the Drina* prompted many critics to liken Ivo Andric to Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy, Andric was concerned with the inevitable flow of history, with the precedence that events take over the individual. Andric has been compared to American novelist Herman Melville. Stoyan Christowe demonstrated that the elephant in the novella *The Vizier's Elephant* was similar to Melville's fictional whale, Moby Dick, because "both personify the universal, hostile forces against which man struggles."

History and the Redemptive Imagination A key aspect of Andric's work is the portrayal of history as a dimension of human life. He confronts the conflict, brutality, and hatred that may be seen as particularly concentrated and close to the surface in his native Bosnia in order to expose universal patterns of experience. But individual experience is always counterbalanced by further examples, so that the picture emerging from Andric's work as a whole is subtle and complex. His constant journeys into the past do not signify an escape from the present reality but rather a keen understanding of the unity of time and space in the history of the Bosnian people.

In his Nobel Prize banquet speech he commented that "the storyteller and his work serve no purpose unless they serve, in one way or another, man and humanity." These words sum up Andric's philosophy concerning his literary output. It can be safely said that he has fulfilled his mission of a witness to the existence and history of his country, small by space and numbers, but important to Andric within his artistic vision.

Works in Critical Context

When Andric received the Nobel Prize, the citation praised "the epic force with which he has traced themes and depicted human destinies from his country's history."

"For Andric, man, set against the vast panorama of history, is insignificant—fearful of external disaster and inwardly aware of his own insecurity in a world where everything is ephemeral, however much he may long for constancy," Konstantin Bazarov explains in *Books and Bookmen*. "The particular history of old Turkish Bosnia, with its despotism and violence, thus portrays the broader theme of man's tragic struggle against the oncoming darkness of change and death."

The Bridge on the Drina When *The Bridge on the Drina* was published in 1945, critics praised the novel for its epic scope and historical richness. This book in particular led to Andric's being compared to writers like Leo Tolstoy and Herman Melville, and played a key role in his being awarded the Nobel Prize. Although the book did not achieve great fame in translated English editions, it remained highly regarded by critics and scholars for several decades. In the 1990s, increased tensions in the Balkans brought a renewed interest in the book, which offers a sweeping history of the region even though it focuses on a single bridge. As a reviewer for *The Economist* wrote in 1994, "Why are the Balkans such a tinder box? A great novel can be of some assistance in answering such questions, by communicating truths through fiction—or by a skilful mingling of fact and fiction." James Martin, reexamining the novel for *America* in 1995, states, "At the heart of the narrative is a clear polemic against the greatest evil in Andric's eyes, regardless of religion, and in any state of war: the fear a dominating power has of its people."

Responses to Literature

1. Ivo Andric decided to express his social and political concerns through his writing. What can you learn about a country or region by reading its literature that you cannot learn by reading the news?
2. Two themes in Andric's works are the divisions between sections of the community and the self-imposed isolation of different groups. The United States has been called a "melting pot" of different cultures, in which immigrants become essentially American. It has also been called a "salad bowl," in which immigrants keep parts of their original culture. Which do you think is preferable? Why?
3. Andric's writings explore the rich cultural heritage of his native country, which became Yugoslavia after World War I. However, a bitter civil war ripped apart the country along ethnic lines in the 1980s and 1990s, and today it has split into six separate nations. Write an essay analyzing the following quote by George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." How does that quote relate to Andric's reasons for writing about Bosnia and its history?
4. Andric believed that imagination allows us to connect with other people and the past in order to start understanding our own life. Write an essay about your family history. How has it shaped your own personality and way of thinking? Be sure to use specific examples.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ivo Andric lived and worked in a rich literary tradition that is not familiar to many American readers. Here are some works by other writers from the region formerly known as Yugoslavia.

The Mountain Wreath (1847), a play by Prince-Bishop Petar II. This long poem in the form of a play by the Montenegrin politician and poet is based on true events in the previous century, when converts to Islam were given the choice of converting back to Christianity or being killed.

On the Edge of Reason (1938), a novel by Miroslav Krzela. This novel by the great Croatian writer and poet satirizes enforced conformity by exploring the disastrous consequences of an honest opinion blurted out by a model citizen.

Death and the Dervish (1966), a novel by Mesa Selimovic. This novel, by a writer who identified himself as both Bosnian and Serbian and came from a Muslim family, is set during Bosnia's occupation by the Ottoman Empire and explores the interior world of a dervish, or Islamic religious man, who is tormented by his brother's arrest.

Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel (1988), a novel by Milorad Pavic. This contemporary Serbian novel is styled as three cross-referenced encyclopedias (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish), which through interconnected and sometimes contradictory stories explore the conversion to Judaism of much of the Khazar people in the late eighth century; it is available in a "female" and a "male" edition, which are identical except for one paragraph.

Songs of the Serbian People (1997), a nonfiction work by Vuk Karadzic. Karadzic, a nineteenth-century Serbian linguist, collected traditional folk songs, of which selected ones are translated and explored in this edition.

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☒ Jean Anouilh

BORN: 1910, Cérissolle, France

DIED: 1987, Lausanne, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Traveler without Luggage (1937)

Thieves' Carnival (1938)

Antigone (1942)

Invitation to the House (1947)

The Waltz of the Toreadors (1952)

The Navel (1981)

Overview

French playwright Jean Anouilh was an accomplished craftsman. Considered among the most important and influential twentieth-century French dramatists, he had a life and approach to literature that were both far from ordinary. While most French dramatists of the 1930s and 1940s not only wrote for the stage but also composed poetry, novels, or essays, Anouilh concentrated exclusively on writing for the stage. Among Anouilh's other distinguishing features are his claims that he was apolitical and the fact that he rarely commented formally on his work. Dedicated neither to philosophical elaborations nor to theorization about drama, he instead labored over the exact wording, gestures, and situations of his characters.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Call of the Theater Jean Anouilh was born in Cérissolle, near Bordeaux, on June 23, 1910. His father, a



Jean Anouilh Anouilh, Jean, 1971, photograph. AP Images.

tailor, and his mother, a violinist in an orchestra, undoubtedly imparted their respect for craftsmanship and a love of art, which he likely adopted during the hours he spent at the theater with his mother. Anouilh received his primary and secondary education in Paris, where he later studied law for a year and a half. In 1929, he went to work in an advertising agency, where he wrote publicity and comic film scripts for two years.

From early childhood, Anouilh had been fascinated by the stage. He frequented theaters and was writing plays at the age of twelve. After a period in the military, he worked as secretary to the respected actor and director Louis Jouvet. He married Monelle Valentin, an actress who later created the roles of many of Anouilh's heroines. Like many stage-struck youths, he tended to confuse real life with the theater, which, in his early plays, led him to sacrifice substance for theatricality. Undaunted by Jouvet's lack of encouragement and by the near total failure of his first plays, he stubbornly resolved to devote his life to the theater.

With the success of *Traveler without Luggage* (*Le voyageur sans bagages*) in 1937—inspired by the true-life story of a French World War I soldier who suffered amnesia during combat—Anouilh's popularity began steadily growing over the next two decades both in France and abroad. Profoundly impressed by the plays of Jean Giraudoux and Luigi Pirandello, which broke with the tradition of the realistic theater, Anouilh recognized the value of poetry, illusion, fantasy, and irony as a means of portraying

basic truths about human life. He was convinced that the essence of the theater and its quality of make-believe mirror a person's pretense and self-delusion, a conviction that led him to exploit the artificiality of the theater in order to expose the falsity of human motives and the allegedly noblest principles and sentiments.

Antigone and the Nazi Occupation Just as Anouilh was making a name for himself in the French theater, the Nazi forces of Germany—under the command of Adolf Hitler—began to occupy the countries of western Europe, an event which led directly to World War II. The French and English both declared war against Germany after Nazi forces took control of Poland in 1939; the following year, the Nazis advanced into France, defeating the French army and taking control of most of the country. A single region of France, with Vichy as its seat, remained outside German control due to an agreement reached by the Germans and the French government; many in France viewed this as collaboration with the enemy and refused to support the Vichy regime.

Although Anouilh was not an outspoken supporter of the French Resistance to Nazi occupation, his play *Antigone* (1942) is often viewed as an allegory of the situation in France at the time. The play was performed in Paris during the occupation, and was therefore subject to approval and censorship by Nazi officials. The deliberately vague references in the play—as well as the fact that it was inspired by an ancient Greek play of the same name—are likely reasons for the play's ability to slip past Nazi censorship.

Adamant about Solitude Anouilh's constant preoccupation with the technical production of his plays gradually led him to the role of director. In this capacity he produced, along with his own works, plays in line with his own views, such as those of Molière. Completely absorbed in theater, he avoided outside involvements, choosing instead a secluded private life. His first marriage had ended painfully for him after Monelle had carried on several adulterous affairs, and it was not until 1953 that he married Charlotte Chardon, another actress.

One of his children, Catherine, also followed the theater path as an actress, starring in several of her father's productions. She would later write in her biography of her father in sympathetic terms, depicting him as a reclusive writer, and a color-blind, myopic man who never thought himself handsome. He was also, she wrote, a doting father and husband who was overly protective of his family.

A diligent worker, Anouilh labored daily at his craft on a rigid schedule. He was reluctant to travel far from home and asked his family to make necessary trips on his behalf. Catherine Anouilh writes that beyond his family life and work regimen, her father was a solitary man comfortable with only a few close friends. He was afflicted by a morbid shyness, particularly with strangers, that would bring him to the point of panic in public.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Anouilh's famous contemporaries include:

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Known best as an existential philosopher, but also associated with the Absurdist philosophy highlighted by Anouilh.

Omar Nelson Bradley (1893–1981): Bradley was an American army commander during World War II whose concern for his men led to his reputation as the "soldier's general."

Howard Hughes (1905–1976): One of the wealthiest people in the world, Hughes was, among other things, an American aviator and film producer whose mental illness led to his becoming a recluse.

Alexander Fleming (1881–1955): Scottish biologist who shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for his discovery of penicillin as an antibiotic.

Gloria Steinem (1934–): A writer and journalist, Steinem is an icon of American feminism and women's rights.

Even Anouilh's closest friends knew little of his personal life. Always protective of his privacy and rarely granting interviews, the mysterious playwright wrote in a 1946 letter addressed to the Belgian critic Hubert Gignoux, "I do not have a biography and I am very happy about it. The rest of my life, as long as God wills it, will remain my personal business, and I will withhold the details of it."

An Increasing Pessimism Still, Anouilh's plays provide important clues about his life and his most personal beliefs. He grouped his pieces into several categories according to their predominant tone—pinks, blacks, brilliants, jarring, costumed, or baroque. Whatever their classification, Anouilh's works all offer a unified and profound view of the human condition. His characteristic heroes are essentially rebels, revolting in the name of an inner ideal of purity against compromise with the immoral demands of family, social position, or their pasts. Yet the efforts of his early heroes to escape from reality give way in most of the later plays to a profound bitterness caused by the realization that no escape is possible.

Anouilh's only escape was when he spent time in his elegant apartments in Paris or in Pully, Switzerland, near Lausanne, where he died on October 3, 1987. Throughout his long career, his unwavering love of the stage extended to second-rate musicians and struggling actors as well as people who had his sympathy and were often portrayed in his plays. He associated such people with the plight of the masses, from the Depression era to the time of postwar poverty. Appalled by modern society's excesses and given to pessimism about the future, Anouilh had insisted on a private life where he could live according to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While Anouilh's style is difficult to categorize, his themes are usually recognizable, as he wrote about what affects humans at the most basic level—class division, money issues, death. Here are a few works by other writers who have explored similar subjects:

The Infernal Machine (1936), by Jean Cocteau. In this drama, the playwright turns the classic story of Oedipus into a tragi-comedy by using irony where there originally was none.

No Exit (1944), by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this well-known existential play, three characters are escorted to a room on a basement floor, where they eventually realize that "Hell is other people."

True West (1980), by Sam Shepard. Dysfunctional family dynamics are played out to the hilt in this drama with a Western backdrop.

his personal code of moral values and had avoided direct involvement in the political controversies of his day. With Anouilh both inclined to let his art convey his ideas and content to relinquish his voice to actors in order to maintain his privacy, his plays themselves have become a reflection of the man who composed them. They portray heroism under difficult circumstances, insist upon the values of solidarity and courage, and, most of all, emphasize individual freedom, even against impossible odds.

Works in Literary Context

Although, as one researcher contends, Anouilh cannot be linked with any particular school or trend, and because he was so private, scholars can only surmise who or what inspired Anouilh. An early influence was his father, who instilled in his son a pride in conscientious craftsmanship. He may owe his artistic bent to his mother, a violinist who supplemented the family's meager income by playing summer seasons in the casino orchestra in the nearby seaside resort of Arcachon. While his earlier works were realistic and naturalistic studies of a sordid and corrupt world, Anouilh later adopted the existentialist views of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the methods of theater introduced by Louis Jouvet, Jean Giraudoux, and Roger Vitrac, Anouilh found a new angle for his writing. Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello was another playwright whose work helped shape that of Anouilh.

The Fine Line between Farce and Frown Anouilh would occasionally leave the darker and more thoughtful side of his drama by striking a balance between farce and seriousness: He once said that thanks to Molière, "the true French theater is the only one that is not gloomy, in which we laugh like men at war with our misery and our horror.

This humor is one of France's messages to the world." From frivolous and fanciful to serious, Anouilh's plays use the artificiality of the theater to criticize the human predicament—for example, the corruptive power of money, the incongruities of society, or the intricacies of decaying family ties. At times he engages his characters in role-playing and has them suffer the distance between social classes before allowing them to experience love's power in conquering appearances. In several plays, dance and music are integral elements of the action. He carefully prepared choreography and musical accompaniments for such plays so that he could call them "ballets." Except for the relatively rosy endings of a few, these works have lighthearted beginnings, gradually darken, and then end gloomily.

Influence and Impact In terms of literary style, Anouilh is difficult to categorize, because his work shows evidence of all major twentieth-century French artistic trends. Because of his collaboration with many of France's greatest artists, the complexity of Anouilh's work is unsurprising. Also of no surprise is how, after fifty plays in fifty years, Anouilh has a wide-reaching sphere of influence in both the past and present of French theater.

Works in Critical Context

While he overcame indecision and a fear of risk through his work, Anouilh took criticism of his work personally and with difficulty; however, his efforts were generally well-received and considered a success. Furthermore, his work fared better when it was revived.

Antigone (1942) Premiering near the end of the German occupation of World War II, Anouilh's reinterpretation of *Antigone* was a great success because the French audience identified with Antigone's resistance to her uncle Creon, the ruler of Thebes. In a review for *Horizon*, Germaine Brée insightfully notes that the essence of Anouilh's characters is a "fidelity to the role one is designated to play, the acceptance of oneself in a given part whatever its essential absurdity." Critic John Edmond Harvey also captures the core of the conflict: "Heroine and spectator alike uncover the true meaning of her role. Her destiny is not, as everyone has believed all along, to subordinate civil obligations to those of family and religion. Creon lets slip a few words in praise of everyday happiness and all is over: Antigone pounces on these words, and in a flurry of rhetoric she suddenly understands that her role is to reject compromise, to spurn all life which is less than perfection." For a French public a few months away from liberation, the sobriety of *Antigone* heightened the tragedy of Antigone's negation.

Responses to Literature

1. In *Antigone* why do you think Anouilh writes in the stage instructions that the play should be set "without historical or geographical implications"? How

does the lack of environment help or hurt you as you read and picture the set[ting]?

- Imagine you are directing *Antigone*. What feelings and ideas could you evoke with select settings? Consider a countryside setting, a castle setting, an alley, and a bedroom. What setting would you choose to convey the play's message, and why?

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Paul Antschel

SEE Paul Celan

Guillaume Apollinaire

BORN: 1880, Rome

DIED: 1918, Paris

NATIONALITY: French, Italian

GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Alcools (1913)

The Cubist Painters (1913)

The Breasts of Tiresias (1917)

Caligrammes (1918)

Overview

Guillaume Apollinaire is known as a leader in the development of avant-garde artistic movements in Europe, and as the person who coined the word “surrealism.” In his brief but prolific career, he produced innovative poetry and theater, and influential works of criticism and literary

theory. He became a legend for his artistic daring and his flamboyant, bohemian personality.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Cosmopolitan Childhood Apollinaire was born in Rome on August 26, 1880, under the name Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitsky. He was born out of wedlock to a poor Polish noblewoman and an Italian army officer, who abandoned Apollinaire's mother soon after the boy's birth. He spent his youth moving around the French Riviera with his gambling mother and a younger brother. During this difficult but exciting childhood, he learned several languages, developing a cosmopolitan outlook and an interest in literature. He attended schools in Monaco, Cannes, and Nice, but did not pass the baccalaureate exam and never went to college.

On the Artistic Scene in Paris By the age of eighteen, Apollinaire had settled in Paris. Over the next few years, he worked as a bank clerk and journalist; in between, he spent a year as a private tutor in Germany. At the same

time, he became actively involved in the intellectual world of the French capital. He befriended symbolist poets such as Alfred Jarry, and avant-garde artists such as Georges Braque, Henri Rousseau, and Marcel Duchamp. His friendship with the young Pablo Picasso marked a turning point in Apollinaire's career. He became a defender of experimentation and innovation in the arts. His essays on cubism, starting in 1904 and culminating with a book on *The Cubist Painters* (1913), remain pertinent for art critics. His writings helped bring artists such as Picasso, Braque, and Rousseau to a wider audience.

Living in an age that fostered inventions such as the airplane and cinema, Apollinaire was fascinated by technology and its potential for the future of culture. He was also greatly influenced by innovations in contemporary art and music. Never affiliated solely with one group or school, but a partisan of all modern artists, Apollinaire was intrigued by and tended to associate with, those who appeared challenging or antagonistic toward bourgeois society. This inclination probably led to his six-day imprisonment in September of 1911, when he was wrongly suspected of being connected with the theft of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre. He tried to implicate Picasso in the crime, but both were exonerated.

Artistic Experiments Apollinaire published his first book of poetry, *The Rotting Magician*, in 1909. His first collection of short stories, *The Heresiarch and Co.*, published a year later, was nominated for the prestigious Goncourt Prize. His first important poetry collection, *Alcools* (1913), was experimental in content but largely conventional in form, except for the complete (and then-shocking) absence of punctuation.

Another project from this period, *At What Time Will a Train Leave for Paris?* (1914), is a pantomime Apollinaire created along with two painters and a musician. In this play, which never reached the stage, and the Apollinaire poem on which it is based, a man with no facial features enchants the women of Paris with his flute, in the manner of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Literary scholar Willard Bohn has suggested that this play is the first theatrical example of Dadaism, a movement officially launched two years later in 1916. Like all Dadaist works, it is intended to shock its audience; words are reduced to their sound and cadence, and the human voice becomes just another urban noise, like an automobile horn.

After the outbreak of World War I, Apollinaire volunteered to defend his adopted country. He joined the infantry and served on the frontlines until he suffered a head wound during combat in March of 1916. He was sent back to Paris, where he resumed his literary career while convalescing.

"A Surrealist Drama" Apollinaire gained notoriety in 1917 with the staging of his play *The Breasts of Tiresias*. He coined a new word for the play's subtitle: "A Surrealist Drama." By "surrealist," Apollinaire meant a representation that surpassed traditionally simplistic or sentimental

realism. He felt that theater should suggest the infinite possibilities of the modern world, in which science was turning fantasy into reality. The results might shock or outrage traditional audiences, but would appeal to the modern mindset that understands life as an unpredictable blend of tragedy, comedy, and surprise.

The Breasts of Tiresias takes place on the island of Zanzibar. Therese, a new feminist, refuses to bear children. Her breasts—colored balloons—liberate themselves and facial hair magically appears. Therese becomes Tiresias, the sexually unstable sage of ancient Greek myth. A character named "The Husband" decides to assume his patriotic duty to repopulate society, assisted only by an incubator. This broad, zany burlesque, punctuated by music, juggling, and slapstick comedy, established a model for advanced avant-garde theater that influenced the Dadaists and budding surrealists such as André Breton.

Apollinaire was now a leader of the avant-garde. In November of 1917, he delivered an influential lecture entitled "The New Spirit and the Poets," a manifesto for what art might accomplish in the new century. If writers now enjoyed greater liberty than at any other time, he said, they also bore the responsibility of creating a literature that conveyed the spirit of this new age. They should dwell in the realm of pure invention and total surrender to inspiration, taking risks and being as experimental as scientists.

Early Death Following his own advice, Apollinaire engaged in daring experimentation in his poetry, while leaving a prismatic record of his experiences in the war. His second collection, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War* (1918), features early examples of visual poetry, in which the words form designs on the page, and collage poems reminiscent of Cubist creations. Some poems consist of snatches of overheard conversation.

Apollinaire, who had suffered numerous bouts of unrequited love, married Jacqueline Korb, a woman to whom he had written during the war, in May of 1918. However, the marriage was short. Weakened by the head wound from which he never fully recovered, the poet succumbed to the influenza epidemic that ravaged Europe at the close of World War I. He died on November 9, two days before the armistice ending the war was signed.

Works in Literary Context

Guillaume Apollinaire was an artistic free spirit. He was educated in the traditional canons of Western literature, but by no means bound by their conventional assumptions. The Romantic poets were an influence on him, as were French symbolists such as Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. More direct influences were the writers, painters, and musicians with whom he surrounded himself in Paris. He is famous for his positive appraisal of the notoriously cruel Marquis de Sade (from whom

originated the term “sadistic”) as “the freest spirit that ever existed.”

Dada, Cubism, and the Spectacle Apollinaire’s fame as a playwright rests upon a single work, *The Breasts of Tiresias*, but his interest in the theater was abiding. Had he lived longer, he may have established a greater reputation as a dramatist. His stage work is noteworthy for incorporating the substance of intellectual movements, such as Dadaism and cubism, into traditional comic genres such as farce and sex comedy. The principles of surprise and spectacle are paramount in his theatrical creations. In *Tiresias*, characters move about constantly, dancing, performing acrobatics and magic tricks, breaking dishes, and cutting hair; costumes include electric lights and painted faces; actors shout their lines through megaphones; and carefully lettered placards repeating lines of poetry appear frequently to echo the dialogue. In one of his earlier plays, anchovies leap out of their barrels to sing. Yet his are not nonsense plays; rather, in a radical break with nineteenth-century theater, he creates rich, multidimensional spectacles that involve the spectator.

A New Poetry in Traditional Forms Apollinaire’s poetry and short stories are extravagantly imaginative, full of fantastic characters and situations. Like the symbolist writers before him, he stressed that realistic and naturalistic approaches to writing impose arbitrary limitations on the artist’s vision. Unlike the symbolists, however, whose work intentionally ignored everyday reality, Apollinaire’s strategy was to confront and transform worldly experience. Many themes in *Alcools* and *Calligrammes*—images of technology, for example, and the alienation of modern existence—had never been treated before in serious poetry and though some of his themes hark back to Romanticism, including love, nostalgia for childhood, and solitude, his techniques were very up-to-date. He reveled in the irreverent attitudes of Dadaism, the fragmented perspectives in cubist painting, and the flexible structures of jazz. He deliberately juxtaposed the modern with the traditional, and the serious with the ludicrous, in his effort to grapple with the complicated, contradictory realities of the twentieth century.

A Figurehead or a Prophet? Apollinaire’s visual poetry, fantastical theater, and pornographic novels; his theoretical essays championing literary experimentation; and his charismatic personality all represent the artistic traits that led Tristan Tzara and the Dadaists, André Breton and the surrealists, and other literary outlaws to claim him as their figurehead, and even their prophet. At the time of his death in 1918, he was the unofficial leader and spokesman of the Paris literary avant-garde. His legacy is claimed by writers such as Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein; he also had a notable impact on modern art, through his contribution to the development of cubism.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Apollinaire’s famous contemporaries include:

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): A noted American modernist writer, and part of Apollinaire’s literary circle in Paris.

Tristan Tzara (1896–1963): A Romanian-French poet and essayist, and a leading figure of Dadaism.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918): A British soldier-poet of World War I.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): An Anglo-American poet; his breakthrough piece, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” was published in 1915.

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930): A British novelist and poet, a modernist persecuted in his time for the eroticism of his prose.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): A Spanish painter closely associated with cubism, who was a close friend of Apollinaire.

Erik Satie (1866–1925): A French avant-garde composer and author.

Works in Critical Context

Despite his short life and relatively slim body of work, Guillaume Apollinaire looms large in twentieth-century cultural history. He stood on the crest of a wave that broke over the aesthetic sensibilities of Paris, transforming them forever. Aside from the quality and notoriety of his own work, his tireless advocacy for emerging and innovative artists helped bring cubism, fauvism, Dada, and surrealism into the limelight. Some of his friends, and at least one of his biographers (Francis Steegmuller) claim that his knowledge of art was superficial at best; others rank him among the century’s greatest art critics.

A Leader of the International Avant-Garde Apollinaire’s iconic stature has only grown in the generations since his death. Although some critics hesitate to rank him in the highest echelons of poetry, his vision of artistic freedom, and his willingness to take artistic risks, are his lasting legacies. Much Scholarship on Apollinaire has explored his role in the cultural milieu of the Parisian art world (for example, Steegmuller’s *Apollinaire: Poet Among the Painters*), and has juxtaposed his artistic theory with his literary works. The American scholar Willard Bohn has written several definitive works on the artist, including *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* and, more recently, a study of the impact of *Calligrammes* on modern visual poetry. Bohn argues that “it is instructive to study Apollinaire’s reception: how his work was received by various artists and writers and what they thought of it,” because such study can help us “shed

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Guillaume Apollinaire was a key figure in the artistic movements known as Dada and surrealism. The following works represent landmarks in these movements; each created an outrage in its time.

King Ubu (1896), a play by Alfred Jarry. This glorious and vulgar satire sparked a riot after its very first word—a four-letter word—was uttered on stage.

Parade (1917), a ballet with music by Erik Satie and scenario by Jean Cocteau. Apollinaire used the word “surrealism” to describe the premiere of this production, with sets designed by Pablo Picasso; it led to that rare cultural disturbance, a classical music riot.

The Magnetic Fields (1920), a novel by André Breton and Philippe Soupault. Claimed as the first surrealist novel, it was created through the technique of automatic writing, spontaneous and uncensored.

The Gas Heart (1920), a play by Tristan Tzara. This savage theatrical parody consists of a sequence of absurd non sequiturs, spoken by characters named after parts of the body.

Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog, 1928), a film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. The slicing of an eye is just one of the shocking images in this silent masterpiece of avant-garde cinema.

new light on the paths of aesthetic exchange that characterized France’s relationship with the rest of Europe and with the Americas.” Recent scholarship has also looked closely at Apollinaire’s erotic writings, previously ignored or denigrated, to arrive at fresh insights into his personal vision and vitality—though not necessarily nobility of character. Bohn again, for example, suggests in *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* that in his erotic writing “Apollinaire takes the women for himself, consigning them to his own personal harem.”

Responses to Literature

1. Define “Dadaism,” and discuss examples of its sensibility in the work of Apollinaire.
2. What impact have the avant-garde movements Apollinaire is associated with, such as surrealism and Dadaism, had on the literature and culture of today?
3. To what purposes does Apollinaire use humor in his writing? Provide examples from his work.
4. Aside from sheer visual interest, what is significant about the visual poetry Apollinaire created in *Calligrammes*?

5. How do you respond to the artistic philosophy Apollinaire expressed in works of criticism such as his essay “The New Spirit and the Poets”?

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Louis Aragon

BORN: 1897, Paris

DIED: 1982, Paris

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Adventures of Telemachus (1922)

Treatise on Style (1928)

Persecutor Persecuted (1931)

Aurelien (1944)

The Communists (1951)

Holy Week: A Novel (1958)



Louis Aragon Aragon, Louis, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Louis Aragon was a writer, poet, and critic who analyzed the underlying messages in the literature and politics of France. Giving his voice and images to the art of France, Aragon was a leading influence on the shaping of the novel in the early to mid-twentieth century. He was also a founder of the Dada and surrealist movements.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Child Prodigy Aragon was born in the Beaux Quartiers section of Paris on October 3, 1897, to Marguerite Toucas-Massillon and Louis Andrieux Aragon. His mother was single, and his father was already married. To hide the circumstances of his birth, his parents arranged for him to be brought up as the adoptive son of his maternal grandmother, Claire Toucas. At fourteen months he was reunited with his parents, though he was brought up to believe that his mother was his sister, his father was his godfather and tutor, and his grandmother was his adoptive mother.

Aragon was reading and writing even before he started attending Madame Boucher's private school in 1906 and the École Saint-Pierre in 1907. He completed his first novel at age nine. In 1912, he went to the Lycée Carnot in Paris, earning degrees in Latin and the sciences in 1914 and in philosophy in 1915.

In 1908, he enrolled in the Faculté de Médecine de Paris, met André Breton at Adrienne Monnier's avant-garde bookshop, and his writing came to the attention of Guillaume Apollinaire. When Aragon published his first article on Apollinaire, "Alcide," in the journal *Sicouí* (1917), Apollinaire asked Aragon to write a review of his play *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1917).

Wrote While Serving in World War I By this time, France as well as much of Europe were embroiled in World War I. While the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, invoked a domino effect of war declarations because of entangling alliances of many European countries, the Great War was also caused by various military, economic, and ethnic rivalries as well. World War I was primarily fought in trenches on the Western Front, including France.

In 1917, Aragon learned the truth about his parentage after he was called into the French infantry, where he met up with fellow draftee Breton. Aragon was sent to the frontlines as a medical orderly. In the midst of battle, he composed some of the poems that appear in his first collection, *Bonfire* (1920). He also began to write his first novel, *Anicet, or, The Panorama* (1921), and the narrative *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922). Aragon served in the military until 1919, taking part in the Allied military occupation of the Rhineland and Saar. In the spring of 1919 he, Breton, and Philippe Soupault formed a group dedicated to establishing a new art form, one that reached beyond realism to a dreamlike quality.

Medicine Abandoned for Literature Returning from war, Aragon resumed his medical studies, pondered his literary career, and set out to establish a new kind of literary movement in postwar Paris. The horrors of the Great War compelled some artists to comment on the new way they saw existence and to reject the principles upon which society was founded. Throughout 1920, he and his group staged events at venues for this unique movement called Dada, which included literary as well as artistic elements. Though the origins of the word "Dada" are unclear (it is most likely just a nonsense word), Dadaists wanted to found an alternative to established artistic conventions. Dadaist events included staged scandals of anti-art art where, for example, spectators were provided with hatchets and invited to destroy the exhibits. Aragon also considered joining the French Communist Party—as did many intellectuals in Europe excited by the potential they saw in Communism, especially after the Russian Revolution—but temporarily abandoned the idea.

Aragon's fiction also began to appear in print, including *The Panorama* (1921) and *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922). Failing his second doctoral examination, he withdrew from medical studies to concentrate on his literary career. He published short stories in France and *Paris at Night* (1923) in Berlin. In March 1923, he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aragon's famous contemporaries include:

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Primary spiritual guru of India, and a major leader of the Indian independence movement.

James Joyce (1882–1931): Irish expatriate author, considered to be one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930): Russian poet and playwright, considered one of the forerunners of Russian futurism.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and communist; controversial winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): American politician and thirty-second president of the United States. He was so popular with the people he was elected to the office four times.

became editor in chief of the weekly *Paris-Journal*, but he stayed in the position only one month. During the summer of 1923, Aragon began exchanging love letters with Denise Lévy, whom he later identified as the model for Bérénice, the heroine of his novel *Aurélien* (1944). In 1924 and 1925, Aragon worked with Breton and others to promote surrealism—the movement that included a style of writing that has surprising, dreamlike images.

“Doctor of Dada” Another of his novels and two additional narratives of the 1920s survived Aragon's getting frustrated and burning several segments. In between two critical works, he published the most important work of criticism in his career, *Treatise on Style* (1928). In November 1928, Aragon happened to meet the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky at a Montparnasse café. The next day, Mayakovsky introduced him to his sister-in-law, Elsa Triolet. Aragon and Triolet immediately fell in love and married soon thereafter.

Commitment to Communism Aragon had joined the French Communist Party in 1927. His commitment to communism became more intense after he met Triolet, an award-winning novelist who was herself a dedicated communist. In 1930, the couple traveled to the Soviet Union to attend a revolutionary-writers conference, and Aragon returned determined to combine his art and politics. His provocative poem “The Red Front” (1933) earned him a suspended five-year prison sentence for allegedly inciting troops to mutiny.

Writing for French Communist Party publications, Aragon praised the 1939 German-Soviet Nonaggression

Pact. Signed only days before World War II began, the agreement stated the two countries would not attack each other and included the division of Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. (Despite this pact, the Germans later attacked the Soviet Union, drawing the Soviets into World War II on the side of the Allies.) One 1939 piece by Aragon, “Long Live the Peace!” (published in *Ce Soir*) provoked the French authorities into shutting down the newspaper.

Served in Military During World War II In September 1939 as Aragon was starting his major work, the narrative series *The Real World*, he was mobilized for war as a member of the French military. He was first sent to the 220th Régiment Régional de Travailleurs, a labor battalion to which politically suspect individuals—communists, anarchists, fascists, and others—were assigned. By February 1940, he was put in charge of a unit of stretcher bearers attached to the newly created Third Division Légère Mécanique. Captured by the Germans in Angoulême, Aragon led a daring escape, getting thirty men in six vehicles to freedom in June 1940. Two days later, he volunteered to rescue several wounded men who were trapped by enemy fire. For this action, Aragon was awarded a Croix de Guerre as well as the Médaille Militaire.

Postwar Emphasis on Nonfiction Immediately after World War II ended, Aragon returned to writing nonfiction and took on the editorship of the journal *French Letters*, for which he had served as a staff writer since 1949. During the 1950s, the still-confirmed communist also worked to strengthen literary alliances between France and the Soviet Union, published several works on modern painters and art, and continued to offer loving tributes to his wife right up until she died of a heart attack on June 16, 1970. Aragon himself died peacefully in his sleep just before Christmas 1982, after two months of deteriorating health.

Works in Literary Context

Louis Aragon is more than a writer to be studied for a style or a running theme. His themes were his life and his life was a composite of concerns not just with personal motifs but entire literary movements. Thus, Aragon is a twentieth-century personification of Dada. He was also at the forefront of the period in which he lived and wrote, with his pacts with surrealism and communism. All three movements make up the bulk of Aragon's fiction, poetry, and essays in his collected works and in his posthumous publications.

Dada: The Anti-Art In his poems, there exists the “antithesis of art.” Such works as “The Talking Dog” are intentionally artless, nonlinear, and absurd, demonstrating the essence of Dada. In his fiction, such as *The Adventures of Telemachus*, Aragon introduced a protagonist who is an “anti-type,” the classical archetype turned inside out, an everyman who is also no man and who is

immersed in a narrative technique of stream of consciousness that is reduced to a single lingering utterance. The name “Eucharis,” for instance, is enunciated four hundred times: “Eucharis, Eucharis, Eucharis . . .”

Postwar Novels Aragon’s work had a great impact on others. Some of his postwar works can be seen as anticipating the *nouveaux romans*, or new novels, of postmodern writers as varied as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Kathy Acker. As were the existentialists and others he included in his ambitious studies, Aragon was a commanding intellect of *la France réveillée* (France awakened).

Works in Critical Context

Because Aragon’s career was marked by distinct, even contradictory phases, he took criticism from two different sides. As one of the leading theorists of the avant-garde art movements of Dada and surrealism, he received fairly favorable, though limited, criticism of his writing. In response to his surrealist novel *Paris Peasant* (1926), for example, several critics gave high praise. Biographer and critic Lucile F. Becker, for instance, called the book “one of the masterpieces of French twentieth-century literature.” As a loyalist to the French Communist Party, however, Aragon received several conflicting responses. Early on he was labeled an opportunist or political hack by some observers, while his political allies praised this “Poet of the Resistance” whose stirring patriotic works inspired the nation’s fight against the Nazi occupation forces of World War II.

By the 1950s, as a writer of politically oriented fiction for a limited audience, Aragon was little noticed outside his political circle. “Even in France,” Becker reported, “very little critical material [had] appeared on Aragon other than in the Communist press, which hailed all of his work indiscriminately.” It was not until the late 1950s and the appearance of his series *The Real World*—a cross between a communist manifesto and a kind of personal communist coming-out—that the author reached a wider critical audience, with such works as the final novel in the series, *Holy Week*.

Holy Week Less politically motivated than his earlier work, the story of French king Louis XVIII’s escape from Napoleon in the nineteenth century was favored by the literary critics. As Becker noted, those who had “ignored or discounted Aragon’s previous work because of his political sympathies praised what they termed his return to objectivity.” Leon S. Roudiez observed in the *Saturday Review*, “a philosophy of history, a social ethic, and a political ideology inform [the novel’s] entire structure . . . its Marxist flavor is rarely obtrusive.”

Responses to Literature

1. In the 1920s, Aragon made a transition from Dadaism to surrealism. In the 1950s, Aragon made a transition from surrealism to Communism. His series

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aragon’s involvement in Dadaism and surrealism had a profound impact on literature. Here are a few works by writers who have also been associated with one or the other movements in particular or who influenced Dadaism and surrealism in general:

The Automatic Message (1933), by André Breton. In this important nonfiction treatise, the author discusses automatism in the context of surrealism.

Last Nights of Paris (1929), by Philippe Soupault. In this small novel is some mystery, some obsession, and much Dada.

Djinn (1981), by Alain Robbe-Grillet. This nouveau roman, or new novel, presents itself as one of the most experimental and most challenging reads.

The Real World demonstrates these “themes” and expresses his personal and stylistic transformation. Make a group effort to distinguish these literary and political shifts by surveying the three movements. In pairs, do research in order to define one of the three: Dadaism, surrealism, and communism. Share your definitions as a group. How are the movements similar? How are they different?

2. Historians look back on the periods of 1917 through 1920 and the 1940s through 1950s as those involving the “Red Scare.” In the United States, the fear of communism’s infiltration was so great that accusations were made against citizens who might or might not have been “commies,” “pinkos,” or “reds.” Research the Red Scare by investigating such phenomena as the anticommunist witch hunts, McCarthyism, slander, libel, and propagandist technique. Where would Aragon fit into your research? How did he combine his art and politics?
3. The literature and art of any period is a response—to social concerns, political attitudes, or cultural events. As a group effort, find several selections of social or political music or art. Make copies to teach each other in a seminar session. For instance, if one person chooses “L’internationale” to share with the group, what could be said about this Soviet national anthem? Who wrote the lyrics? Who composed the music? What, in addition to patriotism, is being expressed?
4. To put Aragon’s military contributions into perspective, conduct a group investigation into France’s part in World War II. Search for military documents, personal or professional letters, newspaper entries, journal entries, or anything useful in aiding your understanding of France and its fighters. Who were

their allies? What goals did the resistance groups fight for? How did they perform rescues? What is meant by the Fall of France?

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Reinaldo Arenas

BORN: 1943, Oriente Province, Cuba

DIED: 1990, New York, New York, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Celestino before Dawn (1967)

Hallucinations (1969)

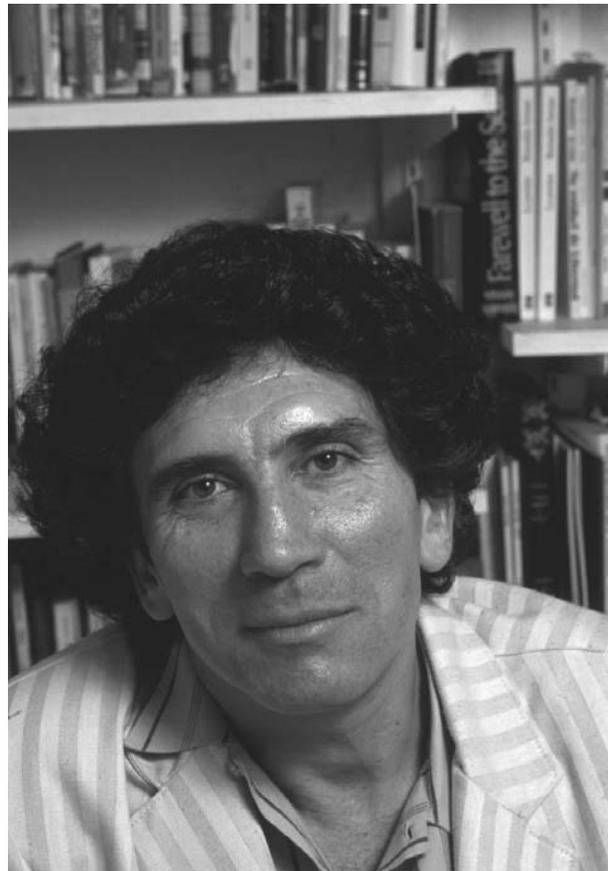
The Palace of the White Skunks (1975)

Farewell to the Sea (1986)

Before Night Falls (1992)

Overview

A member of the generation of Cuban writers who emerged on the literary scene of the island during the 1960s, Reinaldo Arenas has been almost unanimously



Reinaldo Arenas Arenas, Reinaldo, photograph. Carol Halebian / Liaison / Getty Images.

hailed as one of the most significant authors contributing to the formation of a "new writing" mode in Spanish America. His passionate works are examples of the radical changes experienced by Cuban society and culture during its first postrevolutionary years. Within his group of younger authors, which has come to be broadly and imprecisely identified as the "Post-Boom" generation, Arenas voiced staunch opposition to any sort of power, be it political or cultural, that imposes an official ideology on the imagination, on perception, and on the individual's social conduct.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Humble Origins Arenas was born on July 16, 1943, near Holguín, in the province of Oriente, Cuba. Shortly after Arenas's birth his father abandoned the family, and his mother moved into her parents' home. Arenas lived there with eleven aunts, a grandmother who frequently interrupted her domestic chores to pray, and a grandfather who, Arenas says, would threaten to commit suicide every time he got drunk. Arenas learned to read and

write from his mother and spent all of his childhood in this humble, rural family environment.

By 1958, his mother had moved with him to Holguín, then a major agricultural center in western Cuba. By this time, Cuba was undergoing political turmoil as Fulgencio Batista had seized power in the early 1950s. Though Batista's government became legitimized in the mid-1950s, rebel forces led by revolutionary Fidel Castro continued to challenge his rule. At age fifteen, Arenas decided to join Castro's revolution and fought in the nearby Sierra de Gibara against Batista's army. After Castro-led rebel forces overthrew Batista's government and Castro became prime minister in 1959, Arenas returned to Holguín, where he received a scholarship from the new revolutionary government to study agricultural accounting. (Castro later became president of Cuba, holding that post until his resignation in 2008.)

Upon completing his degree, Arenas went to work at a poultry farm located in the Sierra Maestra, the southern mountain range of the province, but soon he became tired of pastoral life and left for Havana, Cuba's capital, to attend a national training program for economic planners. In 1962, he undertook this new specialization at the Universidad de la Habana but soon lost interest. The following year, he began working as a staff member of the Biblioteca Nacional and decided to make writing central to his life.

Early Success Despite Political Difficulties Even though Arenas had been writing since age thirteen, it was not until 1964 that he was able to finish his first mature novel, *Celestino before Dawn*. In 1965, it received a Primera Mención at the Concurso Nacional de Novela Cirilo Villaverde, and it was published in Havana in 1967. The novel was well received by Cuban critics, but shortly thereafter, due in part to political pressures as Castro's government became increasingly repressive, Arenas's voice was stifled as the reprinting of his novel was prohibited. Arenas grew disillusioned as the revolutionary leader he once supported came to be just as dictatorial as his predecessor.

Arrests and Escape Castro's government began aggressively pursuing political dissidents and others deemed socially undesirable. As a homosexual and a critic of the government, Arenas was a target of harassment. He was charged with ideological deviation in 1973, and convicted for being extravagant, immoral, and for publishing abroad without official consent. He was sent to prison in Havana, but after a few months he managed to escape and remained free under disguises. In 1974, he was rearrested and remained in the Morro Castle prison in Havana. He was freed in 1976 after signing an agreement not to write again.

Rewrote Lost Novel After Arenas's release, however, he began rewriting his fourth and most ambitious novel, *Farewell to the Sea* (1982). In 1971, Arenas had given the original 1969 manuscript to a close friend in order to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arenas's famous contemporaries include:

- Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): One of the few American novelists to live in and write extensively about Cuba.
- Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar** (1901–1973): Cuban dictator overthrown by Castro and rebel forces in 1958.
- Fidel Castro** (1926–): Controversial president of Cuba from 1959 until 2008.
- Che Guevara** (1928–1967): Iconic guerrilla leader who helped to overthrow Batista in the Cuban Revolution.

avoid its confiscation by the government. The friend, in turn, passed it on to some old women he knew for better security. The content of the novel apparently offended the traditional morals of the women, who proceeded to burn it. Arenas then rewrote it, and just before his arrest in 1973 he hid the manuscript in the tile roof of his Havana home. His status as an ex-convict, however, did not allow him to return to the same house, and after a failed attempt to recover the manuscript from the roof, he considered it lost for a second time.

Fled to the United States Arenas spent 1976 through 1980 working on the third version of this novel and living a somewhat picaresque life in order to survive. He did a variety of menial jobs and constantly changed residences. On May 5, 1980, Arenas, one of the thousands of Cuban refugees who left the island from the port of Mariel, arrived in Florida. After a short stay in Miami, he moved to New York City, where he wrote the rest of his life without refraining from passionate denunciations of Fidel Castro's revolution.

Life and Cuba Covered in Last Book His final work, *Before Night Falls* (1993), is an autobiography that covers, both tragically and humorously, key episodes of his life from early childhood to his last days in the United States. More than an autobiographical work, the book is a dramatic example of a poetic memoir and testimony. In *Before Night Falls*, Arenas exposes the corruption and evil that have dominated Cuban political history and that finally led the nation into the iron grip of Castro and "political suicide." It is also a universal indictment of the basic hypocrisy and dishonesty of society. In order to denounce and fight this social oppression, Arenas irreverently brings forward his own homosexuality and emphasizes the liberating dimension of writing.

On December 6, 1990, after several years of suffering from AIDS, he wrote a letter to be published after his death and committed suicide in his New York apartment.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Arenas was an openly gay writer in a time when Cuba was trying to repress and oppress all forms of what the government considered “immoral” behavior. The difficulties he faced were similar to those faced by many writers and artists; here are a few works that deal with this theme.

- Gypsy Ballads* (1928), poems by Federico García Lorca. In this collection, García Lorca explored themes of sexuality amidst a romantic and surrealist Spanish background.
- Giovanni's Room* (1956), a novel by James Baldwin. In this work, a young man in Paris begins an affair with Giovanni, who is due to be executed.
- Howl* (1955), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's best known poem celebrates the lives of the disenfranchised, the disrespected, and the misunderstood people of the Beat generation.
- Before Night Falls* (2000), a film by Julian Schnabel. This film based on Arenas's final autobiographical novel stars Oscar winner Javier Bardem.

Works in Literary Context

Greatly influenced by his experiences during a turbulent era in Cuban history, Arenas's fictions are characterized by surrealist imagery, satire, and elements of the fantastic while being rooted in reality and sincere emotion. Considered a subversive intellectual and a deviant writer by Cuban authorities, his work reflects the literary marginalization, political confinement, and exile that he suffered.

Use of Parody Parody is the imitation of an existing work or style in order to achieve humor or drive home a message different from the original work. Parts of *Celestino before Dawn* closely follow some of André Breton's surrealist poetical formulas, while others draw on verses by Jorge Borges, Arthur Rimbaud, Federico García Lorca, and Eliseo Diego, among others. In *Farewell to the Sea*, there are parodic reminiscences of works by Homer, Walt Whitman, and the Cuban writer José Martí. In general, the parodic function of Arenas's works undermines the controlling and often political forces in the novels.

Oppression and the Illusion of Freedom Throughout Arenas's works the motif of “no escape” keeps reminding the reader that absolute freedom and truth is illusory. However, this is offset by the passionate longing for harmony in all of Arenas's works. In the face of divine silence and human blindness, liberation and insight may be found in writing and rewriting, which reveals the imagination's boundless capacity.

The trilogy of *Celestino before Dawn*, *The Palace of the White Skunks*, and *Farewell to the Sea* can be consid-

ered as one continuous text that deals with the central theme of oppression. The first novel is the story of a child who lives a cruel life of persecution and punishment at the hands of his grandparents. The young anonymous narrator tells in a lyrical manner of his liberating experiences with his alter ego, the young cousin Celestino, whose predilection for poetic writing constitutes a major transgression from the grandfather's vision of order.

The second novel of this group involves an interlude in the life of the same narrator, now an adolescent living in Holguín; he is on the verge of sexual awakening while his country undergoes the crumbling effects of the insurgent fight against the forces of Batista. The death of the adolescent narrator coincides with the end of the novel and confirms the allegorical dimension of the story. *Farewell to the Sea* has a different hero, a young poet living in Cuban revolutionary society, and the novel presents a day-to-day account of a vacation at the seashore with his wife. The first half of the book comprises the wife's diary, and the second half is a long poem written by the young man. As in the previous novel, death seems the only feasible escape, but this time in the form of the husband's suicide.

While Arenas has been recognized as an important Latin American writer and lauded for his work, he was widely censored in his own country, limiting his popular influence there. His voice is still considered significant, however, especially among international audiences.

Works in Critical Context

Having emerged from a totalitarian milieu that he described in *Encounter* as one holding that “there's nothing more dangerous than new ideas,” Arenas continues to garner attention and praise as an eminent writer who—in the tradition of fantastic Latin American fiction—depicts the reality of life in contemporary Cuba.

Commenting in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on the effect of the author's writings, Alberto Manguel observed, “Reinaldo Arenas' Cuba is a dreamworld of repeatedly frustrated passions.” The critic further theorized that the writer's works have turned Castro into a “literary creation,” rendering the dictator “immortal” and “condemn[ing him] to repeat [his] sins for an eternity of readers.”

Hallucinations *Hallucinations*, Arenas's second novel, chronicles the life of nineteenth-century Mexican monk and adventurer Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who manages an unbelievable series of escapes from his captors only to fight in an ultimately doomed revolution. “Servando's real crime,” theorized Alan Schwartz in *Washington Post Book World*, “is his refusal to be demoralized in a world completely jaded and dedicated to the exploitation of power and wealth.” Arenas defended *Hallucinations* against claims by several critics that the surrealistic rendering of Servando's exploits should have more closely approximated the monk's actual adventures.

“True realism,” the author told interviewer Ana Roca, “is fantasy, the fantastic, the eclectic. It knows no bounds.” Arenas further maintained that the depiction of Servando he envisioned could only be accomplished by weaving historical fact with fantasy: “My aim was to portray this compelling personality as a part of the American myth, the New World myth . . . part raving madman and part sublime, a hero, an adventurer, and a perennial exile.” Schwartz conceded that any flaws in Arenas’s “ambitious technique” were “overshadowed by [the author’s] madcap inventiveness, the acid satire, and the powerful writing.” Despite (or because of) this, the antirevolutionary implications of *Hallucinations* led to the banning of the book in Cuba by the Castro government.

Responses to Literature

1. Determine how coincidental it is that Arenas was eventually imprisoned much like the main character in *Hallucinations*. Are there any other ways in which Arenas’s life mirrored that of his character?
2. Some scholars have suggested that times of great change and conflict result in greater works of art than times of peace and prosperity. How might the oppression of Cuba have had a positive influence on Arenas’s writing?
3. Compare some passages in *Before Night Falls* with the movie version of the book. Is Arenas’s Cuba much like the movie version’s? In what ways is the movie different? Why do you think these changes were made?
4. Can you find any passages in *Before Night Falls* where Arenas foreshadows his own death? How do you think committing suicide affects the legacy of an artist, if at all?

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José María Arguedas

BORN: 1911, Andahuaylas, Peru

DIED: 1969, La Molina, Peru

NATIONALITY: Peruvian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Los ríos profundos (*Deep Rivers*, 1958)

Todas las sangres (*All Bloods*, 1964)

Overview

José María Arguedas is one of Peru’s leading novelists, along with Mario Vargas Llosa. However, while Vargas Llosa belongs to the Western mainstream, Arguedas wrote as a spokesman of the indigenous Quechua-speaking Andean world, setting out to correct the distorted, stereotyped image of the Indian presented by earlier fiction.

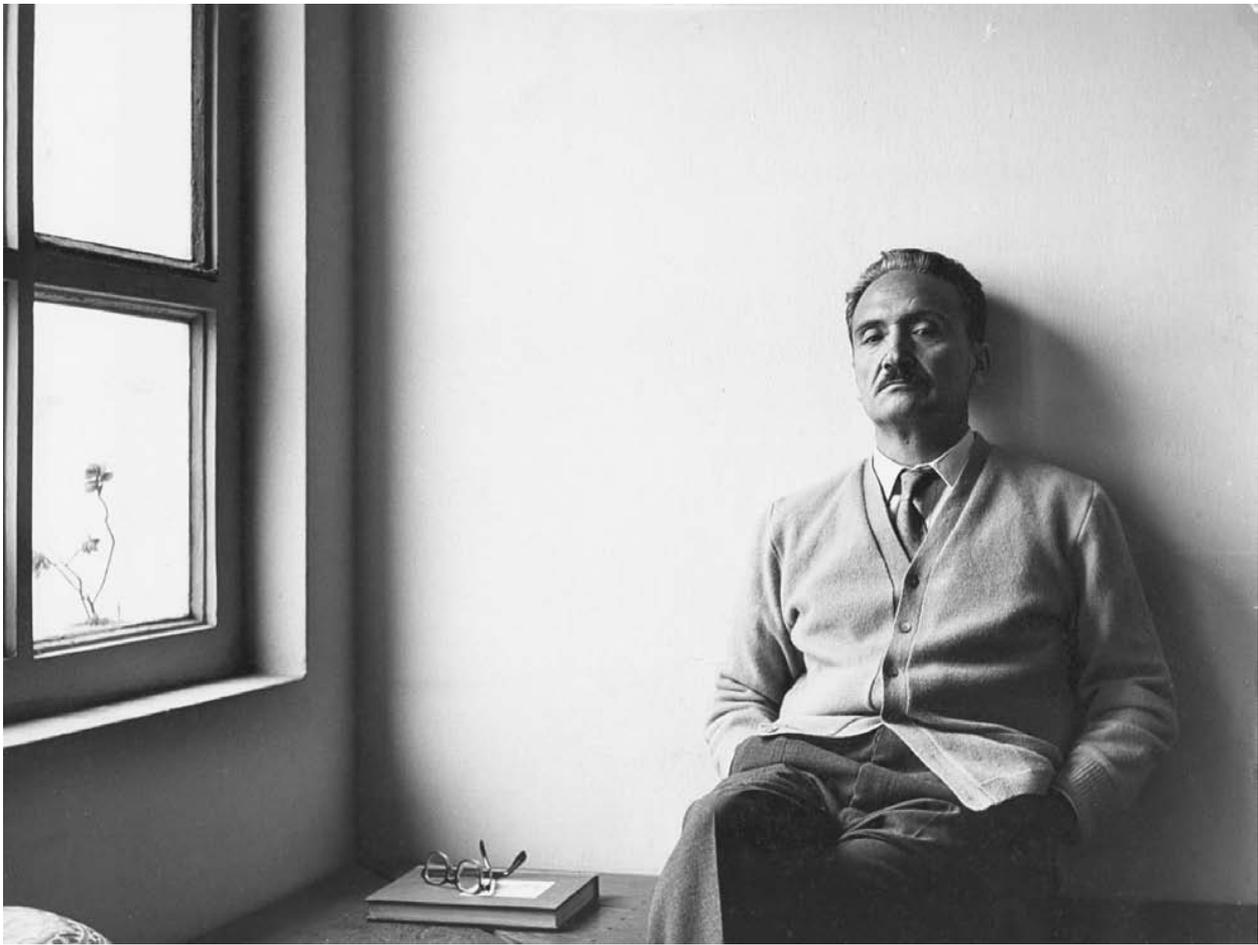
Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Remote Culture José María Arguedas was born on January 18, 1911, in the province of Andahuaylas in the southern Peruvian Andes mountains. He was the son of Victor Manuel Arguedas Arellano, a lawyer, and Victoria Altamirano Navarro.

His birth and childhood in Andahuaylas were important to the world he created in fiction and informed his historical sense of Andean peoples. Even today, access to Andahuaylas is difficult; in the time of Arguedas’s childhood, however, the province was almost completely isolated from the outside world. Its capital city, Abancay, located on the low eastern slopes of the Andes’ western chain, was then and remains today oriented toward Cuzco, the ancient center of the Incan empire.

After his mother’s death and his father’s remarriage, Arguedas grew up as a virtual servant in his stepmother’s home. Thus, although he was non-Indian, for all practical purposes he grew up not only within the Indian culture of the house servants and field workers in the hacienda, but also as a monolingual Quechua speaker.

Merging Two Worlds As a teenager, Arguedas began to learn Spanish as a literary and intellectual vehicle of expression. Throughout his life, however, Arguedas continued to write in Quechua in an effort to convert it into a modern literary language. As a writer, he was faced with the problem of translating into the alien medium of Spanish the sensibility of a people who express themselves in Quechua. His initial solution was to modify Spanish in



José María Arguedas © Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú / Instituto Riva-Aguero

such a way as to incorporate the basic features of Quechua syntax and thus reproduce something of the special character of Indian speech; but these experiments were only partially successful, and he later decided on a correct Spanish manipulated to convey Andean thought-patterns.

As a university student, Arguedas was involved with the academic and intellectual circles interested in change and social justice in Peru. His association with the emerging political-left parties landed him in jail in 1937 during the dictatorship of General Oscar Raimundo Benavides. Thanks to Arguedas's future wife, Celia Bustamante Vernal (whom he married in 1939), and a dedicated core of friends, he was eventually freed. Arguedas soon became a full-time anthropologist, field researcher, and novelist.

Early Publications Arguedas's first book, *Agua. Los escolares. Warma kukay* (Water. The Students. Puppy Love), usually referred to as *Agua*, brings together three short stories that deal with the economically exploited Indian communities. Upon its publication in 1935, it was largely ignored.

In 1941 he published his first novel, *Yawar fiesta* (Blood Fiesta). *Diamantes y pedernales. Agua* (Diamonds and Flintstones. Water, 1954) includes the contents of

Agua and introduces his first and only novella, *Diamantes y pedernales*. His major novel, *Los ríos profundos* (1958; translated as *Deep Rivers*, 1978) is widely considered his masterpiece. With its publication, Arguedas became a pre-eminent figure not only in Peruvian life but also among the international scholars who study Peru's ancient and contemporary civilizations.

El sexto (The Sixth, 1961) followed, a novel about the confinement of political prisoners in the most dreaded of Peruvian prisons, El Sexto. This hallucinatory novel was followed by the story of Rasu Niti, the master scissor dancer in *La agonía de "Rasu Niti"* (Rasu Niti's Agony, 1962).

Anthropological Inspiration Arguedas was one of the first anthropologists to demonstrate the range, role, and significance of poetic composition for complex singing arrangements. He composed many short ballads and lyrics in Quechua, but perhaps his greatest poetic composition in Quechua is his *Túpac Amaru Kamaq taytanchisman; Haylli-taki. A nuestro padre creador Túpac Amaru; Himno-canción* (To Our Lord the Father-Creator Túpac Amaru; Hymn-Song, 1962).

From 1963 until 1969, he held an important teaching position at the Universidad Nacional Agraria in La Molina. In 1963 he also became director of the Casa de la Cultura, Peru's major institution for the organization and promotion of artistic and intellectual activity.

Todas las sangres (All Bloods), was published in 1964. In this later work, Arguedas's interests changed from the Andean villages of *Los ríos profundos*—set in the early 1920s before roads, cars, and trucks made communication easier among the many isolated areas of the Andean territory—to a deteriorating and partially abandoned provincial capital in *Todas las sangres*. As the title of the novel indicates, the plot attempts to bring together the many races (or bloods) that constitute a fragmented society caught in the corrosive process of becoming a nation. With its emphasis on modernity, *Todas las sangres* spells out the beginning of the end of the world of *Agua*. Arguedas regarded that ending with more terror than relief, for the Andean culture whose achievements and beauty he had so dexterously portrayed could no longer aspire to continue untouched if the Indians were to liberate themselves from domination.

Later Life Arguedas often experienced intense and crippling depression. In 1966, soon after his divorce from his first wife, he attempted suicide. In 1967 he married Sybila Arredondo, a Chilean; however, in 1969, in a bathroom near his office at La Molina, he succeeded in committing suicide.

El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo (*The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, 1969) was published after Arguedas's death. In it, Arguedas attempts to come to grips with the new world wrought in Peru by the forces of hunger, improved communications, the fast influx of foreign capital, and the contending ideologies of the time. In 1983 his widow, Sybila, with others, edited and published his *Obras completas* (Complete Works).

Works in Literary Context

The Complexity of Andean Society The context of José María Arguedas's fiction is the semifudal socioeconomic order that prevailed in the Andean highlands from the Spanish Conquest until recent times. However, while earlier writers had depicted a black-and-white confrontation between oppressive white landowners and a down-trodden Indian peasantry, Arguedas presents a much more complex picture of Andean society. His work as an anthropologist led him to the remote Andean villages of Peru, where he collected folktales, songs, and myths. Arguedas thus was deeply aware of the Andean literary legacy in the form of legend, art, and humor.

Authentic Indian Perspective In his search for solutions to his problem of authenticity, Arguedas searched for the means by which Spanish as a literary system would not betray the essence or the difference of what he wanted to inscribe: the Indian and his world as seen by himself. While writing *Agua*, he read many current Peruvian novels. He found that these texts offered a deeply

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arguedas's famous contemporaries include:

Ruth Benedict (1887–1948): American anthropologist and proponent of cultural relativism, the theory that each culture has its own definition of right and wrong.

Pieter Botha (1916–2006): white South African prime minister (1978–1984) and president (1984–1989) who refused to abolish apartheid, the brutal state-sanctioned policy of enforced segregation of blacks and whites.

Ferruccio Lamborghini (1916–1993): Italian tractor manufacturer who founded the Lamborghini automotive brand in 1963.

Mario Vargas Llosa (1936–): leading Peruvian writer who combines realism and experimentalism in his novels; he unsuccessfully ran for the presidency in 1990.

Czesław Miłosz (1911–2005): Polish poet who defected to the United States in 1960; his work was banned in then-Communist Poland until he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980.

false and negative view of the Indian world. Arguedas's objective in writing fiction as well as his final choice of writing in Spanish was in part driven by the passion to correct a falsehood and the need to portray the world of his childhood. Arguedas's reading of the works of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky opened windows for the portrayal of the oppressed and the suffering.

Works in Critical Context

Early in his career as an anthropologist and novelist, Arguedas spoke about the painful task of creating an imaginary world that was based on his hatred of the world order created by the masters who oppressed the Indians. Thirteen years after the publication of *Agua*, he said he wrote it in a fit of rage (*arrebato*). Such a confrontational opposition became the core of Arguedas's plot structures. As Antonio Cornejo-Polar has shown in *Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas* (1973), Arguedas's entire fictional corpus is anchored in a play of oppositions, which develops a series of variations of ever-richer complexity.

The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below

His final book, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, was published posthumously to acclaim and recognition of the autobiographical nature of the work. Julio Ortega, writing for *Review*, described the book as “a complex and extraordinary document.” Ortega concluded, “Even though this novel is not, as such, on a par with his previous books, as a document it possesses a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

José María Arguedas was part of the Indianismo movement in Latin American literature, which explored the lives of indigenous peoples. Here are some other works that examine the lives of indigenous people:

Broad and Alien Is the World (1941), a novel by Ciro Alegria. This Peruvian novel examines the effect of land reform on the indigenous Indian communities.

The Devil to Pay in the Backlands (1956), a novel by Joao Guimaraes Rosa. In this novel, considered to be the Brazilian equivalent of James Joyce's modernist landmark *Ulysses*, a bandit from the Brazilian hinterlands tells his life story to a stranger.

In the Castle of My Skin (1953), a novel by George Lamming. This autobiographical novel by the Barbados writer explores the experience of growing up in a West Indian village under colonial rule.

Men of Maize (1949), a novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias. This magical realist novel, by the Nobel Prize-winning Guatemalan writer, examines two views of maize: that of the indigenous people, who consider it sacred, and that of international corporations, who view it solely as a commercial staple.

Flint and Feather (1912), a poetry collection by E. Pauline Johnson. Selected poems from the Canadian First Nations poet focus on native themes and characters.

value of a different order, and its peculiar intensity and character confer upon it a heightened and deepened life.”

Responses to Literature

1. When we read about an unfamiliar culture, how can we be sure that it is being presented accurately? What misunderstandings might this lead to?
2. Today, because of the Internet and global communications, cultural change seems to happen especially quickly. Do you think that many cultures will emerge as one larger culture as a result, or do you think people will still hold on to some of their traditional beliefs and practices? Can you apply these ideas of blending cultures to Arguedas's later works set in cities rather than small villages?
3. Leaving behind what you know and are familiar with can be scary and intimidating. José María Arguedas went to college and became a respected author and scholar, leaving behind the Indians he grew up with and their rural culture. But he wrote about them in his novels and also in his work as an anthropologist. Think of something you are afraid of leaving behind and write a list of ways that you can keep that in your life while also moving on and growing.
4. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research your own ethnic heritage. Write an essay analyzing how it has been presented over time and examining how and why this presentation has changed. Do you feel it is accurate as currently presented? Explain.
5. How can you express in one language the thoughts and words of speakers of a second language? Choose a hip-hop or rap song and “translate” it into standard English. Were you able to get across the original meaning, as well as its nuances?

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Aristophanes

BORN: 450 BCE, Athens, Greece

DIED: 385 BCE, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Plays

MAJOR WORKS:

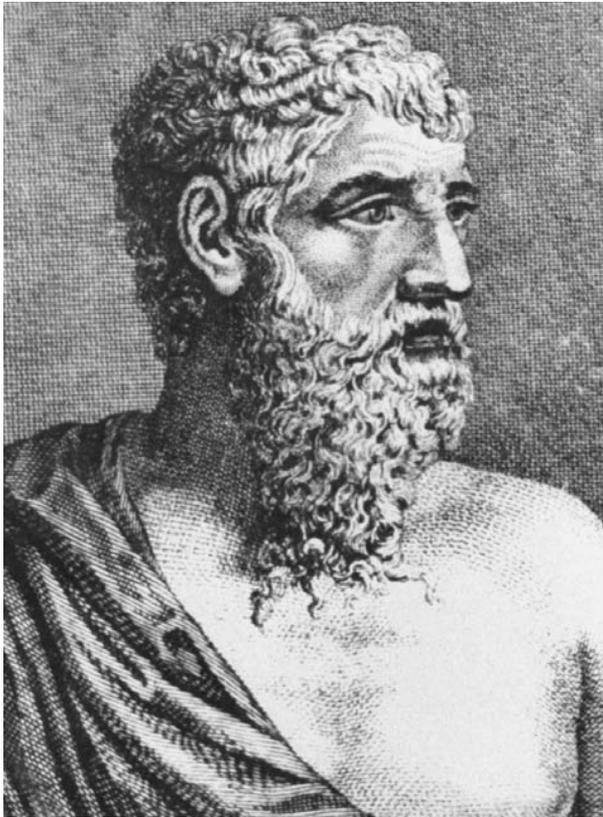
The Acharnians (425 BCE)

Peace (421 BCE)

The Birds (414 BCE)

Lysistrata (411 BCE)

The Frogs (405 BCE)



Aristophanes Aristophanes, photograph. PD

Overview

Aristophanes was the greatest writer of Old Comedy in Athens in the fifth century BCE and the only playwright from that era with any complete plays surviving. Old Comedy was a form of drama that has no parallel in subsequent European literature. It was a mixture of fantasy, political and personal satire, farce, obscenity, and, in the case of Aristophanes at least, delightful lyric poetry. Although he used the language brilliantly, Aristophanes was above all an inspired creator of bizarre fantasy worlds that defy fundamental laws of rationality and logic. He paid little attention to consistency of time, place, or character and was not very interested in the logical development of a dramatic plot. He brought to his art a command of every kind of comedy, from slapstick to intellectual farce. Parody was one of his specialties, and he had a devastating way of deflating pomposity in politics, social life, and literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Equal-Opportunity Satirist Knowledge of Aristophanes is confined almost entirely to his career as a dramatist. It is believed that he was born in Athens, Greece, in c. 450 BCE, a time when the city was one of the two

leading political powers in Greece and the most important center of artistic and intellectual activity. Little is known about his family except that it was not a poor one. He had an excellent education and was well versed in literature, especially poetry, and above all Homer and the great Athenian tragic dramatists. In addition, he was well acquainted with the latest philosophical theories. All of Aristophanes' boyhood was spent in the Periclean Age, an interlude of peace between 445 and 431. When the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta broke out in 431, Aristophanes was still a youth. What part he played in the war is not known, but he probably saw some active service before it finally ended in 404.

Already famous as a young man, Aristophanes used the power of comedy throughout his long career to ridicule and deplore the shortcomings of his society. Because of Aristophanes' open sympathy toward the land-owning aristocracy, he opposed a war that spelled the destruction of agriculture, so some scholars have seen the poet as a political reactionary. It is true that Aristophanes never tired of heaping abuse on the rulers of Athens, but his comic world view kept him from partisanship of any kind. He was an equal-opportunity satirist, and one politician was just as good a target for ridicule as any other.

An Unprecedented Honor Aristophanes' career as a dramatist started in 427 BCE when he put on a play, now lost, called *The Banqueters*. A year later he brought out another play, which has not survived, *The Babylonians*, that politically criticized Athens's imperial policies. As a result, Cleon—who eventually ruled Athens and represented the will of the city's powerful merchant class—hailed the author before the council, apparently on a charge of treason. No action was taken against Aristophanes.

After 410 the Peloponnesian War situation gradually worsened, and in the winter of 407–406, a generation of other great classical writers was dying. Euripides died in Macedonia, to be followed in less than a year by his great rival Sophocles. Aristophanes clearly felt that the great days of tragedy were over, and in *The Frogs* (405 BCE), he showed Dionysus, the patron god of drama, going down to the underworld to bring Euripides back from the dead. When after many ludicrous adventures the god finally arrives in Hades, he acts as referee in a long poetic dispute between Euripides and Aeschylus, which contains much delightful comedy but also some serious criticism. After its debut, the play was given the honor of a second performance—something unheard-of at the time.

The End of War and After The Athenians eventually lost their war with Sparta, having been starved into surrender in the spring of 404. This defeat broke the spirit of many Athenians, including Aristophanes. Thereafter, the author's patriotism was colored with a nostalgic attachment to the ideal of Greek unity from earlier heroic times. Though Athenians soon regained considerable importance in both politics and intellectual life, they were

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aristophanes' famous contemporaries include:

- Euripides** (c. 480 BCE–406 BCE): One of the three great tragedians of classical Athens and a poet, Euripides penned ninety-five plays, of which eighteen have survived in complete form.
- Cratinus** (c. 520–423 BCE): As Aristophanes' rival in comic drama, Cratinus was considered one of three great masters of Athenian Old Comedy, along with Aristophanes and Eupolis. Only fragments of his work have survived.
- Sophocles** (c. 496 BCE–406 BCE): This Greek tragedian is one of the three greatest playwrights of ancient Greece who produced tragedies that have survived to the present day. It is believed that he wrote 120 or more plays during his lifetime, only 7 of which still exist.
- Eupolis** (c. 446 BCE–411 BCE): This Athenian poet of the Old Comedy was seen as Aristophanes' equal in the purity and elegance of his diction. He was also a master of irony and sarcasm. Seventeen plays are attributed to him.
- Aeschylus** (c. 525 BCE–456 BCE): This Greek playwright is often recognized as the founder of dramatic tragedy and is the earliest of the three great Greek tragedians that include Sophocles and Euripides.

never quite the same again. In the sphere of comedy the uninhibited boisterousness of the Old Comedy disappeared, replaced by a form that was less imaginative and spirited and more cautious and reasonable.

Aristophanes continued to write plays after the end of the war. Of them, *Women in Parliament*, a skit about equality in marriage and in ownership of property—included ideas later put forward by Plato in his *Republic*. Aristophanes lived for nearly twenty years after the war. One of his three sons, Araros, became a minor comic dramatist.

Works in Literary Context

Criticism of Politics and War The principal themes of Aristophanes' comedies reflect the poet's profound dissatisfaction with the political reality of Athens. For example, in *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes' first play, an Athenian peasant excludes himself from the Peloponnesian War by obtaining a separate truce from Sparta. Another play addressing the issue of war, *Peace*, produced in 421 BCE, involved a principal character who travels to Mt. Olympus on a dung-beetle to see what the gods have in store for his war-torn city. It includes a mock-mythological allegory of the Peloponnesian War.

Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* (411 BCE) is both a piece about women and one of the most powerful condemnations of war in European literature. *Lysistrata* (even the name puns on the idea of disbanding an army) is an Athenian woman who organizes, with the help of a Spartan ally, a sex strike with a view to putting an end to the war. All of the women of Athens agree not to have sex with their soldier and politician husbands until they end the war. Of course the plan quickly works.

Athenian Foibles In addition to war and politics, Aristophanes also ridiculed characteristics of Athenians themselves and human foibles more generally. In *The Wasps*, he poked fun at Athenians' obsession with unnecessary lawsuits. Bdelycleon, driven to despair by his father Philocleon's compulsive attachment to jury duty, tries to keep the old man from the law courts by allowing him to conduct a trial of two dogs, one of which is called Cleon. Aristophanes satirizes two typically Athenian foibles: one, a blend of excessive zeal and meddling ingenuity, which often brings about ambitious projects that fail miserably; and two, passivity and inertia. In *The Clouds*, a name suggesting the impermanence of intellectual abstractions, the poet blames the professional philosophers of Athens for introducing a spirit of immorality into Athenian culture. He portrays Socrates as the head of a preposterous school that encourages absurd research and logically sound dishonesty. The comedy was not well received, obtaining the third prize at a competition—a crushing defeat for the poet. Finally, in *The Birds*, which many critics consider Aristophanes' masterpiece, the author describes a society that is ruled by birds. Conveniently located between heaven and earth, the society manages to avoid both divine excesses and human folly.

Influence As an author, Aristophanes exerted great influence not only on people in his own era but also on authors of other eras and other countries. In western Europe, Aristophanes' fame was rekindled as a result of the revival of Greek learning during the Renaissance. Later, Aristophanes' comedies were revered as great poetic works by Romantic poets and scholars. This enthusiasm determined the comic poet's place, which subsequent scholars generally did not dispute, among the greatest representatives of European literature. Poets who acknowledged their admiration for Aristophanes include Heinrich Heine, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Browning, and T. S. Eliot. Aristophanes' influence has also been recognized as having been significant for satiric and comedic authors such as François Rabelais (1494–1553)—an avant-garde writer of fantasy, satire, the grotesque, dirty jokes, and bawdy songs—and Henry Fielding (1707–1754), an English novelist and dramatist who emulated Aristophanes, satirizing politicians with gusto.

Works in Critical Context

Among the various and conflicting interpretations of Aristophanes' works, there is a general admiration for the poet's seemingly boundless imaginative power and his habit of allowing the creative human spirit to triumph over all constraints of reality. Critics and scholars across the centuries have equated Aristophanes with the best of the Old Comedy, ignoring other representatives of this particular art, such as Cratinus or Eupolis, partly because only Aristophanes' comedies have survived in complete form.

Aristophanes' fame eventually waned after his death, but he quickly became central to the Western literary canon. Among the early authors who wrote commentaries on Aristophanes were Photius, the erudite patriarch of Constantinople, and John Tzetzes, the noted encyclopedist. Plato's attitude toward the comic poet was more ambivalent, but this was probably because of Aristophanes' devastating portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*. It is nevertheless reasonable to assume, given the prominent role played by Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium, that Plato also admired the poet's genius. Early Greek scholars compiled critical editions of Aristophanes' comedies, but they valued the comic poet solely for his magnificent language.

Later authors who represented the softer, less offensive, more refined New Comedy eclipsed Aristophanes after his death as Old Comedy's raucous hilarity stopped appealing to the tastes and sensibilities of the urban populations of the later Roman eras. Thus it was New Comedy authors, not Aristophanes, who provided a blueprint for Roman comedy, which in turn exerted a decisive influence on the European stage.

Responses to Literature

1. How would you compare and contrast Aristophanes' political comedy with current books, movies, and plays that lampoon political leaders?
2. How would you characterize different types of humor in Aristophanes' plays, and what are their different satirical effects?
3. Why use animals rather than human beings as the main characters? What does this bring to the satire?
4. Explain how *The Birds* depicts a utopia, or perfect world. Is this utopia still a paradise by our current standards? What, if anything, has changed in our values from the Classical era?
5. Choose a subject that is very familiar to you, such as life at school, and try to satirize the parts of it that you least like or appreciate. See if you can use humor to poke fun at certain aspects of your subject. Could you use animals, perhaps including your school mascot, to heighten the satire?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many themes consistently appear in Aristophanes' works, including themes of humanism, opposition to war, and ridicule of wrongheaded politicians whose elaborate projects come to nothing. He satirized what he did not like (and sometimes what he did like) using a peculiar mixture of fantasy, political and personal satire, farce, obscenity, and lyric poetry, often including animals as a way of conveying meaning or telling a story. Other works that rely heavily on satire include:

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a satirical novel by Jonathan Swift. This classic of English literature is both a satire on human nature and a parody of "travelers' tales," a literary genre popular during the eighteenth century. It also ridicules the ambitious and pointless scientific projects of intellectuals and the empty pride of political leaders.

The Parliament of Birds (c. 1372–1386), a poem by Geoffrey Chaucer. The author puts forward a satirical debate over different approaches to love and marriage within the context of a conference of birds who meet to choose their mates on Valentine's Day.

Animal Farm (1945), a novella by George Orwell. This bitter and inventive satire uses the metaphor of animals in a barnyard to discuss human politics generally, and the politics of the Soviet Union under Stalin in particular.

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▣ Aristotle

BORN: 384 B.C.E., *Stagira, Greece*

DIED: 322 B.C.E., *Chalcis, Greece*

NATIONALITY: *Greek*

GENRE: *Treatises, notes*

MAJOR WORKS:

Inquiry into Animals

Nicomachean Ethics

Rhetoric

Politics

Metaphysics

On the Soul

Overview

Aristotle's importance may be greater than that of any other philosopher, not only because what he said was taken as an almost unquestionable authority during the formative periods of Western culture, but also because he



Aristotle Aristotle, engraving. The Library of Congress.

addressed so many different fields of learning. His ideas influenced practically every field of intellectual endeavor, from philosophy and theology to science and literature. Aristotle's works defined the basic categories of thought and formulated the fundamental rules of inference, in effect becoming the Western tradition's basis for thought. In addition, Aristotle's literary views, discussed in his *Poetics*, dominated literary criticism from antiquity until modern times, setting a standard for any theoretical approach to literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Love of Science Aristotle was born in Stagira, a small town in northern Greece located on the peninsula known as the Chalcidice, in the summer of 384 B.C.E. Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, was the royal doctor for the Macedonian king, Amyntas II. Young Aristotle is believed to have spent part of his childhood living with his father at the royal court in the Macedonian capital of Pella. This early connection with the Macedonian court would have a major impact on later events in his life. As a doctor's son, he was probably trained in first-aid techniques and basic drug therapy from an early age. This early training may have contributed to his love of science in general, his orderly approach to learning (evident in the highly structured nature of his works), and to his special interest in biology (clear in *Inquiry into Animals*). Both of Aristotle's parents died when he was young, and Proxenus, an older relative, became his guardian.

Plato and the Academy At age seventeen, Aristotle was sent to Athens to attend the most famous school in Greece, the Academy of the great philosopher Plato. At the time, Athens was the intellectual center of the world, and Plato's Academy was the center of Athens. Aristotle won recognition as the master's most brilliant student, and his energetic gathering of research and general love of books led Plato to nickname him "the reader." During his time at the Academy, Aristotle studied mathematics and dialectic, a form of argumentative reasoning. Although Aristotle was both a student and a close friend of Plato's, the strength and independence of his own mind suggests that he was never simply a follower of his teacher. Aristotle spent twenty years at the Academy, until Plato's death in 347 B.C.E.

A School of His Own Aristotle left Athens soon after Plato's death in 347 B.C.E. He settled near a Greek city called Atarneus in northern Asia Minor (now Turkey). The city's ruler, Hermias, was an avid student of philosophy who had supported Plato's Academy. He invited Aristotle and some other Academy members to set up a similar school in nearby Assos, where he provided them with everything they needed to pursue their studies. Aristotle later married Hermias's niece, Pythias, and the couple had two children, a daughter and a son.

It was in Assos that Aristotle finally stepped out of Plato's shadow and began the work that truly reflected his own interests. Instead of puzzling only over the fact that things existed at all (one of Plato's favorite areas of inquiry), he began to focus on the nature and function of the things themselves. He observed animals in their natural environments and carefully recorded his findings. The result, a huge collection of notes and longer writings, is today called the *Inquiry into Animals*. It describes in great detail the bodies, habitats, and behavior of an astonishing variety of animals, from whales to woodpeckers and from insects to elephants.

Tutor to Alexander the Great After Hermias's territory was overrun by the Persians, Aristotle moved to Mytilene. King Philip II of Macedonia, known for his prodigious military skills and expansionist plans, invited Aristotle to accept the post of tutor to his son Alexander. Philip was impressed with Aristotle's reputation and family connections to Macedonia. Aristotle accepted, and served in the position for three years, teaching the boy rhetoric, literature, science, medicine, and philosophy. According to legend, Aristotle presented his pupil with a copy of the ancient Greek epic the *Iliad*, which became Alexander's most prized possession: he slept with it under his pillow. Alexander went on to become one of the most successful military commanders in history, conquering an empire stretching from modern-day Italy to India within a span of ten years.

The Lyceum In 335 B.C.E., Aristotle returned to Athens and opened his own school, one that rivaled Plato's Academy. Since it was located at the temple of Apollo the Lycian—Lycia was an area in Asia Minor associated with the god Apollo—the school was called the Lyceum. And because Aristotle often walked up and down a covered courtyard or *peripatos* while lecturing, he and his followers were referred to as "Peripatetics." The students and other teachers followed the rules of Aristotle, ate their meals together, and once a month gathered for a symposium, a party of sorts, with a focus of intellectual discussion. At the same time, Aristotle continued writing what was to become an expansive body of work that encompassed the various branches of science, literature, philosophy, and history.

Death of Pupil and Teacher In 323 B.C.E., Alexander the Great died unexpectedly at the age of thirty-two. He had left no clear instructions for the management of his empire, which quickly dissolved into chaos. In Athens, anti-Macedonian sentiment boiled over and riots broke out. Aristotle, aware that his close connections to the Macedonia court and to Alexander in particular could put his life in danger, left Athens for the island of Euboea. He died there in 322 B.C.E. of a digestive ailment. Some historians have suggested that he was poisoned, but the cause of death is uncertain.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aristotle's famous contemporaries include:

Socrates (370 B.C.E.–399 B.C.E.): Although a few people practiced something like philosophy before Socrates, his prolific career as a teacher, orator, and defender of philosophy justify his being called "The Father of Philosophy."

Alexander of Macedonia (also known as Alexander the Great) (356 B.C.E.–323 B.C.E.): This Macedonian king vastly increased the size of his kingdom and built a lasting reputation as a conqueror during the thirty-three years of his life.

Aristophanes (456 B.C.E.–ca. 386 B.C.E.): This Athenian comic playwright authored *Lysistrata*, a comedy that deals openly with sex, feminism, and pacifism.

Democritus (460 B.C.E.–370 B.C.E.): This Greek philosopher's most important theory is that all matter is composed of atoms.

Xenophon (431 B.C.E.–355 B.C.E.): This Greek historian's work gives us a window into the lives of the Greeks during his lifetime.

Works in Literary Context

After his death, Aristotle's manuscripts were hidden in a cellar in present-day Turkey by the heirs of one of his students and not brought to light again until the beginning of the first century B.C.E., when they were taken to Rome and edited by Andronicus. Andronicus's revisions probably do not represent works that Aristotle himself prepared for publication. The peculiarly clipped language in which they are written indicates that they are lecture notes organized from oral discussions of the material by Aristotle. Nevertheless, Aristotle's work had incalculable influence on Western thought for centuries to come, shaping the way artists, writers, architects, doctors, scientists, kings, queens, and even priests approached their work.

Philosophy Analysts throughout the centuries have asserted that Aristotle's philosophy is systematic, universal, and epoch-making. Trained in the Platonic tradition, Aristotle nevertheless rejected his teacher's theory of Ideas. True, in formulating his ontology, or doctrine of being, Aristotle views each individual concrete thing as a blend of matter and form. While the Aristotelian concept of form superficially resembles Plato's Ideas, the forms, as W. G. de Burgh observed, "do not exist...in a super-sensible heaven, cut adrift from the actual world of our experience... Thus for Aristotle it is the concrete individual, not the mere universal, that has substantial being." The basic task of philosophy, according to Aristotle, is to explain why and how things are what they are. In order to learn why

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although much of what is read about Aristotle has to do with his impact on science and logic, one should remember that he was among a number of thinkers who developed a “golden mean” concept for living. Essentially, the golden mean has to do with moderation. For instance, a coward is a person who flees from the least sign of danger, a courageous person is a person who has an appropriate level of fear in a dangerous situation, and a rash person is one who rushes into a dangerous situation that he or she is ill-equipped to deal with. The courageous person is the one who illustrates the golden mean best because this person is neither too frightened nor too rash. This individual has exercised ethical reasoning. Other works that deal with ethics include:

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This novel analyzes the responsibility of great individual thinkers and innovators to the society in which they live.

Summa Theologica (c. 1274), a theological work by Thomas Aquinas. This treatise, written by a priest and Aristotle scholar, analyzes the virtues of fortitude and prudence, especially as they relate to man’s relationship with God.

On the Genealogy of Morality (1887), a book by Friedrich Nietzsche. In this text, Nietzsche attempts to provide a history of morality (or ethics) and to theorize the psychological origins of various systems of belief about morality.

something exists, Aristotle insists that one must identify four fundamental causes. Using the example of a sculpture, Aristotle defines these causes as material (the artist’s medium), efficient (an artistic conception translated into the sculptor’s physical manipulation of his medium), formal (the form the artist strives to externalize), and final (the end-product of the creative process). This “conception of form as the end or purpose of development, in contrast to undeveloped matter,” de Burgh has written, “is the fundamental thought of all Aristotle’s philosophy.”

Literature and Oratory Aristotle’s ideas on literature and oratory are presented in two works: the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. While the latter work focuses on the formal, linguistic, and stylistic rules for effective persuasion in verbal discussion or written argument, the hugely influential *Poetics* presents a literary theory that no subsequent critical discussion could ignore. Unfortunately, the *Poetics* exists in fragments, without the important discussions—on subjects such as catharsis and the comic—referred to in other works. Offering a full treatment of tragedy, with marginal attention to other literary genres, the *Poetics* nevertheless constitutes a comprehen-

sive philosophy of art. Like Plato, Aristotle defined art as “mimesis,” or imitation, but refined the Platonic conception of art by introducing different types of imitation. According to Aristotle, epic and tragedy portray human beings as nobler than they truly are; comedy does the opposite; and the plastic arts (art that does not involve writing or composing—sculpture, for example) strive toward plain imitation. As his description of tragedy indicates, Aristotle does not separate aesthetic from ethical judgments, and his discussion of tragic characters in the *Poetics* includes explicit statements about their morality.

Metaphysics Through the Years Though the discourses in the *Metaphysics* are not finished works, they are sufficiently complete to show what Aristotle conceives to be the basic problems that confront a science of First Philosophy and to indicate how he thinks one should attempt to resolve these problems. The influence of this work has been enormous, both because it lays out a problem for a study of metaphysics and because it provides a persuasive way of thinking about the issues. Such medieval philosophers as Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224–1275) attempted to integrate their Christian beliefs into this framework, a synthesis that inevitably modified both the Christian dogmas and the Aristotelian system. Though modern philosophers beginning with René Descartes were anxious to reject the Aristotelian beliefs that were part of their scholastic education, much of the Aristotelian vocabulary, such as the notions of substance and attributes, remained. Many of the problems Aristotle discusses in this work remain unresolved by philosophers today. Questions about the meaning of being or the nature of universals and one’s knowledge of them are still vexing philosophical issues.

Biology Aristotle contributed much to the field of biology, especially through his early work on classification. He realized that scientists had to observe an array of characteristics, not just one, as a basis for grouping, and scientists consider him to be the first person to group organisms in ways that made sense. He did not believe in evolution, but as a careful student of nature, he separated living things according to their complexity, according to a scale of nature. He assigned each increasingly complex form of life a step on a ladder. In the eighteenth century, Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) developed a system whereby all organisms were named according to genus and species, expanding and refining Aristotle’s basic idea. Linnaeus said, “God creates, Linnaeus arranges.” His system of classification remains in use today.

Works in Critical Context

Traditionally readers of Aristotle have been impressed most by the systematic nature of his work, and accordingly they have treated the whole of it as expressing a single body of doctrine. In recent decades, however, much scholarship has been devoted to exploring the

development of Aristotle's thought. The underlying assumption of this approach is that at one time Aristotle more or less agreed with his teacher Plato, but gradually began to articulate his own views. Such studies have focused on the relative influence Plato's views seem to have had on Aristotle in a given work as a way of assessing his intellectual development.

In Werner Jaeger's book *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (1948), the work that pioneered these developmental studies, Jaeger argues that Aristotle's thought is divided into three periods that roughly correspond to the three main periods of his life. In his years at the Academy, Aristotle's views on the soul and on ethics, which may be found in surviving fragments, are thoroughly Platonic. After Plato's death Aristotle left the Academy and began to develop his own metaphysical and epistemological views. His return to Athens and founding of the school at the Lyceum marks a third period in his development, in which he turned from the philosophical problems he inherited from Plato and embarked upon a program of empirical research. This period thus includes his biological works as well as the lost collection of political constitutions. Further research has discredited some of Jaeger's conclusions, but most studies of Aristotle's development continue to assume with Jaeger that his thought progresses steadily away from Platonism.

Poetics In Aristotle's time the influence of the *Poetics* did not extend beyond his own school, and, unlike his scientific and philosophical works, the book was rediscovered relatively late, during the Italian Renaissance. But its impact then became significant, especially upon the literature and literary criticism in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The principles of poetry and drama in the *Poetics* were considered by many during this period to be the correct rational principles to which literary works should conform. Much of the *Poetics* was still an authoritative source for literary principles well into the nineteenth century. The *Poetics* was used, for example, to argue for clearly defined literary genres as we know them today.

Rhetoric Many of those who practiced and taught rhetoric in Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. wrote books about the art of rhetoric. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is written within this tradition; but his work is the first and only systematic treatment of rhetoric in this period. It is unlikely that the *Rhetoric* had a significant influence as a handbook for public speaking among Aristotle's contemporaries, because by the time it was written political oratory was in decline. Though the work itself is not polemical, it no doubt served also to distinguish Aristotle's views on rhetoric from those of his rival Isocrates. Cicero and other Romans studied the *Rhetoric*. For them it is likely that its rhetorical principles were instructive as practical guidelines for oratory. When humanistic learning was revived during the Renaissance, the *Rhetoric* formed the

basis for the study of rhetoric. The Aristotelian rhetorical model is still commonly taught in introductory writing courses at the high-school and college level.

Responses to Literature

1. Can you think of a situation in which "the golden mean" is not the best method for determining what one should do? Since perceptions or measures of moderation will vary from person to person, what factors decide where the golden mean lies? Drawing from what you know about Aristotle's philosophy, as well as those of great thinkers throughout the ages, explain and defend your answers.
2. For many years, Aristotle's reputation as a philosopher was so strong that he was often referred to simply as "The Philosopher." To modern ears, his work sounds much more like science than philosophy. What are some of the differences between the kind of philosophy Aristotle participated in and the kind of philosophy practiced by philosophers in the twenty-first century?
3. Explain Aristotle's statement from *Poetics* that "all art is the imitation of nature." Provide evidence from literature, musical composition, and the plastic arts.

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▣ Roberto Arlt

BORN: 1900, Buenos Aires, Argentina

DIED: 1942, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentine

GENRE: Drama, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Rabid Plaything (1926)

The Seven Madmen (1929)

300 Millions (1932)

Porteño Etchings (1936)

Overview

Lauded by critics for exploring innovative themes in his narratives and in the theater, Roberto Arlt was one of the most influential figures in Argentine literature during the first half of the twentieth century. Premised on what he considered a breakdown of the philosophical and religious values of Western civilization, his fiction and dramas concern the plight of individuals contending with “the inevitably crumbling social edifice,” frequently depicting social unrest, urban alienation, deviant behavior, sexual maladjustment, and class hostility. Arlt is also noted for his “Aguafuertes porteñas”—“etchings” of Buenos Aires life: collected essays whose language and tone are still admired by Argentine writers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

School Dropout Arlt was born on April 2, 1900, in Buenos Aires, Argentina to European immigrants. His father had served in Bismarck’s German army, while his mother was Italian. Neither spoke Spanish particularly well; German was spoken at home. Although Roberto was expelled from school at the age of eight, he read widely and published his first story at fourteen. He left home two years later and worked odd jobs while aspiring to be a writer.

From 1919 to 1920, Arlt served in the Argentine armed forces in Córdoba and attended the Naval School of Mechanics. He spent much of his free time in the taverns, especially the café La Punalada, and shady spots of Buenos Aires, making the acquaintance of the seedy patrons who would later populate his writing.

Journalist Between 1914 and 1916, at the same time he was starting his fiction-writing career, Arlt began writing for newspapers. He interned with writer and journalist Ricardo Güiraldes from 1925 to 1927 and published with Güiraldes’s magazine, *Prova*. He began his journalistic work as a way to make money and to introduce himself into Argentine literary circles. However, this work turned out to be more than that. His daily columns for *El mundo*, “Aguafuertes porteñas” (“Porteño Etchings”), appeared from 1928 to 1942 (compiled first in book

form in 1936) and earned him nationwide fame. On the day his column appeared each week, *El mundo* sold twice as many copies as on other days.

The Underside of Argentina In 1929, Arlt published *The Seven Madmen*, which was to be his only English-language success and his most notable novel. None of his other works have been translated into English. *The Seven Madmen* won a municipal award, but the critics read it as a realistic book and criticized it for bad grammar and craftsmanship. The book was meant to be experimental and expressionistic. *The Flamethrowers* was the sequel novel to *The Seven Madmen*. Both *The Seven Madmen* and *The Flamethrowers* were influenced by Dostoyevsky. Both reveal the underside of Buenos Aires life, with its delinquents, prostitutes, and ruffians. In 1931, Arlt published *Love of the Sorcerer*, his last novel.

300 Millions With his major work in fiction behind him, in the 1930s, Arlt turned his attention to playwriting. Arlt’s first play, *300 Millions*, premiered on June 17, 1932, in Buenos Aires at the Teatro del Pueblo. In this play, Sofía, a poor maid from Spain, dreams about inheriting 300 million pesos to help her cope with her loneliness and the indifference of the people around her. Finally, she decides to kill herself by throwing herself in front of a tram. As a journalist, Arlt was present at just such a suicide and was so impressed by the story behind it that he had originally decided to write about it in 1927 for the newspaper *Crítica*.

Arlt continued to write throughout the 1930s, but was increasingly exhausted by his hard living. In 1935 he was sent to Spain by *El mundo* as a correspondent, where he wrote a series of articles featuring his impressions of the country. It was one of the few times in his life that Arlt left Buenos Aires. The political climate in Spain had been increasingly tense since the adoption of a controversial new democratic Constitution in 1931; this tension was made worse in 1933, when democratic elections were at least partially ignored by the president and ruling party, leading to riots and strikes. Soon after Arlt left Spain, the country descended into a bloody civil war. His writings from the assignment were collected in *Spanish Etchings* (1936). Arlt continued to write for *El mundo* until he died of a stroke in 1942.

Works in Literary Context

Arlt was a largely self-taught, avid reader. He was particularly enamored with Russian authors, like Dostoyevsky, whose work directly influenced at least one of his protagonists. On the other hand, concerned as Arlt was with the real language of the people of Argentina, he felt little need to confine his art to the “accepted” and “formal” language of traditional literature. Indeed, Arlt’s use of so-called “low” or “vulgar” language and foreign languages in his primarily Spanish-language literature was considered revolutionary and influenced innovative Spanish writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis

Borges, although his language and its impact received little critical recognition during his lifetime.

The Language of Common Culture Many of Arlt's contemporary readers admired his linguistic audacity. During the 1920s and 1930s, when academics were calling for purity and uniformity in the Spanish language, Arlt, along with other avant-garde writers, proposed the "derhetoricizing" of what they considered a pompous, florid, and stodgy literary idiom that lacked the resources for innovation and invention. Thus his characters and narrators use colloquialisms common to middle- and lower-class Spanish and the familiar form of "you," *voseo*, rather than the acceptable literary form of the pronoun; Arlt was the first novelist to use the familiar tense in his work. In "The Language of the Argentines," translated for the *Review* from his collection *Aguafuertes porteñas*, Arlt condemned those demanding linguistic purity, criticizing "the absurdity of trying to straightjacket in a prescriptive grammar the constantly changing, new ideas of a people."

Arlt's writing style was innovative. He was the first novelist to use the language of thieves (*lunfardo*), the language of Buenos Aires (*porteños*), vulgarities, foreign language, Castilian Spanish, scientific language, and lyricism. He broke the literary rules of tradition at every turn and populated his work with the unpleasant and grossly urban. He also cited the new and changing ideas of people as being a reason to reject the censures of "linguistic purity." Arlt assumed that language was ever changing, even living.

Grotesque Characters As a natural outgrowth of the rough language Arlt used, his characters are often described as grotesque. Just as one example of many, consider *The Manufacturer of Phantoms*. This play is about an egotistical playwright, Pedro, who, convinced of his superiority, proceeds to murder his wife, since he feels that she interferes with his creativity. He is then pursued and murdered by his own literary creations. The play is influenced by Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. The murderer has a "superman complex"—essentially, the belief that he is above the law—as does Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov; he is later plagued by his conscience as is the protagonist of Dostoyevsky's novel; and the judge in Arlt's play represents Porfiry Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment*. (Arlt's judge pursues Pedro after realizing that he did indeed kill his spouse.)

The literary tradition of the grotesque is particularly evident in this play. The nightmarish characters created by Pedro represent his guilty conscience, which persecutes him despite his attempts to deny its existence. There is a bizarre masquerade in which the distraught protagonist unmask a beautiful and seductive woman who suddenly is transformed into his dead wife, and then into a series of frightening creatures each time another mask is torn from her face.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arlt's famous contemporaries include:

- William S. Burroughs** (1914–1997): Influential American Beat generation writer whose works, like Arlt's, were condemned because of their strong, vulgar language.
- Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956): Innovative German playwright and poet.
- Ho Chi Minh** (1890–1969): Vietnamese revolutionary who was president of North Vietnam from 1955 until his death in 1969.
- Jorge Luis Borges** (1899–1986): Argentine author of highly imaginative stories who is often credited as one of the earliest practitioners of magical realism.
- Kenneth Slessor** (1901–1971): Popular Australian poet who brought to traditional Australian poetry the influence of modernists.
- Theodor Seuss Geisel** (also known as Dr. Seuss) (1904–1991): American author whose fanciful worlds have entertained readers for decades.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime Arlt was largely ignored by the critics. On the other hand, several of his fellow left-wing writers were able to perceive the talent he possessed in communicating the inner feelings of solitude and helplessness of the antiheroes in his dramas as well as his novels. These antiheroes are similar to Arlt himself and represent many people who are unable to communicate with each other and who live within the boundaries of an indifferent and often hostile society. For other writers and critics, however, Arlt was no more than an imaginative writer who did not follow the rules of good writing.

The Seven Madmen *The Seven Madmen* is now considered by both the general public and literary critics to be one of the most important Argentine novels of the twentieth century. In this novel, a group of seven *locos* (insane people) prepare for a revolution using counterfeit money and the profits from prostitutes working in brothels. "The reader's first reaction to [*The Seven Madmen*] is complete disorientation," David William Foster noted in *Currents in the Contemporary Argentine Novel*, because "the controlling consciousness of the novel [is] Erdosain's muddled perspective on reality." Arlt's confusing narrative is a deliberate manifestation of Erdosain's own bewildered involvement with the society, whose members and plotting he does not understand. *The Seven Madmen* won a municipal award but, upon its release, drew the censure of critics who, failing to appreciate the novel's experimental and expressionistic tendencies, read it as a realistic book and lambasted its poor grammar,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Critics feel it is unnecessarily difficult to read some of Arlt's work, especially *The Seven Madmen*, because Arlt does not always draw a clean distinction between reality, hallucination, and fantasy. The effect of this approach is generally a submersion of the reader into the psyche of the characters whose worlds the author is exploring. The blurring of the line between fantasy and reality has become more popular in literature since Arlt's death. Here are some more works that use the technique.

Madeleine Is Sleeping (2004), work of fiction by Sarah Shun-lien Bynum. This text is often referred to as a novel, but in actuality, it is less a novel and more a series of vignettes—short, powerful stories and images—that may or may not be the dreams of a young girl named Madeleine.

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs.

Unlike the other pieces of art mentioned here, this novel is not about the connection between dreams and reality but rather the different states of consciousness experienced by drug users. Written as it was in the 1950s, the forthrightness with which the text explores drug use was quite a scandal.

Eraserhead (1977), a film directed by David Lynch. This film, like *Madeleine Is Sleeping*, contains a vast number of dream sequences, none of which is immediately distinguishable from the "waking life" of the protagonist. The disorienting effect is so strong that some have felt that the film is not really a film at all—in the sense that a film, above all else, tells a story—but an "experience."

composition, and craftsmanship. "If anyone ever actually believed that this novel was realistic," Paul Gray wrote in a 1984 issue of *Time*, "then life in the Argentine capitol must once have been unimaginably weird."

Arlt's subject matter and style did not fit the traditional aesthetic concept of beauty upheld by established Spanish literary critics and authors, many of whom were still extolling the virtues of cowboys on the vanishing Argentine frontier. Arlt dwelt on the least pleasant aspects of urban life. According to Foster in the *Review*, his novels depict, with "appalling fidelity," the horrid conditions in which Argentineans were forced to live. In the prologue to *The Flamethrowers*, quoted by Lee Dowling in the *Review*, Arlt answered and indicted his detractors, particularly the wealthy and genteel establishment writers: "It is said of me that my writing is poor. That may be. . . . Often I have wanted to compose a novel that would consist of panoramic scenes like Flaubert's. But today, amid the babble of an inevitably crumbling social edifice, it is impossible to linger over embroidery."

Responses to Literature

1. Flexibility with language is an important part of Arlt's art. His ability to use the language of the common people and to utilize aspects of the Spanish language in his novels that others had never used before mark his work as exceptional. In order to increase your own flexibility with language, take a passage from one of your textbooks—something that feels a little stuffy, a little boring—and try to rewrite it in more accessible language. Consider not just the language but also the presentation. Would the passage work better as a scene in a play, a song, or a poem? How would it look in blog form?
2. Both *Madeleine Is Sleeping* and *The Seven Madmen* are disorienting for the reader because they blur the line between reality and fantasy. Read *Madeleine Is Sleeping*. Try to determine which vignettes depict "reality" and which depict "fantasy." Based on these observations, describe the "real" Madeleine. Do the same for the protagonist in *The Seven Madmen*. How does this process of dissecting these texts affect your impressions of them?
3. Compare the conclusions of *The Manufacturer of Phantoms* and *Crime and Punishment*, by which Arlt was influenced. Which do you find more satisfying? Why?
4. Arlt's characters have been linked to the "grotesque"—a tradition in which abnormal-looking characters or filthy characters are described in great detail. The key here is the incredible detail used to describe the characters. After having read some Arlt, take a stab at describing, in great detail, a "grotesque" object.

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▣ Ayi Kwei Armah

BORN: 1939, Takoradi, Gold Coast (now Ghana)

NATIONALITY: Ghanaian, Senegalese

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

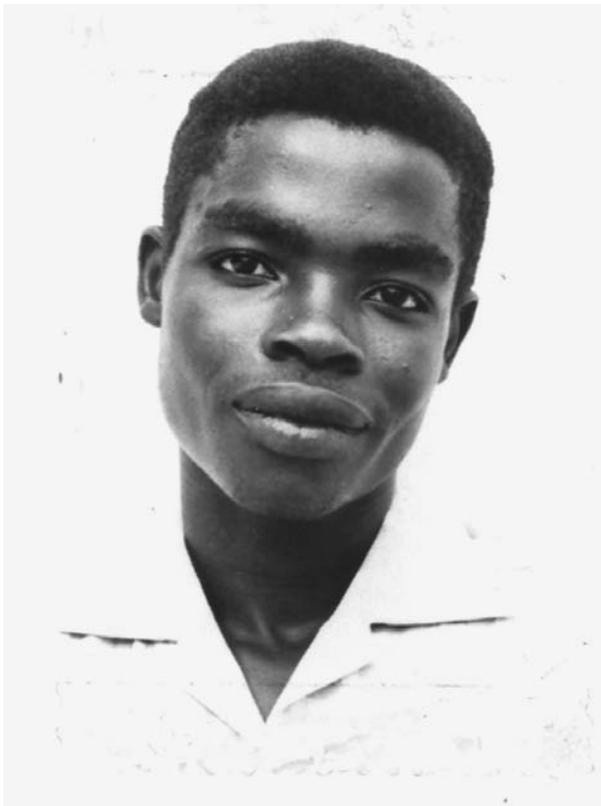
The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968)

Fragments (1971)

Two Thousand Seasons (1973)

Overview

Ayi Kwei Armah is perhaps the most versatile, innovative, and provocative of the younger generation of postwar African novelists, and like all authors who express extreme



Ayi Kwei Armah *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

views in their books, he has become a controversial figure in both African and Western critical circles. The controversy has centered exclusively on the works and not on the man, about whom extremely little is known.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Coincided with Ghanaian Independence Only twice has Armah broken his rule of silence about himself and his work, and it is to these two essays that Western critics owe nearly all of their biographical information about him.

Armah was born in 1939 in the coastal city of Takoradi, a seaport of the then-British colony of the Gold Coast. During World War II, citizens of the Gold Coast participated in the war effort, often under the auspices of the British military. In the postwar period, veterans and others who lived in the Gold Coast realized they had just fought a war against oppression and wanted to gain their own freedom. The colony was able to achieve self-government in 1951, and formal independence in 1957 when it became Ghana.

The first twenty years of Armah's life coincided with the development of his country, through a mixture of political negotiation and violent struggle, into Africa's first independent state. To complete his secondary education, Armah studied at Achimota College in Ghana. He then worked as a Radio Ghana scriptwriter, reporter, and announcer, before winning a scholarship to study in the United States in 1959, two years after Ghanaian independence.

Left Harvard to Trek Across the World Armah spent one year at a preparatory school in Massachusetts before entering Harvard University in 1960, but left college in 1963 before completing his courses and examinations. Influenced by the growing number of African revolutionary movements and perhaps by the American civil rights movement as well, Armah set out on a seven-thousand-mile trip over four continents to pursue a truly "creative existence." The experience led to a physical and mental breakdown.

First Novel an International Success Returning to the United States, Armah went back to Harvard, completed his BA, and later earned an MFA at Columbia University. He spent 1967 to 1968 in Paris, where he worked as the editor of *Jeune Afrique*. In 1968, Armah published *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a novel often described as existentialist. It burst upon the international literary scene and quickly became a classic of African fiction. The protagonist, simply known as "the man," is a railway clerk in Ghana during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah, the African leader who took power when Ghana gained independence from Britain.

American Experiences Informed Next Two Novels After again living in the United States and working

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Armah's famous contemporaries include:

Muammar al-Gaddafi (1942–): Libyan leader and advocate of pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism; widely respected throughout Africa for the stability of his rule, but, until recently, considered by the West to be a sponsor of terrorism.

Mariama Ba (1929–1981): Muslim Senegalese author and feminist; her work exposes the discrimination and imbalance of power that African women experience in daily life.

Breyten Breytenbach (1939–): White South African poet and advocate for minority rights; he has been exiled and imprisoned for his political views.

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961): Writer and scholar from Martinique, West Indies; his works critiquing colonization strongly influenced Armah as well as many anticolonial liberation activists.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972): First prime minister (1952–1966) of Ghana after its independence and influential pan-Africanist, promoting African unity and traditional African values; while he was out of the country, his government was overthrown by a coup.

at the University of Massachusetts, Armah returned to Africa in 1970, where he continued to write while holding teaching, scriptwriting, translating, and editing jobs. He first lived in Tanzania, where he taught African literature and creative writing. From 1972 to 1976, he was teaching the same subjects in Lesotho. During this period, he wrote a number of important novels as many independent countries in Africa continued to struggle to define themselves as political entities.

Like “the man,” the protagonists of Armah’s next two novels are alienated in their respective societies and, like Armah, they have studied in the United States. *Fragments* (1971) tells the story of a “been-to,” (someone who has been to the United States) who is hounded into madness by his family because of what he brings back from his stay in America. It is not the instant return of material possessions and prestige that they expect of him, but a moral idealism that interferes with the selfish materialism they have taken over from Western culture.

Why Are We So Blest? (1972) is the story of Modin, an African student studying at Harvard. He leaves school and returns to Africa with his white girlfriend Aimee to participate in a revolutionary struggle. Modin is ultimately destroyed in Armah’s complex tale, which explores, among other things, sexual relationships and the hierarchy of race as Modin is subjugated and sped to destruction by Aimee.

Turned to “Historical” Novels In *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), however, Armah began to portray entire African communities in a historical context—and in their struggles, these communities would succeed. The novel, which calls for the reclamation of Africa’s traditional values, covers one thousand years of African history. *The Healers* (1978), Armah’s next novel, is the story of a young protagonist, Densu, who studies to become a healer at a time when Africa is being ravaged by a virulent plague of non-African origin.

Wrote from Senegal Since the publication of this novel, Armah has advocated the establishment of an African publishing industry and of an African literature in African languages, rather than European languages. Armah returned to the United States to teach at the University of Wisconsin in 1979. He later went back to Africa and made his home in Dakar, Senegal, where he focused primarily on his writing.

In 1995 came the novel *Osiris Rising*, which was published only in Senegal, as was *Kmt: In the House of Life* (2002). Armah continues to live and work in Senegal.

Works in Literary Context

Influences and “Un-African” Style Armah’s combination of an African background with an American education has made the question of the literary sources of his fiction a difficult one. During the 1970s, many Western critics detected European influences, including that of French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, Irish postmodernist Samuel Beckett, French “nouveau roman” pioneer Alain Robbe-Grillet, and innovative French writer Louis-Ferdinand Celine.

In the case of Armah’s third novel, *Why Are We So Blest?*, black American literature and polemic were added to the list of influences. The divergence of Armah’s visionary, symbolic fictional modes from the realist mainstream of African fiction has provoked charges from African critics, notably Chinua Achebe, that his characterization and style are “un-African” and have more in common with expatriate fiction about Africa written by Europeans than with African writing.

Importance of Ritual and Tradition However, Armah’s figurative treatment of the intricacies of ritual process gives his work an unexpected and seldom-noticed common ground with work from which his own art has been thought far removed, such as the tradition-oriented early plays of Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer, and with the writing of authors who have adopted a hostile critical stance toward him, such as the Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor.

African commentators—notably Solomon O. Iyasere and D. S. Izevbaye—who adhere to more inclusive concepts of traditionalism have drawn attention to the connection of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* both to African fable and to the personifications of the oral tradition, and to *Fragments*’s striking simulation of the

ocular and editing devices of the narrative style of the griots, or traditional oral storytellers.

Reflections of African Society In his first three novels, Armah also wrote about the struggles, alienation, and failures of individuals in contemporary African society. In the Ghana of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, for example, filth and excrement are everywhere, serving in the novel as metaphors for the corruption that permeates society. The man, however, resists this corruption and fights the “gleam” that causes almost all Ghanaians to pursue material wealth and power through bribery and other foul deeds. With *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, Armah turned to more historical African concerns and highlighted the need to return to traditional African culture as a model for the future, something he tried to do in his own influential life and work.

Works in Critical Context

While Armah is considered one of Africa’s leading prose stylists writing in English, his works have met with a somewhat mixed critical reaction, though many reviewers have praised his stylistic innovations. The author is usually appreciated for the strength of his convictions and desire to promote the improvement of the African continent and those who live there as well.

Early Works Lauded by Critics Critics generally praised Armah’s first three works, especially *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*; many compared Armah’s writing ability with that of such celebrated Western writers as James Joyce and Joseph Conrad. Charles R. Larson, in *The Emergence of African Fiction*, describes the book as “a novel which burns with passion and tension, with a fire so strongly kindled that in every word and every sentence one can almost hear and smell the sizzling of the author’s own branded flesh.” In the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, James Booth describes it as “the most powerful work of a novelist of genius.” But other critics—notably Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe—accused Armah of portraying Africa in a European manner.

Early critical allegations that there are few “Africanisms” in Armah’s first two novels and that the books do not draw upon Ghanaian settings, speech, or history, have not held up under close investigation, however. These books are so imbued with surviving ritual forms, ceremonial motifs, local mythologies, and residual ancestral beliefs that traditional West African culture is always powerfully, if remotely, present, both in its superior ethical imperatives and its inherent deficiencies.

Mixed Reception for “Historical” Novels *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* have had a mixed reception. These two historical novels have been widely hailed by African critics as evolving a major new style for African literature. Some Western critics, notably Gerald Moore and Bernth Lindfors, have expressed reservations about them, however, and there seems to be a consensus

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Colonialism is never far from the surface in Armah’s novels. Here are some other works that examine colonialism and its effects.

Colonialism and Neo-colonialism (1964), by Jean-Paul Sartre. This classic collection of writings by the French philosopher examines his country’s colonization of Algeria, a microcosm of the West’s colonization of developing countries.

The Glass Palace (2000), by Amitav Ghosh. This epic novel sweeps from Burma and Malaya from 1885 to the present, tracing the history of colonialism across those countries.

The Harbor Boys (2006), by Hugo Hamilton. This coming-of-age memoir tells of the author’s struggle to define himself in 1960s Dublin, Ireland, as the son of a German mother and a vehemently anti-English Irish father.

In My Father’s House (1993), by Kwame Anthony Appiah. This book of essays by the Ghanaian philosopher examines modern African identity, cultural assumptions, and postcolonial African culture.

The Open Sore of a Continent (1997), by Wole Soyinka. This nonfiction book by the Nobel Prize–winning Nigerian writer examines the crisis in Nigeria brought on by its governing dictatorship.

in the West that they show signs of reduced inspiration and declining artistic achievement. Robert Fraser, on the other hand, has argued that their apparent radical line of departure is really a curve in an arc of continuous development and achievement from the early novels, and he has fewer reservations about the method and manner by which the beautiful ones are finally “born” in Armah’s fiction.

Responses to Literature

1. Armah is known to keep fairly quiet about his personal life and work. Many of his novels, however, draw heavily from his own life experiences as a Ghanaian and as an Ivy League student in the United States. Compare Armah’s novel *Fragments* with the known details of the author’s life. What elements are taken directly from his own experiences? Which appear to be largely fictional? Why do you think he chose to create a fictional work instead of an autobiography?
2. Armah’s recent novels have only been published in Senegal. Do you think that a writer should always aim to reach as many readers as possible? What are some reasons why a writer might choose to target a smaller audience?

3. Read the excerpt from Armah's essay "One Writer's Education." What does he mean when he calls writing "the least parasitic option open to me"?
4. Armah advocates using a common African language as the main language in Africa instead of European languages. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research Chinua Achebe and Breyten Breytenbach, two African writers who have chosen to write in "hostile" languages in order to reclaim them. Write an essay analyzing their view and contrasting it with Armah's view. Explain whose view you agree with more, using specific reasons to back up your argument.

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Matthew Arnold

BORN: 1822, Laleham on the Thames, England

DIED: 1888, Liverpool, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems (1853)

New Poems (1867)

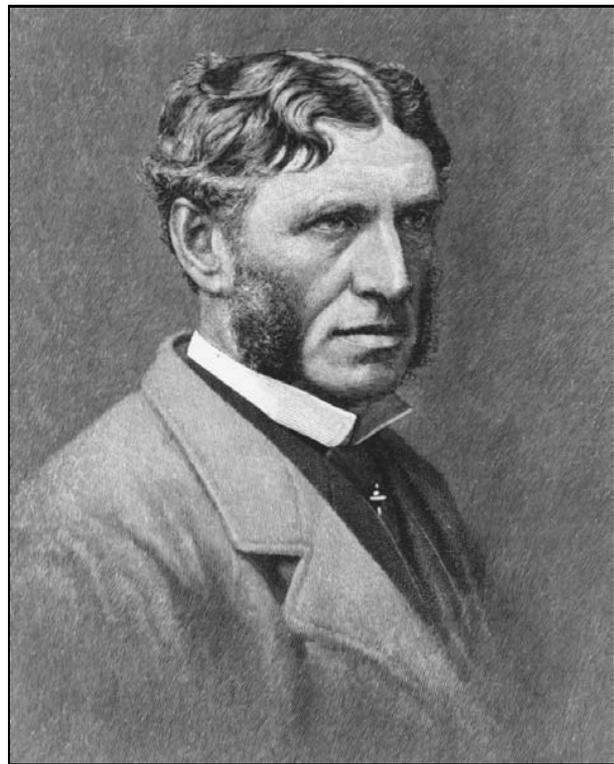
"Dover Beach" (1867)

Culture and Anarchy (1869)

Literature and Dogma (1873)

Overview

Matthew Arnold's work deals with the difficulty of preserving personal values in a world drastically transformed by industrialism, science, and democracy. His poetry often expresses a sense of unease with modernity. He asserted his greatest influence through his prose writings as a social critic, calling for a renewal of art and culture. His forceful literary criticism, based on his humanistic belief in the value of balance and clarity in literature, significantly shaped modern theory.



Matthew Arnold Arnold, Matthew, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Child of the Headmaster Arnold was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, an influential educator who became, in 1828, headmaster of the prestigious Rugby School. His family took many pleasant holidays in England's Lake District where they became acquainted with William Wordsworth. Much of the imagery in Arnold's landscape poetry was inspired by the locale.

Arnold's poetic landscapes also are indebted to the region around Oxford University, which Arnold attended after being offered a scholarship in 1840. At Oxford he met Arthur Hugh Clough, who became his close friend and correspondent. After leaving Oxford, Arnold took a temporary post as assistant master at Rugby for one term before accepting a position in London as private secretary to the politician Lord Lansdowne.

Success as a Poet While holding this position, Arnold wrote some of his finest poems. He published them, signed with the initial *A.*, in two separate volumes: *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1849) and *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (1852). Arnold published the bulk of his poetry, including *Poems* in 1853, in the eight years following the publication of *The Strayed Reveller*. However, his best-known poem, "Dover Beach," was not published until 1867. The poem, often viewed as a meditation on the importance of love, describes a locale on the coast of England that Arnold is said to have visited in 1851.

Oxford Lectures At the age of thirty-four, Arnold was elected to the poetry chair at Oxford University, an appointment that required him to deliver several lectures each year. Traditionally, the lectures had been read in Latin, but Arnold decided to present his in English. He used the occasion of his first lecture in 1857 to discuss his views about the worth of classical literature. In the first lecture, entitled "On the Modern Element in Literature," later published in *Macmillan's* magazine (1869), Arnold advocates a liberal education that features wide-ranging knowledge and the use of the comparative method to build knowledge and to shape understanding.

Arnold's next major prose work, *On Translating Homer*, was a series of three lectures given at Oxford in 1860 and 1861. In these essays, he evaluates selected translations of Homer, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each in an attempt to establish the characteristics of a well-written translation. They are lively introductions to classical poetry and urge English writers to imitate Homer's "grand style."

Social Criticism In his prose works, Arnold pursued many of the same ideas he had introduced in his poems, especially man's need for spiritual and intellectual fulfillment in a materialistic, provincial society. In his Oxford lectures and in his education reports, Arnold suggested a

single solution to humankind's problems—a liberal education. As an essayist, Arnold continued to address the subject of intellectual and spiritual growth.

Of the several books that Arnold wrote on politics and sociology, the most important is *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). He criticizes nineteenth-century English politicians for their lack of purpose and their excessive concern with the machinery of society. The English people—and the narrow-minded middle class in particular—lack "sweetness and light," a phrase that Arnold borrowed from Jonathan Swift. England can only be saved by the development of "culture," which for Arnold means the free play of critical intelligence and a willingness to question all authority and to make judgments in a leisurely and disinterested way.

The subject of four of Arnold's books was the threat to religion posed by science and historical scholarship. The most important of these is *Literature and Dogma* (1873). He argues that the Bible has the importance of a supremely great literary work, and as such it cannot be discredited by charges of historical inaccuracy. And the Church, like any other time-honored social institution, must be reformed with care and with a sense of its historical importance to English culture.

Arnold focused on social and literary topics during the last ten to twelve years of his life, offering more elaborate or definitive statements of his views on matters that had long interested him. In 1883 and 1886 he toured the United States and gave lectures in which he tried to win Americans to the cause of culture. Many of Arnold's late essays deal with literature and, more specifically, with sound criticism of literature. The best known of his later collections is *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*, which Arnold began discussing with his publisher in January of 1888, but which was not actually printed until November of that year, seven months after Arnold's sudden death from a heart attack.

Works in Literary Context

Emptiness One of the dominant themes of Arnold's poems is that of the intellectual and spiritual void he believed to be characteristic of nineteenth-century life. Looking about him, he witnessed the weakening of traditional areas of authority, namely the dwindling power of the upper classes and the diminishing authority of the Church. He believed man had no firm base to cling to, nothing to believe in, nothing to be sustained by.

Arnold's early poetry, such as *Alaric at Rome* (1840), had the brooding tone that would become characteristic of his mature work. In "To Marguerite—Continued," he concludes that the individual is essentially isolated. The theme of man's alienation and longing for refuge is echoed in later poems such as "Rugby Chapel" and "Dover Beach."

Influences For Arnold, the German poet Heinrich Heine truly possessed the critical spirit. Heine cherished the French spirit of enlightenment and waged "a life and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arnold's famous contemporaries include:

- Andrew Carnegie** (1835–1919): American industrialist and businessman; made his fortune in the steel industry
- Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): English naturalist who, with A. R. Wallace, first introduced the idea of natural selection
- Charles Dickens** (1812–1870): English novelist and journalist, whose writing often commented on the lives of the poor
- George Eliot** (1819–1880): Pen name of Mary Ann Evans; English novelist who emphasized realistic plots and characters
- Karl Marx** (1818–1883): Prussian philosopher and revolutionary; developed the theory of communism with Friedrich Engels; author of *Das Kapital* (1867), criticizing capitalism.
- George Sand** (1804–1876): Pen name of Amantine Dupin; French novelist and feminist; stated that women should have the same rights within marriage as men

death battle with Philistinism,” the narrowness Arnold saw typified in the British. Arnold felt that the English romantics had failed to reinstitute the critical spirit. The German romantic Heine, however, he believed, was able to accomplish what the English romantics could not.

Despite his criticism, however, the two romantics Arnold held in highest esteem were Lord Byron and William Wordsworth. He praised Byron at length for his stand on social injustice, and ranked Wordsworth only after William Shakespeare, Molière, John Milton, and Johann von Goethe in his list of the premier poets of “the last two or three centuries.”

Works in Critical Context

Poetry As E. D. H. Johnson has pointed out, Arnold tried “to reaffirm the traditional sovereignty of poetry as a civilizing agent.” Arnold believed that great art, functioning as a civilizing agent to enrich the intellectual and spiritual life of man, had universal application. But his views were not the same as those of his contemporaries, who felt that art should have immediate, practical application to everyday experience.

Arnold's first collection, *The Strayed Reveller* (1849) was a failure; sales were poor and the book was withdrawn. *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (1852), after a sale of only fifty copies, also was withdrawn. Critics charged that Arnold's first two volumes of poems did not consistently deal with contemporary life. Charles Kingsley's comments in 1849 are representative: “The man

who cannot . . . sing the present age, and transfigure it into melody, or who cannot, in writing of past ages, draw from them some eternal lesson about this one, has no right to be versifying at all.”

Poems (1853) included works from the two earlier collections as well as new ones, notably “Sohrab and Rustum” and “The Scholar Gypsy.” That volume contains his famous preface outlining why he did not include the title poem from *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. Arnold declared that it did not fulfill the requirements of a good poem and therefore did not qualify as meaningful art. Alba Warren explains that “great poetry for Arnold is not lyric, subjective, personal; it is above all objective and impersonal.” H. F. Lowry says of Arnold that “[t]he deepest passion of his life was for what is permanent in the human mind and the human heart,” and that he found this in classical literature.

Because, perhaps, of the mournful tone of his verse, Arnold was not a popular poet in his day. However, many of his poems—most notably “The Scholar-Gypsy,” “Empedocles on Etna,” “Thyrsis,” and “Dover Beach”—are still studied and respected as some of the best verse of the Victorian period. T. S. Eliot stated that “the valuation of the Romantic poets, in academic circles, is still very largely that which Arnold made.”

“*Culture and Its Enemies*” In “Culture and Its Enemies,” published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1867 and later included in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold continues to wage war against complacency. But his views were met with considerable scorn. Readers claimed that he was an elitist, a snob, and they labeled his ideas inadequately developed and impractical. Henry Sidgwick found the essay “over-ambitious, because it treats of the most profound and difficult problems of individual and social life with an airy dogmatism that ignores their depth and difficulty.”

Arnold responded to his critics in a series of five essays published in 1868, entitled “Anarchy and Authority.” In the essay series Arnold continues his championship of culture by stressing the present need for it.

Essays on Religion Arnold also championed religion as a profound cultural force. However, Ruth Roberts shows that Arnold is guilty of “overingenuity” in his religious works. His argument is not as disinterested as he claims, and he often glosses over biblical passages inconsistent with his position. For Arnold, the Bible was literature and must be read as such. J. C. Shairp, a contemporary of Arnold's, argued, “They who seek religion for culture-sake are aesthetic, not religious.” The same charge was later echoed by T. S. Eliot, who found that Arnold had confused “poetry and morals in the attempt to find a substitute for religious faith.”

Basil Willey summarized Arnold's view in *Literature and Dogma* as being a “false approach to the Bible which seeks to extract dogma from poetry.” Unsurprisingly, *Literature and Dogma* stirred even more controversy

than his previous religious works. Many of Arnold's critics were clergymen, such as John Tulloch, who was not alone in accusing Arnold of dabbling in "amateur theology."

"The Study of Poetry" One of Arnold's most important later essays, "The Study of Poetry," first appeared in 1880 as the introduction to *The English Poets*, an anthology edited by T. Humphry Ward. R. H. Super reminds that the essay was intended "to give some guidance to a middle-class public not sophisticated in the reading of poetry." "The Study of Poetry" no more remained unchallenged than had any of Arnold's other works. Many, including contemporary critics, have disagreed with Arnold's choice of touchstone passages, and many have taken offense at Arnold's pronouncements about the merits of individual authors. Despite such objections, the essay remains an historically important piece of criticism and an important guide to Arnold's own tastes.

As John Holloway observes, in Arnold's prose, it is "his handling of problems" that is more important than his solutions to them. One of Arnold's contemporaries, John Burroughs, writing two months after Arnold's death, claimed that Matthew Arnold deserved to be read extensively, for only then could he be fully appreciated. In Arnold's prose, Burroughs wrote, "his effect is cumulative; he hits a good many times in the same place, and his work as a whole makes a deeper impression than any single essay of his would seem to warrant."

Responses to Literature

1. Look up several definitions of *culture*. What does today's popular culture—movies, music, TV shows, books—say about American culture as a whole? Does "American culture" mean different things depending on someone's gender or ethnicity? Should it?
2. What is the point of education? Should it broaden students' minds, or should it focus on practical results? Is it more worthwhile to learn about interesting things you may never use, or to learn practical things, even if they're less exciting?
3. Arnold thought art should be a "civilizing agent." What does he mean by that? Is it patronizing to think that art should improve people? Should art shock, anger, calm, or excite people? Write a paper discussing your views of the purpose of art today, using specific examples.
4. One criticism of Arnold's poetry was that he did not deal with contemporary issues. Does poetry have to be contemporary to be effective? Research three poets from different eras, and write a paper examining how—or whether—their time period affects their current relevance.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Anxiety about the rapidly changing world characterized much of Victorian literature and is a theme echoed in Arnold's poetry. He evokes feelings of isolation, loneliness, and fear of the future. Recent scientific discoveries made people question religion's place in their lives, but without religion, people are essentially alone. Here are some other works that examine feelings of isolation and emptiness:

Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger. Three days in the life of an alienated teenage boy, who rebels against the smug adult world.

Lament for the Dorsets by Al Purdy. Elegy for a civilization that died out because it was unable to survive in changing conditions.

Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert. A middle-class woman struggles to find fulfillment through a realization of her romantic fantasies of love and wealth.

Shizuko's Daughter by Kyoko Mori. Growing up in Japan, a girl is lonely, partly because she does not relate to others who accept their status in life without questioning it.

Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse. A wealthy yet spiritually empty Hindu goes on a quest to explore the deepest meaning of life and the self.

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■ François-Marie Arouet

SEE *Voltaire*

▣ Juan José Arreola

BORN: 1918, Ciudad Guzman, Jalisco, Mexico

DIED: 2001, Guadalajara, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Bestiaries (1958)

Cofabulario and Other Inventions (1962)

The Fair (1963)

Overview

Juan José Arreola was outstanding among the generation of young writers who transformed the Mexican short story in the mid-twentieth century. He wrote satirical and boldly irreverent Modernist works that treat themes of universal consequence, breaking with the Mexican tradition of realistic literature that focuses on native themes and subjects. In his writings, Arreola comments on the absurdity of life and attacks hypocrisy, complacency, religiosity, commercialism, and materialism, as well as the possibility of harmony between the sexes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Brief Acting Career and Nervous Breakdown

Arreola was the fourth of fourteen children born to a deeply religious family in Zapotlan el Grande (now Ciudad Guzman), in west central Mexico. As a child, he demonstrated an excellent memory and an interest in literature, but he was forced to end his formal schooling



Juan José Arreola *Arreola, Juan Jose, photograph. AP Images.*

at the age of twelve to become a bookbinder's apprentice. He worked a series of jobs in Zapotlan before moving to Mexico City, where he enrolled in the Instituto de Bellas Artes to study acting in 1939.

During his time in the capital, Arreola was also writing and becoming acquainted with a group of young Mexican writers. He collaborated with Juan Rulfo in the creation of the short-lived literary journal *Pan* in the early forties, and in 1943 published his first nationally recognized story, "Hizo el bien mientras vivio." Arreola's acting provided the opportunity for him to travel to France on a fellowship in 1945, but his stay in Europe was brief, cut short by symptoms of a nervous disorder. He was back in Mexico City the following year, working in an editorial position at the Fondo de Cultura Economica.

Arreola Turns to Writing Arreola continued his writing during this period, publishing *Varia invención*, a collection of stories, in 1949. The work elicited almost no response from critics, although it was noticed and read in the literary circles of Mexico City. However, his next collection of stories, *Confabulario* (1962), published three years later, inspired generally positive comment. *La hora de todos*, his first play, was performed in 1953 and published the next year, followed by a series of prose sketches called *Punta de plata*, together with illustrations by artist Hector Xavier, in 1958. This latter work was expanded and renamed *Bestiaries* and appeared, along with almost everything else he had previously published, in the *Confabulario and Other Inventions* of 1962.

Career Takes Off In 1963, Arreola wrote his only novel, *The Fair*, a work often cited as one of his most significant literary accomplishments. That same year he was awarded the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize. In 1964, he edited the anthologies *Los Presentes* and *El Unicornio*. In addition, he accepted a professorship at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Eight years later, he completed *Palíndrome*, which includes his second play, *Tercera llamada tercera! o empesamos sin usted*. Arreola's production of new fiction dropped off after *Palíndrome*, as he focused his attention on lecturing and became involved in television. In 1973, Arreola published *La palabra educación*, and in 1976, *Inventario*. Years later a literary study followed—*Ramón López Velarde: Una lectura parcial de Juan José Arreola* (1988). With this book Arreola pays homage to a poet he recognizes as an important presence in his works: "Mis búsquedas, mis disparates y mis fortunas surgen de López Velarde" (My search, my nonsense and my fortune come from López Velarde).

The Favorite Son of Guadalajara Toward the end of his career Arreola received numerous accolades for his contributions to Mexican literature. In 1969, Arreola was recognized by the José Clemente Orozco Cultural Group of Ciudad Guzmán. In 1979, he received the National Prize in Letters (*Premio Nacional en Letras*)

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arreola's famous contemporaries include:

Graham Greene (1904–1991): English novelist who wrote in a range of genres, including the Western and religious novels.

Jorge Amado (1912–2001): Brazilian novelist whose works are set in the Bahia region of northeastern Brazil and reveal the author's fascination with the rich cultural heritage of Bahia's inhabitants.

Jacques-Yves Cousteau (1910–1997): French explorer, ecologist, and inventor responsible for co-developing the aqua-lung, an important scuba diving device.

Mother Theresa (1910–1997): Albanian nun who won the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1997, for her humanitarian work.

Paul Tibbets (1915–2007): American Army Air Corps pilot who flew the airplane that dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

in Mexico City. In 1989, he was awarded the Jalisco Prize in Letters and in 1992 the *Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe Juan Rulfo* Prize. In 1997, he received the Alfonso Reyes Prize; and in 1998, the Ramón López Velarde Prize.

In 1999, on his eightieth birthday, Arreola was named favorite son of Guadalajara, where he died two years later.

Works in Literary Context

Although he wrote in a variety of genres, Arreola is best known for his short stories and sketches, which have been praised for their stylistic originality and philosophical sophistication. Ranging from one-page vignettes and brief, comic pieces to apocryphal biographies of historical figures and existential short stories, his works demonstrate his wry and satirical humor, as well as his deep cynicism and pervasive sense of absurdity. Arreola's work was influenced by authors including Giovanni Papini, Marcel Schwob, Franz Kafka, and Borges, among others.

Allegory, Cynicism, and Satire The vignettes of Arreola's *Bestiaries* combine allegory, cynicism, and satire, displaying human foibles in a series of animals—among them a rhinoceros, a boa constrictor, and a hippopotamus. His tone in these works, ostensibly that of an objective naturalist, masks a clever allegory, which satirizes human vanity, destructiveness, and insensitivity and criticizes the state of sexual relations between women and men. Of this bestiary, Margaret Mason and Yulan Washburn have written, "[Arreola] regards animals as a mirror in which man sees himself reflected. Man's qualities and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Arreola's *Bestiaries* includes a number of animals that have human characteristics. In art, the attribution of human qualities to animals (and, indeed, inanimate objects and even forces of nature, like thunderstorms) is called "anthropomorphism." The technique is extremely common throughout the history of literature, dating back at least as far as the representation of Greek Gods as thunderclouds, bulls, and snakes. Here are a few more examples of anthropomorphism in art:

Aesop's Fables (c. sixth century B.C.E.), a collection of stories by Aesop. This work, though quite old, features stories still told today, including "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and "The Tortoise and the Hare."

Animal Farm (1945), a novel by George Orwell. A satire of the Soviet government, *Animal Farm* uses animals to represent different important historical figures from the Soviet Union.

The Rabbits (2003), a children's book by John Marsden. Marsden and illustrator Shaun Tan presented an allegorical depiction of the effects of colonization and environmental degradation.

defects, both spiritual and physical, are accentuated in beasts." The allegorical nature of Arreola's writings is also evident in one of his most famous short stories, "The Switchman." In this tale the traveler X—attempts to make his way along a national railroad system that seems to obey no laws of rational order. The switchman who explains the workings of the railroad describes areas where one of the rails does not exist, false facades of stations, chasms without bridges and the unlikely chance of X—ever reaching his destination, the town of T—. The work is seen as a comment on the inadequacy of Mexico's transportation system, as well as an exploration of the inescapable absurdity of human existence.

Absurdity The absurdity in Arreola's short stories appears with different modifications. In "A Reputation" everyday life is depicted, but the story is nonetheless set on a bus where the protagonist sees himself as the hero and savior of the women who ride the bus. "Parable of the Exchange" presents another situation with absurd elements: a merchant arrives in a certain town to trade old wives for new ones. The character that narrates the story does not trade his, and thus he is not a victim of the deception suffered by the husbands who are dazzled by the mirage of the promised exchange.

Contradictory Attitudes Toward Women Men's attitudes toward women are contradictory throughout Arreola's canon, as is the case in "A Tamed Woman." A

woman's inhuman status as the object of a street show ends at the conclusion of the story when the narrator values and honors her. The strong feminine characters can never be subjugated, as illustrated in "The Bird Spider," which prefigures his short-story collection *Bestiaries* with its treatment of the relationships between animals and human beings. "The Bird Spider" is distinctly a horror story, told by a narrator who is, or at least feels, caught between life and death. The anguish of being trapped by a spider reminds him of the feeling he previously experienced with a woman, with whom he was also unable to live. Absurdity is again present: the main character has bought the spider and taken it home. Arreola's prose creates a poetic vision out of a situation where horror is established from the very first lines.

Influences on Contemporary Latin-American Literature *Inventario*, a series of reflections on culture, was published in 1976; years later a literary study followed—*Ramon Lopez Velarde: Una lectura parcial de Juan José Arreola* (1988). With this book, Arreola pays homage to a poet he recognizes as an important presence in his works: "My search, my nonsense and my fortune come from Lopez Velarde." Indeed, Mexican literature has two major figures in these two provincial writers: Lopez Velarde in poetry and Arreola in prose. The artistry of Arreola's writing and his work as a teacher and guide of various generations of writers make Juan José Arreola one of the most important figures in contemporary Mexican and Latin-American literature.

Works in Critical Context

Although Arreola wrote and published in a variety of genres, he has received little critical acclaim for his novel and his drama. Indeed, Arreola's career and reputation rest mostly upon his short stories, which have engendered nearly universally positive responses, which have been praised for their subtle beauty, their scathing satire, and their insightful allegorical elements. His point of view has been described as existential—emphasizing the emotional isolation of human beings and the irrationality of human existence—and decidedly modern; his friend Seymour Menton has called him "a true man of the twentieth century, an eclectic who at will can draw upon the best of all who have preceded him in order to create truly masterful works of art which in turn will be seized upon by others."

Confabulario and Other Inventions Arreola's best-known collection of short stories and sketches is *Confabulario*, which was first published in 1952 and, after being expanded twice, was published in English translation as *Confabulario and Other Inventions*. Selections from *Confabulario* were also included in a later Spanish collection, *Estas paginas mias*, which was published in 1985. Among the pieces reviewers have lauded are "Verily, Verily I Say Unto You" and "The Disciple." The story "Verily, Verily I Say Unto You" alludes to the

biblical warning that a camel can pass through the eye of a needle more easily than a rich person can enter heaven. In the tale a scientist devises a costly method—which would be financed by wealthy people—to disintegrate a camel and thus allow it to pass through a needle. The scientist reasons that if he and the rich people can make the camel go through the needle, they will go to heaven. In his introduction to *Confabulario and Other Inventions*, translator George D. Schade described Arreola's often cynical portrayals of human shallowness and greed, such as the one in "Verily, Verily I Say Unto You": "With mordant descriptions, pungent attacks, or sly irony, [Arreola] shows how silly mankind is, how outrageous man's behavior and antics are, how one is at the mercy of a world and society that more often seems to care for what is trivial and ephemeral than for what is essential."

"The Disciple" reveals Arreola's artistic, rather than social, concerns; in the story, an art teacher draws an outline for his pupil and calls the outline "beauty." The teacher then creates a splendid picture by filling in the outline, but he explains that he has destroyed beauty and subsequently burns the picture. Menton considered the story a reflection of Arreola's sentiments about literature as well as other forms of art. The reviewer explained in his *Hispania* article, as quoted in *Modern Latin American Literature*, "Arreola's message is, of course, that true beauty lies in suggestion only. Once a work of art goes beyond suggesting beauty, it loses its charm." With the looseness of plot and the ephemeral portrayal of action and character in Arreola's short stories, it is clear that his work abides by this simple but difficult-to-achieve description of beauty.

Indeed, critics have most often responded positively to his short stories—succinct, universalizing pieces that have evoked comparisons to those of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. In his shorter works are found the finest examples of "Arreola's fertile imagination and his sense of form and humor," which according to Russel M. Cluff and L. Howard Quackenbush "have immortalized him as one of Mexico's foremost writers of prose."

The Fair *The Fair*, Arreola's sole novel, shares certain affinities with his other writings. Like many of his shorter works, *The Fair* lacks the well-defined characters and plots of conventional fiction. Instead, the novel develops from related and unrelated scenes, partial conversations, and portions of letters and diaries; it suggests plot and character instead of depicting them directly. "Yet the totality of the work has body, literary development, and novelistic scope," suggests critic Joseph Sommers. The novel's fragmented parts coalesce, Sommers explains, to portray the life-cycle of a Mexican village, from its founding in colonial times to its deterioration in the present age. *The Fair* concludes with a fabulous display of fireworks set off by vandals, which, instead of providing harmless entertainment, kills several onlookers. "If this symbolism implies anguish and cynicism," writes Sommers,

"these qualities are mediated by the author's understanding and sympathy for the complexity of human problems. Arreola's sensitive use of language . . . and his wry tone of bitter humor are the basis for the literary unity of this novel."

Although early reaction to *The Fair* was mostly negative, the novel's publication did much to address a stereotype from the mid-fifties that labeled Arreola an overly cosmopolitan writer uninterested in Mexican themes. Over the years, however, the novel has achieved greater esteem.

Responses to Literature

1. Both *Animal Farm* (1945) by George Orwell and *Bestiaries* use anthropomorphism to satire human beings. Read these texts and then write a short essay in which you explore the effect achieved by the use of anthropomorphism in each text. In your response, consider the following question: How would the text work differently if the authors chose to use humans, rather than animals, as their main characters? In other words, why use animals?
2. Arreola's *The Fair* has been described as "chaotic." Read the novel. Then, in a discussion with your peers, try to explain why the text is so chaotic in form. How does the form complement the content? What is Arreola trying to achieve with the chaotic style of the text?
3. It has been suggested that beauty is best captured in the outline—in suggestions of it, not in an attempt to display it fully. Arreola himself says as much in the short story "The Disciple." Respond to this idea in a discussion with your peers. Consider these questions: What do you find beautiful? In what ways does this conception fit with Arreola's? In what ways does it differ?
4. Give anthropomorphism a shot. Write a short story or a scene for a movie or play in which at least one of your characters is an animal or inanimate object that has human characteristics. Then, reflect upon this process. Why did you choose this animal or inanimate object? Why did you choose to give it the human characteristics you chose to give it?

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Antonin Artaud

BORN: 1896, Marseilles, France

DIED: 1948, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama theory, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Fountain of Blood (1925)

The Theater of Cruelty (1933)

The Cenci (1935)

The Theater and Its Double (1938)

The Death of Satan (1953)



Antonin Artaud Antonin Artaud as Jean Massieu, photograph. © Henry Guttmann / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Overview

Perhaps the twentieth century's most original and controversial dramatist, Antonin Artaud created works that are complex, difficult, at times obscure, and often beyond categorization. Considered among the most influential figures in the evolution of modern drama theory, Artaud associated himself with surrealist writers, artists, and experimental theater groups in Paris during the 1920s. When political differences resulted in his break from the surrealists, he founded the Theatre Alfred Jarry with Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron. Together they hoped to create a forum for works that would radically change French theater. Artaud, especially, expressed disdain for Western theater of the day, criticizing the ordered plot and scripted language his contemporaries typically used to convey ideas, instead championing a return to the primitive and ritualistic in drama.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Effects of Illness Artaud was born in Marseilles, the son of a prosperous shipfitter and his wife. Throughout his childhood and adolescence Artaud suffered ill health, chiefly headaches that were believed the result of an acute case of meningitis in 1901. Meningitis, which is a swelling of the protective membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord, was first described in detail at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Until the first successful treatments were developed by Simon Flexner in 1913—twelve years after Artaud's battle with the disorder began—the mortality rate for those contracting meningitis was as high as 90 percent.

As a young man, Artaud attended the Marist school in Marseilles, where he founded a student journal in which he published his own poetry. In 1915, suffering from depression, headaches, and other ailments, he sought treatment at a local sanatorium.

At the same time, Europe had erupted in war. Beginning with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe aligned with Germany on one side and the Allied powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. France provided over 8 million troops to the cause, two-thirds of which were either killed or wounded during combat. In 1916, Artaud was drafted into the army but given a medical discharge a few months later due to his mental instability. He spent two years in a Swiss hospital, where his artistic tendencies were encouraged as part of his therapy.

After Artaud's condition had improved, he moved to Paris under the care of Dr. Edouard Toulouse, a psychoanalyst and editor of the literary magazine *Demain*. While being treated by Toulouse in a hospital, Artaud was encouraged to express himself in poetry, which the doctor later published in *Demain*. Despite the efforts of

psychotherapy, Artaud's life and his work reflected his mental afflictions and were further complicated by his dependence on narcotics.

In 1823, while helping edit *Demain*, Artaud submitted several poems to Jacques Riviere, the editor of the *Nouvelle revue française*. Although Riviere rejected these works as incomprehensible, he did publish Artaud's correspondence, which comprised a defense of his works and a statement of his poetic theory, as well as a disclosure of the mental problems that afflicted him.

Involvement with the Theater In Paris, Artaud became fascinated by the theater, and he joined a series of experimental theater groups, including that of Charles Dullin at the Theatre de l'Atelier. His associates in Paris included many of the artists and writers of the surrealist group, and for a time Artaud was identified with that movement. However, Artaud, with Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron, was repudiated by the surrealists when he refused to embrace Marxism, which called for workers to unite against the ruling class to end their own exploitation. Together, the three founded the Theatre Alfred Jarry in 1926, stating that their intention was "to contribute by strictly theatrical means to the ruin of the theater as it exists today in France." Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Artaud worked in theater and film, all the while growing increasingly dependent on narcotics, which he found relieved the symptoms of his mental disorders.

In 1931 he attended a performance by a Balinese theater troupe and was fascinated by the predominance of movement over speech in their art, something he later sought to emulate in his own theatrical works. His essays describing his philosophy of theater, particularly his idea of the "theater of cruelty," were written throughout this time and published in the groundbreaking book *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1938. In 1936 he traveled to Mexico to study the Tarahumaras, a tribe of Native Americans living in the Sierra Madre whose religious rituals include the use of peyote, a hallucinogenic drug derived from cactus. Artaud's experiences among the Tarahumaras had a profound influence on his perception of the value of mystical religious experience, and he later incorporated this understanding into his work in the theater. He subsequently became interested in Irish mythology as well, and traveled to Ireland in 1937 in possession of a walking stick he believed to have once belonged to St. Patrick. Although details of the event are unclear, Artaud was deported after causing a disturbance in a Dublin monastery. Upon his arrival in France he was judged mentally ill and institutionalized in Rouen. Artaud spent nine of his last eleven years confined in mental asylums and died of cancer in 1948.

Works in Literary Context

Considered among the most influential figures in the evolution of modern drama theory, Artaud made great

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Artaud's famous contemporaries include:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): This German playwright, stage director, and poet is credited with, among many things, epic theater.

Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936): Pirandello was an Italian novelist, playwright, and poet whose tragic farces are at the forefront of modern theater.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Stalin who was the de facto dictator responsible for what is today known as Stalinism.

Victoria Woodhull (1838–1937): When she ran for president of the United States in 1872, Woodhull, a suffragist, advocated many things taken for granted today: the eight-hour work day, graduated income tax, social welfare programs, and profit sharing.

impact with his development of the "theater of cruelty," which has influenced playwrights from Samuel Beckett to Edward Albee. He challenges Western thought and Western modes of representation by questioning of the origins of language and the roles of art and metaphysics in contemporary societies. In addition, his exploration of oriental theater and mysticism and the changes he brought to the French stage place him as a leader in modern French theater.

Wake Up and Shake Up Most scholars believe that Artaud's most noted contribution to drama theory is his idea of "theater of cruelty," an intense theatrical experience that combines elaborate props, magic tricks, special lighting, primitive gestures and articulations, with appalling plots of rape, torture, and murder to shock the audience into confronting the base elements of life. Based on Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem by the same name, *The Cenci* (*Les Cenci*, 1935), Artaud's play about a man who rapes his own daughter, and is then murdered by men the girl hires to eliminate him, typifies Artaud's theater of cruelty. Another example is *The Fountain of Blood* (*Le jet de sang*, 1925), a farce about the creation of the world and its destruction by humans, especially women. Like many of Artaud's other plays, scenarios, and prose, *The Cenci* and *The Fountain of Blood* were designed to challenge conventional, civilized values and bring out the natural, barbaric instincts Artaud felt lurked beneath the refined, human facade.

While aspiring to eliminate the four-walled performance space and place the spectator in the center of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Most critics believe that Artaud's most notable contribution to dramatic theory is his theater of cruelty, an intense theatrical experience meant to shock the audience into confronting the base elements of life. Here are a few works by other writers who employ similar stunning techniques:

Waiting for Godot (1953), by Samuel Beckett. Beckett's play, greatly influenced by Artaud, is a stark and daunting exploration of human cruelty, human tolerance, and human perception.

The Elementary Particles (2001), by Michael Houellebecq. The controversial novel recently has been described as "transcending faddish success."

Marat/Sade (1963), by Peter Weiss. In the tradition of Artaud, this drama is a bloody, provocative examination of human suffering.

action, Artaud envisioned and advocated in his writings a "langue théâtral pur" (pure theatrical language) that was free of verbal discourse. This new approach, he noted, would alter the influence of the playwright, who would take a secondary role in the representation of his plays. As described in the preface of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Artaud's ultimate mission was "réveiller et secouer" (to wake up and shake up) spectators and make them an active participant. He sought to produce a cathartic experience, a trance; the experience was to act as a revelation, uncovering the mysteries of the psyche. Additionally, Artaud sought to break from Western theater and radically alter French theater with the theories he recorded in *The Theater and Its Double*. Working from his experience with Balinese ritual theater and dance, he theorized about the functions of the human body and the ways in which theater could transform the body and allow it to transcend its ordinary form. He believed that the multiple facets of the body and its masks could take on many meanings and represent the "doubles" of theater.

Lasting Influence Artaud remains an important point of reference in the world of twentieth-century theater. A research center focusing on Artaud was established at the University of Paris III in 1997, led by Olivier Penot-Lacassagne and a new generation of young researchers. The mission of this research center is to develop a comprehensive archival database dedicated to Artaud studies. The center started a new journal in 2000 called *Bulletin Antonin Artaud* meant to further illuminate Artaud's role in theater.

Artaud's influence, however, has extended beyond French and Western theater. He has had a marked impact on the work of experimentalists, performance artists, and writers and directors, including Joseph Chaikin, Karen Finley, Richard Foreman, Spalding Gray, Liz LeCompte, Charles Marowitz, and Sam Shepard. Artaud's work has inspired others outside of the literal theater, as modern-day artists from a variety of fields have named him specifically or alluded to Artaud as a significant inspiration: rockers Jim Morrison, Mötley Crüe, Christian Death, and Bauhaus; novelist and poet Charles Bukowski; and philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Works in Critical Context

Labeled at once as a genius, a madman, and a "poète maudit" (a cursed poet), Artaud continued to be a marginalized figure until the last years of his life. By the time of his death in 1948, Artaud was largely ignored by critics, who rarely moved beyond considering whether or not he was mad. When Artaud's works started to gain recognition in the 1960s, however, he quickly became a cult figure, a legend in the world of theater and art.

Theater of Cruelty Although Artaud's theater of cruelty was not widely embraced, his ideas have been the subject of many essays on modern theater, and many writers continue to study Artaud's concepts. Author George E. Wellwarth, for example, in *Drama Survey*, explained the theater of cruelty as "the impersonal, mindless—and therefore implacable—cruelty to which all men are subject. The universe with its violent natural forces was cruel in Artaud's eyes, and this cruelty, he felt, was the one single most important fact of which man must be aware. . . . Artaud's theater must be ecstatic. It must crush and hypnotize the onlooker's sense." Another description of the theater of cruelty was offered by Wallace Fowlie in an essay published in *Sewanee Review*. Fowlie wrote: "A dramatic presentation should be an act of initiation during which the spectator will be awed and even terrified. . . . During that experience of terror or frenzy . . . the spectator will be in a position to understand a new set of truths, superhuman in quality." About *The Fountain of Blood*, Albert Bermel captured the horrified yet intrigued response to the theater of cruelty: "All in all, *The Fountain of Blood* is a tragic, repulsive, impassioned farce, a marvelous wellspring for speculation, and a unique contribution to the history of the drama."

Mental Illness Many critics view Artaud's work and ideas through the lens of his mental illness. In *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision*, author Bettina L. Knapp wrote of the theorist's condition: "Artaud was unable to adapt to life; he could not relate to others; he was not even certain

of his own identity.” Knapp commented that “Artaud was in essence constructing an entire metaphysical system around his sickness, or, if you will, entering the realm of the mystic via his own disease. The focal point of his universe was himself and everything radiated from him outward.” Referring to Artaud’s “The Umbilicus of Limbo” (*L’ombilic des limbes* (1925), Knapp indicated Artaud “intended to ‘derange man,’ to take people on a journey ‘where they would never have consented to go.’” She further explained, “Since Artaud’s ideas concerning the dramatic arts were born from his sickness, he looked upon the theater as a curative agent; a means whereby the individual could come to the theater to be dissected, split and cut open first, and then healed.” Knapp also offered an explanation of Artaud’s popularity long after his death: “In his time, he was a man alienated from his society, divided within himself, a victim of inner and outer forces beyond his control. . . . The tidal force of his imagination and the urgency of his therapeutic quest were disregarded and cast aside as the ravings of a madman. . . . Modern man can respond to Artaud now because they share so many psychological similarities and affinities.” Similar words were issued in a *Horizon* essay by Sanche de Gramont, who wrote of Artaud: “If he was mad, he welcomed his madness. . . . To him the rational world was deficient; he welcomed the hallucinations that abolished reason and gave meaning to his alienation. He purposely placed himself outside the limits in which sanity and madness can be opposed, and gave himself up to a private world of magic and irrational visions.”

Responses to Literature

1. What are your primary feelings as you read *The Cenci*? Do you feel angry? Happy? Horrified? Like laughing? Insulted? Hurt? Frustrated? Stimulated? Bored? What in the work do you think elicits an emotional response? Consider elements of theme as well as issues of morality. Compare the impact on audiences of *The Cenci* with that of the art and entertainment of our current society.
2. Many drama teachers consider Artaud’s work particularly difficult to teach. If you were a teacher, would you include Artaud in your lesson plan? Why or why not?

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Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis

BORN: 1839, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

DIED: 1908, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, plays, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Epitaph of a Small Winner (1881)

Quincas Borba (1891)

Dom Casmurro (1899)

Overview

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis is thought by many to be Brazil’s greatest writer. Although he wrote in many genres, he achieved his greatest literary successes in the novel and short-story forms. A complex blend of psychological realism and symbolism, Machado’s fiction is marked by pessimism, sardonic wit, an innovative use of irony, and an ambiguous narrative technique.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Success and a Change in Perspective
Machado was born in Rio de Janeiro on June 21, 1839, to a Portuguese mother who died when he was ten; his father was a house painter. Machado had epilepsy and a speech impediment, which are thought to have made him very self-conscious. Machado did not receive a formal education, and most of his learning occurred while working as a printer’s apprentice. During these years, Machado began writing poems and stories. When Machado began



Joaquim Machado de Assis *Machado de Assis, Joaquim, photograph.*
The Library of Congress.

working as a proofreader at a bookstore, he met many prominent literary figures. These contacts helped Machado get his first works published, which launched his career as a writer. He was an early success, and his work was widely acclaimed by the time he was twenty-five.

In 1860 he entered the civil service, to which he dedicated himself, and he eventually attained the directorship of the Ministry of Agriculture. Over the next decade, while working for the ministry, Machado wrote mostly poetry and several comedies—drama being his first literary passion—before he gave more serious attention to narrative fiction.

In 1879 Machado suffered a serious illness, and the long convalescence allowed him time to change his worldview. When he returned to writing, he began a novel radically different from anything he had done before. His previous works of sentimental Romanticism gave way to mordant irony. His first novel in this new period was *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1881), translated under the title of *Epitaph of a Small Winner* in 1952. The book's narrator is deceased and is writing his memoirs as a man who has already arrived on the other side. Ten years later, Machado wrote *Quincas Borba* (translated under the title of *Philosopher or Dog?*), and his next novel, *Dom Casmurro*, was written in 1900.

The Brazilian Academy of Letters The formation of the Brazilian Academy of Letters began after the pro-

clamation of the republic in 1889. The best writers in Brazil, including Machado, were brought together to contribute to *Revista Brasileira* (Brazilian Review). Within this group, there was a movement to establish an academy along the lines of the famous Académie française. When the academy was officially constituted in 1897, Machado was named the first president in perpetuity, a title he held until his death on September 29, 1908.

Works in Literary Context

Among Latin American fiction writers of the nineteenth century, Machado is without peer. He emerged from undistinguished biographical and literary origins with a brilliant and subtle voice that set him apart from his contemporaries and pointed the way to the Ibero-American literary boom of the twentieth century. Though Machado's first novels and poetry were characteristically Romantic, the maturing writer became more contemporary. Machado could see that Romanticism was past its prime, but he had problems with the values of realism and naturalism so prevalent among the Brazilian writers of his day. Instead, he sought narrative models from the eighteenth century, especially those involving a meandering, free-associative style.

According to the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, Machado's adherence to the early traditions of the novel made him the legitimate heir of Miguel de Cervantes. Paradoxically, Machado's devotion to past models made him an important precursor of future trends. Through self-reference, irony, the rejection of strict verisimilitude, and an emphasis on the relativity of events and actions, the Brazilian author, more than any other Latin American of his century, cleared ground for Jorge Luis Borges and his successors.

Short Fiction with a Broad Range Having a much broader range than his novels, Machado's short fiction is concerned with the destructiveness of time, the nature of madness, the isolation of the individual, conflicts between self-love and love for others, and human inadequacy. Often humorous, Machado's stories portray the thoughts and feelings, rather than the actions, of characters who often exemplify Brazilian social types. Machado's stories deal satirically with cultural institutions and contemporary social conditions. His short fiction favors self-revealing dialogue and monologue rather than description or narration.

Unlike his novels, very few of Machado's more than two hundred short stories have been translated into English, but those that have represent his most accomplished works in the genre. These include "The Psychiatrist," which struggles with the twin questions of who is insane and how one can tell; "Alexandrian Tale," a satirical attack on the tendency to use science to cure human problems; "The Companion," one of Machado's most anthologized tales, in which a man hired to care for a

cantankerous old invalid is driven to murder him instead; and “Midnight Mass,” regarded by most as his best single story, which relates the events surrounding an ambiguous love affair between the young narrator and a married woman.

Works in Critical Context

Some critics have interpreted Machado’s narrative art as being part of the realistic trend in literature, but most have identified his work with the modern movement, linking the style and technique of his fiction to writers such as Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Thomas Mann. Other scholars have examined Machado’s works as an influence in the construction of a postcolonial Brazilian national identity and for indications of the author’s stand on racism and civil rights. As international readers have slowly discovered his fiction through translation, most agree that Machado’s narrative art is the work of a largely unrecognized genius.

Outside his native Brazil, Machado’s short stories are relatively unknown and consequently have received little international critical attention. This lack of recognition is attributed in part to the fact that Portuguese is not widely accepted as a literary language, and Brazilian literature, in particular, makes up a small part of the traditional Western canon. According to Earl Fitz, “[H]ad [Machado] written in French, German, or English, for example, [he] would be as well-known today as Flaubert, Goethe, or Shakespeare.”

Epitaph of a Small Winner Machado’s best-known novel, *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, is often cited as the first modern novel of the Western Hemisphere. It appeared in installments in 1880 and was published as a book the following year. With the early installments it became clear that Machado was finished with his previous models of sentimental Romanticism; irony, wit, and pessimism had become his new mediums. The unobtrusive third-person narrators of the past were replaced by a brash and impudent first-person narrator, interacting aggressively with the reader.

Machado’s readers, including his close friends, apparently had a hard time knowing what to make of *Epitaph of a Small Winner*. Capistrano de Abreu went so far as to ask if it was a novel at all. Noteworthy is Machado’s response to that question, which appears in the preface to the third edition of the novel. Rather than directly answering the question, Machado quotes his narrator, saying that it would seem to be a novel to some but not to others. Responding to remarks about the book’s pessimism, Machado again quotes his narrator, who characterizes his own account as pessimistic. Machado ends by saying, “I will not say more, so as not to become involved in the analysis of a dead man, who painted himself and others in the way that to him seemed most fitting.” Machado seems to have tried to draw an important line

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Machado’s famous contemporaries include:

- José de Alencar** (1829–1877): Brazilian novelist whose works advocated a fiercely independent nationalism.
- Giosuè Carducci** (1835–1907): Italian poet widely considered one of Italy’s greatest writers.
- Rosalía de Castro** (1837–1885): Galician poet who is considered to be one of Spain’s best poets.
- Thomas Hardy** (1840–1928): English writer whose poetry was part of the naturalist movement.
- Claude Monet** (1840–1926): French artist who was one of the founders of impressionism.
- Stéphane Mallarmé** (1842–1898): French poet and critic who influenced the development of Dadaism.
- Arthur Sullivan** (1842–1900): English composer best known for his collaborations with William Gilbert on comic light operas.

here. He wanted his readers not to look to him, the author, for the “real meaning” of the book. The book has a narrator, and the opinions expressed in the book are his. As that narrator himself says on the opening page, “The work in itself is everything.”

Dom Casmurro Many critics feel that *Dom Casmurro* is the finest novel ever written in both Americas. The history of the reception of *Dom Casmurro* has involved diametrically opposed ways of reading the novel. The narrative is told by a digressive and eccentric first-person narrator, Bento Santiago, who has grown old and now finds himself alone and uneasy. He vows to recover the happier moments of his youth by writing a memoir. The narrator thus recounts the adolescent romance he experienced with Capitu, the girl next door. The sweet love story turns into bitterness, however, when after several years of marriage and the birth of a son, Bento becomes convinced that Capitu has been unfaithful to him with his friend from the seminary.

Published reviews and analyses show that for generations readers accepted the narrator’s perspective at face value, assuming that Capitu was guilty of adultery. The tide of opinion began to change in 1960, with Helen Caldwell’s *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis*, in which she claims that Capitu is the innocent victim of her husband’s jealous and domineering mind. That view gained favor, particularly since Roberto Schwarz’s “discovery” of Caldwell in *Duas meninas* (1997), and it seems to have become the prevailing opinion in Brazil. Both the reading of Capitu as adulteress and the reading of her as innocent victim,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Machado's novels reject the attempt at an objective, truthful narrative in favor of exploring the relativity of events and actions. Here are some other works that take a similar approach:

Don Quixote (1605, 1615), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. This two-volume novel, often seen as a satire of orthodoxy, truth, and veracity, follows the largely imagined adventures of a farcical knight.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. This short horror story recounts the murder of an elderly man, but the reader is unsure whether the account is true or the ranting of a madman.

The Two Deaths of Quincas Wateryell (1959), a novel by Jorge Amado. This novel shows how two different groups of people compete over the memory of a single, unusual man who has recently died.

Seven Types of Ambiguity (2003), a novel by Elliot Perlman. This novel tells the story of a peculiar crime from the perspective of seven different characters who were directly or indirectly involved.

however, are partial and unbalanced. The more critically acute reading is that Machado wrote an ambiguous novel in which the truth of Santiago's claims against his wife cannot possibly be determined with any degree of confidence.

Responses to Literature

1. Critics disagree about whether Machado's works should be considered realist or modernist. Which designation seems more appropriate? Does Machado defy categorization? Why or why not?
2. Read one of Machado's short stories and discuss the reliability of the narrator. Discuss how the narrator's reliability affects the reader's interpretation of the plot.
3. Machado is noted for creating uncertainty and ambiguity in his novels and short stories. Write a story that re-creates this kind of ambiguity.
4. Machado avoided commenting on the "real meaning" of his books. He asserted instead that "the work in itself is everything." Write an essay supporting this assertion.

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🏠 Miguel Angel Asturias

BORN: 1899, Guatemala City, Guatemala

DIED: 1974, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Guatemalan

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The President (1946)

Men of Maize (1949)

The Strong Wind (1950)

The Green Pope (1954)

The Eyes of the Interred (1960)

Overview

Guatemalan statesman and Nobel laureate Miguel Angel Asturias is best known for the novels *The President*, about a Latin American dictator, and *Men of Maize*, about the conflicts between Guatemalan native Indians and land-exploiting farmers, as well as for a trilogy of novels about the Latin American banana industry. His writing—an extensive canon of fiction, essays, and poetry—often blends Mayan myth and folklore with surrealism and satiric social commentary, and is considered to evidence his compassion for those unable to escape political or economic domination.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life Affected by Dictator Asturias was born in 1899 in Guatemala City, Guatemala, just one year after the country came under the dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Asturias's father, a supreme court magistrate, lost his position in 1903 when he refused to convict students who protested against Estrada Cabrera's increasingly totalitarian regime. Consequently, Asturias's family was forced to leave the city for a rural area in Guatemala, where the young Asturias's interest in his country's native Mayan and peasant customs perhaps originated. Although his family returned to Guatemala City four years later, Asturias had nonetheless suffered the first of many personal disruptions that autocracy and political unrest in Guatemala would cause throughout his career.



Miguel Angel Asturias Pierre Boulat / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Political Activities Force Exile After attending secondary school, Asturias entered the Universidad de San Carlos to study law. As a college student, he was politically active, participating in demonstrations that helped to depose Estrada Cabrera and then serving as court secretary at the dictator's trial in the early 1920s. Asturias also helped to found both a student association of Guatemala's Unionist party and the Universidad Popular de Guatemala, an organization that provided free evening instruction for the country's poor.

In 1923, as the military (which had helped oust Cabrera) gained strength and Guatemala's political climate worsened, Asturias earned his law degree and shortly thereafter founded the weekly newspaper *Tiempos Nuevos* (*New Times*), in which he and several others began publishing articles decrying the new militarist government. Asturias fled the country the same year, his own life in danger after a colleague on the paper's writing staff was assaulted.

Began Literary Career Abroad Asturias lived for the next five months in London, spending much of his time learning about Mayan Indian culture at the British Museum. He moved then to Paris, where he supported himself for several years as European correspondent for Mexican and Central American newspapers while he

studied ancient Central American Indian civilizations at the Sorbonne. He completed a dissertation on Mayan religion and translated sacred Indian texts, including the *Popol Vuh* and the *Anales de los Xabil* (*Annals of the Xabil*).

In Paris, Asturias also began his literary career. Associating with such avant-garde French poets as André Breton and Paul Valéry, Asturias was introduced to the techniques and themes of the surrealist literary movement, which would become important elements of his writing style. In 1925, Asturias privately published *Rayito de estrella*, a book of poetry. His *Legends of Guatemala*, a critically acclaimed collection of native stories and legends recalled from childhood, garnered him the 1931 Sylla Monsegur.

Changes in Regimes Offered New Possibilities

Asturias returned to Guatemala in 1933, where he spent the next ten years working as a journalist and poet while the country operated under the military dictatorship of Jorge Ubico Castaneda. Asturias entered politics in 1942 with his election as deputy to the Guatemalan national congress. Three years later, after the fall of the Castaneda regime and the installation of the new president, Juan José Arevalo, Asturias joined the Guatemalan diplomatic service. The more liberal policies of the new government proved important for the author, both politically and artistically. Under Arevalo's rule, Asturias served in several ambassadorial posts in Mexico and Argentina from the early 1940s until 1952. In addition, the more tolerant political atmosphere made it possible for Asturias to publish his first novel, *The President*, in 1946.

Three years after the publication of *The President*, while serving as Guatemalan cultural attaché in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Asturias completed and published the first of his novels explicitly to evoke the mythology of his country's ancient past. Translated as *Men of Maize* in 1975, the story unfolds from the point of view of the indigenous people, whose ancient beliefs teach that the first human was made from corn and that the grain is therefore sacred and must be grown only for tribal use. When their resistance leader, Gaspar Ilom, is assassinated, the people place a curse on their enemies, beginning a series of events that becomes part of the Mayan Indian mythological heritage.

Published Lauded "Banana Trilogy" During his diplomatic assignments in Argentina, Asturias also worked on what has come to be known to English-speaking readers as his "Banana Trilogy"—three novels about the Latin American banana industry. Consisting of *The Strong Wind*, *The Green Pope*, and *The Eyes of the Interred*, the trilogy focuses on the conflicts between the labor force in an unidentified country (taken again by critics to be Guatemala), and Tropical Banana, Inc., a North American conglomerate commonly accepted as a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Asturias's famous contemporaries include:

Estrada Cabrera (1857–1923): President of Guatemala from 1898 to 1920, a time when the United Fruit Company was a powerful political influence.

Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915): President of Mexico from 1876 to 1880 and 1884 to 1911 and a famous war hero.

Paul Valéry (1871–1945): French poet and philosopher whom Asturias befriended in Paris.

Juan Perón (1895–1974): Controversial Argentine president and founder of the authoritarian movement of Peronism.

André Breton (1896–1966): French writer considered one of the founders of surrealism.

portrait of the real-life United Fruit Company. Founded in the late nineteenth century by American Minor C. Keith, the United Fruit Company wielded much power in Guatemala and eventually became based there. The company corrupted every aspect of Guatemalan politics and government in the early 1900s, was supported by the dictators that ruled the country, and greatly oppressed the Guatemalan people until the late twentieth century. Although the “Banana Trilogy” was not as critically acclaimed as his first two novels, it earned Asturias the International Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union, which honored the work’s stance against capitalist imperialism.

Forced Back into Exile Working for the government of Arevalo’s successor Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1953, Asturias was sent as Guatemalan ambassador to El Salvador to try to prevent El Salvadoran rebels from invading Guatemala. Although he had enlisted the El Salvadoran government’s aid, the rebels, with backing from the United States, nonetheless invaded Guatemala and overthrew Arbenz Guzman. Because of his support for the defeated leader, Asturias was stripped of his citizenship and exiled in 1954. Asturias later incorporated details from these El Salvadoran events in his 1956 collection of stories titled *Weekend in Guatemala*.

Asturias lived in exile, working in Argentina as a journalist for the Caracas, Venezuela, newspaper *El Nacional* until 1962, when he traveled to Italy as part of a cultural exchange program. During this period he continued to write, completing scholarly studies and publishing lectures, children’s stories, and another novel. Asturias did not recover his Guatemalan citizenship until

the election of president Cesar Mendes Montenegro’s moderate government in 1966, when he accepted a job as French ambassador, the position in which he remained until 1970. In 1967, Asturias was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for the body of his work. On June 9, 1974, the author died from cancer of the intestine.

Works in Literary Context

Influenced by Indian and Spanish folklore as well as the often political and social upheaval he experienced firsthand in Guatemala, Asturias achieved worldwide fame because of his poetry and often poetic novels and short stories. He sensitively presented the culture of the Maya as well as that of greater Latin America. His masterful use of language, shaped by exposure to European ideas like surrealism, added to his power.

Mayan Myths Asturias’s poetry reflects the cultural duality that surrounded him in his formative years. There are poems, such as his sonnets, that only someone who was immersed in European culture could have written. There are also poems such as “Man of Water” and “Marimba Played by Indians” that only someone acquainted with Mayan culture could write. Asturias gained a firsthand acquaintance with Mayan Indian culture in early childhood as he listened to Lola Reyes, a Mayan servant in his home, tell traditional indigenous and mestizo tales; later, he read the ancient Mayan texts.

Political Oppression *The President* protests against dictatorship. Its setting is not specific but could reflect many Latin American countries of the mid-twentieth century. This novel portrays a prototypical military dictator and the repression, humiliation, unjust imprisonment, degradation, and even the murders of his opponents or of those who momentarily displease him. A nightmarish horror permeates this novel both in the scenes it depicts and in the actions it relates. Although many critics regard this novel as a representation of a generic Latin American dictatorship, it is also widely accepted that it is based on the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera, who controlled Guatemala for twenty years. This novel is responsible for Asturias’s fame throughout the Americas and eventually the world, because it is much more than just a novel of political criticism. There are passages of poetic language and, as in his poetry, legends and myths from Mayan culture.

Considered an early practitioner of magic realism, Asturias influenced the “Boom” generation of writers and many of the Latin American modernists who followed him.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have often praised Asturias’s work for its commitment to social causes and its innovative use of myth, legend, and surrealist techniques. However, his ever-popular works have undergone a critical reevaluation in the light of recent

literary theories, and taking into consideration the directions in which Latin American fiction has developed since his death in 1974. New scrutiny may result in a different vision of his contribution to world literature, but it is also clear that his place among the most important Latin American novelists of this century is assured.

The President In 1968, *The President* was acclaimed for portraying both totalitarian government and its damaging psychological effects. Asturias's stance against all forms of injustice in Guatemala caused critics to view the author as a compassionate spokesman for the oppressed. "Asturias... does not see the drama of his people from the outside, as a dilettante... but from the inside, as a participant," noted *Les Temps Modernes* contributor Manuel Tunon de Lara. And a *Times Literary Supplement* review, also commenting on Asturias's success in portraying the country's unique political circumstances, asserted that *El señor presidente* presents "Latin American problems according to their merits and not according to preconceived stereotypes."

Men of Maize While *Men of Maize* was coolly received at the time of its publication in 1949, many critics have come to view the work as Asturias's masterpiece. Reviewers especially admired the author's portrayal of the contrasting conceptions of the world. "At one level," noted *Washington Post Book World* reviewer Patrick Breslin, the book is "symbolic of the Spanish conquest itself. The social and economic order violently introduced by the Spanish four and a half centuries ago is still tenuous, not only in the highlands of Guatemala, but throughout the Andes of South America as well."

Responses to Literature

1. Find three Mayan legends from any of Asturias's works. How does he use the legends to make the modern elements of the stories more resonant or meaningful?
2. Explain how Asturias's political views are revealed in *The President*. Cite at least five specific passages that seem to contain an explicit or implicit political argument.
3. Research the United Fruit Company and compare it to Tropical Banana, Inc., Asturias's fictionalized fruit company in his "Banana Trilogy." Did Asturias use real-world events as the inspiration for his novels? Did the author change certain real-world elements, either for dramatic effect or to avoid backlash from the powerful banana-growing industry?
4. How do you think Asturias's time in Paris among surrealist writers influenced his work? Find examples of surrealism in *The President*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In most of his books, Asturias uses legends from his Guatemalan culture to enrich his writing. Because so much literature is based on oral traditions and tales, readers often feel connected to the stories they heard as children in the cultures in which they were raised. Here are a few other works that employ cultural myths and legends.

Cry the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton.

Issues of apartheid permeate this novel, set in South Africa and heavily influenced by Christian stories from the King James Bible.

Master and Margarita (1967), a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. This novel about Communist Russia is populated by mythical characters such as Satan, Faust, and a group of witches.

Almanac of the Dead (1991), a novel by Leslie Marmon Silko. Silko, a Laguna Pueblo writer, sets her novel in the United States and Central America and uses myths and storytelling to unite characters.

Green Grass, Running Water (1993), a novel by Thomas King. In this novel, the author uses the character of Coyote, a legendary trickster, to advance the plot.

5. Can you make a claim for *Men of Maize*'s being more of a surrealistic text than a legend-based one? What is the difference?

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Alaa al Aswany

BORN: 1957, Egypt

NATIONALITY: Egyptian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Yacoubian Building (2002)

Chicago (2007)



Alaa al Aswany Bryan Bedder / Getty Images for TFF

Overview

Alaa al Aswany is a contemporary Egyptian writer whose best-selling books use social realism to take an unflinching look at the problems of modern Egypt. Al Aswany also achieved recognition as one of the founders of Kefaya, a political coalition aimed at opposing the presidency of Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Dentist Turned Writer Al Aswany was born May 26, 1957, in Cairo, Egypt, during the sixteen-year rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's second president. He was trained as a dentist in both Egypt and Chicago. Al Aswany opened a dental clinic in the Yacoubian Building, the setting for his best-selling novel, before turning to writing. His novel *The Yacoubian Building* uses the building itself, as well as the intertwining stories of its fictional tenants, to depict the political and societal decay of Egypt since its formation as a republic. Despite its controversial themes, the book became a success, and even spawned a film adaptation that set a record for theatrical debut earnings in Egypt. Al Aswany was also inspired by his experiences as a student in America, which resulted in his second major work, *Chicago* (2007), set on a college campus in the title city.

Al Aswany was also one of the founding members of Kefaya, also known as the Egyptian Movement for Change. The group formed primarily to oppose President Hosni Mubarak, whose controversial election reforms have made it difficult for other candidates to run against him for the position of president. Many members believe Mubarak is attempting to groom his son Gamal to become the next leader of Egypt and plans on transferring power directly to his son in the manner of a dictator rather than relying on a fair election process. The group is also known for protesting against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Al Aswany holds weekly literary salons to discuss a wide range of cultural and political issues relevant to contemporary Egyptian life. Despite his great literary success, al Aswany continues to work as a dentist in Cairo.

Works in Literary Context

Al Aswany is noted for his scathing portrayal of modern Egyptian society, particularly its political corruption and economic exploitation, as well as his inclusion of themes such as terrorism, radical Islam, and homosexuality. His best-selling novel *The Yacoubian Building* is a historical novel set in 1990 just before the Gulf War, but in most ways, it is about the concerns of present-day Cairo, with the population's fears of Islamic extremism and increasing repression by the government.

Egyptian Realism The Yacoubian Building stands on one of Cairo's main boulevards. Al Aswany uses the different characters in the building as a microcosm of

modern Egyptian society. Though the novel is composed of a series of vignettes and the lives of the inhabitants are intertwined, the story follows the life of the doorman's son who dreams of becoming a policeman. His girlfriend must turn to a life on the street to earn money. The novel not only focuses on the lives of building tenants, it highlights their living conditions, sexuality, corruption, social and political issues, Islamic terrorism, and the clash between ancient and modern Egypt.

Works in Critical Context

Al Aswany has faced criticism from Egyptian politicians for his unflinching look at corruption and sexuality, but literary critics in the Arab world assert that al Aswany may be the saviour of the Arabic novel. His bold storytelling and his willingness to tackle controversial issues avoided by most other Egyptian and Arab writers have earned him high praise in both the Arab world and the West. One reviewer noted that al Aswany "is becoming the Charles Dickens of Arab literature. Like Dickens, his novels are rooted in social realism and set agendas for reform."

The Yacoubian Building Al Aswany's second novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, caused a scandal at its publication in Egypt because of its social frankness and homosexual themes, but it became the best-selling Arabic novel for both 2002 and 2003. It was also voted Best Novel for 2003 by listeners to Egypt's Middle East Broadcasting Service. It was subsequently translated into nine languages and made into a film in 2006 with the largest budget in Egyptian cinema history. The film, like the book, was hailed by both critics and audiences as a great success. Although the success of both the novel and the film have mostly been limited to the Arab world, they are receiving exposure internationally and gaining notice by critics in the West.

Caroline Moorehead wrote in the *Spectator*, "Poignant, sad, funny, often disquieting, *The Yacoubian Building* is a remarkable novel." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Lorraine Adams wrote, "Aswany has conjured a bewitching political novel of contemporary Cairo that is also . . . about sex, a romantic novel about power and a comic yet sympathetic novel about the vagaries of the human heart. Even the least politically oriented reader will find it engrossing."

Responses to Literature

1. *The Yacoubian Building* is set during the Gulf War and portrays modern Egypt since its revolution during the 1950s. Discuss how the building and its deterioration is a metaphor for what was happening in Egypt.
2. Al Aswany's treatment of homosexuality is controversial in Arab literature. Do you think that this

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Al Aswany's famous contemporaries include:

Jay McInerney (1955–): McInerney is an American writer who was one of the first members of the American "literary brat pack" of the 1980s.

Mohsen Badawi (1956–): Badawi is an Egyptian political activist and writer who founded the Abdurrahman Badawi Association for Cultural Creativity.

Rigoberta Menchu (1959–): Menchu is an indigenous Guatemalan whose writings publicize the plight of Guatemala's native peoples; she was the recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.

Rick Bragg (1959–): Bragg is an American journalist and memoir writer who won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1996.

Luc Besson (1959–): Besson is a French film director known as the "French Steven Spielberg."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Al Aswany portrays the struggles of a wide range of characters amid turbulent times in his country's history. Here are some other works set in similar circumstances:

A Man of the People (1966), a novel by Chinua Achebe.

This novel explores the conflict between two generations of political activists through the story of a young man and his former teacher who enters politics in an unnamed African country.

The Black Book (1990), a novel by Orhan Pamuk. This postmodernist novel contains many stories within the main story that recount Turkey's past alongside present-day Istanbul.

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007), a novel by Khaled Hosseini. This novel tells the story of two Afghan women struggling to survive through extremely tumultuous times.

controversy makes it more or less likely that his other messages of social and political reform will be heeded? Explain.

3. Al Aswany tackles many controversial issues that are avoided by most authors in the Arab world, yet these same issues are common themes for writers in the West. Write an essay exploring the

cultural, social, and political reasons for the different literary context faced by Arab and Western writers.

4. Al Aswany writes both novels and political editorials. Choose one of the messages for social reform from one of his novels and write a political editorial on this topic.

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■ Margaret Atwood

BORN: 1939, Ottawa, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Double Persephone (1961)

The Circle Game (1966)

Surfacing (1972)

The Handmaid's Tale (1985)

The Blind Assassin (2000)

Overview

Internationally acclaimed as a novelist, poet, and short story writer, Margaret Atwood has emerged as a major figure in Canadian letters. Her fiction explores the relationship between humanity and nature, unsettling aspects of human behavior, and power as it pertains to gender and political roles. Best known for her novels, Atwood is also admired for her accomplishments as a poet, critic, essayist, and short story writer. Atwood has published more than forty books and has also worked in other media, including motion pictures, television, and theater.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on November 18, 1939, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, and grew up in suburban Toronto, a metropolitan area that appears in many of her stories and novels. As a child she spent her



Margaret Atwood Graham Jepson / Writer Pictures / drr.net

summers at her family cottage in a wilderness region of Quebec, where her father, a forest entomologist, conducted research. She first began to write while in high school, contributing poetry, short stories, and cartoons to the school newspaper.

Early Acclaim as Poet As an undergraduate at the University of Toronto, Atwood met the critic Northrop Frye, who introduced her to the poetry of William Blake. Influenced by Blake's contrasting mythological imagery, Atwood wrote the poems collected in her first volume, *Double Persephone* (1961). While this work demonstrated her skill for using metaphorical language, it was her second volume of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1966), that garnered widespread critical recognition. The winner of the 1967 Governor General's Award, Canada's highest literary honor, *The Circle Game* established the major themes of Atwood's poetry: the inconsistencies of self-perception, the paradoxical nature of language, Canadian identity, and the conflicts between humankind and nature.

From Poet to Novelist During Rise of the Feminist Movement Atwood's work was regularly published in the popular Canadian press after the publication of her next volume of verse, *The Animals in That Country* (1968). After teaching university-level literature and creative-writing classes for a year, Atwood's

poetry began appearing in American as well as Canadian journals and magazines. In 1969, Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Woman*, was published, and she was awarded the Union League Civic and Arts Foundation Prize by the Chicago magazine *Poetry*. She also began writing the screenplay for *The Edible Woman* that same year. She soon became recognized as a novelist as well as a poet.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were watershed years in the women's rights movements in the United States and Canada. The National Organization for Women had been founded by Betty Friedan in 1966, and women across North America became vocal in their push for social and legal equality with men. Atwood became a leading voice in Canadian feminism. In 1971, after living in Europe for a year, Atwood moved to Toronto to teach literature and creative writing at York University. That year her book of verse, *Power Politics*, was published and her public visibility increased. Critics felt uncomfortable with the seemingly anti-male attitude of some of *Power Politics*, and the book produced a great deal of controversy—which raised Atwood's profile.

New Life on an Ontario Farm The years 1972 to 1976 were eventful for Atwood. She published another novel, *Surfacing*, in 1972. That same year, she became writer in residence at the University of Toronto, published the controversial *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, and separated from her husband. Soon afterward, she moved to a seventy-acre farm near Alliston, Ontario, with novelist Graeme Gibson and wrote the book of verse, *You Are Happy* (1974), which was awarded the Bess Hopkins Prize by *Poetry* magazine. Soon after her divorce from her first husband was finalized, Atwood and Gibson had a daughter, Jess. Atwood's short stories began appearing in magazines while she labored over her next novel, *Lady Oracle* (1976). She managed to produce, in 1978, both a children's book, *Up in the Tree*, and a new volume of poetry, *Two Headed Poems*. In that year, she also won the St. Lawrence Award for Fiction.

Real Threats Ficitonalized in A Handmaid's Tale Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Atwood's interest in women's rights remained keen. The movement was dealt a setback in 1982 when the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would have made sex discrimination illegal in the United States, failed to gain ratification despite ten years of lobbying and demonstrations by women. Around the same time, various groups who opposed the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which had legalized abortion, began campaigns of intimidation and violence against women seeking abortions and doctors performing them. Disturbed by what she considered serious threats to women's rights, Atwood wrote her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopic story in which fundamentalist Christians have taken over the United States and relegated women to wholly subservient roles.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Atwood's famous contemporaries include:

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993): A prolific writer and critic, Burgess is perhaps best remembered for his mediation on the nature of evil, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), for which he developed a whole new slang language for his futuristic criminals.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): Thirty-seventh president of the United States and thirty-sixth vice president (under Dwight Eisenhower), Nixon was elected to two terms beginning in 1968 but resigned in 1971 before completing his second term under a cloud of suspicion of criminal activity related to the Watergate scandal.

Anne Rice (1941–): Best-selling author of Gothic fantasy novels, including her famous *Vampire Chronicles* as well as religious and erotic works. Her recurring themes across all of these genres focus on love, death, immortality, and redemption.

Norma McCorvey (1947–): Known better by her legal pseudonym of "Jane Roe," McCorvey found herself at the center of the legal firestorm known as the *Roe v. Wade* case, which overturned the criminalization of abortion in 1973.

Margaret Drabble (1939–): English novelist, biographer, and critic, Drabble has published seventeen novels to date, including *The Millstone* (1965), which earned her the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1966.

Continued Focus on the Lives of Women Since the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which went on to become a best seller and a 1990 major motion picture, Atwood has achieved prominent stature in Canadian letters. Her work in the 1990s focused increasingly on the complicated relationships between women. *The Robber Bride* (1993), for example, features several friends whose lives are complicated not by male domination but by an aggressively self-centered woman. Atwood won the Man Booker Prize in 2000 for her novel, *The Blind Assassin*. The novel features a multilayered narrative with interweaving story lines that highlight Atwood's continued interest in the various social systems that support male domination of women. Atwood gave voice to the silent women of ancient myth in her 2005 work *The Penelopiad*, a retelling of the Greek myth of the homecoming of the hero Odysseus told from the point of view of his wife Penelope and her twelve handmaidens.

Works in Literary Context

Presenting the poet as both performer and creator, Atwood questioned the authenticity of the writing process and the effects of literature on both the writer and the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Much of Atwood's work is concerned with feminist themes. Whether she is writing about patriarchal social systems in subtle ways or exposing the repressive nature of sexism more pointedly, Atwood's fiction consistently reveals the author's strong feminist beliefs. Here are some more works that deal with feminist themes:

Woman on the Edge of Time (1976), a novel by Marge Piercy. Like Atwood, Piercy writes poetry and fiction with a feminist bent. This novel tells the story of a time-traveling psychiatric patient at Bellevue Hospital.

The Feminine Mystique (1963), a nonfiction work by Betty Friedan. Analyzing the frustrations of women at the time, this book served as the flash point of the modern feminist movement.

Orlando (1928), a novel by Virginia Woolf. A story that explores concepts of gender and how it impacts an individual's experience of life across time.

The Awakening (1899), a novel by Kate Chopin. This novel revolves around its female protagonist's ultimately tragic attempts to define her individuality in the stiflingly rigid society of the turn of the twentieth century.

reader. Although all of her verse explores the uniqueness of the Canadian psyche, it was in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) that Atwood devoted her attention to what she calls the schizoid, double nature of Canada. Centered on the narratives of a Canadian pioneer woman, *Journals* examines why Canadians came to develop ambivalent feelings toward their country. Atwood further developed this dichotomy in *Power Politics* (1971), in which she explored the relationship between sexual roles and power structures by focusing on personal relationships and international politics. Her examination of destructive sex roles and her nationalistic concern over the subordinate role Canada plays to the United States are variations on the victor/victim theme that continue to dominate her work.

Nationalism In addition to her numerous collections of poetry, Atwood earned widespread attention for *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), a seminal critical analysis of Canadian literature that served as a rallying point for the country's cultural nationalists. In *Survival*, Atwood argues that Canadians have always viewed themselves as victims, both of the forces of nature that confronted them as they settled in wilderness territory and of the colonialist powers that dominated their culture and politics. She proposed that Canadian writers should cultivate a more positive self-image by embracing indigenous traditions, including those of Native Americans and French Canadians, rather than

identifying with Great Britain or the United States. Atwood's youthful experience in the wilderness of Quebec likely gave her an appreciation for the uniquely Canadian features of her country, and inspired her nationalist vision.

Feminism The title of Atwood's first collection of short fiction, *Dancing Girls* (1977), refers to the leading characters in the stories—women who obligingly accept the roles assigned to them by male-dominated society rather than following their own desires. This volume, which is considered more pessimistic in outlook than Atwood's earlier works, contains pointed observations concerning patriarchal social systems and emotionally withdrawn males. The protagonists of these short stories are intelligent, urbane, and alienated from their social environment. Sometimes this alienation emerges as psychosis, such as the schizophrenia experienced by Louise in "Polarities." Commentators note that several of the stories in this volume reflect the theories of psychologist R. D. Laing, who regarded schizophrenia as an understandable reaction to irrational conditions created by modern society. Louise, hospitalized for psychotic behavior, is portrayed as being fundamentally in touch with reality, while her ostensibly "normal" friend Morrison is dismayed by his own moral shortcomings. As in most of Atwood's short stories, the female is depicted as intuitive, life-affirming, and allied with nature, while the male stands for violence, oppression, and artificial values.

Atwood turned to speculative fiction with her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this work she created the dystopia of Gilead, a future America in which fundamentalist Christians have imposed dictatorial rule. Here, in a world polluted by toxic chemicals and nuclear radiation, most women are sterile; those who are able to bear children are forced to become "Handmaids," official breeders who enjoy some privileges yet remain under constant surveillance. Almost all other women have been deemed expendable, except those who embrace the repressive religious hierarchy run by men. Although Atwood's strong feminist beliefs were evident in her previous novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* is the first of her works to be dominated by feminist concerns.

Works in Critical Context

Ann Marie Lipinski, writing in the *Chicago Tribune*, described Atwood as "one of the leading literary luminaries, a national heroine of the arts." Atwood's critical popularity is matched by her popularity with readers. She is a frequent guest on Canadian television and radio, her books are best sellers, and "people follow her on the streets and in stores," as Judy Klemesrud reported in the *New York Times*. Atwood, Roy MacGregor of *Maclean's* explained, "is to Canadian literature as Gordon Lightfoot is to Canadian music, more institution than individual." Atwood's popularity with both critics and the reading public has surprised her. "It's an accident that I'm a

successful writer,” she told MacGregor. “I think I’m kind of an odd phenomenon in that I’m a serious writer and I never expected to become a popular one, and I never did anything in order to become a popular one.”

The Handmaid’s Tale *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a radical departure from Atwood’s previous novels. Her strong feminism was evident in earlier books, but *The Handmaid’s Tale* is dominated by the theme. As Barbara Holliday wrote in the *Detroit Free Press*, Atwood “has been concerned in her fiction with the painful psychic warfare between men and women. In ‘The Handmaid’s Tale,’ a futuristic satire, she casts subtlety aside, exposing woman’s primal fear of being used and helpless.” Atwood’s creation of an imaginary world is also new. As Mary Battiata noted in the *Washington Post*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* is the first of Atwood’s novels “not set in a worried corner of contemporary Canada.” Many critics favorably compare *The Handmaid’s Tale* with George Orwell’s *1984* and other distinguished dystopian novels for its disturbing extension of contemporary trends and its allegorical portrait of political extremism.

Atwood’s Poetry Linda W. Wagner, writing in *The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism*, asserted that in Atwood’s poetry “duality [is] presented as separation.” This separation leads her characters to be isolated from one another and from the natural world, resulting in their inability to communicate, to break free of exploitative social relationships, or to understand their place in the natural order. “In her early poetry,” Gloria Onley wrote in the *West Coast Review*, “[Atwood] is acutely aware of the problem of alienation, the need for real human communication and the establishment of genuine human community—real as opposed to mechanical or manipulative; genuine as opposed to the counterfeit community of the body politic.” Speaking of *The Circle Game*, Wagner wrote that “the personae of those poems never did make contact, never did anything but lament the human condition. . . . Relationships in these poems are sterile if not destructive.”

Suffering is common for the female characters in Atwood’s poems, although they are never passive victims. In more recent works, they take active measures to improve their situations. Atwood’s poems, the *West Coast Review*’s Onley maintained, concern “modern woman’s anguish at finding herself isolated and exploited (although also exploiting) by the imposition of a sex role power structure.” Atwood explained to Klemesrud in the *New York Times* that her suffering characters come from real life: “My women suffer because most of the women I talk to seem to have suffered.” By the early 1970s, this stance had made Atwood into “a cult author to faithful feminist readers,” as the *Chicago Tribune*’s Lipinski commented. Atwood’s popularity in the feminist community was unsought. “I began as a profoundly apolitical writer,” she told Lindsay Van Gelder of *Ms.*, “but then I

began to do what all novelists and some poets do: I began to describe the world around me.”

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the feminist themes in Atwood’s work. How does she address such issues as the myths of femininity, women’s need for self-fulfillment, their place in society, and their relationships with each other and with men?
2. Atwood’s fiction often deals with the theme of treachery. Discuss two scenes in her work that depict treachery. Why do you think Atwood is so interested in exploring this particular topic?
3. Margaret Atwood’s stories often show women coping with the restrictions placed on them by a male-dominated society. Using your dictionary and the Internet, write out a working definition of the word “patriarchy.” Can you think of any evidence that ours is a patriarchal society? Now imagine matriarchal, or woman-dominated, society. What might it be like and how would it differ from our own?
4. Research and write about the differences between Canadian and American society. How does Atwood’s views of Americans come through in her stories?
5. Margaret Atwood wrote a poem called “Siren Song” in 1976. What is the mythological origin of the term *siren song*? How does the mythology relate to Atwood’s poem?

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W. H. Auden

BORN: 1907, York, England

DIED: 1973, Vienna, Austria

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Orators: An English Study (1932)

"Funeral Blues" (1938)

"September 1, 1939" (1939)

Another Time (1940)

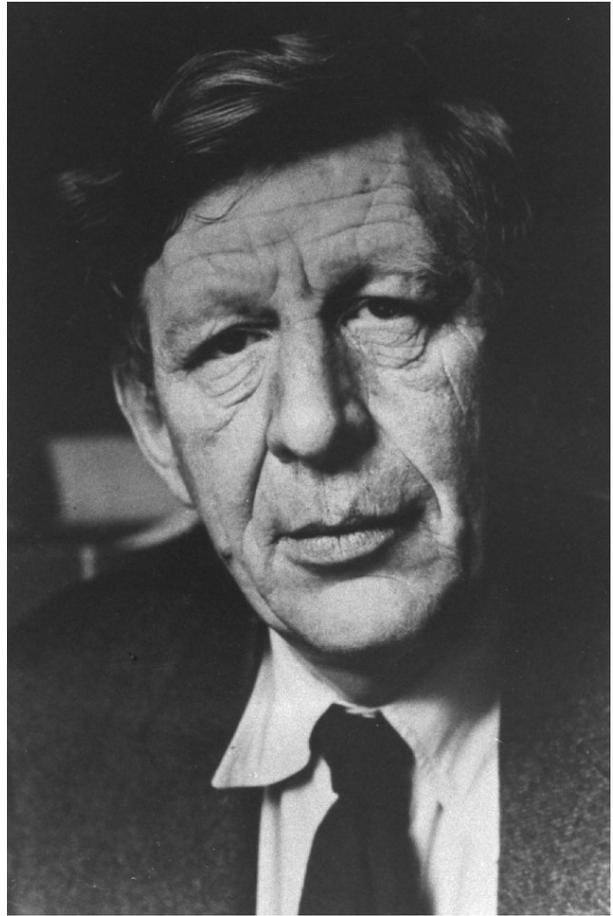
City Without Walls, and Many Other Poems (1969)

Overview

W. H. Auden was a major English poet, one of the most important English-speaking poets born in the twentieth century. His works center on moral issues with strong political, social, and psychological orientations. Noted especially for native lyrical gifts and highly developed technical expertise, he also displayed wide reading and acute intelligence in his poems. His life contains sharp contradictions. His early poems were praised for their political pertinence as well as their aesthetic modernity, and his later poems were condemned for their religious and political orthodoxy. But contradictions notwithstanding, he continues to receive recognition as one of the most important poets of the century, and as one of its most representative figures as well.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Wystan Hugh Auden was born on February 21, 1907, in York, England. His father was the medical officer of the city of Birmingham and a psychologist. His mother was a devout Anglican, and the combination of religious and scientific or analytic themes are implicit throughout Auden's work. He was educated at St. Edmund's preparatory school, where he met Christopher Isherwood, who later gained a wide reputation as a novelist. At Oxford University, fellow undergraduates were Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, and Stephen Spender, who, with Auden, formed the collective variously labeled the Oxford Group or the "Auden Generation." At Oxford Auden studied Anglo-Saxon English and also became



W. H. Auden Auden W. H., photograph. The Library of Congress.

familiar with modernist poetry, particularly that of T. S. Eliot, which was to influence his early writing.

Travels and Collaborations A small volume of Auden's poems was privately printed by Stephen Spender in 1928, while Auden was still an undergraduate. *Poems* was published a year later by Faber and Faber (of which T. S. Eliot was a director). *The Orators* (1932), a volume consisting of odes, parodies of school speeches and sermons, and the strange, almost surreal "Journal of an Airman" provided a barrage of satire against England, "this country of ours where no one is well." It set the mood for a generation of public school boys who were in revolt against the empire of England and its trappings.

After he completed college, Auden traveled in Weimar Republic, Germany. In 1937 he went with MacNeice to Iceland and in 1938 with Isherwood to China. The literary results of these journeys were collaborations: with MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (1937), and with Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (1939). Auden did not participate in World War II as a soldier, though he traveled to Germany after the end of the war with the United States Strategic Bombing Survey to witness firsthand the

devastating and demoralizing effects of Allied bombing on the mental well-being of German citizens.

To America and Christianity In 1939 Auden took up residence in the United States, supporting himself by teaching at various universities. His first book as an immigrant, *Another Time* (1940), contains some of his best-known poems, among them “September 1, 1939,” “Musée des Beaux Arts,” and “Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love,” a love poem written to Chester Kallman. In 1946, Auden became a U.S. citizen.

A famous line from “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”—“Poetry makes nothing happen”—presents Auden’s complete rejection of Romantic tenets. Auden’s increasing focus on ethical concerns in *Another Time* points to his reconversion to Christianity, which he had abandoned at the age of fifteen. These concerns are central to *The Double Man* (1941) and *For the Time Being* (1944). *The Double Man* contains “New Year Letter,” a long epistolary poem outlining Auden’s readings of Christian literature, while “For the Time Being” features two allegorical pieces that present the author’s views on art and life and Christian faith.

In his final years, Auden wrote the volumes *City Without Walls, and Many Other Poems* (1969), *Epistle to a Godson, and Other Poems* (1972), and the posthumously published *Thank You, Fog: Last Poems* (1974). All three works are noted for their range and humanitarian content. Auden’s penchant for altering and discarding poems has prompted publication of several anthologies in the decades since his death, on September 28, 1973 in Vienna, Austria. The multivolume *Complete Works of W. H. Auden* was published in 1989.

Works in Literary Context

In the 1930s W. H. Auden became famous when he was described by literary journalists as the leader of the so-called “Oxford Group,” a circle of young English poets influenced by literary Modernism, in particular by the aesthetic principles espoused by T. S. Eliot. These authors adhered to various communist and antifascist doctrines and expressed in their writings social, political, and economic concerns, all of which are evident in Auden’s work of the 1930s.

Rejecting the traditional poetic forms favored by their Victorian predecessors, the Modernist poets favored concrete imagery and free verse. In his work, Auden applied conceptual and scientific knowledge to traditional verse forms and metrical patterns while assimilating the industrial countryside of his youth.

He disliked the Romantic poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, whom he referred to as “Kelly and Sheets.” This break with the English post-Romantic tradition was important for his contemporaries. It is perhaps still more important that Auden was the first poet in English to use the imagery (and sometimes the terminology) of clinical psychoanalysis.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Auden’s famous contemporaries include:

Carson McCullers (1917–1967): Auden briefly shared a New York apartment with this Southern gothic author. Her novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) has a strong antifascist theme underlying its small-town Georgia setting.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): American poet best known for his watershed poem *Howl* (1956). One of the most well-known “Beat” poets, his enthusiastic style was in large part a reaction to the detached irony of Auden’s modernist style.

Dylan Thomas (1914–1953): Welsh poet who largely inherited the crown of England’s favorite poet after Auden left the country in 1939.

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963): First Catholic president of the United States. He ushered in an era of significant social change before being killed by an assassin’s bullet in Dallas, Texas.

Mark Rothko (1903–1970): Latvian-born Jewish-American painter. He was one of the founders of the mid-twentieth century New York School of painters, poets, and composers, and is renowned for his use of color to communicate spiritual transcendence.

The Symbolic and the Rational Auden’s early poetry, influenced by his interest in the Anglo-Saxon language as well as in psychoanalysis, was sometimes riddle-like, sometimes jargonish and clinical. It also contained private references inaccessible to most readers. At the same time it had a clouded mysteriousness that would disappear in his later poetry. In the 1930s his poetry ceased to be mystifying; still dealing with difficult ideas, however, it could at times remain difficult to penetrate. His underlying preoccupation was a search for interpretive systems of analytic thinking and faith. Clues to the earlier poetry are to be found in the writings of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. In the later poems (after “New Year Letter,” in which he turns to Christianity), some clues can be traced in the works of Søren Kierkegaard, and in Reinhold Niebuhr and other theologians.

Among Auden’s highly regarded attributes was the ability to think symbolically and rationally at the same time. This allowed intellectual ideas to be transformed into a uniquely personal, idiosyncratic, and often witty image-based idiom. He made ideas concrete through creatures of his imagining for whom the reader could often feel affection while appreciating the austere outline of the ideas themselves. He nearly always used language that is interesting in texture as well as brilliant verbally.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Auden's poetry experienced renewed popularity after his poem "Funeral Blues" was read in the 1994 hit film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. The poem focuses on the immediate sense of anguish and loss at the death of a loved one. Other works that attempt to capture the complexity of grief include:

Selected Poems (1970), a poetry collection by Margaret Atwood. Her "Death of a Young Son by Drowning" focuses on the speaker's response to the death of her son.

Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924), a collection of poetry by Pablo Neruda. "Tonight I Can Write," included in this collection, is another heartfelt expression of grief over the loss of a loved one.

"O Captain! My Captain!" (1865), a poem by Walt Whitman. This, one of Whitman's most famous poems, was composed after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

The Year of Magical Thinking (2005), a memoir by Joan Didion. This book chronicles the year that follows the death of Didion's husband and the prolonged illness of her daughter.

He employed a great variety of intricate and extremely difficult technical forms. Throughout his career he often wrote pure lyrics of grave beauty, such as "Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love" and "Look, Stranger!"

Contemporary Concerns Often Auden's poetry may seem a rather marginal criticism of life and society, a poetry written from the sidelines. Yet sometimes it moves to the center of the time in history in which he and his contemporaries lived. In "The Shield of Achilles" he recreated the anguish of modern totalitarian societies in a poem that holds one particular time in a mirror for all times. His famous poem "September 1, 1939" offers his own feelings on humanity's fate while standing at the brink of war; this is summed up in the poem's most quoted line, "We must love on another or die."

Works in Critical Context

Auden's career has undergone much reevaluation through the years. While some critics contend that he wrote his finest work when his political sentiments were less obscured by religion and philosophy, others defend his later material as the work of a highly original and mature intellect. Many critics echo the assessment of Auden's career by the National Book Committee, which awarded him the National Medal for Literature in 1967: "[Auden's poetry] has illuminated our lives and times with grace, wit and vitality. His work, branded by the

moral and ideological fires of our age, breathes with eloquence, perception and intellectual power."

While most critics view Auden's poetry from the 1930s and early 1940s as his best, controversy surrounds evaluation of the middle and later periods of his career. "New Year Letter" continues to receive much critical attention, as does the relevance of Auden's self-imposed exile in America. Some critics believe that Auden's poetry lost much of its imaginative power and vitality after his immigration to the United States.

On This Island When his poetry collection *On This Island* was published in 1936 (having been published in England under the title *Look, Stranger!* the previous year), Auden had already made a name for himself as a writer to watch with his collected *Poems* and *The Orators*. Edmund Wilson, in a review of *On This Island* for the *New Republic*, states of Auden, "He certainly has more of what it takes to become a first-class poet than anybody else of his generation in England or, so far as I can think, the United States." However, Wilson also noted that the style and tone of the poems do not always mesh, and that "the off-rhymes begin to get on one's nerves." David Daiches, in a review for *Poetry*, commented, "The simple and highly effective strain of description and meditation which runs through these poems, the subtle clarity and plastic handling of language which he displays, seem to indicate that at last he has found a public, that he knows to whom he is speaking."

Responses to Literature

1. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Auden's poem "September 1, 1939" was widely circulated. Why do you think this was? What historical event was the poem referring to and what connection might it evoke with the events of 9/11?
2. Auden titles one of his books *The Age of Anxiety*, a phrase that came to define the post-World War II world. What events or social changes made the period 1945–1965 an age of anxiety. Research some of the major events of this twenty-year period in the library and on the Web and compare the information you find to Auden's loss of belief in political solutions to modern problems and his spiritual conversion.
3. Auden's poetry often concerns itself with human suffering in both the personal and cultural realms. Compare and contrast the statements on suffering in Auden's "Funeral Blues" and "Musée des Beaux Arts." How does the style in each reflect the theme?
4. Write a poem about a loss you have experienced. How did that loss alter your view of the world?
5. How does Auden's late conversion to Christianity affect his writing? Choose two poems, one from before his conversion and one from after, and

compare and contrast the two in terms of theme and use of language.

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☒ Jacques Audiberti

BORN: 1900, Antibes, France

DIED: 1965, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Race of Men (1937)

Abraxas (1938)

Evil Runs (1948)



Jacques Audiberti Audiberti, Jacques, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

French author Jacques Audiberti had already proved himself as a novelist, poet, and essayist when he began concentrating on plays after World War II. By the time of his death in 1965, he was widely known as an innovative dramatist whose work was associated with the "theater of the absurd."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Strong Connection to City of Birth Jacques Séraphin-Marie Audiberti was born on March 25, 1899, in Antibes, on the French Riviera, to Louis Audiberti, a master mason, and his wife, Victorine. Audiberti lived the whole of his childhood in that city, which had been the place of a significant battle for Napoléon upon his return to France from exile in Elba in 1815. The author appreciated the history of his native city, understanding its weight and violence, and drew on the city's history in his later literary works. Audiberti would regularly return to Antibes as an adult.

Audiberti dropped out of school in 1914 for health reasons, and although he resumed his studies in 1916, he never formally graduated. He was, however, a great fan of cinema and read many classic French authors, including

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Audiberti's famous contemporaries include:

Louis Aragon (1897–1982): French poet; one of the founders of surrealism.

Jorge Luis Borges (1889–1986): Argentine writer and poet; his work weaves together the mystical components of human existence.

Jean Cocteau (1889–1963): French writer and filmmaker; well-known for his movie *Orpheus* (1950), a contemporary take on the Greek myth.

Friedrich Hayek (1889–1992): Austrian economist and winner with Gunnar Myrdal of the 1974 Nobel Prize in Economics; he defended free-market capitalism against socialist and collectivist economic theories.

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): Russian American novelist; famous for his 1955 novel *Lolita*.

Victor Hugo and Anatole France, who later influenced his work. Starting in 1914, Audiberti began writing on his own with the encouragement of playwright Edmond Rostand, and contributed short articles and poetry to a local daily paper.

As Audiberti neared adulthood, World War I was raging in Europe. Though he did not fight in the Great War, it greatly affected those living in France with food shortages and loss of life. Significant parts of the country were covered in the trenches that were a hallmark of the conflict, and by the war's end, more than ten percent of France's population had been killed or gone missing.

Met Surrealists While Employed by Newspapers

In 1918, poor health exempted Audiberti from military service, and he took a job as a clerk at the Antibes courthouse. Then, after a short stint living in or near Marseille, Audiberti left for Paris in 1924, where he worked for newspapers for at least the next ten years. During this time, he also became acquainted with members of the Surrealist movement, including Benjamin Péret and André Breton. While he did not subscribe to their beliefs and affiliations, the Surrealists—who were inspired by the subconscious, dreams, and fantasy—eventually had some influence on Audiberti's work.

Around this time, Audiberti also met a young primary school teacher from the Caribbean Islands. They married in 1926 and had two daughters, Jacqueline (born in 1926) and Marie-Louise (born in 1928).

Early Writings Validated by Acclaim In 1930, Audiberti, with the help of money borrowed from his father, self-published his first book of poetry, *The Empire and the Trap*. The book was favorably reviewed in two

well-known literary journals. These reviews caught the attention of Valéry Larbaud, who introduced the poet to the major writers of Paris, including Leon-Paul Fargue, Drieu la Rochelle, and, later, Jean Cocteau, Louis Aragon, André Malraux, and Jean Paulhan.

In 1937, two major events occurred in Audiberti's literary career. First, he was awarded a prize for "best one-act play" for *L'Ampélour* (published in 1948). Second was the publication of his second book of poetry, *Race of Men*. In 1938, Audiberti became the first recipient of the Mallarmé Award for poetry, and his ambitious first novel, *Abraxas*, was put in print. Audiberti's career flourished, and he regularly published poetry, novels, and essays and contributed to newspapers, literary magazines, and movie magazines.

Prolific Period as Writer of Novels, Essays, and Poetry

Audiberti's most prolific period was from 1939 to 1947. During most of this time, World War II was raging in Europe. France was at the center of the struggle as Nazi Germany controlled the country for much of the conflict. Though France was devastated by the war, the author produced nine novels, including *Carnage* (1942) and *La Nâ* (1944), and two essays, including *The New Origin* (1942), a sort of poetry manifesto. During this period, Audiberti also published three collections of poetry

Audiberti's Plays Take Center Stage

Although Audiberti continued to publish novels, essays, poetry, and translations until his death, theatrical works became a major part of his literary production beginning in 1945. As with his poetry and novels, Audiberti's plays explore complex philosophical and religious concerns. Many of his dramas—including *Quoat-Quoat* (performed 1946, published 1948), whose original production was low budget because of the economic effects of World War II on France—reveal his preference for the disordered, natural paganism of antiquity over the structured Christian belief system of the twentieth century.

Audiberti won the Prix des Jeunes Comapagnies for his most famous play, *Evil Runs* (produced 1947, published 1948), which touches on both religious and sexual themes. His popular *The Glapion Effect* (1959), which was subtitled "parapsychocomedy," combined elements of vaudeville and surrealism and provided a bridge between the "anti-theater" of the period and more traditional commercial theater. With this production, Audiberti publicly distanced himself from the avant-garde of the 1950s.

Continued Output Despite Declining Health

In 1964, Audiberti's health worsened significantly. He busied himself finishing novels, poetry books, essays, and a movie scenario, and he wrote only one more play before his death from cancer on July 10, 1965: an adaptation of his 1956 novel *The Doll* (published in 1969).

Works in Literary Context

Audiberti's plays are considered part of the innovative "theater of the absurd." Other absurdist playwrights include Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Absurdist drama depicts humans' uncertain place in a meaningless world and uses abstract ideas, illogical language, and incongruous situations to communicate its effect. While Albert Camus' philosophy of disillusionment was a key precursor to the theater of the absurd, Audiberti and his contemporaries were also reacting to the traumatic effect of World War II on the European psyche with their plays and ideas.

Paganism and Christianity Many of Audiberti's works deal directly with the traditions of Christianity or with symbolism taken directly from those traditions. In *Quoat-Quoat*, a satire of nineteenth-century melodrama, and *Spoken Opera* (1956), the violence of paganism proves victorious over Christianity. In *Spoken Opera*, a young goddess is forced to marry an evil baron who represents Christianity's vindictive aspects, and a previous lover avenges his loss by embracing evil and attacking Christian outposts.

The Struggle against Evil Evil is often central to Audiberti's works, as is the conflict between the soul and the flesh. For Audiberti, evil arises from the repression of such natural drives as sex and aggression. In *The Black Beast* (1945), an unloved man appears to release his frustrations with the world through violent acts, though he also leads the search for the "unknown" killer. *Evil Runs* (published 1948), Audiberti's most successful play, is a fairy tale about a princess who realizes that to survive as a governing power she has no choice but to use evil to fight evil, and therefore let "evil run."

Works in Critical Context

Critics praised Audiberti for his passionate, if not flamboyant, use of language and a strong sense of the melodramatic and absurd in his writings. They also noted that his novels are complicated and often obscure, while his poetry is both formal and extravagant and his plays combine absurdist farce with surreal melodrama.

Importance of Language in Audiberti's Writings Referring to Audiberti's first novel, *Abraxas* (1938), Constantin Toloudis declared: "The religious symbolism, the allegorical character of the voyage, the tone and texture of the language in the tale recounting the adventures of the intrepid hero . . . amount to an eloquent, almost exhaustive exposé on the lore of Audibertian themes and devices."

Critics have often noted the rich expression of Jacques Audiberti's plays, but they often qualify them as poetic and linguistic games. Whereas in the absurdist plays of *The New Theater* the crisis of communication frequently seemed to be the result of an atrophy of discourse, there is an inverted will in Audiberti's work to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jacques Audiberti's plays deal with what George Wellwarth calls "the Savage God," or an active power of evil in the universe. Here are some other avant-garde works that deal with this theme:

Endgame (1957), a play by Samuel Beckett. The two main characters in this play are faced with nothingness as they attempt to find meaning for their existence.

The Jet of Blood (1925), a play by Antonin Artaud. A violent work considered difficult to produce, this play concludes with a prostitute biting the giant wrist of God and causing a stream of blood to splash onto the stage.

The Miracle of the Rose (1943), a novel by Jean Genet. Written while Genet was in prison, this autobiographical novel proclaims a cult of the criminal, praising both crime itself and the perpetrators of it.

Professor Taranne (1953), a play by Arthur Adamov. In this play, an upstanding citizen cannot defend himself against bizarre accusations.

Rhinoceros (1959), a play by Eugene Ionesco. In this play, everyone except the main character is transformed into a rhinoceros; unable to join them, he decides to fight them.

explore the limits of the creative potential of language, a phenomenon that translates into excessive wordiness.

Verbal Virtuosity in Poems and Plays Commenting on the "verbal delirium" of Audiberti's poetic style, Kenneth Cornell noted: "Elements of the swift and torrential burst which give so much of Audiberti's verse an epic tone and which impede to some degree ready comprehension find their way into everything he writes."

The emphasis on language and the dramatic verbal flow in Audiberti's plays have led critics to laud the vitality and originality of his work as well as fault it for unchecked wordiness and extravagance. As Leonard Cabell Pronko noted: "The danger is that vigor, imagination, lyricism, and rhetoric may take over."

Responses to Literature

1. Audiberti has received both praise and criticism for his use of poetic and extravagant language in his plays. Find a sample of dialogue in one of his plays that you think meets this description. In your opinion, does Audiberti's use of language add to or detract from the play? Would your opinion be different if the same language were used in a poem instead of a play? Why or why not?

2. In many of Audiberti's works, the presence of evil as a part of human nature is accepted as a given. Find an example of this in one of his plays and describe how this evil is shown to be a part of human nature. Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?
3. Research the drama style "theater of the absurd." What characteristics define this type of play? How do Audiberti's works display the characteristics of the "theater of the absurd"?

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Augustine

BORN: 354 CE, Tagaste, Numidia (now Souk-Ahras, Algeria)

DIED: 430, Hippo, Numidia

NATIONALITY: Numidian, Roman

GENRE: Letters, sermons, treatises

MAJOR WORKS:

On True Religion (390)

On Free Choice (395)

Confessions (401)

The City of God (425)

Overview

Augustine was a theologian and bishop of the fourth and fifth centuries who used his intellect and skill with language to strengthen and expand the Christian Church. Born during the decline of the Roman Empire, he provided a bridge between the thought of ancient Greece, interpreted in the light of Judeo-Christian scriptures, and the Middle Ages. His authority as an inspired visionary of the Christian world has remained unparalleled through-



St. Augustine of Hippo © The Print Collector / Alamy

out the history of Christianity. But even if he were not a transitional figure spanning both the ancient and modern worlds, the nature and scope of Augustine's writings would have assured him a prominent place in the history of Western philosophy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Christianity to Manichaeism Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus) was born on November 13, 354 ce, in Tagaste, Numidia (in the modern Souk-Ahras, Algeria). His father, Patrick, a pagan until shortly before his death, was a member of the town council. His mother, Monica, raised a Christian and determined to see her son raised

likewise, ensured that his childhood included what she considered proper religious education. Augustine developed serious doubts concerning Christianity and looked for spiritual fulfillment in philosophy and Manichaeism, a system of belief that claimed the world was created out of a conflict between light and dark substances and that good and evil could be attributed to two separate and distinct deities. Manichaeism strongly appealed to Augustine's intellectual curiosity because it claimed to put everything to the test of reason and because it offered him a deterministic explanation of the existence of evil that left human beings free of personal responsibility.

Although not wealthy, Augustine's parents were intent upon obtaining an excellent education for their son. In the late Roman Empire, education could be an important stepping-stone to high office and great wealth. In 370, after completing his intermediate studies at Madura, about twenty miles from Hippo, Augustine was forced to return to Tagaste while his father attempted to raise money to send him to Carthage for advanced studies. *The Confessions* (401) provide an intimate picture of the adolescent Augustine during his year at home. With shame he noted that the "bubbling impulses of puberty" had so debased his soul that he "could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness." He took a mistress who bore him a son, Adeodatus (the name means "Gift of God"). Spurred on by the pressure of his peers, Augustine descended "deeper into vice to avoid being despised." So depraved were he and his friends that they stole some pears and threw them to the pigs—the pleasure, Augustine later reflected, "lay in doing what was not allowed," rather than in eating the pears.

Depression and Return to Christianity After completing his formal education and achieving a fair degree of success as a teacher and scholar, Augustine recorded that he was miserable. He grappled with severe depression, certain that his "hope of discovering the truth," his life's quest, was futile. Neither Manichaean cosmology nor the wisdom of philosophy had provided the spiritual answers he sought. In desperation, he decided to investigate the religion of his childhood, perhaps under the influence of Ambrose, the eminent bishop of Milan. Listening to his sermons, Augustine learned that scripture could be interpreted allegorically, a crucial insight to a man troubled by the discrepancies he found in Scripture when read literally. Augustine attempted to consult Ambrose privately, only to discover that the busy bishop was not easily accessible. In the end, the answers he craved had to be found on his own.

Retiring to Cassiciacum, an estate outside of Milan, in September of 386, Augustine took up the study of Neoplatonism, a prominent philosophy of his age, and set about investigating the Christian Scriptures. Augustine's reading of the Platonic philosophers, coupled with his increasing exposure to Ambrose's sermons, began to lead him toward a conversion to Christianity. He documented

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Augustine's famous contemporaries include:

Pope Leo I, The Great (380–461): A Roman Catholic pope, Leo I attempted to persuade Attila, King of the Huns, not to sack Rome.

Constantine I (271–337): In addition to establishing Christianity as a major religion in the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine I also founded the city of Constantinople, a thriving cultural center for the following one thousand years.

Odoacer (435–493): This chieftain and warrior is best known for overthrowing the last emperor of Rome, Romulus Augustus, in 476.

Eusebius (275–339): This bishop is often cited as the "Father of Church History" because he recorded much of the early history of the Christian Church.

his moment of conversion in *Confessions*. According to Augustine, he was in a garden engulfed in spiritual turmoil when he heard a voice like that of a child, chanting repeatedly, "Take up and read." This, Augustine believed, was a divine directive; he opened the Scriptures and read the first thing that he saw: "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts" (Rom. 13:13–14). Augustine was so overjoyed in this sudden revelation that he went to tell his mother, who had earlier traveled to Milan to be with him. Upon her advice, Augustine sent his mistress away.

To Augustine, the subsequent transformation of his life was nothing short of a miracle. He subsequently gave up teaching and spent the winter with his family in the country. He prepared himself for his new life by coming to terms with his physical passions. He returned to Milan, and on Easter, April 25, 387, he and his son were baptized by Ambrose. In the nearly forty years of priesthood that followed, Augustine worked with unceasing energy and conviction to provide the unity and answers the Church sought.

Works in Literary Context

Trained in rhetoric and armed with an impressive knowledge of scripture and classical philosophy, St. Augustine used his writings to combat those he considered heretical. In fact, his work's wide-ranging influence continues to the present day. As a writer, Augustine was persuasive, and his body of work was prodigious.

Language Skills Scholars view Augustine as one of the most accomplished stylists in Latin literature, emphasizing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Augustine held the view that one's ultimate salvation was predetermined—that, to a certain extent, one's life is already mapped out. Matters of predetermination, free will, and fate have been explored extensively throughout the ages. Certainly there is long tradition in literature and a growing history in film of thinkers struggling to discover whether an individual's future is already laid out or whether one can do something to alter fate.

Minority Report (2002), a film directed by Steven Spielberg and based on a story by Philip K. Dick. In this science fiction film, investigators are able to see crimes before they happen and catch the potential perpetrators just before they perform the crime. When one of the investigators sees that he himself is going to commit a crime, he tries to change his fate.

On the Bondage of the Human Will (1525), a theological treatise by Martin Luther. This work analyzes salvation in terms of Pauline theology and Augustine's writings.

Oedipus Rex (429 BCE), a play by Sophocles. This play tells the story of a king who sends his infant son to his death because of a prediction that he will be slain by his son; however, Oedipus, unaware of his heritage and the prediction, returns to his homeland and unknowingly slays his father.

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. This 1741 sermon on the topic of God's complete power over human life is a Puritan treatment of the idea of predestination.

his skill in adapting his tone and level of discourse to his subject. H. J. Rose, writing in *A Handbook of Latin Literature*, deems him "the best stylist of all the Christians" because of his ability "to combine ornateness and simplicity, dignity and a feeling for the colloquial language of the day, to an extent which makes his writings interesting even for the least theologically inclined of moderns and those most out of sympathy with the doctrines which he taught." Other commentators have praised Augustine's virtuosity in providing access, through language, to the labyrinthine and hidden world of human feelings.

Christianity Triumphant An extraordinarily versatile and original thinker, Augustine did not, as scholars point out, create a system of thought; it is not a unified worldview that Augustine offers, but rather a vision of triumphant Christianity. The starting point of his thought is inner experience, the space in which the mind grasps itself as indubitably real. Augustine identifies doubt as the most significant act of the thinking subject, the mental

operation that establishes an individual's existence, since one needs to exist in order to doubt one's own existence. Furthermore, the intellect, by grasping itself, also gains access to the immaterial realm of eternal principles, and, ultimately, to God. However, this encounter with God does not imply complete knowledge of Him. That can be attained only after death, as God remains fundamentally incomprehensible and mysterious to the human intellect.

Creation from Nothing Augustine's Christian philosophy has as one of its cornerstones the tenet that God freely created the world from nothing. Augustine thus opposed the Neoplatonic notion of a world emanating from God through necessity. "Creation from nothing" also necessitates the rejection of the Greek view that the world was formed much like an artist making a finished product from materials at hand. Such a model requires preexisting and independent material for a divine craftsman to work upon. According to Augustine, either such unformed matter must be conceived so abstractly as to be the same as nothing at all, or it is something having form and made by the Creator.

According to the book of Genesis, different forms of things appeared at different times, the successive days of creation. On the other hand, Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach in the Roman Catholic version of the Old Testament) teaches that all things were made together. The appearance of inconsistency vanishes, however, if one says, as Augustine recommends, that all things were created together from nothing but that some were created from nothing in a seminal condition, to be brought to actual formation later.

Understanding of the Soul Augustine's view of the soul is thoroughly Platonic. For him it is a substance distinct from and superior to the body, which is joined to the body by a sort of vital attention. Augustine states that though the soul is something that came to be, it cannot cease to be. To show this, he adapts arguments used in Plato's *Phaedo*. For example, the soul is what it is because it shares in a principle, life, which does not admit of a contrary. So, being a soul, it cannot die.

A theological problem attends the genesis of the human soul. Does God create each soul individually or did He create all souls together in making Adam's? On the former view, combined with a belief in original sin, God would create something that is evil. On the latter view, Adam would have passed on a human soul to his descendants that was made evil by his sin but was not evil when God created it. Traducianism is the name of the second position, and it was the one to which Augustine was inclined.

Works in Critical Context

Although Augustine's impact on Christianity is undeniable, his work and theories were often met with hostility. In fact, much of Augustine's work can be firmly situated as a response to an existing debate and as the beginning to future debates. Indeed, Augustine's work inspired

pillars of Christianity like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Erasmus. Even though Christian theology has mostly moved beyond the Platonism-influenced beliefs of Augustine, it is difficult to imagine the Christian Church developing the way it has without the profound influence of Augustine.

Predestination During the 420s, another debate connected to the doctrine of free will arose. In “Epistle 194” to Sixtus, a church official in Rome who later became a bishop, Augustine explained his understanding of the doctrine of predestination. The letter became the source of a dispute between monks at a monastery at Hadrumetum in the African province of Byzacena. Several of the monks could not reconcile the seemingly exclusive doctrines of free will and predestination. A deputation was sent to Hippo to hear Augustine’s side of the argument firsthand. Augustine wrote *On Grace and Free Will* to explain his views more thoroughly, but the controversy soon spread to Gaul. Augustine’s opponents, prominent ecclesiastics such as John Cassian and Victor of Marseilles, feared that the end product might be spiritual apathy, a pessimistic belief that one would be damned or saved regardless of one’s actions.

Augustine replied to the doubters of Gaul with *On the Predestination of the Saints* and *On the Gift of Perseverance*, explaining that the two doctrines (free will and predestination) were not mutually exclusive. The controversy, however, was not to be resolved during his lifetime. Prosper of Aquitaine would continue to fight against this “Semi-Pelagianism.”

However, these men were not Pelagians. Their disagreement with Augustine centered on his version of predestination, which they believed was too rigid.

Arguments with Pelagius The better part of the last two decades of Augustine’s life was spent confronting the Welsh monk Pelagius (whose real name was Morgan) and his followers. As Christianity became the religion of the empire, conversion became expedient; insincere conversions were frequent. As a reaction to these insincere conversions, Pelagius and his followers taught that people were able to do good merely if they so willed. Virtue was within the grasp of everyone, unaided by grace. Pelagius even used Augustine’s *On Free Choice* (395) to support his position that humans can do good without the grace of God.

Augustine recognized that the teachings of Pelagius endangered the Pauline doctrine of salvation through grace. Salvation is a freely given gift of God, unable to be merited by humans. People can only do good—can only begin to do good—by the grace of God. This argument over the role of grace in salvation and the ability of humans to do good of their own volition surfaced again when Martin Luther and Erasmus went to battle over the same issues. Martin Luther, more or less, sided with Augustine, while Erasmus espoused Pelagius’s views.

There has been no definitive resolution to the issue, and the argument continues to rage today.

Responses to Literature

1. After reading Augustine’s work on predestination and salvation, watch at least two films that deal with destiny and fate. (See “Common Human Experience” above.) How do these films approach the questions of free will and predestination? How do these approaches differ from Augustine’s in terms of the ability a human has to change his or her future by means of his or her own volition?
2. Many thinkers have pondered the beginning of the world. Augustine discusses whether or not it is possible to create something out of nothing. In your opinion, what are the implications of believing that the world has been created out of nothing? On the other hand, what are the implications of believing that the world was not created out of nothing? What is your opinion of the controversy?

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Jane Austen

BORN: 1775, Steventon, England

DIED: 1817, Winchester, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Novels

MAJOR WORKS:

Sense and Sensibility (1811)

Pride and Prejudice (1813)

Mansfield Park (1814)

Emma (1816)

Northanger Abbey (1818)

Persuasion (1818)



Jane Austen *Austen, Jane, engraving.*

Overview

Though virtually unknown in her own lifetime, Jane Austen's humorous novels of love and manners are now celebrated as among the best of British literature. Her work, which stands between the melodramatic style of the eighteenth century and the realism of the later nineteenth century, uses humor and social commentary to reflect on a woman's place in English life. Austen wrote about a world in which women had no rights and no importance outside of marriage. Still, her attention to detail, unforgettable characters, and lively, humorous tone make her novels much more than drawing-room romances. Indeed, they are among the most beloved works in the English language.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born in Steventon, Hampshire, England, on December 16, 1775, Jane Austen was the seventh of eight children. She was the daughter of George Austen and Cassandra Leigh, who came from a prominent English family. Though her father had suffered financial hardship as a child, he was able to improve his place in life through education and ambition and married into the wealthy Leigh family before settling down as an Anglican rector and priest. Austen would grow up in a close-knit, large family of six brothers and one older

sister. Her family's support led not only to her education, but her success as a writer.

Ambitious Education List for an Aspiring Female Writer Though Austen and her beloved sister Cassandra had little in the way of formal education, they grew up in a house where learning was valued. They attended school briefly but had to leave because their father could not afford to continue their studies. Instead, they studied at home under the supervision of their father and brothers. Austen was an enthusiastic reader with access to classics by William Shakespeare, John Milton, Alexander Pope, David Hume, Ben Johnson, Daniel Defoe, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Such a challenging reading list was considered highly ambitious, even inappropriate, for a young lady of Jane Austen's time. Though she also studied sewing, music, and drawing (accomplishments expected of a young lady of her class), she developed a lifelong love of reading and began writing at a young age.

Austen's early work tended to imitate or poke fun at the literary forms of the eighteenth century. For example, she imitated epistolary novels (novels written in letter format); in fact, her first two published novels were initially written in this style. However, Austen abandoned this approach as her skills surpassed its benefits.

An Age of Revolution One aspect of Austen's work that has intrigued readers and critics is the surprising lack of mention of the revolutionary and tumultuous world events that marked the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in her novels. Austen was born just one year before the beginning of the American Revolution, an event of momentous importance in British and world history. She was a teenager when the French Revolution began, and must certainly have followed the anti-aristocratic actions of the French revolutionaries with interest and concern. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, almost every European power, including Britain, was locked in a desperate struggle with France's self-appointed—and seemingly unstoppable—Emperor Napoleon. Only after Napoleon overextended himself by invading Russia in 1812 did his fortunes sour and the tide turn in favor of Britain and its allies. Austen lived through a period of social and political upheaval unlike any other in history, but Austen chose to place her stories in a local context into which the events of the world seemed not to intrude. It seems that personal, social, and artistic considerations likely influenced Austen to avoid even fictional commentary on world events.

Thwarted in Love, Focused on Writing Austen's life was restricted by distinct expectations of a woman's proper role in society. Upper-class women in England were entirely legally dependent on their male relatives for financial support, and they were expected to marry well and be dutiful wives and mothers. Despite these social constraints, Austen did have some unconventional

female role models during her childhood and youth. Her Aunt Perrot, a maternal relative, defended herself successfully in court after a shoplifting allegation that was probably true. Her intelligence and independence left a lifelong impression on Jane, as did the lively wit of her cousin, Eliza, Comtesse de Feuillide.

Austen fell in love with Tom Lefroy, a neighbor's nephew, when she was twenty-one years old. However, the romance was not to be—his family did not like the match, and he was sent away from the neighborhood. Her writing, which had initially been for the amusement of family and friends, became more focused during this period and she completed early drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in the late 1790s. She also completed a draft of *Northanger Abbey* in those early years, but that work would not be published until after her death.

In these early novels, Austen played with contrasts—city versus country, money versus poverty, common sense versus sentimentality. She also focused on character, creating lively, humorous heroines and intelligent heroes. Her heroines tend to overcome almost insurmountable obstacles in their determination to marry for love instead of money or social status, though the material pleasures of a comfortable living are never ignored.

In 1800, Austen's father unexpectedly announced his retirement and his intention to move the family to Bath. This upset Austen greatly (she is said to have fainted upon hearing the news), and she disliked the urban environment of the spa town. While visiting friends, she received her first and only proposal of marriage from Harris Bigg-Wither, an unattractive man who was the heir to significant property. Austen initially accepted him, aware that his money would allow her to live comfortably and provide for her parents in their old age, but she soon realized her mistake and withdrew her acceptance. Her refusal to marry a man for convenience rather than love would be reflected over and over again in her heroines.

From Financial Ruin to Professional Success

Austen's father died in 1805, and that event devastated the family emotionally and financially. The Austen women were forced to rely on the other men in the family for financial assistance, which led to their leaving Bath to live with an older brother in Southampton from 1806 to 1809. After that, they settled in a small cottage at Chawton in Austen's beloved Hampshire. There, Austen's period of relatively low production ended. She worked hard editing *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* and began *Mansfield Park*.

Sense and Sensibility appeared in 1811; however, early editions did not include Austen's name, only that the book had been written by "A Lady." The novel was well received and the print run sold out by 1813. Not only did her success please her, but the money Austen earned from *Sense and Sensibility* afforded her a certain

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Austen's famous contemporaries include:

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824): A leading figure of English Romantic poetry.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826): Revolutionary, intellectual, and third president of the United States.

Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802–1838): An English poet and novelist whose romantic verse influenced later poets.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): Preeminent German composer whose music helped bridge the Classical and Romantic eras.

Marie Antoinette (1755–1793): Queen of France, executed during the French Revolution.

independence. *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813, was an immediate success, garnering more favorable reviews. *Mansfield Park* failed to impress the critics, but had popular success, outselling any of Austen's other novels during her lifetime.

Excited by her success (which was recognized by public figures such as the Prince Regent who was said to have kept a set of her books at each of his residences), Austen kept working. In 1815 she published *Emma*, a book about a matchmaking heroine who is unlucky in love, and began work on *Persuasion*, a mature novel about a woman who gets a second chance.

Widespread Recognition After Death Austen remained productive, but her health began to suffer. Her brother Henry, who had persuaded her publishers to take on her first novels, had arranged for *Northanger Abbey's* publication, but his bank failed and he was plunged into financial ruin. The entire family suffered and the brothers were no longer able to afford to care for their female relatives. Though Austen had played down her physical symptoms, it soon became apparent that she was quite ill. By 1817, she was confined to her bed.

Historians suspect that Austen suffered from Addison's disease, a condition that affects the adrenal glands. Though she was hard at work on her unfinished last novel, *Sanditon*, her physical symptoms soon forced her to stop writing. Nursed by her beloved sister Cassandra, she died on July 18, 1817.

Ironically, Austen's death meant the beginning of her recognition as an author. Her obituaries identified her as the author of her popular novels, and *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were both published after her death. While critics of the nineteenth century were unsure how to assess Austen's literary success, her

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jane Austen's novels often pit spirited heroines against men in a "battle of the sexes." This theme has been explored in other works of fiction, including:

Gone With the Wind (1939), by Margaret Mitchell. This epic novel follows vivacious Scarlett O'Hara as she survives the Civil War—and a roller-coaster relationship with the dashing Rhett Butler.

Working Girl (1988), a film directed by Mike Nichols, tells the story of a young woman's tooth-and-nail climb to corporate success in New York.

Star Wars (1977), a film directed by George Lucas, pits insensitive Han Solo against the feisty Princess Leia in a space-opera setting.

I Love Lucy (1951-1957), a TV series created by Desi Arnaz, features Lucille Ball's humor as a foil to her husband's plans and performances.

reputation as an author and one of England's most important literary voices grew steadily throughout the twentieth century.

Works in Literary Context

Jane Austen was influenced by the books she read while under her father and brothers' educational care. Though she read serious works by authors like Shakespeare, Joseph Addison, William Cowper, and Samuel Richardson, she was also heavily influenced by such authors as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. The influence of Austen's own work on future generations of writers is almost impossible to estimate; her work affected writers from Henry James to contemporary writers like Helen Fielding.

Sentiment and Immoral Literature While Austen may have enjoyed the sentimental or Gothic novel, which combined horror and romance, she also was its greatest critic. Many of her works, most notably *Northanger Abbey*, point to novels as a dangerous moral downfall for young girls whose parents fail to adequately protect them from their dangerous content. Though part of this critique was probably tongue-in-cheek, Austen referred to immoral plays and novels as a way of pointing out the loss of virtue she saw in her own society.

Relationships Between Women Austen's novels all center around a female heroine and feature vivid, descriptive passages that depict close relationships between females. Given Austen's own close relationship with her sister and the inspiration she gained from other women in what was often a closed society, it is not surprising that

her works should celebrate and investigate relationships between women. Though Austen does show close friendships and supportive sister pairings (such as Jane and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and Marianne and Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility*), she also shows the potentially destructive character of female relationships. For example, in *Mansfield Park*, the mild-mannered Fanny is preyed upon by the lively Mary Crawford, an immoral woman who uses her friendship to get closer to her cousin. The title character of *Emma* is not a good friend to Harriet, whose life she tries to control through faulty matchmaking attempts.

Not content to only show friendships, Austen also examined family relationships between women. She often uses a silly or selfish older female character as a foil for her heroine. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's romantic future is constantly jeopardized by her mother's meddling ways, and in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is made unhappy by the whimsical demands of her aunts. Though older women are often depicted as conniving or standing in the way of love, women in Austen novels generally have to band together to survive in a man's world.

Marriage and Social Rank In Austen's fiction, marriage is the ultimate goal and the primary source of conflict. Ironically, Austen was a spinster throughout her life, but she saw firsthand the perils of relying on a male relative for financial support. Since women at the time were not allowed to own property and there were no lucrative professions for women, women had to rely on family members and marry as soon as possible in order to live comfortably. This created the "marriage of convenience," in which a woman would marry for money or social standing. However, Austen, who herself turned down a man who was not her intellectual equal, stands firmly on the side of love in marriage. While secondary characters often enter into matches of convenience, Austen's heroines wait for love.

Battle of the Sexes Austen specializes in strong, humorous female characters. Though her female characters are often flawed, they are placed in contrast to male characters who are immoral, silly, conniving, or otherwise threaten their happiness. For example, *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price must fend off the advances of Henry Crawford, a playboy she cannot love. Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* must endure the attentions of Mr. Collins, a ridiculous cleric who tries to win her hand, and has her happiness threatened by Wickham, a dashing but immoral suitor who eventually elopes with her sister. While men often threaten women's social position and future happiness, they also provide entertainment and moral support. The lively exchanges between Elizabeth Bennet and William Darcy are among literature's most entertaining and humorous dialogues, and readers will not soon forget such sympathetic male characters as Captain Wentworth of *Persuasion* and Mr. Knightley in *Emma*.

Works in Critical Context

Contemporary responses to Austen's work were few. Because she published anonymously, her true identity was unknown to most, and though her books sold well, they received few positive reviews. Her real critical heyday came after her death when her books took on a critical stature on par with Shakespeare and other major writers in the English language.

Early Admirers Among Austen's early admirers were writers Richard Whately and Sir Walter Scott. Both praised Austen's realistic descriptions and her lively representations of life. Though the Victorians preferred more sweeping romance and natural depictions of strong emotion, the praise of Scott and Whately created a foundation for future critical response.

The growing literary elite of the nineteenth century considered Austen's work to be sophisticated and tasteful, which prevented it from spreading to the masses. However, the publication of a memoir by Austen's niece and a series of low-cost printings contributed to Austen's growing popularity near the end of the nineteenth century. It became popular to idolize Austen. This "Austenolatry" created a backlash in the literary community, and elite "Janeites" like Henry James told themselves they were the only people who really understood Austen's complex body of work.

Modern Appraisals Whomever Austen's work "belonged" to, it could no longer be ignored by critics. From the end of the nineteenth century on, her work was increasingly scrutinized. Mark Twain and Richard Simpson were among these early critics, but the literary world would have to wait until the twentieth century for the meatiest study of Austen's body of work.

In 1911, A.C. Bradley, a Shakespearean scholar, presented "Jane Austen: A Lecture." In it, Bradley praised Austen's narrative skill and compared her to Samuel Johnson. An academic edition of Austen's works followed in the 1920s, but Mary Lascelles's *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939) marked the real start of serious Jane Austen scholarship.

A new wave of academic interest in the author came in the 1960s and 1970s, when feminist critics turned their attention to Austen's life and heroines. Critics like Margaret Kirkham reexamined Austen as a subversive force dedicated to the rights of women and placed her in a context of eighteenth-century feminist ideals. More recently critics like Moira Ferguson have examined Austen's work through a postcolonial lens, looking at her use of female characters as a critique of imperial and colonial English society.

Responses to Literature

1. Austen's works are considered to be "novels of manners," and were often dismissed for failing to show passionate emotions. Do you agree with this assessment of Austen's novels? Give examples from her work that reveal ways she does or does not evoke strong emotion in her characters and/or their circumstances.
2. Marriage and love are central to Austen's novels. Using your library and the Internet, write a paper that focuses on the status of women and how traditional marriage customs of the early nineteenth century affect their lives.
3. Austen loved to satirize novels of her time. Choose a popular contemporary literary style and write an essay that satirizes that style.

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B

■ Li Bai

SEE *Li Po*

▣ Honoré de Balzac

BORN: 1799, *Tours, France*

DIED: 1850, *Paris, France*

NATIONALITY: *French*

GENRE: *Fiction, drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

La Comédie humaine (1842–1850)

Overview

Honoré de Balzac, whose realist novels and plays focused on French society after the fall of Napoléon Bonaparte in 1815, was one of the most popular and influential European writers of the nineteenth century. His masterpiece *La Comédie humaine* (1842–1850), a multivolume work involving about one hundred interwoven novels and stories, has influenced writers as disparate as Marcel Proust, Charles Dickens, and Henry James, and continues to be regarded by critics as one of the most important and effective character studies to emerge from that century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Estrangement and Ill-Fated Love The years before and after Balzac's birth saw great political upheaval in France. The French Revolution of 1789 brought a bloody end to the country's long-standing rule by monarchy, with many nobles publicly executed by beheading. Just a few years later, however, Napoléon Bonaparte led a coup that resulted in the establishment of his own monarchy of sorts, declaring himself emperor and appointing family members as rulers of regions he conquered. When Bonaparte was removed from power in

1815, the traditional French monarchy was reinstated, though the following decades would see still more upheaval; in 1848, another revolution once again ousted the monarchy, and another Bonaparte—Napoléon III—seized control of France and declared himself emperor. These uncertain times had a profound effect on the fiction Balzac would create.

Balzac, born in 1799 in Tours, France, had a solitary childhood and received little attention from his parents. He lived with a wet nurse until the age of three, and at eight was sent to board at the Oratorian College at Vendome. Later, his family moved from Tours to Paris, where Balzac completed his studies. He received his law degree in 1819; however, to his parents' disappointment, he announced that he intended to become a writer. From 1819 to 1825 Balzac experimented with several different literary forms and later wrote sensational novels and stories under various pseudonyms. He considered these works to be stylistic exercises; they were conscious efforts to learn his craft. They were also his only means of financial support, because he had been estranged from his family. At one point in his career he abandoned writing to become involved in a series of unsuccessful business ventures. Later, he returned to writing, but despite eventual renown, money problems continued to haunt him throughout his life.

Le dernier Chouan; ou, La Bretagne en 1800 (1829; *The Chouans*) was Balzac's first critically successful work and the first to appear under his own name, to which he added, in 1831, the wholly self-bestowed aristocratic particle *de*. The novel *Physiologie du mariage; ou, Méditations de philosophie eclectique sur le bonheur et le malheur conjugal* (*The Physiology of Marriage*) and the collection of short stories *Scenes de la vie privée* (*Scenes from Private Life*), both published in 1830, further enhanced his reputation. These works also increased his appeal to female readers, who valued his realistic and sympathetic portraits of women as vital members of society. In 1832 Balzac received a letter from one of his female admirers signed *l'Étrangère* (the Stranger). The writer expressed her



Honoré de Balzac LAPI / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

admiration for *Scenes de la vie privée* and chided Balzac for the ironic tone in his newest work, *La peau de chagrin* (*Luck and Leather: A Parisian Romance*, 1831). Later this stranger revealed her identity as Madame Hanska, the wife of a wealthy Polish count. Balzac and Madame Hanska carried on an extended liaison through letters and infrequent visits. For nine years after her husband's death in 1841, she refused to remarry; her marriage to Balzac just five months before his death, however, came too late to ease his financial troubles and just soon enough to leave her saddled with a mountain of his unpaid bills.

The Human Comedy, in Life as in Print Commentators on Balzac rarely fail to note his flamboyant lifestyle and eccentric work habits. He never completed a work before sending it to the printer; instead, he sent a brief outline and scrupulously composed the entire work on successive galley proofs. To be free of distractions, he began working at midnight and continued, with only brief interruptions, until midday, fueled by tremendous quantities of strong black coffee. After several months of this solitary, exhausting routine he would cease working and plunge into a frenzy of social activity, hoping to be admitted to the milieu of Parisian aristocracy. Balzac's ostentatious dress, extensive collection of antiques, outrageous printer's bills, and unsuccessful business schemes kept him perennially short of money. Many critics believe

that the pressure of mounting debts pushed him to write faster and thus contributed to the vast amount of material to be found in *La Comédie humaine*.

La Comédie humaine, a massive grouping of over ninety novels and short stories written between 1830 and 1850, is considered Balzac's crowning achievement. His preface to the 1842 collection outlines the goal of his writings. He refers to himself as "secretary to French society," and expresses his desire to describe and interpret his era. Balzac considered it possible to classify social species as the naturalists had classified zoological species. By organizing his stories into groups that depict the varied classes and their milieus, Balzac reveals his belief that environment determines an individual's development. *La Comédie humaine* includes three main sections: *Études analytiques* (*Analytical studies*), *Études philosophiques* (*Philosophical studies*), and the bulk of his work, *Études de mœurs* (*Studies of manners*), which he further divided into scenes of provincial, Parisian, political, military, country, and private life. He intended to portray all levels of contemporary French society but did not live to complete the task. Balzac died in Paris in 1850.

Works in Literary Context

Balzac's reputation as an artist is often tainted by the reputation for bad behavior he garnered while alive. Promiscuous in both romantic and financial affairs, Balzac was constantly in debt, and notorious for disreputable dealings. His life regularly fertilized his fiction; however, his literary reputation might have been still greater had he lacked such an open biography. Many responses to his masterpiece, *La Comédie humaine*, have been seriously influenced by his irresponsibility, his casual attitude toward contracts, his naïveté about his purchases and investments, and perhaps even by his ridiculous appearance.

A Focus on Character Like many great artists, Balzac made changes in the genres in which he worked: in particular, he achieved success in steering novels and short stories away from traditional forms. While the eighteenth-century novel was dominated by narration, Balzac's work focuses primarily on character and setting, studying society as a whole rather than an individual in particular. Though Balzac was more than willing to please his popular audience and provide melodramatic plots to sell his books, he was thoroughly committed to his oft-repeated desire to be the "secretary of his age." While his books contain many wonderful tales, the stories are always subordinate to the overriding vision of the whole of his society. Unlike the normal plot-based novel—which may begin with birth and end with death, begin with a crisis and end with its resolution, or begin with an event and end with its cause and result—Balzac's novels conclude with an understanding of a character, such as Eugénie Grandet, or a type of person, such as a thirty-year-old woman, or the cause of a significant social phenomenon, such as the lust for gold and pleasure that

informs *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (*The Girl with Golden Eyes*, 1834).

The Parts and the Whole Critics often argue over whether it is more beneficial to study the stories in Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* as individual works or as part of a cohesive whole. Early in his career, Balzac explained that his works had appeared in seemingly random order as a result of changing fashion, or of his desire to fill out a volume, or to satisfy his need for variation or renew his inspiration during the gargantuan labors, and so on. Nonetheless, he said through the character of Félix Davin, in the introduction to *Études philosophiques* (*Philosophic Studies*, 1835–1840), “The author no more worried about these transpositions than an architect inquires about the place on the building site where the stones with which he is to make a monument have been brought.” Balzac himself, it seems, always thought of his works as parts of a whole. He put his creations into an explicit, skillfully constructed frame that often limited, defined, and intensified. The frame narrative usually set up a parallel or an opposition with the enclosed story operating rather like a tuning fork, beginning at some point to reverberate. The reader becomes increasingly conscious of the resonances as he or she proceeds through the fiction. One might call this frame its context, whether that means the entire cycle or the reality that served Balzac as a backdrop.

Works in Critical Context

Modern critical interest in Balzac attests to his enduring importance. His influence on the development of the novel in France is unsurpassed. Many critics contend that his use of the genre as social commentary steered the novel toward realism, and Balzac is now considered one of the world's greatest novelists. His ability to blend realistic detail, acute observation, and visionary imagination is considered his greatest artistic gift.

La Comédie humaine The morality of Balzac's works has long been debated. According to Ferdinand Brunetiere, “Balzac brought about a revolution in the novel by doing artistic work with elements reputed unworthy of art.” In his effort to achieve a complete representation of society, Balzac included in his world not only virtue, faithfulness, and happiness, but also squalor, misery, chicanery, sexual perfidy, and greed. Many nineteenth-century readers and critics found his work to be depressing, and, more frequently, they considered his representation of life immoral. Others contended that Balzac was a realist and merely depicted society as he saw it. British playwright Oscar Wilde wrote of Balzac that he “was of course accused of being immoral. Few writers who deal directly with life escape that charge. His answer to the accusation was characteristic and conclusive. ‘Whoever contributes his stone to the edifice of ideas,’ Balzac wrote, ‘whoever proclaims an abuse, whoever sets his mark upon an evil to be abolished, always passes for immoral. If you are true in your portraits, if by dint of daily and nightly toil, you succeed in writing the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Balzac's famous contemporaries include:

John Keats (1795–1821): One of the key poets of the English Romantic movement, Keats was roundly denounced by critics during his lifetime but exerted a most profound influence on English and world poetry after his death.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): The son of a Unitarian minister, Emerson was an American poet and philosophical essayist, generally credited with spearheading the Transcendentalist movement in the United States.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828): An Austrian composer highly regarded for his melodic and harmonic compositions. Though Schubert died extremely young—at the age of thirty-one—his influence on music has been compared to that of Beethoven.

Brigham Young (1801–1877): An important early leader and organizer of the Mormon church in the United States, Young helped annex the territory of Utah for the federal government and was known by many as “the Mormon Moses.”

Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855): Tsar Nicholas was known as the most reactionary of the Russian monarchs, seeing his role as being simply to autocratically rule over his people by whatever means necessary.

most difficult language in the world, the word immoral is thrown in your face.”

Despite the great length and ambitious scope of *La Comédie humaine*, most critics now agree that the work should be approached as a whole. Many praise Balzac's technique of using the same characters in several novels, depicting them at different stages in their lives. For some critics, this strengthens the believability of Balzac's fictional world and enables him to explore the psychology of individual characters more fully than would have been possible in a single novel. Henry James considered Balzac's portraits of people to be his greatest talent. In each of Balzac's memorable portraits, the essential characteristics of an individual are distilled into an embodiment and a reflection of an entire class. Balzac's accurate rendering of detail is generally attributed to his acute powers of observation; however, many critics, notably Charles Baudelaire and George Saintsbury, have emphasized other aspects of his work. They note that while he observed and recorded a wide variety of social milieus with objectivity and accuracy, his work also reveals a profound creative and imaginative power. Modern critics concur, finding Balzac's work to be a blend of acute observation and personal vision.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Balzac is best known and loved for his *La Comédie humaine*, a sprawling work that sets out a world that can only be grasped through immersion in a series of interrelated short stories and novels. Here are several works of fiction that represent key moments in the massive life-worlds created by other authors:

Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone (1997), a novel by J. K. Rowling. The popular author's record-breaking sensation sets up a magical world alongside and intertwined with the mundane world, one which is real only to those with an inborn magical ability. The series of seven Harry Potter volumes, of which this is the first, imagines a world nearly as complex and broad-ranging as many people's experience of our own.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. American modernist Faulkner's highly acclaimed fourth novel represents one piece in the enormous puzzle that was Yoknapatawpha County, a fictional county in Mississippi that mirrored and almost exceeded Faulkner's own real-world Lafayette County.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), a novel by Thomas Hardy. The British author's fictional Wessex County is one of literature's most carefully sustained imaginary landscapes, and the tragic and moving *Mayor of Casterbridge* unfolds in the county seat of Dorchester, where town and farmland meet and mingle, collapsing into one another.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss examples of exaggeration in *La Comédie humaine*. What role does exaggeration play in Balzac's exploration of larger themes? How does it help or hinder our efforts to read *La Comédie humaine* as a sociological document, a quasi-scientific examination of French society and culture?
2. Research Balzac's colorful personal life. What role did his lifestyle play in the development of his fiction? Comparing Balzac with one or two other authors with colorful or not-so-colorful lifestyles (for example, Flannery O'Connor or Henry James), would you say that a life of personal excitement is a crucial element of masterly fiction writing? Why or why not? Be sure to ground your response in research into the lives and works of actual authors.
3. Consider class dynamics in Balzac's work. How does he portray the aristocracy's relationship with the lower classes? What messages does he seem to be sending? Do you believe work like his can have a specific social impact? Why or why not? Be sure to

anchor your argument in actual research and analysis of the texts and the society they appeared in, rather than simply offering an unsupported opinion.

4. Many critics have responded not only to Balzac's work, but to that of a variety of other authors, with the demand that it offer standards for moral behavior. Consider a few famous arguments for and against this position (you may want to start with John Milton's *Areopagitica*) and insert your voice into the debate on one side or the other. Using Balzac's writing as evidence, and responding to and citing other authors on this topic, make a case for why literature should or should not be expected to set moral standards for its readers to follow.

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Julian Barnes

BORN: 1946, Leicester, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Metroland (1980)

Duffy (1980)

Flaubert's Parrot (1984)

A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters (1989)

England, England (1998)

Overview

Julian Barnes writes clever, humorous novels in which he examines such themes as obsession, self-discovery, and personal suffering. He has been praised for his confident tone,



Julian Barnes Barnes, Julian, photograph. Pierre Verdy / AFP / Getty Images.

verbal proficiency, and irreverent wit. Barnes attracted wide critical attention with *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), a book that takes as its topic a stuffed parrot supposedly owned by nineteenth-century French novelist Gustave Flaubert. The book masterfully blended fiction, biography, and literary criticism. This blending of genres marks much of Barnes's work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Knowledge of French and Law Studies Julian Patrick Barnes was born in Leicester, an industrial city in England's East Midlands, on January 19, 1946. His parents, Albert Leonard and Kaye Scoltock Barnes, taught French. The family moved to the London suburb of Northwood when Barnes was quite young. He attended the City of London School on a scholarship, commuting on the Metropolitan Line of the London Underground—an experience that inspired Barnes's first novel, *Metroland*. He studied languages at Magdalen College, Oxford, taught in France from 1966 to 1967, and received a bachelor of arts degree with honors in 1968. His fondness for France, and especially French novelist Gustave Flaubert, is reflected in his books *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Cross Channel*, and *Something to Declare*. Back in England, Barnes took a job as editorial assistant at the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Because he worked mostly with women, he explained in a 1989 interview with Amanda Smith, he was assigned most of the “rude words and sports words.”

In 1972 he moved to London, where he studied law and passed his final bar exams. He also became involved in journalism, reviewing novels and then serving as assistant literary editor and television critic of *The New Statesman*, contributing editor of the *New Review* (where he published under the name “Edward Pygge”), deputy literary editor of the *Sunday Times*, and television critic for *The Observer* (London). During this period he also

wrote a restaurant column for the *Tatler* under the pseudonym “Basil Seal.” He left *The Observer* in 1986 to become a full-time writer and wrote the “Letter from London” column for *The New Yorker* for five years. Barnes still reviews and comments regularly for such journals as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*. Since 1979 he has been married to Pat Kavanagh, a prominent literary agent. His pseudonym Dan Kavanagh—under which he has written several crime novels—seems to be a tribute to his wife, to whom many of his novels are dedicated.

Thatcherism Barnes rose to success as a novelist not long after Margaret Thatcher became the first female prime minister of England in 1979. A conservative leader, Thatcher was known for opposition to both the Soviet Union and powerful trade unions within England, as well as her support of the free market. Thatcher has been criticized for increasing both unemployment and poverty in England during her terms as leader. Some topics with which Thatcher is associated, such as opposition to the European Union and staunch free-market capitalism, play an important part of Barnes's 1998 satirical novel *England, England*, in which the most important parts of England are transported or recreated on a small island that becomes its own sovereign nation as the original England falls into decay.

Works in Literary Context

The Traditions of English Poetry Barnes's first novel, *Metroland*, published in 1981 when Barnes was thirty-five, owes a great deal to the language and traditions of English poetry. The plot centers around a young Englishman, Christopher Lloyd, who visits France during the revolts of 1968 and has a brief affair with a young French woman. The novel immediately demonstrates Barnes's aptitude as both meticulous stylist and careful recorder of closely observed detail. Its three balanced scenes, which echo Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* in many ways, are equally vivid and imaginative. They include the adolescent pranks of clever schoolboys Chris and his friend Toni; Chris's belated and intelligently unsentimental sexual initiation in Paris; and the suburban idyll of Chris's subsequent marriage, to which Toni's rather phony iconoclasm is compared.

Postmodernism Barnes's *A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters* (the allusion is to H. G. Wells's classic of Edwardian optimism *A Short History of the World*) confronts history with postmodern theories of representation to produce the most successful of his novels so far. Its ten chapters describe a succession of critical moments from our culture and history where nothing less is at stake than human survival itself. Simultaneously playful and serious, yet packed with suggestive detail, the book presents a world that is imagined through the postmodern concept of “fabulation,” one in which everything

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Barnes's famous contemporaries include:

Philip Larkin (1922–1985): English novelist, poet, and jazz critic, named England's "best loved poet" and named the country's poet laureate, an honor he declined.

Joyce Carol Oates (1938–): Novelist, playwright, poet, literary critic, editor, professor, Oates's interdisciplinary approach and impressive output has made her a major figure in the literary world.

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Respected Mexican novelist and essayist who has exerted an influence on contemporary Latin American writers and English-language authors alike.

Bernard Pivot (1935–): French journalist and interviewer, known for his use of an adaptation of a questionnaire originally developed by Marcel Proust.

is subtly related to everything else by metaphor and analogy rather than by causal succession, a world only comprehensible in terms of the "primal metaphor" of sea voyage and survival. Its lush parenthetical celebration of love—the half chapter at the core of the novel—links English poetry and postmodernism, since, to return to Larkin's "almost" truth: "what will survive of us is love."

Works in Critical Context

The much-quoted glowing tribute paid to Julian Barnes by Carlos Fuentes has given him the reputation—by no means entirely undeserved—of being the most literary, the most intellectual, and above all, the most international of British contemporary novelists. Barnes's fluency receives frequent acclaim, and indeed, this prolific writer's most successful literary experiments can be most closely compared to his Italian, French, and South American contemporaries.

"Julian Barnes," wrote *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Merritt Moseley, "is one of the most celebrated, and one of the most variously rewarding, of Britain's younger novelists." His work, the critic continued, "has been acclaimed by readers as different as Carlos Fuentes and Philip Larkin; reviewers and interviewers sum him up with praise such as Mark Lawson's claim that he 'writes like the teacher of your dreams: jokey, metaphorical across both popular and unpopular culture, epigrammatic.'" In addition to novels such as *Flaubert's Parrot*, *A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters*, and *The Porcupine*, Barnes has also won a reputation as an essayist and writer of innovative detective fiction. "Since

1990," Moseley concluded, "he has been the London correspondent of the *New Yorker* magazine, contributing 'Letters from London' every few months on subjects such as the royal family and the quirkiest side of British politics." Barnes was also one of many writers—among them Stephen King and Annie Proulx—invited to read from their works at the first-ever New Yorker Festival in 2000.

Barnes's detective fiction also looks at times and characters for whom life has gotten out of control. The title character of *Duffy* is a bisexual former policeman who was blackmailed out of his job. "The thrillers are active, louche, violent, thoroughly plotted," stated Moseley. "*Duffy* shows the result of serious research into the seamy world of London's sex industry; in *Duffy*, as in its successors, the crime tends to be theft or fraud rather than murder, though Barnes successfully imbues the book with a feeling of menace."

Flaubert's Parrot It was with the publication of *Flaubert's Parrot*, however, that Barnes scored his greatest success to date. In the book, amateur Flaubert expert Geoffrey Braithwaite muses on his subject's life, and his own, as he tracks a stuffed parrot that once inspired the famous author. Barnes "uses Braithwaite's investigations to reflect on the ambiguous truths of biography, the relationship of art and life, the impact of death, the consolations of literature," explained Michael Dirda in the *Washington Post Book World*.

Far from a straightforward narrative, *Flaubert's Parrot* blends fiction, literary criticism, and biography in a manner strongly reminiscent of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, according to many critics. *Newsweek* reviewer Gene Lyons called it "too involuted by half for readers accustomed to grazing contentedly in the best-seller list," but recommended it to readers "of immoderate literary passions." Other reviewers stressed that, although it is a complex and intellectual work, *Flaubert's Parrot* is also "endlessly fascinating and very funny," in the words of London *Times* contributor Annabel Edwards. Dirda concluded that this "delicious potpourri of quotations, legends, facts, fantasies, and interpretations of Flaubert and his work... might seem dry, but Barnes' style and Braithwaite's autumnal wisdom make the novel into a kind of Stoic comedy.... Anyone who reads *Flaubert's Parrot* will learn a good deal about Flaubert, the making of fiction, and the complex tangle of art and life. And—not least important—have a lot of rather peculiar fun too."

Some reviewers and literary journalists suspected *Flaubert's Parrot* of not being a novel at all. One line of argument was summed up by David Sexton in the *Sunday Telegraph* (June 11, 1989): "Barnes writes books which look like novels and get shelved as novels but which, when you open them up, are something else altogether. *Flaubert's Parrot* was for the most part a set of studies of Flaubert and his parrot." A burlesque by Eric Metaxas, titled "That Post-Modernism," pretended to describe "Flaubert's Panda," by "Boolean Jarnes," as "part biography, part literary criticism,

part fire hydrant, and part decayed wolf's pelt—in short, the post-modernist novel at its best.” Defending his claim that the book is, indeed, a novel, Barnes is quoted by Sexton as invoking the more experimental Continental novelists and showing that his work fits the definition of the genre: “It’s an extended piece of prose, largely fictional, which is planned and executed as a whole piece.”

A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters Of Barnes’s more recent works, *A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters* and *The Porcupine* are probably best known to U.S. readers. *A History of the World in Ten and One-Half Chapters* “builds on Barnes’ reputation as one of Britain’s premier postmodernists,” stated *Village Voice Literary Supplement* contributor Rob Nixon. “The anti-novel that emerges attempts to double as a novel of ideas—never Brit lit’s forté. . . . The principal concern of the novel, which begins with corruption on the Ark and ends in the tedium of heaven (pretty much like life with lots of shopping), is to debunk religion and that most seductive of theologies, History.” Barnes conceives of history in the book as a series of different, mostly unrelated events, and the connections individuals invent to link them together. “One of Barnes’s characters rather improbably describes her supposed mental condition—imagining that she has survived a nuclear disaster, which, as it turns out, she has—as ‘Fabulation. You keep a few true facts and spin a new story about them,’” declared Frank Kermode in the *London Review of Books*. “This is what Barnes himself, in this book, attempts. He fabulates this and that, stitches the fabulations together, and then he and we quite properly call the product a novel.” “As a ‘historian,’” stated Anthony Quinn in the *New Statesman and Society*, “he is unlikely to dislodge [Edward] Gibbon or [T. B.] Macaulay; but as satirist and story-teller he has few equals at present.”

Responses to Literature

1. In his short story “Melon,” Barnes hints at an affair between the duke of Dorset and the queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Read a biography of Marie Antoinette and write an explanation that either takes the position that her reputation has been slandered or that the story captures the sort of person she actually was.
2. Barnes has often been called a “postmodernist” writer. Research the term *postmodernism* and discuss what qualities Barnes’s writing possesses that would place him in that category. Who are some other contemporary postmodernist writers, and how do their styles compare to Barnes’s?
3. Julian Barnes wrote his “Duffy” detective novels under the pen name of Dan Kavanagh. Other established writers have also used pen names to write certain stories. Why do you think this is? Research some famous authors who have used pen names and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Flaubert’s Parrot centers around an academic’s energetic quest for information that the typical person might find insignificant. The book examines the relationship between such a researcher and his or her subject. Other books that focus on academic quests and the researchers who pursue them include:

Prin (1957), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. A Russian-born professor at a New England college tries gamely to preserve some small happiness and pursue his interests in this masterful work by Nabokov.

Possession (1990), a novel by A. S. Byatt. Like Barnes, Byatt blends genres in this work about two researchers pursuing information about the relationship between two fictional Victorian poets.

Lord Byron’s Novel: The Evening Land (2005) a novel by John Crowley. This work is about the discovery of a lost novel by famed British poet Lord Byron.

the reasons behind their choice to do so. If you had a pen name, what would it be?

4. *Flaubert’s Parrot* has been accused by some critics of not actually being a novel. Discuss what you think the essential aspects of a novel are, and how much you can take away from a novel before it ceases to be one—for example, does a novel have to be fiction?
5. Barnes has been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize three times, for *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *England, England*, and *Arthur & George*. Why is this award considered such a high literary honor? Research the history of the Booker Prize, past winners, and the qualifications to win the award.

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❏ J. M. Barrie

BORN: 1860, Kirriemuir, Angus, Scotland

DIED: 1937, London, England

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: Drama, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

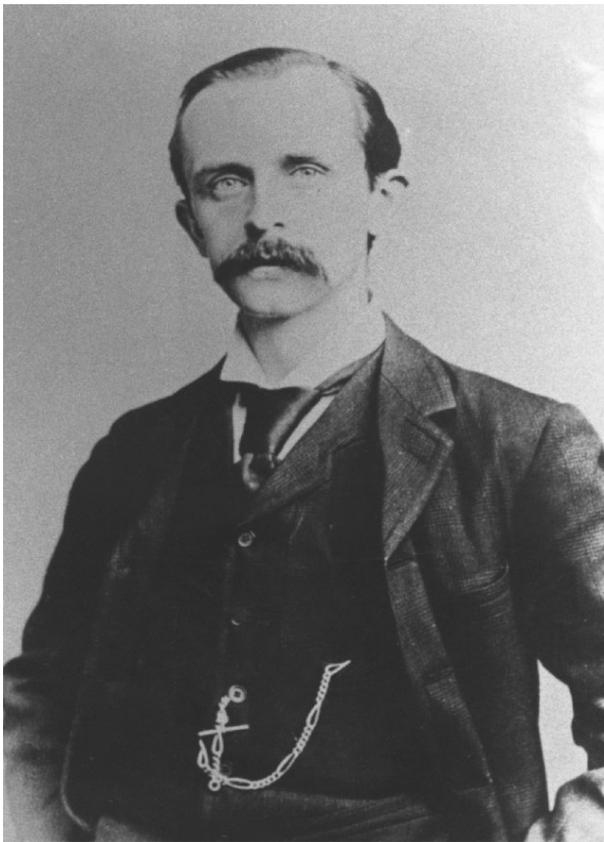
Auld Licht Idylls (1888)

A Window in Thrums (1889)

Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up (1904)

Mary Rose (1920)

"Farewell, Miss Julie Logan" (1937)



J. M. Barrie Barrie, Sir James M., photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

J. M. Barrie wrote dozens of plays in his lifetime and is best known as the creator of *Peter Pan*. However, he began his career as a journalist, during his early years as a writer composed some forty short stories, and ended his prose fiction career with what is arguably his best story.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Victorian Era Barrie grew up in a time known as the Victorian Era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories (including Scotland). Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also witnessed an extended period of peace and prosperity, leading many free to pursue intellectual interests and occupy themselves with the complex rules of behavior found in "proper" society.

Early Tragedy James Matthew Barrie was born on May 9, 1860, in Kirriemuir, Scotland. His parents were Margaret Ogilvy Barrie, daughter of an Auld Licht Kirk stonemason, and David Barrie, a weaver. James was their third son and the ninth of ten children. Some biographers attribute much in his emotional development to a childhood event that sent his devastated mother to her bed for the remainder of her life: In January 1867 Barrie's thirteen-year-old brother David was knocked down by an ice-skater. His skull was fractured, and he died. Barrie later recounted his attempt to take the place of this favorite son. Only seven years old, he told his mother, "Wait till I'm a man and you'll never have reason for greeting [weeping] again."

Barrie and his mother loved stories. They often read to each other, and she recalled for him memories of her early life. These times formed the basis of his early work in journalism and his two collections of short stories. At age twelve he regularly received a monthly penny magazine called *Sunshine*. One month the issue failed to arrive, and he decided to write his own stories to entertain his mother. He wrote in his mother's biography *Margaret Ogilvy* that after these early ventures in writing, "my mind was made up; there could be no hum-dreadful-drum profession for me; literature was my game." His first publication was a piece titled "Reckollections of a Skoolmaster" (1875) in a journal called *The Clown* begun by his friend Wellwood (Wedd) Anderson while they were at Dumfries Academy.

"That Scotch Thing" Barrie began his journalism career as an editorial writer for the *Nottingham Journal*, where he worked from January 1883 to October 1884. In the fall of 1884 he submitted an article called "Auld Licht Idylls" to the *St. James's Gazette*. Frederick Greenwood, its editor and founder, retitled the piece "An Auld

Licht Community” and published it on November 17, 1884. Barrie believed that he had finished with the subject and submitted pieces on different topics. However, Greenwood rejected these articles, returning them with the famous note, “I like that Scotch thing. Any more of those?” Barrie’s responses to this query make up the bulk of his first two collections of stories and sketches. “That Scotch thing” was titled “Thrums” and appears as the second story in his first collection, *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888). “Thrums” possesses many of the fictional qualities for which Barrie was later both lauded and dismissed—humor, stereotyping, Scots dialogue, realistic setting, sentimentality, and fantasy.

He moved to London on March 28, 1885. Barrie began writing a regular column for the *British Weekly*; Hodder and Stoughton, publisher of the *British Weekly*, suggested to Barrie in 1888 that he collect some of his old articles in book form. He chose the Auld Licht stories and created a dominie (schoolmaster) narrator. *Auld Licht Idylls* was published in April 1888. Immediate critical reaction was enthusiastic, though later critics would waver trying to classify and qualify his prose.

April 1888 through January 1889 brought a flurry of publishing activity for Barrie. When Greenwood left the *St. James’s Gazette*, Barrie began looking for another sympathetic editor, finding one in William Ernest Henley, founder of the Edinburgh weekly the *Scots Observer*. Barrie became one of “Henley’s young men,” a group that included Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, and William Butler Yeats.

The Kailyard School In 1891 Barrie wrote a novel called *The Little Minister*, which along with *Auld Licht Idylls* and *A Window in Thrums* placed him in what came to be known as the Kailyard (cabbage patch) School, a term first used by Henley when he titled an uncomplicated article by J. H. Millar in the *New Review* of 1895 “Literature in the Kailyard.” Barrie, as well as Scottish Free Church ministers and authors S. R. Crockett and John Watson, were the primary laborers in the Kailyard. Even detractors of the school, however, recognized that Barrie was the most skilled of the three writers.

Barrie married Mary Ansell in 1894. In 1895 his joy would be replaced, however, with devastation: His beloved sister Jane Ann and their mother died three days apart. Yet by 1896 he had completed a novel, *Sentimental Tommy*, and his mother’s biography. He had also set about dramatizing *The Little Minister*. The play opened to appreciative reviews in 1897. In this same year, Barrie made the acquaintance of a family that shaped his most famous work: the Davies family, with their three sons George, Jack, and Peter. Barrie became a frequent visitor to the Davies household, and named his most famous character after one of them. His play *Peter Pan, or, The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up* (1904) captured the spirit of youth Barrie witnessed in his time with the boys. After the death of their parents in 1907 and 1910, Barrie was

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Barrie’s famous contemporaries include:

Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940): British Conservative politician who assumed the post of prime minister in 1937.

Rudyard Kipling (1835–1936): India-born English author known for his popular children’s works, including *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Just So Stories* (1902).

Joseph Carey Merrick (1862–1890): British gentleman who suffered a physical deformity that caused him to be known as “The Elephant Man.”

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright who co-founded the Abbey Theatre and spearheaded the Irish Literary Revival.

trusted to help raise the Davies boys along with their two younger brothers, Michael and Nicholas.

One Last Success In his final year, Barrie did manage to go through his old stories and articles and compile *The Greenwood Hat* (1937). These “delvings into the past,” wrote biographer Denis Mackail, “released something,” setting “the secret processes to work,” and Barrie was once again motivated to write fiction. The result was “Farewell, Miss Julie Logan,” and the critics were almost unanimous in their approval. Barrie wrote one more play, *The Boy David* (1936), but was unable to attend the opening performance in Edinburgh because of his failing health. He died on June 19, 1937, at age seventy-seven and was buried next to his mother and his brother David in Kirriemuir.

Works in Literary Context

Victorian Style Barrie’s plays were for the most part well received, but he seems to have emerged full-blown as a short-story writer. His stories—providing a transition to the more distinctive fictional voices of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence—offer a clear view of an accepted style of fiction common to late Victorian writing.

In his major collections *Auld Licht Idylls* and *Window on the Thrums*, the narrative device is the observant yet unobtrusive schoolmaster; the subject is an amusing family; and by the last stories there is a true thematic unity. At the center of the thematic content of his stories are characters who depend upon strict patterns in church, family, and work to deal with the stresses of daily living. In this respect his stories mirror their composer, who fiercely sought evidence that ignoring life’s challenges could eradicate them. Barrie saw himself as a writer rather than an artist, and in fairness, his skill at creating dialogue, setting, mood, and humorous plots must be recognized.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Barrie did focus some of his writing on social concerns, but his most popular works are those magical worlds accessible only to children. Here are a few works by writers who have created memorable fantasy worlds for children:

Alice in Wonderland (1865), a novel by Lewis Carroll. In this magical tale, Alice falls through a rabbit hole into a world of Mad Hatters and giant caterpillars, all with the gift for words of nonsense.

Winnie the Pooh (1926), a novel by A. A. Milne. Christopher Robin's toy bear comes to life and has simple adventures that result in constructive lessons.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), a novel by L. Frank Baum. In this adventure story, Dorothy and her dog Toto are taken on a journey and must find the Wizard of Oz to return home, meeting along the way some unique characters who also have specific needs.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950), a novel by C. S. Lewis. In this novel, four siblings reach the land of Narnia by passing through the back of an old wardrobe. Once there, they find themselves caught up in a fierce struggle against the evil White Witch, who has plunged Narnia into never-ending winter.

He simply had no interest in delving into the realities of the Industrial Revolution, which changed the lives of his fellow Scots, nor in exploring, for example, the effect of World War I upon his countrymen in England.

Influences Two important influences mark Barrie's writing: his storytelling sessions with his mother and her retelling of her own past. It is also evident he was a consummate reader—of penny dreadfuls, the works of R. M. Ballantyne and James Fenimore Cooper, and more. Barrie also followed what was suggested to him by his editors; Greenwood, Robertson Nicoll, and Henley provided him with a formula, and he chose never to deviate far from it.

Fellow writers Robert Louis Stevenson, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and H. G. Wells admired Barrie's work, but it seems to have had no impact on their own writing. Barrie's major influence is seen only in the works of S. R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren, who are usually mentioned only as examples of the usually deplored Kailyard School.

Works in Critical Context

Though later viewed as the sentimental outpourings of a man who refused to grow up and of a writer who dodged the harsher realities of poverty and the severity of the Church in his native Scotland, Barrie's short stories were typically well received in their time. Immediate enthusi-

asm for *Auld Licht Idylls*, for example, is demonstrated in a review by William Wallace in *Academy*: "[Barrie's] descriptive power, which is little if at all inferior to his humour, and, like it, has the saving grace of self-restraint, reminds one sometimes of Mr. Thomas Hardy." A generation later, however, critics attempting to place Barrie's short stories within a body of Scottish literature found the humor of *Auld Licht Idylls* heavy-handed and the quaintness of his unusual Lowland rural folktales unrealistic.

A similar combination of views is found in later criticism, which, while tending to lump *Auld Licht Idylls* and *A Window in Thrums* together, still manages to find some maturing of Barrie's writing. Critic Eric Anderson notes that "the greatness of this minor masterpiece [*A Window*] lies not in its humour and pathos, nor even in the brilliance of its dialogue and the spare prose of its descriptive passages, but in the sense of significance with which Barrie invests the humble life which he describes." Yet another critic, George Blake, sees the whole book as "sorry stuff in terms of life" and as "a debauch of sentimentality." However, the analysis of modern scholars like Leonee Ormond suggests a new willingness to discuss his writing apart from his life, his unfortunate classification as a Kailyard writer, and the easy dismissal of him as a sloppy sentimentalist.

Granted, few of Barrie's earliest pieces qualify as short stories by most modern definitions. But a consensus of critics have found some redeeming qualities in later stories—a knack for moving the narrative ahead with dialogue, which presages his transition to drama in the early 1890s; a comical sense of the absurd; interesting historical depictions of early nineteenth-century Scottish traditions, customs, and language; and a mature portrayal of human sensibilities. Such skills are seen in stories like "Farewell, Miss Julie Logan."

"Farewell, Miss Julie Logan" (1937) The critics were almost unanimous in their approval of this last short story, featured in Barrie's 1937 collection, *The Greenwood Hat*. A review in *Commonweal* represented the positive reaction, calling it "a marvel of construction, of characterization, deft humor, and amiable sentiment . . . with just that touch of fancifulness that distinguishes the highest artistic creation." In this story Barrie creates, perhaps for the first time in his short-story career, an atmosphere rather than an attitude. The character of Adam Yestreen, a learned man open to new ideas and to a romantic approach to life, is fully realized, as is the voice of the narrative, knowing yet not sly. In addition, the supernatural element gives the piece an underpinning of intellectual suspense. Barrie also finally achieves a thematic treatment of adult romantic love. Many years after the publication of "Farewell, Miss Julie Logan," critics continue to find charm and skill in Barrie's last short story.

Responses to Literature

1. J. M. Barrie is perhaps unfairly relegated to the Kailyard School and incorrectly credited with

founding this minor literary movement. In an effort to decide whether you think Barrie should be remembered in this context, research the Kailyard School. Consult literary encyclopedias and other useful resources, and discover where the term originally comes from, what characterizes a Kailyard writer, and who else was included in this movement. You may also wish to discuss with peers why the Kailyard School is considered a “minor” rather than major literary movement. Do you think this had to do with attitudes toward Scottish people in general? Toward Scottish writers?

2. Go online to literary sites and databases and find one aspect of Victorian literature to investigate. This could be Victorian literary style, esteemed Victorian writers, lesser-known Victorian writers, publishing venues of the period, differences in the Victorian Era writing of different cultures, or even the events and concerns that influenced Victorian themes. When you have printed out examples, return to share your new area of expertise with the group.
3. Barrie’s most famous character is Peter Pan, from his play of the same name. This character was based not only on one of the young boys Barrie helped raise but on the feisty and mischievous Greek god of the woodlands, Pan. Research the Greek background for Pan. Then look into other Greek gods and goddesses. How have these ancient figures made their way into other literature and art? How are they similar to our human heroes and celebrities?
4. Peter Pan in Barrie’s play is the “boy who wouldn’t grow up.” Barrie was sometimes criticized as a man who refused to grow up. In the 1980s, psychologist Dr. Dan Kiley proposed *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up* (1983). What constitutes this popular psychological syndrome, and where else in literature or film can you identify the refusal to be anything other than a child?

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🗒️ Matsuo Bashō

BORN: c. 1644, Ueno, Iga, Japan

DIED: 1694, Osaka, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Seashell Game (1672)

The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton (1685)

The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches (1689)

Overview

Best known as the progenitor of the modern haiku form, Matsuo Bashō is considered one of the most important figures in Japanese literature. Whereas the brief, seventeen-syllable poem form had traditionally been a vehicle for light humor and esoteric wordplay, Bashō, drawing on the more somber and introspective modes of Chinese poetry, created haiku that used simple descriptions of nature and life to create a more profoundly expressive poetic form.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Deserted Samurai Training Although little is known about Bashō’s early life, he is generally believed to have been born in 1644 in the Iga province of Japan. He was the son of a low-ranking samurai, in a time when the meaning of the term was changing. The samurai were an aristocratic class of warrior knights who practiced martial values and had elaborate rules about dress and behavior, as well as their own code of honor. While the



Matsuo Bashō © Roger-Viollet / The Image Works

samurai had recently received special privilege in this time period, there was little warfare after the early seventeenth century and they saw their power weaken as the ruling isolationist Tokugawa shogunate (military dictatorship) took hold.

Bashō became a page to Todo Yoshitada, a young samurai two years his elder; the young men became close friends, bonded by their mutual interest in *haikai*, a form of long poem from which haiku derives. Bashō intended to become a samurai himself and even acquired a samurai name, Matsuo Munefusa, but he abandoned his training when his master died unexpectedly in 1666. Scholars attribute his decision both to grief over his friend's death and his diminished hopes for his future as a samurai under a new, less amicable master.

Became Acclaimed Haiku Master Bashō's exact whereabouts during the next several years are unclear, but he is believed to have lived for some time in Kyoto (then the capital of Japan), where he studied philosophy and poetry and had verses published in at least four anthologies between 1667 and 1671. In 1672, Bashō compiled *The Seashell Game*, an anthology of haiku written for a contest in which he judged and commented on the work of thirty poets, including himself.

Later that year, Bashō moved to Edo (present-day Tokyo), where he began to write under the pseudonym Tosei. For the next eight years, his reputation as a haiku master steadily increased. He began to attract a large

retinue of disciples, who built him a small hut where he wrote and taught. In front of the hut was planted a banana tree, a rarity in Japan, which pleased the poet so much that he took for his writing name "Bashō," the Japanese word for "banana plant."

New Faith Led to Inspirational Journeys Having achieved his longtime goals of artistic success and material prosperity, Bashō increasingly felt a sense of purposelessness and spiritual disquietude. Consequently, he began the study of Zen Buddhist meditation and embraced an ascetic lifestyle at a time when Buddhism was essentially the government-required religion for every Japanese citizen. In 1684, he undertook a pilgrimage on foot across the Japanese countryside. Bashō regarded his journey as an exercise in spiritual and artistic discipline, but it proved to be physically trying for him. He recounted his travels in *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton*, a diary of prose and poetry.

For the remainder of his life, Bashō continued to make pilgrimages, visiting religious and secular sites, spreading his ideas on haiku to fellow poets, and often begging alms for subsistence. His prose and haiku recollections of these travels, especially *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, are considered his most accomplished and lasting literary works. Between journeys, he spent much of his time living and writing in secluded huts in the wilderness.

In 1691, Bashō returned to Edo, where he found himself again besieged by visitors. He struggled with a spiritual conflict between his religious desire to transcend worldly affairs and his poetic avocation, which focused attention upon himself. This conflict briefly forced Bashō into self-imposed isolation in 1693, and the following year he began a series of travels along the Pacific coast of Japan. When his health declined rapidly that spring, he was forced to stop in Osaka, where he died of a stomach ailment that summer.

Works in Literary Context

Although Bashō wrote in various poetic forms—including the *haibun*, a prose poem written in a language and tone similar to the haiku and the *renku*, a longer poem written by several poets contributing alternating verses—it was in the haiku that he made his greatest contribution to Japanese literature. Prior to the 1670s, Bashō saw poetry primarily as a pleasant diversion and his haiku from this period rely mostly on puns and parody for effect. Most critics remark that these poems evidence a spry wit, though little poetic merit. Indeed, the haiku form itself was not regarded as a serious form of literature at the time that Bashō began to practice it. Rather, it was considered a light intellectual exercise.

Danrin Movement After moving to Edo, Bashō committed his efforts to establishing himself as a poet. His poetry became more distinguished and inventive when he became associated with the Danrin movement in Japanese haiku. The Danrin poets, among whom

Bashō soon became acknowledged as a leader, sought to expand the scope of the haiku beyond that of urbane witticisms. They produced poems that were more concerned with the common experiences of everyday life than with intellectual and courtly humor.

It was not until roughly 1680, however, when he became established as a haiku master and teacher, that Bashō began to make the stylistic renovations that would elevate haiku to its position as one of the dominant literary forms in Japan. Modeling his writing after Chinese poetry, which is traditionally more understated and serious in tone than Japanese verse, Bashō began to write haiku that evoked deep emotions through simple and almost purely descriptive language.

Zen Buddhism Influenced by his study of Zen meditation, his haiku of the early 1680s became contemplative studies in which he attempted to recapture fleeting moments of his experience. One of Bashō's most famous haiku, often cited as the poem that marks this turn in his career, reads: "On a bare branch / A crow is perched— / Autumn evening." These haiku generally depict scenes from nature, often linking together disparate images to create an implied mood. They relied for their effect on the reader's interpretation of the images described rather than on any explicit statement.

Although these haiku were intended to evoke an emotional response, they were not meant to express personal emotion unlike traditional Japanese poetry in which the imagery served as a mirror of the poet's own feelings. "Learn about a pine tree from a pine tree, and about a bamboo plant from a bamboo plant," Bashō advised; that is, the role of haiku poets is to capture in words the inner nature of their subjects and in order to do this they must detach themselves emotionally in their writing. Most critics contend that Bashō began composing his finest haiku after 1684, when he began making pilgrimages and writing his famous travel diaries, in which he intermingled prose and poetry.

Loneliness and Lightness It was during this time that Bashō formulated the concept of *sabi* as an essential for the haiku poet. Derived from the Japanese word for loneliness, *sabi* refers not to emotional solitude but to what Bashō considered the proper mood for a haiku: the poet's awareness of the transiency of individuals and objects. In his later poems, Bashō often juxtaposed images of short-lived phenomena with those of a more enduring nature, as in the poem, "The old pond. / A frog jumps in / The sound of the water." Here, Bashō contrasts a momentary splash with an "old" natural feature, evidencing the relationship between the ephemeral and the eternal that concerns much of Zen philosophy. Furthermore, *sabi* suggests the sense of quietude that imbues many of Bashō's haiku.

A second major principle informing Bashō's later poetry is that of "lightness." That is the poet's bemused and detached acceptance of the impermanence and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bashō's famous contemporaries include:

Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727): Physicist and mathematician, Newton's theories on gravitation and motion revolutionized science and defined the laws of the universe for centuries to come.

Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709): The great-grandson of the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate that controlled Japan's fortunes for 250 years, Tsunayoshi's reign was marked by a golden age in Japanese arts.

Robert de LaSalle (1643–1687): French explorer who led expeditions around the Great Lakes region and down the Mississippi River. These explorations, which claimed the entire Mississippi River basin for France, would eventually lead to the formation of the Louisiana Territory.

Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693): Creator of the "floating world" genre of Japanese prose, Saikaku—according to some reports—composed 23,500 verses in twenty-four hours in 1684.

imperfections of the material world. It is important to note that, for Bashō, these principles of poetry were also principles of living. He saw his philosophy as inseparable from his poetry and advocated the concepts of *sabi* and lightness as part of one's attitude toward life. Indeed, many critics have noted that Bashō developed these principles at times of crisis in his personal life. They contend that these principles helped him to reconcile the conflict between his religion and his desire to write poetry, which he sometimes disparaged as a "sinful" practice that jeopardized his dedication to Zen.

Helped Define Japanese Poetry Bashō's influence on later Japanese poetry is such that many subsequent literary movements have defined themselves to some extent in terms of their relationship to Bashō. Poets of the Haikai Restoration movement of the eighteenth century took as their motto, "Return to Bashō," and the Japanese symbolist poets of the early twentieth century adopted many of the techniques employed by Bashō in his haiku.

Works in Critical Context

So completely was Bashō venerated in Japanese letters that negative criticism of him began to appear only after the end of the country's isolationist period in the nineteenth century, when many Japanese, embracing the Western emphasis on individualism, began to fault Bashō's de-emphasis of the idiosyncrasies and personal emotions of the poet. Outside Japan, Bashō has been

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bashō's poetry was informed by his devotion to Zen Buddhism, and his verse addresses many of the tenets of that religion. Other Zen poets have explored similar themes:

Wild Ways: Zen Poems of Ikkyū, by Ikkyū (1995). Ikkyū was a fifteenth-century Buddhist monk known for his hedonistic, almost heretical take on Zen as well as his contributions to creating the formal tea ceremony. His poetry is as eccentric as his life.

One Robe, One Bowl; The Zen Poetry of Ryōkan, by Ryōkan Taigu (1977). An eighteenth-century Zen monk who lived most of his life as a secluded hermit, Ryōkan's poetry is equal parts gentle humor and quiet meditation on nature.

The Zen Poetry of Dogen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace, by Dogen (1997). The thirteenth-century Zen philosopher Dogen is perhaps better remembered for his koans, short parables meant to aid in the path to enlightenment, but his poetry is equally respected.

cited as a direct or indirect influence upon many poets who took inspiration from haiku—most notably Ezra Pound. Bashō is generally acknowledged as the greatest poet ever to write in that form, as much for his integration of poetry, religion, and philosophy into an all-encompassing way of life as for his stylistic innovations.

In an essay discussing the relationship between Bashō's philosophy and his poetry, critic Makoto Ueda has commented, "[Bashō's] great poetry is a combined product of the two: his philosophy of life comparable to religion in its profound understanding of reality, and his art which gave it a full expression."

The Narrow Road While all of Bashō's books have been applauded by critics for many years, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* has received special emphasis. Writing in *The Bamboo Room: An Introduction to Japanese Haiku*, Harold Gould Henderson noted of the collection, "It is quite short—it could be translated into English in about ten thousand words—and it contains only about fifty of Bashō's haiku. Yet it is undoubtedly one of the great works of Japanese literature, and it has probably been annotated and commented on more than any other work of its size in the world."

Responses to Literature

1. Bashō was a devout practitioner of Zen Buddhism. Research the tenets of that religion, and analyze the Zen concept of the eternal that marks Bashō's verse.

2. Summarize Bashō's contribution to the art of traditional haiku. What was haiku like before Bashō? How has it changed since his day?
3. Try writing your own haiku. Take note of some basic, striking truth of nature and record it in three lines—five syllables in the first, seven syllables in the second, and five syllables in the third. For this type of poem, there is no need to explain the significance of the event, only to record it clearly.
4. Discuss the haiku format. Do you think that it is too confining, or does it spare the poet the problem of having to choose a style? Do you think haiku writers would overexplain if they could use more words?
5. Compare Bashō's "Temple Bells Die Out" with a haiku written by a modern Asian American writer, Diana Chang's "Most Satisfied By Snow." Explain how the haiku style, as displayed in this poem, appears to have influenced Chang's style, and point out similarities in the two poems' ideas.

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Charles Baudelaire

BORN: 1821, Paris, France

DIED: 1867, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Les Fleurs du mal (1857)

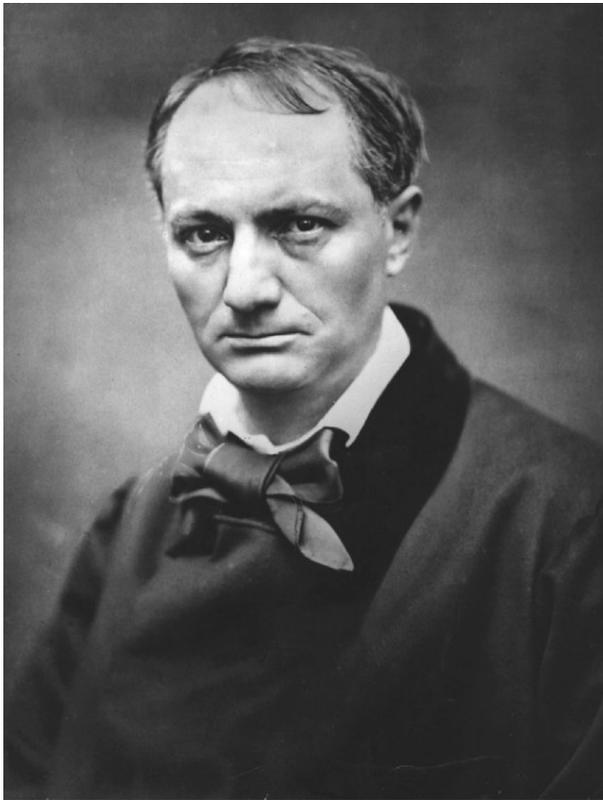
Les Paradis artificiels: opium et haschisch (1860)
Journaux intimes (1887)

Overview

Charles Baudelaire is one of the most compelling poets of the nineteenth century. While Baudelaire's contemporary Victor Hugo is generally acknowledged as the greatest of nineteenth-century French novelists, Baudelaire excels in his expression of modern themes within structures of technical artistry. Baudelaire is distinctive in French literature also in that his skills as a prose writer virtually equal his ability as a poet. His body of work includes a novella, influential translations of the American writer Edgar Allan Poe, highly perceptive criticism of contemporary art, provocative journal entries, and critical essays on a variety of subjects. Baudelaire's work has had a tremendous influence on modernism, and his relatively slim production of poetry in particular has had a significant impact on later poets.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Complex Family Relationships Charles Baudelaire was born on April 9, 1821, in Paris. His father, Joseph François Baudelaire, had been a friend of the philosophers C. A. Helvétius and A. N. de Condorcet and tutor



Charles Baudelaire Etienne Carjat / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

to the young sons of the Duc de Choiseul Praslin. His mother, Caroline Archimbaut-Dufays Baudelaire, was born in London in exile in 1793 and died at Honfleur in 1871. At the time of their marriage, François was sixty and Caroline just twenty-six.

In February 1827, when Baudelaire was not yet six, François died. His father's death led to a period of very close intimacy with his mother, for whom the boy felt a deep love. Her remarriage near the end of the following year to the handsome officer Jacques Aupick might have seemed to her son a cruel betrayal.

It is understandable that Baudelaire might have been jealous of his mother's new husband, because he was deeply attached to his mother. Their close relationship was of enduring significance. Much of what is known of his later life comes from his extended correspondence with her.

Baudelaire's stepfather, a capable and resolute man, rose to the rank of general, was named minister to Turkey in 1848 and ambassador to Spain in 1851, and in 1853 became a senator. But his nature was different from Baudelaire's, and he took a very dim view of his stepson's desire to be a poet. Financial constraint, alienation, and complex emotions defined Baudelaire's life. It is against this backdrop of complicated family relations that some of the best poetry in the French language was written.

An Extravagant Lifestyle Baudelaire was expelled from the Lycée Louis le Grand in 1839 for refusing to give up a note passed to him by a classmate. He had not yet received his baccalaureate degree, but he managed to obtain it later that year. He registered for legal studies in Paris. For a time he led a dissipated, bohemian existence in the Latin Quarter, where he probably contracted syphilis, which later caused his death. He may also have begun taking opium and hashish during these years. In 1841 his worried parents arranged a sea voyage to India to draw the young poet out of his dissolute environment. His ship sailed from Bordeaux but was damaged in a storm. Baudelaire apparently went no farther than the island of Mauritius, to the east of Madagascar. He returned home, however, with unforgettable memories of exotic lands and seas.

When he was twenty-one, Baudelaire inherited a modest fortune from his father's estate, but his extravagance soon led to the appointment of a legal guardian whose conscientious control of his finances drove the poet nearly to despair. A long affair with a multiracial woman who called herself Jeanne Duval added to his suffering, although she seems to have been the person, along with his mother, whom Baudelaire loved most in life. She was his "Black Venus" and the inspiration for some of his most beautiful and most despairing poems. Other women frequently celebrated in his verses were the voluptuous Madame Sabatier ("la Présidente") and green-eyed Marie Daubrun.

The Revolution of 1848 The France of Baudelaire's time was a country of near-constant political unease. Though the French Revolution in 1789 had been fought to improve the lives of the lower classes, by the 1830s the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Baudelaire's famous contemporaries include:

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Well known today for his macabre mystery stories and gothic poetry, Poe is also generally considered the father of detective fiction and a major contributor to the birth of science fiction.

Victor Hugo (1802–1885): Romantic poet, playwright, and novelist, best known in the English-speaking world for his novels *Les Misérables* (1862) and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831).

Édouard Manet (1832–1883): Revolutionary French painter—forerunner of Impressionism and modern art.

Louis Napoleon (1808–1873): Nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, Louis Napoleon was elected first president of the French Republic in 1848. Four years later he was proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III. His reign would last until 1872, when defeat in the Franco-Prussian War would bring an end to the last French monarchy.

country was largely ruled by a monarch, King Louis-Philippe, who aimed to reduce the power of the masses by limiting the rights of the press and keeping the lower classes from voting. Opposition to this form of government built, especially as unemployment and economic hardship worsened. This resulted in a relatively bloodless revolution that led to the formation of a new provisional government advocating citizens' rights to work and to vote. Baudelaire, like many writers and artists of the time, supported the revolution and its ideals.

Controversial Work and Life Baudelaire's significant early publications were two essays of art criticism ("Le Salon de 1845" and "Le Salon de 1846") and two volumes of translations from the tales of Poe in 1856 and 1857. *Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs du mal*) appeared at the end of June 1857. It is considered his greatest work and is the work for which Baudelaire was tried for offenses against religion and public decency. He was found guilty of the second charge and sentenced to pay a fine of three hundred francs and to remove six poems from his collection.

Baudelaire's writings on wine, opium, and hashish mirror his concerns as artist and moralist. In his most famous writing on drugs, *Les Paradis artificiels: opium et haschisch* (1860), the opium essay is based on Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, but "Le Poème du haschisch" is Baudelaire's own. He knew from experience the hallucinations of both drugs and apparently suffered the miseries of addiction to opium. He concludes that man cannot, without terrible danger, alter "the primordial conditions of his existence." If the artificial paradises enhance imagination, they destroy the "precious substance" of the will.

As the years passed, ill health and financial problems added to Baudelaire's miseries. In 1864 he went to Belgium to deliver a series of lectures that ended in dismal failure. He suffered further terrifying attacks of illness. In the midst of all this unhappiness he learned that Jeanne Duval might be going blind. Finally, in March 1866, he fell while visiting a church at Namur, Belgium, with friends. A few days later he was found dazed in a café and taken home, where he was later discovered paralyzed and unable to speak or understand those speaking to him. In July 1866 he was brought back to Paris and placed in a rest home. He died in his mother's arms on August 31, 1867, and was buried two days later in the family vault in Montparnasse Cemetery, where a somber monument was unveiled to his memory in 1902.

Other Writings In the *Petits poèmes en prose* (1869), sometimes called *Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire developed the prose poem into an exquisite form. The volume's fifty examples of this genre depict mostly a world of lonely people: old women, artists, children, workmen, crowds, widows, clowns, cold and perverted lovers—the poor and cynical and bored men and women of the great city. But again, beyond the suffering and misery, one finds Baudelaire's understanding of the strange "heroism of modern life."

Among Baudelaire's *Journaux intimes* (1930), the most notable are the two notebooks called *Fusées* and *Mon coeur mis à nu*, a title that Baudelaire took from Poe. They contain invaluable insights into the poet's inner world "his intellectual, ethical, religious, and aesthetic speculations and his comments on love and women, boredom, and material progress. There is constant evidence of Baudelaire's moral and intellectual elegance, of his dandyism, and of his violent antipathy to the society of his day; but above all, one is conscious in these pages of his inner distress—his fears and longings and his sense of the loneliness of the human situation.

Works in Literary Context

Sin and Despair Baudelaire's most famous work is his collection of poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), whose title means both "Flowers of Evil" and "Flowers of Suffering." Baudelaire believed that original sin pervades man's world, and a sense of theological evil looms over his thought like a cloud. But he proclaimed suffering "a divine remedy for our impurities" and wrote that "it is one of the prodigious privileges of Art that...suffering put to rhythm and cadence may fill the mind with a calm joy."

The first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* contains only 100 poems, and the posthumous edition of 1868 suffers from having been put in order by friends after the poet's death. Thus the second edition of 1861 (the last arranged by Baudelaire's own hand) is most useful for a study of his art. It comprises an introductory poem, "To the Reader," which is a powerful indictment of the current society, and

126 poems divided into six sections: “Spleen and Ideal,” “Parisian Sketches,” “Wine,” “Fleurs du mal,” “Revolt,” and “Death.”

Baudelaire’s imagination and moral nature were deeply rooted in his Catholic background, and although his gloomy conception of humanity doomed by original sin is not alleviated by any assurance of salvation, it is important to recognize that Baudelaire does keep for man’s spiritual nature a dimension of eternity. Love in Baudelaire’s poetry, as elsewhere in his writings, is seen most often in dark and despairing terms, and many of his epithets for woman are extremely cruel. His grim vision of love is evident, for example, in the hideous imagery of the poem called “Voyage à Cythère” and in “Sed non satiate.”

Beauty and Aesthetics Poems concerned with aesthetics, such as “Correspondances,” “Les Phares,” “La Beauté,” “L’Idéal,” and “Hymne à la Beauté,” reveal Baudelaire’s very complex ideas on the beautiful. While greatly influenced by the aesthetic concepts of romanticism, Baudelaire also recalls significant elements in the great neoclassic writings of the seventeenth century in his concern with the moral, psychological, and religious aspects of man’s nature, in his relatively small vocabulary, and in his powerfully compressed expression. Baudelaire’s belief in the importance of beauty for its own sake had a marked influence on the so-called “decadent” writers of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers such as Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde.

Modern Subject Matter It is in his subject matter and the range of his sensibility that Baudelaire seems most modern. His poems on ennui bear the accent of his age; and his poetic imagery, with its marvelous interplay of the senses—for example, “Correspondances” and “Harmonie du soir”—introduces a powerful new sensuousness into French poetry and gives a new literary importance to odors and fragrance that would be exploited later in the novels of Émile Zola and Marcel Proust.

Baudelaire’s vision of Paris in the eighteen poems of the “Parisian Sketches” includes what he called “the heroism of modern life.” His Paris is a city of physical and spiritual and moral suffering, and the eyes of the men and women in the poems depicting it are full of unrest and sorrow. But over the great city are skies that make one think of eternity; and there is mystery and enchantment amidst the suffering.

In *Les Fleurs du mal* there are recurrent dominant images of ennui, time, and death. The clock is seen as a sinister god, terrifying and impassive, and time is ultimately the victor over man. The last poem in *Les Fleurs du mal* is “Le Voyage,” representing death as a voyage that may lead to “something new.”

Works in Critical Context

When *Les Fleurs du mal* was first published, reviewers were frightened away from offering positive reviews. As A. E. Carter explains it, this was a catastrophe that can

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Les Fleurs du mal provoked a scandal when it was published, but it has since been hailed as a classic. Other works whose reputation has shifted in the same way include:

Madame Bovary (1856), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. This novel, now considered one of the greatest works of literature ever written, was initially at the center of an obscenity trial. Flaubert expressed sympathy for Baudelaire when he came under fire for his work not long after.

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. Irish novelist Joyce’s modernist masterpiece was deemed pornographic in the United States, and its publication in America was banned until 1934.

Tropic of Cancer (1934), a novel by Henry Miller. Miller’s semiautobiographical novel, published in Paris, was still controversial enough to earn him an obscenity trial when the first American edition of the book was published in 1961.

Howl and Other Poems (1955), a poetry collection by Allen Ginsberg. American Beat poet Ginsberg was launched into stardom when he was put on trial for obscenity after the publication of this book.

hardly be understood in a modern age in which scandal often translates into sales: “In 1857 the uses of publicity were not properly understood: Instead of profiting by the lawsuit, Baudelaire’s career suffered an undeniable setback. Poetry is seldom an easy article to market, especially poetry like his, and now publishers had a sound excuse for turning down his manuscripts. Not until twenty or thirty years later did the 1857 stigma prove negotiable. It has paid off pretty well since; *Les Fleurs du mal* have always smelled of forbidden fruit.”

The second edition of the book, in 1861, is the one on which Baudelaire’s considerable reputation is built—the six poems deemed to be indecent were removed, and roughly a hundred new poems were added.

Baudelaire was considered a breakthrough poet, at least by other poets. His reputation was discussed, but his works were not widely available until after 1917, when the copyright ran out and his works fell into public domain. Baudelaire was a powerful influence on the French symbolists, who gained international acclaim in the late 1800s. He was also a strong influence on T. S. Eliot, whose artistic theories were central to the development of the Modernism movement from the 1920s forward.

Contemporary critics are able to see the influence that Baudelaire’s poetry has exerted on the literary world

over time. Most literary analyses focus on his fascinations with Satan and beauty, such as when Lewis Piaget Shanks noted, in 1974, that “Baudelaire could never shake off the Catholic dualism, that consciousness of our warring flesh and spirit.” It is this dualism that has made him a model poet—his poetry is intellectually challenging, but still based in the experiences of the senses.

Responses to Literature

1. “Hymn to Beauty” is about a beautiful woman who is considered a “sacred monster.” Research several female celebrities who are famous for their “bad girl” images. What about their behavior is considered shocking? Is there a point at which the public stops being titillated and starts being disgusted?
2. Baudelaire makes frequent reference in *Les Fleurs du mal* to “spleen.” What does he mean when he uses this term? How does spleen contrast to his concept of the ideal?
3. Baudelaire’s poetry can either be seen as a condemnation or affirmation of love. Choose a side and then support your argument with evidence from his poetry.
4. Using your library and the Internet, research current obscenity laws at the local and national level. Could these laws be applied to label any music or literature that you enjoy as obscene?
5. Research a recent court case or public controversy that involves censorship of a writer, musician, filmmaker, or cartoonist. Have the issues or themes that provoke calls for censorship changed in the last century? How are they different? How have they remained the same?

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■ Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

BORN: 1732, Paris, France

DIED: 1799, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:
Eugenie (1767)

The Barber of Seville (1775)

The Marriage of Figaro (1784)

Overview

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais is considered one of the greatest playwrights of eighteenth-century France. Working in a period of stylistic transition, he effectively synthesized elements of Molière’s comedy of manners, Italian *commedia dell’arte* (play of professional artists), and the ideas of Denis Diderot concerning the *drame bourgeois* (bourgeois tragedy). Although his early plays are rarely performed, *The Barber of Seville*, and, above all, *The Marriage of Figaro* are considered masterpieces of the comedic genre and are frequently produced.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life at Court Beaumarchais was born Pierre-Augustin Caron in Paris on January 24, 1732, the son of a clock-maker. He was educated at the Ecole d’Alfort until the age of thirteen, then apprenticed to his father. During his employment as a designer in his father’s shop, Beaumarchais invented a new type of escapement for regulating watches that was recognized by the Academie des Sciences in 1754. He was presented at court the same year, where he soon won the favor of Louis XV and his



Pierre August Beaumarchais *Beaumarchais, Pierre August, photograph.*
The Library of Congress.

mistress Madame de Pompadour. Beaumarchais consolidated his position at Versailles, in 1755, when he bought an annuity from a retiring court official, Franquet. The following year, he married Franquet's widow, who died in 1757, leaving him a small property from which he derived the name Beaumarchais.

An increasingly influential figure at court, Beaumarchais became the music instructor to the daughters of the king, and organized concerts for special occasions. During this period he became friendly with Joseph Paris-Duverney, a powerful banker who invited Beaumarchais into the world of high finance and made him a partner in speculative business schemes. Through Duverney's assistance, Beaumarchais purchased, in 1761, the title of *Secrétaire du Roi*, which conferred legal status of hereditary nobility.

Beaumarchais Begins his Writing Career Beaumarchais visited Spain from 1764 to 1766, where he attended court and pursued financial negotiations on behalf of Duverney. He returned to Paris, in 1767, to present *Eugenie*, his first serious effort as a playwright. His next play, *The Two Friends*, was produced three years later. Beaumarchais was involved in a series of highly controversial court cases in the 1770s, and consequently his influence at Versailles in the final years of Louis XV greatly diminished. With the accession of Louis XVI in 1774, however, his fortunes rapidly improved; he even served as a government agent in 1774–75, providing aid to American forces during the early phases of the Revolutionary War. Also in 1775, he produced *The Barber of Seville*, and in 1784 his masterpiece, *The Marriage of Figaro*, which enjoyed an extraordinary success at the Theatre de la Comedie Francaise. Beaumarchais's interest in opera became manifest when he wrote the libretto for *Tarare*, set to music by Salieri and produced in 1787.

French Revolution Although Beaumarchais initially welcomed the meeting of the Estates-General in Paris in 1789, the increasingly radical course of the French Revolution made his position extremely precarious, and he was arrested in 1792, narrowly escaping the September massacres—an explosion of mob violence, which resulted in the killing of half the Paris prisoner population. Beaumarchais subsequently fled to England and Holland before settling in Germany as an émigré; meanwhile his family was imprisoned and his properties alienated to the Jacobin regime. Beaumarchais returned to France in 1796, but his appeals for the restoration of his property were unheeded, and he was left destitute. He died of a stroke in Paris on May 18, 1799.

Works in Literary Context

Beaumarchais's plays, influenced by Molière, incorporate complex characters and critiques of social customs and the relationship between the aristocracy and the other classes of society. While it is debatable just how revolutionary this tactic was, it is clear that Beaumarchais was very successful in his criticism of the aristocracy, given that, in response to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Beaumarchais's famous contemporaries include:

Laurence Sterne (1713–1768): Experimental English novelist who is best known for his novels including *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen*.

Voltaire (1694–1778): French philosopher and author who, although a very popular figure, was exiled from Paris for most of his career.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): American Founding Father whose many activities include writing, invention, and diplomacy.

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809): Austrian composer who is one of the most important early figures in the history of symphonies.

Henry Cavendish (1731–1810): English scientist who discovered hydrogen.

Benedict Arnold (1741–1801): Born in Connecticut, this general fought first for the Revolutionaries in the American Revolution but later switched sides and supported the British Army in its attempt to halt the revolution.

one of his plays, the King of France suggested that it could singlehandedly bring down his monarchy.

Criticism of the Aristocracy Within *The Barber of Seville* (as later with *The Marriage of Figaro*), Beaumarchais took every opportunity to denounce aristocrats for abuses of servants, to elucidate injustices in the treatment of women, and to challenge absurdities of the French state. In addition to the importance of these comedies in their denunciation of political power, Beaumarchais's use of comic procedures espoused by Molière enabled him to control the ebb and flow of intrigue. Such procedures as the use of nuanced characters and the apt depiction of social customs in diverse settings demonstrate an original dramatic style, one that allowed Beaumarchais to make new observations upon the changing relationship between the servant class and the aristocracy. At the same time, Beaumarchais filled his plot with new intrigues and changing social roles amid a burgeoning bourgeois economy, as when Figaro, in *The Barber of Seville*, emphatically exclaims, “Me, spoil with a vile salary the good service that I do?”

Pleas for Social Justice Beaumarchais saw his second play, *The Marriage of Figaro*, premiere in 1784; it excelled both as satire and as a plea for social justice. Figaro the barber, now risen to the rank of gatekeeper at the chateau of Count Almaviva, wishes to marry Suzanne, the countess's maid. Although the count agrees to this marriage, he also wishes the young woman's favors for himself, adhering to the long-standing *droit de seigneur*. Consumed by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Beaumarchais's plays, critical of the aristocracy, were wildly popular. However, Beaumarchais's treatment of the upper class brought him the disfavor of the King of France—so much so that Louis XVI argued that *The Marriage of Figaro* would incite the public to destroy the monarchy. Louis XVI later retreated from this position and actually praised the play for its popularity. Many authors and artists feel the wrath of the government of the country in which they work, but not all of them receive the same kind of approval Beaumarchais eventually received. Here are a few works that have been received poorly by figures of political power:

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. Before this text was published in a single volume, its various parts were published in a magazine over a period of almost two years. During this time, Joyce was charged with indecency for his portrayal, among other things, of masturbation.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (1997), a novel by J.K. Rowling. Although never officially banned by the government, the entire *Harry Potter* series has been challenged by various groups for its purported promotion of magic and devaluation of Christian beliefs.

The Satanic Verses (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. An analysis of Muslim identity in the modern world, this work was so controversial and considered so blasphemous by Muslim leaders that the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, issued a decree that any good Muslim ought to kill Salman Rushdie and his publishers for the heresy the book contains.

jealousy and infuriated by the escapades of the page Cherubin toward his wife, the count avenges himself in aiding the countess's servant, Marceline, in a lawsuit against Figaro. Through its many romantic intrigues, which link characters of diverse classes, *The Marriage of Figaro* can be considered a plea for social justice.

In both *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro* Beaumarchais's role as defender of morality of both sexes is offered through the representation of diverse views on love, money, and vanity, of concern to all classes in his society. Originally banned by Louis XVI, who stated that its performance would require the destruction of the Bastille, *The Marriage of Figaro* was first performed in private before the count of Artois, the King's brother. In 1784, the ban was lifted; first performances were both successful and scandalous, with Beaumarchais himself inciting groups of moralists and conservatives.

In addition to his considerable efforts at using complex characters to take jabs at the aristocracy, Beaumarchais was inadvertently responsible for ushering in a new era

of opera when his *The Marriage of Figaro* was put to the music of Mozart. In this modern era of opera, the focus moved from music to action, a shift that writers had been petitioning for, for quite a while before Beaumarchais.

Influence on Modern Opera Beaumarchais realized his ultimate ambition: he reform opera, and the reform was revolutionary and permanent. It was by setting Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* that Mozart achieved his operatic ideals and gave himself at last the central dramatic ensemble that had to be constructed for him factitiously in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. The experience also radically altered Mozart's style, and determined the course of opera for the next century. Part of the credit must be given to Lorenzo Da Ponte, who adapted the play for Mozart, but even more belongs to Beaumarchais himself. His theater was not transformed into opera, but was originally conceived in operatic terms, quite literally inspired by the tradition of comic opera and its unrealized possibilities.

As spokesperson for the Enlightenment, Beaumarchais had considerable influence on eighteenth-century social institutions. Through dramatic, lyric, and autobiographical texts, he synthesized the spirit and fulfillment of his age into forms that relegated laughter to the service of characters. His drama was strikingly original in its portrayals of multifaceted characters and the social problems of the revolutionary period. Thus, he humanized stereotypes, according them the variety of social backdrops he himself had known. Relying on art, he displayed his public to itself, proclaiming through his wit essential preconditions for an aristocracy of merit and the advent of a new age.

Works in Critical Context

Reputation Reverses with Success in The Barber of Seville Despite the failure of *The Barber of Seville* on opening night, Beaumarchais listened to his critics and, in a period of three days, reduced it to four acts instead of five, resulting in the resounding success of the second performance. Recounting the premiere, eighteenth-century critic Frédéric Melchior Grimm noted in his *Correspondance* (1879) that Beaumarchais was "the horror of Paris a year ago, and everyone, based on neighborhood gossip, believed him capable of foulest crimes." And yet, he said, "the public raves about him today and defends him for what he has written. What a darling child is the French nation! When vexed, how spiteful it turns; when made to laugh, how good natured and well-behaved." Modern criticism has included discussions of the play's historical evolution. For example, in his essay "Inventor of Modern Opera" critic Charles Rosen argues that *The Barber of Seville* was initially conceived in operatic terms and goes on to lament the proliferation of numerous shorter versions of the original text which lack the artistic prowess of the original. He writes, "If publishers are going to make the variants available for the delight of scholars, it is self-defeating to print them in a way that can

give pleasure to no one, and is disgustingly painful to read. I should have sacrificed the hundreds of pages of Beaumarchais's mediocre sentimental plays for a satisfactory printing of the five-act version of *The Barber*.”

Contemporary Approaches to Beaumarchais Beaumarchais's critical stature is considerably higher in France than in the English speaking world, where his work has received comparably scant attention. Critics from England and America have explored diverse themes in their analyses of Beaumarchais's plays. Whereas some commentators consider them merely an extension of particular historical movements—for example the French Enlightenment—others consider the plays in terms of character types, dramatic structures, or thematic motifs, such as that of children's games explored by Walter Rex. Critics are in general agreement, however, that Beaumarchais transformed classical French comedy by emphasizing its social discourse as opposed to its formal stylistic properties.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Marriage of Figaro*. What about this play do you think scared Louis XVI so much that he felt its performance could incite the public to overthrow the monarchy?
2. Beaumarchais often criticizes the aristocracy in his plays. Read *Eugenie* and *The Barber of Seville*, then answer these questions: What specifically does he criticize? Why? What do you make of these criticisms? Do they seem well-founded? In your response, use the Internet and the library to research the society in which Beaumarchais writes in order to evaluate his jabs at society. Also, make sure to cite specific examples from whichever text you choose to read.
3. Discuss the presence of useless precaution in *The Barber of Seville*. How does this theme appear and what role does it serve?
4. Research the French Enlightenment on the Internet and in the library. In what ways does the work of Beaumarchais exemplify the ideals of the French Enlightenment?

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Samuel Beckett

BORN: 1906, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1989, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction, drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Waiting for Godot (1953)

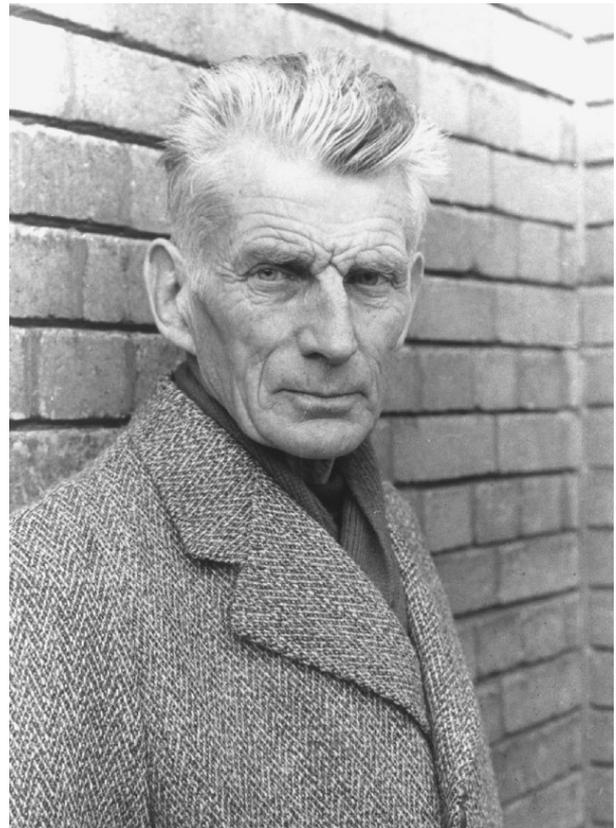
Happy Days (1961)

Breath and Other Shorts (1972)

Not I (1973)

Overview

Samuel Beckett stood apart from the literary circles of his time, even though he shared many of their preoccupations. He wrestled with the problems of “being” and “nothingness,” but he was not an existentialist in the manner of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Although Beckett was suspicious of conventional literature and of conventional theater, his aim was not to write antinovels or anti-plays as some authors did. His work shows affinities to James Joyce's, especially in the use of language; to Franz Kafka's in the portrayal of terror; and to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's in the



Samuel Beckett *Beckett, Samuel, photograph.* © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

probing of the darker recesses of the human spirit. Beckett was inspired, rather than influenced, by literary figures as different as the Italian poet Dante; the French philosophers René Descartes and Blaise Pascal; and the French novelist Marcel Proust. Beckett's own work opened new possibilities for both the novel and the theater that his successors have not been able to ignore.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Stellar Student Beckett was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906, to middle-class Protestant parents. He attended the Portora Royal boarding school in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, where he excelled in both academics and sports. In 1923, he entered Trinity College in Dublin to specialize in French and Italian. His academic record was so distinguished that upon receiving his baccalaureate degree in 1927, he was awarded a two-year post as *lecteur* (assistant) in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

James Joyce In France, Beckett soon joined the informal group surrounding the great Irish writer James Joyce and was invited to contribute the opening essay to the book *Our Examination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, a collection of twelve articles written as a defense and explanation of Joyce's still-unfinished *Finnegans Wake* by a group of Joyce's disciples. Beckett also moved in French literary circles. During this first stay in Paris he won a prize for the best poem on the subject of time in a competition sponsored by the Hours Press. His poem *Whoroscope* (1930) was his first separately published work and marked the beginning of his lifelong interest in the subject of time.

Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 to teach French at Trinity College but submitted his resignation after only four terms, saying that he could not teach others what he did not know himself. During the year he had obtained a master of arts degree. His penetrating essay on novelist Marcel Proust, published in 1931, indicates how many of his subsequent themes Beckett was already beginning to consider at this time. After several years of wandering through Europe writing short stories and poems and working odd jobs, he finally settled in Paris in 1937.

First Attempt at Playwriting At the beginning of his career, Beckett spent his time in Dublin reading, in his own word, "wildly." From Johann Goethe to Franz Grillparzer to Giovanni Guarini, he finally settled into a single-minded concentration upon the life and work of Samuel Johnson. He began to collect information about Johnson, filling page after page in a large three-ring notebook with miscellaneous facts and quotations. Quite possibly this exercise was a means to keep his mind off *Murphy*, his first novel, which had recently been refused by the twenty-fifth publisher to see it, but also it repre-

sented a means to engage in a form of agreeable activity that counterbalanced his unpleasant circumstances.

Something convinced Beckett that he must turn all the material he had collected about Dr. Johnson into a play, and by early summer 1936, he was calling it his "Johnson Fantasy." He claimed to have the entire play outlined in his head and that he only needed to commit it to paper. His original idea was to write a long four-act play to be called "Human Wishes," after Johnson's poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes."

Beckett wrote a ten-page scene of the play, but the rest of the material remains unwritten and the notes are unedited. His work was halted by the realization that he could not accurately capture the eighteenth-century English language as Johnson and his contemporaries spoke it.

Despite his early failures at playwriting, Beckett would later return to the art form to create some of his best-received work, including the play *Waiting for Godot*.

World War II: Writing in French When World War II broke out in 1939, Beckett was in Ireland. He returned immediately to Paris, where, as a citizen of a neutral country, he was permitted to remain even after Nazi German occupation. He served in the Resistance movement until 1942, when he was obliged to flee from the German Gestapo, the Nazi secret state police, into unoccupied France, where he worked as a farmhand until the liberation of Paris by Allied troops in 1944. During these years he wrote another novel, *Watt*, published in 1953. By 1957, the works that finally established Beckett's reputation as one of the most important literary forces on the international scene were published. Surprisingly, all were written in French.

Other Media Beckett reached a much wider public through his plays than through his difficult, obscure novels. The most famous plays are *Waiting for Godot* (*En Attendant Godot*) (1953), *Endgame* (*Fin de partie*) (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), and *Happy Days* (1961). The same themes found in the novels appear in these plays in more condensed and accessible form. Later, Beckett experimented successfully with other media: the radio play, film, pantomime, and the television play.

Works in Literary Context

Beckett's work is best seen as a refinement of the French existentialist thinkers who were his contemporaries. Existentialists primarily concern themselves with the problem of the meaning of life, specifically as it is viewed in terms of its inevitable ending. That is, existentialists are perplexed by the problem of enjoying life while knowing that death is just around the corner. Beckett's own take on this problem forces him down roads that other existentialists had not traveled—for example, into a discussion of the disconnect between the language one uses and the world one tries to describe with it and how this disconnect reflects the absurdity of life.

French and the Absurd Beckett's work often tries to express the pure anguish of existence. In order to do this, he felt he must abandon "literature" or "style" in the conventional sense and attempt to reproduce the voice of this anguish. Indeed, these concepts—that existence is a kind of anguish—was widely expressed in French by authors Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. These philosophers were called "existentialists," and concerned themselves with the evaluation of the quality of human life, about whether life had meaning at all, and if so what that meaning was. Like Beckett, Camus felt that there was something essentially "absurd" about the lives humans live, in which they hope for so much but ultimately know that they must and will die, a reality that, in a way, diminishes the joy of life itself. Not surprisingly, then, Beckett utilized the French language to express his own feelings about the absurd.

The trilogy of French novels *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnamable* (1953) deals with the subject of death. In a twist on the existentialists' thoughts of the time, in these novels it is not death that is the horror or the source of absurdity, but life itself. To all the characters, freedom can exist only outside time, and since death occurs only in time, the characters try to transcend or "kill" time, which imprisons them in its fatality. Recognizing the impossibility of the task, they are finally reduced to silence and waiting as the only way to endure the anguish of living. Another novel, *How It Is* (*Comment c'est*), first published in French in 1961, emphasizes the solitude of the individual consciousness and at the same time the need of every individual to have others he or she cares for; after all, it is only when one is with another human being that one can know one exists. The last of Beckett's French novels to be published was *Mercier and Camier* (*Mercier et Camier*) in 1970. This work demonstrates Beckett's interest in wordplay, especially in its use of French colloquialisms.

Language and Meaning *Watt*, like each of his novels, carries Beckett's search for meaning a step further than the preceding one, or, as several critics have said, nearer the center of his thought. In many respects, *Watt's* world is everyone's world, and he resembles everyone. And yet his strange adventure in the house of the mysterious Mr. Knott—whose name may signify: not, knot, naught, or the German *Not* (need, anxiety), or all of them—is Beckett's attempt to clarify the relationship between language and meaning. *Watt*, like most people, feels comfort when he is able to call things by their names; a name gives a thing reality. Gradually, *Watt* discovers that the words men invent may have no relation to the real meaning of the thing, which would imply that the language one uses cannot help one in communicating truth. Language is separate from the world it tries to describe, an idea that feeds into the concept of the "absurd." After all, what kind of meaning can one's life have if one cannot even express one's experiences accurately?

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Beckett's famous contemporaries include:

James Joyce (1882–1941): By far the most popular of Irish authors. Until Ireland switched over to the euro, Joyce's portrait appeared on the country's currency—evidence of the important role the author played in his home country.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): This French author is credited with examining the "absurdity" of life in his novels and plays.

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): Thatcher was the first female Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. She held the office from 1979 until 1990.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro led Cuba, either as president or prime minister, for the better part of fifty years. He held the office of president from 1976 to 2008.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist whose dense and complex work, like Beckett's, has been applauded by scholars but has yet to find a popular readership.

Irmgard Keun (1905–1982): German novelist whose works were banned by the Nazis in 1932.

A Play with No Action? When Beckett worked on his Samuel Johnson play, he tried to conform his talents to the traditional form of the play—including the use of five acts to tell his story. *Waiting for Godot*, however, broke the tradition. Additionally, in this relatively short play, Beckett throws action out the window. Unlike the plays of Shakespeare in which action is as crucial to the telling of the story as the words of the play, in *Waiting for Godot*, audiences are asked to watch two characters wait for a third person, Godot, whom they were each supposed to meet. Aside from the dialogue, very little happens. This minimalist approach to playwriting paved the way for so-called one-man acts, in which a single character does little more than talk to the audience.

Lasting Legacy A vast range of contemporary authors have expressed their admiration of the work of Beckett, including seminal Beat Generation writer William S. Burroughs and Nobel Prize-winner J. M. Coetzee, whose *Waiting on the Barbarians* is an homage in form to *Waiting for Godot*. Coetzee has also spent a good part of his career writing essays about the work of Beckett.

Influences A close examination of Beckett's work reveals several literary influences. There is a likeness to James Joyce, especially in Beckett's use of language; with Franz Kafka in Beckett's portrayal of terror; and with Fyodor Dostoyevsky in the author's tendency to probe the darker side of the human spirit. The author was also

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Much of Beckett's work is directly or indirectly concerned with time and its representation on the stage and in novels. Many of Beckett's plays, in fact, have a sense of timelessness, a feeling that the actions in the plays do not occur in any particular time at all but stand outside of time itself. Other works that attempt to capture a feeling of being outside of time include:

Invisible Cities (1972), a work of fiction by Italo Calvino.

Calvino's book is set up as Marco Polo's dreamlike recollection of his travels to Kublai Khan, but there is no linear path through the story or the travels.

Hopscotch (1963), a novel by Julio Cortázar. Cortázar offers multiple paths through his novel about self-discovery, as well as multiple endings, including one that would set readers on an infinite loop.

"The Library of Babel" (1941), a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. One of Borges's most famous stories, "The Library of Babel" speculates about the existence of an infinite library in which all books ever written and all books that could possibly be written exist.

Groundhog Day (1993), a film directed by Harold Ramis. This comedy tackles the interesting question of what would happen if a person was forced to relive the same day over and over again.

obviously inspired by a range of literary figures as different as Dante; the French philosophers René Descartes and Blaise Pascal; and the French novelist Marcel Proust. Regarding Beckett's influence on literary tradition, his work opened new possibilities for both the novel and the theater.

Works in Critical Context

Critical and popular response to Beckett has always been divided. Some find Beckett's unique plays and complicated novels fascinating and brilliant, while others find them simply frustrating. Although Beckett's plays will probably never qualify as long-running Broadway hits, his reputation remains strong while his works have become staples of literature classes.

The critical response to Beckett's most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, perhaps best exemplifies the way the author has been reviewed through the years.

Waiting for Godot *Waiting for Godot* contains two acts in which two men, Vladimir and Estragon, both down-and-out, wait for someone named Godot, who is supposed to keep an appointment with them. Critical attitudes toward the play were positive from the premiere, when Sylvain Zegel wrote in the very first review that "The audience understood this much: Paris had just

recognized in Samuel Beckett one of today's best playwrights." Armand Salacrou wrote, "An author has appeared who has taken us by the hand to lead us into his universe." More than a decade later, however, author Martin Esslin described the "succes de scandale" the play had become: "Was it not an outrage that people could be asked to come and see a play that could not be anything but a hoax, a play in which nothing whatever happened! People went to see the play just to be able to see that scandalous impertinence with their own eyes and to be in a position to say at the next party that they had actually been the victims of that outrage."

Responses to Literature

1. Read or watch a production of *Waiting for Godot*. How does Beckett use time elements in this play? What effect does the passing of time have on you as the reader (or audience)? How does this effect differ from the effect achieved in *The Persistence of Memory*?
2. Beckett's work is marked by peculiar and, at times, playful uses of language. Often, though, readers find this wordplay difficult to follow. As you read Beckett, pick out a few instances of wordplay and analyze what Beckett achieves with them.
3. Beckett once wrote a play in which the only character was a pair of disembodied lips. How do you think such a play would be received today?
4. Beckett's interest in time and its passage in his plays is tremendous. Compare Beckett's representation of time with the representation of time in a contemporary movie like *Memento*, which also plays with time. Which representation of time is more engaging and why?

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▣ Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

BORN: 1836, Seville, Spain

DIED: 1870, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Leyendas (*Legends*, 1857–1864)

Rimas (*Rhymes*, 1871)

Overview

Best known for his poetry collection *Rimas* (1871) and short stories collected as *Leyendas* (1857–1864), Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer is considered one of the most important Spanish lyric poets of the nineteenth century. Although his melancholic themes suggest comparisons with the Romantics, his restrained and understated style is decidedly un-Romantic. He has been called Spain's first modern poet.



Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. *Becquer, Gustavo*, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Orphan with Artistic Aspirations Gustavo Adolfo Domínguez Bastida was born February 17, 1836, in Seville, Spain to Don José Domínguez Bécquer, a well-known painter, and Joaquina Bastida de Vargas. Orphaned at the age of ten, Bécquer lived with various relatives and trained to be an artist. He moved to Madrid in 1854 to pursue a career in literature. He would remain there the rest of his life.

Bécquer became active early on in a circle of writers, artists, and musicians under the tutelage of composer and literary editor Joaquín Espin y Guillen. Bécquer fell in love with Guillen's daughter Julia—who is widely considered the inspiration for his *Rimas*—but his feelings were unrequited. Bécquer found some success with the publication of his *Leyendas* (*Legends*, 1857–1864). In 1861, he married Casta Esteban y Navarro, daughter of a physician who had treated him for tuberculosis. They had three children, but their marriage ended in separation.

The Glorious Revolution During his lifetime, Bécquer published a number of his poems and short stories in journals, particularly *El Contemporáneo*, in which he also published his “spiritual autobiography,” *Letters from My Cell* (1864). He supported himself largely through journalism, translating, and minor government posts, including official censor of novels—a position he held from 1864 to 1868, when the government of Queen Isabella was overthrown by the Glorious Revolution, which established a Spanish republic instead of a monarchy.

At the time of the Glorious Revolution in 1868, Bécquer was collecting his *Rimas* for publication. The manuscript was lost in the turmoil, and he was forced to reconstruct it from memory. Bécquer died of pneumonia and hepatitis on December 22, 1870, in Madrid. The poems were published as a collection in 1871, the year following his death, under the direction of Bécquer's friend and biographer Ramón Rodríguez Correa. *Rimas* consists of a sequence of seventy-six poems that relate the poet's quest and failure to achieve an ideal in either art or love.

Works in Literary Context

Critics have noted Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's profound influence on such later writers as Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, Spanish poet and novelist Miguel de Unamuno, and Nobel Prize-winning Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez. Others, such as Jorge Guillen, have noted his relationship to German literature. Guillen writes: “Bécquer's predecessors are undoubtedly those poets in Germany who, at the end of the eighteenth century, proclaimed the primordial importance of dreams.”

The Grotesque In calling the supernatural elements in *Leyendas* representative of the Romantic “grotesque” style, Paul Ilie argues: “To isolate [the grotesque mode] as a sensibility is to reveal Bécquer's place in the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bécquer's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): An English novelist and poet in the naturalist style, Hardy is well known for his themes that expose and comment on social constraints.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): While president of the United States, Lincoln presided over the Civil War and issued the Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order abolishing slavery in the Union states. He was assassinated in 1865.

David Livingstone (1813–1873): A Scottish missionary and explorer, Livingstone unsuccessfully searched for the source of the Nile River in Africa and was the first European to see Victoria Falls, which he named after the British queen.

Claude Monet (1840–1926): A French painter, Monet founded the impressionist style of painting in contrast to the popular style of realism.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): A French writer of the naturalist school, Zola is also famous for accusing the French government of obstruction of justice and anti-Semitism for falsely convicting a Jewish soldier to life imprisonment, which resulted in justice finally being done in the case.

development of the grotesque esthetic in Spain, from [Spanish golden age poet Francisco de] Quevedo and [eighteenth-century Spanish painter Francisco] Goya before him, to Spanish surrealism afterwards.” Ilie continues by suggesting that “Bécquer’s works are not only the most important in Spanish Romantic literature, but they raise questions that are fundamental to European esthetics in the second half of the nineteenth century.”

The Disembodied Soul Critic Julian Palley finds a strong literary heritage for the out-of-body experiences included in *Rhymes*, from classical writers Plato and Cicero through Italian Renaissance poet Dante’s *Divine Comedy* to the pre-Romantics and Romantics. Palley argues: “This particular kind of oneiric [dream] experience, in which the disembodied soul rises, soars, travels vast distances, in an indeterminate time, becomes one of the characteristic forms that dreams take in Bécquer’s *Rimas*. . . . Yet in Bécquer’s dreams, as well as in those of [German Romantic writer] Novalis and [English writer Thomas] De Quincey, the flight itself (so common in recorded dreams) is subordinated to an effortless transportation to higher or distant regions; they do not give us the sensation of flight, but rather its result.” Palley also notes that “[t]he diaphanous, ethereal, airy images and metaphors, which are characteristic of nearly all of Béc-

quer’s *Rimas*, can thus be better understood as relating to the central dream vision of the ‘disembodied soul,’ with its ascension and weightlessness.”

Works in Critical Context

Widely regarded as a founder of modern Spanish poetry, Bécquer was popular among his contemporaries, although the poems in *Rimas* were not published as a collection when he died. Instead, after his death, his poems were passed along by word of mouth from poet to poet until a complete collection was published. Commentators have remarked on the progressiveness of his poetic style. Written in colloquial language, the poems in *Rimas* are characterized by half-rhyme and speech-rhythms.

Rimas and Leyendas Critics of Bécquer’s works have focused on his *Rimas* and *Leyendas*, noting his concern with such themes as idealism, love, spirituality, and the supernatural. According to Gabriel Lovett, for example, “A constant in Bécquer’s work [is] the pursuit of the unattainable,” specifically in *Leyendas*, where “the supernatural once more plays the decisive part [as the] protagonist tries to reach for something beyond man’s possibilities.”

Responses to Literature

1. In Bécquer’s time, most poetry was not written in colloquial, or everyday, language. Today, however, poetry is generally written like everyday speech. First, think about whether you believe poetry should be elevated in order to show the poetic skill involved or whether you believe poetry should be more accessible, demonstrating subtler skill. Then, using resources at your library or on the Internet, find a short poem (ten to twenty lines) that illustrates your opinion. Using the poem you found to support your ideas, write a short essay exploring your side of the issue.
2. Bécquer worked as a censor for the royal government. At that time, books could be censored if they might corrupt someone. Go to Banned Books Online (<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/banned-books.html>) and look at some of the books that have been censored. Write a personal statement that explores the following questions: Do you think people should be protected from reading certain things, or should people be able to judge for themselves? If people should be protected, who should decide what is suitable and what is not?
3. Using the Internet or your library’s resources, research the “grotesque” style popular in Bécquer’s time. Write an essay describing it and explaining why Bécquer may have felt it important to include it in his work.
4. With a classmate, visit the Alba Learning Web site (<http://albalearning.com/audiolibros/Bécquer.html>) and click on “Leyendas” to read Bécquer’s story “Maese Perez the Organist” in English.

After you read the story, discuss what you think really happened.

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Brendan Behan

BORN: 1923, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1964, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Plays, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Quare Fellow (1954)

The Hostage (1958)

Borstal Boy (1958)

Overview

Once characterized as "a professional young Irishman," Brendan Behan took that role fully to heart. In 1964, he died an early death from diabetes brought on by alcoholism. By that time, he had already become a legend. Stories of his drunken antics and his youthful "terrorist" activities for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were more prevalent in the media than mention of his literary creations.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's use of the grotesque in his short stories is part of a long literary tradition that continues to this day. Here are some examples:

Duma Key (2008), a novel by Stephen King. After an accident that took his arm and ended his marriage, Edgar Freemantle moves to Florida and becomes obsessed with—or perhaps possessed by—painting.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. Roderick Usher believes that his house is a living creature; after he buries his dead sister, ominous events occur.

The Golden Pot (1814), a novella by E. T. A. Hoffman. In this masterpiece of German Romantic literature, a young student struggles with the supernatural seemingly woven into his daily life.

The Phantom of the Opera (1986), a musical written by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Based on Gaston Leroux's 1909 novel by the same name, this popular musical tells of the haunting of the Paris Opera by the "Opera Ghost," a disfigured man who lives below the building and falls in love with one of the singers.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this work by the English poet, a sailor kills an albatross after his ship is blown off course during a storm, and is tormented by enraged supernatural beings as a result.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Upbringing Rich in Politics and Literature
Brendan Francis Behan was born in Dublin on February 9, 1923. His father, Stephen, was a housepainter, as had been his father before him. Both of Brendan's parents had known middle-class comforts (though not in their married lives). As a youth, Brendan's father was educated in a seminary. Kathleen, Brendan's mother, was the sister of Peadar Kearney, who wrote "The Soldier's Song," (c. 1907), which became the Irish national anthem in 1926. Kathleen was also the sister-in-law of P. J. Bourke, who was manager of the prestigious and popular Queen's Theatre in Dublin. The two formative influences on Behan's life and writing were his Republican politics and his love and knowledge of Irish literature and culture. He owed these influences to both sides of his family, many of whom were involved in nationalist politics or Irish literature (sometimes both), as Colbert Kearney, member of the Kearney family line, points out in his writings on Brendan Behan. The family home was filled with books by Irish writers ranging from William Butler Yeats to Sean



Brendan Behan Behan, Brendan, photograph. AP Images.

O'Casey. Behan joined the Irish Republican Army in 1937, and two years later, was sent to a reform school (called a Borstal school) for his political activities.

The IRA and the Irish Fight for Independence

In the year Behan was born, the people of Ireland were embroiled in a devastating civil war over the country's fate as either a dominion of Great Britain or as an independent nation. According to a treaty signed in 1921, Ireland was established as a free state that would remain a part of the United Kingdom. Opponents of the treaty included many members of the Irish Republican Army, who had long fought to establish Ireland's complete independence from England. These Republicans argued that remaining a part of the United Kingdom would deny them the complete freedom and independence they sought for their country—especially since the treaty specifically required Irish citizens to pledge an oath of allegiance to the reigning British monarch. The bloody conflict between Republicans and Free State supporters lasted less than a year, but resulted in the death of thousands, including both soldiers and civilians caught in the action. The Republicans lost the battle, though the cause of complete independence remained the main focus of the IRA in the decades following the war.

The forces that shaped Behan's politics and writings were those that also formed much of twentieth-century Irish political and cultural history—militant republicanism, traditional and modern Irish literature (itself rooted in Irish nationalism), and contemporary politics. In 1939 Behan was acting as an IRA courier when he was arrested in Liverpool for possession of explosives. He was sentenced and imprisoned in February 1940. After two years in a Borstal school at Hollesley Bay, Suffolk, he was deported to Dublin only to become involved in a drunken shooting incident with the police. Behan's experiences as a prisoner at Hollesley Bay inspired his later autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy* (1958).

Behan was released early under a general amnesty in 1946, but was almost immediately arrested again in Manchester, England, for his involvement with the attempted breakout of an Irish prisoner. He was lucky to receive only a four-month term of imprisonment. In the years that followed, Behan took on a variety of jobs, including housepainting, working as a columnist for the *Irish Press*, and singing ballads on a radio program.

Productions of The Quare Fellow Paradoxically, Behan, this most Irish of writers, became famous as a result of his first full-length stage play in England. Opening night of *The Quare Fellow* occurred two weeks after the legendary first night of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre. Behan's play rapidly became part of the explosion of theatrical activity in London that characterized the late 1950s and 1960s and changed the face of British theater and culture. This revolution brought a new generation of theater practitioners—and especially writers—to the stage. They were mostly of lower-class origins (Osborne, Arnold Wesker, and Shelagh Delaney, for example), and were interested in contemporary subjects. Initially, this "New Wave" (as this period in theater was called) was associated with new companies, such as the Theatre Workshop and the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, each committed to opening up theatrical productions in distinctive ways.

The writers associated with the New Wave, who were also described as "Angry Young Men" and (with more justice) "working-class realists," were also part of much wider social and cultural shifts in British society.

For many of the most prominent Angry Young Men, the role of left-wing hell-raiser was short-lived. They knocked on the door of the British establishment and were soon admitted. Behan did not follow this trajectory; he did, however, enjoy the fame and notoriety that his plays and public behavior brought him. As many friends and colleagues have testified, Behan was generous with his time and money, more at home drinking with what he termed "my people"—the London and Dublin working class—than with the tabloid journalists who often pursued him (and whom he invariably welcomed). Howard Goorney, a stage and television actor in the Theater Workshop, reports that Behan regularly attended his own plays, often interrupting performances of *The Hostage*, heckling the actors and joining in with the songs. Behan also appeared drunk on the BBC television program *Panorama* in an interview with Malcolm Muggeridge in May 1956. This public drunkenness, more than anything that he wrote in his plays, stereotyped him for the wider public.

A Career Too Brief Behan did not appear in any great hurry to repeat the success of *The Quare Fellow*. His next play, *An Giall* (translated and revised as *The Hostage*) did not appear until two years later.

On March 20, 1964, Brendan Behan died of diabetes brought on by his alcoholism. This was only a few months after the birth of his daughter, Blanaid. His last

works, most of which he dictated on tape, were *Brendan Behan's Island: An Irish Sketchbook* (1962), a book drawn from existing material—stories, observations, memories—from throughout his life; *The Scarperer* (1964), a novel about a smuggling adventure, first published serially in the *Irish Press* (October/November 1953); *Brendan Behan's New York* (1964), about his time in New York, a city whose bustle and chaos he obviously relished; and *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (1965), the second volume of his autobiography, which further explored his ambivalent relationship with the Irish Republican movement.

Works in Literary Context

Brendan Behan was the most important new Irish dramatist of the 1950s. Writing without the support of the theatrical establishment (the Abbey Theatre rejected his early efforts) Behan developed an original style that combined bawdy humor, genuine pathos, and social insight. If he had a model for his role as a dramatist, it was probably Sean O'Casey, whom Behan admired both as a playwright and as an opponent of censorship. The major influence on his plays, however, was Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, which emphasized improvisational effects, songs, and contemporary allusions that made the play more relevant to an audience.

Imprisonment A prisoner himself during his formative years, many of Behan's works deal with prison settings and feature prisoners as their main characters. In fact, in *Borstal Boy*, the author himself recalls his own experiences as a prisoner. His less autobiographical works still deal frequently with the issues of prisoners; his most famous play, *The Quare Fellow*, hinges upon the execution of an unseen prisoner for an unknown crime, and focuses on the reactions of the fellow inmates to this tragic event. His second play, *The Hostage*, also deals with the execution of an unseen prisoner, and with a British soldier being held prisoner by the IRA.

The Irish Fight for Independence As an Irish writer living through the troubled times of the Republican struggle for a free Ireland, it is not unusual to find this theme at the core of most of Behan's writing. His upbringing and early work illustrates his passion for the Irish fight for independence, though his later work reveals an understanding of the complex issues involved in the struggle. As a teenager, while in the youth branch of the IRA, he published poems and prose that expressed an idealistic view of the struggle for Irish independence. *Borstal Boy*, as a document of the author's own experiences in prison before he was eighteen, reveal a distaste for the violence and divisiveness that often accompanied the struggle. His play *The Hostage* offers a sympathetic portrayal of a young British soldier caught in the conflict and acknowledges the suffering felt by both the British and the Irish because of the conflict.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Behan's famous contemporaries include:

Elie Wiesel (1928–): writer and activist best known for his novel *Night* (1958).

Elvis Presley (1935–1977): American musician and pop figure credited with popularizing rock and roll music.

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech playwright imprisoned for his political views who ultimately served as president of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent Czech Republic.

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969): American Beat writer famous for his stylized stream-of-consciousness novel *On the Road*.

Liam O'Flaherty (1896–1984): Irish writer acclaimed for his short story "The Sniper," set and published during the Irish Civil War.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): Irish playwright famed for his absurdist works such as *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Works in Critical Context

Serious connections have been drawn between the content of Behan's writing, particularly his major plays *The Quare Fellow: A Comedy-Drama* and *The Hostage*, his politics, and his self-destructive drinking. In his work, as in his life, laughter and the despair of dying mingle with intoxicating effect. Behan himself once said that he possessed "a sense of humor that would cause me to laugh at a funeral, providing it wasn't my own." About his comedies, critic Alfred Kazin stated in *Contemporaries*, "There is the constant suggestion in Behan's work that the laughter which supports despair does not always hide despair." Ted Boyle, writing in his work *Brendan Behan*, commented, "A good deal of the comedy in Behan's plays portrays the hysteria which overcomes the human being caught in a situation over which he has no control."

At a time when the only substantial Irish playwrights were émigrés Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett, Behan helped to revitalize the theater in Ireland, largely by producing two plays that have more than a parochial interest, and by using realistic speech in combination with Brechtian music-hall effects. Kazin commented that "although Behan wrote only two notable plays, even that achievement entitles Behan to a place of some significance in the modern Irish theater." His lasting influence is shown in the posthumous stage adaptation of his novel *Borstal Boy*, which went on to win a Tony Award in 1971 for Best Play.

Responses to Literature

1. In *The Quare Fellow*, how do the viewpoints of Regan and the prison governor differ on the issue of the death penalty? Why did each one bear that

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ireland has been plagued by civil unrest for generations, and many of its leading literary figures have focused almost exclusively on their country's violent internal struggles. The upheavals in other countries that have experienced prolonged periods of civil unrest are detailed in these works:

July's People (1981), a novel by Nadine Gordimer. South African writer Gordimer tells the story of a fictional revolution by the native black population in South Africa. For decades in the twentieth century, South Africa maintained a forced, legal separation between the majority black population and the elite white population.

No Telephone to Heaven (1996), a novel by Michelle Cliff. Jamaican writer Cliff weaves a semiautobiographical tale in this novel set against the backdrop of a guerrilla uprising in Jamaica.

Ten Days That Shook the World (1919), a nonfiction work by John Reed. This work by journalist Reed details the tumultuous events surrounding the October Revolution in Russia in 1917.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress (2000), a novel by Dai Sijie. Chinese writer Sijie tells the tale of an unusual romance set during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

unique opinion? How did each viewpoint fit into the social schema of the time? Provide several real examples.

- Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop greatly emphasized the use of improvisational effects, songs, and contemporary allusions to make the play more immediately relevant to an audience. Discuss how one of these techniques might make a production of *The Quare Fellow* more relevant to an audience today.
- Although Behan's reputation rested mainly with the two plays, *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*, he also published an autobiographical novel titled *Borstal Boy* based on his childhood experience in a reform school. Discuss how this experience, as represented in *Borstal Boy*, influenced his dramatic works. Compare in the work of a more contemporary writer with similar thematic content how the writing styles may be different but are used to achieve the same goals.

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Hilaire Belloc

BORN: 1870, *Le Celle St. Cloud, France*

DIED: 1953, *King's Land, England*

NATIONALITY: *British, French*

GENRE: *Nonfiction, fiction, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bad Child's Book of Beasts (1896)

The Path to Rome (1902)

The Servile State (1912)

A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History" (1926)

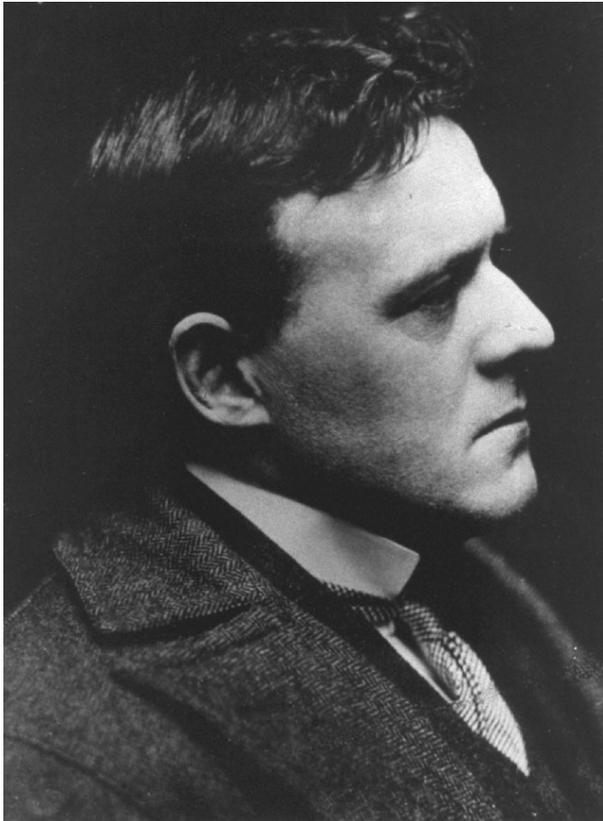
Essays of a Catholic Layman in England (1931)

Overview

Hilaire Belloc was one of the most controversial and accomplished men of letters of early twentieth-century England. He was a productive historian, novelist, and essayist as well as a poet, noted for his light verse for children. More importantly, Belloc was recognized as an outspoken proponent of radical social and economic reforms, all grounded in his vision of Europe as a "Catholic society."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Political Instability The son of a wealthy French father and English mother, Belloc was born Joseph Hilaire Pierre Sebastien Rene Swanton Belloc in La Celle St. Cloud, France, a few days before the Franco-Prussian War, also known as the 1870 War, broke out. Tensions between the two sides, France and German-



Hilaire Belloc *Belloc, Hilaire, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

backed Prussia, revolved around the empty Spanish throne following the deposition of Isabella II in 1868. The Belloc family fled to England at the news of the French army's collapse. During the siege of Paris and its aftermath, the Belloc home was occupied by German troops who vandalized the furniture and family pictures, cut down the chestnut grove, and left Belloc with a lifelong distaste for "the Prussian," which corresponded to his enthusiasm for the Latin cultures. It also perhaps encouraged his tendency toward racial hostilities and overgeneralizations.

Catholic Education After the death of Belloc's father in 1872, the family again took up residence in England, where Belloc was raised and received a Catholic education, notably at Cardinal John Henry Newman's Oratory School near Birmingham, where he won many academic prizes and came to the attention of Newman himself.

Five Unsettled Years After Belloc left the Oratory School in 1887, he decided to garner a larger experience of life than that afforded by the English academic world. He began, and soon abruptly ended, careers in the French navy, as a land agent on the duke of Norfolk's estate, and as an architectural draftsman. The five unset-

tled years after he left school provided him with experience from which he drew—as much as from his more academic learning—for his writing throughout his life. During these years Belloc also cultivated the acquaintance of Cardinal Manning, another English convert to Catholicism, but of a far more militant stamp than the reserved and saintly Newman. Manning's polemical stance and vision of a Catholic society were a great influence on the tone of Belloc's writing and the social and religious ideals behind much of his work.

Catholic Advocacy Belloc's career as an advocate of Catholicism first attracted wide public attention in 1902 with *The Path to Rome*, perhaps his most famous single book, in which he recorded the thoughts and impressions that came to him during a walking trip through France and Italy to Rome. In addition to its infusion of Catholic thought, the work contains what later became acknowledged as typically Bellocian elements: rich, earthy humor, an eye for natural beauty, and a meditative spirit.

Light Verse and Popular Success By the mid-1890s, Belloc had married and, through the influence of his sister Marie Belloc Lowndes, a noted writer, began writing for various London newspapers and magazines. His first book, *Verses and Sonnets*, appeared in 1896, followed in the same year by *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, which satirized moralistic verse for children and proved immensely popular. Illustrated with superb complementary effect by Belloc's friend Basil T. Blackwood, *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, according to critics, contains much of the author's best light verse, as do such later collections as *More Beasts (for Worse Children)* (1897), *The Modern Traveller* (1898), and *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907). An impulsive man who seldom lived in any one place for more than a few weeks and whose frequent trips to the Continent proved a constant drain on his financial resources, Belloc welcomed the popular success of his verse collections.

A Brilliant Champion of Roman Catholicism In 1892, Belloc continued his studies at Balliol College, Oxford, where he gained a reputation as a brilliant student, a skilled debater, and an aggressively outspoken champion of Roman Catholicism. Prejudice against Belloc's Catholicism led to his being rejected in his bid for a history fellowship, an experience that intensely embittered him. Through this rejection Belloc came to hate university dons in general, later directing many satiric attacks against them, portraying them as smug, pretentious defenders of privilege.

In 1899 Belloc began a series of biographies, which included two French revolutionaries *Danton* (1899) and *Robespierre* (1901) and many eminent literary and political figures of France and England. In 1902 he published *Path to Rome*.

Belloc and Chesterton For the next thirty years, Belloc enjoyed his widest fame and influence. During these

years Belloc also became very active in political life. He became a British citizen in 1902, and in 1906 he was elected to Parliament. In 1910 he abandoned political office for journalism, which he felt was a more effective means of achieving reform. When Belloc met G. K. Chesterton, Belloc found a talented illustrator of his books, a friend, and a man who shared and publicly advocated many of his own religious and political views. Anti-industrial and antimodern in much of their advocacy, the two were jointly caricatured in print by George Bernard Shaw as “the ChesterBelloc,” an absurd pantomime beast of elephantine appearance and outmoded beliefs. Both, according to Shaw and other adverse critics, had a passion for lost causes.

Three Acres and a Cow In 1912 Belloc published *The Servile State*, which outlined his antisocialist and anticapitalist philosophy of distributism. Belloc called for a return to familial self-sufficiency through the widespread restoration of private property; according to his prescription, which has been described by many critics as at best quaint and at worst ridiculously impractical, every family should own three acres and a cow. His views were shared by G. K. Chesterton, and together they founded the political weekly *New Witness* to press forward the fight for reform.

Eye Witness The ChesterBelloc’s political ideas were also expounded in the *Eye Witness*, a weekly political and literary journal edited by Belloc, which became one of the most widely read periodicals in prewar England. Belloc attracted as contributors such distinguished authors as Shaw, H. G. Wells, Maurice Baring, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. In addition, he and his subeditor, Cecil Chesterton, involved the *Eye Witness* in a political uproar in 1912 when they uncovered the Marconi scandal, in which several prominent government officials used confidential information concerning impending international business contracts in order to speculate in the stock of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company.

Belloc had established himself as a polemicist who could write forceful and convincing essays on nearly any subject, in a prose style marked by clarity and wit. This reputation reached its zenith in 1926 when, in *A Companion to Mr. Wells’s “Outline of History”*, he attacked his longtime opponent’s popular book as a simpleminded, nonscientific, anti-Catholic document. A war of mutual refutation ensued, fought by both writers in the pages of several books and essays.

Decline of Influence His exchange with Wells was Belloc’s last major triumph as a man of letters, as throughout the 1920s and 1930s his own ideas were increasingly brushed aside by a public uninterested in seeing Britain return to Catholic values and medieval social structures. Further, in light of the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Europe, a growing number of readers were offended by Belloc’s casual use of

anti-Semitic remarks in his works and his view of Mussolini as one of Europe’s great warrior-kings reborn. Embittered that his opinions were no longer taken seriously and that his creative gifts were diminishing, Belloc spent the last years of his career writing histories and biographies, which have been described by Wilfrid Sheed as “a ream of unsound, unresearched history books blatantly taking the Catholic side of everything.” In the early 1940s, after authoring over 150 books, Belloc was forced into retirement by old age and a series of strokes. He spent the last ten years of his life in quiet retirement at his longtime home in rural Sussex, King’s Land, and died in 1953.

Works in Literary Context

In his time, Hilaire Belloc enjoyed the same popularity with readers as George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and G. K. Chesterton. Belloc’s literary reputation is currently in decline; yet during his lifetime he achieved great acclaim for his writings in a wide variety of genres. His contemporary fame was linked to that of Chesterton, and the two of them attained major status in British letters during the period prior to World War I. Belloc’s career was both lengthy and prolific.

Forms, Themes, and Style Belloc turned his hand to virtually every form of literature. He wrote poetry, fiction, history, travel pieces, and works on topography, as well as articles and essays in a wide variety of modes including ridicule, parody, satire, and logical argumentation. Although his first love was poetry, the essay was his daily occupation. His themes are diverse: God, nature, society, culture, literature, politics, and history. His style is clear, concise, and profound whether he is being playful and charming, angry and bitter, or humorous and funny.

Articulating Unpopular Opinions An impassioned controversialist and a brilliant talker, Belloc enjoyed espousing unpopular opinions and telling the British public, especially the intellectuals, about the folly and ignorance of their cherished views. However erratic his own views were, Belloc delivered them, in person or in print, with such eloquence and fluent wit that people were usually eager to hear him out.

It is one of the ironies of literary reputation that, in the vast body of Belloc’s work, the verses for children that seemed to his contemporaries such a minor and ephemeral part of his achievement, and that were never labored over and polished as his adult poetry was, seem to be the only aspect of his work that has retained its appeal. In contrast with his “serious” books, Belloc’s children’s verse has given pleasure and amusement to generations of readers and seems likely to continue to do so. *The Bad Child’s Book of Beasts* (1896) and *Cautionary Tales for Children, Designed for the Admonition of Children Between the Ages of Eight and Fourteen Years* (1908), along with their sequels, are masterpieces of nonsense and continue to delight children in contemporary illustrated editions.

Works in Critical Context

Belloc is an author whose writings continue to draw either the deep admiration or bitter contempt of readers. Many critics have attacked Belloc's prescriptive polemical works for their tone of truculence and intolerance and, especially, for recurrent elements of anti-Semitism, but they also have joined in praise of his humor and poetic skill, hailing Belloc as the greatest English writer of light verse since Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear.

Poet of Light Verse While Belloc's political and social views have proven unpopular, critics have highly praised the author's light verse, with W. H. Auden going so far as to state of Belloc that "as a writer of Light Verse, he has few equals and no superiors." In his widely known cautionary verse for children, Belloc assumed the perspective of a ridiculously stuffy and pedantic adult lecturing children on the inevitable catastrophes that result from improper behavior. Among his outstanding verses of this type are "Maria Who Made Faces and a Deplorable Marriage," "Godolphin Horne, Who Was Cursed with the Sin of Pride, and Became a Bootblack," and "Algeron, Who Played with a Loaded Gun, and, on Missing His Sister, Was Reprimanded by His Father." "Unlike Lear and Carroll, whose strategy was to bridge the gulf between adults and children," Michael Markel has written, "Belloc startled his readers by exaggerating that gulf. Belloc's view of children did not look backward to the Victorian nonsense poets, but forward to the films of W. C. Fields." Like his children's verse, Belloc's satiric and noncautionary light verse is characterized by its jaunty, heavily rhythmic cadences and by the author's keen sense of the absurd, as reflected in "East and West" and in "Lines to a Don," which skewers a "Remote and ineffectual Don / That dared attack my Chesterton."

Hilaire Belloc is chiefly remembered for his controversial political opinions, often belligerent character, and strong allegiance to the Catholic Church. His deep feelings about the important political and social issues of his day manifest themselves in most of his works. Although he has been criticized because of his tendency to sermonize, the sheer number of his published works, their versatility, and their stirring and often humorous style are impressive.

Responses to Literature

1. Belloc's popularity waned after World War II partly because of the unpopularity of his anti-Semitism in the wake of the Holocaust. As a class, discuss why authors lose their popularity and influence when events lead to a major shift in public opinion. Do you think readers should turn away from writers who have expressed unpopular opinions, or should they instead look past those opinions for the merit in the writer's work?
2. Many of Belloc's essays and historical writings were designed to promote his program of Distributism. Using the Internet and your library resources,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Belloc's famous contemporaries include:

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Irish playwright who won both the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925 and an Academy Award in 1938.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): English writer who is best known today for his pioneering science fiction novels. During his lifetime, he was also an outspoken advocate of socialism.

G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936): Influential English writer who was widely praised by his contemporaries.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Prominent British statesman of the Conservative Party who led Great Britain during World War II.

Antoine de Saint Exupéry (1900–1944): French aviator and writer best known for *The Little Prince* (1943).

research the basic principles of Distributism. In your research, state whether you think Distributism would work in today's capitalistic world.

3. Belloc's most enduring legacy is his children's literature. After reading several of Belloc's stories, write your own children's story that uses Belloc's combination of adult wit and absurdist children's storyline.
4. Belloc often used his travel, literary, and historical essays to make a point about current political issues. Write an essay about a historical figure, author, or personal trip designed to prove a point about a controversial political topic.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The mockery of human pretensions through the use of nonsense verses about animals were a central aspect of Belloc's children's stories. Here are some other works of children's stories with similar themes:

- Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), a children's book by Lewis Carroll. This classic children's book follows Alice's adventures in a topsy-turvy world populated by talking animals and outlandish characters.
- Ogden Nash's Zoo* (1986), a collection of children's poems by Ogden Nash. This book consists of short, nonsensical poems about animals.
- Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004), a film directed by Brad Silberling. This is a film adaptation of the Lemony Snicket series of books that follows the adventures of three children through absurdist storylines

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❏ Jacinto Benavente

BORN: 1866, Madrid, Spain

DIED: 1954, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Drama, nonfiction, poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bonds of Interest (1907)

A Lady (1908)

The Prince Who Learned Everything from Books (1909)

The Wrongly Loved (1913)

Overview

Jacinto Benavente, the author of more than 170 plays, dominated the Spanish stage for half a century. He achieved fame and official recognition in his long career and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1922. His work is best known for its comic satire, aimed largely at the decadent upper and aristocratic classes of Madrid.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Love of the Theater Jacinto Benavente y Martínez was born in Madrid on August 12, 1866. He was the youngest child of Venancia Martínez and Mariano Benavente, a respected doctor who was considered a pioneer in the field of pediatric medicine in Spain. The couple, who had three sons, enjoyed a privileged place in Madrid society because of the doctor's reputation.

The family had the opportunity to attend premieres and go to the theater regularly. Benavente was a theatergoer at an early age. He also learned to read at home at the age of five and soon was reading plays by both Spanish and foreign authors, especially Shakespeare, whom his father admired greatly. Because the young man studied French, English, Italian, and some Latin in his high school years, he was able to read many plays in their original languages. During his childhood and into his early teenage years, he built several toy theaters and performed puppet shows for his friends and neighbors and the household staff.

Discouraged from Acting Besides producing original plays, the young Benavente memorized and often recited scenes from classic and contemporary authors, including Molière, Friedrich Schiller, Shakespeare, and the Spanish playwrights Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and José Zorrilla. Benavente's father was concerned that his youngest son spent too much time and energy rehearsing and performing plays instead of studying, so he told him to stop these activities. Benavente was disappointed, since he hoped to be an actor. He was so affected by his father's decision that he became depressed and later wrote that he considered this depression the end of his childhood.

His father wanted him to become an engineer and convinced him that he should attend college. He enrolled in the University of Madrid in 1882, but when his father died in 1885, he dropped out of college without hesitation and devoted himself to reading, writing, and traveling abroad between 1885 and 1892. Benavente also attended the literary gatherings at the Café Iberia and spent his time writing comedies and poems at home and reading the classics and contemporary works. One of Benavente's older brothers, Mariano, encouraged him to continue writing.

Undisclosed Private Life Benavente had a close relationship with his mother, with whom he lived as an adult until her death in 1922. It appears that he never had a significant emotional relationship with anyone else, priding himself on being a confirmed bachelor. Critics have wondered about the fact that there is so little available information about the private life of such a famous writer. Persistent but unconfirmed rumors, particularly in theatrical circles, alleged that Benavente had homosexual



Jacinto Benavente Benavente y Martínez, Jacinto, photograph. The Library of Congress.

leanings. When he was told about rumors regarding his “certain physiological anomalies,” the writer simply shrugged; he also ignored malicious whisperings about his sexual orientation.

Avoiding curious critics, Benavente focused on his writing, publishing *Fantasy Theatre*, a compilation of unproduced short plays, in 1892. The edition included *Spring Story*, *The Magic of an Hour*, *Artist’s Love*, and *The Favorites*. The latter was produced in Seville in 1903. *The Magic of an Hour* was produced in Madrid in 1905. The other two plays have never been performed.

An Actor at Last In 1893 Benavente expanded his literary output and published three books: *The Down of the Thistle*, *Verses*, and *Women’s Letters*. *Women’s Letters* became a commercial success and was also praised by critics; yet the poems in *Verses* were considered mediocre, even by the author himself. He never published another poetry book during his lifetime, although more than one hundred poems, found among his papers, appeared posthumously in the appendix to volume ten of the *Complete Works* (1942–1958). His experiences with the stage were far more important for his future career: in 1890 he

finally realized his lifelong dream and joined the María Tubeau theater company as an actor.

In 1894 he produced *Another’s Nest*, which most scholars consider the beginning of his career as a dramatist. Benavente had tried to convince a family friend, Emilio Mario, who was the respected impresario of Comedy Theatre in Madrid, to perform the play, and for years had brought Mario over a dozen plays until Mario finally accepted *Another’s Nest*. It premiered on October 6, 1894, but was a resounding failure. The majority of critics wrote negative reviews—most attributing the play’s failure to the loud complaints against its alleged immorality. This undoubtedly affected young Benavente and forced him to be more cautious in his criticism of society’s values. From then on, his theater was a balancing act: his subsequent plays offered social satire as long as it could be tolerated by the middle-class audience that filled the theaters at the time.

Overwhelming Success Two years after the brief disastrous run of *Another’s Nest*, Benavente managed to convince the theater company of Cobeña and Thuiller to give him another chance with his comedy *People of Importance*. The play premiered in 1896, and the public liked the sharp, witty dialogue and the contemporary situations it presented. It was his first success, to be followed by many more—including *The Téllez Woman’s Husband* (1897), *A Lady* (1908), and *The Passion Flower* (1913). By the time *A Lady* was produced, he was the most sought-after playwright in Spain. He was still in his early forties and had already produced more than fifty plays. Besides contributing to several literary and dramatic journals, in 1899 he was involved in the establishing of Artistic Theatre—an attempt to bring to the Spanish public alternative plays, productions different from those usually seen in the commercial theaters. In 1909 Benavente founded the Theatre for Children with the impresario Fernando Porredón—a project intended to promote quality plays for children.

Benavente’s presence on the Spanish stage was almost constant for over half a century. Until his death in 1954, he produced at least two or three new plays a year, and often four or five. He wrote sketches for puppet shows, and in some cases he was also the puppeteer. He also wrote plays such as *Earning a Living* (1909) and the best known of his children’s plays, *The Prince Who Learned Everything from Books*, which also premiered in 1909.

Highest Accolades Benavente’s contributions to Spanish theater were awarded not only immense popularity in his lifetime but also public recognition and official honors. In 1912 he was elected to the Spanish Royal Academy. In 1920 he was named director of the Spanish National Theatre. In 1922 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the second Spaniard to receive the honor. Benavente could not attend the Nobel award ceremony because he was in Argentina at that time participating in a theatrical tour, an opportunity he had welcomed in order

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Benavente's famous contemporaries include:

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944): Russian printmaker, painter, and art theorist, he is considered the founder of the abstract painting movement.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901): French painter, he depicted the Bohemian lifestyles of Paris and for this was known as the “soul of Montmartre.”

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): English novelist and nonfiction writer, Wells was one of the foremost science fiction writers in history and one of the first to write on the theme of time travel.

Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957): An American author who was a popular writer of children's books. Her best-known work from her pioneer series is *Little House on the Prairie* (1935).

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright, Yeats was a leading modernist literary figure, cofounding the Abbey Theatre and spearheading the Irish Literary Revival.

to cope with his grief over his mother's death earlier that year. He also visited Mexico, Cuba, and the United States, receiving more honors along the way, and upon his return to Spain, he received the Great Cross of King Alfonso the Wise. The city council of Madrid named him Favorite Son of the city in 1924.

Blacklisted The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), in which the ultranationalist forces of General Francisco Franco overthrew the Spanish Republic and established a military dictatorship, changed the artistic climate in Spain dramatically. Benavente's third and last transatlantic tour took place in 1945 under precarious circumstances, when he was in his late seventies. That year, he went to Argentina and premiered his last rural drama, *The Noble Woman*, in Buenos Aires. In 1947 he resumed his contributions to Madrid's conservative newspaper *ABC*. In one of his first articles in this period, “Taking Dictation,” he defended Marshal Phillipe Pétain, the disgraced French military leader who had been imprisoned for treason in 1945 for cooperating with the Vichy government during World War II. In was a clear attempt to stay in the good graces of Franco, Spain's dictator. The article had a considerable impact in Spain. In 1948 it won him the coveted Mariano de Cavia Prize in journalism.

But Benavente's attempts to ingratiate himself with the Franco regime were deemed insincere. Because of his reputation as a liberal and his initial endorsement of the Spanish Republic, he was blacklisted by Franco's government. His name could not appear in the Spanish press, which was

controlled by rigid government censors. He had to be referred to in theatrical reviews as “the author of *The Passion Flower*.” Even the ads and the playbills for his plays could not use his name. Despite the problems with censorship, however, Benavente's plays were not banned, and the Spanish public continued to hold him in high esteem. When he died in Madrid on July 14, 1954, at age eighty-seven, he was still active on the Spanish stage.

Works in Literary Context

Classic Influences Benavente typically sought his models outside the traditional Spanish stage, and was influenced not only by contemporary European playwrights, but also by the comedy of manners and the works of Molière and Shakespeare. *The Favorites* (1903), for example, is based on Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* (c. 1598–1599). His fascination for the circus world is reflected in the settings of several plays, such as *Saturday Night* (1903) and *Brute Force* (1919). The main characters and plot of such works as *The Bonds of Interest* (1907), however, are inspired by the tradition of Spanish classic literature. Crispín, the central character, recalls the figure of the *picaro* or rogue of the Spanish golden age novel; the archetypal friendship of the idealistic Leandro and the commonsensical Crispín also evokes that of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605).

Modernized Style Benavente is credited with introducing European modernist trends into the Spanish theater. His later plays anticipate the advent of naturalist theater in Spain. Critics have pointed out innovative aspects in early plays such as *Another's Nest* (1894), for example, with its use of prose instead of verse, effective dialogue, the predominance of dramatic tension over action, the development of the characters' psychological complexity, the lack of violence and outbursts of passion, and the realistic tone that prevails.

Works in Critical Context

For a large part of the twentieth century, Benavente was simultaneously the most revered and the most criticized playwright in Spain. He had great success with the Spanish public in commercial theaters and inspired many imitators; but despite his popularity and influence, a large group of respected intellectuals and critics maintained negative assessments about his plays and his impact on contemporary Spanish theater. These critics, including Ramón Pérez de Ayala, considered Benavente's work outdated and unworthy of praise. Pérez de Ayala later changed his view, but other critics still blamed Benavente for the perceived crisis of Spanish theater. They believed that he was too complacent because of his success with the Spanish middle-class public.

The Bonds of Interest Nevertheless, some works have sustained critical and popular interest, such as *The Bonds*

of *Interest* (1907). Francisco Ruiz Ramón, one of the most influential historians of contemporary Spanish drama, considers *The Bonds of Interest* one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century Spanish theater. It is one of the few plays by Benavente that is still staged in Spain, and it has gone through many permutations. The public and critics of the time reacted with enthusiasm when it was premiered, and theater scholars have always praised it highly. The Spanish Royal Academy awarded it the Piquer Award in 1912. In a 1930 poll, fifty thousand people chose it as the best comedy by Benavente.

After being attacked by critics and almost forgotten by the theater-going public since the 1970s, Benavente's disputed place in the canon has been seriously revised by scholars. Since the 1990s, his most important plays and his early works have reappeared in critical editions, and a younger generation of academics is evaluating his role in the renovation of the Spanish stage from new perspectives. Benavente has in some ways come full circle, with modern critics finding him, as he was called by Julius Brouta in 1915, "the [George] Bernard Shaw of Spain."

Responses to Literature

1. Some of the characters of *The Bonds of Interest* (1907) are inspired in the tradition of the Italian commedia dell'arte, improvisational theater, as stated in the prologue. Commedia dell'arte was performed primarily through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in Italy and consisted of unscripted plays, outdoor performances, and very few props. Investigate further the practice of commedia dell'arte in Italy and explain how it influenced Benavente's style. Find examples from one or more of his plays.
2. Benavente has been termed a feminist for his excellent presentation of female characters who usually have more moral substance than their male counterparts. In *Another's Nest*, for instance, Benavente denounces the oppressive situation of married women in Spanish society. Look into feminism in Spain. When did people begin to acknowledge women's equality? How is the movement reflected in Benavente? That is, how is female sexuality and behavior depicted and how is the depiction "feminist"?
3. Benavente had at one time a reputation as a liberal, though his initial endorsement of the Spanish republic was later retracted. Research the Spanish republic of the period to understand what it meant to be a loyalist. Then consider an extended biography of Benavente and come to a conclusion about what it meant for the playwright to switch loyalties—moving as he did from being in favor of the Spanish republic to making an apology for Franco's government, a former ally of the Axis Powers. What was the impact of his political shift? How did it hurt his writing career?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Benavente's view is essentially one of kindness, self-sacrifice, and love. This outlook tempers his sharp dissection of the weaknesses of human nature and Spanish society. His plays celebrate moral tolerance by satirizing the inflexible. Here are a few works by writers who also examine humans with weak moral fiber:

Brideshead Revisited (1945), a novel by Evelyn Waugh.

With a cutting, challenging, and satirical tone, the author explores what he once identified as "the operation of grace."

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. This novel of good and evil and moral dilemmas focuses on a murderer who eventually atones for his sins.

Man-servant and Maid-servant (1947), a novel by Ivy Compton-Burnett. In this novel, English author Compton-Burnett examines the lives of English servants, poking mocking fun at the upper classes they serve.

Of Mice and Men (1937), a novel by John Steinbeck. This book explores mental and social disability, and society's insensitivity toward the handicapped.

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✠ Mario Benedetti

BORN: 1920, Paso de los Toros, Tacuarembó, Uruguay

NATIONALITY: Uruguayan, Hispanic American

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Montevideanos (1959)

Office Poems (1968)

Death and Other Surprises (1968)

Juan Angel's Birthday (1971)

The Exile Wind (1981)

Overview

Mario Benedetti is one of Uruguay's most prolific writers. He excels in all literary forms: novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, political articles, and songs. His seemingly inexhaustible creative power parallels his con-



Mario Benedetti MIGUEL ROJO / AFP / Getty Images

stant activity to improve the sociopolitical situation of his country and, by extension, all of Latin America; and his writing reflects the idiosyncrasies of the powerful Uruguayan middle class.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Urban Uruguay and Class Coverage Benedetti was born on September 14, 1920, in Paso de los Toros, a small rural city in Tacuarembó, Uruguay. His parents were Breno Benedetti, the son of an established Italian grape grower and chemist, and Matilde Farrugia Benedetti, the daughter of a Spaniard and a French woman. The family moved to the capital, Montevideo, when Mario was four years old. This city, with its European style and aspirations, inspired Benedetti and helped shape his writing.

As a young man, Benedetti foresaw the problems of the proud Uruguayan society. The economic structure of the country would not reach its financial crisis until 1955, but signs of the weakening system had appeared by the late 1930s, and Benedetti paid attention to those signs, portraying them in the weaknesses of his characters. He had found the topic he knew best: the world of the middle class to which he belonged.

In 1956 he published *Office Poems*, a book that would change Uruguayan poetry with its unlikely focus on the office as a subject. This kind of poetry was not popular in Latin America in 1956, but the novelty and themes ensured its success. *Office Poems* also initiated Benedetti's period of literary maturity and, with the three works that followed, made him the most-read Uruguayan author in the country and abroad.

Important Social Commentary By the end of the 1950s, more Uruguayans were becoming aware of the challenges faced by their country. Two events in 1959 made the year an important one for Benedetti and inspired in him a deeper interest in the political dimension of Uruguay, as well as of the rest of Latin America: the Cuban Revolution and his trip to the United States with a drama fellowship from the American Council of Education. The Cuban Revolution resulted in the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista, who had himself overthrown the previous leader who had been elected by the Cuban people. The revolution showed Benedetti that Uruguay was not isolated from the rest of Latin America and that revolution was a new possibility for the solution of Uruguayan problems. The trip to the United States, besides allowing him to study great American theater, exposed him to poverty, social injustice, and racism in countries other than his own.

His American experience is reflected in the poem "Birthday in Manhattan," in *Day to Day Poems* (1961), and in the short story "The Rest Is Jungle," in *Montevideanos*. Both works show the solitude of the protagonist. In the powerful United States, where different races and

nationalities meet, the protagonist feels marginalized as a Latin American.

During the 1960s, Benedetti traveled extensively. In 1966, 1967, and 1968, he stayed in Cuba for long periods, and his literature reflected the social experience of the Cuban Revolution. In the 1960s, Benedetti published several books, including the collection of short stories *Death and Other Surprises* (1968).

Social Protest and Exile Writing In the 1970s, Benedetti began a more intense political and literary life. By the end of the 1960s Uruguay had fallen into a state of unrest that ultimately led to the coup d'état of June 27, 1973. Benedetti not only opposed with his writing a government that was becoming more and more repressive, but he participated directly in Uruguayan political life. In 1971 he became the leader of a movement that united the left-leaning parties; his political speeches and articles that had appeared in the journal *Marcha* were compiled in *Chronicles of '71* (1972).

In 1971 Benedetti published *Juan Angel's Birthday*, a work he defined as “a novel written in verse.” Juan Angel was his literary answer to the sociopolitical process of Uruguay, in which the long Uruguayan tradition of peace, order, and contentment was disrupted in a few years. Once Uruguayans awoke from the lethargy of being the “Switzerland of South America,” the country experienced in a very short time several different historical periods. Hence Benedetti in his novel synthesized in one day the entire life of a character as a symbol of that rapid process.

Multiple Genres and More Protest After the coup d'état of 1973, torture, death, exile, and censorship were the most powerful weapons the military regime used to attack those who opposed its ideology. In response, Benedetti joined the exodus of Uruguayan intellectuals, and his work and name were banished from the country. Benedetti lived in Argentina, Peru, and Cuba for some time, and then in Spain. The author subverted the punishment of exile by writing and publishing constantly, and his old works reached new readers when several of his earlier books were republished in Mexico. Benedetti's work could not be read in Uruguay, but Uruguayan literature, thanks to Benedetti, was being read in other parts of the continent as well as in Europe and North America.

Later living alternately in Madrid and Montevideo, Benedetti has succeeded in showing the world a new, more complex, and contemporary image of Latin America in general and Uruguay in particular. Benedetti continues to strengthen the literary and cultural link between Uruguay and Spain, clearly aware of the importance of keeping alive this interest.

Works in Literary Context

Urban Characters and Concerns Benedetti transformed historical, social, personal, and collective events into literature. Defining himself as one of the *Montevidean*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Benedetti's famous contemporaries include:

Julie Andrews (1935–): English performer of several decades who has won multiple awards for her work in popular musicals.

Jean Anouilh (1910–1987): Prolific French playwright whose works range from absurdist to high drama.

Paul Celan (1920–1970): Jewish poet and writer who won several esteemed awards for his works on the Holocaust.

Carlos Saavedra Lamas (1878–1959): Distinguished Argentinean law professor and political leader who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1936.

Carlos Santana (1947–): Mexican rock guitarist and leader of the band Santana.

nos, his early work is essentially urban. In a country where half of the population lives in a single city, it would seem difficult not to be urban. Yet, until the end of the 1930s, Uruguayan literature had been primarily rural. Uruguayan novelist Juan Carlos Onetti complained in 1939 that Montevideo did not exist because writers did not re-create the city in their work. The prestige of gaucho and, later on, Creole literature, in which gauchos and rural men were observed with nostalgia, had kept the national literature and subject matter essentially rural in character. But through the first decade Benedetti infused his writing with the social and political concerns of the Uruguayan urban sector, and by the late 1950s he had expanded his focus on setting as well as class. By the time of his 1959 *Montevideanos*, he had enlarged the social sector of his characters from the bureaucracy to the entire middle class—at all of its economic and social levels. He had succeeded in interpreting and representing the Uruguayan urban sector through an increasing understanding of his people and a strong command of narrative techniques.

Mediocrity and Bureaucracy In the 1950s, Benedetti was working on mastering the narrative techniques of William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce—narrating works such as *Who of Us* according to the different perspectives of the characters and using devices such as the stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue of *This Morning* to develop those characters. His people are common people whose stories are, or may be, everybody's stories. His structure is simple and clear. He had by the end of the 1950s developed a coherent and mature style.

In all his mature works, there are running themes. There is a moral and humane criticism of individuals who are motivated by mediocre goals, by envy, by inertia, or by tediousness. Benedetti showed empathy for these

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The poems of *Office Poems* focus on the lives of ordinary, middle-class people. Other works that focus on the seemingly humdrum lives of middle-class people include:

- Madame Bovary* (1856), by Gustave Flaubert. Emma Bovary, the title character, has a series of affairs to escape the boredom of her life as a doctor's wife.
- "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (1939), a short story by James Thurber. Walter Mitty is a mild-mannered man who escapes from his life into a vibrant daydream world.
- "The Swimmer" (1964), a short story by John Cheever. Cheever's famous short story concerns a suburban man who, while swimming in the various pools in his community, comes to see his life as empty and cold.

individuals but at the same time separated himself from them—whether they were the bosses or the subordinates who envy and loathe their bosses but want to become them, the ho-hum characters who dream of a salary raise that never materializes or the worthless bureaucrats who trap public employees in a maze of papers and endless meetings.

Early on, Benedetti concerned his writings with themes of destroyed love, fate, and death, and of time as a powerful force human beings cannot hope to overcome. Before later themes of political oppression in his fiction came the themes of a kind of oppression not seen before in poetry: the oppression of life (or lack of life) for the middle- or working class. Before *Office Poems*, for example, such subjects had been considered antipoetic, since there was nothing interesting in the monotonous routine of an office. Nevertheless, numbers, balances, inventories, accounts, salaries, budgets, ink stains, calendars, and telephone calls became the new language of poetry, and Benedetti's work was a success. Like his early narratives, *Office Poems* interprets the bureaucratic middle class that almost completely constituted Montevideo. The style is direct and colloquial and the tone is realistic.

Exile Benedetti's writing in exile had the further important function of informing the rest of the world of what was happening in his country, a painful personal and collective experience. This latter work is characterized by its hybrid nature. Testimonial writing is linked with fiction. Poetry and prose are strongly united—the poems as long epigraphs contain the essence of the stories that follow them. Contemporary literature is characterized by the removal of the traditional generic borders. These equally important "experimental" writings show that not only the subject of exile but the experience itself are such

complex realities that their transformation into literature overflows the traditional divisions of genres.

Influences

Through his literary work, as well as through the works of other Latin American writers formerly or now in exile, Benedetti has evoked in the Hispanic people a growing interest in Latin America and in the problems of the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and the southernmost parts of Brazil. He has achieved this by way of his own influences. Driven by preferences for Faulkner, Woolf, Joyce, Onetti, and Marcel Proust, his short fiction demonstrates his efforts at mastering such devices as stream-of-consciousness narration. But as he said in an *Americas* interview with Caleb Bach, "the real influence on my work was reality, that of my country and Latin America in general."

Works in Critical Context

Benedetti has been called the most representative author of the "Generation of 1945," or "the critical generation." These terms, unanimously accepted by critics, identify a group of writers who by 1945 were using literature as one of the ways to show the inherent contradictions of reality. Literature by these writers, especially the narrative form, came to be written in an objective and realistic mode. Thus the close relationship between Benedetti's literature and exterior reality, or contemporary history, could be viewed as weakening the poetic value of his work. Some critics have tended to classify his work as "committed" literature. But his works—even those of the 1970s, which clearly show his political preoccupations—are not primarily "preachy" in intent. Evidence of this is in the critical regard for several of Benedetti's works, including *The Country with the Straw Tail* (1960) and *Blood Pact and Other Stories* (1997).

The Country with the Straw Tail *The Country with the Straw Tail* has the same function as *The Truce*: to show the moral crisis Uruguay was suffering. Unlike *The Truce*, however, which received positive critical response backed by a strong popular reception for all its versions, *The Country* was not well received. In the novel *The Truce*, Benedetti had not developed the political crisis, but in the essays of *The Country*, he wrote directly about the corruption of the political parties. Here Benedetti did not pretend to assume the role of a political scientist or sociologist. In the prologue to the first edition, in fact, he acknowledged his limitations. As a result, critics reacted negatively to the essays. Uruguayan readers, however, found in them an expression of their feelings and thoughts, and the book became a best seller.

Blood Pact and Other Stories *Blood Pact and Other Stories* is a composite of stories taken from Benedetti's entire body of work. The collection demonstrates the author's impressive literary range and reflects the change

in his focus from his earlier works to the works written in exile. The collection involves fifteen different translators covering six different genres, and yet is considered by most critics to be a seamless and smoothly toned final edition. *New York Times Book Review* contributor James Polk praised the collection for its “singular and surprising nature” and asserted that the best stories “lead relentlessly toward one apparent ending before abruptly shifting direction and winding up in a totally unexpected place.”

Responses to Literature

1. To get a better understanding of the localist nature of Benedetti's writing, conduct group research on Uruguay and its capital city Montevideo. Consider its population, geography, and history, and look for parallels between what you find and Benedetti's early work.
2. Class distinctions are an important part of Uruguay's history and a major feature in many of Benedetti's works. Find an example of a historical event where two classes were in opposition, such as the French Revolution. What are the characteristics of each class? What is the core argument? Which “side” do you see more clearly represented in Benedetti's writing?
3. Put Benedetti in the larger context of Uruguayan literature. What literary movements were significant to this culture? What other writers are included in his time, area, and genres? What kinds of literature existed and which were most valued? How is Benedetti considered one of the most popular Uruguayan writers?
4. Benedetti lived and wrote in a most revolutionary time for Uruguay. But the country has a history of unrest that reaches much further back than the coup d'état of 1973. Research political unrest in Uruguay during the coup, and consider the ways in which those earlier periods have been reported. Were the times chronicled by literary figures? Were the newspaper circuits the sole method for communicating events? Is there currently any evidence of journals, underground papers, or other writings that reveal the history as Benedetti and his fellows revealed the conditions in the 1970s?

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✠ Mongo Beti

BORN: 1932, *M'balmayo, Cameroon*

DIED: 2001, *Douala, Cameroon*

NATIONALITY: *Cameroonian*

GENRE: *Novels*

MAJOR WORKS:

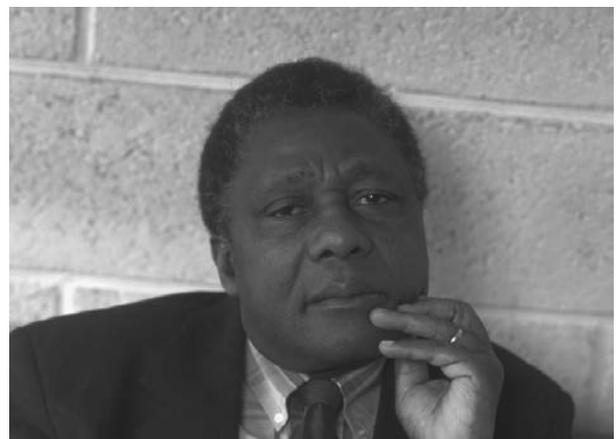
The Poor Christ of Bomba (1956)

King Lazarus (1958)

Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness (1974)

Overview

Alexandre Biyidi, who published under the name Mongo Beti, was one of the first French-speaking African novelists to combine humor and perceptive social criticism. He



Mongo Beti © Bassouls Sophie / Corbis Sygma

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Beti's famous contemporaries include:

- John Updike** (1932–): Pulitzer Prize-winning American writer who chronicles the Protestant middle class.
- V. S. Naipaul** (1932–): Trinidadian-born British writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.
- Shintaro Ishihara** (1932–): Japanese author and politician who won the Akutagawa Prize for Best New Author of the Year in 1956.
- Manuel Puig** (1932–1990): Argentinian novelist whose best-known work, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976), was made into a film and a Broadway musical.
- Susan Sontag** (1933–2004): American writer and political activist who created numerous controversies with her literary and political statements.
- Norman Rush** (1933–): American novelist whose stories are set in Botswana.

is widely recognized as a master among African writers of all languages.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Cameroon to France Born in the small town of M'balmayo, located in the French-controlled territory of Cameroon on the western coast of Africa, Beti's given name was Alexandre Biyidi. Beti was educated in local French missionary schools until his expulsion for unknown reasons at the age of fourteen. He then attended the lycée in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé. He went to France in 1951, studying first at the University of Aix-en-Provence and then at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he received his *licence*, or BA, with honors. Later, Beti began teaching French literature, classical Greek, and Latin in various lycées in France.

While he was a student at Aix, Beti wrote and published his first novel, *Cruel City*, under the pseudonym Eza Boto. Beti's often controversial reputation began with three works published in close succession between 1956 and 1958: *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, *Mission Accomplished*, and *King Lazarus*. Although these works were well received by critics, they made little money for their author, and Beti found it necessary to teach in order to support himself and his family.

As a committed Marxist, or believer in the rights of the workers and the goal of a class-free society, he refused to return to Cameroon when it achieved independence in 1960. He was hostile to the new Yaoundé regime of President Ahmadou Ahidjo, who had structured the new country's government to provide himself with far-reaching

power and silence his critics. Beti instead remained in France with his family, devoting himself to teaching.

Topical Criticism In 1972 Beti published a political essay, "The Plundering of Cameroon." In it, he criticized the Yaoundé regime for remaining under the control of the French long after Cameroon's formal liberation in 1960. For years Beti had written essays on current affairs in Africa, but with "The Plundering of Cameroon" he shifted from a historical perspective to an essentially topical one. Soon after, Beti published two novels, *Remember Ruben* and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*. In *Remember Ruben*, Beti emphasized the corruption of national politics through glimpses of the harshness of individual lives, a theme he explored again in *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, a critique of the slavlike conditions of the modern woman in contemporary Africa.

Return to Cameroon Beti visited Cameroon in 1991 after a self-imposed absence of thirty-two years. When he retired from teaching in 1994, he returned permanently to Cameroon, where he opened a bookshop in the capital to encourage literacy and provide an opportunity for authors to sell their critical texts. During this period, Beti supported an opposition political party, and the government attempted to suppress his activities. He published several novels in response, but his final trilogy remained unfinished at his death on October 8, 2001.

Works in Literary Context

In his early novels, Beti unleashed his sense of humor to create a series of harsh but comic indictments of French colonial rule in Cameroon. Later, in *Remember Ruben* (1974) and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* (1974), Beti criticized the corruption he witnessed in Cameroon during the years of independence.

Disdain for the Colonial System When it was first published, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* was banned outright in French Africa and was controversial in France, where critics defended the French record in Africa against Beti's account. Beti followed with *Mission Accomplished*, the story of young, Western-educated Jean-Marie Medza and his mission to retrieve the wayward wife of a relation in "primitive" Kala. In *King Lazarus*, Beti's next offering, a missionary persuades the polygamous tribal chief of the Essazam to convert to Christianity and give up all but one of his wives. The twenty-two former wives and their families, outraged at the breach of tribal custom as well as at the rudeness of turning the women out of their home, protest to the French colonial authorities. In the confrontation between the civil administration, the missionary, and the tribal chief, Beti exposes the vices of each party.

The Unexpected Comedic Elements of Colonialism While Beti's early work has been called "astonishingly varied," there are at least two elements common to all the novels: humor and disdain for the colonial system. This

mixture of comedy and contempt had little precedent in the history of African fiction. As Fernando Lambert maintained in a 1976 *Yale French Studies* essay, “By adopting two antithetical levels of representation—the tragedy of the fate forced upon Africans by colonization and the comedy of characters and situations made possible by such a state of affairs—Beti establishes a form of dialectic which allows the necessary demystification of colonial pretensions and also the affirmation of Negro humor. . . . Beti is the first to open this path to African literature.”

Works in Critical Context

Many critics regard Beti as one of the greatest French-language novelists of Africa. As critic Robert P. Smith Jr. concluded in *CLA Journal*, Beti is “one of the best of the contemporary black African novelists who seek to promote true liberty in Africa and to insure a lasting dignity for her.”

Cruel City Beti has repudiated his first novel, *Cruel City*. This work is generally considered weak and melodramatic, but Gerald Moore, writing in 1980, claimed that it “is a rather bad novel, but it is manifestly not the work of a bad writer.” Along the same lines, Clive Wake suggested the “substantial work” needs more than a “cursory reading,” directing attention to a story that may seem “awkward and contrived” at first, but demands another look. He praised the “evocative quality” of Beti’s language and imagery, particularly those that detail the “evils of colonialism.”

Controversy and a Break in Writing Beti’s often controversial reputation began with three works published in close succession between 1956 and 1958: *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, *Mission Accomplished*, and *King Lazarus*. These early works were generally warmly received by critics, though Beti made little money from them and was forced to continue his teaching to make a living. After *King Lazarus*, he stopped writing novels for more than a decade.

Criticism of Postindependence Africa Beti returned to the novel with *Remember Ruben* and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, both published in 1974. In *Remember Ruben*, Beti emphasized the corruption of national politics through glimpses of the harshness of individual lives, a theme he explored again in *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, a critique of the slavlike conditions of the modern woman in contemporary Africa. Critics praised both novels, commending Beti’s new focus on African independence. Writing in *CLA Journal* in 1976, Smith maintained: “Mongo Beti has broken his silence, not to criticize the colonial past as was his custom, but to accuse the present period of independence and self-government, and to attempt to pave the way to a better future for Africa and Africans.”

Responses to Literature

1. One critic has noted that Beti sought “to promote true liberty in Africa.” Read one of Beti’s novels.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Beti’s works are consistently critical of the colonial system in Africa, both before and after independence. Here are some other works that are similarly critical:

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel depicts tribal life in Nigeria both before and after the coming of the colonial system.

Concierto barroc (1974), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. This novel tells the story of the consciousness raising of an upper-class Mexican during the colonial period of the eighteenth century.

Waiting for the Rain (1975), a novel by Charles Mongoshi. This novel explores the effects of settler colonialism on African lives and culture through the story of an extended family living on a “native reservation” in Rhodesia.

Then write an essay in which you discuss how this novel reflects or aids this cause. Or, in contrast, write about how this particular novel seems to work against Beti’s political and social goals. Use specific examples from the book to support your opinions.

2. Beti lived in a self-imposed exile from Cameroon for over thirty years. With a group of your classmates, discuss what impact this absence might have had on his writings about his homeland. Also explore the ways in which his distance from the subject of his novels may have helped or hindered his writing. Use specific examples from Beti’s work to support your ideas.
3. At the end of his life, Beti became politically active in his native country. Write an essay that either supports or opposes the practice of novelists turning directly to politics to have an impact on the world.
4. Beti uses humor to show his disdain for the European system of colonialism in Africa. Write an essay analyzing his use of humor, discussing the ways that it detracts from his criticisms and the ways that it makes them more effective.

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▣ Adolfo Bioy Casares

BORN: 1914, Buenos Aires, Argentina

DIED: 1999, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentinian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Invention of Morel (1940)

A Plan for Escape (1945)

The Dream of Heroes (1954)

The Adventures of a Photographer in La Plata (1985)

Memories (1994)

Overview

Argentinean author Adolfo Bioy Casares inspired generations of Latin American readers and writers with his elegant humor and prophetic imagination. Bioy (as he is most widely known) began writing as the young colleague of the inimitable Jorge Luis Borges, but went on to considerable acclaim in his own right. The writer's many awards include the prestigious Premio Miguel de Cervantes de Literatura, which he won in 1991.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Comfortable Upbringing in Buenos Aires Adolfo Bioy Casares was born in Buenos Aires on September 15, 1914, the only child of wealthy parents. His father, Adolfo Bioy, descendant of a French family from Béarn (the southwestern region of France often in the background of his son's stories), was the author of two volumes of memoirs. He married Marta Casares, considered a great beauty in her day, who came from a well-established family, owners of the largest dairy chain in the La Martona region of Argentina. It was through her



Adolfo Bioy Casares. Bioy Casares, Adolfo, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

friendship with the Ocampo family that her son, at seventeen, would meet his wife-to-be—Victoria Ocampo's sister, the writer Silvina Ocampo—and his literary mentor Borges. Rincón Viejo, the Bioy family ranch in Pardo in the province of Buenos Aires, was to give Bioy and Borges their first pretext to write in collaboration. This collaboration led to many stories, translations, anthologies, and film scripts, and to the occasional invention of a third writer (with several pseudonyms) christened, by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Biorges."

Bioy, Borges, and Beginnings The familiar image of Bioy as disciple and collaborator of Borges placed him in the Latin American canon under the shadow of the maestro. Even though Borges once called Bioy the secret master who led him out of his experimentation with baroque metaphors into classical prose, Borges's message was, as always, double: master in the sense that children teach their parents. It was Borges who told Bioy in an early conversation: "If you want to write, don't mess around with publishing companies or literary magazines. Just read and write." Despite this dictum, Borges and Bioy would initiate in 1936 a short-lived magazine and press called *Out of Time*, challenging the approach of

traditional literary criticism. Borges's advice still reverberates in a recent story by Bioy, "Trio" (1986), where a friend advises the narrator: "When you spend too much time analyzing your projects, you don't do them. The best way to write is to write."

Borges and Bioy were more than mentor and disciple; they were lifelong friends whose ingenious and impassioned discussions of literature were mutually nourishing. Bioy has said that while he and Borges shared a similar and largely Victorian literary taste, each had different literary fondnesses. Borges favored the epic, as his enthusiasm for American poet Walt Whitman and his admiration for compadres (local gangsters) testify, while Bioy tended toward the lyrical and writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine.

Continuing Success Bioy wrote and published six books before 1940, but he considers (as do his critics) that his real literary production began with *The Invention of Morel* (1940). To entertain friends in later years he would often read one of his early attempts at writing. He would claim it was written by some young writer, read a section that would be sure to produce mocking laughter, and then reveal that he was the author. Also in 1940, Bioy married Silvina Ocampo, sister of Victoria Ocampo, a friend who had introduced him to Borges.

In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentines but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. Under Perón's regime, many writers suffered persecution for expressing views that Perón did not agree with; Casares's friend Borges was one of these. However, even though he socialized with many famous writers and intellectuals, Casares remained aloof from the world of politics.

Bioy lived a basically private life among friends and family in the same apartment in Buenos Aires for many years, in an elegant neighborhood near the Plaza de Francia. In his studio there he composed *The Invention of Morel*, *The Dream of Heroes*, and *Asleep in the Sun* (1973). At his beach house in Mar del Plata, he wrote *Diary of the War of the Pig* (1969). Bioy was awarded the Premio Cervantes—the most prestigious prize in the Hispanic literary world—in Spain, and the Premio Alfonso Reyes in Mexico. He died in 1999 in Buenos Aires.

Works in Literary Context

Humor and irony are in all of Bioy's writings, and critics note that he uses these devices to couch his often serious commentary on aging, death, love, and artistic expression. His widely acclaimed *Invention of Morel* satirically examines the nature of love and human relationships and the role of the artist in contemporary society.

Isolation and Estrangement The plot of *The Invention of Morel* transports love into the realm of science fiction and away from Argentina to an unknown and supposedly deserted island—much as Bioy, in his own life, needed to remove himself from the subjectivity of his immediate

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bioy's famous contemporaries include:

- Octavio Paz** (1914–1998): Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat who won the 1990 Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Otto Preminger** (1906–1986): Austro-Hungarian director who directed more than thirty-five Hollywood feature films in a five-decade career.
- Jorge Luis Borges** (1899–1986): One of Argentina's most beloved authors, Borges is famous for his intricate, intellectually impressive stories.
- Eva Perón** (1919–1952): Wife of Juan Perón and former First Lady of Argentina, "Evita" was a much-loved political figure and feminist organizer.

Argentine reality to gain aesthetic distance. The protagonist, a fugitive from Venezuela who writes a diary, discovers strange inhabitants who turn out to be three-dimensional movie images. His typically bungling antihero (Bioy's creation of characters is inspired by a mixture of silent-movie comedy and Kafkaesque absurdity) falls madly in love with a woman named, allusively, Faustine. After learning how to activate the machine that has captured these images, he proceeds to place himself near her, making it look as if a relationship exists between the two, though she is unaware of his existence. His actions are tragic, because Faustine and now the narrator, like all who are photographed by Morel's machine, are dead.

Like Morel, the narrator is the artist who ultimately sacrifices his life for art. The book can also be read as Bioy's homage to cinema and photography as he is an aficionado of both. Whatever the interpretation, what remains is a text that speaks of other texts, from *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to a tradition of utopian literature going back to Plato's *Atlantis*.

Another highly praised novel, *A Plan for Escape* (1945), also takes place on an island—a recurring motif in Bioy's stories, suggesting isolation and estrangement. Here the protagonist finds prisoners undergoing a surgical procedure, which completely reverses their perceptions of reality. In effect, the protagonist becomes the prisoner of a fantasy world and struggles to escape to reality.

The Fantastic Both science fiction and detective genres, along with a metaphysical treatise, make up what Bioy first called the hybrid genre of the fantastic. In his May 1942 review (in *Sur*) of Borges's first volume of stories, *The Garden of Forking Paths* Bioy wrote: "Borges, like the philosophers of Tlön, has discovered the literary possibilities of metaphysics." Science fiction provides the fantastic invention or event; the detective genre contributes the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In many works of fantasy the narrator is unreliable—either dreaming, hallucinating, or just oblivious to reality. Here are a few more works in which the narrator's perceptions might not be as trustworthy as they initially seem:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a novel by Lewis Carroll. On a lazy summer's day, Alice falls down a rabbit hole and meets a host of strange characters.

The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896), a novel by H. G. Wells. After a shipwreck, a man washes up on a mysterious island that may or may not be inhabited by a mad scientist.

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs. In this Beat Generation novel, a man finds himself in Tangier in a place called Interzone that is probably a figment of his imagination.

intricate yet elegantly methodical plot. Both genres have also served as modes of social and political satire.

In *The Invention of Morel*, the encounter between the “real-life” fugitive and the “magical” Faustine (and the supernatural machine that created her) makes Bioy's work paradigmatic of the fantastic. But allegorical interpretations are tempting. The novella has been interpreted as a parable of the relationship between reader and text: The nameless narrator-protagonist encounters the fictional characters invented by the mad scientist Morel and interpolates himself—his interpretation—upon them.

Bioy's elegant textual machines, like the invention of the mad scientist Morel, are works of passion, expressing a desire for eternal love and a poignant failure to counter mortality. The futuristic machine as the pathetic or sinister vehicle of human hopes in this century of technology is both a comic and a terrifying motif throughout Bioy's work: he compares humankind to a mechanical monkey on a bicycle that gradually rusts away and wears down with use.

Works in Critical Context

Critics disagree in their assessment of Bioy's writings. Several have noted that his works lack originality, often drawing their adventure plots from the works of H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as from detective and science fiction stories. Other scholars, however, have maintained that Bioy's creative reworking of the elements of linear time and space imbues his works with a surrealistic quality that distinguishes them from the fiction of his predecessors. Many agree, however, that Bioy's ironic humor makes his writings both appealing and memorable.

The Invention of Morel Bioy's meticulously wrought novella of 120 pages was received with acclaim and brought him recognition beyond the borders of the *Sur* group as well as the 1940 Buenos Aires municipal prize for literature. When translated into French in 1953, his narrative device of two lovers coexisting spatially in two different temporal dimensions inspired Alain Robbe-Grillet's script for Alain Resnais's film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). Aside from several movie and television versions made in France, Italy, and Argentina, *The Invention of Morel* has become a cult reference as, for example, in Argentine Hector Subiella's metaphysical film *Man Facing Southeast* (1985). At the same time, among the proponents of realism, the book caused Bioy to acquire the reputation of an intellectual enamored of his own mental constructions, or “bachelor machines.”

Stories Between 1944 and 1967, Bioy published eight volumes of stories—including *Prodigious Story* (1956), from which he selected and revised, in 1972, two volumes of stories: *Love Stories* and *Fantastic Stories*. The love stories are ironic fables about human follies. The fantastic stories present futuristic machines or supernatural events. In “The Great Seraphim,” for example (later included in the book of that name), a Neptune-like creature emerges from the sea at a beach resort. But parody transcends both categories, as it does Bioy's manipulation of detective and science fiction genres. Bioy's stories, like his novels, are really fantastic comedies, as Peruvian critic Jose Miguel Oviedo aptly calls them, in which the void produces laughter (the other side of terror) and in which Bioy's men are often like reckless or fearful children, at the mercy of beloved women who are often abominable monsters. D. P. Gallagher, in a survey of the author's work for the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* in 1975, states, “Bioy Casares's novels and short stories are comic masterpieces whose fundamental joke is the gap that separates what his characters know from what is going on.”

Responses to Literature

1. How do you think Bioy's collaboration with Jorge Luis Borges strengthened his writing?
2. For an introduction to the rise of Argentinian dictator Juan Perón, read Tomas Eloy Martinez's fact-based “novel” about Perón's life: *The Perón Novel* (1988).
3. Describe the role of women in *The Invention of Morel*. What would you say in response to someone who claims Bioy is sexist?

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■ Alexandre Biyidi

SEE *Mongo Beti*

■ Eric Blair

SEE *George Orwell*

▣ William Blake

BORN: 1757, London, England

DIED: 1827, London, England

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

- The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)
Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1794)
The First Book of Urizen (1794)
The Book of Los (1795)
Jerusalem: The Emancipation of the Giant Albion (1804)



William Blake *Blake, William*, painting by John Linnell. Source unknown.

Overview

William Blake was an English poet, engraver, and painter. An imaginative rebel in both his thought and his art, he combined poetic and pictorial genius to explore important issues in politics, religion, and psychology. Considered insane and mostly discounted by his contemporaries, Blake's reputation as a visionary artist grew after his death.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Interest in Art William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757, the second of five children born to James Blake and his wife, Catherine. His father was a hosier, selling stockings, gloves, and haberdashery (men's clothing). At age ten, Blake started to attend drawing school; at fourteen he began a seven-year apprenticeship with an engraver, and it was as an engraver that Blake was to earn his living for the rest of his life. After he was twenty-one, he studied for a time at the Royal Academy of Arts, where he formed a violent distaste for the academic rules of excellence in art. In August 1782 Blake married Catherine Boucher, who had fallen in love with him at first sight. He taught her to read and write, and she later became a valued assistant.

Fusion of Art and Poetry with New Printing Process From his early teens on, Blake wrote poems,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Blake's famous contemporaries include:

- Edward Jenner** (1749–1823): British physician who developed a smallpox vaccine.
- Marie Antoinette** (1755–1793): Queen of France during the French Revolution.
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791): Austrian composer and musician.
- Horatio Nelson** (1758–1805): Preeminent British naval commander during the Napoleonic wars.
- Robert Burns** (1759–1796): Scottish poet.
- William Wordsworth** (1770–1850): British poet famous for his Romantic style.
- Sir Walter Scott** (1771–1832): Popular British writer known for such classics as *Ivanhoe*.

often setting them to melodies of his own composition. When he was twenty-six, a collection entitled *Poetical Sketches* was printed with the help of the Reverend and Mrs. Mathew, who held a cultural salon and were patrons of Blake. This volume was the only one of Blake's poetic works to appear in conventional printed form. He later invented and practiced a new method.

After his father died in 1784, Blake set up a print shop with a partner next door to the family hosiery shop. In 1787, his beloved younger brother and pupil, Robert, died. Thereafter William claimed that Robert communicated with him in visions and guided him. It was Robert, William said, who inspired him with the new method of illuminated etching that was to be the vehicle for his poems. The words, design, or some combination of the two was drawn in reverse on a plate covered with an acid-resisting substance; a corrosive was then applied. From these etched plates, pages were printed and later hand-colored. Blake used his unique methods to print almost all his long poems.

In 1787, Blake moved to Poland Street, where he produced *Songs of Innocence* (1789) as the first major work in his new process. This book was later complemented by *Songs of Experience* (1794). The magnificent lyrics in these two collections systematically contrast the unguarded openness of innocence with the cynicism of experience. They are a milestone in the history of the arts, not only because they exhibit originality and high quality but because they are a rare instance of the successful fusion of two art forms by one man.

Age of Revolution Sparks Blake's Imagination
After a brief period of admiration for the religious thinker Emanuel Swedenborg, Blake produced a disillusioned reaction titled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–

1793). In this satire, the “devils” are identified with energy and creative genius, and the “angels” with repression of desire and the oppressive aspects of order and rationality.

Blake had become a political radical and sympathized with the American Revolution and with the French Revolution during its early years. At Poland Street and shortly after his move to Lambeth in 1793, Blake composed and etched short “prophetic” books concerning these events, religious and political repression in general, and the more basic repression of the individual psyche, which he came to see as the root of institutional tyranny. Among these works, all composed between 1793 and 1795, are *America*, *Europe*, *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Los*, *The Song of Los*, and *The Book of Ahania*. In these poems, Blake began to work out the powerful mythology he refined in his later and longer “prophecies.” He presented this mythology in his first epic-length poem, *The Four Zoas* (c. 1795–1803), which was never published.

Felpham Period Blake spent the years 1800–1803 working in Felpham, Sussex, with William Hayley, a minor poet and man of letters. Hayley tried to push Blake toward more profitable undertakings, such as painting ladies's fans, but Blake rebelled and returned to London. One result of this conflict was Blake's long poem *Milton* (c. 1800–1810). In this work, the spiritual issues involved in his quarrel with Hayley are allegorized. Blake's larger themes are dramatized through an account of the decision of the poet Milton to renounce the safety of heaven and return to earth to rectify the errors of the Puritan heritage he had fostered.

Later Years Blake continued to produce some significant work, including his designs for Milton's poems *Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, (1816), and the writing of his own poem *The Everlasting Gospel*, (c. 1818), but his work found no audience. After 1818, however, conditions improved. He became acquainted with a group of young artists who respected him and appreciated his work. His last six years were spent at Fountain Court, where Blake did some of his best pictorial work: the illustrations to the *Book of Job* and his unfinished *Dante*. In 1824, his health began to weaken and he died on August 12, 1827.

Works in Literary Context

William Blake was an English writer, poet, and illustrator of the Romantic period. Romantic authors and artists tended to emphasize the content of their works over the form, stressing imagination and emotion and celebrating nature and freedom.

Picture Books Blake did not write or draw specifically for children, but he believed that children could read and understand his works. He was opposed to the kind of moralistic writing for children that was done by the

clergyman Isaac Watts, whose *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, published in 1715, taught readers to be hard-working and avoid idleness and mischief. Blake believed that children—and adults, for that matter—should be allowed the freedom to dream and imagine. His first biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, said in his *Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus* that Blake “neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for the workday men at all, rather for children and angels.” He called Blake “‘a divine child,’ whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth.” Children are also the subjects of many of his works. Since Blake also did the illustrations for his writings, some authorities consider his works to be forerunners of the picture-book form.

Revolutionary Politics The storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789 and the agonies of the French Revolution sent shock waves through England. Some hoped for a corresponding outbreak of liberty in England while others feared a breakdown of the social order. In much of his writing Blake argues against the monarchy. In his early *Tiriel* (c. 1789), Blake traces the fall of a tyrannical king. Blake also consistently portrays civilization as chaotic, a direct reflection of the tumultuous times in which he lived.

Politics was surely often the topic of conversation at the publisher Joseph Johnson’s house, where Blake was often invited. There Blake met important literary and political figures such as William Godwin, Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. According to one legend, Blake is even said to have saved Paine’s life by warning him of his impending arrest. Whether or not that is true, it is clear that Blake was familiar with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day.

Another product of the radical 1790s is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Written and etched between 1790 and 1793, Blake’s poem brutally satirizes oppressive authority in church and state. The poem also satirizes the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted Blake’s interests.

Blake’s work influenced a diverse assortment of later writers and artists, including Irish poet William Butler Yeats, American poet Allen Ginsberg, children’s book author and artist Maurice Sendak, and songwriter Bob Dylan.

Works in Critical Context

Blake once defended his art by remarking, “What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care.” Blake’s passion for originality and imagination informs his creation of a private cosmology that embraces both his lyric and prophetic poetry. In his lifetime, the public knew Blake primarily as an artist and engraver. Perhaps as a result of his unusual method of “publication,” Blake’s poetry did not receive wide public recognition during his lifetime, but it was read by such famous contemporaries as William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge and other prominent literary figures of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Blake was best known for exploring the role and value of imagination in humanity’s search for truth. Here are some other works that have similar themes:

Lyrical Ballads (1798), by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads* sought to emphasize personal experience and imagination over abstract language and themes.

A Vision (1937), by William Butler Yeats. Yeats was greatly influenced by Blake and worked to create his own symbolic mythology in this dense and complex treatise.

Howl (1956), by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg’s seminal work of the Beat Generation lauded the misfits and rebels whose minds, he claimed, were “destroyed by madness” brought on by the constraints of 1950s American social life. Ginsberg was influenced deeply by Blake, even claiming to have had a vision in which Blake’s voice helped him understand the interconnectedness of the universe.

time. For a long time, however, Blake’s reputation floundered.

Blake’s Critical Recovery The publication in 1863 of Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus* helped save Blake’s works from obscurity and established Blake as a major literary figure. Gilchrist’s biography motivated other studies of Blake, including Swinburne’s 1868 study of Blake’s prophecies.

In the early twentieth century, John Sampson’s 1905 edition of *The Poetical Works*, provided a solid text for serious study of Blake as did A.G.B. Russell’s 1912 catalogue *The Engravings of William Blake*, which reproduced many engravings. Joseph Wicksteed’s 1910 study, *Blake’s Vision of the Book of Job*, provided a close analysis of Blake’s designs and helped to demonstrate that Blake’s art should be interpreted in careful detail.

Modern Blake Scholarship Modern scholarship is in large part based on the herculean efforts of Geoffrey Keynes, whose 1921 *A Bibliography of William Blake* (along with his 1953 *Census of William Blake Illuminated Books*) set a firm foundation for a critical examination of Blake’s works. Keynes’s 1925 edition of the *Writings of William Blake* (and subsequent revisions) became the standard text for decades.

In 1947, Northrop Frye’s seminal work *Fearful Symmetry*, opened the field of Blake scholarship by showing the mythic structure of the major works and making the claim for Blake as a major poet of English literature. David Erdman’s *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (first

published in 1954, revised 1969), is important in showing Blake as a commentator and critic of the age in which he lived. Among the numerous explications of Blake's poetry that followed, Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (first published in 1961, revised 1971), and Blake's *Apocalypse* (published in 1963), influenced many critics in the reading of individual poems.

Today, Blake scholarship continues at a rapid pace with many critics concentrating on the relationship between text and design in Blake's major poetry. From the relative obscurity of his reputation in his own time, Blake is now recognized as one of the major poets of the Romantic period and one of the most original and challenging figures in the history of English literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Choose any of the aphorisms presented in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and examine how it may be relevant to today's world.
2. Blake meant for the poems of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* be read together. Choose any of the companion poems (such as "The Chimney Sweeper" or "The Lamb" and "The Tyger") and discuss how each poem presents a different aspect of the same concept.
3. Explore the relationship between any of the illustrations accompanying the "illuminated" poems and the text itself. Be sure to use specific references to imagery used in both the illustrations and the text.
4. Explore how Blake influenced writers like William Butler Yeats and Allen Ginsberg. Provide specific examples.
5. Blake's books *America: A Prophecy* and *Europe: A Prophecy* deal with the idea of revolution in highly allegorical ways. Is this an effective way of addressing political situations? Support your response with specific references to the poems.

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■ Karen Blixen

SEE *Isak Dinesen*

☒ Giovanni Boccaccio

BORN: 1313, Italy

DIED: 1375, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Filostrato (c. 1335)

The Decameron (1349–1351)

Life of Dante (1373)

Overview

The Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio is best known for *The Decameron*. For his Latin works and his role in reviving Hellenistic learning in Florence, he is often considered one of the early humanists. Though Boccaccio is rooted in the Middle Ages, his conception of life hints at the Renaissance; like his fellow poet Petrarch, he straddled two periods. He strove to raise Italian prose to an art form nurtured in both medieval rhetoric and classical Latin prose and had immense admiration for Petrarch as well as for another of his Italian contemporaries, Dante Alighieri.



Giovanni Boccaccio Boccaccio, Giovanni, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Desire to Compose Giovanni Boccaccio was the son of a merchant from Certaldo, identified as Boccaccio di Chelino. The exact date and place of Boccaccio's illegitimate birth are unknown. Despite tales of his birth in Paris, it seems that he was born in 1313 in Certaldo or, more likely, in Florence, where he spent his childhood. Of these years he wrote, "I remember that, before having completed my seventh year, a desire was born in me to compose verse."

Banking, a Muse, and Education in the Royal Court His father claimed him as legitimate about 1320 and gave him a decent education, sending him to the school of a famous educator, Mazzuoli da Strada, whose son Zanobi remained a lifelong friend and correspondent of Boccaccio. In 1327, Boccaccio's father was sent to Naples to head the branch of the Bardi banking company there. He took his son with him, clearly planning for him a life in commerce. The king of Naples, Robert of Anjou, was eager to establish lines of credit with the major Florentine banking houses. Under the Angevins, a French dynasty also named the House of Plantagenet, Naples became a commercial hub and, since King Robert had a taste for culture, a major center of learning. Boccaccio's formative years were

spent in this vibrant southern capital. While learning the business of banking (for which he had little inclination), he was drawn to the dynamic life of the port and the tales of merchants who arrived from all corners of the Mediterranean.

Through the royal court and library, he came into contact with some of the most distinguished intellectuals of his day. Naples was also a city of beautiful women, who both stimulated the young man's senses and inspired his first literary efforts: romances in prose and verse that resembled the tradition of French love poetry. Like Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura, Boccaccio's "Fiammetta" served as a muse, inspiring the works of the first half of his career. She has frequently been identified as Maria of Aquino, the illegitimate daughter of King Robert. Yet, like the notion of Boccaccio's Parisian birth, this idea must be classified as myth, in part encouraged by Boccaccio himself, who sought to romanticize his life into a story overshadowed by the cloud of illegitimacy.

Before leaving Naples, Boccaccio had composed *Diana's Hunt* (c. 1334) and the lengthy *Filostrato* (c. 1335), a version of the tale of Troilus and Cressida in octave form. His *Filostrato* and *The Book of Theseus* (1340–1341) that followed are of particular interest, since they are, respectively, the sources of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382) and "The Knight's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400).

Back to Florence When Boccaccio returned to Florence at the end of 1340, he found a city in crisis. An upheaval in the banking world had brought many major Florentine companies close to bankruptcy. Boccaccio's father, having weathered severe financial setbacks, had returned to the city in 1338 and was married to a woman for whom the son expressed little sympathy. Naples must have seemed far away, and Florence a dreary alternative. During the next decade, however, Boccaccio established himself as the leading storyteller of his generation.

Around this time, Boccaccio began thinking about his masterpiece, *The Decameron*. This collection of one hundred stories established Boccaccio as one of the founders of European narrative and served as a sourcebook for future storytellers (including Chaucer and Shakespeare). *The Decameron* weaves the idealized loves of the medieval tradition into the lives of merchants and adventurers. Set against the backgrounds of cities such as Florence, Naples, and Milan, the stories emphasize intelligence and individual initiative. The great pestilence of 1348 may have afforded Boccaccio the occasion to write his masterpiece; it provides the framework for this collection of one hundred stories. The book grew out of a period of despair for Boccaccio, as the plague killed his father and stepmother and made him the head of the family. *The Decameron* reflects Boccaccio's desire for the restoration of order out of chaos.

Petrarch and Politics Crucial to Boccaccio's spiritual and artistic development in these years was his friendship with Petrarch, whom he had admired from a distance but

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Boccaccio's famous contemporaries include:

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321): Boccaccio wrote the first biography of this famous Italian poet known for *The Divine Comedy*.

Petrarch (1304–1374): This close friend of Boccaccio was known for his poetry and gave his name to a sonnet form.

Pope Urban V (1310–1370): Pope from 1362 to 1370, Urban was a supporter of education and of the restoration of the papacy to Italy.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–c.1400): This English writer's *Canterbury Tales* is very similar to *The Decameron*.

finally met in Florence in September of 1350. In the spring of 1351, Boccaccio led a delegation to Padua, where Petrarch was residing, bringing with him the official restoration of citizenship to the poet (Petrarch's father had been exiled, along with Dante, in the political crisis of 1300). Boccaccio also offered Petrarch a professorship at the newly established University of Florence—which he declined. In a garden in the shadow of the city cathedral, these two masters of Italian letters spent weeks in intimate conversation (faithfully transcribed by Boccaccio) on questions of poetry, politics, and morals. When Boccaccio experienced a religious crisis in 1362, Petrarch persuaded his dear friend not to abandon the vocation of literature and not to burn the manuscript of *The Decameron*.

During these years, Boccaccio was also at the service of the republic when needed and was actively engaged in diplomatic activities. He twice led delegations to the papal court at Avignon (in 1354 and 1365). The intention was to assure the pope that Florence was devoted to the papacy, as well as to encourage Pope Urban V to restore the pontificate to Rome. In spite of his age and the increasing dangers from bandits, both journeys were diplomatically successful.

By early 1361, Boccaccio had retired to Certaldo, which thereafter remained his home and refuge. In this final chapter of his life, three themes persisted: fidelity to relatives and friends (notably Petrarch), prompt service to the republic, and tireless devotion to literature. News of Petrarch's death reached him late in 1374. On December 21, 1375, Boccaccio himself died and was buried in Certaldo in the Church of Saints Michael and James.

Works in Literary Context

Italian Prose Boccaccio wrote in Italian at a time when Latin was considered the proper language of literature. He wrote prose when poetry was considered the domain of

artists. He paved the way for generations of future novelists who sought to capture real speech in their works. The prose of *The Decameron*, in its balanced, rhythmic cadences, became the model of Italian literary prose.

Humanism *The Decameron* tales have an abundance of subjects. In his multitude of characters, from ridiculous fools to noble and resolute figures, from all times and social conditions, Boccaccio depicts a fair version of human nature. He emphasizes intelligence and a kind of worldly prudence with which characters overcome difficult situations, noble or ignoble. Boccaccio presents life from an earthly point of view, with a complete absence of moralizing intentions. While Petrarch's humanism is considered classic, Boccaccio's approach is considered vernacular, or common, yet Petrarch's traditional influence eventually changed Boccaccio's style.

Works in Critical Context

Women in *The Decameron* The essential feature of *The Decameron* is realism; the world of the tales is the world of here and now. The demographic range is wide: it includes not only lords and princes but merchants, bankers, doctors, scholars, peasants, priests, and monks—and a surprising number of women. A token of the feminist thrust of the work may be seen in the fact that seven of the ten narrators are women. Additionally, Boccaccio prefaces *The Decameron* with a dedication to women. Scholar Ray Fleming, in his study of "Day Five" of *The Decameron*, looks at what he sees as Boccaccio's "happy endings" through a feminist lens and shows that these endings are only perceived as happy due to "masculine priorities and values." In contrast, Pamela Joseph Benson invites a reading of female agency: "A persuasive and sensitive profeminist voice emerges from the text, a voice that admires female political, moral and physical strength although it does not endorse a change in the contemporary political status of women." Janet Levarie Smarr summarizes: "The issue of Boccaccio's attitudes towards women has evoked considerable debate, especially in the last decade [1990s]. Arguments are easily found for both cases: that Boccaccio was a feminist ahead of his time, and that he shared the traditional or even misogynistic views of his era."

Poetic Force in *The Decameron* Barbara Zaczek suggests that "by imbuing a word with the power to change, even invert, a given situation, Boccaccio draws the readers' attention to the role of language in society, demonstrating how verbal interaction assumes social significance." Gregory Stone also notes Boccaccio's intersection between language, meaning, and importance: "Boccaccio conceives poetry as the force that originates, determines, or triggers physis. Poetry, in other words, is regarded not as the imitation of nature but rather as natura herself, as the birth, blossoming, or arising of a previously concealed human ethos. Poetry, for Boccaccio, is the event of historical alteration of human nature."

Responses to Literature

1. Read Boccaccio's *Book of Theseus* and Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale". Make a chart comparing and contrasting them. Consider plot points, characterization, settings, language, and tone.
2. With a classmate, research humanism on the Internet or at your library, then find examples of it in today's pop culture. Create an audiovisual presentation for the class based on your findings.
3. Read a selection of Shakespeare's sonnets. With a classmate, brainstorm ways in which the sonnets are similar to selections from Boccaccio that you have read in class.
4. Love, fortune, and pity are recurring themes in *The Decameron*. With a classmate, find two passages in the selections of *The Decameron* that you have read that deal with love, fortune, and/or pity. Together with your classmate, write an informal paper describing Boccaccio's concept of love, fortune, and/or pity. Use examples from the text to support your opinions.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Boccaccio is said to be one of the Western world's first important humanists. Humanists during Renaissance times were concerned not with the supernatural but with morality and decency for all human beings, despite class, religion, or education. Here are some other works that affirm humanity's basic rational qualities.

- History of the Peloponnesian War* (c. 411 BCE), a history by Thucydides. This account of the famous war is special because it is relatively neutral, based on hard evidence, and does not focus on gods.
- Canzoniere* (1327–1368), poetry by Petrarch. Though these descriptions of the poet's love for Laura are often lofty, they express very honest human emotions.
- Utopia* (1516), a book by Thomas More. In More's idealized world, almost everything is tolerated, particularly most religions.

Ed. Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki. Vol. 8. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Annali d'Italianistica, 2006.

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❖ María Luisa Bombal

BORN: 1910, *Chile*

DIED: 1980, *Chile*

NATIONALITY: *Chilean*

GENRE: *Novels, short stories*

MAJOR WORKS:

The House of Mist (1935)

The Shrouded Woman (1938)

New Islands, and Other Stories (1982)



María Luisa Bombal Colección del Archivo del Escritor Biblioteca Nacional de Chile

Overview

Although she produced only a small body of work during her lifetime and was relatively unknown in English-speaking countries until after her death, María Luisa Bombal is credited with changing the style, tone, and substance of Hispanic literature. Her avant-garde works—considered early examples of feminist writing—deviated from the exaggeratedly masculine trends that dominated South American fiction. Composed in reaction to the confines of her society, Bombal’s writing centers on women who escape their lonely, boring, and unfulfilled existences through fantasy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Living the Boom María Luisa Bombal was born in Viña del Mar, Chile, on June 8, 1910. Her father was an Argentine of French origin, and her mother was of German descent. In 1923, after the death of her father, Bombal journeyed to Paris with her mother and two sisters and spent her adolescent years there. She adopted French as her own tongue and wrote her first literary pieces in that language.

Bombal graduated from the University of the Sorbonne in Paris with a thesis on the nineteenth-century French writer Mérimée. She also studied dramatic art and participated in several theatrical groups, both in France and in Chile. During these formative years spent in Paris, the literary and artistic movement of surrealism was in fashion, and a strong surrealist tendency can be seen in her novels and short stories.

In 1931, Bombal returned to her native Chile but soon left in 1933 to live in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she became a member of the thriving literary group often nicknamed “The Boom,” which included Jorge Luis Borges and Victoria Ocampo, publisher of the famous magazine *Sur*. Bombal worked for the journal, which published her two novels and short stories. At that time she shared an apartment with poet Pablo Neruda and his wife, composing her first fiction at their kitchen table. At the time, Neruda, the Chilean poet who became a Nobel Prize winner, was the Chilean consul in the Argentine capital. Inspired by him, Bombal finished her first novella, *The Final Mist*, which met with critical acclaim in 1935. In 1938, her novella *The Shrouded Woman* appeared. That same year she married an Argentine painter, but the marriage broke up two years later.

To America In 1941, Bombal took a brief trip to the United States where she met such important writers as William Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson. Back in Buenos Aires, she published her stories “The Tree” and “The New Islands.” Later that same year, Bombal moved back to Chile, where she shot and seriously wounded Eulogio Sanchez Errazuriz, her anti-Communist lover. She was

jailed and, upon Errazuriz's recovery, banished from Chile. Bombal then immigrated to the United States. Unlike many other Latin American authors of the time, including Borges and Neruda, Bombal avoided much of the political turmoil in Argentina and Chile due to her move to the United States. In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentines but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. This Latin American turmoil continued throughout Bombal's life, with military dictator Augusto Pinochet taking control of the Chilean government in 1973 and remaining in power until 1990 despite many charges of human-rights abuses against him.

During the thirty-year span Bombal lived in New York, the only works she published were English translations she wrote herself of her books *The Final Mist* (revised and published as *The House of Mist* in 1947) and *The Shrouded Woman*. She added so much additional explanatory material to the original of *The Final Mist* that it unfortunately lost much of its power and fascination. Finally, in ill health, Bombal returned to spend her last few years in Chile, where she died in Santiago on May 6, 1980. During most of her life, Bombal did not achieve significant fame, although in her last years the Chilean government granted her a stipend. With the keen interest in the feminist movement in later years, her works were read and commented on more widely.

Works in Literary Context

Bombal was one of the first Latin American novelists to break away from the realist tradition in fiction and to write in a highly individual and personal style, stressing irrational and subconscious themes. During the 1930s when most of her fellow writers were turning out works emphasizing social conflict, Bombal turned inward for her inspiration and produced several works of remarkable artistic quality. She incorporated the secret inner world of her women protagonists into the mainstream of her novels. She accomplished this in a prose charged with poetic vibration and filled with a sense of imminent tragedy, a melancholy atmosphere in which the factors of time and death play somber roles.

The Universal Woman As she writes and rewrites her material, Bombal draws on an apparently finite number of characters, situations, and motifs. When considered as a whole, her work may be perceived as a set of variations on one specific theme. The greater part of her writing is comprised of the life, development, crises, and sufferings of women; it is almost as if each successive piece of writing offers a new facet of the same woman. Almost without exception, they experience tremendous difficulties in carrying out their traditional role as dependent female, or wife, the only truly acceptable role that society seems to envisage for them. We are reminded of one of Bombal's most poignant lines, voiced by Ana

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bombal's famous contemporaries include:

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): This Spanish painter was responsible for much of the surrealist movement in Europe and abroad.

Eudora Welty (1909–2001): American author noted for her fiction about the American South.

Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006): Controversial president of Chile from 1974 to 1990, known for his human rights abuses and also for his bringing order and economic stability to Chile.

Gunter Grass (1927–): A 1999 Nobel Prize winner, Grass is a German writer whose first novel, *The Tin Drum* (1959) leads readers through the events of the World War II and postwar years through a distorted and exaggerated perspective.

María in *The Shrouded Woman*: “Why, why must a woman's nature be such that a man has always to be the pivot of her life?”

Escape Women in Bombal's stories seem to be embarked on a permanent, and often fruitless, quest for love and companionship. These troubled, alienated women are driven to seek refuge in a universe of dreams or fairy tales that eventually becomes more real, more immediate, and infinitely more tolerable than their objective, physical world. Fantasy mingles with reality, until neither the protagonist nor the reader is sure which is which. Equally at ease with a first-person or third-person narrative, Bombal's prose is intensely poetic and musical. In fact, music plays an important part throughout her writing (though nowhere as clearly as in “The Tree”). Her narrative concentrates on one essential theme that she explores with sensitivity and honesty, the limitations imposed on women—as much by women themselves as by the men who control their lives.

Works in Critical Context

Bombal offers many interpretative challenges to her readers and critics, not least because she is one of the few authors who has rewritten their own novels in another language. Critics largely agree that Bombal's literary output, though not great in quantity, is of the highest quality. Bombal is commonly credited with having introduced a new, feminist sensibility to Chilean literature. There are Chilean elements in her works, but her depiction of characters and their conflicts transcends the local and national, becoming a universal comment on the situation of humanity, not a set of observations rooted in any particular society or age.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bombal was very concerned about women's rights and how women make their way and find their identity in patriarchal societies. Here are a few other works that explore this theme.

As I Lay Dying (1930), by William Faulkner. This disastrous and darkly comic tale chronicles the death of Addie Bundren and the subsequent journey to bury her corpse in her family's cemetery several miles away.

To the Lighthouse (1927), by Virginia Woolf. This observational novel shows the limitations of purely masculine and purely feminine qualities and presents a vision of uniting the two through art.

Play It as It Lays (1970), by Joan Didion. Protagonist Maria Wyeth is a failed actress trying to scrape her life back together in the California desert.

Thelma and Louise (1991), directed by Ridley Scott. Two women desperately try to outrun the law after a violent incident in a parking lot.

The Final Mist Bombal's first novella, *The Final Mist*, was published in Spanish in 1935; twelve years later, it was revised, enlarged, and published in English as *The House of Mist*. Set in South America, the tale revolves around Helga, a woman who resorts to a dream life for satisfaction after realizing that her new husband, Daniel, remains devoted to his dead wife. The novella is named for the white mist that rolls up from the lagoon where Daniel's first wife drowned. American critics found the tale somewhat oversentimentalized but nonetheless intriguing. In a review for the *New York Times* Richard Sullivan noted, "Bombal's heroine dwells far too steadily on her raptures," but he judged *The House of Mist* to be "dexterous, amoral, delicate."

New Islands, and Other Stories Bombal's English-speaking audience expanded after her death with the release of *New Islands, and Other Stories* in 1982. The entire collection is inundated with the author's preoccupation with the powers of the imagination. One story, "The Unknown," is about a pirate ship lost in a whirlpool at the bottom of the sea. One of her most popular stories, "The Tree," chronicles a woman's growing alienation from her husband. As observed by Ronald De Feo in the *New York Times Book Review*, the closing lines capture Bombal's basic philosophy: "It may be that true happiness lies in the conviction that one has irremediably lost happiness. It is only then that we can begin to live without hope or fear, able finally to enjoy all the small pleasures, which are the most lasting." *New Islands* was well received in the United States. Reviewers were particularly impressed by Bombal's ability to elicit empathy in her readers.

Responses to Literature

1. Examine the male characters in a few of Bombal's works. Can you fault them entirely for the suppression of the female characters? Why or why not?
2. Compare and contrast one of Bombal's short stories with one of Pablo Neruda's poems. What similarities do you find that might help you understand Chilean literature and culture?
3. Much of Bombal's work examines how women react to the social and emotional constraints of their lives. Many women writers of past generations have treated this theme, including Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*, 1899) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman ("The Yellow Wallpaper," 1892). Do you think women today feel the same kinds of constraints experienced by Bombal's protagonists? Or have times changed sufficiently so that women are now "free" from old limitations?

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Yves Bonnefoy

BORN: 1923, Tours, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, translation, literary criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve (On the Motion and Immobility of Douve, 1953)

Hier regnant desert (In Yesterday's Desert Realm, 1958)

Anti-Platon (Against Plato, 1962)

Pierre écrite (Words in Stone, 1965)

Dans le leurre du seuil (Lure of the Threshold, 1975)

Overview

Poet, translator, and respected critic of both literature and art, Yves Bonnefoy is widely acknowledged as the most



Yves Bonnefoy Michal Cizek / AFP / Getty Images

significant and influential figure in contemporary French poetry. Critics note in Bonnefoy's work affinities with both the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the surrealists of the twentieth century. He is admired for his investigation of spiritual and philosophical matters and his preference for exploring the subconscious rather than material reality and conscious perceptions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Landscape and Loss Yves Bonnefoy was born in Tours, France, on June 24, 1923, the son of Marius Elie Bonnefoy, a railroad worker, and Hélène Maury Bonnefoy, a teacher. Bonnefoy spent his childhood summers at his grandfather's house in Toirac, near the Lot River. This summer landscape, he is quoted as saying in the preface to *New and Selected Poems: Yves Bonnefoy* (1995), "formed me in my deepest choices, with its vast, deserted plateaus and gray stone," providing images and themes that his poetry has probed ever more deeply over the years. His early life was also profoundly influenced by the loss of his father, who died when Bonnefoy was thirteen. Bonnefoy reacted to this loss by immersing himself in his studies. A more lasting and more poetically resonant impact of his father's loss may be found in the sense of desolation that pervades his early work, relieved, however, by moments of clarity and illumination redolent of his idyllic childhood summers.

Literary Success In 1944 Bonnefoy arrived in Paris—which was occupied by Nazi German troops at the time—to study mathematics and philosophy at the Sor-

bonne. He began to write poetry under the influence of such surrealists as André Breton and Victor Brauner. His study of the German philosopher George Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel is also evident throughout his work. Hegel's theory operates both thematically and structurally in Bonnefoy's poetry, allying his work with surrealism.

With the encouragement of Jean Wahl, Bonnefoy put aside his philosophy thesis and worked for three years at the National Center for Scientific Research, studying English literary creativity, reading literary theorists, and writing his own poetry. His first major collection, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (1968), was published in 1953 to immediate acclaim and established his reputation. The collection of short poems centers around a mysterious female, Douve. She variously represents earth, woman, love, and poetry. The progress of the poem portrays changing moods and metaphysical transformations and sets up dialectics such as mind/spirit, hope/despair, and life/death.

The publication of *In the Shadow's Light, and Early Poems, 1947–1959* reinforced Bonnefoy's reputation as a great postwar poet, one dedicated to crafting verses that embrace and envelop human feelings and emotions. In 1966 Bonnefoy cofounded a journal of art and literature, *L'Ephémère*, with Gaëtan Picon, André du Bouchet, and others; he coedited the review until it ceased publication in 1972. Since the 1970s, Bonnefoy has taught literature at several universities. He wrote many philosophical essays on the nature of writing and continued to published poetry, including the lauded 1975 collection *Dans le seuil du seuil* (*Lure of the Threshold*).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Bonnefoy turned his attention to translating the poetry of such writers as John Donne, John Keats, and William Butler Yeats. At present, Bonnefoy continues to write essays and translate Shakespeare's plays into French.

Works in Literary Context

The Unity of Things Much of Bonnefoy's poetry is preoccupied with loss and death, and the transience of all earthly things is emphasized as a paradoxical compensation for the loss of hope for immortality. Some critics view his work as a quest for what Bonnefoy himself terms "*le vrai lieu*" (the true place), a location in time or space, or a state of mind wherein the fundamental unity of all things is perceived. Bonnefoy's insistence on the importance of accepting the presence of death in everyday life has prompted many commentators to regard him as the first existentialist poet. Jean Starobinski commented: "The work of Bonnefoy offers us today one of the most committed and deeply pondered examples of [the] modern vocation of poetry. His writings as poet and essayist, in which the personal accent is so clear, and in which the I of subjective assertion is manifested with force and simplicity, have for [their] object a relation to the world, not

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bonnefoy's famous contemporaries include:

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): French author and theorist, most recognized for her metaphysical novels, she laid significant groundwork for contemporary feminist thought in her 1949 analysis of women's oppression, *The Second Sex*.

James Dewey Watson (1928–): A molecular biologist and codiscoverer of the structure of DNA.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Movie director known for his thriller and suspense films.

Madeleine Albright (1937–): The first female United States Secretary of State.

Anne Frank (1929–1945): A young Dutch writer who penned her famous *Diary of a Young Girl* while she hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): Author, philosopher, and critic, this Frenchman is renowned for his philosophical principles of existentialism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost to Bonnefoy's themes is the presence of death in everyday life, leading some to label him "the first existentialist poet." Other works that explore humankind's preoccupation with death and the possibility of immortality include:

Fear and Trembling (1843), a book by Søren Kierkegaard. In his interpretation of the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, *Binding of Isaac*, Kierkegaard explores the conflicts between theology and philosophy, ethics and morality.

Notes from the Underground (1864), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Widely considered to be the first existentialist novel, this work influenced numerous writers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Joseph Heller, and Ralph Ellison.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883–1985), a philosophical treatise by Friedrich Nietzsche. Among the many themes explored in Nietzsche's best-known work is that of eternal recurrence, the concept that everything that has occurred in history will repeat itself an infinite number of times.

Nausea (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. Famous as one of the most important existentialist texts, this novel explores thirty-year-old protagonist Antoine Roquentin's struggle with existential angst, unreality, and the hostility of the human condition.

an internal reflection on the self. This oeuvre is one of the least narcissistic there is."

Works in Critical Context

Bonnefoy's first three volumes of verse, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, *In Yesterday's Desert Realm*, and *Words in Stone*, are often considered a poetic cycle. Each volume is composed of short, interrelated poems that expand or resolve themes present in the others.

On the Motion and Immobility of Douve Critics have variously interpreted Douve as the speaker's beloved, a mythological symbol for all women, a river or moat, a forest, the poetic principle, and as the poem itself. Against a surreal and stark landscape in which wind, stone, and fire are discernible elements, Douve repeatedly dies, decomposes, and comes back to life. Michael Bishop remarked: "Death, despite its 'frightful,' 'silly' orchestrations is felt, throughout these intense poems, to be doubly positive. It is the one phenomenon that, for Bonnefoy, flings us back towards our existence, our leaking yet potentially full being-in-the-world."

In Yesterday's Desert Realm and Words in Stone

In the collection *In Yesterday's Desert Realm*, Bonnefoy explores the significance of death and its presence in daily life. Although Bonnefoy employed a more optimistic tone and less-violent imagery in this collection, the poems are generally considered more difficult and have garnered the least critical attention of the three volumes in the cycle. In an essay, Marc Hofstadter presented the idea that *In Yesterday's Desert Realm* is a continuation of the journey begun in *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* and the journey is completed in *Words in Stone*. Hofstadter wrote: "Beginning in despair of the validity of the search or of the self's ability to pursue it . . . *In Yesterday's Desert Realm* takes the poet and us through a journey that ends, after all, in an opening up towards presence. *Words in Stone* emphasizes presence in the here-and-now and maintains the optimism which concluded *In Yesterday's Desert Realm* by praising the present moment as not only all there is but all that the speaker desires."

Responses to Literature

1. As you read *Lure of the Threshold*, note the imagery Bonnefoy chooses. In a short analysis, note images that are particularly striking and explain how these images relate to the themes Bonnefoy explores.
2. Using *Lure of the Threshold* as an example, discuss the role of the past in Bonnefoy's verse.
3. Bonnefoy is often considered the first surrealist poet. Others have argued that he is the first existentialist poet. Use several of Bonnefoy's poems to provide examples of these labels.

- Using specific examples from his first three volumes of poetry—*On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, *In Yesterday's Desert Realm*, and *Words in Stone*—describe Bonnefoy's views on death.

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📖 Jorge Luis Borges

BORN: 1899, Buenos Aires, Argentina

DIED: 1986, Geneva, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Argentinian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, and criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Passion for Buenos Aires (1923)

Ficciones (1944)

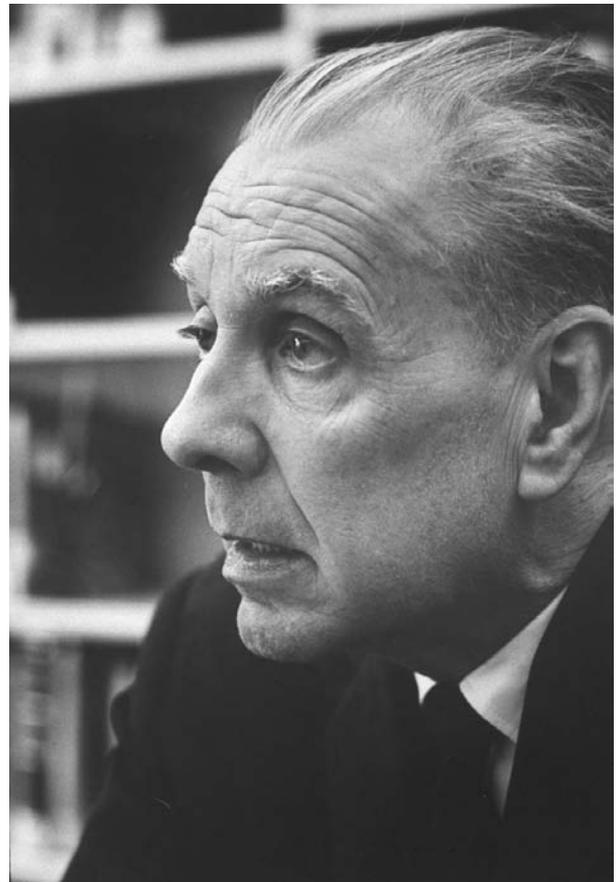
The Aleph (1949)

Other Inquisitions (1952)

Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings (1972)

Overview

Jorge Luis Borges, considered by some as one of the great writers of the twentieth century, was an Argentine writer and poet. Borges was a significant influence on such celebrated Latin American writers as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa. He is best known for his short stories, but was also an estab-



Jorges Luis Borges Charles H. Phillips / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

lished critic and translator. His early works were classified as avant-garde, or innovative and daring compared to mainstream literature; later, his style evolved into what can best be described as “post-avant-garde.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jorge Luis Borges was born on August 24, 1899, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A few years later his family moved to the northern suburb of Palermo, which he was to celebrate in prose and verse. He received his earliest education at home, where he learned English and read widely in his father's library of English books. When Borges was nine years of age, he began his public schooling in Palermo, and in the same year, published his first literary undertaking—a translation into Spanish of Oscar Wilde's “The Happy Prince.”

European Education and Influence In 1914 the Borges family traveled to Europe. When World War I broke out, they settled for the duration in Switzerland where young Borges finished his formal education at the Collège in Geneva. During World War I, most of Europe was engaged in the conflict by siding with either the



Jorge Luis Borges Borges, Jorge Luis, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Allied powers—headed by Great Britain, France, and Russia—or the Central powers, led by Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, a handful of countries remained neutral throughout the four-year war; these countries included Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—where the Borges family waited out the war. By 1919, when the family moved on to Spain, Borges had learned several languages and had begun to write and translate poetry.

In Seville and Madrid he frequented literary gatherings where he absorbed the lessons of new poetical theorists of the time—especially those of Rafael Cansinos Asséns, who headed a group of writers who came to be known as “Ultraists.” When the family returned to Argentina in 1921, Borges rediscovered his native Buenos Aires and began to write poems dealing with his intimate feelings for the city, its past, and certain fading features of its quiet suburbs.

Back to Argentina With other young Argentine writers, Borges collaborated in the founding of new publications in which the Ultraist mode was cultivated in the New World. His first volume of poetry, *Passion for Buenos Aires* (*Fervor de Buenos Aires*), was published in 1923, and it also made somewhat of a name for him in Spain.

In 1925 his second book of poetry, *Moon Across the Way* (*Luna de enfrente*), appeared, followed in 1929 by *San Martín Copybook* (*Cuaderno San Martín*)—the last new collection of his verse to appear for three decades. Borges gradually developed a keen interest in literary criticism. His critical and philosophical essays began to fill most of the volumes he published during the period 1925–1940.

A New Style In 1938, with his father gravely ill from a heart ailment, Borges obtained an appointment in a municipal library in Buenos Aires. Before year’s end, his father died. Borges himself came close to death from complications of an infected head injury.

This period of crisis produced an important change in Borges. He began to write prose fiction tales of a curious and highly original character. These pieces seemed to be philosophical essays invested with narrative qualities and tensions. Others were short stories infused with metaphorical concepts. Ten of these concise, well-executed stories were collected in *Ficciones* (1944). A second volume of similar tales, entitled *The Aleph* (*El Aleph*), was published in 1949. Borges’s fame as a writer firmly rests on the narratives contained in these two books, to which other stories were added in later editions.

Writing Under Perón In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentines but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. Under Perón’s regime, Borges was removed from his position at the Buenos Aires Municipal Library. He boldly spoke out against Perón, and remained in Argentina despite the persecution he faced. In 1955, following the overthrow of the Perónist regime in Argentina, Borges was named director of the National Library in Buenos Aires. In that same year his sight deteriorated to the point where he became almost totally blind.

After *The Aleph*, Borges published an important collection of essays, several collections of poetry and prose sketches, and two collections of new short stories. Aside from these works, Borges wrote over a dozen books in collaboration with other persons. Foremost among his collaborators was Adolfo Bioy Casares, an Argentine novelist and short-story writer, who was Borges’s closest literary associate for nearly forty years. A Viking collection of Borges’s work began in 1998 with *Borges’s Collected Fictions* and followed by *Selected Poems* (1999), a bilingual volume of two hundred poems covering the range of Borges’s work.

World Recognition In 1961 Borges shared with Samuel Beckett the ten-thousand-dollar International Publishers Prize, and world recognition at last began to come his way. He received countless honors and prizes. In 1970 he was the first recipient of the twenty-five-thousand-dollar Matarazzo Sobrinho Inter-American Literary Prize.

Borges married Elsa Astete Millan in 1967 but divorced in 1970. He married Maria Kodama in 1986, shortly before his death on June 14 in Geneva, Switzerland.

On March 13, 2000, the National Book Critics Circle honored Borges's memory with the criticism award for his collection *Selected Non-Fictions*. The collection won praise for its sharp criticism and philosophical incisiveness.

Works in Literary Context

In his 1969 study *The Narrow Act: Borges's Art of Allusion*, Ronald J. Christ offers an important piece of advice to anyone reading Borges for the first time: "The point of origin for most of Borges's fiction is neither character nor plot . . . but, instead, as in science fiction, a proposition, an idea, a metaphor, which, because of its ingenious or fantastic quality, is perhaps best call[ed] a conceit."

The Labyrinth Borges's signature in literature is the construct known as the labyrinth. The writer's life is transmuted into images that are reanimated in his work. Reid wrote, "The library becomes the infinite library of Babel, containing all the possible books and turning into nightmares." In a 1983 interview with Nicomedes Suárez-Aráuz in the *Massachusetts Review*, Borges discussed his discovery of the labyrinth as a youth in his father's library. A book he found there included a large engraving of a building with many cracks. With his myopic vision, Borges thought that with a magnifying glass he would find a Minotaur—a fierce creature who inhabited a maze in Greek myth—within the seemingly exitless maze. Of the experience he stated, "That labyrinth was, besides a symbol of bewilderment, a symbol of being lost in life. I believe that all of us at one time or another, have felt that we are lost, and I saw in the labyrinth the symbol of that condition."

The lost labyrinth is a particularly favored form in the author's work, especially in the story "The Garden of the Forking Paths." Borges told Suárez-Aráuz that such a construct was something magical to him. He said that the "lost labyrinth seems to me to be something magical because a labyrinth is a place where one loses oneself, a place (in my story) which in turn is lost in time. The idea of a labyrinth which disappears, of a lost labyrinth, is twice as magical. That story is a tale which I imagined to be multiplied or forked in various directions. In that story the reader is presented with all the events leading to the execution of a crime whose intention the reader does not understand."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Borges's famous contemporaries include:

Juan Perón (1895–1974): General and politician, president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955 and again from 1973 to his death a year later. A divisive figure, his ardent supporters praised him for his support of the working classes while his opponents considered him little more than a dictator and Nazi sympathizer.

Eva Perón (1919–1952): Wife of Juan Perón and founder of Argentina's first female political party. She seriously considered a run for the vice presidency before being appointed with the official title of Spiritual Leader of the Nation; a year later, she was dead from cancer at the age of thirty-three.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Irish modernist writer and expatriate. By the time his last novel, *Finnegans Wake*, was published in 1939, his influence on Latin American writers was firmly established, leading to the later "boom" of Latin American literature by the likes of Borges and Marquez.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): British author known primarily for such works of science fiction as *The Time Machine* (1888) and *The War of the Worlds* (1897). Wells was also an outspoken socialist and pacifist. Borges, an admirer of Wells, was influenced by both his literature and his politics.

Postmodernism Continuing the tradition of fantastic literature established by Edgar Allan Poe in the nineteenth century, Borges transformed the genre into an electric whole that allowed him to explore philosophical ideas and to pose relevant questions. After participating in and observing the development of the avant-garde during the first quarter of the century, Borges created his own type of post-avant-garde literature in order to reveal the formal and intellectual density involved in writing. Borges's influence is seen, especially in Latin American literature, in various writers such as Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez, his confessed admirers.

The first half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of literary schools, styles, and attitudes espoused and practiced by Argentine poets, novelists, and short-story writers. By the time Borges wrote *The Aleph*, his country had witnessed the birth and death of several literary movements, all of which surface in the whole of Borges's work.

Works in Critical Context

Borges is universally regarded as a major and powerful figure in twentieth-century literature; indeed, it is as

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Borges's work is often marked by extreme erudition and a concern more with fantastical ideas rather than plot or character. Other such works include:

Foucault's Pendulum (1988) by Umberto Eco. Three friends hatch an occult conspiracy plan that takes on a life of its own in this novel.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (1979) by Milan Kundera. Czech writer Kundera explores the idea of "forgetting" in different contexts in this novel.

Murphy (1939), by Samuel Beckett. Beckett, like Borges, experimented with the short story form and adapts many of the latter's techniques in this novel, especially the incorporation of various types of obscure knowledge as an essential element of the story.

difficult to find a negative critique of Borges's work as it is to find an essay on the failures of Shakespeare as a dramatist. Most critics agree with James E. Irby, who boldly states in his preface to the 1962 collection *Labyrinths* that Borges's work is "one of the most extraordinary expressions in all Western literature of modern man's anguish of time, of space, of the infinite."

When Borges's collection of short stories *The Garden of Forking Paths* initially appeared in Argentina in 1941, reviewers were quick to recognize something new. Most critical commentary had concentrated on his poetry, although in 1933 a special issue of the magazine *Megafono* devoted to a discussion of him reveals that critics had begun to treat him as a writer of prose as well as poetry.

Although Borges's stories garnered critical acclaim, the jury charged with selecting the 1941 National Literary Prize did not choose *The Garden of Forking Paths* as the recipient of the award. Many Argentinean writers and critics were outraged, and they subsequently dedicated an entire issue of *Sur*, an important literary magazine, to a consideration of his work. Nevertheless, even among those critics who felt he should have received the award, there was some reservation. Most commonly, these reservations focused on his cerebral style and his esoteric subject matter.

Other critics, however, found Borges's work to be important and original. In his book *Jorge Luis Borges*, Martin Stabb cites, for instance, Pedro Henriquez Ureña's famous comment: "There may be those who think that Borges is original because he proposes to be. I think quite the contrary: Borges would be original even when he might propose not to be."

In the early 1940s the translation of his work into English began in literary magazines, although it was not

until the early 1960s that whole collections were translated and published. However, the work made an immediate impact. John Updike presented an important survey of his work in the *New Yorker* in 1965, a review in which he noted his fascination with calling attention to a work of literature *as* a work of literature. Another seminal article on Borges by the novelist John Barth appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1967. In the article, Barth discussed the literature of the 1960s, placing Borges at the center of such literature. In addition, Barth paid careful attention to his use of the labyrinth as an image in his work.

Other critics attempt to trace the influences on Borges's work. Andre Maurois, in a preface to Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby's edition of *Labyrinths*, directly addresses his sources. He cites H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, G. K. Chesterton, and Franz Kafka as important influences on Borges's writing. Borges himself noted in several places the debt he owed to Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling.

"The Aleph" "The Aleph" is conventionally praised as one of Borges's most important stories. In her 1965 study *Borges the Labyrinth Maker*, Ana Maria Barrenechea argues that "the most important of Borges's concerns is the conviction that the world is a chaos impossible to reduce to any human law." She specifically praises "The Aleph" as an example of "the economy of Borges's work" in its ability to erase "the limits of reality" and create in the reader "an atmosphere of anxiety." In his 1969 study, Ronald Christ contends that "The Aleph" stands as wholly representative of Borges's art and his attempts to "abbreviate the universe in literature." To Christ, the Aleph of the story's title is a symbol of Borges's style and desire to compose another of his "resumes of the universe." Martin S. Stabb, in his 1970 book *Jorge Luis Borges*, suggests that "The Aleph" is Borges's attempt to explore his dominant themes in a lighthearted fashion that may not possess the depth of his other work that reads as a "half-philosophical, basically playful composition—generously sprinkled with Borgesian irony and satire." Perhaps the most effusive praise of the story comes from George R. McMurray, who (in his 1980 study *Jorge Luis Borges*) states that the story not only reflects the "mystical aura of magic that imbues so many of Borges's works," but also "emerges as a symbol of all literature, whose purpose . . . is to subvert objective reality and recreate it through the powers of imagination."

Responses to Literature

1. Look at some of the other writers of the Latin American "boom." What are some of the countries that produced important writers after World War II? What political or social changes happened in those countries that these writers comment on in their works?

2. Borges lived during a very tumultuous time in Argentine history. What were the important political events in Argentina from 1900 to 1986? What happened in the 1970s and 1980s? Why do you think many of the Latin American writers who were influenced by Borges criticized his refusal to write about politics?
3. Research the philosophical puzzles known as the paradoxes of Zeno and Pascal's sphere. How do stories such as "The Aleph" dramatize these paradoxes in narrative form?
4. Part of what makes "The Aleph" a success is Borges's setting it in an everyday location and describing the fantastic event in everyday language. Compose a story in which a character discovers a fantastic object or event and use Borges's style to describe it. How does the use of everyday language heighten the believability of the event for the reader?
5. Literary allusions are references within a story to other historical or literary figures, events, or objects. Try to identify at least five allusions in "The Garden of Forking Paths." Look up the allusions in a dictionary and/or encyclopedia. How does your understanding of the story change with your understanding of these allusions?

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■ Maryse Boucolon

SEE *Maryse Conde*

☒ Elizabeth Bowen

BORN: 1899, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1973, London, England

NATIONALITY: *British, Irish*

GENRE: *Fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The House in Paris (1935)

Death of the Heart (1938)

The Demon Lover, and Other Stories (1945)



Elizabeth Bowen Bowen, Elizabeth, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Elizabeth Bowen was an Anglo-Irish author whose fiction typically attends carefully to realistic details of both character and place. In her best stories as well as in her novels, Bowen unobtrusively steers readers through the geography of motives and interactions on which human identity and human character depend.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Anglo-Irish Heritage Elizabeth Bowen was born in Dublin, Ireland, on June 7, 1899 to Henry Charles Cole Bowen and Florence Colley. Her family can be traced to Welsh, not English, ancestors, but critics and biographers have considered her heritage, as did Bowen herself, "classic Anglo-Irish."

Illnesses Split Family Apart During her first five or six years of life, most of each year was spent in Dublin, where her father was first a lawyer in private practice, then an official of the Land Commission; during the summer the family moved to Bowen's Court, in County Cork, Ireland, which had been the Bowen family seat for years.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bowen's famous contemporaries include:

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (1900–2000): Queen Consort of King George VI of the United Kingdom, known as the Queen Mother after her husband's death; during the Blitz, Germany's bombing of London in World War II, she famously refused to leave London, winning the hearts of the British.

Robert Graves (1895–1985): British novelist and poet; well known for his memoir of World War I, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), as well as for his historical novel *I, Claudius* (1934), about the Roman emperor.

P. G. Wodehouse (1881–1975): English writer, many of whose short stories and novels center on a hapless aristocrat and his unflappable butler; he also wrote plays and lyrics for musicals, including *Anything Goes* (1934).

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): English modernist novelist and writer, part of the influential Bloomsbury literary group; her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) argued that women must have private space in order to be able to create.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright, who favored Ireland's independence from England; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

By the time she was seven, however, her father was hospitalized for mental illness, and she and her mother moved to England to stay with relatives while he recovered. In 1912, as the family began preparations to reunite, Bowen's mother was diagnosed with cancer; her death soon afterward left Elizabeth in the care of what she called "a committee of aunts" from her mother's large family. She was educated at Downe House, a boarding school in Kent, England, and at the London Council School of Art, which she left after two terms in 1919. Thus, her young years were somewhat sheltered from the turmoil that had engulfed Europe during World War I (1914–1919).

Short Stories, Marriage, and Increased Productivity It was when she was living on her own in London that Bowen began to write seriously. Her first short story collection, *Encounters*, appeared in 1923, the same year she married Alan Charles Cameron. Their move in 1926 to Oxford opened Bowen to a stimulating literary circle that included the critics C. M. Bowra and Lord David Cecil, and writers Evelyn Waugh, Edith Sitwell, Walter de la Mare, and Aldous Huxley. By 1929, she had published two more volumes of short stories and two novels, establishing a rate of production she would maintain much of her life.

Influential Associations Bowen published three other novels by 1935—*Friends and Relations* (1931), *To the North* (1932), and *The House in Paris* (1935)—and in 1935 Cameron and Bowen moved to London. This move, like the move to Oxford, enhanced Bowen's career. She began to associate with Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury literary circle in London, wrote reviews for the *Tatler* magazine in addition to her regular writing of fiction.

In 1937 Bowen was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters. *The Death of the Heart*, her sixth novel, was published in 1938. To many Bowen critics it represents the pinnacle of her achievements as a writer of fiction. Its narrative mode incorporates an expertly handled multiplicity of viewpoints that evoke a multiplicity of responses to a single event or situation.

Influence of the War Years World War II dominated much of Bowen's life in London and the writing she produced during this period. Her experiences living and working as an air-raid warden in London during World War II inspired what many critics consider her finest short story collection, *The Demon Lover, and Other Stories* (1945). In these stories she introduced a hallucinatory tone and supernatural themes in order to convey war's effect on the human mind.

Career Advances Despite Personal Loss In 1948, Bowen was made a Commander of the British Empire and, in 1949, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by Trinity College, Dublin. During the same year *The Heat of the Day* was published to glowing reviews. Before this novel was published, Bowen had produced two new collections of short stories, a selection of previously published short stories, a radio play, a critical study of the novel, two volumes of memoirs and family history, and a play (coauthored with John Perry and produced in 1948, although never published). She also continued to write the reviews and critical articles that appeared regularly in various periodicals. The Camerons moved from London to Bowen's Court in Ireland in 1952, which she had inherited in 1930. That same year Alan Cameron died. In 1957, Bowen was awarded a Doctor of Letters by Oxford University. Following her husband's death Bowen remained at the family home until 1959, when she decided to sell Bowen's Court and return to England.

In 1964, *The Little Girls*, a novel set in Kent, England, where she had lived with her mother during her father's illness, was published. Her last novel was *Eva Trout* (1969), for which she received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1970. During the last four years of her life Bowen was in declining health, suffering from repeated bouts of respiratory illness. In 1972, she learned that she had lung cancer, from which she died on February 22, 1973.

Works in Literary Context

Elizabeth Bowen's works are often compared with Katherine Mansfield's because of her extreme sensitivity

to perceptions of light, atmosphere, color, and sound. Like Mansfield, Bowen is considered expert at presenting the emotional dynamics of a situation and then swiftly illuminating their significance, particularly within the prescribed bounds of the short story. Her work also has been compared to that of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Henry James, and Jane Austen. Her work is also heavily influenced by her experiences in war-time London.

The Ghosts of War In his introduction to *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* Angus Wilson notes that Bowen's stories may be some of the best records any future generation will have of London during the war and of the psychological violence and tenderness that the war evoked. Through the stories in *The Demon Lover, and Other Stories* readers may also gain an appreciation for Bowen's ghosts—spirits that are rarely malign but that seem to elucidate the “real” world. In “The Happy Autumn Fields” Mary prefers to dwell in a past peopled by ghosts inspired by letters that are more real than her own bombed house. London exists as its own moonlit ghost in “Mysterious Kor,” a story that superbly displays Bowen's painting with words and also shows the threads of feeling that may become entangled in times of war. And the title story, “The Demon Lover,” introduces the ghost or “demon” born of one woman's fickle nature.

Works in Critical Context

While acclaimed in her lifetime for both her short stories and novels, since her death Elizabeth Bowen has slipped from critical attention. Some critics suggest that her romanticism, wit, and sensitivity to both language and feeling have gone out of style; others assert that her writing is flawed by a too-simple style and narrow range of characters. Nonetheless, Bowen is revered by many for the radiance of style and subtlety of expression shown perhaps most assuredly in her short stories.

Angus Wilson notes that her stories may be some of the best records any future generation will have of London during World War II and of the psychological violence and tenderness that the war evoked. Some critics find that the short story seems an even more appropriate form than the novel for Bowen's psychological portraits and powerful sense of the period.

Bowen was “a highly conscious artist,” Walter Allen wrote in *The Modern Novel* (1954), who “evolved over the years a prose style that has the elaboration, the richness of texture, the allusiveness of poetry, a prose as carefully wrought, as subtle in its implications, as that of Henry James in his last phase.” A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer summarized her reputation by noting that “critics generally consider *The Death of the Heart* her best novel; some call it one of the best English novels of the century.”

Responses to Literature

1. Elizabeth Bowen was a prolific writer, often publishing a novel each year. Do you think this meant

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Some of Elizabeth Bowen's best-regarded works deal with the psychological effects of World War II. Here are some other works examining the human impact of war.

War Poems (1919), a poetry collection by Siegfried Sassoon. The poems in this book echo Sassoon's own experience fighting in World War I and established him as an important British poet.

War Trash (2005), a novel by Ha Jin. This work examines the situation of a Chinese soldier during the Korean War, who is sent by his government to fight for the Communist side, but is captured by the enemy instead.

The Wind That Shakes the Barley (2006), a film directed by Ken Loach. This critically acclaimed movie traces the political development of an Irish student during the early days of the Irish Republican Army, which violently opposed British rule.

Half of a Yellow Sun, (2006), a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This story takes place in Nigeria in the 1960s, when a civil war was raging and traces its effects through the lives of a teenage boy and two sisters.

A Long Way Gone (2007), a memoir by Ishmael Beah. This work tells the story of a twelve-year boy forced to become a child soldier during Sierra Leone's Civil War in the 1990s.

that she had more imagination than less-published authors, or was she simply more disciplined?

2. After reading one of Bowen's novels, discuss what aspects of the novel's style or structure might seem to modern critics to be out of fashion. Did you find the novel old-fashioned? Point out specific passages to support your argument.
3. Using your library and the Internet, research the Anglo-Irish during the early part of the twentieth century. Write an essay analyzing how their life in Ireland changed with the growing movement toward Irish independence. Do you feel sympathetic toward them? Explain your feelings.
4. Bowen's life and work were heavily influenced by her experience of World War II in England. To find out more about the Battle of Britain (as the German attacks on Britain were called), read Stephen Bungay's *The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain* (2001).

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■ Bertolt Brecht

BORN: 1898, Augsburg, Germany

DIED: 1956, East Berlin, German Democratic Republic

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Drama, Poetry, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Drums in the Night (1922)

The Threepenny Opera (1928)

Fear and Misery of the Third Reich (1938)

The Good Woman of Szechwan (1943)

Mother Courage and Her Children (1949)

Overview

Bertolt Brecht’s status as one of the major playwrights of the twentieth century is largely uncontested. In addition to writing a significant body of plays that are performed all over the world, Brecht also developed in a number of theoretical writings his theory of “epic” or “didactic” theater, which he applied to the “model” productions of his own plays in the early 1950s. He hoped his plays would instruct as well as entertain. His goal was to make audiences think about what might be, rather than what was. His work, influenced by German social theorist Karl Marx, was often violent and chaotic. “Epic theater” became known throughout the world and would affect the work of generations of dramatists. In addition to being an influential playwright, Brecht is considered a poet of considerable power and originality. More recently, his prose fiction has attracted increased attention.



Bertolt Brecht *Brecht, Bertolt, Paris, 1954, photograph. Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Controversial Pacifist Eugen Berthold Brecht—he later dropped the first name and changed the spelling of the middle name—was born in Augsburg, Germany into a fairly well-to-do bourgeois family on February 10, 1898. His father, Friedrich Berthold Brecht, an employee of a paper factory, advanced to the position of business director; Brecht’s mother was Sofie Brezing Brecht. Brecht attended elementary and high school in Augsburg. Having failed to educate his teachers (as he put it), he began to write occasional poems. In 1914 he had a short play, *The Bible*, published in the school journal.

Although he wrote a few patriotic poems at the outbreak of World War I, Brecht’s antiwar sentiments developed early. His criticism of Horace’s dictum “Dulce est et decorum pro patria mori” (“It is sweet and honorable to die for the fatherland”) almost led to his expulsion from school. Various journals and newspapers printed poems and stories by the fledgling author, who liked to play the guitar, pursue amorous adventures, and roam through countryside, fairs, and pubs with a group of similarly dissatisfied friends.

Blacklisted by the Nazis In 1917 Brecht moved to Munich, enrolled at the university, read many books, scouted the theater scene, became increasingly involved in literary circles, and tried his hand at several projects, among them one-act plays and a full-fledged drama, *Baal*

(published, 1922; performed, 1923). Even the one-act plays written in 1919 exhibit features that were to become his trademark. *The Beggar, or the Dead Dog*, for example, confronts the extreme opposites of the social scale: the world of the emperor and the world of the beggar. In *Lux in Tenebris* Brecht uses the theme of prostitution on several levels for his attack on what he considers the physical, spiritual, and social corruption of the upper middle class, whose perversion of the spirit, language, and action is highlighted by parodying certain scenes from the Bible (which was to become one of his major literary sources) via the characters' actions.

Shortly before the end of World War I, Brecht, who had enrolled in medical studies to avoid the draft, was called to military service nevertheless. As a hospital orderly he witnessed the suffering of victims of war and disease. He wrote the satiric "Legend of the Dead Soldier," in which a corpse is revived to be declared fit for military service again. This antiwar ballad was sung in the fourth act of *Drums in the Night* (1922) and was one of the reasons Brecht was put on the blacklist of the Nazis (the socialist political party that would rise to power in the 1930s under Adolf Hitler) as early as 1923. After the war Brecht witnessed the turbulent beginning of the Weimar Republic (the post-World War I regime in Germany) and the power struggle among political parties.

Embracing Communism Brecht wrote his first work of "epic theater," the 1926 play *A Man's a Man*. This is also one of a series of didactic (instructional) plays, works in which Brecht expressed his newfound commitment to the philosophy of communism. Less overtly political, and one of the playwright's most popular productions, is the 1928 *The Threepenny Opera*, which also formed the basis of Brecht's only novel. One of several collaborations with composer Kurt Weill, *The Threepenny Opera* is an extravaganza of humor, bitterness, and social criticism. Brecht based this drama on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Throughout his career, Brecht adapted the works of other authors, transforming them with modern and highly original interpretations. His literary knowledge allowed him to combine a wide range of influences in his work, including Spanish, Far Eastern, and Elizabethan drama, popular songs, folk literature, and films.

Exile and Productivity in the United States In 1933 Brecht's Marxist politics forced him to leave fascist Germany and go into self-imposed exile in Scandinavia and the United States. Later, the Nazi government annulled the playwright's citizenship. While in exile Brecht became an anti-Nazi propagandist, writing for a German-language periodical published in Moscow and composing the 1938 drama *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*. During this time Brecht also wrote what are critically regarded as his greatest works.

From the outbreak of World War II in 1939, until 1947, Brecht lived in the United States. In that time, he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brecht's famous contemporaries include:

Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934): Hindenburg was sixty-six when he became a national hero after commanding the German army to victory at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914. Named supreme commander of the German Army in 1917, Hindenburg was later elected second President of the German Republic in 1925. Despite his failing health, he was re-elected at age eighty-four, but was unable to stop Adolf Hitler from effectively seizing power. Upon Hindenburg's death, Hitler became the Führer of Germany, effectively ending the Republic.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): American writer and poet, best known for her wisecracks and sharp wit. Parker was a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table and was nominated for two Academy Awards.

Karl Valentin (1882–1948): Comedian, author, and filmmaker, Valentin was a major influence on and active in the German Expressionist movement of the 1920s.

Max Schreck (1879–1936): Best remembered today as the titular vampire in the 1922 film *Nosferatu*, Schreck was also an experienced theater actor who appeared in several of Brecht's early plays.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965): English playwright, novelist, and short story writer. Maugham was one of the most popular authors of his era and one of the highest paid during the 1930s.

Karl Korsch (1886–1961): German Marxist theorist, he maintained a distance from established mainstream Communist doctrine of his time. He emphasized the need to adapt Marxism to the realities of the twentieth century.

worked on several motion picture productions and wrote three plays. But his work in America was not warmly received, and Brecht did not receive the United States warmly, either. He never applied for citizenship. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the United States was in the initial stages of the so-called Cold War with the Soviet Union, and a feeling of extreme paranoia regarding the dangers of communism pervaded society and the government. It was perhaps inevitable that he would be called before the communist-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee and questioned about his communist connections. Almost immediately, he left the United States to return to Germany. When asked by a friend if he had indeed done anything "un-American," Brecht is said to have replied, "I am not an American." He chose to live in communist East Berlin. He and his wife Helene Weigel founded a theater company there, the Berliner Ensemble,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brecht returned often to the theme of class conflict between supposedly “superior” and “inferior” people, and the promotion of the causes of the lower classes. Other works that address these themes include:

The Plague (1947), a novel by Albert Camus. This novel explores the human condition by examining the reactions of the residents of a city during an outbreak of plague. Arbitrary class divisions disintegrate in the face of death, only to rear up again once the epidemic has passed.

Monsieur Verdoux (1947), a film directed by Charlie Chaplin. The darkest of Chaplin’s comedies, this film centers on an unemployed banker who marries and murders wealthy widows in order to support his family. He justifies his behavior by saying that he is simply doing what businessmen and soldiers do every day.

Trainspotting (1993), a novel by Irvine Welsh. By presenting a story narrated from the point of view of heroin junkies, Welsh challenges the reader to identify with the lowest of lower-class characters in true Brechtian fashion.

Angels in America (1990), a play by Tony Kushner.

Another work that focuses on a marginalized group, in this case gay men dealing with the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Kushner was also heavily influenced by Brecht’s use of multiple points of perspective and the chronicle play, all of which are in evidence in this epic work.

where Brecht produced his own plays as well as adaptations of Shakespeare and Molière.

Gradually, however, Brecht’s health began to fail. He died on August 14, 1956.

Works in Literary Context

Brecht’s ability to express his political and philosophical views in fresh and formally ingenious ways is also observable in his poetry, which he produced throughout his career. In both poetry and drama he attained one of the most controlled and completely realized aesthetic visions in literature. During the last part of his life, Brecht returned to Berlin and formed his own company, the Berliner Ensemble, enabling him to implement his dramatic theories and gaining him the admiration of devotees of dramatic art.

Farcical Satire In style, Brecht’s early works tend toward farcical satire; they show some influence of the Munich comedian Karl Valentin, whose witty dialogues Brecht admired and with whom he had performed in sideshows at fairs. Brecht’s first full-fledged

play, *Baal*, glorifies unfettered, amoral individualism, reflecting, to some extent, Brecht’s own lifestyle and his sympathy for such figures as Frank Wedekind, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and François Villon. It is both a literary and a social protest.

Social Concerns Brecht’s genius for artistic invention and his desire to motivate social concerns in the playgoer combine in his mature dramas to form a rich and varied view of existence. Through the crisis of its scientist hero, *Galileo* (1943) reexamines Brecht’s recurrent theme of the obstacles to social progress. Yet despite its focus on philosophical issues, critics find in this play a strong main character who, along with the protagonist of *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1949), enlists the spectator’s feelings as well as reason. In his mature works Brecht transcended the single-minded message of his earlier didactic pieces and achieved a more complex viewpoint than that permitted by the official policies and doctrines of communism.

Works in Critical Context

The Threepenny Opera Well known in Germany during his life, Brecht became recognized as a major dramatist by critics throughout Europe and the United States only after his death. His best-known plays, *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, are both considered highly influential on later dramatists. *The Threepenny Opera* was one of Brecht’s collaborations with composer Kurt Weill. The musical comedy features the song “Die Moritat vom Mackie Messer,” translated in English as “Mack the Knife,” which became a jazz standard recorded by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra. Though set in London, the play conveys perhaps like no other work of literature the moral malaise of the German Weimar Republic. As Ben Brantley writes, “the show’s real satiric targets were the middle classes of poverty-crippled, rudderless Germany in the 1920s.” The play is hard-edged and dirty, peopled by low-lives—murderers, prostitutes, and thieves. As critic Arthur Lazere contends, “Brecht’s text is sardonic and brittle . . . every character would sell out any other if an advantage is to be gained.” As Brantley notes, “the play was designed to sustain an intellectual distance, to allow audiences to see their own reflections in vicious thugs, whores, beggars and policemen motivated by the same primal needs and instincts as themselves.” It was an immediate hit in Europe, but something of a flop at first in the United States. It was not until the 1954 off-Broadway production featuring famed German actress Lotte Lenya (Weill’s widow) that the play was hailed as a masterpiece in America.

Mother Courage and Her Children In the program notes to a recently staged production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* by the New York Public

Theater, artistic director Oscar Eustis called Brecht's work "the greatest play of the twentieth century." Certainly, it is among the most powerful anti-war works in literature, and was written in direct response to the rise of the Nazis in Germany. However, the play is also very long and difficult to stage, and successful productions are rare. The play hinges on the characterization of the character of Mother Courage herself, and the exact nature of the character is a matter of much critical debate. Some have branded Mother Courage as a greedy coward; others laud her practicality and toughness. Her "true" nature is complex, and thus hard to portray on stage.

Responses to Literature

1. Pick one of Brecht's plays and analyze his stage directions. Do you feel they are effective? How do they complement the dialog? What sort of atmosphere do they create?
2. Write about Brecht's time in exile. How did it affect his popularity? How did his writing change? Do you think his exile was beneficial or harmful?
3. Research Karl Marx and the tenets of Marxism. Analyze one of Brecht's plays for its Marxist undertones. How does Brecht express his political views in the play?
4. Using his *Writings on Theater* as a starting point, summarize Brecht's thoughts on epic theater. Which of his plays successfully implement these views?

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Breyten Breytenbach

BORN: 1939, Bonnievale, South Africa

NATIONALITY: French, South African

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Season in Paradise (1980)

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist
(1985)

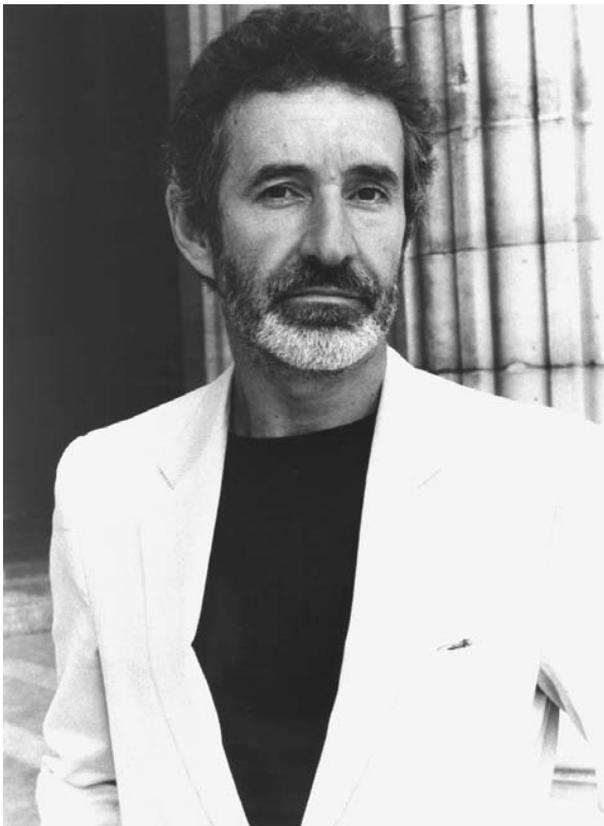
Return to Paradise (1993)

Overview

Breyten Breytenbach is one of the major postwar poets writing in Afrikaans, the language derived from Dutch and spoken by the first white settlers in South Africa. In his works he alternates between outrage at South Africa's governmental policies of economic and political repression of nonwhites, and, on the other hand, love for his country and its landscape.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up an Afrikaner Breyten Breytenbach was born September 16, 1939, in Bonnievale, South Africa, to Johannes Stephanus and Catherina Johanna Cloete. The Breytenbach family was among the early European settlers of the seventeenth century who called themselves Afrikaners—the group that would rule South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s under a system known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for “separateness.” This government-sponsored system involved des-



Breyten Breytenbach Breytenbach, Breyten, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

ignating certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and forbade people of different races from marrying. It also led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups kept separate from each other; this allowed the white Afrikaners, who made up a small percentage of the population, to remain in control of the large nonwhite population. Though Breytenbach was a member of the ruling Afrikaners, witnessing the unfairness of apartheid firsthand helped to shape much of his later work.

Life in Paris and Early Works After high school, Breytenbach attended the University of Cape Town, leaving school at age twenty and then traveling to Europe. In 1961, Breytenbach settled in Paris, where he painted, wrote, and taught English, and where he married Yolande Ngo Thi Hoang Lien, who was born in Vietnam. His unusual paintings and drawings, often of self-referential figures with bodies of distorted proportions, are always featured on his book covers or are used as illustrations in his books. The integration of the pictorial and verbal in his work is part of his attempt to transcend genre boundaries.

In 1964, Breytenbach published *Die Ysterkoei Moet Sweet* (*The Iron Cow Must Sweat*), his first book of poems. The title comes from a Zen proverb indicating that the miraculous must happen before nothingness can be destroyed. This was followed by *Die Huis van die Dowe* (*House of the Deaf*, 1967) and *Kouevuur* (*Gangrene*, 1969), which contains the first indications of a serious concern with South African politics. Two non-political volumes of poetry followed *Kouevuur: Lotus* (1970), under the name Jan Blom, and *Met Andere Woorde: Vrugte van die Droom van Stilte* (*In Other Words: Fruit from the Dream of Silence*, 1973). Both were extensively influenced by Zen Buddhism.

In 1972, Breytenbach's most outspokenly political poetry at that point was published, *Skryt: Om 'n sinkende skip blou te verf* (*Scryer: To Paint a Sinking Ship Blue*). One of the editions of the book was banned in South Africa in 1975, apparently because of a poem to the prime minister, which is followed by a list of names of detainees who had died in detention. The ban on the book was not lifted until 1985.

Return to South Africa Breytenbach wanted to return to South Africa to collect poetry awards he had won in 1967 and 1969, but his wife was refused an entry visa as a “nonwhite” and Breytenbach was told he could face arrest under the Immorality Act, which made interracial marriage a crime. But in 1973, when *Met Ander Woorde* was published, the Breytenbachs were both issued three-month visas to visit South Africa. That journey back to his homeland after twelve years of exile in Paris both rekindled warm childhood memories and reinforced his anger at the violence and injustice of apartheid. Breytenbach recorded his homecoming impressions in a

book of poetry and prose, published in a censored version in South Africa in 1976 as *'N seisoen in die Paradys* and in English translation in 1980 as *A Season in Paradise*.

By the end of his stay, Breytenbach had so exasperated the authorities with his scathing public criticism of the Afrikaner nationalist government that they told him not to come back. Upon his return to Paris with his wife, however, he renewed his ties with antiapartheid groups. Ultimately he founded—with other white South Africans in exile—an antiapartheid organization called Okhela (“ignite the flame” in Zulu). They decided that Breytenbach should travel undercover to South Africa to make contacts to channel money from European church groups to black trade unionists in South Africa.

Fight Against Apartheid and Imprisonment In August 1975, Breytenbach flew to Johannesburg under an assumed name with a false passport. The South African security police shadowed and then arrested him, charging him under the Terrorist Act. He was sentenced to nine years in prison for the intent with which he had entered the country. The court took the view that trade union campaigns against apartheid constituted a threat to the safety of the state. In November 1975, Breytenbach began solitary confinement in Pretoria’s maximum security section.

He wrote many poems while in prison. He produced *Voetskrif* (*Foot Script*, 1976) while he was in detention and awaiting trial. Once Breytenbach was sentenced, no new writing of his was allowed to appear. This led to the publication of old unpublished material, anthologies, and translations of his work, including *Sinking Ship Blues* (1977) and *And Death as White as Words* (1978), which was banned in South Africa on publication.

Imprisonment brought international attention to Breytenbach. The French government brought diplomatic pressure to bear on Pretoria, South Africa’s capital, which intensified when the socialist government of François Mitterrand came to power. In December 1982, the South African government changed Breytenbach’s sentence from nine years to seven. He returned to Paris and became a French citizen in 1983.

Prison Poetry In 1983, the first volume in a series conceived as a cycle appeared, titled *Eklips* (*Eclipse*). This volume was followed in 1983 by *Yk, Buffalo Bill: Panem et Circenses* (*Buffalo Bill: Bread and Circuses*, 1984), and *Lewendood* (*Life and Death*, 1985). Most of the titles in the prison cycle refer to living on the brink of death, or to a living death.

Translations in English of Breytenbach’s prison poems appeared in *Judas Eye* (1988). These poems were translated mostly by Breytenbach himself. In many of the poems, he expresses the end of his relationship with Afrikaans and announces it is a dead language.

Prison Novels While he was in prison, Breytenbach also wrote the semifictional pieces subsequently published and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Breytenbach’s famous contemporaries include:

Stephen Biko (1946–1977): South African antiapartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement; died of massive head injuries while in police custody.

Rosa Parks (1913–2005): Called “the mother of the American civil rights movement,” in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks refused to move to the “colored” section of a bus so a white passenger could have her seat. Her subsequent arrest sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Helen Suzman (1917–): South African politician and member of Parliament for thirty-six years; from 1962 to 1974, was the only member of Parliament completely opposed to apartheid.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006): leading Indonesian novelist and writer; spent extensive time in prison and under house arrest for political activity.

Desmond Tutu (1931–): The first black Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa; received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his work to end apartheid.

translated under the title *Mouir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* (1984). The book is a series of loosely connected stories or sketches that present an imagistic, surreal portrait of Breytenbach’s psyche as a prisoner. Its complexity relates to the fact that the manuscript had to be handed over to the prison guards on a daily basis.

On his release from prison, Breytenbach felt compelled to publish a more direct account of his experiences. The result was *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1985), which describes his years of physical and psychological deprivation, and outlines the prospects for South Africa’s future.

Later Work *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989), the first book with material written after Breytenbach’s release, is more fictional than the works based on his prison experience. Breytenbach’s 1993 memoir *Return to Paradise* chronicles a 1991 return visit to his homeland. According to the author, this title, along with *A Season in Paradise* and *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, is meant to be read as a series.

In 1998, Breytenbach scandalized Afrikaner audiences with his three-hour-long play *Boklied: 'n Vermaaklikheid in Drie Bedrywe* (*Goat Song: An Entertainment in Three Acts*), which contained some graphic sexual scenes. In 1998 *Dog Heart: A Travel Memoir* was published, which marks a return to the world and the legends of Breytenbach’s youth, with short prose texts interspersed with poetry.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Breytenbach is a political exile, a fact that inevitably informs his work. Here are some other works that deal with the condition of being an exile.

After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives (1986), a nonfiction work by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr. Said, a Palestinian exile, wrote the text for this book of photographic portraits of Palestinians.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953), a novel by Ray Bradbury. In this science fiction novel, a firefighter grows increasingly alienated from his society, in which his job is to burn books that are forbidden.

The Thickness of Skin of a Dead Cat (1978), a novel by Celedonio Gonzalez. This novel by the Cuban writer urges Cubans living in the United States to make the most of their lives in this country.

Thoughts Abroad (1970), a collection of poetry by Dennis Brutus. Poems by a leading black South African poet and political activist that deal with exile; published under a pseudonym, the book was banned in South Africa when its author's identity was discovered.

Women in Exile (1994), a nonfiction work by Mahnaz Afkami. Nonfiction portraits of twelve women, plus Afkami, living in political exile in the United States; their countries of origin include Sudan, Chile, China, and Argentina.

Breytenbach currently divides his time between South Africa and Europe while regularly traveling to other parts of the world.

Works in Literary Context

In a contemporary review in *Die Burger*, the prominent poet W. E. G. Louw referred to Breytenbach as an “Afrikaans [Dutch Golden Age poet Gerbrand] Bredero or [French Symbolist poet Paul] Verlaine.” Breytenbach was a major figure in the generation of authors known in Afrikaans as the “Sestigers” (literally, “Sixties’ers,” referring to authors who came to the forefront during the 1960s). They were especially influential in changing the political perceptions of young intellectual Afrikaners who identified with their vocal criticism of apartheid.

Love and Hate for South Africa Breytenbach's texts are marked by a love-hate relationship with the country of South Africa and the language of Afrikaans. Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer commented: “If Breytenbach's imagery is to be compared with anyone's it is that of Czeslaw Milosz, with whom he shares an intense response to nature and a way of interpreting politically

determined events and their human consequences through the subtleties of the physical world.”

Works in Critical Context

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist Joseph Lelyveld, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, speculated that Breytenbach's “confessions” are “an important contribution to a corpus of South African prison literature that has been steadily, painfully accumulating over the last quarter-century; and they are especially important since his is the first such memoir to have been written by an Afrikaner.” Rob Nixon, writing in *American Book Review*, came to a similar conclusion. In the confessions themselves, he says, Breytenbach “meticulously recreates his spell in prison, interrogating with undiminished insight, not only his own shifting selves but also his jailmates and the motley flunkies of apartheid whose job it was to ensure that he remained solitary but not private.” Like Lelyveld, Nixon viewed *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* as an important document in South Africa's rich “traditions of prison literature . . . partly because Breyten Breytenbach is firstly an established writer and only secondarily a political activist . . . and partly because he is a rare and important defector from Afrikanerdom.”

Return to Paradise J. M. Coetzee, a fellow South African novelist writing in the *New York Review of Books*, decried Breytenbach's analysis of the state of South Africa in *Return to Paradise* as “not . . . original.” However, along with other reviewers, he praised Breytenbach's narrative: “An immensely gifted writer, he is able to descend effortlessly into the Africa of the poetic unconscious and return with the rhythm and the words, the words in the rhythm, that give life.” Adam Kuper in the *Times Literary Supplement* concurred: “The best parts of this book have nothing to do with politics. They are the occasional descriptions of landscapes, rendered with the intensity of a painter, and the portraits of his Afrikaner friends.” William Finnegan, in the *New York Times Book Review*, noted that “purposeful reporting is not Mr. Breytenbach's forte” but declared the book to be “protean, funny, bitchy, beautifully written and searingly bleak.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *My Life as a Traitor*, a memoir by Zarah Ghahramani. Do you believe in any cause strongly enough to be jailed for it?
2. Do you think it is easier to advocate for the rights of a minority if you are part of the majority culture because you have the protection of belonging to the majority? Or is it more difficult, because you are going against your own culture and upsetting the social order even though your own life may not be adversely affected by the wrongs being done?

- Recent figures indicate that one out of one hundred Americans is in prison. Using your library's resources or the Internet, research conditions in the U.S. prison system. Do you think prisoners are rehabilitated and ready to start a new life when they are released, or are they damaged by their prison experience and ready to continue a life of crime? With so many people in jail, what are the implications for our society? Which states have the highest success rates with rehabilitation, and why would that be the case in those particular states? In which countries in the world are the prisons still primitive? Why are they like that?
- Look up the definitions of *terrorism* and *resistance*. Research one of the following groups, designated terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department: the Tamil Tigers (Sri Lanka), the Irish Republican Army (Northern Ireland), Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone), or ETA (Spain). Write an essay arguing whether this group is a true terrorist group, or whether it should be considered a resistance movement. What is the difference? Use specific examples to support your argument.
- In the United States today, many colleges and universities are researching their role in the slave trade during the 1700s and 1800s, in order to take responsibility for their past actions. What is our responsibility in the present for the harm our ancestors caused? Does working through the past bring old issues to light so they can be resolved, or does it keep old wounds open and make a new start impossible? Write an essay developing your point of view.

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André Brink

BORN: 1935, Vrede, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Looking on Darkness (1973)

A Dry White Season (1980)

On the Contrary (1994)

Overview

André Brink's career has run parallel to developments that took his native South Africa from a state marked by apartheid—the government policy that maintained a system that disenfranchised, exploited, and radically oppressed all nonwhites in the country—to the dismantling of this system of racial injustice. Through his work, he has promoted an awareness of the problems of his society,



André Brink Ulf Andersen / Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brink's famous contemporaries include:

J. M. Coetzee (1940–): A prominent South African novelist and essayist whose works describe his feelings of alienation from fellow Afrikaners. He won the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Tobias Wolff (1945–): An American writer whose memoir *This Boy's Life* was a huge popular success and whose novel *Old School* gained a fair deal of critical acclaim.

Cyprian Ekwensi (1921–2007): A Nigerian writer credited with pioneering the Nigerian novel.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): The first democratically elected president of South Africa, Mandela was a strong anti-apartheid activist—for which he served years in prison under the racist white regime.

Bob Dylan (1941–): An American poet, songwriter, and musician, Dylan's songs captured, defined, and influenced the sentiments of the 1960s.

explored their roots, and expressed opposition to repressive authorities, and now enjoys the freedom to explore a delight in storytelling. Brink was an existentialist when he began writing, citing Albert Camus among his significant influences. He developed a social conscience that was reinforced by strong reactions against his work, notably in the form of state censorship. In a country where Afrikaans was the language of whiteness, and hence of power, he was the first Afrikaner writer to be censored (for *Looking on Darkness*, 1973). He continues to write significant works today, the most recent of these being *Other Lives* (2008).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Seeing Clearly from Afar André Philippus Brink was born in Vrede, Orange Free State, South Africa on May 29, 1935. His father was a magistrate, and Brink's family was repeatedly relocated with his father's new appointments. Brink studied at Potchefstroom University, which he described as "a small Calvinist university." There, he took a bachelor of arts degree in 1955, a master's degree in English in 1958, and another master's in Afrikaans and Dutch in 1959. From 1959 to 1961, he settled in France to do postgraduate work in comparative literature at the Sorbonne. Brink commented that witnessing from afar the Sharpeville massacres in South Africa of March 1960—in which South African police fired at and killed 69 black protesters (wounding another 180 or so more, among these 50 women and children)—

forced him "to reexamine all the convictions and beliefs I had previously taken for granted."

Banned for His Conscience Returning to South Africa, Brink gained prominence as a spokesperson for the "Sestigers," a group of largely antiestablishment authors who wrote in Afrikaans. In the late 1960s Brink returned to Paris where, he relates, he found himself in the midst of the student revolt of 1968 and reevaluated the writer's role in society, concluding that he needed to return to South Africa to, as he put it, "assume my full responsibility for every word I write, within my society." The Generation of '68, as the students who revolted in Paris and elsewhere throughout France and Germany have come to be known, sought above all a more equitable society, a new distribution of power in their respective countries. For Brink, *Looking on Darkness* resulted. The work brought intimidation and harassment in the form of censorship, state confiscation of his typewriters, and death threats from white supremacists of all stripes. These reactions served to strengthen Brink's convictions, however, and he began to write all his work in English in order to permit publishing outside his country, and to acquire a wider, international readership. His method since has consisted of writing in both Afrikaans and English, translating back and forth.

A Professor and a Decorated Writer Brink was a faculty member in the Afrikaans and Dutch department at Rhodes University from 1961 until 1990, and became a professor of English at the University of Cape Town in 1991. He was president of the Afrikaans Writers Guild (1978–1980) and won recognition abroad with several awards, among them, the Médicis étranger prize (France) and the Martin L. King Memorial Prize (UK) for *A Dry White Season* in 1980. Further formal foreign recognition followed, especially in France, where he was named Chevalier, Legion of Honor 1982 and Commander, Order of Arts and Letters in 1992, distinctions that have allowed him to take a place alongside fellow South African writers like J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, and Athol Fugard.

In recent years, Brink has continued to win and receive nominations for a number of important literary awards and fellowships, including a Commonwealth Writers Prize for *The Other Side of Silence* (which he won in 2003). He is currently a professor emeritus of English at the University of Cape Town, where he continues to write. He has also published a wide variety of both literary criticism and journalism.

Works in Literary Context

As an emerging Afrikaans novelist in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brink almost single-handedly modernized Afrikaans novel writing. Arguably the most eclectic South African writer at the time, he knocked the conservative Afrikaans literary tradition out of complacency with themes and techniques drawn from writers like Camus,

Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul Sartre, Vladimir Nabokov, Henry Miller, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, and Lawrence Durrell. In 1974, the Afrikaner establishment was hit by the sensational news that Brink's *Kennis van die aand*, later translated into English as *Looking on Darkness*, had been banned. The banning created a major division between the state and many of the country's Afrikaans writers, and introduced a new era of increasingly vocal dissidence from within the establishment.

Banned for Challenging Racism In Brink's *Looking on Darkness*, the black protagonist, Joseph Malan, murders his white lover, Jessica Thomson, in a mutual pact and then sits in jail, awaiting execution. Calling the 1973 novel "ambitious and disturbing," Jane Larkin Crain concludes in the *Saturday Review* that "a passionately human vision rules here, informed by an imagination that is attuned at once to complex and important abstractions and to the rhythms and the texture of everyday experience." Noting that the "novel is structured in the form of a confessional," Martin Tucker adds in *Commonweal* that its style "is compelling; it is a work that throbs with personal intensity." Because of the novel's explicit treatment of sex, racism, persecution, and the torture of political prisoners in South African jails, C. J. Driver suggests in the *Times Literary Supplement* that it is not difficult to understand why it was banned; however, Driver concludes that "within its context this is a brave and important novel and in any terms a fine one."

European publication of *Looking on Darkness* coincided with the Soweto riots of 1976, and the novel became something of a handbook on the South African situation. The Soweto riots began as a peaceful protest against racist language policies in black schools, but ended with somewhere between two and six hundred dead, and became a turning point in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Brink himself remarked afterward, "*Looking on Darkness* elicited much comment because it is one of the first Afrikaans novels to openly confront the apartheid system. This account of an illicit love between a 'Cape Coloured' man and a white woman evoked, on the one hand, one of the fiercest polemics in the history of that country's literature and contributed, on the other, to a groundswell of new awareness among white Afrikaners of the common humanity of all people regardless of color. In numerous letters from readers I was told that 'for the first time in my life I now realize that 'they' feel and think and react just like 'us.'" Far more significant in politically challenging racism, of course, was the activism of anti-apartheid activists like Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, but Brink's role in making whites see as constructed a division many imagined to be simply natural was certainly not without importance.

"African Magic Realism" Brink's early career was spent producing work in Afrikaans. The banning of *Look-*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although Brink introduced a kind of African magic realism to South African literature in a number of his novels, this style of writing had been used by other artists for many decades. Magic realism gained prominence when Gabriel García Márquez utilized it in his now-classic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Here are some other examples of magic realism in literature and film:

The House of Spirits (1982), a novel by Isabel Allende. Told from the perspective of two protagonists, this novel incorporates elements of magic realism as it retells the history of four generations of a single family.

Big Fish (2003), a film directed by Tim Burton. In this film, Will Bloom tries to discover the truth about his father's life, somewhere amid all the exaggerated tales he's been told through the years.

Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. In this novel, young Piscine Molitor is stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with an orangutan and a tiger named Richard Parker.

ing on Darkness was a turning point that forced Brink to work also in English in order to maintain a readership; this, in turn, helped him focus on his subject: South African society, roots, and realities. It marked the beginning of a style Brink has referred to as "African Magic Realism." Magic realism is a style of writing that involves so-called magical elements in an otherwise realistic text. Brink uses the technique in order to blur the borders that separate life from death, reality from dreams, and fantasy from reality.

Brink's *On the Contrary*, for example, (1994) is the narrative of historical figure Etienne Barbier. The novel is presented as a single letter—comprising over three hundred sections interweaving fact and fantasy—that is written to a slave girl on the eve of Barbier's execution. The actual Barbier was a French adventurer in the Cape of Good Hope in the 1730s who led rebel Afrikaner colonists in their struggle with the corrupt administration of the East India Company, but the novel includes both mythical creatures and the voice of Jeanne-D'Arc (Joan of Arc). This magical, mythical strain continues in *Imaginations of Sand* (1999), a novel that explores a feminine perspective. Set against the background of the South African elections of 1994, the story is told through the eyes of Kristien Muller, a white South African woman who has returned from exile to be with her dying grandmother. The grandmother is a repository of stories of the South African past and promises her granddaughter, who has been away too long, "I'll give you back your memory." Critic Michael Kerrigan observes that this

“rambling roundabout skein of stories . . . comprises the true history of the Afrikaners.”

Works in Critical Context

Brink is a prodigious, multitalented literary figure. In addition to plays, travel writing, and critical work, he has written sixteen novels and translated a great many works into Afrikaans. Despite three nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Brink is disliked by many Afrikaans writers and critics in South Africa, not because of his outright moral opposition to apartheid, but for what is regarded as sentimentality and sensationalism in his writing. There is no doubt that Brink’s writing is extremely uneven. Critics agree that his novels tend to be flawed in some respect or another, and Brink has a singular penchant for placing gauche and inane statements in the mouths of his characters; likewise, his rendition of sexual experience is often seen as cliché-ridden and tasteless. However he has written some of the most powerful stories to emerge in recent South African letters, and literary activism played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid.

Essays Brink’s essays are recognized as important statements on literature and politics. Commenting on these, Joseph Skvorecky places Brink among the writers who have labored under oppressive censorship “with considerable technical skill and almost the elaborateness of a Henry James.” J. M. Coetzee, with whom Brink has published an anthology called *A Land Apart: A South African Reader* (1986), sees in Brink an example of a writer who is “an organ developed by society to respond to its need for meaning,” and one whose “focus is now not on the existential duty of the writer but on the strategy of battle.”

Looking on Darkness and Other Novels The power of Brink’s novels is recognized by most critics. C. J. Driver, speaking of *Looking on Darkness*, points out that this work is “linguistically exciting, continually perceptive about a society gone mad, fiercely angry about cruelty.” Similarly, Frank Pike calls *An Instant in the Wind* “an ambitious work” that is “memorable by any standards, especially . . . in its evocation of the landscape.” *Rumours of Rain*, Jim Hoagland affirms, “takes the reader inside the reality” of its subject and “captures the spreading terror of the white man trapped within the vast spaces of Africa and surrounded by equally vast numbers of Africans.” Mel Watkins detects in *A Dry White Season* a vehicle for Brink “to better focus our attention on the ruthlessly dehumanizing apparatus of the apartheid system itself,” while Jim Crace finds in *The Wall of the Plague* a novel that is “a courageous self-assessment” and “an interesting and pivotal work.”

Along with these praises, however, are some recurring complaints. Brink is often accused of melodrama and sensationalism. In *Looking on Darkness*, Driver finds that,

at times, “imaginative credibility slips, the control of the narrating ‘I’ wavers and pity becomes self-pity.” Roger Owen, in a review of *A Chain of Voices*, complains that despite the “awesomeness of the subject matter” there are serious flaws, among them “derivativeness; a proneness to cliché; a striving for ‘fine’ writing; a certain wood-ness of style.”

Responses to Literature

1. Brink discusses apartheid practices in South Africa in relation to racism in the United States. Research the history of apartheid in South Africa—its causes and its manifestations. Then, in a short essay, compare apartheid in South Africa in the 1960s to present-day manifestations of racism in the United States.
2. Read *Looking on Darkness*. Based on your reading of the text, why do you think the South African government banned the book?
3. Magic realism is an important element in a number of Brink’s works. Read several passages from *Imaginations of Sand*. Discuss how magic realism is (or is not) different from fantasy. Create a list of elements that define each genre to help clarify your discussion.
4. Watch the movie adaptation of *A Dry White Season*, then write a short essay comparing the film and the book. What does a medium like film allow the director to highlight or focus attention on? If you look at the film as an interpretation of the meaning of the novel, what key insights do you think director Euzhan Palcy makes?

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Joseph Brodsky

BORN: 1940, Leningrad, Soviet Union

DIED: 1996, Brooklyn, New York

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

A Part of Speech (1980)

On Grief and Reason (1995)

So Forth (1996)

Collected Poems in English (2001)

Overview

Iosif Alexandrovich Brodsky was reviled and persecuted in his native Soviet Union, but the Western literary establishment lauded him as one of that country's finest poets. Brodsky aroused the ire of Soviet authorities as soon as he began publishing his ironic, witty, and independent verse—both under his own name, and under the slightly altered name of Joseph Brodsky. After spending five years in Arkhangelsk, an Arctic labor camp, and two different stays at mental institutions, Brodsky became the focus of a public outcry from American and European intellectuals over his treatment. In 1987 Brodsky received the Nobel Prize for Literature and in 1991 he was named poet laureate of the United States.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Exile in His Own Country Iosif Alexandrovich Brodsky was born on May 24, 1940, in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Russia. As an infant, Brodsky lived through one of the most devastating episodes of World War II: the siege of Leningrad, during which Nazi German troops cut off all supplies to the city for over a year, resulting in the mass starvation of Russian citizens and over one and a half million deaths. In many ways, Brodsky lived as an exile before leaving his homeland. His father lost a position of rank in the Russian navy because he was Jewish; this left the family in poverty. Brodsky quit school and embarked on a self-directed education, reading literary classics and working a variety of unusual jobs. He learned English and Polish so that he would be able



Joseph Brodsky *Brodsky, Joseph, 1991, photograph. AP Images.*

to translate the poems of John Donne and Czeslaw Milosz. His own early poetry won the admiration of one of his country's leading literary figures, poet Anna Akhmatova.

Brodsky's poems were circulated by friends on type-written sheets and published in the underground journal *Sintaksis*. By 1963, he had become sufficiently well-known to serve as a target for a Leningrad newspaper, which denounced his work as pornographic and anti-Soviet. The following year, Brodsky was officially charged by a Soviet court as a "social parasite." In the Soviet Union, which supported the rights of workers as its most important ideal, all citizens were expected to contribute meaningfully and substantially to society. Many Soviets viewed artistic pursuits as a waste of resources unless the art was meant to glorify the citizens of the Soviet Union; government officials frequently used this rationale to persecute or imprison writers and artists who were critical of Soviet policies and actions.

Solomon Volkov, writing in his book *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Journey through the Twentieth Century*, explained that Brodsky's "Kafkaesque trial occupies a central position in the Brodsky myth." Little did Leningrad officials suspect when they instigated this routine case that the individual they considered a Jewish "pygmy in corduroy trousers, scribbling poems that alternated gibberish with whining, pessimism, and pornography," would

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brodsky's famous contemporaries include:

Tobias Wolff (1945–): American fiction writer whose memoirs and novels overlap with Brodsky's in tone, theme, and content.

Valentina Tereshkova (1937–): A Soviet cosmonaut, Tereshkova was the first woman to fly in space.

Sirhan Sirhan (1944–): Palestinian who was convicted of assassinating American politician Robert F. Kennedy.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist who wrote *Things Fall Apart*, the most widely read African novel ever written, and received the Man Booker International Prize in 2007.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): Before his imprisonment as a terrorist and a Communist, Mandela actively opposed apartheid practices in South Africa. After spending twenty-seven years behind bars, Mandela was released then elected president of South Africa in 1994.

turn their Soviet court proceedings into an absurd drama at the intersection of genius and idiocy. When the female Soviet judge asked Brodsky, "Who made you a poet?" Brodsky thoughtfully replied, "And who made me a member of the human race?" and added hesitatingly, "I think it was God." Brodsky's friend, Lev Loseff, observed that in an instant Brodsky's answer took the proceedings to a different level. This notorious dialogue became one of the most frequently quoted court exchanges in the history of twentieth-century culture. The poet was sentenced to five years in a labor camp above the Arctic Circle.

Thanks to outside pressure from the literary community, after eighteen months Brodsky was released. Still, the poet was continually harassed. By 1972, when the visa office strongly "suggested" that he leave the country, Brodsky had been imprisoned three times and was twice committed to mental institutions. That year the poet was put on a plane for Vienna, an unwilling emigrant who left behind his parents and a son. Fortunately, Brodsky's exile was softened by the friendship of poet W. H. Auden and others. The position of poet-in-residence at the University of Michigan introduced Brodsky to American academic life, and Brodsky was soon publishing works in Russian and English.

Poet Laureate in America Brodsky became an American citizen in 1980, an indication that he had come to terms with permanent exile from his homeland. His new country also accepted Brodsky in an unprecedented manner. In 1991 he became the first foreign-born person to be named poet laureate of the United States—the

highest honor the country offers a poet. Brodsky used the position to promote the mass distribution of poetry, suggesting that books of poems be placed in hotel rooms and sold in drug stores. In 1993, he and Andrew Carroll founded the American Poetry & Literacy Project, an organization whose goal is to introduce poetry into everyday American life. Since its creation, the group has given away over one million books of poetry to schools, hospitals, subway and train stations, hospitals, jury waiting rooms, supermarkets, truck stops, day-care centers, airports, zoos, and other public places.

Works in Literary Context

Though one might expect Brodsky's poetry to be political in nature, this is not the case. His themes tend more toward the common themes of traditional poetry—love, nature, mankind, life, and death. Although the significance and worth of Joseph Brodsky's creative opus continues to be debated to this day, the fact that he challenged many preconceived political, aesthetic, and philosophical sensibilities of his time—in both his poetry and his prose works, in both English and Russian, and in his bearing while under prosecution as a "parasite"—is indisputable.

Poetry In 1962 Brodsky discovered the work of the English metaphysical poets, primarily Donne, whose poetry—full of wit, coolly passionate, philosophically detached, highly intellectual, exquisitely crafted with intricate conceits and geometric figures—galvanized the young man. Both in its themes and in its foreignness to the dominant Russian poetic tradition, Donne's work corresponded perfectly to the feelings of alienation that Brodsky had already discovered in himself.

In 1962 and 1963, under the influence of Donne as well as of Marina Tsvetaeva, whose powerful *poemy* (long narrative poems) he had recently discovered, Brodsky composed his own first *poemy*. This genre, distanced from the intimacy of the short lyric form, held the potential for the creation of a kind of "lyrico-philosophical" epic that remained attractive to Brodsky throughout the remainder of his creative life, becoming the hallmark of his poetic legacy. The characteristics of Brodsky's works in this genre are rhythmic and stanzaic inventiveness, extended complex metaphors, the mingling of wildly different linguistic registers, paradoxical thought patterns, a tight weaving together of intricate compositional and metaphysical strands, and an acidic sense of humor.

Time and Memory In the poems Brodsky wrote during his exile in the village of Norinskaia, he makes use of the compositional possibilities of the baroque—the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the serious, the ephemeral and the eternal, the coarse and the eloquent—while at the same time distancing himself from pure lyricism and adopting, instead, a profoundly intellectual worldview.

Exemplary of all these developments in Brodsky's poetics is his poignant elegy "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot," written after Eliot's death on January 4, 1965. In this poem Eliot's magi (from his poem "The Journey of the Magi," 1927) are replaced by the androgynous figures of two mythic maidens, England and America, the two nations where Eliot made his home. Time is an overwhelming presence, and in fact time itself—not death or God—claims the poet's life. Poetry, as Brodsky often wrote, is time reconfigured: "in the rhyme / of years the voice of poetry stands plain." Through the strength of his poetry Eliot has inscribed his being on the physical world. The living will remember him intimately through his poems "as the body holds in mind / the lost caress of lips and arms." Poetic language is the vessel of memory; Brodsky's own poetic signature is now developed to the point at which he, too, etches himself into the consciousness of his physical surroundings—he knows now his own poetic strength.

Influences Brodsky's poetry was influenced by his mentor and friend Anna Akhmatova; the English poet John Donne, for whom he wrote an elegy; and W. H. Auden, who wrote a foreword for Brodsky's *Selected Poems, Joseph Brodsky* (1977) prior to Auden's death in 1973. Brodsky's other personal literary antecedents included Virgil, Aleksandr Pushkin, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Eugenio Montale, Constantine Cavafy, T. S. Eliot, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Lev Shestov, and Isaiah Berlin.

Works in Critical Context

Outside of the government of the Soviet Union, Brodsky's early "Romantic" work is virtually universally praised for its fervor, if not for its execution. As Brodsky continued to grow as a poet, he became increasingly more adept at matching tone and style to subject. His achievements were recognized when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987 and the position of poet laureate of the United States of America.

The Height of Brodsky's Success: The American Years The strength of Brodsky's poetic voice and vision is demonstrated in the hundreds of poems published in his major collections of the American years: *End of the Belle Epoque* (1977); *Urania* (1987); *Notes of a Fern* (1990); and *View with a Flood* (1996). Brodsky's refusal to relinquish either his command of the Russian language or his rightful position in the Russian poetic pantheon was not, however, the only factor that guaranteed his poetic survival in emigration. His adoption of the English language as his second mother tongue and of the United States as his second homeland undoubtedly played an important role in ensuring that he did not fade into nonexistence as Soviet authorities had hoped. Instead, Brodsky remained an imposing literary presence. Indeed, critical acclaim of his work was virtually universal

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brodsky is not the first artist to have his work scrutinized by the government and, in fact, to have legal charges brought against him for the work. Artists often find it necessary to challenge conventional wisdom regarding politics, religion, sexuality, and an array of other controversial topics. Here are some of the works that provoked a strong negative response:

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), a novel by Oscar Wilde.

When this book was released, it came under scrutiny for its homosexual themes. Wilde's character was called into question, and he eventually was convicted of "indecency" and served two years behind bars.

The Necessity of Atheism (1810), an essay by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley published this text while still a student at Oxford. He was immediately expelled from the university.

The Master and Margarita (1973), a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. Bulgakov wrote his fantastical critique of Stalinist society in the 1930s, but due to government censorship, it could not be published until long after the author's death.

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. When this book was published in 1922, it was immediately banned in both the United States and the United Kingdom for "obscenity." It is now considered one of the greatest literary achievements of the twentieth century.

during this period of Brodsky's life. However, when Brodsky began to work in English, critical opinion was divided.

Collected Poems in English *Collected Poems in English*, published posthumously, is a definitive collection of Brodsky's translated work and his original work in English. It is "dramatic and ironic, melancholy and blissful," reported Donna Seaman in *Booklist*. She claimed that this volume "will stand as one of the twentieth century's tours de force." *Collected Poems in English* is "a highly accomplished, deft, and entertaining book, with a talent for exploitation of the richness of language and with a deep core of sorrow," in the estimation of Judy Clarence in *Library Journal*. It captures Brodsky's trademark sense of "stepping aside and peering in bewilderment" at life, according to Sven Birkerts in the *New York Review of Books*. Birkerts concluded: "Brodsky charged at the world with full intensity and wrestled his perceptions into lines that fairly vibrate with what they are asked to hold. There is no voice, no vision, remotely like it."

Responses to Literature

1. Today, there are a number of Tibetan authors imprisoned by the Chinese government. Using the

Internet and the library, research one or two of these writers. In a short essay, compare their trials with Brodsky's. How dangerous do you think these writers are to their respective countries?

2. As poet laureate, Brodsky tried to make poetry common throughout the country. Why do you think Brodsky thought it was necessary to promote poetry? Do you think poetry is less popular now than it used to be?
3. Read Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*. In this collection of poems, Brodsky explores the meaning of the Christmas season, both on a personal and a social level. How accurate is his assessment of the importance and meaning of Christmas? In what ways is his interpretation accurate? In what ways is it lacking?
4. For more background on life in Russia during Stalin's regime, read *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (2007), by Orlando Figes. The book uses firsthand accounts to show just how tightly the government of the Soviet Union controlled families and individuals.

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☒ Anne Brontë

BORN: 1820, Thornton, England

DIED: 1849, Scarborough, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Agnes Grey (1847)

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)

"The Three Guides" (1848)

"Self-Communion" (1848)

"A dreadful darkness closes in" (1849)

Overview

Anne Brontë was one of the famous Brontë sisters, all well-known writers of the mid-Victorian era in England. While Anne Brontë remains the least known of the Brontë sisters, often referred to as the "other one" even by scholars, at the time of her death at age twenty-nine in 1849 she was actually more accomplished than her sisters Charlotte and Emily. Brontë not only published a volume of poetry with her sisters, but also saw several of her poems and two novels published independently. Considering that neither Emily nor Charlotte were as productive by their twenty-ninth year, many critics speculate that the youngest of the Brontë sisters might have been a major literary figure had she lived into her thirties.



Anne Brontë Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Anne Brontë was born in Thornton, in the English county of Yorkshire, on January 17, 1820. She was the sixth and youngest of Reverend Patrick and Maria Branwell Brontë's children, and spent most of her early life in the village of Haworth at her home at the parsonage. Her mother died in 1821, and Elizabeth, her "Aunt Branwell", joined the family and served as the household supervisor until her death in 1842. Perhaps to lessen the strain on Aunt Branwell and to help educate his daughters, Patrick Brontë decided to send his daughters away to get an education.

Tragedy at Cowan Bridge Anne was fortunate that as the youngest daughter she was unable to join her elder sisters, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Emily at the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge, because it was there that an epidemic occurred in 1825 that took the lives of Maria and Elizabeth and forced Emily and Charlotte to return to Haworth. The harsh, cramped conditions at the school fostered the spread of tuberculosis, the disease that claimed Maria and Elizabeth and, ultimately, Anne herself, who likely contracted the disease from her sisters. Researchers estimate seven out of every ten people in England contracted tuberculosis in their lifetimes in the nineteenth century, before doctors understood how the disease was spread. Anne received some formal education between 1835 and 1837 at Margaret Wooler's boarding school at Roe Head and later, when Wooler's school was relocated, at Dewsbury Moor near Leeds.

Work as a Governess and Literary Productivity Anne served as a governess between 1839 and 1845, but the work proved too much of a strain for her. After resigning her post in June 1845, she returned to Haworth, where she would remain with her family until her death a few years later.

Anne Brontë's early years—both before and after her tenure as a governess—were extremely productive in a literary sense. Throughout her childhood, at least up until the time she left Haworth for Blake Hall, Brontë and her sister Emily collaborated on a series of imaginative adventures about the fictitious land known as Gondal. While none of their Gondal prose survives, much of the poetry from that period is still available. One of Brontë's earliest poems, dated July 1, 1837, is a Gondal poem titled "Alexander and Xenobia."

Romantic Infatuations Anne had a youthful enthusiasm for romance, evident in some of her poetry. This was apparently tested in 1839 when she developed an infatuation with her father's curate, the Reverend William Weightman. While the exact nature of their relationship has long been a point of debate, it seems beyond conjecture that Weightman was never a serious suitor. Despite the fact that their relationship never amounted to much,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist best known for her book *Little Women*, she was also a seamstress, servant, teacher, and Civil War nurse before becoming an author.

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): American civil rights advocate and leader, she was instrumental in the securing of women's rights, including the 1919 right to vote.

William Booth (1829–1912): A British Methodist preacher, he founded the Salvation Army—originally a Christian coalition bearing no arms and now one of the largest humanitarian services in the world.

Louis Pasteur (1822–1895): French scientist famous for his breakthrough discoveries about the causes of disease. He is especially known for his work in the areas of germ theory and vaccine development.

many critics have noted that Weightman's death in September 1842 may have affected Anne deeply. Two of her poems—"To _____," written in the December following his death, and "Severed and Gone," written in 1847—ostensibly demonstrate Anne's mourning his loss.

Attempts at Success with Acton Bell In May 1846 a book of poetry by the Brontë sisters appeared under their pseudonyms as *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. Acton was Anne's pen name. While the sisters considered publication of the book an accomplishment in itself, the collection, which was modestly priced and the beneficiary of several good reviews, had by June 1847 sold only two copies.

Yet even as sales of the collection failed to live up to expectations, the sisters turned to other literary endeavors. They each wrote a short novel and then searched for a publisher who would release Anne's *Agnes Grey*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, and Charlotte's *The Professor* as a three-volume set. After a series of rejections the quasi-reputable firm of Thomas Cautley Newby of London agreed to publish *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* together if the sisters agreed to contribute fifty pounds to offset expenses. Despite the tough conditions of the offer and Newby's refusal of Charlotte's novel, Anne and Emily agreed to the terms, and *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* were published in December 1847. While *Agnes Grey* was and still is overshadowed by its companion novel, it was nevertheless at the time warmly received. *Agnes Grey*, like Charlotte's later novel *Jane Eyre* is the story of a governess, forced into her profession by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also been interested in themes of love and death:

As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. This novel tells the story of the aftermath of the death of Addie Bundren from the point of view of several different characters.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. In a kind of journalist-detective style, the author tells the story of a murder and the efforts to solve it.

Romeo and Juliet (c. 1595), a play by William Shakespeare. In this classic tale of star-crossed teenagers, love is short-lived and death is inevitable.

Sula (1974), a novel by Toni Morrison. In this contemporary novel themes and characters are presented in an evocative structure of opposites.

financial necessity. Anne drew from her own experience as a governess in writing the novel.

Mixed Acclaim for Anne Brontë The reviews of Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, however, were in some cases far from kind. Unlike Charlotte, who essentially gave up writing poetry after the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847, Anne did not let her interest in novel writing end her career as a poet. It was about this time, in fact, that she accomplished what her more famous sisters did not: she had one of her poems published independently in a magazine. Anne's poem "The Three Guides" was published in the August 1848 issue of *Fraser's Magazine*. Unfortunately, just as she seemed to be reaching maturity as a poet, tragedy and illness befell her family. On September 24, 1848, a little more than a month after the publication of "The Three Guides," Brontë's brother Branwell died. By October 9 Emily's health seemed in question as well. Refusing medical attention until her last day alive, she died of tuberculosis on December 19, 1848. Anne's health, which had been delicate even before Emily's death, began to fail rapidly. In January 1849 she wrote "A dreadful darkness closes in," a poem that seems not only to address Emily's recent death, but to anticipate her own. She did not long survive her beloved sister. Anne died of tuberculosis on May 28, 1850.

Works in Literary Context

Two other British poets, Robert Burns and John Milton, are said to have influenced Anne Brontë's writing. Further influence on her poetry was the loss of loved ones.

Her mother Maria Branwell Brontë died of cancer, and her two older sisters Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis. Much has been written on the impact these deaths had on Brontë.

Gothic Tendencies Brontë's early poetry demonstrates a tendency toward emotional extremes, morbid preoccupation, and the supernatural common to Gothic literature. Gothic literature can be considered part of the Romantic movement in literature and the arts, which spanned the first half of the nineteenth century. The Romantic movement that sought to break with the cold rationalism and focus on science prevalent in the eighteenth century and focus instead on nature, emotion, beauty, and personal experience. One of Brontë's Gothic-type poems was "A Voice from the Dungeon," written in October 1837 when Brontë was at Dewsbury Moor. This poem has a rather gruesome tone, as the narrator claims to "dream of fiends instead of men." The narrator, in a trancelike state, is awakened by "one long piercing shriek. / Alas! Alas! That cursed scream," which portends that she must "die alone." Indeed, the eerie nature of the verse is more emblematic of Emily's work than Anne's, and for some time this was considered to be Emily's poem despite the fact that Anne signed the manuscript. It is perhaps an indication of the extent to which Anne Brontë's reputation as a poet has been reclaimed that she is now justly given credit for this poem that, like much of Emily's work, is preoccupied with death.

"A Voice from the Dungeon" is rather atypical of Brontë's early poetry in some ways. But other poems written during this period have more consistent thematic connections. A Gondal poem titled "Alexander and Xenobia" contains stanzas depicting the reunion of two young lovers after a period of separation and demonstrates Brontë's teenage infatuation for romantic poetry. The tone of the poem is cheerful and optimistic although that outlook became less common in Brontë's poetry after she reached maturity and was beset by a variety of woes. "The Three Guides," for example, displays a more mature point of view, combining elements of religiosity and underlying morbidity found in much of her early work.

Works in Critical Context

Brontë's reputation as a novelist and poet was for many years somewhat squashed by her sister Charlotte's influence. Charlotte did not favor *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)—the story of an abused woman who deserts her alcoholic and adulterous libertine husband. Charlotte disliked the subject matter to such an extent that she perhaps tried to compensate for it by stressing her sister's piety and quiet nature. These efforts to protect Brontë's reputation succeeded perhaps too well: literary historians have tended to assume that Brontë lacked the fire and

passion of her sisters, and that her success was almost entirely due to their fame. These efforts to protect her caused her to be seen somewhat as a writer of extremes.

“Self-Communion” (1848) Written after “The Three Guides,” between November 1847 and April 1848, “Self-Communion” is the longest poem Brontë wrote as an adult, and it is also one of her best works. This poem, which most critics agree explores her relationship with her sister Emily, transcends much of her earlier poetry. For pure lyric beauty, it ranks among the best poetry composed by the Brontë sisters. As in most of her poetry, the presence of God is emphasized. Were this poem representative of the majority of her work, Brontë might rank as one of the greatest of Victorian women poets.

Anne’s piety has often led critics to be dismissive about her work. Some critics have assumed from the prevalence of religious themes in her poetry that she was a bored country girl with little else to write about—although this assessment does belie the careful consideration with which Brontë pursued theological questions. Yet few critics have believed in her abilities as fervently as did George Moore, who claimed on the basis of her novels alone that had Brontë “lived ten years longer she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen, perhaps even a higher place.”

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out who were the most popular writers of the mid-nineteenth century in England. Search for actual newspaper articles and other period documents. What were the critics of the time saying about the popular writings? What subject matter and themes were important to readers of the period? Are the writers who were most popular then still read today, or do modern readers and scholars prefer different writers from the period?
2. Why do you think Anne Brontë has enjoyed less fame than her sisters?
3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about tuberculosis in the nineteenth century. How widespread was the disease? How was it diagnosed? How was it treated? Write a paper summarizing your findings.
4. Anne Brontë worked for years as a governess. To find out more about the lives of real nineteenth-century governesses, read *Governess: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres* (2008) by Ruth Brandon.

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Charlotte Brontë

BORN: 1816, England

DIED: 1855, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Novels, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846)

Jane Eyre, An Autobiography (1847)

Shirley (1849)

Villette (1853)

The Professor (1857)

Overview

Charlotte Brontë was one of three famous sisters (Anne and Emily Brontë being the other two) who each contributed significantly to the literary landscape of the nineteenth century. Charlotte Brontë’s reputation rests mostly on her 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, a book that was a



Charlotte Brontë *Brontë, Charlotte, photograph of an illustration.*
International Portrait Gallery.

public sensation in its own day and has scarcely diminished in popularity since. The book's enduring attraction to critics and readers alike has much to do with the ways its headstrong narrator, the heroine Jane Eyre, both satisfies and challenges the social and literary conventions of the Victorian era. In one sense, the book is a period piece about the narrow spheres of British governesses; in another sense, it foreshadows a brand of feminism that would not take shape for another one hundred years.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Charlotte Brontë was born on April 21, 1816, in the village of Thornton, West Riding, Yorkshire. Her father, Patrick Brontë, was the son of a respectable Irish farmer in County Down, Ireland. Charlotte's mother, Maria Branwell Brontë, died when her daughter was only five years old. She had given birth to six children in seven years: Maria (1813), Elizabeth (1815), Charlotte (1816), Patrick Branwell (1817), Emily (1818), and Anne (1820). She died of cancer at the age of thirty-eight. Though the loss of their mother certainly made a difference in the lives of all the Brontë children, the younger ones—Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne—seem not to have been seriously affected by her death. An otherwise remarkably observant child, Charlotte remembered

little of her mother; when, as an adult, she read letters that her mother had written to her father during their courtship, she wrote to a friend on February 16, 1850, "I wish she had lived and that I had known her."

Tragedy for the Brontë Sisters at Cowan Bridge School In 1824, when she was eight years old, Charlotte and her sister Emily joined their older sisters at the newly opened Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in the parish of Tunstall. Living conditions at the school were harsh and difficult. Charlotte's later depiction of the bleak "Lowood School" in *Jane Eyre* was based on Cowan Bridge.

Charlotte found the rigors of boarding school life trying in the extreme. Food was badly prepared under unsanitary conditions and, as a consequence, outbreaks of typhus forced the withdrawal of many students, some of whom died. Maria developed tuberculosis while at Cowan Bridge and was harshly treated during her incapacitating illness, an incident Charlotte drew upon in portraying her character Helen Burns's martyrdom at the hands of Miss Scatcherd in *Jane Eyre*. Patrick Brontë was not informed of his eldest daughter's condition until February 1825, two months after Maria began to show symptoms; when he saw her, he immediately withdrew her from the school and she died at home in early May. Elizabeth, in the meantime, had also fallen ill. When the entire school was temporarily removed on doctor's orders to a healthier site by the sea, Elizabeth was escorted back to Haworth where she died two weeks after Charlotte and Emily were brought home by their father on June 1.

Isolation in Yorkshire a Spur to the Imagination

Following the tragic experience at Cowan Bridge, Patrick Brontë tutored his four remaining children at home and provided them with music and art instruction from competent teachers. The relative isolation of the Brontë children in their Yorkshire home caused them to develop very strong attachments to each other. The weather in Yorkshire was often inhospitable, and the children, with no other playmates to divert them, relied on their imaginations to invent their own make-believe world called Gondal, about which they created many poems and stories. In 1829, Charlotte began writing poetry. Producing sixty-five poems and a satirical play about poetry writing in 1829–1830, the fourteen-year-old self-consciously attempted to define herself as a poet. The various poetic forms that Brontë experimented with during this time reflect her self-designed apprenticeship through imitation of earlier poets. For example, her many descriptions of natural landscapes are indebted to the eighteenth-century topographical poetry that had been developed by "nature poets" such as James Thomson and William Wordsworth.

Attempts at Poetry Interrupted by Schooling at Roe Head

This spate of poetic production was interrupted in January 1831, when Brontë left Haworth for a second time, traveling twenty miles to become a student

at Roe Head School in Mirfield, near Dewsbury. Roe Head was a small school that usually enrolled only about seven boarding students at a time, all girls around the same age, and therefore was able to attend closely to the needs and abilities of individuals. Though she was homesick at first, in time she won the respect and affection of her peers and came to feel quite at home in her new school environment.

After her departure from Roe Head in May 1832, the rather uneventful round of life at Haworth, where she was in charge of her younger sisters' education, eventually led Brontë back to writing poetry. In December of 1836, she decided to try her hand at professional writing, with the hope of earning her living as a publishing poet. To this end she sought the advice of no less a figure than Robert Southey, then poet laureate of England, to whom she sent a selection of her poems. The discouraging response in his letter of March 12, 1837, has become infamous: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, & when you are you will be less eager for celebrity." Such was the prevailing opinion at the time about women's artistic abilities and women's proper place in society. It was widely believed that a woman's only "proper duties" were to be a wife and mother. An unmarried woman might find respectable work as a teacher or governess, but a woman seeking a professional career of any sort was seen as unnatural.

Despite Southey's discouragement, between January 1837 and July 1838 Brontë wrote more than sixty poems and verse fragments, including drafts of what were eventually to be some of her best poetical works. However, they remained fragmentary and defective; it was not until 1845 that she was able to revise them into poems she was willing to publish.

Broadened Horizons at a Belgian School Charlotte and Emily Brontë left England in February 1842 to enroll as the oldest students in a Belgian school run by Madame Claire Zoë Heger and her husband, Constantin. English and Protestant in a school of Roman Catholic Belgians, the Brontës were isolated from their younger peers by differences in language, culture, age, and faith, not to mention Emily's austere reserve and Charlotte's social timidity. However, both young women made considerable academic progress in Brussels and were praised for their success.

Although she apparently composed little new poetry in Brussels, Brontë did continue to transcribe revised versions of earlier poems into a copybook she had brought with her from Haworth, an indication that she may have been contemplating publishing them in the future. The letters she wrote to Constantin Heger from Haworth in 1844 reveal Brontë's increasing anxiety

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): An American civil rights leader who played a prominent role in the abolitionist, temperance, and women's suffrage movements.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861): One of the most respected Victorian poets, she is best known for her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892): English poet laureate who relied heavily on natural imagery, revealing traces of Romanticism.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863): English novelist and journalist who wrote one of the first glowing reviews of *Jane Eyre*.

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): Alcott gained lasting fame for her 1868 novel *Little Women*.

about establishing herself in a fulfilling line of work. Always troubled by extreme nearsightedness, she experienced a temporary further weakening of her sight at this time, causing her to sink into depression.

Self-Published Poems with Pen Names Brontë suddenly recovered from this period of depression in the fall of 1845, when she stumbled upon a notebook of Emily's poems. She eagerly pressed her sister to publish her poems with a selection of her own verse, to which were added poems contributed by Anne. The sisters agreed to publish the poems under male pen names, probably in order to overcome the widespread prejudice against literature by women and the potential embarrassment their pursuit of a writing career might cause their family. Indeed, it was common practice for women writers (including such nineteenth-century favorites as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and George Sand) to publish either anonymously or under a male pen name. Charlotte Brontë energetically set about the task of finding a publisher for *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846), which the small London firm of Aylott & Jones agreed to print at the authors' expense, a common practice for unknown writers. Despite Charlotte Brontë's excitement over her sisters' verse, she wrote almost no poetry after 1845 and was already attempting to secure a contract for her first novel, *The Professor* (1857), before the *Poems* had even appeared in print.

The Professor was rejected nine times before she received an encouraging reply from the firm of Smith, Elder, which declined to publish the book but asked to review any other novel she might be working on. Heartened by this request, Brontë finished *Jane Eyre* rapidly—in about two weeks—and had the satisfaction of seeing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *Jane Eyre*, the title character is saved thanks to love—she eventually leaves a life of drudgery and finds herself happily married to her previous employer, Edward Rochester. Though this kind of romance is difficult to find in the real world, its presence in literature has been a constant through the ages. Here are some other works where love and romance save the day.

Cinderella (1697), a fairy tale by Charles Perrault. Though there are many versions of the Cinderella fable, Perrault's was the first to introduce the glass slipper and the fairy godmother's pumpkin; thanks to these props, a forlorn chambermaid wins the hand of a handsome prince.

A Room with a View (1908), a novel by E.M. Forster. In this Edwardian novel, a young Englishwoman traveling in Italy falls in love with a man who seems "beneath her." She ignores the advice of her chaperon and happily elopes anyway.

The Sound of Music (1965), a film directed by Robert Wise. Via her musical abilities and endless cheer, a governess manages to win the hearts of the captain for whom she works and his children in this hit movie based on a musical.

the novel in print shortly thereafter. The book was immediately popular and "Currer Bell" quickly became known by the reading public.

After *Jane Eyre*, *Marriage and Celebrity* After the success of her novel, Brontë wrote no poetry except for three unfinished poems on the occasions of her sisters' deaths. Though greatly saddened by the deaths of her siblings, she continued to publish novels—*Shirley* in 1849, and *Villette* in 1853. Letting her identity become known, she achieved the literary celebrity that Southey had warned her to avoid and became acquainted with several important authors, including William Makepeace Thackeray. At the age of thirty-eight, Brontë married her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nichols, and died, possibly of either dehydration and malnutrition brought on by severe morning sickness (it was speculated that she was pregnant) or a serious infection of the digestive tract, on March 31, 1855. She is buried, along with the rest of her remarkable family (except for Anne, who died in the seaside town of Scarborough), in the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, immediately across from her parsonage home.

Works in Literary Context

The Rise of the Novel Although Charlotte Brontë started her career as a poet, it is as a novelist that she is

best remembered. Like her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she experimented with the poetic forms that became the characteristic modes of the Victorian period—the long narrative poem and the dramatic monologue. Unlike Browning, Brontë gave up writing poetry at the beginning of her professional career, when she became identified in the public mind as the author of the popular novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). Brontë's decision to abandon poetry for novel writing illustrates the dramatic shift in literary tastes and the marketability of literary genres—from poetry to prose—that occurred in the 1830s and 1840s.

Brontë's remarkable success with *Jane Eyre* was in part attributable to the shift in literary tastes of the period. While the English literary landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been dominated by poets, the nineteenth century reading public demanded works with which they could more readily identify. *Jane Eyre* was such a work: a story of an ordinary person who experiences extraordinary things. However, if one agrees with Virginia Woolf's claim that Charlotte Brontë's novels are read "for her poetry," one might argue that Brontë never did entirely abandon her career as a poet. Adapting her creative impulses to the demands of the market, Brontë incorporated poetic features into the more viable form of the novel, and so became a successful literary professional in Victorian England.

Gothic Influence in a Bildungsroman Format

Like her sister's novel *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* is heavily influenced by the Gothic horror novels that rose to popularity at the turn of the nineteenth century. The dark setting, the mysterious Mr. Rochester, and the strange goings-on in the attic of his home all play on the conventions of horror. At the same time, the novel follows the structure of a *Bildungsroman*, or novel of maturation, as the plot follows Jane's journey from youth into womanhood.

First-Person Narration The plot of *Jane Eyre* follows the progress of a poor orphan from humiliating dependence to happiness and wealth as an heiress and the wife of her former employer. Victorian readers were disturbed by the novel's suggestion that women need not always be passive or submissive, and by its treatment of love, which, by contemporary standards, seemed coarse and offensive. The importance of romantic love is an ancient theme in literature, but in *Jane Eyre* it was presented with a frankness and intensity new to English fiction. That intensity is made possible by Brontë's decision to tell the story in the first person, from Jane's point of view. Jane Eyre dominates her world; every action is filtered through the medium of her sensibility, every character lives only as an actor in the drama of her life. In one of the most famous lines in English literature, Brontë further intensifies the reader's experience of the novel's events by having her first-person narrator address the reader directly as she states the resolution of all her

struggles to come to terms with her relationship with Mr. Rochester: “Reader, I married him.”

Works in Critical Context

While *Jane Eyre* was popularly received, the initial critical reception of the novel varied. Several commentators admired the power and freshness of Brontë’s prose; others, however, termed the novel superficial and vulgar. Perhaps the best-known early review, by Elizabeth Rigby, flatly condemned *Jane Eyre* as “an anti-Christian composition.” Still other critics questioned the authorship of the novel. Some doubted that a woman was capable of writing such a work, while a critic in the *North American Review* contended that a man and a woman were its co-authors. In another early assessment, George Eliot expressed her admiration for the novel but complained that Brontë’s characters spoke like “the heroes and heroines of police reports.”

Although most critics have praised Brontë’s narrative technique, some have argued that the story of *Jane Eyre* is unrealistic. Many commentators have lauded the novel’s powerful language and have explored the work’s unity, which they attribute to the use of the heroine as narrator as well as to Jane’s process of spiritual growth.

Responses to Literature

1. Some readers of *Jane Eyre* wonder about the first Mrs. Rochester and her somewhat cruel treatment by Mr. Rochester. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a “prequel” to *Jane Eyre* that imagines the early life of Edward Rochester’s first wife.
2. Read a poem of Emily Brontë’s and one of Charlotte’s. Do you, like most critics, find Emily’s poetics to be stronger? Why or why not?
3. Look at Edward Rochester and then at Heathcliff from Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Do the two men have any traits in common? Would men like Mr. Rochester and Heathcliff be popular in today’s world?

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Emily Brontë

BORN: 1818, Yorkshire, England

DIED: 1848, Yorkshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

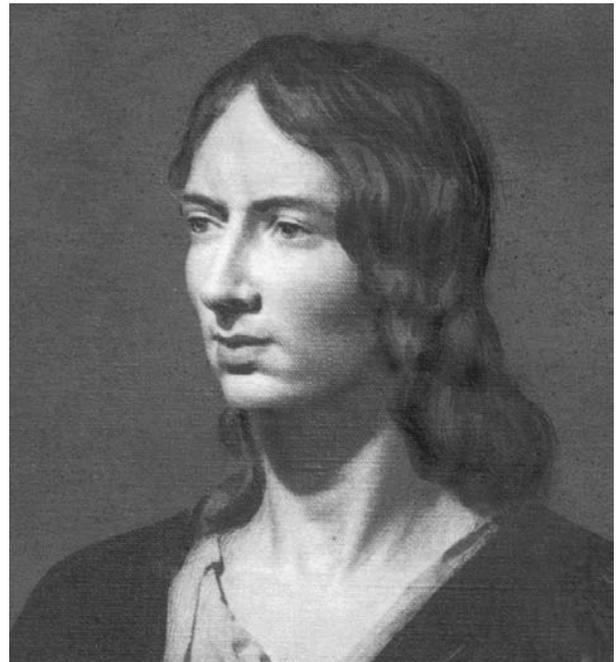
GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Wuthering Heights (1847)

Overview

Emily Brontë is considered one of the most important yet elusive figures in nineteenth-century English literature. Although she led a brief and sheltered life, she left behind some of the most passionate and inspired writing in Victorian literature. Today, her reputation rests primarily



Emily Brontë Brontë, Emily, 1846, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

John Quincy Adams (1767–1848): Sixth president of the United States; established the Monroe Doctrine, stating that foreign governments were not allowed to interfere with U.S. affairs and that America in turn would stay neutral toward Europe, as long as no military actions were taken in the Americas.

George, Lord Byron (1788–1824): English Romantic poet with a famously scandalous life; his 1812–1816 poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* established the Byronic hero as romantic and tortured.

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850): French novelist and playwright, considered one of the creators of realism in French literature; his characters are multidimensional and complex, rather than simply good or bad.

Mary Shelley (1797–1851): British writer, married to Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; her best-known work is the 1818 novel *Frankenstein*.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave, who led a bloody rebellion in Virginia against white Southerners before being caught and hanged; in the aftermath, Virginia debated abolishing slavery but narrowly decided to continue it.

on her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which has attracted generations of readers and critics and is a literary classic.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Tragedies Emily Jane Brontë was born on July 30, 1818, at the parsonage at Thorton in Yorkshire, England, the fifth child and fourth daughter of the Reverend Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë. She was raised by her father and maternal aunt at his new parsonage in Haworth following her mother's death in 1821. In 1825, she was sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, but she returned home when her sisters Maria and Elizabeth became ill at the institution and died.

Literary Life at Haworth In 1826, Patrick Brontë bought a set of wooden toy soldiers for his children, which opened up a rich fantasy world for Emily and her siblings Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne. Emily and Anne later invented a romantic legend centered upon the imaginary Pacific Ocean island of Gondal. The realm of Gondal became a lifelong interest for Brontë and, according to many scholars, was a major imaginative source for her writings. Beginning in 1826, Brontë also began making

drawings and sketches of natural subjects such as birds to which she was drawn for the remainder of her life. Her close observations of birds, animals, plants, and the changing skies over Haworth formed a significant part of the poetry she began writing at an early age.

Although Brontë was intellectually precocious, she also was painfully shy. She briefly attended a school in East Yorkshire in 1835 and worked as an assistant teacher at a school around 1838, but living away from home was too difficult for her. She returned home, writing poetry and attending to household duties until 1842, when she and Charlotte, hoping to acquire the language skills needed to establish a school of their own, took positions at a school in Brussels. There were limited career opportunities for British women of this time period, with teaching being one of the few options. The death of Brontë's aunt later that year, however, forced Brontë to return to Haworth again, where she lived for the rest of her life.

Brontë's Poetry In 1845, Charlotte discovered one of Emily's private poetry notebooks. At Charlotte's urging, Emily reluctantly agreed to publish some of her poems in a volume that also included writings by her sisters. *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, reflecting the pseudonyms adopted by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, was published in May 1846. While only two copies of the book were sold, at least one commentator, Sydney Dobell, praised Emily's poems, singling her out in the *Athenaeum* as a promising writer and the best poet among the "Bell" family.

Her poetry is difficult to evaluate and interpret, as it was not written for publication, though she did revise much of her early work in 1844. Some of what has been preserved can be discounted as immature early drafts. Much of it deals with the fantasy world of Gondal, which is a barrier to the proper appreciation of the poetry.

Completed Only Novel *Wuthering Heights* Brontë had been working on *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which was published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell in an edition that also included Anne's first novel, *Agnes Grey*. Brontë's masterpiece was poorly received by contemporary critics who, repelled by the vivid portrayal of malice and brutality in the book, objected to the "degrading" nature of her subject. In the nineteenth century, as women began writing and publishing more fiction, critics often gave negative assessments of their works based solely on the author's gender. Such critics believed women lacked the worldly experience, critical judgment, and rationality to write works of value despite a rapid rise in works written by women and for an expanding female audience.

Brontë worked on revising her poetry after publishing *Wuthering Heights*, but her efforts were soon interrupted. Her brother Branwell died in September 1848, and Emily's own health began to decline shortly afterward. She was suffering from tuberculosis, an airborne infectious disease that attacks the lungs. The slow-killing

disease was common in the nineteenth century, especially in England and the United States, because of close quarters often created by intense industrialization and urbanization. In accordance with what Charlotte described as her sister's strong-willed and inflexible nature, Brontë apparently refused medical attention and died of the disease on December 19, 1848, at the age of thirty.

Works in Literary Context

In her writings, Brontë's exploration of the self, the imagination, and the visionary associate her more closely with Romantic poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth than with Victorian writers such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning. She was a serious poet, who, like her peer Emily Dickinson, wrote dozens of poems with no intention of publishing or even showing them to her family.

Antiromance Many of Brontë's Gondal poems as well as her novel are viewed as being antiromantic. Unlike the Romantic poets William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Lord Byron, Brontë's idea of love does not enforce eternity but ruthlessly refuses it. In *Wuthering Heights*, the setting is cold, dreary, and barren, and the protagonist Heathcliff is curiously mean and calculating, unlike John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* or the heroes of Lord Byron's works.

Critic Helen Brown was one of the first to point out the influence of George Gordon, Lord Byron, on Brontë's Gondal characters and their isolation, passions, dark crimes, and darker thoughts. The influence of Sir Walter Scott and Percy Bysshe Shelley on Brontë's poetry is also clear.

Works in Critical Context

Even though Brontë is more distinguished as a novelist than as a poet, scholars regard her poetry as a significant part of her work. Critical assessment of Brontë is divided over the question of whether to assess her poems separately from the Gondal mythology or to retain the Gondal context in order to clarify obscure references and provide dramatic and thematic unity. While *Wuthering Heights* was met with general perplexity upon its original publication, by the early twentieth century Brontë was hailed as one of the most important women novelists of the nineteenth century. The novel was considered one of the most powerful and original works in Victorian literature, incorporating elements of the Gothic novel, the Romantic novel, and the social criticism found in a Victorian novel.

Importance of Poetry In particular, lacking firsthand information concerning Brontë's life and opinions, commentators have looked to the poems as a source of insight into Brontë's personality, philosophy, and imagination. Critics have attempted to reconstruct a coherent Gondal "epic" from Brontë's poems and journal entries. In addition, critics have consequently noted many similarities

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though *Wuthering Heights* is a story about love and passion, the theme of revenge is equally important, as Heathcliff returns to carry out a vengeful plan. Here are some other classic works that include the theme of revenge:

Elektra (c. 425 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This play focuses on an extreme example of family misfortune.

Electra convinces her brother Orestes to avenge their father's murder by killing their mother, Clytemnestra.

The Count of Monte Cristo (1844), a novel by Alexandre Dumas. The novel is a romantic tale of power, adventure, and revenge, as its protagonist, Edmond Dantès, seeks justice against those who betrayed him.

"The Cask of Amontillado" (1946), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. This well-known short story features a protagonist who is verbally insulted and avenges his honor by killing a man in a macabre way.

Hamlet (1601 or 1602), a play by William Shakespeare. In this revenge play, the readers wait for Hamlet to gather enough evidence before he avenges his father's murder.

between the passionate characters and violent motifs of Gondal and *Wuthering Heights*, and today, a generous body of criticism exists supporting the contention that the Gondal poems served as a creative forerunner of the novel.

Wuthering Heights Initially, critics failed to appreciate Emily Brontë's literary significance. While commentators acknowledged the emotional power of *Wuthering Heights*, they also rejected the malignant and coarse side of life that it depicted. Charlotte Brontë responded to this latter objection in 1850, defending the rough language and manners in her sister's novel as realistic, but apologizing for the dark vision of life in the book, which she attributed to Emily's reclusive habits.

This focus on Brontë's aloofness, combined with the mystical aspects of her poetry and the supernatural overtones of *Wuthering Heights*, created an image of the writer as a reclusive mystic that dominated Brontë criticism into the twentieth century. Writing about the novel in 1900, William Dean Howells of *Harper's Bazaar* saw slightly more to the work, commenting that Brontë "bequeathed the world at her early death a single book of as singular power as any in fiction; and proved herself, in spite of its defective technique a great artist, of as realistic motive and ideal as any who have followed her."

Charles Percy Sanger's 1926 monograph was one of the first modern studies to bring Brontë's craftsmanship to light. As a result, scholars discovered the sophistication and complexity of her images, characterizations, themes,

and techniques in *Wuthering Heights*. Psychological aspects also gained attention in the late twentieth century as Brontë continued to be regarded as an influential novelist.

Responses to Literature

1. After reading *Wuthering Heights*, hold a discussion about Heathcliff and his actions. How does his social class influence his actions?
2. Little is known about Emily Brontë's life, and some scholars try to get hints from her poetry. Read several of Brontë's poems and discuss what you think the poems reveal about her.
3. Create a chart that lists examples of both Romantic and Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights*.
4. Using the Internet and/or your library's resources, conduct research on Emily's sisters Charlotte and Anne. Review their main works and compare them with Emily's *Wuthering Heights*.
5. Emily Brontë created an imaginary world—the island of Gondal—a world she used in her writing. With a partner, create an original story about Gondal. Who lives there? What do they do? What does the island look like?

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Rupert Brooke

BORN: 1887, Rugby, England

DIED: 1915, off the island of Scyros, Greece

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Pyramids (1904)

The Bastille (1905)

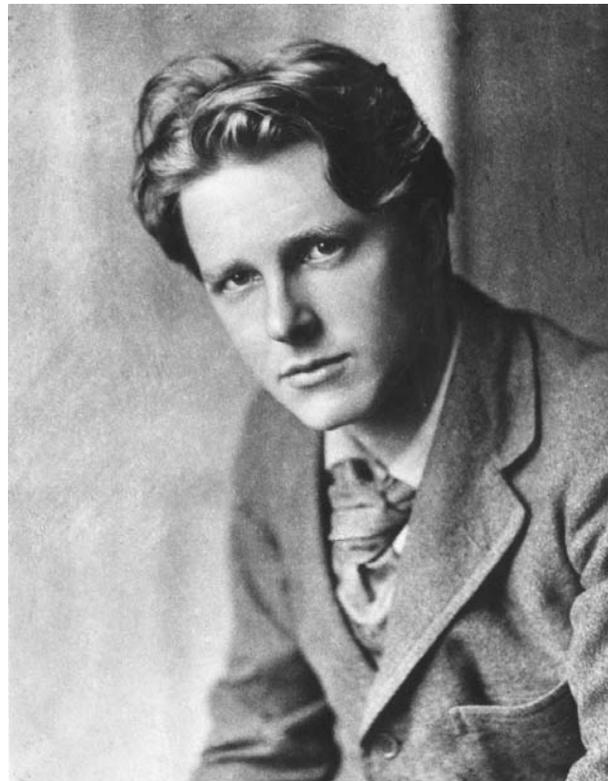
Poems (1911)

1914, and Other Poems (1915)

Letters from America (1916)

Overview

At the time of his death at the age of twenty-eight, Rupert Brooke was considered to be England's foremost young poet. As an uncommonly handsome young man, Brooke came to represent the "doomed youth" of the generation that was killed in World War I. His sonnets



Rupert Brooke Sherril Schell / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

about the war, written in Antwerp, where Brooke first saw battle, were published in December 1914 and made him famous almost overnight. These sonnets, the high point of Brooke's brief poetic career, came to be an enormous source of inspiration and patriotism for those in the muddy trenches and those back home. Other contemporary poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Isaac Rosenberg lived long enough to take a more realistic and cynical view of war, but Brooke was always (as Winston Churchill described him) "joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, ruled by high, undoubting purpose . . . all that one could wish England's noblest sons to be."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Gifted Youth Rupert Brooke was born on August 3, 1887, in Rugby, England, one of three brothers who would all die young. Good-looking from infancy, he was a fine athlete, good at soccer, cricket, tennis, and swimming, as well as intellectual pursuits. Brooke began writing poetry at the age of nine. By his teens he was writing in earnest.

Brooke's student years at King's College, Cambridge, were full of creative experimentation with politics, sexuality, and poetry. He became the president of the Fabian Society, a student group promoting socialist politics. Brooke was bisexual, and he was surrounded by both male and female friends who were in love with him. One of these was James Strachey, the younger brother of Lytton Strachey, who was close friends with writer Virginia Woolf and others in the intensely intellectual and sexually liberated set known as the "Bloomsbury Group." Brooke eventually tired of the Bloomsbury crowd and set off on an ambitious series of world travels.

He went to Italy twice in his late teens, to Germany in his twenties, and he traveled across the United States and Canada in 1912 writing pieces for the liberal London newspaper the *Westminster Gazette*. From San Francisco he set sail for the South Sea islands—Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, and Tahiti.

Death in World War I Brooke joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve in August 1914, the first year of World War I. Beginning with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe aligned with Germany on one side and the Allied Powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. World War I was the first conflict that saw widespread use of armored tanks and chemical warfare, which left many survivors permanently disabled or disfigured. Although Brooke himself never engaged in combat, nearly ten million soldiers were killed

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brooke's famous contemporaries include:

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): A British author born in Bombay who wrote in almost every genre—poetry, journalism, fiction, essays, and children's stories.

Lytton Strachey (1880–1932): A London-born biographer and essayist who was a prominent member of the Bloomsbury Group, which advocated intellectual ambition and sexual tolerance. He wrote for many periodicals and contributed several innovative biographical studies, including the influential anthology *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): This Irish poet and playwright set the agenda for modernist poetry throughout his long career. Like the painter Picasso, Yeats went through several experimental styles, each deeply marked by his strength of personality, political convictions, and formidable artistic technique.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): An Austrian psychiatrist whose influence reached far beyond the practice of medicine. His theories of the powerful conflicting forces that exist in the subconscious mind affected all of the arts, helping to establish modernism as the exploration of the fragmentation of the individual mind that can hardly begin to fully understand itself.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914): Heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria had taken control of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, a deeply unpopular move among the Serbians, who wanted these territories to be part of a Serbian state, not the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A Serbian terrorist assassinated Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, setting into motion a chain of events that would quickly escalate into World War I.

during the war, with another ten million civilians suffering the same fate.

After service in Belgium, Brooke was destined for the famous Gallipoli Campaign in February 1915, a joint operation with the French to capture the Turkish capital of Istanbul. Brooke did not die from wounds suffered during one of the largest battles of World War I, however; he died from a tiny insect bite on his lip. Fatal blood poisoning set in, and because the British Navy had orders to move on with their campaign, he was hastily buried in a grove of olive trees on the Greek island of Scyros. He was twenty-seven years old. All of England mourned his death, thinking of the lines in his most famous poem, "The Soldier": "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the themes in Brooke's poetry is a sentimental view of the English countryside and small-town life, informed by his idyllic years as a student in Rugby and Cambridge. There is a tradition in British poetry of such sentimental and nostalgic poems, dating from the eighteenth century to the present day. Here are some more works that reflect these themes:

"Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1742), a poem by Thomas Gray. In this poem the poet looks over the rolling hills at the site of his former school, pondering his past life and approaching demise.

Lyrical Ballads (1798), a collection of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The straightforward poems in this collection turned the page to an entirely new era of Romanticism in English poetry.

Moortown (1979), a collection of poems by Ted Hughes. These poems portray life in the English countryside in a realistic but still idealized way, showing how the virtues of hard work on the farm and simple human decency can put mankind in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Works in Literary Context

Brooke's early models were the so-called "decadent" writers: Charles Baudelaire, Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and others. The "decadents" often wrote about morbid or perverse topics with an excess of self-expression and moodiness, emphasizing the importance of pure art for art's sake. While their works may seem dated or exaggerated now, they were nevertheless important for making the transition away from the moralistic realism that dominated the nineteenth century and into the artistic experimentation and new subjective perspectives of twentieth-century modernism.

Poetic Experimentation The poems Brooke wrote between 1905 and 1908 reflect this transitional period. Poems such as "Sleeping Out: Full Moon," "Ante Aram," and "The Call" are filled with abstractions, heavy imagery, antique spellings of words, and imperfect rhythms—they are written to sound like what young Brooke thought poems should be, rather than poems written in his own unique voice.

Similarly, Brooke's college-era love poetry is often beautiful but abstract and impersonal, heavily influenced by the idealism of the Romantic poets Percy Shelley and John Keats. William Butler Yeats, the dominant poet of the day, met Brooke and advised him to leave behind the empty abstractions and replace them with a more robust sensuality that would come to be more typical of mod-

ernist literature (as evidenced in the poetry of Yeats and the novels of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence). Brooke was slow to take the hint, however, and instead became one of the leaders in a small John Donne revival in 1912. Donne (1572–1631), a great poet of both sensual and spiritual matters writing around the time of William Shakespeare, was a "metaphysical" poet who fused the abstract and concrete, soul and body. Brooke attempted to do the same, but again he had not yet found his own poetic voice.

Nationalism It is perhaps not surprising that Brooke wrote his most famous poems about his nostalgic love for England and praise of its countryside only when he was far away from home. Brooke's travels to the South Sea islands seemed to set him free from the expectations other people had of him and the assumptions they made based upon his appearance. Brooke soon became associated with the "Georgians," a group of poets writing around the time King George V came to the throne in 1910, who wrote sentimental poetry about rustic life and nature in the manner of William Wordsworth (1770–1850).

War Brooke's best-remembered poems are the sonnets he wrote about war. These were collected in *1914, and Other Poems*, published in 1915, after his death. Brooke's war sonnets perfectly captured the mood of the moment. Unlike such later war poets as Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) and Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), who would live long enough to see more of the horrors of war, Brooke wrote of the service to country and noble causes with a spirit of brave optimism. His war poetry may seem hopelessly idealistic to more cynical readers today, but at the time it provided genuine consolation and encouragement to weary soldiers homesick for a safe, supportive, and unchanging England.

Works in Critical Context

Only one collection of Brooke's poetry was published in his lifetime: *Poems* (1911), which contains fifty poems. After his death, *1914, and Other Poems* was published; it includes thirty-two more poems written between 1911 and 1914, including the immensely popular war sonnets.

The War Sonnets When Brooke died, he was hailed as a hero, even though he had seen little or no actual combat. Winston Churchill himself gave him a very eloquent eulogy. As Edward A. McCourt later wrote in his survey for the *Dalhousie Review*, "The popularity of the 1914 sequence is accounted for by the fact that through it Brooke expressed perfectly the mood of the moment." "As the war dragged on and death tolls climbed higher and higher, however, what used to seem idealistic in Brooke's poetry started to look more like foolishness to many people. The more cynical and intense poetry of Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon captured the violence and ultimate futility of the war, and their

poetry became elevated over Brooke's as greater literary achievements toward the end of World War I and throughout World War II.

Critical Backlash By the 1940s there was a backlash against Brooke. Readers who had grown up with two wars, a great economic depression, and rapid urbanization found little they could relate to in Brooke's poetry, and literary critics were declaring him massively overrated. It was all too easy to find evidence for this in the clumsy poetic technique of some of his early verse. Likewise, some critics found issue with his final writings. In his 1974 book *Rupert Brooke: The Man and the Poet*, Robert Brainard Pearsall states: "The question of what Brooke might have accomplished if he had lived a few more decades had almost been answered by the time of his death. I judge that his slight talent had not only peaked, but moved along in its downward curve."

Myth and Reality From the 1970s until today, critical attention on Brooke is often focused on efforts to separate the Rupert Brooke "myth" from reality. Recently, Brooke's poetry has been given energetic re-readings in light of new biographical perspectives. While Brooke has had a rough time with professional literary critics from the 1940s onward, his reputation has always been, and continues to be, secure with general readers. His poetry often shares a shelf with poets such as Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg—sensitive, easy-to-understand poets of nature and human conflict who appeal to people who read their poetry for pleasure and insight.

Responses to Literature

1. To what extent should a poet's work be separated from his or her life? Should the "legend" of a poet's life be relevant to what they wrote?
2. Why do you think some of Brooke's best writing about England happened when he was in a place that could hardly be more different—the South Sea islands of Hawaii and Tahiti? What did Brooke find so appealing about these places?
3. Read some of Brooke's early poetry. What are your own opinions about its quality? Have the critics been unfair, do you think, to the poetry Brooke wrote when he was just a teenager? Write your own assessment of one of his poems.
4. Using your library and the Internet, research the poetry that is being written by soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq today. Can you make any generalizations about the style and perspective they are using? How does it compare with the poetry written by soldiers from World War I and World War II? What has changed, and what has remained the same, about war poetry?

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Anita Brookner

BORN: 1928, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Watteau (1968)

The Debut (1981)

Hotel du Lac (1984)

Family and Friends (1985)

Altered States (1997)

Overview

Anita Brookner began writing novels at the age of fifty-three after establishing herself as a respected art historian. Since then, she has been a prolific writer, averaging a book a year. Although some critics have noted her tendency to return to the same themes time and again, Brookner has garnered significant critical praise for her novels, winning the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984.



Anita Brookner *Brookner, Anita*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Suburban London Brookner was the only child of middle-class, socialist, nonreligious Jewish parents. She was born and grew up in Herne Hill, an upscale suburb of south London. Her birth date is July 16, 1928, although when she started to write she deducted ten years from her age until a friend pointed out the discrepancy in the *London Times*. Brookner's mother, Maude Schiska, was a professional singer who gave up her career to marry Brookner's father, Newson Bruckner. Brookner remembers her childhood as both crowded and lonely. Living in a suburban villa with her grandmother, parents, bachelor uncle, and many servants, she remembers her parents as silent and unhappy. In the 1930s and during World War II, the household was also filled with Jewish refugees who had fled Nazi Germany's persecution and imprisonment of Jews. During the war, the Nazis killed roughly 6 million Jews through exposure to the cold, starvation, and execution. The tragic situation of Jews in Europe permeated Brookner's childhood and adolescence.

Early on, Brookner showed great academic promise. After attending a local primary school and James Allen's Girls' School in Dulwich, she studied history as an undergraduate at King's College, London, and then completed a doctorate in art history at the distinguished Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where its director, the magisterial art historian and spy, Anthony Blunt, both encouraged her as her teacher and used her as an unknowing stooge in his covert operations (a fact of which Brookner was not aware until the publication of Peter Wright's book *Spycatcher* in 1987).

Art and the Turn Toward Fiction After studying the art of Jean-Baptiste Greuze in Paris on a French government scholarship, Brookner was launched on her first distinguished career as an art historian. Brookner's area of specialization is late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century French art, and her books on the subject are not only respected but composed with the kind of narrative drive that in retrospect merges seamlessly with her talent as a novelist.

By 1980, Brookner had earned considerable recognition as an art historian, but she turned to fiction as a form of escape. In a 1989 interview with Olga Kenyon, Brookner summed up her life and the mental state that turned her toward fiction at the age of fifty-three. "Mine was a dreary Victorian story: I nursed my parents till they died. I write out of a sense of powerlessness and injustice, because I felt invisible and passive."

A Prodigious Output Brookner wrote her first novel, *A Start in Life* (published in the United States as *The Debut*), during her summer vacation. "It was most undramatic," she told Amanda Smith in 1985.

Nothing seemed to be happening and I could have got very sorry for myself and miserable . . . and I'd always got such nourishment from fiction. I wondered—it just occurred to me to see whether I could do it. I didn't think I could. I just wrote a page, the first page, and nobody seemed to think it was wrong. . . . So I wrote another page, and another, and at the end of the summer I had a story. That's all I wanted to do—tell a story.

The influential editor Liz Calder accepted the novel for Jonathan Cape.

A Start in Life was followed by two more novels in 1982 and 1983, establishing Brookner's reputation for insightful and stylistic prose. This reputation was cemented by her fourth book, *Hotel du Lac*, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984. Not one to rest on her laurels, Brookner has continued to publish roughly a novel a year for over twenty-five years.

Despite her success in two highly public careers, Brookner's has been a quiet, fastidious life. She is not part of the social scene of literary London. For many years she has lived in the same small apartment in Chelsea in London, and her needs have been simple: no word processor, answering machine, microwave, cellular telephone, or car.

Works in Literary Context

With the appearance of her first novel in 1981, Anita Brookner immediately secured a reputation as one of the finest stylists among contemporary writers of fiction in Britain. After a late start as a novelist, Brookner has proved to be a prolific source of the morally engaged novel of consciousness and of exquisite sensibility. Equally admired and criticized for her attention to the themes of stoicism, loneliness, and melancholy, which beset her contemporary, genteel characters, Brookner's voice is instantly recognizable as the most recent contributor to a tradition of distinguished British female writers that includes Jane Austen, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, Elizabeth Taylor, and Barbara Pym.

Brookner's work both borrows from and differs from that of the writers she admires. Like Charles Dickens (and despite the limitations of her range), she is a chronicler of London life. Like Henry James, she is an intense moralist, examining the dilemmas of the upper class. Like Marcel Proust, she has a deep interest in psychological obsession and the failure of desire. Brookner has a compelling interest in the individual and the family, in romance, and in the ways that art structures expectations. She also writes in a thoughtful and sometimes combative dialogue, using the cruder versions of the feminism of her day, with the topic of the life of the solitary, independent, intelligent woman being one of the hallmarks of her fiction.

Autobiography While Brookner's novels have varied in plot and subject, many critics have pointed out that much of her fiction is autobiographical to some extent. Her heroines, such as Dr. Ruth Weiss from *A Start in Life* or Kitty Maule from *Providence*, are intelligent, solitary women who must make sense of the connections, and lack of connections, with the people around them. Themes of loneliness, cultural and social isolation, and complex moral dilemmas—issues with which Brookner herself has had to deal—permeate her work.

Works in Critical Context

Acknowledged as one of the most successful prose stylists of twentieth-century British fiction, Anita Brookner has attracted both the rabid devotion and critical scrutiny of a major author. She established a reputation for consistent and insightful fiction with her first three novels and then won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1984 for *Hotel du Lac*.

Hotel du Lac John Gross of the *New York Times*, who considers Brookner “one of the finest novelists of her generation,” calls *Hotel du Lac* “a novel about romance, and reality, and the gap between them and the way the need for romance persists in the full knowledge of that gap.” What distinguishes this novel from Brookner's previous novels, says Anne Tyler in the *Washington Post Book World*, is that in *Hotel du Lac*, “the heroine is more

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brookner's famous contemporaries include:

Nora Ephron (1941–): American film director, producer, screenwriter, and novelist best known for her romantic comedies. She is a triple nominee for the Academy Award for Original Screenplay.

Anne Tyler (1941–): American novelist best known for winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1989 for her novel *Breathing Lessons*. Tyler was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 1986 and National Book Critics Circle Award winner in 1985.

Charles, Prince of Wales (1948–): The eldest son of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Charles is heir apparent to the thrones of sixteen sovereign states known as the Commonwealth realms. He was married to Diana of Wales from 1981 to 1996.

Iris Murdoch (1919–1999): Irish novelist and Booker Prize winner known for such novels as *Under the Net* (1954).

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and poet most famous for his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

philosophical from the outset, more self-reliant, more conscious that a solitary life is not, after all, an unmitigated tragedy.”

With the award of the Booker Prize for *Hotel du Lac*, Brookner received accolades that assured her of a place among the ranks of the best contemporary writers of British fiction. Many critics and readers regard it as Brookner's best novel to date. However, along with a greater readership, the novel also crystallized criticism of Brookner's writing, as she was now seen as an important enough writer to attack. For example, Adam Mars-Jones, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, stresses the “masochism” of Brookner's view of romance and comments that “*Hotel du Lac* works so hard at the limpness of its heroine that it has a perversely bracing effect.” The novel, in his view, “is divided between narcissism and self-mortification, between wallowing and astringency.”

From this time onward, the annual publication of one of Brookner's novels automatically attracted reviews, commentary, and interviews. Noting, too, her interest in the topic of humiliation and failure, she said that in England her books were criticized for being depressing. She attributed this to her “semi-outsider” position in England and her affinity with French life. While some critics fault the lack of thematic variety in her works, many regard Brookner's elegant prose and detailed descriptions of place, her use of literary devices common to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French literature, and her confessional tone as features that elevate her fiction above the romance genre.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brookner's Booker Prize-winning *Hotel du Lac* focuses on an Englishwoman who travels to Geneva to rethink her life. Other works about foreigners in Geneva include:

Daisy Miller (1878), a novella by Henry James. The ebullient young American girl, Daisy Miller, travels to Switzerland and Italy and falls victim to her own flighty nature in this oft-studied short work by James.

Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party (1980), a novel by Graham Greene. This somewhat bleak novel centers on a rich Englishman living in Geneva who gives dinner parties in which he humiliates his guests.

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. Geneva is the hometown of the original mad scientist Victor Frankenstein, and much of the action in the novel takes place in and around Switzerland.

Responses to Literature

1. Brookner has received both praise and criticism for her portrayal of women. Choose one of Brookner's female central characters and examine her as a role model for women. What messages does that character send? Would you want to live that life?
2. Brookner was a successful art historian before she became a novelist. Research other writers who had prior careers and then turned to writing later in life. How does their previous work experience affect their writing careers, overriding themes, and literary techniques?
3. Brookner claimed that Henry James and Charles Dickens were the two novelists who influenced her the most. Research either one and look for signs of influence in Brookner's work.
4. *Hotel du Lac* won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984. Who were the other finalists, and why was it a controversial year for this prize?
5. Brookner has been much admired as a prose stylist. Choose one passage from her novels that is particularly well written and examine it for literary techniques. Which of these techniques do you think she employed consciously and which intuitively?

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Brigid Brophy

BORN: 1929, London, England

DIED: 1995, Louth, Lincolnshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, essays, short stories, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The King of a Rainy Country (1956)

The Finishing Touch (1963)

In Transit (1969)

Overview

Brigid Brophy, who died in 1995 after a long struggle against multiple sclerosis, lived one of the most interesting, emblematic careers among writers of her generation. She was an "enfant terrible" of the 1960s, a fearless controversial figure, a tireless champion of a broader sphere of human and animal rights, and a campaigner for the dignity and prosperity of the writer's profession. Brophy produced a varied and extensive body of work. Influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Ronald Firbank's literary style, and George Bernard Shaw's aesthetics, Brophy's writings express unconventional and controversial opinions about modern relationships, religious education in schools, and gender issues.



Brigid Brophy Brophy, *Brigid*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Her work often incorporates elements of farce, word play, and witty social satire. After early and extravagant fame, she later lapsed into obscurity. By the time of her death, Brophy's work was mostly out of print.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Irish Influences Born June 12, 1929, the only daughter of Irish novelist John Brophy, Brigid Antonia Brophy spent her childhood in London but frequently visited Ireland and was raised on Irish ideas. She was a precocious reader and, she maintained, a hereditary writer. As a child, she began writing poetic dramas and read works by Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and Ronald Firbank. Reportedly, she read James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) at the age of nine. She learned English and Latin from her mother and the beginnings of her tools as a writer from her father. She remained devoted to both parents all through their lives but said, ten years after her father's death, that she had been closer to him because they had more in common.

Brophy began her education at St. Paul's Girls' School and later attended four terms at Oxford University, where she excelled as a scholar but was expelled for

disciplinary problems. After Oxford, she took a variety of clerical jobs, writing in her spare time. Her first collection of stories, *The Crown Princess, and Other Stories*, appeared in 1953, receiving some admiring reviews. Later that year she published her first novel, *Hackenfeller's Ape* (1953), which won the Cheltenham Literary Festival first prize for a first novel. The book, which deals with animal rights, among other topics, reflected and fostered an interest in animal rights among intellectuals at Oxford. This led to the formation of the Oxford Group, which aimed to establish animal rights and promote the idea of humane treatment of animals in mainstream culture. Brophy was instrumental in the actions of the Oxford Group, and an article she wrote on the subject of animal rights for the *Sunday Times* in 1965 is often cited as one of the first major works of journalism on the topic.

Literary Success and a Daunting Diagnosis From there, she went on to publish several novels, a number of short stories, and nonfiction books ranging from collections of journalistic essays to biographies. In 1974 Brophy joined the Writers Guild of Great Britain as a member of its executive council and the Anti-Vivisection Society of Great Britain, serving as vice president; the two positions reflected well her lifelong commitments to both art and activism in various forms. She published her last novel, *Palace without Chairs*, in 1978. The next year Brophy was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which worsened until she was housebound and confined to a wheelchair.

Until 1979, Brophy remained a public figure; she broadcast regularly on television and radio, wrote copiously for periodicals, and appeared at literary festivals. Most of her novels appeared in the 1960s; her campaigns on behalf of writers occupied more of her time in the 1970s. She published four books after the onset of her illness, including *Baroque 'n' Roll* (1987), a collection of essays that recount her struggles with the debilitating disease. Eventually Brophy was moved into a London nursing home. She died on August 7, 1995.

Works in Literary Context

Brophy took on the role of novelist, essayist, critic, and advocate for writers and social causes. She reflected all of what was odd and endearing about the 1960s, writing about feminism, pacifism, atheism, vegetarianism, and animal rights, among other things. Brophy had much to speak out on in that turbulent era, and she expressed her controversial opinions on everything from marriage to the Vietnam War in a witty, direct way. According to critic Leslie Dock, Brophy's fiction incorporates musical patterns and shifting tempos, a use of language meant to mirror cinematic or photographic effects, and architectural images that enrich the narrative texture.

An Untimely (Post-)Modernist? In the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1995), Steven Moore attributes the unjust neglect of Brophy's work to her being

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brophy's famous contemporaries include:

Václav Havel (1936–): Renowned playwright and author, Havel was both the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the independent Czech Republic.

W. G. Sebald (1944–2001): Sebald has been hailed by many as the greatest German writer of the postwar period. His novels are known for their lucid but surreal shifts in perspective and style, for the way they attempt to come to terms with history and memory by approaching them from a variety of angles.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): After Joseph Stalin, Brezhnev was the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

John Arden (1930–1973): Arden, an English playwright, is associated with the social realist drama of the 1950s. He later turned to experimental theater and improvisation.

Paul Bowles (1910–1999): American composer, novelist, and travel writer, Bowles has been celebrated for his 1949 novel *The Sheltering Sky*, which was successfully adapted to film in 1990 by Italian director and Academy Award-winner Bernardo Bertolucci.

“cursed for being too far ahead of her time; in her 1953 novel *Hackenfeller's Ape* she was writing about animal rights long before the cause became popular, and in 1969 she published the definitive novel about gender confusion (*In Transit*) long before there was a critical context for the topic.” Critics are unable to place her as modernist, realist, or postmodernist, although *In Transit: An Heroicyclic Novel*, at least, possesses features “today associated with modernism/postmodernism: tones that run from deadpan black humor to specious seriousness to mock learnedness, typographical unconventionalities, metafictional asides, fractured plots and subplots and juxtaposed set pieces, diagrams and puzzles, puns and portmanteau words, genre parodies and conflation, intertextuality and Barthesian bliss, camp and kitsch.”

Works in Critical Context

Throughout her career, Brophy was one of the most controversial writers in England, promoting her views in books and articles as well as on television and radio. For instance, she advocated for and succeeded in the establishment of the British Public Lending Right, which pays royalties to authors whenever their books are checked out of libraries; referred to marriage as “an immoral institution”; exhorted the better treatment of animals long before it was popular; and wrote about gender confusion

before a critical context for the topic existed. Many critics have admired Brophy's wit and social criticism, although others have considered her experiments with language, structure, and narrative as major hindrances to comprehending the themes of her fiction. However, Brophy's critical reputation has declined considerably since the early 1980s—the majority of her books remain out of print—despite the freshness and contemporary literary relevance of many of her ideas. Chris Hopkins has argued that this is in part because Brophy's work resists standard literary classifications and categories like realism, modernism, and postmodernism. He has also concluded, however, that Brophy's “books have much to contribute to the current interest in [the postmodern feature of playing with boundaries], as well as to a more various history of twentieth-century literature.”

Black Ship to Hell *Black Ship to Hell*, published in 1962, is an ambitious exploration of the dynamics of hate. Often maddeningly mechanical in its application of Freudian theory to life, it is still an intellectual tour de force. It was fiercely attacked by reviewers, but Peter Porter summed it up accurately in *The Listener*: “Miss Brophy has found a new way of being creative. She disguises her book as a critical work; it seems to me a loving fiction of opinion.”

In Transit Brophy's avant-garde work *In Transit: An Heroicyclic Novel* was a difficult book for some reviewers to characterize. In S. J. Newman's opinion, “though subtitled ‘an heroicyclic novel,’ *In Transit* is less a novel than a cross between a neurotic essay in criticism and a farcical nightmare... The book is best described as an anti-antinovel... [and] the protagonist... is nothing more than a voice.” Though some reviewers could not discern a plot, those who did explain that a young girl, Patricia, is waiting at an airport, “a sort of Kennedy Terminal of the psyche,” described Elizabeth Hardwick in *Vogue*, when a sudden amnesia sets in. The girl's identity fades; indeed, she cannot remember her name or her gender. The remainder of the story describes the girl's struggle for personal redefinition.

According to Robert Phelps in *Life* magazine, *In Transit* brings to the forefront the concept of the multifaceted individual: “At his innermost center, ... [a person] is many things, many appetites, all genders. ... In his soul, he is as polymorphous as the angels. ... Patricia's breakdown is actually a break-through: her tough little ego is fighting for its birthright, and on the last page of *In Transit*, she has died, been reborn, and is about to assume a more spacious selfhood.” Guy Davenport, in *National Review*, was less enthused, writing, “It is not at all clear just what's going on by way of action.” Davenport, like others, found that *In Transit's* experimental style leads to confusion. But what he, with many reviewers, may well have neglected is the way in which such confusion is mimetic. That is, in provoking an almost paralyzing confusion in readers, Brophy asks us

to identify all the more with her gender-troubled protagonist.

Responses to Literature

1. Research the origins of the animal rights movement and Brophy's involvement. What is the relationship between Brophy's writing and the animal rights movement? How does her involvement in this movement relate to the themes that are present throughout her literary production?
2. Discuss the theme of identity and gender confusion in *In Transit*. What is the significance of the airport setting in this novel?
3. In what ways do Brophy's experimental approaches to fiction enhance and detract from your ability to comprehend her themes and positions? Choose one particular novel and imagine how its meaning would be shifted if it were presented in a "straightforward" fashion. Structure your thoughts in the form of an analytical essay, with a clear, arguable thesis.
4. Research the literary movement of naturalism. In a class discussion, explain why Brophy's *The King of a Rainy Country* has been identified as belonging to this tradition.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brophy's style is part of a trend in literature that seeks to get at human truths through the experience of confusion. Other works that ask us to press against and beyond the boundaries of our own understanding include:

Absalom, Absalom! (1936), a novel by William Faulkner.

Although definitively a product of the modernist moment in history, this class tragedy of the American Deep South heralds the arrival of literary postmodernism.

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), a novel by Thomas Pynchon.

This postmodernist novel has the undisputed virtue of brevity; it has a fast-moving plot and is open to several interpretations.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman

(1759), a novel by Laurence Sterne. This classic British novel includes long narratives and is filled with many twists and inversions.

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning

BORN: 1806, Durham, England

DIED: 1861, Florence, Italy

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850)

Aurora Leigh (1856)

Essays on the Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets (1863)

Overview

Elizabeth Barrett Browning is recognized as a powerful voice of social criticism, as well as an innovative poet whose experiments with rhyme and diction have influenced movements in poetry throughout the years. Although Barrett Browning is best remembered today for *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a collection of love poems, she also wrote about social oppression with the same depth of emotion.



Elizabeth Barrett Browning Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Large Family with a Domineering Father

Elizabeth Barrett was born on March 6, 1806, near Durham, England, to Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett, a native of St. James, Jamaica, and Mary Graham-Clarke. The oldest of eleven surviving children of a wealthy and domineering father, she had eight brothers and two sisters. While forbidding his daughters to marry, her father nevertheless encouraged their scholarly pursuits. Her father was so proud of Elizabeth's extraordinary ability in classical studies that he privately published her 1,462-line narrative *The Battle of Marathon* when she was fourteen.

An Accomplished Scholar and Writer, Despite Illness

In 1821, Barrett and her sisters began suffering from headaches, side pain, twitching muscles, and general discomfort. While her sisters recovered quickly, Barrett did not. She was treated for a spinal problem, though doctors could not diagnose her exact malady. Recent examination of Barrett's symptoms has led to a hypothesis that she suffered from either tuberculosis of the spine or bronchial difficulties. Tuberculosis infected nearly seven in ten people in England in the early nineteenth

century, before doctors understood how the disease was spread.

Even with her physical problems, Barrett continued to study and write, and she anonymously published *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* in 1826. The volume established what would become a theme in contemporary criticism—Barrett's unusual, even "unwomanly," scholarly knowledge. Barrett published *Prometheus Bound: Translated from the Greek of Aeschylus, and Miscellaneous Poems* in 1833, again anonymously, followed by *The Seraphim, and Other Poems*, the first book published under her own name, in 1838. The collection attracted much favorable attention.

During Barrett's early years of publishing, she suffered two devastating losses: the unexpected death of her mother and the forced auction of her family home. Barrett's father moved the family to London in 1835. At this time, Barrett was in such poor health that her physician recommended she live for a while in a warmer climate. Torquay, on the south coast of England, was selected, and she remained there for three years as an invalid as various members of her family took turns living with her and caring for her.

When she returned to the family's London home, she felt that she had left her youth behind and that the future held little more than permanent infirmity and confinement to her bedroom. Despite her frail health, she was more fortunate in her circumstances than most female writers of her time. Thanks to inheritances from her grandmother and her uncle, she was the only one of the Barrett children who was independently wealthy. As the oldest daughter in a family without a mother, she normally would have been expected to spend much of her time supervising the domestic servants, but her weakness prevented her from leaving her room. Relieved of all household burdens and financial cares, she was free to devote herself to her intellectual and creative pursuits.

Literary Success and Marriage

Publication of her 1844 two-volume collection *Poems* established Barrett as one of the major poets of her day. The most important work of her life, however, turned out to be a single poem. Barrett admired the work of Robert Browning, a little-known poet six years her junior, and she expressed her appreciation of him in a poem of her own. Browning responded in a letter to Barrett, the first of 574 that they exchanged over the next twenty months. The letter began abruptly: "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett." He continued, "I do, as I say, love these Books with all my heart—and I love you too." Browning became a frequent visitor, not only inspiring Barrett's poetry but also encouraging her to exercise outdoors to improve her health.

In September 1846, ignoring her history of poor health and her father's disapproval, Barrett quietly married Browning. Her father never spoke to her again. The couple moved to Italy and settled in Florence in 1848,

where their only child was born in March 1849. The birth of her son and the intellectually stimulating presence of her husband inspired a creative energy in Barrett Browning that she had never before experienced. She complained to her husband that, in comparison to his worldly experiences, she had lived like a blind poet.

Sonnets from the Portuguese The courtship of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning inspired Barrett Browning's series of forty-four Petrarchan sonnets, recognized as one of the finest sonnet sequences in English. Written during their 1845–1846 correspondence, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* remained Barrett Browning's secret until 1849, when she presented the collection to her husband. Despite his conviction that a writer's private life should remain sealed from the public, he felt the quality of these works demanded publication. They appeared in Barrett Browning's 1850 edition of *Poems*, her personal history thinly concealed by a title that implies the poems are translations.

Italian Politics Barrett Browning's subject matter became increasingly bold. "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," a dramatic monologue, powerfully criticizes institutionalized slavery, showing herself to be in full sympathy with the abolitionist movement in the United States. *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) records Barrett Browning's reactions to the Italian struggle for unity. The unification of the various Italian states into one country in 1861 was the culmination of a movement known as the *Risorgimento*, which was made up of a series of regional revolutions and struggles in Italy. These were seen as a continuation of the American and French revolutions decades earlier. Barrett Browning was in sympathy with the Italian revolutionaries. The volume showed her increasing conviction that poetry should be actively involved in life and, perhaps more importantly, her confidence that a female poet should speak out about political and social issues. In this respect, Barrett Browning differed from such English writers as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë or Emily Brontë, all of whom seemed to avoid any mention of world politics in their novels.

Barrett Browning's passionate engagement in Italian politics was also the subject of her 1860 collection, *Poems before Congress*. Barrett Browning criticizes political inaction that allows crimes against individual liberty. Furthermore, she focuses on a nation's moral identity and asserts that it is a woman's responsibility to be vocal about political issues. Instead of praising Barrett Browning's combination of womanly feeling and manly thought, as notices of earlier works had done, reviewers of this volume complained that she had trespassed into masculine subjects.

Novelistic Experiment Barrett Browning remained concerned about social issues in England during this period as well. Her *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is an ambitious novel in blank verse that embodies both Barrett Brown-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Browning's famous contemporaries include:

George Sand (1804–1876): "George Sand" was the pen name of Aurore Dupin, a French feminist and novelist who lived an unconventional life.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): Most work by this famously reclusive American poet was discovered and published after her death.

Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855): A close friend of Barrett Browning's, Mitford was an English novelist and playwright.

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872): Mazzini, an Italian politician and revolutionary, advocated uniting the various states and kingdoms into one independent republic via a popular uprising.

Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882): Garibaldi was an Italian soldier who was instrumental in bringing about a unified Italian republic.

Charles Fourier (1772–1837): This French philosopher created the word *féminisme* in 1837 and argued that women's rights were a logical extension of social progress.

ing's strengths and weaknesses as a writer. It bluntly argues that the topic of ambitious poetry should not be the remote chivalry of a distant past but the present day as experienced by ordinary people. *Aurora Leigh* achieves this goal of societal relevance, for it deals with an array of pressing Victorian social problems such as the exploitation of seamstresses, limited employment opportunities for women, sexual double standards, drunkenness, domestic violence, schisms between economic and social classes, and various plans for reform. Nothing stirred up more controversy than Barrett Browning's candid treatment of the situation of the "fallen woman"—a subject that was considered by the Victorian public to be outside the sight or understanding of a serious novelist or poet.

Barrett Browning fell ill with a sore throat and cold on June 20, 1861. A rupture of abscesses in her lungs proved fatal, and she died in her husband's arms on June 29. In early 1862, Robert Browning published a final collection of his wife's poetry as *Last Poems*, compiled from a list she had drawn up herself. Some of the twenty-eight poems were written prior to her marriage, some on recent political and personal events. Some of the pieces in *Last Poems* address the power imbalance in relationships between men and women. Reviews of this final volume sounded familiar inconsistencies: commending Barrett Browning for her purity and womanly nature while charging that her verse was coarse, irreverent, and infected by excessive anti-English political fervor.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's work argued, in part, that women were as capable as men. Here are some other works that argue for equality between the sexes:

A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1791), a nonfiction work by Mary Wollstonecraft. This text argues that women should receive an education and similar rights to men.

The Woman in Her House (1881), a nonfiction work by Concepción Arenal. In this book, the Spanish feminist argues that women should aim to be more than simply wives and mothers.

Story of an African Farm (1973), a novel by Mary Daly. The South African writer's first novel tells of three white children growing up in South Africa.

"Ain't I a Woman?" (1851), by Sojourner Truth. This speech, given at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention by a political activist and former slave, argues against the myth of the delicate woman.

Works in Literary Context

Barrett Browning's unorthodox rhyme and diction, once scorned, have been cited more recently as daring experiments. Kathryn Burlinson writes that "the half-rhymes, as well as the metrical irregularities, neologisms, compound-words, and lacunae that infuriated or disturbed her contemporaries now appear among the most interesting aspects of her work. [Virginia] Woolf's claim that Barrett Browning had 'some complicity in the development of modern poetry' is an acute reminder that she influenced many later poets, not only the Pre-Raphaelites but 20th-century authors such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon."

Unconventional Sonnets *Sonnets from the Portuguese* breaks with the conventions of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence—so closely associated with Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare—by making the speaker a woman. Such poems were highly unusual in English literature during Barrett Browning's time because they directly express female physical desire. The poems further challenge Petrarchan conventions by making marriage not the obstruction of love but its fulfillment. Margaret Reynolds commented, "This time, in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, the speaking subject is clearly a woman and a poet. Her beloved is in a different style too, he is also a poet and a speaking subject. By the end of the sequence of forty-four poems they are equal . . . she escapes an old regime where she was enjoined to silence or riddles, and she transforms herself into a speaking subject who can take her own story to market."

A New Kind of Fiction This blank-verse poem, nearly eleven thousand lines longer than Milton's *Paradise Lost*, constitutes a new genre, for it is simultaneously an epic and a drama. In a sense, Barrett Browning's version of modern epic develops from Wordsworth's own adaptation of the genre for his time; however, while he chose the poet's autobiography as his subject, Barrett Browning contrived an ambitious fiction that is simultaneously an autobiography of an artist, a love story, and a poem of social protest. Novelist George Eliot said that she read *Aurora Leigh* at least three times and declared Barrett Browning "the first woman who has produced a work which exhibits all the peculiar powers without the negations of her sex."

Works in Critical Context

The critical view of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a major poet—not to mention the greatest female poet of her time—persisted nearly to the end of the nineteenth century, when attention shifted to her life. Interest in her life then overshadowed the value of her work. As Barrett Browning became romanticized as a loving wife, her outspoken critique of her culture, her visionary social critique, and even her technical daring faded from the picture, leaving in its place a sentimental parody of both the work and the woman. Reconsideration of her poetry by feminist critics since the 1970s, however, increasingly values its modernity, specifically in its depiction of sexual politics and more broadly in its explanation of economic and political issues.

Sonnets from the Portuguese When *Sonnets from the Portuguese* was first published, most critics ignored the work. It was not until a few years later, when the autobiographical nature of the poems became known, that the sonnets received widespread critical recognition. Response to the poems was glowingly favorable. Early commentators praised their sincerity and intensity; most agreed that no woman had ever written in such openly passionate tones. In addition, it was argued that the emotion of Barrett Browning's verse was effectively balanced by the strict technical restraints of the sonnet form. Several critics compared the adept technique utilized in the sonnets to that of John Milton and Shakespeare.

By the turn of the century, critics became more cautious in their praise. Barrett Browning's emotional expression was reevaluated in later years; what had been earlier defined as impassioned honesty was now considered overbearingly sentimental. Angela Leighton says, "Recent feminist critics . . . tend to pass over these ideologically unfashionable poems. Somehow, their subject and their inspiration, which lack the larger sexual politics of *Aurora Leigh*, strike contemporary critics as naked and naive. They are, it is said with wearying regularity, simply too 'sincere.'"

On the other hand, some critics have stressed such technical merits of the sonnets as their structure and

imagery and have expressed admiration for the cycle in its entirety. Jerome Mazzaro writes, “At times, in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, form and content are so deliberately left at odds to mark not excess but empty and artificial boundaries that periodically, on grounds independent of sincerity, critics . . . have called the competence of Barrett Browning’s verse technique into question.”

Both as a revealing chronicle of a famous love story and as a technically skilled rendering of poetry’s most demanding form, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* endures as a testimony to Barrett Browning’s poetic skills. According to Reynolds, they are “accessible enough to be used by everyone, sentimental enough to be felt by us all. Since . . . the so-called Browning love letters were published, the Brownings’ romance and Barrett Browning’s poems have become the true measure of romantic love.”

Responses to Literature

1. Barret Browning’s sonnet “How Do I Love Thee?” is by far her most well known. Read the sonnet for yourself and think carefully about the poet’s choices throughout the poem. What do you think accounts for this poem’s enduring popularity?
2. Think about the writers, actors, and musicians that you like. How does knowing the details of their personal lives affect your experience of their art? In other words, do you get distracted by their personal life when reading, watching, or listening to their work?
3. Today, most people accept that men and women are equally intelligent. However, far fewer women than men pursue math and science careers, but girls tend to get higher grades than boys do. Using your library and the Internet, research the possible reasons for these unusual facts and then write a plan for “leveling the playing field.”
4. Barret Browning was avidly interested in the unification of Italy, or the *Risorgimento*, that was under way while she lived in that country. An excellent novel set during this period is Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard* (1958), a huge best seller in Italy. The novel was made into an award-winning film of the same name in 1963.

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Robert Browning

BORN: 1812, Camberwell, England

DIED: 1889, Venice, Italy

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession (1833)

Paracelsus (1835)

Men and Women (1855)

Dramatis Personae (1864)

The Poetical Works of Robert Browning (1868)

The Ring and the Book (1868)

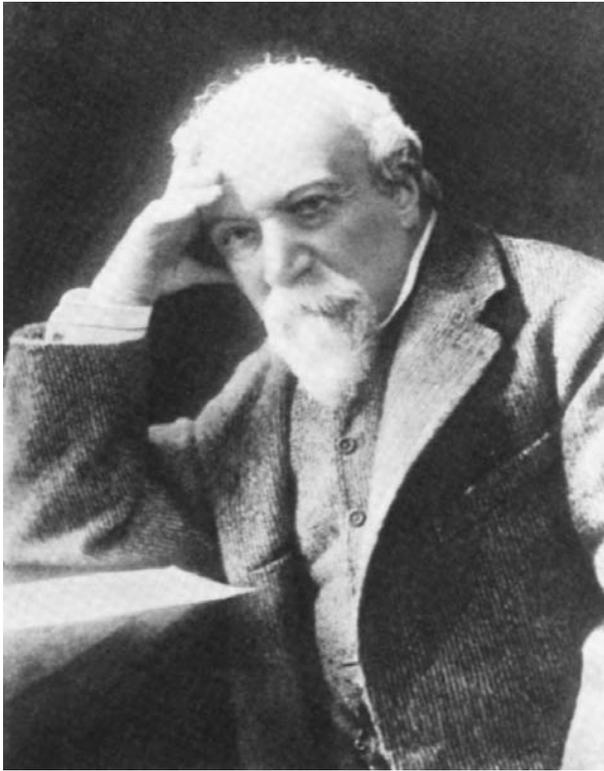
Overview

Victorian poet Robert Browning is chiefly remembered for his mastery of the dramatic monologue and for the remarkable diversity and range of his works. By vividly portraying a central character against a social background, his poems probe complex human motives in a variety of historical periods. As a highly individual force in the history of English poetry, Browning made significant innovations in language and versification and had a profound influence on numerous twentieth-century poets, including such key figures as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Browning was born on May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, London. His father, a senior clerk in the Bank of England, provided a comfortable living for his family and passed on a love of art and literature to his son. His mother, an excellent amateur pianist, instilled in him a love of music. Encouraged to read in his father’s library, which housed a collection of over six thousand volumes, Browning’s intellectual development included the poetry of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, as well as coursework in Latin, Greek, English, and German. In 1828, Browning entered the University of London, but he dropped out after half a year, determined to pursue a career as a poet.

Mixed Success with Early Poems and Plays Browning began to write verses at the age of six. His first published work was *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833), which was issued anonymously. The hero of the



Robert Browning *Browning, Robert, photograph.*

poem is a young poet, obviously Browning himself, who bares his soul to a patient heroine. Although his next poem, *Paracelsus* (1835), did not satisfy Browning, it brought favorable reviews and important friendships with fellow poets William Wordsworth and Thomas Carlyle. Browning also became acquainted with the actor William C. Macready. Encouraged, Browning turned to writing drama. Unfortunately, Browning's first play, *Strafford* (1837), closed after only five performances. During the next ten years, Browning wrote six other plays, none of which were successfully produced. All of Browning's plays are marred by overemphasis of character analysis and lack of dramatic action.

In 1838 Browning traveled to northern Italy to acquire firsthand knowledge of its setting and atmosphere for his next long poem, *Sordello* (1840), but it, too, was panned by critics who called it obscure and unreadable. After the disappointing reception of his drama along with two of his poetic works, Browning turned to the dramatic monologue. He experimented with and perfected this form in the long poem *Pippa Passes* (1841) and two collections of shorter poems, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).

Marriage to Elizabeth Barrett Despite their overall lack of favorable attention, Browning's works had famous admirers, including Elizabeth Barrett, who was a respected and popular poet when in 1844 she praised

Browning in one of her works and received a grateful letter from him in response. The two met the following year, fell in love, and in 1846, ignoring the disapproval of her father, eloped to Italy, where—except for brief intervals—they spent all of their time together. It was there that their son, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, was born in 1849. The Brownings lived in Italy during the climax of the *Risorgimento*, or the movement toward Italian unification, which culminated in the establishment of the unified kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Dramatic Monologues and Mature Poetry In 1855, Browning published *Men and Women*, a collection of fifty-one poems. Though the volume contained many of the dramatic monologues that are best known and loved by modern readers, it was not popular with Browning's contemporaries. Nevertheless, it did receive several positive critical reviews.

After gradually declining in health for several years, Elizabeth Barrett Browning died on June 29, 1861. Browning found that he could no longer remain in Florence because of the memories it held for him. He resolved to “go to England, and live and work and write.” In 1864 he published *Dramatis Personae*. Though some of the dramatic monologues in the collection are complex, difficult, and too long, this was the first of Browning's works to be popular with the general reading public. His popularity increased with the publication of *The Ring and the Book* (1869). Enthusiastically received by the public, this long poem, composed of twelve dramatic monologues in which the major characters give their interpretations of a crime, resulted in Browning's becoming a prominent figure in London society. He was a frequent guest at dinners, concerts, and receptions. In the next ten years, Browning wrote with great energy, publishing a volume almost every year.

Later Years as a Victorian “Sage” By 1870, Browning had a solid literary reputation. In his later years, Browning became that curious phenomenon, the Victorian sage, widely regarded for his knowledge and his explorations of Victorian life's great philosophical questions. In 1880 the Browning Society was established in London for the purpose of paying tribute to and studying his poems, and near the end of his life he was the recipient of various other honors, including a degree from Oxford University and an audience with Queen Victoria. Following his death in 1889 while staying in Venice, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Although Browning's early poems were not successes, they are important for understanding Browning's poetic aspirations and for the opportunity they provide the reader to trace Browning's developing philosophy and developing poetic techniques. As Browning learned to temper the Romantic idealism of Shelley, he began to develop the techniques of representing character action.

The result was a combination of dramatic and lyric expression that would take form in the dramatic monologue.

Dramatic Monologue Scholars agree that Browning's place in English literature is based to a great extent on his contribution to the poetic genre of the dramatic monologue, the form he adopted for a large number of his works. With his diverse topics, striking use of language, and stylistic creativity, his groundbreaking accomplishments in this genre constitute the basis of his reputation. Literary historians define the dramatic monologue as a poem in which the speaker's character is gradually disclosed in a dramatic situation through his or her own words. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," for example, the hypocritical nature of the narrator becomes increasingly apparent to the reader as the poem progresses. As the monk speaks, he reveals aspects of his personality of which even he is unaware; the voice of the poet is absent from the poem altogether.

Whether he chose a historical or an imaginary figure, a reliable or an unreliable narrator, Browning evolved the techniques of exposing a character's personality to an unprecedented degree of subtlety and psychological depth. As few previous poets had done, he explored the makeup of the mind, scrutinizing the interior lives of his characters. His protagonists vary from sophisticated theologians and artists to simple peasant children, spanning a range of personalities from the pure and innocent to the borderline psychotic. A considerable number of Browning's men and women, however, exemplify his overriding interest in thwarted or twisted personalities whose lives are scarred by jealousy, lust, or avarice.

A World of Words In addition to its psychological depth, critics agree that one of the main strengths of Browning's work is its sheer abundance and variety in terms of subject matter, time, place, and character. His difficult subjects demand intellectual effort from the reader and reflect the enormous breadth of his interests in science, history, art, and music. His primary source of inspiration was Renaissance Italy; its unsurpassed artistic accomplishments and rich religious and political history provided him with many of his themes and characters. Nevertheless, his settings range from the Middle Ages to his own era, reflecting a diverse assortment of cultures.

Browning's poetic diction also shows the influence of many cultures and fields of interest. He introduced a large and varied vocabulary into his works, using not only colloquial and traditionally unpoetic language, but also obscure and specialized terms drawn from the past or from contemporary science. Rough syntax, contractions, and the rejection of the vague imagery of romantic poetry in favor of more exact and blunt forms of expression also characterize his writings. Like his use of language, Browning's approach to verse was frequently unconventional. In assessing this facet of his poetry, scholars

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Browning's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England from 1837, Victoria wrote numerous letters and over one hundred volumes of journals.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): This American author wrote *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), his famous account of his two-year experiment in self-sufficiency.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): Darwin was a naturalist and scientist who introduced the concept of evolutionary natural selection.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865): This British author wrote the first biography of Charlotte Brontë, which sparked controversy because it contained allegedly libelous statements that had to be retracted.

emphasize the variety of his invention—his use of uncommon rhymes and his metrical and stanzaic flexibility.

Works in Critical Context

Although Robert Browning's work consistently attracted critical attention, it was not always positive. When John Stuart Mill commented that the anonymous author of Browning's first major published piece (a semi-autobiographical love poem) seemed "possessed with a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than I ever knew in any sane human being," Browning resolved never again to reveal his thoughts directly to his readers. Henceforth, he would "only make men and women speak."

Early Reviewers The critical history of Browning's works initially shows a pattern of slow recognition followed by enormous popularity and even adulation in the two decades prior to his death. His reputation subsequently declined, but gradually recovered with the appearance in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s of important biographical and critical studies by William C. DeVane and other scholars. Browning's early reviewers often complained about the obscurity, incomprehensibility, and awkward language of his works, an impression largely arising from *Sordello*. When Browning did achieve fame with *Dramatis Personae* and *The Ring and the Book*, it was considerable. His Victorian audience considered him a profound philosophical thinker and teacher who had chosen poetry as his medium of instruction. Scholars point out that if his contemporaries continued to regard his poetry as rough-hewn, unnecessarily challenging, and obscure, they found its difficulties justified by what they

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Browning is best known for the dramatic monologue form in which a single speaker, who is not the poet, speaks to someone within the context of the poem. That audience remains silent during the monologue, creating a tension between what the speaker is saying and what that audience may be thinking. Here are other works that use the dramatic monologue form:

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's famous short story is narrated by a mentally unstable murderer.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), a poem by T.S. Eliot. The insecure, aging Prufrock ponders his place in the universe.

"Lady Lazarus" (1962), a poem by Sylvia Plath. Plath explores the legacy of the Holocaust in this dark poem.

Fires in the Mirror (1992), a play by Anna Deavere Smith. Smith weaves multiple monologues into this powerful work that examines the various points of view surrounding the 1991 Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn, New York.

considered the depth and profundity of his religious faith and optimism.

Twentieth-Century Criticism Although the Victorians were mistaken in their conception of Browning as philosophically cheerful and optimistic in his outlook on life, modern critics generally agree that this image contributed to the reaction against his works beginning at the turn of the century. In 1900, for example, George Santayana attacked Browning in an essay entitled "The Poetry of Barbarism," setting the tone for an era that found Browning's mind superficial, his poetic skills crude, and his language verbose. Describing the reasons for Browning's poor reputation throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century, DeVane stated that the poet's outlook on life "seemed incredibly false to generations harried by war and a vast social unrest." Despite this critical disfavor, scholars now recognize that Browning's works had a significant impact on early twentieth-century poets in both England and America.

Critics cite in particular the influence of Browning's diction on the poetic language of Ezra Pound and the effect of his dramatic monologues on the pivotal works of T.S. Eliot. In addition to its considerable influence, the value of Browning's work in its own right continues to be reassessed, with commentators focusing less on the philosophical aspects of his writings and more on his strengths as a genuinely original artist. While Browning's reputation has never again been as prominent as it was

during his lifetime, few scholars would deny his importance or influence.

Responses to Literature

1. The insanity defense typically refers to a plea that defendants are not guilty because they lacked the mental capacity to realize that they committed a wrong or appreciate why it was wrong. Some states also allow defendants to argue that they understood their behavior was criminal but were unable to control it. This is sometimes called the "irresistible impulse" defense. In Browning's dramatic monologue "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker, Porphyria's lover, speaks in a calm and steady voice, even though he has actually gone insane and killed her. Do you think Porphyria's lover can plead either the insanity defense or the irresistible impulse defense? What criteria would you use to assess his mental state both at the time of the murder and at the time he is telling about it?
2. You are the Duchess in "My Last Duchess." Write a letter to your best friend telling your side of the story.
3. In "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," Browning portrays an envious monk so irritated by the shortcomings of his fellow monks that he fantasizes about killing them. Do you think such sentiments might have been common among monks? Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the history of one of the major Christian monastic orders in Europe. Write a paper in which you describe the life of a typical monk.

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❑ Mikhail Bulgakov

BORN: 1891, Kiev, Russia
 DIED: 1940, Moscow, USSR (now Russia)
 NATIONALITY: Ukrainian
 GENRE: Fiction, Drama
 MAJOR WORKS:
The White Guard (1924)
The Fatal Eggs (1924)
Heart of a Dog (1925)
Days of the Turbins (1926)
The Master and Margarita (1966)

Overview

Considered one of the foremost satirists of postrevolutionary Russia, Mikhail Bulgakov is best known for his novel *The Master and Margarita* (1966), which is recognized as one of the greatest Russian novels of the century. Many of Bulgakov's works concern the adjustment of the Russian intellectual class to life under Communist rule. Due to official censorship of his manuscripts during his lifetime, Bulgakov's best works remained unpublished until after his death.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family Life Bulgakov was born on May 2, 1891, in Kiev to a middle-class intellectual family. Music, literature, and theater were important in the family life of the young Bulgakov, as was religion. His father, a professor at the Kiev theological academy, instilled in his son a belief in God and an interest in spiritual matters that he would retain throughout his life.

Served in World War I Bulgakov attended Kiev's most prestigious secondary school, then continued his education as a medical student at the University of Kiev and graduated with distinction in 1916. At the time, Russia was undergoing immense change. The country was embroiled in World War I while the last Russian czar,



Mikhail Bulgakov akg-images, London / RIA Nowosti

Nicholas II, was facing opposition to his rule through rebellions in 1905 and 1917 that ultimately led to his loss of power.

Assigned to noncombat duty in the Russian army during World War I, Bulgakov worked for several months in frontline military hospitals until he transferred to a remote village, where he served as the only doctor for an entire district. His trials as an inexperienced doctor working under primitive conditions, and the difficulties he faced as an educated man among the ignorant, superstitious peasants, are recorded in the autobiographical stories of *A Country Doctor's Notebooks*.

Wrote Amidst Turmoil Upon his discharge in 1918, Bulgakov returned to Kiev in time to witness the Bolshevik Red Army, the anti-Bolshevik White Army, German occupation forces, and Ukrainian nationalists struggle for control of the city, which experienced fourteen violent changes of government in two years. While Kiev was part of several Ukrainian states that were short-lived, the city became part of the Soviet Union in 1921. By the time Nicholas II and his family were executed in 1918 by Communist Party representatives, Vladimir Lenin, a Bolshevik party leader, had assumed power and Communist-controlled Russia had become the Soviet Union.

In 1919, Bulgakov published his first story, and the following year he abandoned medicine to devote his time

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bulgakov's famous contemporaries include:

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): One of the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution and commander of the Red Army during the ensuing civil war, Trotsky was exiled from the Soviet Union after Stalin's rise to power. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent while living in exile in Mexico.

Lavrentiy Beria (1889–1953): Notorious head of the Soviet intelligence agency during the height of Stalin's political purges, he was eventually sentenced to death by firing squad in the wake of Stalin's death (which many blamed him for).

Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948): Highly influential Russian film director whose use of the technique of montage and other innovations changed the language of film forever. His use of villains dressed in white in *Alexander Nevsky* would later inspire George Lucas's white-clad Stormtroopers in the *Star Wars* films.

Vaslav Nijinsky (1889–1950): Widely regarded as perhaps the most talented male ballet dancer of all time, the Russian Nijinsky was noted both for his ability—particularly his leaps—and his intensity.

Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971): Soviet premier beginning in the 1950s through the mid-1960s. During Bulgakov's life, Khrushchev was a minor party functionary. In the wake of Stalin's death, he was placed in power by a faction opposed to Beria, where he would go on to denounce Stalin's tyrannical reign.

to writing feuilletons (light, popular works of fiction) for local newspapers and plays for local theaters in the Caucasian city of Vladikavkaz. In 1921, he moved to Moscow, where he struggled to support himself and his first wife by editing and writing for various newspapers, a task that he described as “a flow of hopeless grey boredom, unbroken and inexorable.” With the partial publication in 1925 of the novel *The White Guard* in the magazine *Rossiya*, Bulgakov gained sufficient respect and popularity as an author to abandon newspaper work.

Political Controversy The realistic novel *The White Guard* (1924) was Bulgakov's first major triumph and is notable as one of the few works published in the Soviet Union that sympathetically portray the supporters of the anti-Bolshevik cause during the Russian revolutions. This outstanding novel was never reprinted in Russia, but Bulgakov's dramatic adaptation of it, *The Days of the Turbins* (1926), became a fixture on the Soviet stage. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, who took power in the late 1920s after the death of Lenin, attended the production fifteen times, viewing the play as ultimately favorable to the Bolsheviks.

From 1925 to 1928, Bulgakov worked in close association with the Moscow Art Theater as a writer, producer, and occasionally an actor. His plays were all well received by audiences but denounced by party critics. In 1929, Bulgakov's works were banned for their ideological nonconformity. For the next two years, Bulgakov was unable to earn a living, and in 1930, frustrated, depressed, and penniless, he wrote to the Soviet government asking to be allowed either to work or to emigrate. Stalin personally telephoned Bulgakov three weeks later and arranged for his appointment to the Art Theater as a producer. By this time, Stalin's repressive policies led to his iron-fisted control of all aspects of society, including severe policies in the arts.

Yet, in 1932, reportedly at Stalin's request once again, *Days of the Turbins* was returned to the stage, making it possible for Bulgakov to have other works published and performed. He remained with the Art Theater until 1936, when he resigned in protest over what he saw as the mishandling of his drama *A Cabal of Hypocrites*, at which time he became a librettist for the Bolshoi Theater. Though publishing little, Bulgakov wrote steadily despite suffering from poor health and becoming blind the year before his death from nephrosclerosis in 1940.

Posthumous Fame It was not until the 1960s that Bulgakov was fully rehabilitated by the Soviet authorities. At that time the manuscripts of numerous stories and plays and of three novels were discovered and published. These works established him as one of the finest twentieth-century Russian writers. The first of the novels to appear was *Black Snow*, written in the late 1930s and a satire on the Soviet theatrical world. The second, *The Heart of a Dog* (written in 1925), is a science fantasy in which human organs are transplanted into a dog, giving it the most disgusting qualities of mankind.

Bulgakov's acknowledged masterwork, *The Master and Margarita*, developed over a period of twelve years through the drafting of eight separate versions. According to biographers, Bulgakov knew that the novel would be his masterpiece and set aside all other projects during the last years of his illness to finish it before his death. He gave copies to his wife and to a friend for safekeeping, and they remained a closely guarded secret until Bulgakov's rehabilitation during Nikita Khrushchev's cultural thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s. (Khrushchev had taken power a few years after Stalin's death in 1953, and soon denounced his dictatorial predecessor.)

The Master and Margarita is a complex, grotesque, and fantastic satire, combining a unique interpretation of the story of Jesus with descriptions of the literary and theatrical circles of Moscow and with weird adventures caused by the mischief of the devil. The novel has many symbolic elements that can be interpreted in a great variety of ways.

Works in Literary Context

Heavily influenced by Nikolai Gogol, Bulgakov combined fantasy, realism, and satire to ridicule modern progressive society in general and the Soviet system in particular. His works celebrate the nonconformist, and often portray an artist or scientist in conflict with society. The repressive era of the 1930s in the Soviet Union crippled the publications of his works, and he wrote privately for a time when he would be able to be published again. Bulgakov also expressed reaction to his censorship and the struggle of the artist subtly in his works, especially in his dramatizations surrounding the artists Molière, Miguel de Cervantes, and Aleksandr Pushkin.

Dramas Bulgakov is believed to have written thirty-six plays, eleven of which survive. Unlike his major prose works, Bulgakov's dramas tend toward the realistic, and are often based on historical events or figures. In direct opposition to Soviet conventions, Bulgakov refused to portray his characters as either wholly positive or negative. Rather, they are drawn as individuals with human strengths and frailties. The theme of adjustment to the new Soviet way of life dominates his plays of the 1920s. His best-known drama, *Days of the Turbins*, has been viewed as Moscow's most important theatrical event of the decade and served as the focus for the debate then being waged over the place of art in postrevolutionary society. The play, which deals with the life of a family of Russian intellectuals in Kiev during the civil war, was the first Soviet play to portray the White intelligentsia as sympathetic figures, rather than the malicious characters common to socialist realist productions.

Novels In addition to his dramas, Bulgakov wrote numerous short stories and novels. His first published collection of stories, *Diaboliad, and Other Stories*, was strongly influenced by Gogol. In them, realism dissolves into fantasy and absurdity, and light comic satire erupts into sudden brutality. Included is his best-known story, "The Fatal Eggs", in which a well-meaning scientist discovers a red ray that stimulates growth. The ray is appropriated by a bureaucrat to increase the country's chicken population, but through a mix-up produces instead a crop of giant reptiles that ravage the countryside. Critics have read the story as a satirical treatment of the Russian Revolution, or, less specifically, as a commentary on progress and a rejection of revolution in favor of evolution. "The Fatal Eggs" also introduces another of Bulgakov's favorite themes: the consequences of power in the hands of the ignorant.

The Master and Margarita was finally published in a heavily censored form in two installments in the journal *Moskva* in 1966 and 1967. A blend of satire, realism, and fantasy, the novel is not easily classified or reduced to a single interpretation. Most critics agree that *The Master and Margarita* is composed of three narrative strands. The first concerns the devil (named Woland) and his associates,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bulgakov was one of several Russian authors who have blended nationalistic themes with an earnest and searching inquiry into the meaning of being Russian. Here are some other works that explore similar themes:

The Gulag Archipelago (1973), a nonfiction book by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn based his account of the Soviet Union's system of secret political prisons on eyewitness testimony and personal experience.

Taras Bulba (1835), a novel by Nikolai Gogol. Called the "Russian *Iliad*," this historical novel of Russian Cossack horsemen fighting against Polish invaders was fundamental in defining the soul of modern Russian nationalism.

The Bronze Horseman (1833), a poem by Aleksandr Pushkin. This poem contrasts the everyday needs of the individual with the impersonal interests of the state through a depiction of the conflict between a victim of flooding in St. Petersburg and a statue of Czar Peter the Great, who had ordered the city to be built despite its location on a flood plain.

War and Peace (1869), a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Considered by many to be the greatest novel ever written, this epic work follows the fates of a large cast of characters, most hailing from five aristocratic Russian families, as their individual destinies are swept up in events far greater than their own lives.

who visit modern Moscow and create havoc in the lives of the stupid, the scheming, and the avaricious. The second deals with a persecuted novelist (The Master) and his mistress (Margarita), who bargains with Woland for the sake of her beloved. The third level of the book is the Master's novel, a retelling of the story of Pilate and Christ that involved a tremendous amount of research into the history of Jerusalem and early Christian thought.

Works in Critical Context

Bulgakov was reviewed with respect during his lifetime, although it was not until the world saw *The Master and Margarita*, published almost thirty years after his death, that he came to be generally recognized as one of the great talents of the twentieth century. During his lifetime, his literary reputation stood mostly on the quality of the plays that he wrote for the Moscow theater. Because of the totalitarian nature of Soviet politics, critics were at least as concerned with the plays' political content as with their artistic merit. In the years after his death, Bulgakov's reputation grew slowly.

Mixed Reaction to His Plays When *Days of the Turbins* premiered, critical opposition was violent. Party

critics immediately accused Bulgakov of glorifying the class enemy and denounced the play as counterrevolutionary. Nevertheless, playgoers who had lost relatives in the civil war identified with the Turbin family and flocked to performances. According to one account, "The women were hysterical; there were tears in the eyes of the men."

Bulgakov's next play, *Zoya's Apartment*, concerns the goings-on at a brothel disguised as a sewing shop in Moscow in the 1920s. A comic melodrama, the play satirizes Communist institutions and life under the New Economic Policy. Popular with audiences, it was condemned by Soviet critics for being "pornographic" as well as for failing to convey the proper ideological viewpoint. His next play, *The Crimson Island*, a comic attack on censorship, prompted counterattacks on Bulgakov's reputation and was taken out of the Art Theater repertory after only four performances.

The Heart of a Dog Another early work, *The Heart of a Dog*, is included among Bulgakov's most important. Considered one of Soviet Russia's best satirical novellas, the work portrays a scientist's transformation of a dog into a man. The creature develops reprehensible human qualities, and the scientist changes him back into the good-natured dog he once was. The story, which has obvious thematic parallels to "The Fatal Eggs," was never published in the Soviet Union because of its counterrevolutionary cast.

Critical reviews of the novella have been similar to those of "The Fatal Eggs." Some critics consider it a blatant political satire, equating the operation with the revolution, while others stress a moral and philosophical interpretation of the conflict between the intellectual scientist and the uneducated masses and of the disastrous results of interfering with a natural process.

The Master and Margarita Many critics have focused their attention on the meaning of *The Master and Margarita*. D. G. B. Piper examined the book in a 1971 article for the *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, giving a thorough explanation of the ways that death and murder wind through the story, tying it together, illuminating the differences between "the here-and-now and the ever-after."

In 1972 Pierre S. Hart interpreted the book in *Modern Fiction Studies* as a commentary on the creative process: "Placed in the context of the obvious satire on life in the early Soviet state," he wrote, "it gains added significance as a definition of the artist's situation in that system." While other writers saw the book as centering around the moral dilemma of Pilate or the enduring love of the Master and Margarita, Hart placed all of the book's events in relation to Soviet Russia's treatment of artists.

Edythe C. Haber, in the *Russia Review*, had yet another perspective on it in 1975, comparing the devil of Goethe's *Faust* with the devil as portrayed by Bulgakov. In the years since the Soviet Union was dismantled, the potency of *The Master and Margarita's* glimpse into life in a totalitarian state has diminished somewhat, but

the book's mythic overtones are as strong as ever, making it a piece of literature that is every bit as, if not more, important than it was when it was new.

Responses to Literature

1. Study the treatment of writers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s through the 1960s. Report on the standards to which writers were held by the government and the punishments that were given to those who disobeyed.
2. Despite Bulgakov's politically unorthodox views and the censorship of his work, he enjoyed support during his lifetime from the Soviet establishment, particularly Joseph Stalin. Why do you think this was? Write an imaginary dialogue between Stalin and Bulgakov based on the phone call Stalin made denying Bulgakov the right to leave the country. What reasons do you think Stalin would have given, and how do you think Bulgakov would have reacted?
3. Read *Faust*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which is openly acknowledged as one of the inspirations for *The Master and Margarita*. Compare Goethe's version of the devil with Bulgakov's Woland. Which do you think is more dangerous? Which is written to be the more sympathetic figure? Why do you think Bulgakov made the changes to the devil that he made?
4. How is oppression expressed throughout *The Master and Margarita*? What role does the devil play in commenting on Soviet oppression? Is oppression presented as a personal or impersonal force?

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✠ Basil Bunting

BORN: 1900, Scotswood, Northumberland, England

DIED: 1985, Hexham, Northumberland, England

NATIONALITY: British

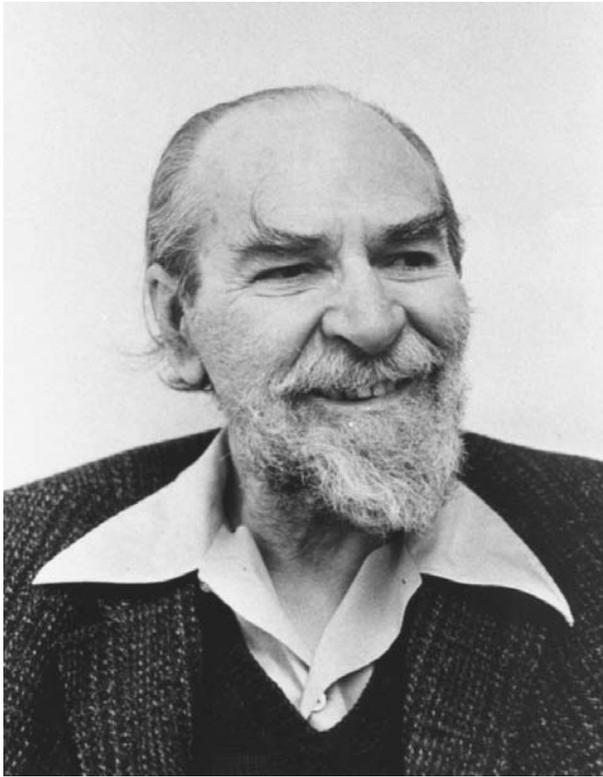
GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Redimiculum Matellarum (1930)

Poems, 1950 (1950)

Briggflatts (1966)



Basil Bunting *Bunting, Basil*, photograph by Thomas Victor. Copyright © 1986 by Thomas Victor. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the Estate of Thomas Victor.

Overview

An innovative poet of the modernist movement, Basil Bunting is perhaps best remembered for *Briggflatts* (1966) and other long poems in which he attempted to duplicate musical forms. These highly allusive works, which Bunting termed “sonatas,” reflect modernist and objectivist beliefs that poetry must convey emotion through sound. While his *Collected Poems* (1968; expanded, 1978) preserves a relatively small body of work, most critics concur with Tom Scott’s assessment: “Bunting stands apart, one of very few dedicated poets of incorruptible integrity of purpose and talent, a subtle and original craftsman of consummate technical skill.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Prison and Music Educated in English Quaker schools, Bunting contends that his commitment to the craft of poetry dates back to his early childhood. In 1918, toward the end of World War I, Bunting turned eighteen and was therefore eligible to be drafted into military service. As a pacifist opposed to the use of violence, he applied for status as a conscientious objector to the war; he was one of approximately sixteen thousand British

citizens who protested the war in this way. This resulted in Bunting’s imprisonment for more than a year. It was after Bunting’s release from prison in 1919 that he began to pursue his poetic career. Following his release, he traveled extensively. In 1922, he met Ezra Pound in Paris. Two years later, Pound started Bunting’s literary career by introducing him to Ford Madox Ford. Bunting secured a job as subeditor at Ford’s *Transatlantic Review* in Paris and, later, became a music critic for the *Outlook*. It was during this time as a music editor that Bunting honed his knowledge of that art, a knowledge that would serve him well when he was writing his sonatas.

Collaborating with Ezra Pound Critics note that Bunting’s early poems display the influence of T. S. Eliot, Louis Zukofsky, and Pound, all of whom experimented with musical forms in literature. Bunting’s first collection, *Redimiculum Matellarum* (1930), was privately printed in Italy, where both he and Pound resided and collaborated on various projects. *Redimiculum Matellarum* contains “Villon,” the first of Bunting’s sonatas, which, like Eliot’s *Waste Land*, was edited by Pound. In “Villon,” Bunting uses a shifting point of view, with some sections narrated from that of the fifteenth-century poet François Villon and a contemporary narrator whose life at times parallels both Bunting’s and Villon’s: they all spent time in prison. Subsequent poems by Bunting from this period appear in the *Active Anthology*, which he edited with Pound, and in Louis Zukofsky’s *Objectivist Anthology*.

Although Bunting was able to support himself in part while in Italy by writing articles for newspapers and magazines, the rising cost of living eventually forced him to leave for the Canary Islands at the end of 1933. Bunting and his family, which included two young daughters, stayed in the Canary Islands until several days before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Bunting’s experiences while living in the Canary Islands were transformed into “The Well of Lycopolis.” This gloomy sonata was written in 1935, but it did not appear in print until it was published in *Poems, 1950*. It is the last of Bunting’s sonatas written prior to World War II.

Persian Influence In 1940 Bunting enlisted in the Royal Air Force and was stationed in Persia. After the war, he held several government and military positions, traveling extensively, with a prolonged stay in Iran. Although he published little new poetry during this time, Bunting’s experiences provided the subject matter that informs much of his later verse and furnished him with extensive knowledge of Persian languages and culture. Bunting evidences this understanding in the lyrical “Odes” from *Poems, 1950* and in *The Spoils* (1965).

Originally published in 1951 in *Poetry* magazine, *The Spoils* is the least musical of Bunting’s sonatas and reflects his belief that Western civilization would benefit greatly from an understanding of Eastern culture. Bunting was trying to show that the priorities that Westerners value and assume are universal, including physical comfort, are

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bunting's famous contemporaries include:

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): This American expatriate poet made a major contribution to the modernist movement of the twentieth century, both in his own poetry and in his crucial editing of the works of T. S. Eliot and others.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Prime minister of Italy in 1922, fortieth president of the Council of Ministers of Italy, and leader of the National Fascist Party, Mussolini was killed while trying to escape to Spain at the end of World War II.

Nina Hamnett (1890–1966): Known to many as the Queen of Bohemia, this Welsh painter, illustrator, and writer remains notorious for her flamboyant and unconventional lifestyle.

Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978): American poet and founder of the objectivist school of modernist poetry who worked closely with Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and others to promote techniques of modernism. A friend and mentor to Bunting, he corresponded frequently with Bunting and provided him with positive reviews.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): After Joseph Stalin, Brezhnev was the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet, essayist, and politician, Neruda was one of the most influential and significant literary figures of the twentieth century. A passionate Communist, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971, despite his political commitments.

not necessarily shared by other cultures. The work shows that other priorities are valued in the East and that perhaps this Eastern set of attitudes toward life may allow humankind to appreciate its existence and its significance in a fuller and richer manner.

Revival and Recognition During the 1960s, Bunting gave up writing and focused on his economic survival. His poetic output was nonexistent until a young Newcastle poet, Tom Pickard, persuaded Bunting to give readings of his poems. The readings inspired Bunting to come out of retirement and begin work on his major sonata, *Briggflats* (1966). The popularity of the sonata, both in England and America, permanently changed Bunting's status as an unknown and secured his reputation as an important modern poet. It is considered by many critics a landmark of twentieth-century poetry.

In the wake of Bunting's increased reputation, Fulcrum Press published a collected edition of his work in

1968 and a second edition and paperback version two years later. In 1978 Oxford University Press republished the *Collected Poems*, at which time four short works were added. Thus, the volume contains all of Bunting's work that he has chosen to preserve—six sonatas, forty-eight odes, fourteen short translations, and one long translation.

After teaching for a number of years, first at the University of California–Santa Barbara and then in a joint position at the universities of Durham and Newcastle, Bunting spent the final years of his life in increasing poverty. In 1984 he moved to Whitley Chapel, near Hexham, Northumberland, where he died the following year.

Works in Literary Context

It is exactly Bunting's stance as a distinctly British modernist that may mark his special achievement in modern poetry. The language used in Bunting's verse, particularly the verse written after 1950, is markedly different from that of the American modernists. Not only does it reveal an interest in etymology and the stresses of the Old Briton and Welsh languages, but it captures the flavor of a British perception of existence. There is in his poetry a loving attention to the details of language and place that distinguishes Bunting as a poet who was not merely born in England but whose work illuminates various aspects of the national character.

Sonatas Bunting was always concerned with adapting music to poetry. In fact, he suggested that his only unique contribution to poetry was his adaptation of the sonata form to a poetic structure. Bunting also suggested that readers look to his poetry only for its aural value and advised them to take pleasure in the sheer sound combinations his poems afford. G. S. Fraser notes in the *Times Literary Supplement* that the poet's work "is verse which is directly melodic, which seems to sing rather than speak," adding, "Bunting perhaps excels all living poets in expressing emotional complexity through apparently simple—not so very simple—melodic artifice." And Anthony Suter extends this musical metaphor in *Agenda*, observing that Bunting's poetry reflects "the structure of meanings, and, moreover, the meanings are organized according to a musical architecture—that of sonata form."

Yet, it may well be his imaginative range and control that stand out most clearly when one attempts to assess the value of his work. Bunting's themes are essentially universal: the relationship of life and art, of past and present, of ideal form and physical manifestation, of memory and artifact, of love and human existence. His manipulation of these thematic concerns—the way he interweaves them throughout his poetic canon and ties them to specific locales in his sonatas—shows a man whose mind truly controls the verse he creates out of his experience of reality. Bunting's struggle with memory and regret, among other great themes, cannot help but

elicit a response in his audience, even if what they hear is primarily, as he feared and hoped, only a “pattern of sound that may sometimes . . . be pleasing.”

Works in Critical Context

Above all, Basil Bunting was a poet of sounds. His achievements lie not only in the way he controls and uses language, but also in the way his poetry captures a particular time and place. Bunting perceives the presence of the past in the present. Throughout his work, there is a continual growth in mastery of the poetic line, in manipulation of varied thematic material, and in the handling of increasingly larger and more cohesive forms.

Briggflatts In Bunting’s final sonata, *Briggflatts*, he brings his musical poetry to fruition. Described by August Kleinzahler as “the finest long poem of the century,” *Briggflatts* displays a pastoral sensibility within a framework that is characteristically erudite and musical. Although subtitled “An Autobiography,” this work focuses on Bunting’s impressions of his experiences and his lifetime of studying literature rather than rendering actual occurrences in his life. The greatest achievement of *Briggflatts* is perhaps the way in which it returns to and musically updates the Quaker influences of Bunting’s childhood, transforming these from the specific tenets of a particular religion to a music of the soul available to all.

Responses to Literature

1. Comment on Ezra Pound’s role in introducing Bunting to readers. Research Pound’s editing and promotion of T. S. Eliot and other authors and consider what role an editor can or should play in the writing and publishing of poetry. What do you make of Pound’s heavy editorial hand?
2. Bunting was adamant that sound was the most important thing about poetry. In a short essay, take a position on lyrical poetry. Explain your view in contrast to or in support of Bunting’s opinion. Structure your response with reference to three to five of Bunting’s poems.
3. Read “The Spoils” and write a critical review, commenting on its message and lyrical qualities.
4. Bunting’s renewed interest in writing poetry began after several readings. Prepare an oral reading of *Briggflatts*. As a class, discuss why this poem received such high acclaim.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While writing “The Spoils,” Bunting indicated to his friend Louis Zukofsky that his theme contrasts Eastern and Western values. Other works that consider apparent distinctions between Eastern and Western cultures include:

- Orientalism* (1978), a nonfiction book by Palestinian American Edward Said. This text is a high-water mark for the postcolonial movement in literary studies.
- Anti-Goeze* (1778), a nonfiction collection by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These nonfiction articles advocate tolerance for world religions.
- Mountains and Rivers without End* (1996), a poem by Gary Snyder. This epic poem reflects a vision of being in the world that is directly and overtly influenced by Snyder’s travels and Eastern philosophy.

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John Bunyan

BORN: 1628, Elstow, England

DIED: 1688, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Some Gospel-Truths Opened According to the Scriptures (1656)

A Few Sighs from Hell; or, The Groans of a Damned Soul (1658)

A New and Useful Concordance to the Holy Bible (1672)

The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come (1678)

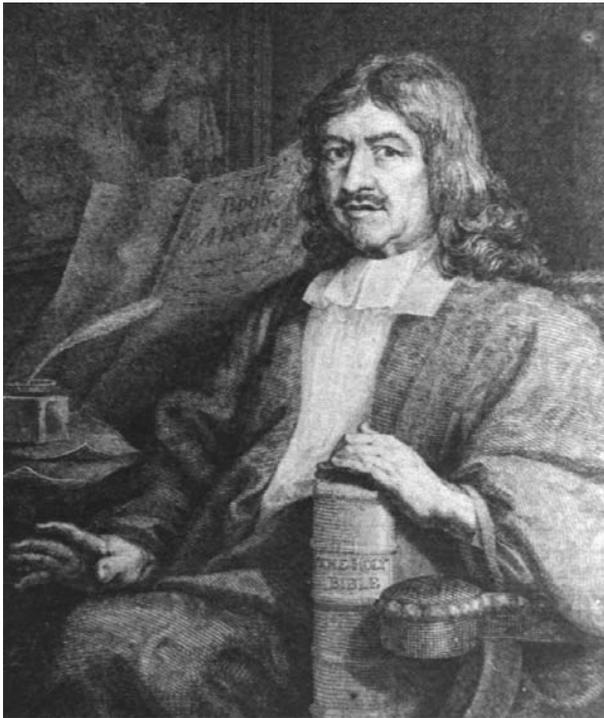
The Life and Death of Mr. Badman (1680)

Overview

The English author and Baptist preacher John Bunyan is recognized as a master of allegorical prose, and his art is often compared in conception and technique to that of John Milton and Edmund Spenser. Although he wrote nearly fifty works, he is chiefly remembered for *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (1678), which, translated into numerous foreign languages and dialects, has long endured as a classic in world literature. While structured from a particular religious point of view, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has drawn both ecclesiastical and secular audiences of all ages and has enjoyed a worldwide exposure and popularity second only to the Bible.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Humble Upbringing and Service in the English Civil War John Bunyan was born in 1628 in Elstow, England, near Bedford, to Thomas Bunyan and his sec-



John Bunyan *Bunyan, John*, painting. The Library of Congress.

ond wife, Margaret Bentley Bunyan. Not much is known about the details of Bunyan's life; his autobiographical memoir, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), is concerned with life events only as they relate to his own spiritual experience. His family was humble though not wholly impoverished, and after learning to read at a grammar school he became a tinker, a sort of wandering junkman, like his father.

The year 1644, when Bunyan was sixteen, proved shockingly eventful. Within a few months his mother and sister died, his father married for the third time, and Bunyan was drafted into the Parliamentary Army fighting against the Royalist cause in the English Civil War. The English Civil War occurred when conflicts between leaders of the English Parliament and the reigning monarch, Charles I, led to the execution of the king in 1649 and the institution of a commonwealth run by Parliamentarian and Puritan Oliver Cromwell. By 1660, however, Charles II—the heir to the English throne who had been living in exile—was brought back to England and restored as its ruler in an event known as the Restoration.

During the English Civil War, Bunyan did garrison duty for three years. He never saw combat, from which he seems to have thought himself providentially spared, because, as he reports, a soldier who was sent in his place to a siege was killed. Nothing more is known about Bunyan's military service, but his exposure to Puritan ideas and preaching presumably dates from this time.

Conversion Experience The central event in Bunyan's life, as he describes it in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, was his religious conversion. This was both preceded and followed by extreme psychic torment. Under the influence of his first wife (whose name is not known) Bunyan began to read works of popular piety and to attend services regularly in Elstow Church. At this point he was still a member of the Church of England, in which he had been baptized.

One Sunday, however, while playing a game called "cat" on the village green, he was suddenly stopped by an inner voice that demanded, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?" Since Puritans were bitterly opposed to participation in Sunday sports, Bunyan saw the occasion of this intervention as no accident; his conduct thereafter was "Puritan" in two essential respects. First, he wrestled inwardly with guilt and self-doubt. Second, he based his religion upon the Bible rather than upon traditions or ceremonies.

For years afterward, he would hear specific scriptural texts in his head, some threatening damnation and others promising salvation. Suspended between the two, Bunyan came close to despair, and his anxiety was reflected in physical as well as mental suffering. At last, he happened to overhear a group of old women, sitting in the sun, speak eloquently of their own abject unworthiness. This gave him the sudden realization that those who feel their guilt most deeply have been most chosen by God for

special attention. Like St. Paul and like many other Puritans, he would proclaim himself the “chief of sinners” and thereby declare himself one of those destined for Heaven.

While he was never wholly free from inner conflict, Bunyan’s gaze from that point on was directed outward rather than inward, and he soon gained a considerable local reputation as a preacher and spiritual counselor. In 1653 he joined the Baptist congregation of John Gifford in Bedford. Gifford was a remarkable pastor who greatly assisted Bunyan’s progress toward spiritual stability and encouraged him to speak to the congregation. After Gifford’s death in 1655 Bunyan began to preach in public, and his sermons were so energetic that he gained the nickname “Bishop Bunyan.” Among Puritan sects, the Bedford Baptists were more moderate and peaceful in their attitude.

Imprisonment Bunyan’s first published work, *Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1656), was an attack on the Quakers for their reliance on inner light rather than on the strict interpretation of Scripture. Above all Bunyan’s theology asserted the helplessness of man unless assisted by the undeserved gift of divine grace. His inner experience and his theological position both encouraged a view of the self as the passive battleground of mighty forces, a fact which is of the first importance in considering the fictional narratives he went on to write.

Bunyan’s wife died in 1658 and left four children, including a daughter who had been born blind and whose welfare remained a constant worry. Bunyan remarried the following year. It is known that his second wife was named Elizabeth, that she bore two children, and that she spoke eloquently on his behalf when he was in prison. The imprisonment is the central event of his later career: It was at once a martyrdom that he seems to have sought and a liberation from outward concerns that inspired him to write literary works. Once the Stuart monarchy had been reestablished in 1660 under Charles II, it was illegal for anyone to preach who was not an ordained clergyman in the Church of England. Bunyan spent most of the next twelve years in Bedford Jail because he would not give up preaching, although the confinement was not difficult and he was out on parole on several occasions. In 1672, the political situation changed when Charles II issued a Declaration of Indulgence that allowed for greater religious freedom. Except for a six-month return to prison in 1677, Bunyan was relatively free to travel and preach, which he did with immense energy and good will. Bunyan’s principal fictional works were published during this post-imprisonment period and included the two parts of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1678 and 1684, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* in 1680, and *The Holy War* in 1682.

Bunyan died in 1688 after catching cold while riding through a rainstorm on a journey to reconcile a quarreling family. He was buried at the Nonconformist cemetery

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bunyan’s famous contemporaries include:

John Owen (1616–1683): An influential Puritan theologian, he wrote condemnations of the state of the English Church and supported other radical religious thinkers, going so far as to bail Bunyan out of jail.

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658): The preeminent military leader during the English Civil War, Cromwell went on to become head of state (called the “Lord Protector”) after the execution of Charles I.

Charles II (1630–1685): King of England after the collapse of Cromwell’s government, and monarch during the Restoration.

Samuel Pepys (1633–1703): English Parliamentarian and naval administrator best remembered today for his famous diary, which he kept from 1660 to 1669 and which covers events such as the Great Plague and Great Fire of London.

of Bunhill Fields in London. By 1692 a folio edition of his works had been published, together with a biographical sketch that includes this portrait: “As for his person he was tall of stature, strong boned though not corpulent, somewhat of a ruddy face, with sparkling eyes, wearing his hair on his upper lip after the old British fashion; his hair reddish, but in his latter days time had sprinkled it with grey; his nose well set, but not declining or bending; and his mouth moderate large, his forehead something high, and his habit always plain and modest.”

Works in Literary Context

Once Bunyan was able to preach freely, he infused his works with a sense of authority. He no longer prefaced them with apologies for his limitations, and he began to address his readers more in fatherly than brotherly fashion, as is clearly evidenced in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. When he was sent back to prison after the Declaration of Indulgence was withdrawn and the persecution of religious dissenters resumed, Bunyan began his first religious allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Specific incidents in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* were borrowed directly from the Scriptures as well as from numerous secular and less edifying works available to Bunyan. But generations of critics have testified to Bunyan’s own comprehensive scope, rich characterization, and genuine spiritual torment and joy drawn from personal experience. Thus, autobiography and allegory serve as two main themes running through his major works.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

John Bunyan was neither the first nor the last author to use allegory to communicate his religious thoughts. Here are some other famous allegories:

Unto This Last (1860), an allegory by John Ruskin. A Victorian author, poet, and artist, Ruskin was also an influential religious thinker. In this work he lays down theories that would prove highly influential to left-wing Christian socialist thought.

The Divine Comedy (1308–1321), an epic poem by Dante Alighieri. Perhaps the best-known religious allegory, this fourteenth-century poem describes the author's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.

The Chronicles of Narnia (1949–1954), a series of novels by C. S. Lewis. Although these tales can be read simply as children's fantasy literature, Lewis purposely wove a deeper layer of Christian allegory into his stories as well.

Spiritual Autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, a relatively short narrative of about a hundred pages, stands unchallenged as the finest achievement in the Puritan genre of spiritual autobiography. Its origins lie in the personal testimony that each new member was required to present before being admitted to the Bedford congregation, and Bunyan's allusions to St. Paul in the preface suggest that he intended the published work as a kind of modern-day Epistle for the encouragement of believers. Determined to tell his story exactly, Bunyan promises to "be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was." What follows is a deeply moving account of inner torment, in which God and Satan vie for possession of the anguished sinner by causing particular Biblical texts to come into his head; Bunyan exclaims grimly, "Woe be to him against whom the Scriptures bend themselves."

Religious Allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* records in allegorical form the author's spiritual awakening and growth. An allegory is a story in which abstract ideas, such as Love or Hope, appear as concrete things or characters. The idea of human life as a pilgrimage was not new in Bunyan's time; its story elements stretched back to even such adventurous journeys as *The Odyssey*, and its popularity was further intensified with the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages. For generations, the virtues and vices had been personified; those peopling the Christian's difficult road to spiritual salvation—many who assist him when he is beset by obstacles and others who are the obstacles themselves—were familiar story elements to Bunyan's first readers.

The Life and Death of Mr. Badman and *The Holy War*, while not as celebrated as Bunyan's renowned allegory, are works equally representative of the author's spiritual concerns, albeit from different perspectives. The first is a dialog between Mr. Wiseman, Bunyan's fictional counterpart, and his faithful disciple, Attentive, who discuss the degeneracy of Mr. Badman as it progresses from youthful vices to misspent and miserable adulthood. *The Holy War*, like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is an allegorical depiction of spiritual struggle but, rather than employing the metaphor of quest or journey, it makes the human soul itself a bastion besieged by evil forces. *The Holy War* chronicles the original fall of humanity, the personal acceptance of salvation through Christ, the falling away after conversion, and ultimate restitution; on a more personal level, it also stresses the lifelong vigilance against sin that each person must wage.

Works in Critical Context

Generations of critics have testified to Bunyan's own comprehensive scope, rich characterization, and genuine spiritual torment and joy drawn from personal experience. Charles Doe, one of Bunyan's contemporaries, remarked: "What hath the devil, or his agents, gotten by putting our great gospel minister Bunyan, in prison? For in prison he wrote many excellent books, that have published to the world his great grace, and great truth, and great judgment, and great ingenuity; and to instance in one, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, he hath suited to the life of a traveler so exactly and pleasantly, and to the life of a Christian, that this very book, besides the rest, hath done the superstitious sort of men more good than if he had been let alone at his meeting at Bedford, to preach the gospel to his own [audience]."

The Pilgrim's Progress Although individual critical interpretations and appraisals of his writings have varied over time, the popularity and relevance of Bunyan's work, most notably of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, remain undiminished today. James Anthony Froude affirmed:

It has been the fashion to dwell on the disadvantages of his education, and to regret the carelessness of nature which brought into existence a man of genius in a tinker's hut at Elstow. . . . Circumstances, I should say, qualified Bunyan perfectly well for the work, which he had to do. . . . He was born to be the Poet-apostle of the English middle classes, imperfectly educated like himself; and, being one of themselves, he had the key of their thoughts and feelings in his own heart. . . . [His] mental furniture was gathered at first hand from his conscience, his life, and his occupations. Thus, every idea which he received falling into a soil naturally fertile, sprouted up fresh, vigorous, and original.

Responses to Literature

1. What are Bunyan's major themes? How does he express those themes through allegory?

2. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Christiana are the allegorical stand-ins for Christian men and women, respectively. How do these two characters' struggles differ, and what does that have to say about Bunyan's views of men and women and their relationship to Christianity?
3. In your opinion, exactly how much progress does the pilgrim Christian make over the course of his journey? In what aspects does he evolve the most as a person?
4. How do you think Bunyan felt about the religious experience? Did he view it as an individual experience or a group experience? Research the Puritan movement and describe how Bunyan's views fit into it.
5. What are Bunyan's "stumbling blocks"? What other allegorical obstacles to Christian virtue can you think of from other stories or legends?

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Anthony Burgess

BORN: 1917, Manchester, England

DIED: 1993, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy
(1956–1959)

A Clockwork Orange (1962)

The Wanting Seed (1962)

Inside Mr. Enderby (1963)

Earthly Powers (1980)

Overview

Anthony Burgess was a prolific literary figure of the twentieth century, producing a large number of novels, plays, biographies, screenplays, critical essays, and articles on an extensive array of topics. Trained in music and interested in linguistics, Burgess frequently applied this knowledge to his writing; his fascination with language is apparent in his best-known novel, *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess often examined the conflict between free will and determinism through fictional worlds that are in disarray. Although Burgess remained pessimistic about the state of modern society, critics generally agree that his inventive humor and wordplay tempered his cynicism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Catholic Upbringing John Anthony Burgess Wilson was born in Manchester, England, on February 25, 1917. His father, Joseph Wilson, played piano in movie houses and pubs, and his mother, Elizabeth (née Burgess), was a music hall singer who died in the influenza epidemic following World War I when Burgess was a toddler. He was raised Roman Catholic, attending Bishop Bilsborough



Anthony Burgess Burgess, Anthony, photograph. AP Images.

Memorial School and Xavierian College, Manchester, but identified himself as a “lapsed Catholic.” One unquestionable legacy from his Catholic upbringing was a fervent belief in Original Sin, or the idea that all humankind is marked by the sins committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

From Music to Literature Although Burgess wrote poetry from an early age, he aspired to a career in music. Unable to earn a scholarship at the University of Manchester, he had to work to save enough money to continue his education, and then, having failed to pass an entrance examination in physics, Burgess had to resign himself to a degree in English literature and linguistics. Burgess was called into service by the British army in the fall of 1940. World War II had begun in Europe in 1939, after Nazi troops from Germany invaded Poland. England, as a key member of the Allied powers opposed to Germany’s actions, called upon all its able men to help repel the German forces. Burgess, after serving with a group of professional entertainers, was sent to Gibraltar, where he remained from 1943 to 1946 doing intelligence work.

At Manchester University, he met Llewela Jones, whom he married on January 23, 1942. While Burgess was in Gibraltar, his wife, pregnant with their first child, did volunteer work in England. At the time, many cities in England undertook nighttime blackouts in order to prevent German bombers from finding targets during night raids. Returning home in the dark of the blackouts one night, Llewela was attacked by four American soldiers intent on robbing her. This event planted the seed for *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess’s wife was so badly shaken by the effort to keep her wedding ring that she miscarried. The miscarriage caused the chronic hemorrhaging that, as Burgess told C. Robert Jennings in *Playboy*, contributed to his wife’s alcoholism and her 1968 death from cirrhosis.

A Meager Living Following his return to England in 1946, Burgess eked out a living by playing the piano and by teaching. In 1949, he drew upon his wartime experience to write *A Vision of Battlements*. Burgess sent his manuscript to Heinemann because of that publishing house’s affiliation with Graham Greene, a contemporary of Burgess’s. He was told, however, that *A Vision of Battlements* was a “second novel” and that he needed to write a first. Heinemann also turned down the manuscript of what Burgess submitted as the “first” novel, eventually published as *The Worm and the Ring* (1961).

Discouraged by his lack of money, Burgess accepted a teaching position in Malaya (which at the time was a protectorate of the United Kingdom). In Malaya he began to concentrate on fiction rather than music, although he never abandoned music completely. Burgess’s first three published novels comprise the *Malayan Trilogy* (published in the United States as *The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy* in 1964). These novels often

prove difficult for the Western reader, because, Burgess said, he had a Malayan audience in mind. Though his talent was acknowledged in the reviews of these first three books, he still considered himself a teacher.

“Death Sentence” In 1959, while giving a lecture in a Malaya classroom, Burgess collapsed and was flown to a hospital in London for examination and treatment. He was informed by British doctors that he had a brain tumor and would probably be dead within a year. Concerned about his wife’s financial security, Burgess began writing as fast as he could, hoping that his work would make enough profit to support her after his death. One year and five manuscripts later, Burgess was alive in Sussex and continuing to write. Burgess later regarded his collapse as a “willed collapse out of sheer boredom and frustration” and claims to have found the year of his “death sentence” one of exhilaration rather than depression. Certainly it was a year of creative productivity.

In 1960 Burgess published *The Doctor Is Sick*, in which his movement toward fantasy is evident, and *The Right to an Answer*. In 1961 he published two more novels—*Devil of a State* and *One Hand Clapping*, a black comedy about the debilitating effects of television, published under the pseudonym Joseph Kell because his publisher was concerned that the novels would be undervalued if he were to acquire the reputation of being too prolific. The “Joseph Kell” books got few reviews and sold poorly, however, until they were republished under Burgess’s name.

Also in the early 1960s he fell in love with translator Liliana Marcellari, and in August 1964 their son, Andreas, was born (though Burgess was still married to Llewela Jones at the time). In October 1968, after the death of Llewela, Burgess and Marcellari were married. After he changed publishers from Heinemann to Jonathan Cape, Burgess and his family left England for Malta, then Italy and Monaco.

Notoriety The book that brought him the greatest fame—and, according to its author, the greatest irritation—was the 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess indicated several events that led to his writing the now classic work. First was a report he had read about American prisons using “behaviorist methods of reforming criminals . . . with the avowed purpose of limiting the subjects’ freedom of choice to what society called ‘goodness,’” according to Aggeler. Second was a trip he and his wife had taken to the Soviet Union, during which they had encountered a group of marauding thugs who maintained a kind of honor code. Last was the 1943 attack on his wife when she was pregnant.

Besides the shocking portrayal of violence, *A Clockwork Orange* garnered immediate attention for its use of the language *Nadsat*, a construction in which he combined Cockney slang and Russian. Notoriety of the work increased when celebrated filmmaker Stanley Kubrick directed the motion picture *A Clockwork Orange* from a

screenplay he adapted in 1971. The film was a stylish and deeply disturbing depiction of gang violence and moral depravity that quickly brought the novel millions of new readers but also brought Burgess the reputation of seeming to “celebrate” violence. This impression is exacerbated by the truncated ending of both the film and the American printing of the book, in which the final chapter—which shows the main character Alex growing weary of violence as he begins to mature—was left out completely. When actual acts of violence were traced back to the movie—for instance, Arthur Bremer’s attempt on presidential candidate George Wallace’s life in 1972—Burgess tried to disown the novel, in part because it had become associated with the adaptation but also because he had become known only as the author of *A Clockwork Orange*.

New Literary Directions Burgess’s frustration with being accused of triggering acts of violence resulted in his writing the novel *The Clockwork Testament, or, Enderby’s End* (1974). In addition to attacking such targets as American academics and their students, television talk-show hosts, and feminists, the novel rebukes the critics who blamed his art for precipitating violence.

In his last years, Burgess continued writing prolifically, his output including two volumes of his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God* (1986) and *You’ve Had Your Time* (1990). The first volume covers his life until his “death sentence.” The second volume covers his life until 1982. After publishing three more novels and a short-story collection, he died of cancer on November 22, 1993.

Works in Literary Context

A New Take on Science Fiction Burgess’s fiction does not fit comfortably in the fantasy and science fiction genre. With the possible exception of *The End of the World News*, his science fiction is not the science fiction of Arthur C. Clarke or Isaac Asimov, who had designs for a futuristic world brought into being by science and technology. Unlike Asimov, Burgess had little background in science, and like Doris Lessing, he had little inclination to read about it.

Burgess himself consistently rejected such a designation and played down the science fiction aspects of his novels. He argued that *A Clockwork Orange*, for example, is set in an England of a quite near future, not the distant one of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), or perhaps even George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Furthermore, in a work such as *The End of the World News*, part of which is unarguably science fiction, Burgess offers a highly ambivalent characterization of Valentine Brodie, who teaches and writes in the genre. Nevertheless, Burgess has been considered a writer of science fiction for *A Clockwork Orange*, a contemporary classic, and for *The Wanting Seed* (1962), 1985, and *The End of the World News*.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burgess’s famous contemporaries include:

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997): This American avant-garde writer was one of the central members of the Beat Generation.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): A widely popular English novelist, essayist, short-story writer, and playwright, Greene was instrumental in the support of many fellow writers.

Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999): Kubrick was an esteemed American filmmaker and director who is perhaps best known for his science fiction classics *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Doris Lessing (1919–): English author of *The Grass Is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook* who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Communist leader and dictator of the Soviet Union from 1922–1953.

The Artist’s Role in Society Geoffrey Aggeler, writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, considered the novels Burgess wrote during his “terminal year” representative of the “themes which he was to develop again and again in the course of the next twenty years—the role and situation of the artist vis-a-vis an impinging world, love and decay in the West, the quest for a darker culture....”

In a series of humorous novels featuring F. X. Enderby, a moderately successful poet whom some critics view as Burgess’s alter ego, Burgess seriously examines the role of the artist in contemporary society. While the middle-aged Enderby is portrayed as an immature individual who can write only in the privacy of his bathroom, the poetry he produces is regarded highly by those few people who still read poetry. Burgess intended for *Inside Mr. Enderby* to be “a kind of trumpet blast on behalf of the besieged poet of today—the man who tries to be independent, tries to write his poetry not on the campus, but in the smallest room in the house where he can have some privacy,” wrote Aggeler. When two Enderby books were released in America as a single volume, Burgess considered it “the book in which I say most, mean most to myself about the situation of the artist.”

The Nature of Good, Evil, and Free Will In *Earthly Powers*, a novel dense with themes relating to philosophy and theology, Burgess examines the nature of good and evil and the concept of free will. This novel follows the destinies of a homosexual British novelist and a charismatic Italian cleric through world events spanning fifty years of the twentieth century. As participants and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Burgess, have presented a dark view of the future:

Brave New World (1932), a novel by Aldous Huxley. In this novel of futuristic medical and other technologies, several developments—sleep-learning, test-tube cloning—drive the storyline.

The Birthday of the World (2003), a short-story collection by Ursula K. Le Guin. A collection of short stories by a master of futuristic fiction, this book explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are “God.”

The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, Canadian author Atwood speculates on a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and Communist takeover by the elite.

observers of human cruelty and degradation, both characters conclude that God has created evil to preserve humanity’s freedom of choice. This same theme lies at the core of *A Clockwork Orange*. Alex, the hoodlum who joyously partakes in violent criminal outbursts, has his free will taken away by the Ludovico treatment he undergoes. The question the author poses is this: Can someone be considered “good” simply because he is no longer physically able to do bad things?

Works in Critical Context

A *London Times* obituarist commented on Burgess’s literary impact:

When some future Burgess a century from now comes to write the cultural history of the second half of the 20th century, Burgess will be recognised as a giant in his tattered humanity and his intolerable wrestle with words and meanings... He enriched his generation more than most, and left a body of work to keep readers arguing and delighted as long as reading survives, and civilisation does not fall into one of his own nightmare visions.

Critical assessment of Burgess ranges from the ecstatic to the offended, for Burgess pulled few punches as a writer. The American writer Gore Vidal observed in the *New York Review of Books* that Burgess was “easily the most interesting English writer of the last half century.” In a review of a later collection of essays, critic Michael Dirda observed in *Washington Post Book World* that Burgess’s “knowledge of literary, linguistic and musical arcana rivals that of any Oxford don; he writes

with a lyrical verve; and he seems willing to turn his hand to anything whatever.”

Earthly Powers Despite the commercial success of other novels, it is *Earthly Powers* that is considered Burgess’s masterpiece. The novel is an autobiography of the octogenarian playwright Kenneth M. Toomey, an amalgam of the writers Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, W. Somerset Maugham, and Burgess himself. Though it is a long book, many critics found its message undiluted by its length. “The book is ruthlessly well organized—there is no point at which the reader feels [Burgess] is not getting on with it and no incident or character not in place by design,” lauded *London Times* reviewer Michael Ratcliffe. “[It] is a hellfire tract thrown down by a novelist at the peak of his powers who cannot forbear to invent, divert, embellish and dazzle us the entire length of the way.” Geoffrey Aggeler, too, found *Earthly Powers* unhindered by its length. “Enormous in scope, encompassing much of twentieth-century social, literary, and political history, it inevitably has some flaws... [They] are, however, minor and unavoidable in a work so large and ambitious. Overall it is a magnificent performance.”

Responses to Literature

1. Burgess entered a period of incredible productivity after he was given what he considered a “death sentence” by doctors following a collapse while teaching. What would you do if you had one year to live? Write a to-do list for your one remaining year of life.
2. The setting for *A Clockwork Orange* is a dystopian society. Look up “dystopia” in the dictionary. What are some of its elements of dystopia present in *A Clockwork Orange*? Does the United States of today share any of these elements? Are there ways in which the United States can be described as a dystopia? Provide examples.
3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about behavior-modification techniques in eliminating unwanted behavior. Do you think these techniques are practical solutions for violent criminals like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*?

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☒ Frances Hodgson Burnett

BORN: 1849, Manchester, England
 DIED: 1924, New York, United States
 NATIONALITY: British, American
 GENRE: Fiction
 MAJOR WORKS:
Little Lord Fauntleroy (1886)
A Little Princess (1905)
The Secret Garden (1911)

Overview

British-born author Frances Hodgson Burnett is chiefly remembered for her book *The Secret Garden* (1911), one of the classics of children's literature. Her biggest contemporary success, however, was *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), though the story is now considered less significant for its literary merits than for its representation of the sentimental Victorian ideal of childhood. Although Burnett wrote for the adult marketplace at least as much as for the juvenile, her reputation rests firmly on her achievements as a children's writer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Difficult Childhood in England Born Frances Eliza Hodgson on November 24, 1849, in Manchester, England, she was the third of five children of Edwin Hodgson and Eliza Boond Hodgson. Her father operated a furniture store in the city, a center of Britain's Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He died when Frances was four



Frances Hodgson Burnett Popperfoto / Getty Images

years old. Her mother tried to maintain the family store, but by 1865, Manchester's economy, which depended primarily on textiles, had become undone by the interruption of cotton imports from the United States during the American Civil War. During that war, the Union navy blockaded the southern states and prevented them from exporting their main cash crop: cotton. The Hodgsons were devastated financially. Looking for a better life, the family immigrated to the United States and settled near Knoxville, Tennessee, where Frances's uncle lived.

In her mid-teens, Frances began publishing stories in women's magazines to help support her family. Such publications offered women writers a chance to publish at a time when it was difficult for them to establish literary careers. Throughout the remainder of the 1860s, such was her popularity that she was published in nearly every popular American magazine. In 1871, Burnett was first published in a more overtly literary publication, *Scribner's Monthly*, and, in 1873, her first novel, *Dolly: A Love Story* (also known as *Vagabondia*), was serialized. The family became increasingly dependent on Frances's income following her mother's death in 1872.

Marriage and Writing Success In the early 1870s, Frances visited England for a year. Upon returning to the United States in 1873, she married a Tennessee doctor,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burnett's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist and abolitionist; best known for her novel *Little Women*.

Crazy Horse (c. 1842–1877): Lakota Indian warrior; fought against U.S. general George Custer in the Great Sioux War in 1876–1877, ending in Crazy Horse's surrender and death.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914): Heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne; assassinated with his wife in Serbia in 1914, which led to the start of World War I.

Thomas Lipton (1848–1931): Scottish grocer and entrepreneur; bought tea plantations in India and established the Lipton tea brand.

Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893): French novelist and writer; considered one of the creators of the modern short story.

Swan Burnett, and the next year—after Burnett gave birth to Lionel, the first of their two children—the family moved to Paris, where Burnett's husband pursued his interest in ophthalmology. Burnett continued to publish in American magazines as a secondary means of income for her family. In 1876, after Burnett gave birth to her second son, Vivian, the family returned to the United States and settled in Washington, D.C., where Burnett's husband established a medical practice.

Throughout the remainder of the 1870s as the United States recovered from the Civil War, Burnett published several realist novels, including the previously serialized works *Dolly* and *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877), which took place in a British mining community. Perhaps the most artistically successful of these novels is *Through One Administration* (1881), in which an unhappily married woman finds herself frustrated by conventions and expectations while circulating among high society in Washington, D.C.

Increased Popularity with Children's Stories In 1879, Burnett also began publishing children's stories. Her first major success in this genre came with the publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886). This book concerns a little boy, Cedric Fauntleroy, who is guided by his seemingly infallible sense of fair play. Burnett's novel became a runaway best seller in both England and the United States. It was translated into twelve languages and sold more than a million copies in English. Its success enabled Burnett to live independent of her husband, for their marriage had long been unhappy. However, its

success also branded Burnett as a popular and romantic writer rather than a serious novelist.

While on vacation abroad in 1887, Burnett discovered that E. V. Seebohm had written an unauthorized theatrical version of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. (International copyright was effectively nonexistent in the nineteenth century.) *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was a major source of income for Burnett, and though Seebohm offered a half share of the profits if she would authorize his version, Burnett instead wrote her own adaptation.

Sensation as a Playwright Seebohm's play went into production in London in February 1888; Burnett's did not open until May. In the meantime, she took legal action against her rival. The judicial verdict was in her favor and established a precedent effectively forbidding unauthorized dramatizations of an author's work. Burnett's victory was not only a legal one, however. When her *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy* was performed, reviewers acknowledged its superiority to the "pseudo-Fauntleroy" of Seebohm, praising the artistry of Burnett's dramatic writing. During the late 1880s and into the 1890s, she enjoyed considerable success as a playwright, producing, for the most part, theatrical versions of her own stories.

In 1888, Burnett published another popular book for children, *Sara Crewe; or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's*, in which a young girl, the daughter of a supposedly rich businessman, falls into poverty after her father dies penniless. This story confirmed Burnett's growing stature as a masterly writer of children's literature.

Personal Tragedy Inspires Life and Work But Burnett's personal life became increasingly unhappy. She had separated from her husband, and her fifteen-year-old son, Lionel, fell ill with tuberculosis, then a common but usually fatal disease of the lungs. During most of 1890, Burnett traveled throughout Europe with her son, hoping in vain to find a treatment center that would cure him. Lionel died in Paris on December 7, 1890.

Following Lionel's death, Burnett threw herself into work for several children's charities, which made her more aware of the harsh fate of poor children in London. She also published two collections of stories—*Giovanni and the Other* (1892) and *Piccino, and Other Child Stories* (1895)—both of which featured many stories about dead or dying children, inspired by her grief over the loss of her son. Between these two books, Burnett published her childhood memoir, *The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (1893). Originally intended to be a brief sketch, it developed into a work for adults. Its comments upon Burnett's idea of childhood, and her memory of her own childhood psychology is illuminating for a study of her children's fiction. The memoir also emphasizes Burnett's lifelong obsession with gardens and the natural world.

Critically Dismissed Adult Fiction In the mid-1890s, Burnett resumed writing adult fiction, producing successful historical “costume dramas,” such as *A Lady of Quality* (1896), *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim* (1899), *The Making of a Marchioness* (1901), and *The Methods of Lady Walderhurst* (1901). The popular success of these works sealed Burnett’s fate with the critics, who viewed her as a writer of third-rate potboilers who was no longer interested in attempting the serious social-realist mode that had earned praise in her early novels.

In 1898, Burnett was divorced from her husband. Two years later, she married her playwriting collaborator, Stephen Townsend. From the outset the marriage was a disaster, and the couple lived separately after 1902. Townsend died in 1914.

A Little Princess and The Secret Garden In 1905, Burnett became a naturalized U.S. citizen. That year also saw the publication of *A Little Princess*, a reworking of her story *Sara Crewe*. In this story, a young girl, reduced to poverty, uses the power of her imagination to transform her reality. *A Little Princess* won widespread favor, and it remains one of Burnett’s most popular works.

Perhaps Burnett’s most acclaimed work for children is *The Secret Garden* (1911), which has the rejuvenating nature of gardening as a theme and celebrates the power of imagination. With its vivid, convincing depiction of life—particularly childhood—*The Secret Garden* is widely considered Burnett’s greatest work and a major contribution to the canon of children’s literature.

While continuing to publish both children’s books such as *The Little Hunchback Zia* (1916) and a number of critically dismissed adult novels such as *The Head of the House of Coombe* (1922) and its sequel *Robin* (1922), Burnett lived comfortably at her home on Long Island, New York. She died there in 1924.

Works in Literary Context

According to her autobiography, Burnett’s imagination was stimulated by stories of adventure and romance she read as a child, such as ballads, biblical tales, and Roman histories. She was also influenced by the works of William Shakespeare, the Romantic poets, and novelists including Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, and Harrison Ainsworth.

Nature in Burnett’s Work Like the English poet William Wordsworth, Burnett depicts nature as the great teacher of children, nurturing spiritual and emotional health. She described her own bliss in the gardens of her childhood and her feelings of entrapment in the crowded and lifeless environment of a large manufacturing city. In contrast, she recounts the flowering of her emotions and the liberation of her spirit in the wilderness of rural Tennessee.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Children’s literature is a vast genre and includes many titles originally written for adults. Here are some classic works of “children’s” literature.

Anne of Green Gables (1908), a novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery. A spunky adopted girl grows up and thrives in a farming community in rural Nova Scotia, Canada.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950), a novel by C. S. Lewis. The first novel in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series introduces the land of Narnia, ruled by the evil White Witch whom four human children must defeat to save the Narnia.

The Little Prince (1943), a novel by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This fable of an isolated prince who learns what love means was written by a French aviator who disappeared while flying over enemy territory during World War II.

The Once and Future King (1958), a novel by T. H. White. This story tells of the childhood and life of King Arthur and his betrayal by his favorite knight, Sir Lancelot.

Treasure Island (1883), a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. This adventure story featuring pirates and buried treasure is based on actual facts.

If the house is a place of masculine rule, the garden is a place of maternal fertility and rebirth. The strong symbolic structures of *The Secret Garden* account for much of its emotional power as a narrative. The pattern of fall and redemption is associated with the biblical Fall of humankind. The locked garden is a version of the Garden of Eden, representing a lost paradise of love and idyllic happiness. In the tradition of medieval romance, the walled garden (often a rose garden) symbolized love, female sexuality, and fertility. The secret garden was initially a garden of love, and it symbolically remains a feminine place, the place of the maternal spirit, to which females bring males to find healing.

Phyllis Bixler notes that Burnett’s use of fairy tale and fantasy and her romantic idealization of the child are in harmony with a contemporary movement in children’s fiction, seen, for example, in the work of Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald.

Works in Critical Context

Critical opinions about Burnett’s adult fiction have labeled her as a second-rate “relic of Victorianism,” increasingly irrelevant to a generation of readers in tune with twentieth-century modernism. However, her reputation as a children’s writer remains undiminished—*The*

Secret Garden, in particular, is praised as a classic of the golden age of British children's literature.

Little Lord Fauntleroy In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, as well as much of Burnett's early writing for children, the author often seems to be "talking to adults in the presence of children," in the words of Barbara Wall, rather than seeking to present a focus appropriate to a child reader. Though *Little Lord Fauntleroy* today is criticized for its sentimentality, contemporary reviews were admiring, stressing the appeal of the sentimental and romantic view of the child. That of the *Manchester Guardian* is typical: "Cedric's simple, truthful, earnest and loving nature is what one would like all children to have, for it was just the same with or without wealth, in the little house in New York or in the great castle."

The Secret Garden With its vivid, convincing depiction of life—particularly childhood—in all its moods and fluctuating facets, *The Secret Garden* is widely considered Burnett's greatest work and a major contribution to the canon of children's literature. Phyllis Bixler observed, "By offering a credible portrayal of changes within child . . . characters and by amplifying these changes through the use of pastoral images and themes, Burnett created a work which deserves its status as a juvenile masterpiece."

Responses to Literature

1. Studies show that being connected to the natural world can relieve stress and help concentration. How often are you outside for fun? What sorts of outside activities do you engage in on a regular basis? Write a brief essay describing one of these activities or an outside activity you would like to participate in, and how it contributes to your daily life.
2. Burnett went from being considered a "literary" writer to a "genre" writer, which is taken less seriously by literary critics. What do you think is the difference between "serious" fiction and popular fiction? Is one type necessarily better than the other?
3. Burnett emphasized the power of imagination in her books. What sorts of things do you think are important for children today to be aware of? Why?
4. Visit a local park, community garden, or botanical garden. Note how you feel before you go, during your time there, and afterward. Write a short essay describing the experience.
5. Do you think that imagination can help people transform their life? Write an essay arguing for or against this idea. If you disagree, what do you think is necessary instead?

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Robert Burns

BORN: 1759, Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland

DIED: 1796, Dumfries, Scotland

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

"Auld Lang Syne" (1788)

"The Battle of Sherramuir" (1790)

"Tam o' Shanter" (1791)

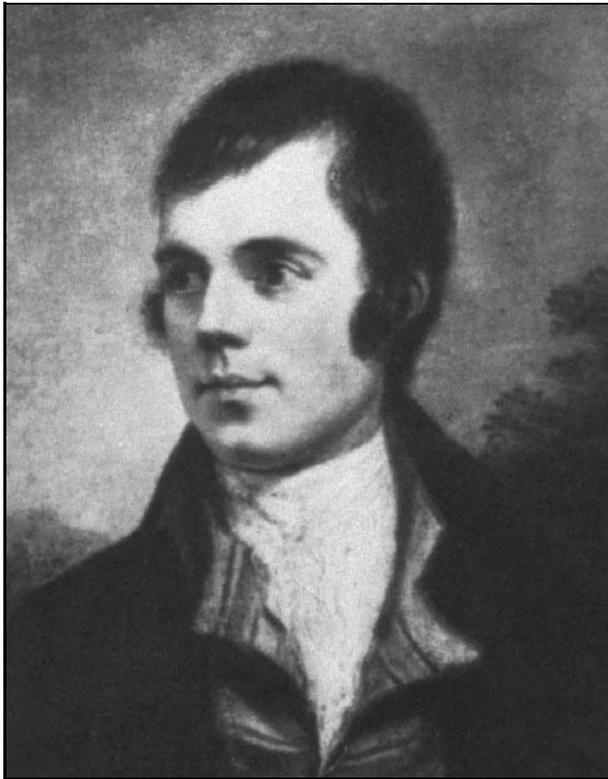
"A Red, Red Rose" (1794)

Overview

Poet Robert Burns recorded and celebrated aspects of farm life, regional experience, traditional culture, class culture and distinctions, and religious practice and belief in such a way as to transcend the specific nature of his inspiration, becoming finally the national poet of Scotland. Although he did not set out to achieve that designation, he clearly and repeatedly expressed his wish to be called a Scotch bard, to extol his native land in poetry and song.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Hard Work and Tragedy on Scottish Farms Born in Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland on January 25, 1759, to impoverished tenant farmers, Burns received little formal schooling, although his father, William Burnes (whose



Robert Burns Burns, Robert, photograph. AP Images.

famous son later altered the spelling of the family name), sought to provide his sons with as much education as possible. He managed to employ a tutor for Robert and his brother Gilbert, and this, together with Burns's extensive reading, furnished the poet with an adequate grounding in English education. Burns's family moved from one rented farm to another during his childhood, enduring hard work and financial difficulties. As the family was too poor to afford modern farming implements, their hardships progressively worsened. All his efforts notwithstanding, William Burnes was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1783; his death followed soon afterward. Many biographers believe that watching his father slowly succumb to the ravages of incessant work and despair was a factor in Burns's later condemnation of social injustice.

A Lover of Women and Poetry While a young man, Burns acquired a reputation for charm and wit and began to indulge in romance. He once attributed the beginnings of his poetry to his sensuality: "There is certainly some connection between Love and Music and Poetry. . . I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I once got heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart." Outspoken in matters religious as well as sexual, Burns was frequently involved in conflicts with the

church, both for his relationships with women and for his criticism of church doctrine. Throughout his life, Burns was fervently opposed to the strict Calvinism that prevailed in the Scottish Church. The doctrine of these Calvinists included a rigid conception of predestination—the belief that the soul's salvation was set at birth—and a belief in an arbitrarily chosen religious elite who were to attain salvation regardless of moral behavior. But although Burns was repelled by this, as well as by the Calvinist notion of humankind as innately and inevitably sinful, he was not irreligious; his theology has been summed up as a vague humanitarian deism, or belief in a distant and undefined God.

Short-Lived Fame In 1786, Burns proposed to Jean Armour, who was pregnant with his child. Her parents forbade the match but demanded financial support from Burns. Angry at this rejection by the Armours and hurt by what he deemed Jane's willingness to side with her parents, Burns resolved to sail to Jamaica to start a new life. The plan never materialized, however, for during that year his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* was published in Kilmarnock. The volume catapulted Burns to sudden, remarkable, but short-lived, fame. Upon success of the book, he went to Edinburgh, where he was much admired by the local intellectual elite, though he afterward remained in relative obscurity for the rest of his life. In the meantime, he was still involved with Jean Armour, whom he was finally able to marry in 1788.

Back to the Hard Life Burns carried on his dual professions of poet and tenant farmer until the next year when he obtained a post in the excise service. Most of Burns's major poems, with the notable exception of "Tam o' Shanter," had been written by this point in his life. The latter part of his creative career was devoted to collecting and revising the vast body of existing Scottish folk songs. In 1796, at the age of thirty-seven, Burns died from rheumatic heart disease, apparently caused by excessive physical exertion and frequent undernourishment as a child.

Works in Literary Context

Through his treatment of such themes as the importance of freedom to the human spirit, the beauties of love and friendship, and the pleasures of the simple life, Burns achieved a universality that commentators believe is the single most important element in his work.

Freedom and Love The topic of freedom—political, religious, personal, and sexual—dominates Burns's poetry and songs. Burns's innumerable love poems and songs are acknowledged to be touching expressions of the human experience of love in all its phases: the sexual love of "The Fornicator," the emotion of "A Red, Red Rose," and the happiness of a couple grown old together in "John Anderson, My Jo."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burns's famous contemporaries include:

Francisco Goya (1746–1828): The official painter for Spain's royal family, Goya's style straddled the classical and the modern. His use of color, his brush strokes, and his subversive subject matter would prove highly influential to later nineteenth-century painters.

John Dalton (1766–1844): English chemist and physicist, Dalton was the first modern scientist to propose a model of atomic theory.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): An international celebrity in his own lifetime, Scott wrote several historical novels that were widely read and highly influential. His medieval epic *Ivanhoe* kicked off a craze of castle building among England's nobility.

George III (1730–1820): King of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 to his death, George is best remembered today for being the king who lost the American colonies and for his "madness" that rendered him nonfunctional for the last decade of his reign.

Mungo Park (1771–1806): A Scottish explorer, Park gained widespread fame for his first journey to discover the source of the Niger River. Although unsuccessful, Park's solitary adventures in the African interior made him something of a celebrity. He returned for a second expedition with forty Europeans, all of whom, including Park, perished on the expedition.

Vitality Another frequently cited aspect of Burns's poetry is its vitality. Whatever his subject, critics find in his verses a riotous celebration of life, an irrepressible joy in the fact of living. This vitality is often expressed through the humor prevalent in Burns's work, from the bawdy humor of "The Jolly Beggars" and the broad farce of "Tam o' Shanter" to the irreverent mockery of "The Twa Dogs" and the sharp satire of "Holy Willie's Prayer." Burns's subjects and characters are invariably humble, their stories told against the background of the Scottish rural countryside. Although natural surroundings figure prominently in his work, Burns differed from Romantic poets in that he had little interest in nature itself, which in his poetry serves but to set the scene for human activity and emotion.

Scottish Nationalism Burns's deep interest in Scotland's poetic heritage and folkloric tradition resulted in his amending or composing more than three hundred songs, for which he refused payment, maintaining that this labor was rendered in service to Scotland. Each written to an existing tune, the songs are mainly simple yet

affecting lyrics of the common concerns of love and life. A great part of Burns's continuing fame rests on such songs as "Green Grow the Rashers O" and, particularly, "Auld Lang Syne."

Works in Critical Context

Although his poetry is firmly set within the context of Scottish rural life, most critics agree that Burns transcended provincial boundaries. Edwin Muir commented: "His poetry embodied the obvious in its universal form, the obvious in its essence and truth." This quality makes his work vulnerable to one charge often leveled against it—lack of imaginative subtlety. Some critics contend that Burns's passionate directness renders him insensible to a more delicate expression of imagination; they find his poetry too accessible, too easily penetrated. A related objection is that Burns's philosophical themes are trite, coming dangerously close to the sentimental and naive. Iain Crichton Smith carried the argument further, stating that Burns's very universality weakens his stature as an individual poet: as Burns has no voice or philosophy that is uniquely his own, his poetry is "artless" in the negative sense of that word. The majority of critics, however, hold that Burns's simplicity of theme is true to life—that his philosophy, while not profound, is true to itself and to human nature. It is widely admitted that Burns's message is not primarily an intellectual one; rather, he expresses the familiar emotions and experiences of humanity. Critics agree that this talent rendered Burns particularly fit for his role as a lyricist.

"The Cottar's Saturday Night" Initial publication of Burns's poems in 1786 was attended by immense popular acclaim, but eighteenth-century critics responded with more reserve. They eagerly embraced the romantic image of Burns as a rustic, untaught bard of natural genius—an image Burns himself shrewdly fostered—but some critics, particularly English critics, were somewhat patronizing. They found the Scots dialect quaint to a point but ultimately intrusive and distracting. Sentimental poems such as "The Cottar's [or Cotter's] Saturday Night" and "To a Mountain Daisy" received the most favorable attention; Burns's earthier pieces, when not actually repressed, were tactfully ignored. "The Jolly Beggars," for example, now considered one of Burns's best poems, was rejected for years on the grounds that it was coarse and contained low subject matter. Although these assessments held sway until well into the nineteenth century, more recent critics have taken an opposing view. "The Cottar's Saturday Night," an idealized portrait of a poor but happy family, is today regarded as affectedly emotional and tritely moralizing.

"To a Mountain Daisy" "To a Mountain Daisy," ostensibly occasioned by the poet's inadvertent destruction of a daisy with his plow, is now considered one of

Burns's weakest poems. Like "The Cottar's Saturday Night," it is sentimental and contains language and images that contemporary critics find mushy and false. "To a Mountain Daisy" is often compared with "To a Mouse," as the situations described in the poems are similar; the latter is the poet's address to a mouse he has disturbed with his plow. Most critics today believe that "To a Mouse" expresses a genuine emotion that the other poem lacks, and does so in more engaging language.

Interestingly, "To a Mountain Daisy" was written primarily in standard English, while "To a Mouse" is predominantly in Scots; critical reaction to these two poems neatly encapsulates the debate over whether Burns's best work is in English or Scots. The issue remains unresolved, but on the whole, earlier critics preferred Burns's English works, while recent critics have favored his Scots. Eighteenth-century commentators viewed Burns's use of dialect as a regrettable idiosyncrasy, but modern critics contend that his English poems tend to degenerate into stilted neoclassical diction and overstated emotion.

Responses to Literature

1. In his poem "A Red, Red Rose," Burns uses several metaphors to describe his love for a woman. Do you think some of these metaphors are more effective than others? Give examples and explain your reasoning.
2. Why do you think Burns's more melodramatic poems are the ones best remembered today?
3. Can you think of a modern form of poetry that uses a distinctive dialect? How does the use of dialect in poetry affect the reader? Do you think it enhances the poetry?
4. Burns uses a combination of English and Scottish dialect in "To a Mouse." Why do you think he chose to combine the two? Why do you think certain passages were written in Scottish dialect?
5. After reading "To a Mouse," write a poem of your own addressed to a small animal or insect that you often encounter but pay little attention to. Try to imagine how it would see you and how you would explain your life to it.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Burns's use of the Scottish vernacular is one of the most distinctive aspects of his poetry. Other poets have used the same approach in their work:

Barrack-Room Ballads, a poetry collection by Rudyard

Kipling. Like Burns, Kipling wrote poetry in a distinctive regional dialect of the British Isles, in this case the Cockney slang of the common British enlisted man.

Lyrics of a Lowly Life, a poetry collection by Paul Laurence

Dunbar. Although most of his poems were written in conventional English, Dunbar, an African American poet, was one of the first to write poems in the dialect of Southern black culture, as in this 1896 collection.

The Works of D. H. Lawrence, a collection by D. H. Lawrence.

Many of Lawrence's poems were written in the dialect of his native Nottinghamshire, what critic Ezra Pound called "the low-life narrative."

Songs of Jamaica, a poetry collection by Claude McKay.

Published in 1912, these poems were the first published in McKay's native patois, an English-African hybrid language of the Caribbean islands. McKay would go on to be a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance of black writers and artists during the 1920s.

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Samuel Butler

BORN: 1835, Nottinghamshire, England

DIED: 1902, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Erewhon; or, Over the Range (1872)

Life and Habit (1878)

Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later (1901)

The Way of All Flesh (1903)

Overview

Samuel Butler was a renowned English author of the late Victorian period. A notorious iconoclast, he presented a scathing portrait of Victorian family life in the autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), created satires of English society in *Erewhon; or, Over the Range* (1872) and *Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later* (1901), and



Samuel Butler Butler, Samuel, painting. The Library of Congress.

opposed the dominant literary, religious, and scientific ideas of his day in numerous essays. Butler's perceptive criticisms of Victorian England, influential during his lifetime, exerted an even greater impact on subsequent generations of writers and thinkers. As a result, he is often cited as one of the primary progenitors of the early-twentieth-century reaction against Victorian attitudes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From England to New Zealand Butler was born on December 4, 1835, in a small village in Nottinghamshire, England, to Reverend Thomas Butler, the son of an Anglican clergyman and the grandson of a bishop, and Fanny Worsley. Butler grew up in England at a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories (including New Zealand). Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also witnessed an extended period of peace and prosperity, leading many free to pursue intellectual interests and occupy themselves with the complex rules of behavior found in "proper" society.

Educated at a boarding school near his home, Butler later attended the prestigious Shrewsbury School, where the curriculum emphasized classical studies. Butler con-

tinued his education at Cambridge, and, after graduating in 1858, followed family tradition by preparing to enter the clergy. During his clerical training, however, he developed doubts about his vocation, and the next year he announced to his father that he did not wish to be ordained. After much debate, during which alternative careers in medicine, art, and diplomacy were proposed, it was decided that Butler would be allowed to move to New Zealand with a small financial endowment and attempt to establish himself there as a rancher. He left England soon afterward, arriving in the Canterbury region of New Zealand in January of 1860.

Butler remained in New Zealand for nearly five years, running a highly successful sheep ranch and eventually doubling the value of his original investment. As owner of the ranch his duties were light, and he was able to read a great deal during this period. In 1861 Butler read Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) in which Darwin outlined his theory of evolution through natural selection. The book strongly influenced Butler; he later commented that, for him, the theory of evolution had replaced Christianity. He subsequently submitted a series of articles to the *Canterbury Press* in 1862, defending and extrapolating from Darwin's theory. Butler's writings attracted much attention throughout New Zealand, and in 1863 Darwin himself wrote to the *Press*, praising Butler's clear comprehension of his work. That year Butler's father compiled a collection of his son's letters and had them published as *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1863). Soon afterward Butler sold his ranch to become a full-time contributor to the *Canterbury Press*.

Return to England and Turn to Satire Returning to England late in 1864, and after an unsuccessful attempt to become an artist, he began writing his first major satire, *Erewhon; or, Over the Range* in 1870. Published anonymously in 1872, *Erewhon*—which, although it was an imaginary country, was clearly based on England and its Victorian society—was an immediate success; when Butler let it be known that he was the author of the work, he was thrust into the limelight. His renown was soon heightened by the publication of *The Fair Haven* (1873), a satirical denunciation of Christian doctrines misinterpreted by some clergymen as a brilliant defense of those beliefs. Butler next began work on the novel *The Way of All Flesh*, but soon realized that its intensely negative portrait of his family would gravely offend those members still living. In 1878 he set the uncompleted work aside.

During the last two decades of his life, Butler continued to oppose the dominant ideas of his time by publishing two controversial philological essays, contending in one that the *Odyssey* had been written by a woman and in the other that William Shakespeare had written his sonnets for a homosexual lover who, although socially inferior to the playwright, had treated him in a cavalier fashion. He also published English translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, collaborated with his friend Henry Festing Jones on a number of musical compositions, and

intermittently worked on the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh*. Before his death in 1902 Butler left instructions that this last work should not be published until after the deaths of his two sisters, but his literary executor, R. A. Streatfeild, ignored those instructions and published *The Way of All Flesh* in 1903.

Works in Literary Context

Butler's most successful works were influenced both in form and content primarily by two thinkers, Jonathan Swift and Charles Darwin. Butler utilized a Swift-like sense of humor, channeled through his many works of satire. In Darwin, on the other hand, Butler found the germ of an idea—evolution—and developed from this seed a vast, varied, and highly criticized supplemental theory concerning the means of evolution. Without these predecessors and their themes, it is difficult to determine what Butler's body of work would look like.

Satire *Erewhon*, a satirical text whose targets are religion and Victorian society, has been criticized by some as too various in its scope, combining satire and utopianism in an inextricable mixture. But it is probably the most effective book of its kind in English literature since Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which it resembles and which certainly influenced Butler. As Swift had done, Butler also makes the reader aware of the new perspectives from which any culture can be seen when reflected and distorted in an alien setting. Among his many telling suggestions, perhaps the most prophetic is that crime can be viewed as disease and illness as malingering; now there are specialists in the psychology of the criminal and in psychosomatic medicine.

Evolution In *Life and Habit*, Butler addressed the issue of biological evolution. After long consideration of Darwin's theory, Butler had come to believe that Darwin had failed to accurately identify the mechanism by which evolutionary adaptations were passed on from one generation to the next. Butler developed in *Life and Habit* and in three subsequent volumes the theory that biological traits are inherited through an unconscious memory of adaptations made by an organism's ancestors in response to some specific need or desire, suggesting that this memory was incorporated into the physical structure of an embryo at the time of conception. Butler's concern with Darwin's work led to a celebrated conflict between the two men, produced not by the differences in their theories, but by a misunderstanding. In 1879 Darwin wrote a preface for the English translation of Ernst Krause's essay on Darwin's grandfather, who had also written about evolution. To the translation of his essay Krause added negative remarks concerning Butler's theory, and Butler, who had read the original German version, erroneously attributed these revisions to Darwin. Embittered by what he considered unfair and unprofessional attacks on his ideas, Butler harbored resentment toward Darwin for the rest of his life, and Butler's subsequent volumes of scientific writings contain numerous

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Butler's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): Author of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin is credited with the theory of evolution, a concept that was crucial to Samuel Butler's work.

Kate Chopin (1850–1904): American author whose *The Awakening* (1899) was extremely controversial during her lifetime because its heroine rejects her traditional female roles.

Carl Spitteler (1845–1924): This Swiss poet was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1919.

Ephraim Shay (1839–1916): American inventor who developed and patented the Shay locomotive, a widely used version of the steam locomotive.

Machado de Assis (1839–1908): This author of short stories and novels is considered the greatest Brazilian writer of all time.

Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838–1917): German inventor whose greatest achievement is the development of the airship that bears his name.

negative references to Darwin's work. Despite his feelings about Darwin the man, however, Butler's feelings about Darwin the biologist's theories remained positive, and their influence on Butler's work was tremendous.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Butler's critical reputation was based on the success of *Erewhon*. His scientific writings, like *Life and Habit*, were viewed with interest but were generally dismissed as inferior to those of Darwin, whom critics deemed more qualified to discuss questions of biological evolution.

Butler's posthumous rise to fame after the comparative obscurity in which he had lived out his life makes an interesting chapter in the history of literature. Obituaries reveal that in 1902 his work was not regarded as important, and *The Way of All Flesh* was hardly noticed on its publication in 1903; the *Times Literary Supplement* did not review it until 1919, by which time the novel's fame had finally forced it to do so. But slowly critics and writers began to speak out. Through the years he was studied, emulated, and praised by Arnold Bennett, Desmond MacCarthy, Arthur Clutton-Brock, George Bernard Shaw, Marcus Hartog, Augustine Birrell, Edmund Gosse, Gilbert Cannon, W. Bateson, C. E. M. Joad, and E. M. Forster. Further, the anti-Victorian tenor of Butler's writing was well before his time, and his criticisms of the restraints of his society, though controversial at the time, would soon become commonplace as England transitioned into the twentieth century and, in turn, modernity.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Butler's theories suggests that machines mark the next step in the evolution of human beings. The idea that mankind's creations will someday supplant mankind itself is a common fear, expressed in many forms of art. Here are some more works that deal with the fearful interaction between mankind and its creations:

The Terminator (1984), a film directed by James Cameron. In a future not that distant, not only have cyborgs—half-machine, half-human organisms—become reality but so has time travel. These cyborgs, called terminators, are sent back in time to kill the mother of a future resistance leader.

"Trucks" (1978), a short story by Stephen King. In this short story, set in a truck stop, humans huddle together in fear as semis come to life and slay their owners.

I, Robot (1950), a collection of short stories by Isaac Asimov. Science fiction pioneer Asimov established many of the conventions of robot interaction with humans now common in fiction and film.

The Way of All Flesh After 1903, the widely read and much-discussed *The Way of All Flesh* overshadowed all of Butler's previous writings; appearing during one of the first waves of anti-Victorian reaction, the novel was hailed by critics as a brilliant exposé and praised for its satiric wit. *The Way of All Flesh* was admired in particular by Bloomsbury critics Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and E. M. Forster, who, while admitting that the novel was flawed, nevertheless found in it the embodiment of their own ideals. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, Butler's reputation suffered a decline, with many politically and socially radical critics viewing his iconoclasm as limited and entirely conventional. In a renowned biography of Butler, Malcolm Muggeridge suggested that despite his outward posture of dissent Butler in fact failed to free himself from the most essential preconceptions of Victorian society, concluding that he was "not so much the anti-Victorian, as the ultimate Victorian."

Critics regard *The Way of All Flesh* as Butler's most important work, significant both as a perceptive autobiography and as a brilliant criticism of the attitudes and institutions of Victorian England. While critics praise the satiric wit and keen intelligence displayed in the book, many suggest that Butler's bitterness led him to subordinate such literary elements as plot and characterization to tirade, resulting in a powerful but nevertheless flawed work of literature. Others, however, have defended the depth and subtlety of Butler's characterizations, noting that the only unsuccessful character in the novel is the

main character, Ernest Pontifex, who appears to have been granted Butler's great intelligence but given limited emotional depth.

Responses to Literature

1. Butler is highly regarded for his works of satire, including but not limited to the two *Erewhon* texts. Can you think of any books or films that satirize American society in this way? How are these satires like Butler's?
2. Consider all the various machines around you, and think about what kinds of human actions they have replaced or altered. What do you make of Butler's theory that the proliferation of machines marks the next step in human evolution? Support your thoughts in a short essay.
3. Using the Internet and your library, find out about the latest theories regarding evolution. Write a short essay comparing Butler's understanding of the evolutionary process to today's common theories of evolution. How are they similar? How are they different?
4. Read *The Way of All Flesh*. Then, using the Internet and the library, research some of the Victorian practices Butler satirizes. Based on your reading of Butler's text and your research, do you think that Muggeridge's claim that Butler wasn't "anti-Victorian" so much as the "ultimate Victorian" is accurate? In a short essay, explain your reasoning.

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▣ A. S. Byatt

BORN: 1936, Sheffield, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, poetry, essays, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

Iris Murdoch: A Critical Study (1976)

The Virgin in the Garden (1978)

Possession: A Romance (1990)

Babel Tower (1996)

The Biographer's Tale (2000)

Little Black Book of Stories (2004)

Overview

A best-selling novelist, short-story writer, distinguished critic, and winner of many prestigious awards and prizes, A. S. Byatt is one of the most ambitious writers of her generation. Her short stories are of crucial interest in connection with her overall work and with regard to postmodernist developments of the genre. Because of her imaginative wisdom and understanding of contemporary culture, Byatt's short stories significantly enrich the



A.S. Byatt Byatt, A.S., photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

postmodern literary scene, while she enjoys a high profile in the media and in public life in general.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Gifted Student A. S. Byatt was born Antonia Susan Drabble on August 24, 1936, in Sheffield, England, the eldest daughter of John Frederick Drabble, a courtroom lawyer, and Kathleen Marie (née Bloor), a schoolteacher. She is the sister of writer Margaret Drabble. She was educated at Sheffield High School and the Mount School, York, a Quaker foundation. Antonia took a bachelor of arts degree (with first-class honors) from Newnham College, Cambridge, and pursued postgraduate study at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania (1957–1958) and Somerville College, Oxford (1958–1959).

Academic and Literary Pursuits From 1962 to 1971, she taught in the Extra-Mural Department of London University and from 1965 to 1969 at the Central School of Art and Design, London. She also published her first two novels, *Shadow of a Sun* (1964) and *The Game* (1967), as well as her first study on Iris Murdoch, *Degrees of Freedom* (1965). In 1969, Byatt married Peter John Duffy, with whom she has two daughters, Isabel and Miranda.

The 1970s were a fruitful decade for Byatt in terms of academic work. In 1970 she published the study *Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time*, which was followed by her second monograph on Murdoch, published in 1976. In 1972 she was appointed a full-time lecturer in English and American literature at University College London. She was appointed a Booker Prize judge for 1974 and a member of the BBC Social Effects of Television Advisory Group (1974–1977) as well as of the Board of Communications and Cultural Studies of the Council for National Academic Awards (1978–1984). After publishing her third novel, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), she edited, together with Nicholas Warren, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1979) for Penguin Classics.

Major Success in Fiction In 1981 she was promoted to a senior lectureship, and in 1983, when she was elected fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, she retired from academic life to write full-time. In 1985 she published her fourth novel, *Still Life*, which won the PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Award for fiction. She served on the Board of Creative and Performing Arts (1985–1987) as well as the Kingman Committee on the Teaching of English (1987–1988), and in 1990 she published *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*.

Byatt's career as a novelist reached a turning point in 1990, when the publication of *Possession: A Romance* brought her international fame. She was appointed a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in addition to winning the Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Byatt's famous contemporaries include:

Tony Blair (1953–): Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1997 and 2007, leader of the Labour Party from 1994 to 2007, and member of Parliament for Sedgefield between 1983 and 2007.

Hilary Rodham Clinton (1947–): First Lady to the forty-second president of the United States and a U.S. senator from New York.

J. K. Rowling (1965–): World-renowned British writer of the Harry Potter series.

Arundhati Roy (1961–): Indian novelist and activist who has won such awards as the 1997 Booker Prize and the 2002 Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize.

Prize, the Eurasian Regional Award of the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and, most important of all, the Booker Prize for Fiction. By December 1995 *Possession* had been translated into sixteen languages, and its phenomenal success has often been compared to that of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Byatt's next novel, *Babel Tower* (1996), took six years to write and publish.

Currently, Byatt holds several honorary doctorates, lives in London, and contributes regularly to journals and newspapers including *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Independent*, and the *Sunday Times*, as well as to radio programs and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Works in Literary Context

Influences In merging realism and naturalism with fantasy, Byatt has been influenced by an eclectic group of esteemed writers, from George Eliot to Robert Browning. In her midcentury-England novels, she takes inspiration from such writers as D. H. Lawrence. And she references everything from Romantic and Victorian literature to research books on zoology as also informing her intertextual work. But "The novelist I love most," she asserts, "is Marcel Proust." "After him, [Honoré de] Balzac, [Charles] Dickens, Eliot, Thomas Mann and [Henry] James, Iris Murdoch, Ford Madox Ford, and Willa Cather. And Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky."

High Style A central characteristic of Byatt's handling of stories is the manner in which they are made to refer to their own status as texts and the ways in which different narrative expectations and multiple types of text—letters, diaries, journals, fairy tales—are merged. In this respect, Byatt's entire collection abounds in what are called inter-

textual references, careful and thorough blends of multiple outside texts into her own. That is, her writing is rich in echoes of her earlier works or works by other authors as well as in self-conscious allusions to the narrative. As one reads Byatt's fiction, one recognizes characters (the academic, the professional storyteller, the woman writer, the painter or craftsman, siblings, daughters, children suspended between life and death, marginalized middle-aged women), their interest in art and literature, and their obsessions with words, with truthfulness, with the body, and with the past, as well as recurrent symbols and images, such as snakes, pools, paintings, and glass objects.

In another respect, Byatt refuses to give shape and finality to her characters and the conditions in which they find themselves. This impression of indeterminacy and openness enhances her "fantastic vein."

High Impact While she agrees she is indebted to multiple influences, Byatt alone catapulted to the front of the queue of contemporary British writers with her fifth novel, *Possession: A Romance* (1990). The work likewise influenced a great number of new and veteran scholars, prompting a surge in critical studies about her work and a mass of interviews with her both in academic journals and in popular magazines.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have unanimously praised the way in which Byatt weaves intricate fictions out of small details and situations. Although many incidents in her early stories point to her own life, the emphasis is less on their autobiographical dimension than on the phenomenon of how fantasy interacts with real life. Lived experience furnishes the raw data out of which the writer spins her tales. While several of her works prompt studied discussion, a few stand out as especially provocative—among them *Possession: A Romance*.

Possession: A Romance The novel reflects Byatt's increasing interest in the short story, because it includes, in the work of the character Christabel LaMotte, "wonder tales," two of which were reprinted as separate stories in Byatt's *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*: "The Glass Coffin" and "Gode's Story." While Richard Todd, in his book *A. S. Byatt* (1997), has argued that these stories read differently divorced from the context of the novel, Jane L. Campbell in "The Somehow May Be Thisow": Fact, Fiction, and Intertextuality in Antonia Byatt's 'Precipe-Encurled'" (1991) has stressed the experimental, intertextual nature of the stories themselves.

The publication of *Possession* also led to a reappraisal of Byatt's earlier work, a compilation of which was published in *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings* (1991). This selection of earlier writings includes reviews and essays on Robert Browning, Eliot, Vincent van Gogh, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, Barbara Pym, and Monique Wittig. In the introduction to *Passions of the Mind*, Byatt explains a feature

characteristic of her whole writing career—the link between creative and academic work, the “encounter with other minds,” and the connection with the cultural past.

Responses to Literature

1. While Reading *Possession: A Romance* consider what the word “romance” means and look at all the ways Byatt presents romance in her novel. Look up “romance” in the dictionary and consider the various definitions of the word with reference to this book.
2. View the film version of *Possession: A Romance*. In the film, the nationality of one of the characters is changed from British to American. How does this change your understanding of the story?
3. Byatt has written two critical studies of Iris Murdoch, a British writer who weaves philosophical themes into her novels. Research the life and works of Murdoch in your library and on the Web. What reasons can you give that Byatt would be attracted to Murdoch and her work as a field of study? Write a paper summarizing your conclusions.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Byatt’s novel *Possession* intersperses two different story lines with a long poem in a complex narrative. Other books that successfully blend literary genres and plotlines include:

The Blind Assassin (2000), a novel by Margaret Atwood.

This prize-winning novel blends two storylines, one set in contemporary Canada and one set in World War II-era Canada, with a pulp science fiction novel.

Pale Fire (1962), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. The highly unusual structure of this novel has been the subject of much critical attention. Nabokov presents a long poem “Pale Fire” as the work of a fictional author. The book also features commentary by a fictional editor.

Lord Byron’s Novel: The Evening Land (2005), a novel by John Crowley. Like *Possession*, this novel centers on an adventure in literary research. The efforts of the research to discover a lost novel by English poet Lord Byron are interspersed with sections of the novel in question.

Lord Byron

BORN: 1788, London, England

DIED: 1824, Missolonghi, Greece

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. Canto the Third (1812–1818)

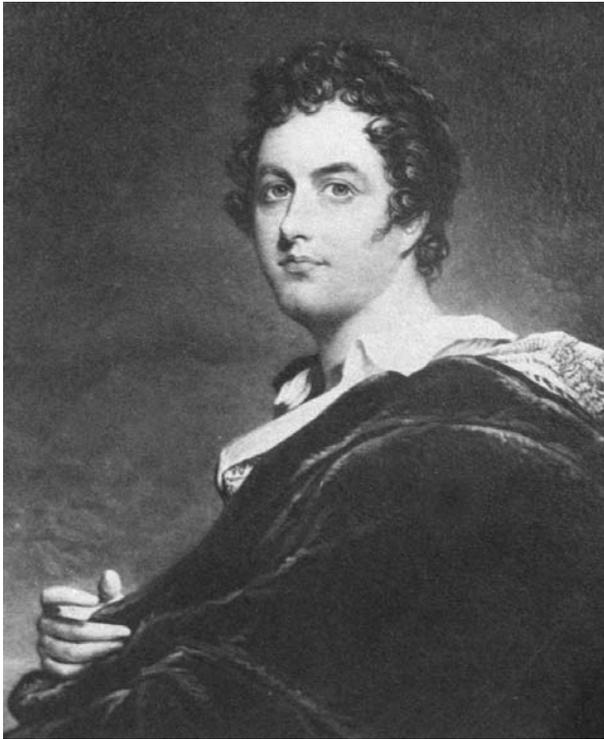
Don Juan (1819–1824)

Overview

The English poet George Gordon Noel Byron, 6th Baron Byron (1788–1824), was one of the most important figures of the Romantic movement. Because of his impressive literary works, active and controversial personal life, and renowned physical beauty he came to be considered the personification of the Romantic poet-hero.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

George Gordon Noel Byron was born, with a clubbed right foot, in London on January 22, 1788, the son of Catherine Gordon of Gight, an impoverished Scots heiress, and Captain John (“Mad Jack”) Byron, a fortune-hunting widower with a daughter named Augusta. The wasteful captain squandered his wife’s inheritance, was absent for the birth of his only son, and eventually left for France as an exile from English creditors.



George Gordon, Lord Byron Byron, George Gordon, engraving-
photograph. The Library of Congress.

An Unstable Upbringing for a Nobleman In the summer of 1789 Byron moved with his mother to Aberdeen. Emotionally unstable, Catherine Byron raised her son in an atmosphere variously colored by her excessive tenderness, fierce temper, insensitivity, and pride. She was as likely to mock his lameness as to consult doctors about its correction. From his Presbyterian nurse Byron developed a lifelong love for the Bible and an abiding fascination with the ideas of inborn evil and predestined salvation. Early schooling instilled a devotion to reading and especially a passion for history that informed much of his later writing.

On the death of his granduncle in 1798, Byron inherited his title and estate. He enjoyed the role of nobleman, proud of his coat of arms. Byron then spent four years at Harrow, one of Britain's finest independent schools, where he excelled in oratory, wrote verse, and played cricket.

Byron then attended Trinity College, Cambridge, intermittently from October 1805 until July 1808, when he received an M.A. degree.

Instant Success Born of Mediterranean Travels In 1807 Byron's early works were collected under the title *Hours of Idleness*; it was harshly criticized by the *Edinburgh Review*. The irate author counterattacked in his next book, *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers*

(1809). In this volume, Byron showed the first signs of his satiric wit and aristocratic education.

In 1809 a two-year trip to the Mediterranean countries provided material for the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Their publication in 1812 earned Byron instant glory, as they combined the more popular features of the late-eighteenth-century romanticism: colorful descriptions of exotic nature, disillusioned meditations on the vanity of earthly things, a lyrical exaltation of freedom, and above all, the new hero, handsome and lonely, somberly mysterious, yet strongly impassioned despite his weariness with life.

Scandalous Social Life While his fame was spreading, Byron was busy shocking London high society. After his affairs with Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Oxford, his incestuous and adulterous love for his half sister Augusta not only made him a scandal, but also reinforced the sense of guilt and doom to which he had always been prone. From then on, the theme of incest was to figure prominently in his writings, starting with the epic tales that he published between 1812 and 1816: *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina*. Byron's marriage to Anna Isabella Milbanke in 1815 soon proved a complete failure, and she left him after a year. On April 25, 1816, Byron left his native country, never to return.

An Extravagant Expatriate with an Interest in Politics In Switzerland, Byron spent several months in the company of the Romantic poet Percy Shelley, resuming an old affair with Shelley's sister-in-law, Clare Clairmont. Under Shelley's influence he read works by poet William Wordsworth.

In October 1816 Byron left for Italy and settled in Venice, where he spent many days and nights living extravagantly. His compositions of 1817, however, show signs of a new outlook. Instead of Byron's previous pessimism and world-weariness, the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* includes sizable sections devoted to the theme of political freedom and national independence—a cause to which he later devoted himself personally. Byron, it seems, was swept up in the revolutionary fervor that typified the decades that followed the American and French revolutions in the late eighteenth century. In addition, the witty, good-humored satire of *Beppo* was a turn toward a more satirical and comic mode and was a preparation for Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*, begun in September 1818.

Hero in the Greek War of Independence After serving as an organizer in the Carboneari, and Italian revolutionary group that opposed Austria, Byron became an active participant in the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829) against the Ottoman Empire. He used part of his considerable personal fortune to refit the Greek fleet and helped organize an attack on the Ottomans at Lepanto. In April 1824, before the attack could take

place, Byron fell seriously ill. He died on April 19, 1824, during a violent electrical storm.

In memorial services throughout the country, he was proclaimed a national hero of Greece. His death proved effective in uniting Greece against the enemy and in eliciting support for its struggle from all parts of the civilized world. In October 1827 British, French, and Russian forces destroyed the Turkish and Egyptian fleets at Navarino, assuring Greek independence.

Byron's body arrived in England in June 1824, and for two days lay in state in a house in Great George Street, London. On Friday, July 16, 1824, Lord Byron was buried in the family vault beneath the chancel of Hucknall Torkard Church near Newstead Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Although Byron is commonly accepted as part of the British Romantic movement in literature (which encompasses the years 1798 through 1826 and includes such authors as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott, Percy Shelley, and John Keats), he departed from that tradition in a few significant ways.

Satire After his first attempts at poetry were criticized by the *Edinburgh Review*, Byron struck back in his *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers*, a longer satirical poem taking jabs at both some of the better-known English poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge as well as the critics. The volume was well received and displayed Byron's gifts for comedic satire that would eventually find fuller expression in *Beppo* and *Don Juan*.

Neoclassical Virtues Neoclassicism is the return to literary forms and styles used in previous times; for Byron, it meant the use of traditional styles and structures used by earlier English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer. While many of the Romantic poets turned from the neoclassical structures and abstract themes of the Augustan movement of Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, and Alexander Pope, Byron advocated the virtues of neoclassicism early in his career and never completely abandoned his admiration of Pope or his use of the heroic couplet—pairs of rhyming lines with stress on the final syllable of each line.

Works in Critical Context

Although his first book of poems was panned by some reviewers, Byron found widespread popularity with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Since then, he has been considered one of the finest satirical and poetic voices of the nineteenth century.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Taken together, the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* helped establish Harold as the archetype of the "Byronic Hero," a world-weary but intelligent and attractive hero traveling the world. Sir Walter Scott declared in 1816 that Byron had created a new and significant Romantic character

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Byron's famous contemporaries include:

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822): British Romantic poet and friend of Byron.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851): Author of *Frankenstein* (1818) and wife of Percy Shelley.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): German poet, playwright, and philosopher.

Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington (1769–1852): British hero of the Napoleonic Wars.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): British Romantic poet and Poet Laureate of England from 1843 to 1850.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish writer of popular works such as *Ivanhoe* (1820) and *Rob Roy* (1818).

type, and others praised the poem for its seriousness and passion

Don Juan After writing the lighter parody of *Beppo*, Byron turned toward the mock heroic quest of Don Juan. However, Byron's treatment of this Romantic hero and libertine legend did not garner the same type of admiration, and both the poem and the poet were vilified in the reviews. Critics called the poem "filthy and impious," and the poet "a cool, unconcerned fiend." Fortunately, the criticism has abated and now scholars view the sixteen cantos of *Don Juan* to be an excellent example of the lengthy narrative poem, some claiming that Byron's narrative skill in poetry is only matched by Chaucer's.

Responses to Literature

1. Byron's childhood was defined by his access to privilege: a good education, a title, money to live and travel. In what ways is this upper-class upbringing apparent in his poetry? Look for specific references to nobility and privilege.
2. Much of Byron's most successful work is satire and parody. Research the conventions and forms of eighteenth-century satire. Do you think these works were effective at prompting change in the societies in which they were written? Why or why not? What are some particularly successful forms of satire and parody today?
3. Critics and scholars have made much of Byron's relationship with his older half sister Augusta and the pervasive themes of incest and adultery in Byron's poetry. Find examples of these themes in his poetry. Do you think critics of Byron reacted appropriately to these elements of his work? Why or why not?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Byron's works were inspired by or describe travels. Here are some other works inspired by journeys:

The Odyssey (eighth or ninth century BCE), an epic by Homer. This epic poem exerted a marked influence on all of Western literature. It tells the tale of the Greek hero Odysseus as he tries to return home to Ithaca after fighting in the Trojan War.

The Canterbury Tales (late fourteenth century), a work of fiction by Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer has each of the voyagers on a pilgrimage to Canterbury tell a story as they journey along together.

Don Quixote (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes's mentally unbalanced knight sets off on a quest through Spain with his sidekick Sancho Panza.

The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955), a trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien. These three novels follow the effort by Frodo Baggins, a mythical humanlike being called a hobbit, to destroy a magical ring and, with it, an evil lord.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. Kerouac's famous novel about his road trips across the country (and to Mexico) helped inspire a generation of travelers, poets, and hipsters.

4. What are the characteristics of the "Byronic Hero," and are there any heroes in modern literature that display those characteristics?
5. Similar to many poets, Byron spent much of his adult life away from his native England. Do you think traveling and experiencing foreign cultures is a necessary part of a poet's career? Can you think of examples of successful poets who did not travel from their native region or country?
6. Compare Byron's treatment of the Don Juan legend with any of the previous incarnations. In what ways is

Byron's hero more sympathetic or less offensive than earlier versions?

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C

☒ João Cabral de Melo Neto

BORN: 1920, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

DIED: 1999, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Death and Life of a Severino: A Pernambucan Christmas Play (1955)

Museum of Everything (1975)

A Knife All Blade: Poetry (1980)

Overview

João Cabral de Melo Neto has earned international acclaim as one of Brazil's most original and influential poets of the post-World War II era. In his work, Cabral examines the ways in which language describes not only the world around the poet, but also its own way of describing that world: the metalinguistics of verse. Unlike many Brazilian poets, he considered poetry a written rather than an oral art form, and his consequent emphasis on syntax and structure, rather than on phonetics and sound, differentiates his work from much other Brazilian poetry. Cabral also aimed to remove his own personality from his work as much as possible, to allow the pure, objective meaning of the work to shine through.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Man of the People Cabral is almost invariably referred to as a *poeta pernambucano*—that is, a poet from the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco, the landscape and atmosphere of which he frequently drew on in his poetry. The second son of Luis Antonio Cabral de Melo and Carmen Leão Cabral de Melo, he grew up on the family's various sugarcane plantations in Pernambuco, surrounded by—but separate in status from—the farmworkers. Whenever they went to the nearby town, the

illiterate workers would bring back booklets called *literatura de cordel* (string literature), which the young Cabral would then read to them. He later portrayed these farm laborers in such poems as “The Discovery of Literature,” which appeared in *The School of Knives* (1980).

Poetry Anticipates Career to Come When he was only seventeen, Cabral wrote two poems on the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello. Though not major works, they are interesting for what they anticipate in a career that was to last half a century. The familiar idea that life is theater (as found in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 1922) is neatly laid out in these pieces in unrhymed free verse that is hard to approximate in English. Before long, though, Cabral began to write formal poetry in quatrains and other familiar verse forms. Almost from the beginning, he was attracted to the surrealism of such French poets as Guillaume Apollinaire. In 1937, when Cabral wrote his poems on Pirandello, surrealism had been part of the European artistic scene for almost a generation, and Apollinaire himself had been dead since 1918. It was still avant-garde, however, in a remote place such as Recife, far up the Atlantic coast from Rio de Janeiro, the then Brazilian capital. The sense of coming from behind—though not necessarily needing to catch up with—Europe played an important role in much of Cabral's poetic output. It was perhaps most significant in his long 1956 poem, *A Knife All Blade*, where Cabral saw himself as taking up a poetic challenge cast by (Spanish) Andalusia.

Diplomatic Service Provides Poetic Inspiration In 1945, Cabral published *The Engineer*, consisting of poems written between 1942 and 1945. In these, Cabral was already moving toward a new, “objective” concept of poetry that involved rational control of the emotions. That same year, he passed the examination that admitted him to the Instituto Rio Branco, the college for diplomats. His admission marked the beginning of a career in the diplomatic service. Cabral was to become a government representative in a way that has been, to some

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cabral's famous contemporaries include:

Truman Capote (1924–1984): American author credited with establishing the nonfiction novel as a literary genre with his book *In Cold Blood* (1966).

Indira Gandhi (1917–1984): First and, to date, the only female prime minister of India, Gandhi was assassinated by her own bodyguards midway through her fourth term in office.

Günter Grass (1927–): Nobel Prize-winning German author, best known for his first novel, *The Tin Drum* (1959).

George H. W. Bush (1924–): Bush was the forty-first president of the United States, and is the patriarch of a political clan that includes forty-third U.S. president George W. Bush and former Florida governor Jeb Bush.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Famed Argentinean author, internationally recognized as one of the most important Latin American writers and thinkers of the twentieth century.

Alain Badiou (1937–): Perhaps the most prominent French thinker of the late twentieth century, Badiou is known for his work on attempting to define the concept of truth.

extent, specific to Latin America; like Cabral, literary figures such as fellow Brazilian Vinícius de Moraes, Chilean Pablo Neruda, and Mexicans Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes all served as representatives of their respective governments at different points in their careers.

Cabral's first diplomatic post, in 1947, was with the Brazilian consulate in Barcelona, Spain, a city that profoundly influenced his poetry. He created a small publishing house, *Livro Inconsútil*, which brought out Spanish and Brazilian poetry, including two of his own books, *Psychology of Composition, with the Story of Anfiön and Antiode* (1947) and *Dog without Feathers* (1950). In the course of four decades of service as a diplomat, Cabral found himself in Great Britain, Switzerland, and Paraguay. He was appointed first ambassador to Senegal and, later, ambassador to Honduras. Throughout, he continued to write poetry.

Retirement and Recognition After retiring from diplomatic service in 1987, Cabral resided in Rio de Janeiro until his death from a degenerative ailment in 1999. The author of more than twenty-five books of poetry, Cabral was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1968 and awarded the São Paulo Literary Prize in 1992. After blindness struck him in 1994, Cabral became reclusive. He died on October 9, 1999, a few months before he would have turned eighty.

Works in Literary Context

Clear and Evocative Language Believing that poetry should act as a vehicle for communicating the interrelationships between the organic and inorganic—between what is alive and what is not—Cabral often uses multiple comparisons to capture the true essence of a subject or object. In “Estudos para uma Bailadora Andaluza,” for example, Cabral compares an Andalusian dancer to fire, a mare, a telegraph operator, a tree, a statue, and a maize plant. Critics maintain that Cabral's comparisons also emphasize his belief that humanity in general is more important than the individual. Cabral's concern with the poetic process is also apparent in such works as *Psychology of Composition*, a collection in which Cabral advocates objectivity and understatement in poetry and attacks what he considers the principal weaknesses of modern poetry—excessive lyricism and romanticism.

Portrayals of Pernambuco Cabral is also known for his repetition of images and his tightly structured syntax. Portrayals of life specific to northeastern Brazil recur throughout much of his poetry. In such poems as “Morte e vida Severina” Cabral describes the misery of an impoverished peasant fleeing drought, while “A cana dos outros” depicts the relationship between the owner of a sugar plantation and a peasant who performs the labor. Cabral also uses images of objects like knives, razors, and scalpels to describe anything with a piercing or aggressive nature. In “As facas Pernambucanas,” for example, Cabral employs descriptions of different types of knives to suggest the tension between the people of Pernambuco's interior and those of its coastal areas.

A Poetic Engineer Throughout his career, Cabral often compared poets to engineers and poems to machines. Upon being awarded the Neustadt Prize, he explained his concept of poetry as an engineering project: “[Poetry] is the exploration of the materiality of words and of the possibilities of organization of verbal structures, things that have nothing to do with what is romantically called inspiration, or even intuition.” For Cabral, poetry was a tool and a methodology for exploring and understanding the world and the human, emotional place in it—not the heady, flighty fantasy-stuff of the Romantic poets.

Works in Critical Context

In an essay in *Latin American Literary Review*, Richard Zenith remarked: “Following the slow ‘education by stone’ which couples patience with passion, [Cabral de] Melo Neto has achieved a poetry that on the one hand is veritable and verifiable art, and on the other hand participates meaningfully (precisely for its artistic rigor) at the sociological level.” Commenting on the modernist aspects of Cabral's poetry in *World Literature Today*, Aguinaldo Jose Goncalves suggested that the “nature of Cabral's influences is one of the more important aspects to determine the structure of his poetry. These influences

embrace several systems of art that conflate in the space of verbal language. . . . The poem leads the reader to face a difficult and fascinating universe of words.”

Trying Not to Perfume the Flower “I try not to perfume the flower,” Cabral once claimed of himself. And indeed, as Djelal Kadir has noted, “Scarcity is one of the fundamental principles of João Cabral’s poetics.” He is a sparing writer, concerned with presenting the world as nearly as it is as possible. There is little question that his sparse, image-driven poetry represents an important—perhaps even crucial—way of seeing the world.

Poetry as Play In 1955, Cabral published his best-known work, *Death and Life of a Severino: A Pernambucan Christmas Play*, a painful story about a poor man from northeast Brazil who, having lost his piece of land to a drought and a rich farmer, has nowhere to go. The story of Severino is an allegory. The name comes from the Latin *severo*, which means severe or rigorous, like the land he tried to farm, the *sertão*—a dry land where only low bushes grow. He represents the people of this harsh region, where droughts are constant and hardly anything grows. Severino wanders from the *sertão* in the hinterland to the coast in the vicinity of Recife, trying to find conditions in which to survive; it is a scene of despair. But a child is born—a sign of survival and hope—and so he abandons the idea of suicide. Due to the structure of the play, it was not preformed as Cabral originally intended until four years after its initial publication. In 1960, however, the work was staged with music by Chico Buarque de Hollanda, first in Brazil and then in Europe. The musical setting that this gifted young composer provided for the play had much to do with its success in Europe and Brazil, which was widespread. It is produced from time to time, and much of the score was recorded in 1966 on a long-playing record in Brazil.

Responses to Literature

1. Based on a reading of at least three of the poems in *A Knife All Blade: Poetry*, consider what it might mean for a knife to be “all blade.” How does the image or the idea of the knife in these poems help Cabral to develop a new image of the world around him?
2. Contrast Cabral’s northern Brazilian slant with the local focus of the works of William Butler Yeats, N. Scott Momaday, Yoko Kawashima Watkins, or Rudolfo Anaya. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a deeply local poetry, when it comes to trying to talk about “the human condition” in general?
3. Discuss a poem by Cabral that demonstrates his skill with cadence and caesura, which is an audible pause that breaks up a line of verse when read aloud. Why do you think the caesura has served as such an important poetic device in so many different languages? In your response, compare and contrast Cabral’s verse with that of at least one other poet.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cabral saw his poetic work explicitly as a tool to be used in comprehending the world around him. In this, he is part of a long tradition of poets concerned with what has come to be known as hermeneutics, a field of philosophy dedicated to interpretation and meaning. Here are several other poets and thinkers who focused on the interpretation of others, the world, and texts in their work:

Truth and Method (1960), a philosophical work by Hans-Georg Gadamer. This book is one of the most thorough modern attempts to figure out and explain what it means for people to understand one another.

Nature (1836), an essay collection by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, an American Transcendentalist poet, suggests in several essays in this volume that there is a difference between reason and understanding, and that he prefers the intuitive truth-seeking he sees in the former.

“Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1807), a poem by William Wordsworth. This songlike poem sees the poet seeking to understand how an adult consciousness can fail to see properly the world around it.

Vectors: Aphorisms and Ten-Second Essays (2001), a poetry collection by James Richardson. The author explores the idea and experience of understanding from five hundred different directions, concluding that “writing is like washing windows in the sun. With every attempt to perfect clarity you make a new smear.”

4. Write a poem in imitation of Cabral, describing the world around you as evocatively as you can, doing your best to keep your own thoughts and emotions as much in the background as possible. What about this exercise is difficult? What about it feels natural? How does writing your own poem in this manner influence the way you read Cabral’s poetry?

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☒ Guillermo Cabrera Infante

BORN: 1929, Gibara, Cuba

DIED: 2005, London, England

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Asi en la paz como en la guerra: Cuentos (1960,
In Peace as in War: Stories)

Vista del amanecer en el tropico (1965, *View of
Dawn in the Tropics*)

Tres tristes tigres (1967, later published in Eng-
lish as *Three Trapped Tigers*)

La Habana para un infante difunto (1979,
Infante's Inferno)

Holy Smoke (1985)

Overview

Guillermo Cabrera Infante is considered one of Latin America's most original and influential writers. Although he lived in exile from his native Cuba from the mid-1960s onward, much of his fiction is set in Havana and details the repressive and violent sociopolitical climate during the regime of Fulgencio Batista—prior to the Cuban revolution in 1959. Cabrera Infante largely eschews traditional literary forms, relying heavily on wordplay and loosely structured, nearly plotless narratives. His satiric, inventive prose has been compared to that of Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Writing Under (and Against) Batista Cabrera Infante was born in 1929 in the Oriente province of Cuba. His mother and father founded the local Communist Party and, when their son was seven years old, were arrested and had their property confiscated. The impact



Guillermo Cabrera Infante *Infante, Guillermo Cabrera, photograph.*
AP Images.

of these events on Cabrera Infante's work can be seen in the political content of his writings. Following a brief period in prison, his parents moved their family to Havana. Cabrera Infante became interested in literature while attending the University of Havana, which he left in 1948 to pursue a literary career. He edited the journal *Bohemia*, founded the literary magazine *Nueva Generación*, and helped establish the *Cinemateca de Cuba* (Film Library of Cuba). In 1952, Cabrera Infante was jailed and fined for publishing a story in *Bohemia* that contained English-language obscenities. Two years later, he became the film critic for *Carteles*, one of Cuba's most popular magazines, writing under the pseudonym G. Cain. Cabrera Infante's writing at this time was censored for its political content and reflects the author's clandestine activity against the Batista regime as part of a loose network of revolutionaries.

Fidel Castro Takes Power When Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, Cabrera Infante became involved with the new government, serving on the Bureau of Cultural Affairs and later becoming cultural attaché to Brussels, Belgium. He also acted as the director of *Lunes de Revolución*, the literary supplement to the pro-Castro newspaper *Revolución*. In 1960, Cabrera Infante published his first fiction collection, *In Peace as in War*. The following year, Castro

disbanded the *Lunes de Revolucion* when its editors protested the censorship of a documentary film directed by Cabrera Infante's brother, Saba Cabrera Infante, that depicted Havana's nightlife during the height of Batista's rule. Leaving Cuba in 1965—in large part because of dissatisfaction with Castro's regime—Cabrera Infante eventually settled in London.

Living in Exile, Successfully In 1967 his novel *Three Trapped Tigers* was published, earning the author international recognition. For several years, however, his income was derived primarily from the writing of such screenplays as *Wonderwall* (1968), *Vanishing Point* (1970), and *Under the Volcano* (1972). Throughout the 1970s, Cabrera Infante continued writing books in Spanish, including *Vista del amanecer en el tropico* (1974; View of Dawn in the Tropics), *Exorcismos de esti(l)o* (1976), and *La Habana para un Infante difunto* (1979; Infante's Inferno). In the 1980s he traveled and lectured throughout the United States and Latin America, in addition to publishing his first book written in English, *Holy Smoke* (1985). Over the years, he came to ever more fiercely oppose Castro's oppressive regime, writing particularly impassioned polemics against the Cuban government in the wake of its 2003 jailing of nearly eighty journalists, poets, and others. Until his London death in 2005, Cabrera Infante regularly published essays in newspapers, popular magazines, and scholarly journals.

Works in Literary Context

Writing Fiction During the Cuban Revolution Cabrera Infante's fictional works typically deal with Cuba's political experience in the twentieth century. The short stories in *In Peace as in War* are written in the mode of social realism and convey the author's contempt for the Batista dictatorship. Cabrera Infante later repudiated this work as being overly realistic at the expense of creativity. In the novel *Three Trapped Tigers*, widely regarded as one of the most important works of contemporary Latin American fiction, Cabrera Infante abandoned social realism for a humorous narrative developed through a series of monologues. Written primarily in Cuban street vernacular and narrated by several characters, *Three Trapped Tigers* depicts a society descending into physical and spiritual confusion; language itself becomes grotesque as it is reshaped by people struggling for new means of communication.

In *View of Dawn in the Tropics* Cabrera Infante again explores pre-Castro Cuba. Similar in structure to *In Peace as in War*, this book is a compendium of over one hundred vignettes tracing the entire history of Cuba. Jorge H. Valdes has contended that the collection depicts Cuban history "as a repetitive and often accidental course of events always leading to an unhappy ending." Set in Havana, Cabrera Infante's next book, *Infante's Inferno*,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cabrera Infante's famous contemporaries include:

Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973): This militant dictator, abhorred by Cabrera Infante, ruled over Cuba until 1958—when he submitted to pressure from Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement during the Cuban revolution.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Hailing originally from Colombia, this author is one of Latin America's most famous and was recognized for his contribution to twentieth-century literature in 1982, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Recently replaced by his brother Raúl Castro as president of Cuba, this revolutionary organized the successful overthrow of Batista's dictatorship, an event that had a major impact on the Cuban revolution.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentinian author of unusual works often considered to be the forerunners of magic realism.

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): Renowned Russian-American author most famous for his provocative novel *Lolita* (1955).

George H. W. Bush (1924–): The forty-third president of the United States.

chronicles the sexual initiation of a youth who bears many of the author's biographical traits.

Wordplay A trademark of Cabrera Infante's work is his abundant wordplay. This is seen in everything he writes, but especially in *Three Trapped Tigers*. This work, which chronicles Havana nightlife on the eve of Batista's fall, abounds with puns, parodies, and wordplay. As with his novels and short stories, Cabrera Infante imbues his nonfiction works with verbal exuberance and rich evocations of Cuban society. Of the nonfiction book *Holy Smoke*, the first book Cabrera Infante wrote in English, John Gross has noted, "[Joseph] Conrad and [Vladimir] Nabokov apart, no other writer for whom English is a second language can ever have used it with more virtuosity."

Writing for and About Films Cabrera Infante worked on screenplays for several films during the 1970s and 1980s, one of which—*Vanishing Point*—is considered a classic by many viewers, including writer-director Quentin Tarantino. Cabrera Infante published two collections of film criticism, *A Twentieth-Century Job* (1963) and *Arcadia todas las noches* (1978), which critics have praised for their judicious insights into the work of American and European filmmakers. John King has additionally noted that *A Twentieth-Century Job* provides "an engaging portrait of Cuban intellectual life in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Revolutionary moments in history are often accompanied by a flurry of artistic output, an expression of the different possibilities brought about by monumental changes in political and social structures. As the formerly oppressed struggle to find their voices among competing ideas and drives, questions of national and personal identity collide in the wake of falling order. Cabrera Infante's unique style captures the uncertainty of such moments. Other works that explore the uncertainty of revolutionary moments include:

Democracy in America (1835), a nonfiction work by Alexis de Tocqueville. Written during a period of intense cultural and political transformation in America, this frequently studied work discusses democracy as the preferable means of negotiation during revolutions of all kinds.

Dubliners (1914), a short-story collection by James Joyce. This famous collection of short stories explores revolutionary moments, or epiphanies, within the individual.

The Order of Things (1966), a nonfiction work by Michel Foucault. Exploring revolutionary moments from the perspective of post-structural theory, this work explores how the conditions of discourse—what kinds of communication are possible—shift from one “episteme,” or historical-conceptual paradigm, to another.

the 1950s.” *Holy Smoke* is a factual account of the history of the cigar and contains an anthology of famous smoking scenes from literature and film.

Works in Critical Context

Writing That Defies Categorization As aptly noted by author and critic Ardis L. Nelson, with books that defy categorization, Cabrera Infante has inspired a wealth of critical response and conjecture. David P. Gallagher asserts that Cabrera Infante aims to demolish literature as a solemn and pretentious art form by using everyday spoken language and by parodying writers, among other techniques. Since Cabrera Infante denies that he writes novels, there is an ongoing debate as to the genre of his works. While Isabel Alvarez-Borland argues that he writes short stories, vignettes, and essays, combining them in a fragmented mosaic, Emir Rodriguez Monegal contends that his work is largely autobiographical.

Three Trapped Tigers established Cabrera Infante's reputation as a writer of innovative fiction, a reputation that only some critics find justified by his other works. Playing with words is an important part of *Infante's Inferno* and his nonfiction work, *Holy Smoke*. Unlike the nearly universal acclaim received for *Three Trapped*

Tigers, critics were unable to reach a consensus on these two works. While some praised Cabrera Infante's continued use of puns as innovative, others had grown tired of the Cuban's verbal contortions.

Infante's Inferno and Holy Smoke Commenting on *Infante's Inferno* in the *New York Review of Books*, Michael Wood complains that Cabrera Infante's relentless punning “unrepentantly mangles language and hops from one tongue to another like a frog released from the throat. Some of the jokes are . . . terrible. . . . Others are so cumbersome, so fiendishly worked for, that the noise of grinding machinery deafens all the chance of laughter.” *New York Review of Books* contributor Josh Rubins has similar problems with *Holy Smoke*. He comments, “In *Holy Smoke* . . . the surfeit of puns seems to arise not from mania . . . but from a mere tic. Or, worse yet, from a computer program.”

“A Good Writer, but a Bad Revolutionary”

Other reviewers are not so harsh in their criticism. In Enrique Fernandez's *Voice Literary Supplement* review of *Infante's Inferno*, for example, the critic observes that the novel is written in “an everyday Cuban voice, unaffected, untrammelled, [and] authentic.” John Gross of the *New York Times* hails Cabrera Infante as a master in the use of language. Commenting on *Holy Smoke*, he claims: “Conrad and Nabokov apart, no other writer for whom English is a second language can ever have used it with more virtuosity. He is a master of idiomatic echoes and glancing allusions; he keeps up a constant barrage of wordplay, which is often outrageous, but no more outrageous than he intends it to be.”

Cabrera Infante's works have been criticized by some for their lack of ideological commitment, but they have been lauded by many for their genius. Since *Three Trapped Tigers*, his works have been forbidden in Cuba, where he is widely considered to be “un buen escritor, pero mal revolucionario”: a good writer, but a bad revolutionary.

Responses to Literature

1. Summarize the picture of Havana portrayed in *Infante's Inferno*. What emotional response(s), if any, did you feel as you were reading? Explain your reaction to Cabrera Infante's choice of literary style.
2. Discuss the influence of Cabrera Infante's political experiences on the content of his writings. Make sure to support your discussion with examples from both his fiction and nonfiction works.
3. Explain how Infante's study of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, which he translated into Spanish in 1972, may have influenced his works.
4. Cabrera Infante rejects the idea that his writings, including his most famous work, *Three Trapped Tigers*, can be categorized as novels. If you had to assign a genre to *Three Trapped Tigers*, what would it be, and why? Use examples from the book to support your opinion.

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☒ Morley Callaghan

BORN: 1903, Toronto, Canada

DIED: 1990, Toronto, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

They Shall Inherit the Earth (1935)

The Loved and the Lost (1951)

Morley Callaghan's Stories (1959)

The Many Colored Coat (1960)

Close to the Sun Again (1977)

Overview

Morley Callaghan was one of Canada's most distinguished writers. He was unquestionably the first to have



Morley Edward Callaghan Callaghan, Morley Edward, photograph.
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established a major international reputation, which he started building in the late 1920s in the little magazines of Paris and the slick monthlies of New York, where his first short stories appeared. A brief participant in the Lost Generation scene in Paris during the late 1920s, Callaghan returned home to Toronto, where he continued a productive writing life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Middle-Class Upbringing in Toronto Morley Edward Callaghan was born in Toronto on February 22, 1903. The second of two sons of Thomas and Mary Dewan Callaghan, Roman Catholics of Irish descent, he was named after John Morley, biographer of Edmund Burke. He was raised in a middle-class home where there was much music and discussion of literature. He began writing early, and while attending Riverdale Collegiate, the young Callaghan had his first feature article published in the *Star Weekly*. At St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, Callaghan read constantly, continued to write nonfiction, and began experimenting with fiction. In 1923 he joined the staff of the *Toronto Star*.

Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the Lost Generation

Callaghan met Ernest Hemingway at the *Toronto Star*. Hemingway, who had been a European correspondent for the paper and spent much of his time in Paris, was back briefly in Toronto writing from the newsroom. The two reporters became friends and often would go to the *Star* library to chat and exchange the short stories they wrote in their spare time. Callaghan's writing also gained the attention of F. Scott Fitzgerald, another American writer living in Paris. After successfully publishing his first novel and first short-story collection with the help of Fitzgerald's editor, Callaghan married his college sweetheart, Loretto Florence Dee, in 1929 and the two sailed to Paris for their honeymoon.

Callaghan spent time with both Hemingway and Fitzgerald while in Paris, and in so doing became associated with the Lost Generation—a term popularized by Hemingway for a group of American writers who lived in self-imposed exile, primarily in Paris, in the years following World War I. These writers were considered “lost” because of the disillusionment experienced during and after the war.

The relationship between Callaghan and Hemingway soured after a boxing match between the two, in which Callaghan knocked down his older and larger opponent. Fitzgerald, who served as timekeeper for the match, tried to cover for Hemingway, saying as timekeeper he had mistakenly let the round go overtime, unfairly tiring Hemingway. The experience strained the friendship between Callaghan and Hemingway. And perhaps worse, it fixed Callaghan in the minds of many as a marginalized member of the Lost Generation. In many books on that era and in much that has been written on Callaghan since then, the boxing incident gets much more discussion than Callaghan's writing, which is either dealt with superficially or overlooked. Tiring of the Paris scene, Callaghan returned home in the fall of 1929.

War and a Fiction Dry Spell Although he was involved in other projects, Callaghan wrote little fiction from 1938 to 1947. He has called this “the dark period of my life.” The author traced his initial lack of productivity to a numbness triggered by the spread of World War II in Europe. His break from novel and short-story writing was also helped along by a flirtation with the theater. In 1938 he was asked by New York Theatre Guild producer Lawrence Langner to write a stage play from his 1935 novel *They Shall Inherit the Earth*. The result was *Turn Again Home*. He wrote a second play that year, *Just Ask for George*, and both plays were optioned for Broadway. Neither was produced because of a lack of financial backing and the unavailability of key actors. They were not staged until a decade later.

Award-Winning Work In the early 1950s, Callaghan began appearing on television as a panelist on the

show *Fighting Words*, moderated by influential theater critic Nathan Cohen. One benefit to this work was the travel it afforded to other Canadian cities, where Callaghan constantly looked for material for his fiction. He found it in Montreal, using Canada's most exotic and wide-open city as the backdrop for *The Loved and the Lost*. The book, exploring the then explosive topic of relations between whites and blacks, is one of Callaghan's best books. It sold over five hundred thousand copies in paperback alone and was adapted as a musical for Broadway. It also won Canada's Governor General's Award for fiction in 1951, the first of several major awards he was to receive.

Hemingway's Ghost Besides having to face mixed reviews for *A Passion in Rome* (1961), Callaghan also had to deal with the ghost of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's July 1961 suicide led to many journalists' discovery that Callaghan had been an early friend of his. Editors and reporters began calling him for his memories of the early days with Hemingway. Callaghan eventually tired of it all, especially the reporters' rehashing of the unfortunate boxing match. He decided to set the record straight with his 1963 book *That Summer in Paris: Memories of Tangled Friendships with Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Some Others*.

Despite advancing years, Callaghan kept up a steady writing pace. In 1974 *Winter* was published. *A Fine and Private Place* appeared the following year. While Callaghan's short stories had not been in the major slick magazines for many years, his work began turning up during the 1970s in *Exile*, a small Canadian literary quarterly. *Exile* became his laboratory, running excerpts from his works in progress. One such piece was a forerunner to the novel *Close to the Sun Again*, published in 1977. The *Toronto Globe and Mail* named it “the best Canadian novel” of the year.

In 1984, after fifty-five years of marriage, Callaghan's wife, Loretto, died. In 1985, the Canadian publishing house of Lester & Orpen Dennys, in conjunction with Exile Editions, brought out a short-story collection titled *The Lost and Found Stories of Morley Callaghan*. After outliving most of his contemporaries, he suffered a brief period of illness and died on August 25, 1990.

Works in Literary Context

“Writing had to do with the right relationship between the words and thing or person being described,” Callaghan once said. “The words should be as transparent as glass.” Writing in a direct, unadorned language from a nonjudgmental point of view, Callaghan often dealt with the struggle of flawed but noble individuals to make it in a hostile or indifferent world. His stories concern the problems of people in the mainstream. As he wrote in the introduction to *Morley Callaghan's Stories*, they are

the problems of “many kinds of people . . . , [though] I neglected those of the very, very rich.” He wryly added, “I have a story that begins, ‘Once upon a time there were two millionaires,’ but I haven’t finished it yet.”

Biblical Themes Many of the locales of Callaghan’s stories are Canadian, but the themes are not. Instead, the themes are universal or common to North America, a choice Callaghan consistently made in his refusal to become a generically Canadian writer. Rich in symbolism and irony, Callaghan’s fiction especially explored biblical themes. *They Shall Inherit the Earth* borrows from the stories of Cain and Abel and the prodigal son. *The Many Colored Coat* tells a secular story of the duplicity of corporate life and modern values but makes consistent references to Joseph and his coat of many colors, a young man who models the scapegoating and subsequent forgiving of his accusers expressed by Callaghan’s protagonist. Rich with messages of redemption and salvation, these themes offer added significance to several of the writer’s works.

Influences Callaghan’s work with religious themes in the 1930s takes influence from a contemporary, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, whom Callaghan knew in 1933. He was also influenced by American and European writers, including, as he recalled in his 1963 memoir, “[Fyodor] Dostoyevsky, Joseph Conrad, Sinclair Lewis, [Gustave] Flaubert; *The Dial*, *The Adelphi*, the old *Smart Set*, edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan; Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence . . . , everything.”

Works in Critical Context

Some critics have likened Callaghan’s style to Ivan Turgenev’s or Anton Chekhov’s, and others have compared his approach to Hemingway’s. Scholar Brandon Conron notes the difference: “Moral rather than physical courage is [Callaghan’s] concern.” He is an author who has steadfastly gone his own independent way, leaving others to contend with the passing literary fads. Publisher Thomas McCormack of St. Martin’s Press conceded in a 1978 interview that Callaghan may suffer for not being plugged into the latest vogue, “but he is part of the spinal literature of the twentieth century that people will remember.”

***The Many Colored Coat* (1960)** This book, like so many of Callaghan’s, divided the critics, including those in his own country. *Canadian Literature* editor George Woodcock found that the novel is too long and that it “hovers uneasily between sharpness of caricature and the flabbiness of sentimental pseudo-realism.” Canadian novelist Hugh MacLennan contended that the work is “over most people’s heads, and possibly mine, also. . . . To me this is a deeply disturbing, rather wonderful and hard-to-comprehend novel.” Renowned critic Edmund Wilson,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Callaghan’s famous contemporaries include:

Clare Booth Luce (1903–1987): American editor, activist, and writer, she was also a high-profile socialite, a congresswoman with a Republican seat in the House of Representatives, and an ambassador to Italy.

Mary Norton (née Spenser) (1903–1992): British children’s author known for several stories made into movies, including a series produced as the Disney movie *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971).

Maxwell Perkins (1884–1947): American journalist who worked as an editor at Charles Scribner’s Sons and was responsible for the introduction of such writers as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos.

Sylvia Beach (1887–1962): American owner of the famous Shakespeare and Company English-language bookshop in Paris through the 1920s and 1930s.

Maria Tallchief (1925–): Native American (Osage Nation) ballerina, she has performed at several venues, has had a number of pieces composed for her, and cofounded such ballet companies as the Chicago City Ballet.

however, examined the responses to Callaghan’s novels and wondered “whether the primary reason for the current underestimation of Morley Callaghan may not be simply a general incapacity—apparently shared by his compatriots—for believing that a writer whose works may be mentioned without absurdity in association with Chekhov’s and Turgenev’s can possibly be functioning in Toronto.”

Responses to Literature

1. As Brandon Conron notes, Callaghan’s short stories follow a “recognizable formula. They are all self-contained anecdotes. Their opening is usually a declarative statement that sets the stage for a drama that most frequently is psychological and involves little action. A problem is posed and, by description, dialogue, and internal monologue, the story moves with easy economy through a climax to an ending which may not resolve the dilemma but invariably leaves it haunting the reader’s mind.” Write your own short story using Callaghan’s formula. Make a declarative opening statement to set the stage. Give your character a problem to solve. Follow through with dialogue, monologue, and a climax. Decide whether to resolve or not resolve the issue.
2. Look up the definitions for *minimalism* and *realism*—two terms often applied to Callaghan’s

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Further tribute to Callaghan's talents as a short-story writer is the fact that he had pieces in fourteen of Edward O'Brien's twenty-six annual anthologies, *The Best Short Stories*. Here are a few works by short-story writers who also took inspiration from the everyday around them and who also succeeded in making the same honor—being anthologized several times over:

"For Love of the Hills" (1912), a short story by Susan Glaspell. This story about a girl who feels that the city of Chicago has failed her was first printed in *Little Masks* by Frederick Stokes of New York.

"Girl" (1983), a short story by Jamaica Kincaid. This very short story, a kind of domestic girl mantra, was first published in *At the Bottom of the River* by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux of New York.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955), a short story by Flannery O'Connor. This story of a family vacation gone dark was first published in the title by the same name by Harcourt in New York.

"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1975), a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin. This story of the perfect community with the perfect scapegoat first appeared in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, published by Harper in New York.

"Soldier's Home" (1925), a short story by Ernest Hemingway. This short story about Harold Krebs, a soldier returning from war, was first published in *In Our Time* by Charles Scribner's Sons in New York.

writing. What characteristics does each style boast? What do you find striking about each style?

3. Find a good working definition of *allegory*. Which of Callaghan's stories could be considered allegories?
4. If you are working with a group who is reading Callaghan, have a discussion about the level of difficulty of his work. Share examples with others of where he seems to "go over" a reader's head. Discuss why you think such works are so difficult.

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Italo Calvino

BORN: 1923, *Santiago de Las Vegas, Cuba*

DIED: 1985, *Siena, Italy*

NATIONALITY: *Italian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Path to the Nest of Spiders (1947)

Italian Folktales (1956)

Invisible Cities (1972)

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler (1979)

Mr. Palomar (1983)

Overview

Italo Calvino was a noted journalist, essayist, and writer of fiction. Perhaps best remembered today for such literary works as *Invisible Cities* and the "Our Ancestors" trilogy, which blended fantasy, fable, and comedy to illuminate modern life, Calvino also made important contributions to the fields of folklore and literary criticism. Calvino's growth as a writer paralleled the major literary trends of the last forty years; he moved from stories firmly grounded in reality to challenging story structures that simultaneously defied and redefined the traditional form of the novel. All the while, his writing remained accessible to the general reading public. More than two decades after his death, Italo Calvino's writings remain both widely respected and crucially relevant to modern literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Child of Scientists Italo Calvino was born in Cuba in 1923. His father, Mario, a botanist, was forty-



Italo Calvino *Calvino, Italo*, photo by Elisabetta Catalano. *The Library of Congress*.

eight when Calvino was born; his mother, formerly Eva Mameli, also a botanist, was thirty-seven. Shortly after his birth, his family returned to their native Italy. They raised Calvino on their farm in San Remo, where he would spend the better part of the next twenty years.

He attended public schools, and because his parents were nonreligious, he did not receive a religious education, nor was he subjected to the obligatory political indoctrination of fascist leader Benito Mussolini's Italian government. A family tradition of devotion to science led him to enter the school of agriculture at the University of Turin, where his father was a distinguished professor of tropical agriculture.

War Stories and Political Tracts Calvino's studies were interrupted, however, when he received orders to join the Italian army. During World War II, Italy was a key member of the Axis powers, along with Germany and Japan; these countries fought against the Allied powers of England, France, and eventually the United States. Opposed to fighting for a cause he didn't believe in, Calvino fled and joined the widespread resistance that was at that time fighting against Italian and German

fascists in the country. During the two years that Germany occupied Italy (1943–1945), Calvino lived as a freedom fighter in the woods of the Maritime Alps, fighting both German and Italian fascists.

At the war's end in 1945, Calvino joined the Communist Party, which supported the rights of workers and the collective sharing of both resources and wealth. He also returned to the University of Turin, this time enrolling in the faculty of letters. He graduated one year later with a thesis on British author Joseph Conrad. He also began writing for left-wing papers and journals.

Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist critic and cofounder of the Italian Communist Party whose writings were published posthumously in book form in the 1940s, exercised a remarkable influence on Calvino. Gramsci called for a national popular literature that would be accessible to the people and receptive to their real concerns. This new literature would be vibrant and rooted in social values and would cover a range of contemporary topics, including film, the American novel, music, and comic books.

Calvino began to record his war experiences in stories that eventually became his highly acclaimed first novel, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* (1947). In this work he revealed the war as seen through the eyes of an innocent young soldier, the first of many youthful or naive protagonists he would use to reflect life's complexity and tragedy. Considered a member of the school of neorealism—a literary movement that sought to bring a feeling of authentic real-life events and emotion into writing—Calvino was encouraged by such writer friends as Natalia Ginzburg and Cesare Pavese to write another novel in this tradition. These friends also invited him to join the staff of their new publishing house, Einaudi. He accepted and remained affiliated with Einaudi all his life.

Parisian Relocation By the middle of the 1950s, Calvino was spending most of his time in Rome, the literary as well as political hub of Italian life. Tired of writing tracts for communist periodicals and, like many European intellectuals, disillusioned by the spread of dogmatic Stalinism—which shared many of the same ideals as communism, but in practice resulted in a murderous dictatorship—he resigned from the Communist Party. His disillusionment with Stalinist tyranny and perversion of communist ideals was sealed with the crushing of the Hungarian revolt in 1956 by forces of the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, as the years passed, Calvino became increasingly skeptical of politics in general.

In 1959, Calvino visited America for six months, and in the early 1960s, he moved to Paris. While living in Paris, he met Chichita Singer, an Argentinian woman who had been working for years as a translator for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). They were married in 1964. Also in the 1960s, Calvino joined the OuLiPo, or *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (Workshop of Potential Literature), an

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Calvino's famous contemporaries include:

- Salvador Dalí** (1904–1989): A Spanish surrealist painter.
- Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): Nobel Prize–winning Chilean poet also known for his outspoken communism.
- Roland Barthes** (1915–1980): French literary critic and philosopher.
- Claude Lévi-Strauss** (1908–): French anthropologist who developed the idea of structuralism as a method for understanding society.
- Joseph Stalin** (1878–1953): General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 to his death in 1953; his brutal authoritarianism alienated many intellectuals affiliated with the Communist Party outside the Soviet Union.
- Ernesto “Che” Guevara** (1928–1967): Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla leader.

experimental workshop founded by Raymond Queneau. His association with this group would influence his subsequent work.

International Recognition and Honors The 1970s saw the publication of three of Calvino's most highly regarded novels: *Invisible Cities*, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. During this period he and Chichita became the parents of a daughter whom they named Giovana.

After his move to Paris, Calvino's work began to show a wider range of influences. A reconciliation with his father, which is treated in the short story “La strada di San Giovanni” (1990; translated in *The Road to San Giovanni*, 1993), gave him the freedom to explore and embrace a scientific perspective more vigorously, honing it into an attitude that blended humanist innocence and scientific wonder.

Calvino worked on the book *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* periodically for several years. In the 1973 postscript to *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Calvino writes about the double origin of the work. The idea first came to him in 1968 while he was attending an international seminar in which one of the participants spoke of fortunetelling with cards. Publisher Franco Maria Ricci decided to bring out an art book employing the Visconti tarot cards illustrated by Bonifazio Bembo and asked Calvino to provide the commentary.

Calvino first won international recognition as a major writer with *Invisible Cities*, which some critics consider to be his most perfect work. The book has a carefully defined mathematical structure that displays its author's abiding interest in symmetries and parallels. The

book is ostensibly a conversation between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, in which Polo enumerates the various cities of the Khan's empire. Yet it can hardly be called fiction, for it does not resemble a narrative, nor does it tell a story.

Calvino's readers had to wait six years for his next book, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979). As if to mockingly reassure his public of the authenticity of the book, he begins by stating, “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Relax . . .” Described by Salman Rushdie as “the most outrageous fiction about fiction ever conceived,” the novel comprises the beginnings of ten other novels to emerge as a constantly mutating parody of literary genres.

Final Years Calvino's last novel was published after he returned to Rome. The protagonist in the novel *Mr. Palomar* (1985) is a visionary who quests after knowledge. Named for the telescope at Mount Palomar in Southern California, he is a wise and perceptive scanner of humanity's foibles and mores. While the scheme of *Mr. Palomar* is less complex than that of *Invisible Cities*, Calvino again employs ideas borrowed from science, set theory, semiotics, linguistics, and structuralism.

In 1975, Calvino became an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters; in 1980, his *Italian Folktales* was included on the American Library Association's Notable Booklist; in 1984, he was awarded an honorary degree by Mount Holyoke College; and in 1985, he was to have delivered the Norton Lectures at Harvard. However, Calvino died at age sixty-one on September 19, 1985, in Siena, Italy following a cerebral hemorrhage.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired by the legacies of such Italian luminaries as Renaissance poet Ludovico Ariosto and revolutionary scientist Galileo Galilei, Calvino interwove an ironic and allegorical use of fantasy with a profound interest in the phenomena of science and mathematics.

Neorealism Calvino began his writing career in the mid-1940s, when neorealism was becoming the dominant literary movement. The dilemma for the young author coming of age at this time of cultural flux was whether to follow the accepted standard of social realism promoted by Marxist ideology or to move beyond literary convention on his own. For a while, Calvino was able to maintain a healthy balance and satisfy both his political commitment and evolving literary aspirations.

Folklore During the 1950s, Calvino began to move away from neorealism. His “Our Ancestors” trilogy is markedly different from his earlier works. In *The Cloven Viscount* (1952), Calvino depicts a soldier halved by a cannonball during a crusade. His two halves return to play opposing roles in his native village. *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959) details the adventures of a suit of armor

occupied by the will of a knight who is otherwise incorporeal. And *The Baron in the Trees* (1957) recounts the saga of a boy who, rebelling against the authority of his father, spends the rest of his life living in the branches of a forest. All three works, set in remote times, rely on fantasy, fable, and comedy to illuminate modern life.

Calvino frequently acknowledged that much of his fantastic material was indebted to traditional folklore. In 1956, he published his reworking of Italian fables, *Italian Folktales*, which has achieved an international reputation as a classic comparable to the work of the Brothers Grimm.

Science and Mathematics Calvino continued to “search for new forms to suit realities ignored by most writers.” In the comic strip, he found the inspiration for both *t zero* (1967) and *Cosmicomics* (1968). In these pieces, which resemble science fiction, a blob-like being named Qfwfq, who variously exists as an atomic particle, a mollusk, and a dinosaur, narrates the astronomical origins of the cosmos as well as the development of the species over millennia. Calvino made further use of mathematics and logic in *t zero*, a collection of stories in which he fictionalized philosophical questions concerning genetics, cybernetics, and time.

Postmodernism Much of Calvino’s later works are considered to be postmodernist, a sometimes vague and imprecise category. Postmodern literature relies on such techniques as the use of questionable narrators, fragmentation, and metafiction—the deliberate tweaking of narrative conventions. Postmodernist writers tend to reject the quest for finding order amid chaos that characterized earlier modernist works, instead often reveling in creating a sense of paradox or deconstructing the traditional narrative structure, as in *Invisible Cities*.

Influences and Legacy Long an admirer of classical literature, Calvino’s earliest influences were drawn from the likes of fellow countrymen Dante and Ariosto, as well as Honoré de Balzac, Miguel de Cervantes, and William Shakespeare. After his relocation to Paris, he built on this core of the Italian narrative tradition and classical studies, by looking to writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, James Joyce, and Robert Musil.

Italo Calvino continues to influence modern writers such as Aimee Bender and Amanda Filipacchi, both of whom explore similar fantastic, surreal, postmodern landscapes.

Works in Critical Context

Calvino’s essays on literature, collected in *The Uses of Literature* and *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, clearly define his aesthetic criteria and philosophical temperament. In *Six Memos*, he states that his goal was to achieve a clarity and lightness of language that would allow him to conduct “a search for knowledge...extended to anthropology and ethnology and mythology...a net-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino explores the emotional potential of imagining strange and distant lands, prompting readers to imagine their own world in new ways. Other works that allow readers a window into unusual worlds include:

Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America during the Years 1799–1804 (c. 1814), a travelogue by Alexander von Humboldt. Brilliant German naturalist and explorer Humboldt records his observations of South America in this substantial work.

The Man Who Would Be King (1975), a film directed by John Huston. Based on a Rudyard Kipling short story, this adventure movie features Sean Connery and Michael Caine as former British soldiers who have a fantastic adventure in exotic lands not seen by Westerners in centuries.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This classic of the Beat Generation chronicles a wild cross-country trip by fictionalized versions of Kerouac and his friends. Though it takes place in the United States of the 1950s, the landscape is both strange and familiar, much like the cities described by Calvino.

The Abyssinian (2000), a novel by Jean-Christophe Rufin. Rufin’s debut novel tells of an adventurous doctor in seventeenth-century Cairo who, through a strange turn of events, is ordered on a dangerous diplomatic mission to the king of Abyssinia.

work of connections between the events, the people and the things of the world.”

Calvino has long earned favor among literary critics. From his early works, Calvino’s narrative is highly personalized, exhibiting the enduring duality most critics find in his writing. Jay Schweig, on the other hand, has called Calvino’s later works “postmodernism at its most frustrating.”

The Our Ancestors Trilogy The three books that make up the *Our Ancestors* trilogy were widely praised when they were first published in the 1950s. Helene Cantarella, in the *New York Times Book Review*, calls the first book, *The Cloven Viscount*, “a dark-hued Gothic gem which transports us into the mysterious late medieval world of Altdorfer’s teeming battle scenes and Bosch’s hallucinating grotesques.” Gore Vidal has described the philosophical theme of *The Cloven Viscount* as a witty and refreshing parody of the Platonic Ideal. Regarding the final book, *The Baron in the Trees*, Frederic Morton, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, states, “Mr. Calvino...seems to have intended nothing less than the deliberate transmutation of fantastic notion into

universal allegory. Since he is not Cervantes he does not succeed—yet we are frequently entertained and even incidentally instructed.” Similarly, John Updike has claimed that Calvino’s novels “can no longer be called novels; they are displays of mental elegance, bound illuminations.”

Responses to Literature

1. Italo Calvino’s collection of Italian folktales was a contribution on par with the works of the Brothers Grimm. Using Calvino’s work as a base, research and summarize five well-known Italian folktales.
2. The later works of Italo Calvino juxtapose fantastic narratives with rigorous applications of mathematical patterns. Note the appearance of numbers, patterns, sequences, and mathematics in general in such works as *Invisible Cities*, *t zero*, *Cosmicomics*, and *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and explain their function.
3. As a young man, Italo Calvino was insulated from, and later revolted against, the rigid and dogmatic policies of Mussolini’s Italy. What was the state-approved art and literature of fascist Italy like? Can you compare fascist art to movements in art and literature that are popular today? Why do you think Calvino’s parents would have wanted to protect him from such influences?
4. Italo Calvino’s early writings are considered part of the Italian neorealist movement. What were the goals and objectives of this movement? Using your library and the Web, find out more about literary realism and neorealism. How do the two styles differ? How are they the same?

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Thomas Campion

BORN: 1567, *St. Andrew Holburn, England*

DIED: 1620, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Plays*

MAJOR WORKS:

A Booke of Ayres (1601)

Observations in the Art of English Poesie (1602)

The Lord Hay’s Masque (1607)

Two Books of Ayres (1613)

Third and Fourth Books of Ayres (1617)

Overview

Perhaps best known today as the composer of music and lyrics for more than one hundred songs for voice and

lute, Thomas Campion was equally celebrated in his own time for his Latin poetry. He wrote a book on poetic composition urging the adoption of specific classical meters in English, and a music textbook that was sufficiently forward-looking to be republished throughout the seventeenth century. His contribution to the dramatic literature of the age consists of four masques.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Orphaned in his Teens Thomas Campion was born on February 12, 1567, in the English parish of St. Andrew Holborn. By 1580 his father, John Campion, and his mother, Lucy, were both dead, leaving him in the care of his mother's third husband, Augustine Steward, and his new wife, Anne Sisley. In 1581 he was sent to Cambridge University, where he remained until 1584, leaving without taking a degree. Two years later he was admitted to Gray's Inn to study law. He acquired no legal qualification, but likely began his writing career during this time. His connection with drama and the masque—a form of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artistic performance designed to privately entertain a court—also began. In 1588 he acted a part in a comedy presented before noblemen that included Lord Burleigh, Lord Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth I, and in 1594 he contributed at least one lyric to *The Masque of Proteus*, a highly significant work in the establishment of the masque form. It is probable that in 1591–1592 Campion joined Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, on his unsuccessful expedition to aid Henry IV of France against the Catholic League in Normandy, France.

In 1595, Campion's publishing career began with the appearance of *Thoma Campiani Poemata*. In 1601, Campion and his friend Philip Rosseter jointly published *A Booke of Ayres*, the first half of which was written by Campion. Rosseter's dedication of this work to English baron and politician Sir Thomas Monson indicates that Campion had for some time been under the protection of this important musical patron. After the publication in 1602 of his treatise on meter, *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, it is assumed that Campion traveled on the European continent. He received a medical degree from the University of Caen in February 1605 and practiced medicine for the rest of his life.

The Masques Campion's masque-writing career began in 1607, when his *The Lord Hay's Masque* was performed on January 6 at court to celebrate the marriage of King James's Scottish favorite James Hay to Honora Denny, the daughter of a wealthy English nobleman. This marriage between a Scotsman and an Englishwoman was symbolic of the recent union between Scotland and England that James had lobbied for since 1603, when, already king of Scotland, he became James I of England as well. The masque as a whole indicates the need for love

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Campion's famous contemporaries include:

Francis Bacon (1561–1626): English statesman and scientist; established an inductive method of scientific inquiry, today known as the scientific method.

John Donne (1572–1631): English metaphysical poet and preacher; converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism.

Guy Fawkes (1570–1606): English Roman Catholic involved in the failed plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill Protestant King James I.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Italian astronomer and scientist; forced by the Inquisition to renounce his revolutionary belief that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English playwright, actor, and poet known for his satirical plays.

Johannes Kepler (1571–1630): German mathematician and scientist; developed the foundation of modern optics and formulated three laws of planetary motion.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618): English poet, courtier, and explorer; a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, he was involved in the settlement of the colony of Virginia.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): English poet and playwright, regarded by many as the greatest writer in the English language.

to replace ancient hostility between the nations and reflects both the symbolic joining of Scotland and England in the marriage and the actual union of the countries under James's rule.

After this work Campion published virtually nothing for six years, with the exception of the musical treatise *A New Way of Making Fowre Parts in Counter-point* (around 1610). In November 1612, during the preparations for Campion's next court masque (a celebration of the marriage of James I's daughter Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector Palatine of Bohemia), the sudden, unexpected death of Henry, the Prince of Wales, inspired Campion's *Songs of Mourning*, a collection of elegies with accompanying music by Giovanni Coprario. In February 1613 Campion's *The Lord's Masque* was at last performed at court, with scenery and decoration by the celebrated architect Inigo Jones. Within the following year Campion was commissioned to write two additional masques for the family of the influential Lord Chamberlain, Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, including one for the marriage of Suffolk's daughter Frances to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, called *The Somerset Masque*.

Poetry of Songs In addition to the masques composed during 1613, Campion also published *Two Books of Ayres*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Campion's reputation today rests on his lyric poetry. Lyric poetry describes poems that are strongly associated with emotion and imagination, and have a song-like resonance (Campion's were meant to be sung). Here are some works of lyric poetry.

Gitanjali (1913), by Rabindranath Tagore. This poetry collection by the Bengali poet, composer, and writer received the Nobel Prize; Tagore's poetry has often been set to music.

"Hymn to Aphrodite" (c. 600 B.C.E., by Sappho. This ancient Greek lyric poem dealing with unrequited love was intended to be sung.

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (c. 1527), by Martin Luther. This hymn and lyric poem was written by the famous German religious reformer who sparked the Protestant Reformation.

"Auld Lang Syne" (1788), by Robert Burns. This Scottish poet wrote the lyric poem that is still sung today as each new year dawns.

The first part of the collection contains songs of a religious or devotional nature, and the second part of the volume contains love songs. In 1617 Campion published a final songbook, *Third and Fourth Books of Ayres*. Campion wrote the songs to be sung accompanied by music, but they are largely read today as lyric poetry.

Tho. Campiani Epigrammatum Libri II. Umbra. Elegiarum liber unus, a collection of Latin epigrams, was published in 1619. Campion died in London on March 1, 1620, and was buried at St. Dunstan-in-the-West, London.

Works in Literary Context

The Masque Traditionally, a masque is a courtly pageant themed around a specific occasion. Everything from the music to the costumes to the set design is meant to reflect the theme of the masque. These events featured play-like segments, often with characters meant to represent abstract ideas or emotions. *The Lords' Masque* (1613) begins with an antimasque of madmen as contrast to the main masque, following a formal innovation introduced by Jonson four years previously.

The Somerset Masque (1613) is significant in the history of the evolution of musical style. Its song "Bring Away This Sacred Tree," set in a highly declamatory style, marks a major step in the advance toward a quasi-operatic manner. Campion himself signaled a departure from his earlier style when in the prologue to the published text he dismissed old-fashioned myth, instead grounding his "whole Invention upon Inchantments and several transformations."

Lyric Poetry Campion is famous for his lyric poetry. Lyric poetry is poetry that has the qualities of a song, whether or not it is meant to be sung. It often features intensely felt personal emotion. There are a variety of examples of lyric poetry forms. The most popular is the sonnet, a fourteen-line rhymed poem. Lyric poetry dates to ancient Greece, where poems were often sung to musical accompaniment. The wandering entertainer of the Middle Ages known as troubadours also produced lyric poetry, also generally with musical accompaniment. More recently, the term "lyric poetry" has been applied to poems that deal with intense feelings, such as the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth.

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Campion varies widely. His music receives mixed reaction today. According to Cecil Gray, "He may be conceded to possess a fertile vein of pleasant, but rather undistinguished melody and that is about all." Campion's lyrics, however, have earned critical acclaim.

The "Ayres" Campion's work was neglected for almost two hundred years, but in the late 1800s he was rediscovered by A. H. Bullen, who published the first collected edition of his various "ayres" or songs. Modernist poets T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were among his admirers. Eliot called Campion "except for Shakespeare... the most accomplished master of rhymed lyric of his time." His lyrics and the songs in which he presented them strongly reflect his period's style. Campion scholar Walter R. Davis finds his subject's influence in the works of such later poets as Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, and Robert Creeley.

E. D. Mackerness asserts, "In his shorter pieces he evolved word patterns which fall naturally into acceptable melodic shapes; yet when considered independently of their music, these poems evoke emotional situations that are of interest for their own sake." Gail Reitenbach says that Campion was a forward-thinking and gifted poet who gave his female speakers the first independent and thoughtful portrayals found in Renaissance literature.

Elise Bickford Jorgens states that "Never Weather-Beaten Saile" in the first part of *Two Books of Ayres* (1613) "illustrates [Campion's] intricate and careful creation of musical and verbal rhythm out of the accentual pattern of the words and the sensitive distribution of the vowel sounds." And critic Thomas MacDonagh characterizes "The Peaceful Western Wind" and "There Is None, O None but You" in the second part of *Two Books of Ayres* as "masterpieces of melody."

According to Walter Davis, "In the texts of the songs" of 1613, Campion "developed contrast, the literal and factual, and he was developing a style that would culminate in a dry realistic tone that encouraged a vibrant complexity of attitude. In his music he was incorporating many different voices, and was moving toward heightened

speech rather than suggestive dance melody as a model for what music should be.” MacDonagh praised the *Third and Fourth Books of Ayres* (1617) for presenting “an ever new variety of rhythm and rime and colour.”

In 1996 Jorgens summarized, “Campion’s importance for nondramatic literature of the English Renaissance lies in the exceptional intimacy of the musical-poetic connection in his work. While other poets and musicians talked about the union of the two arts, only Campion produced complete songs wholly of his own composition, and only he wrote lyric poetry of enduring literary value whose very construction is deeply etched with the poet’s care for its ultimate fusion with music.”

Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet and your school’s library resources, look up the definition of “masque.” How is it similar to today’s musical? What are the differences?
2. Look up the lyrics to some popular songs. How effective are they without music? How much does their emotional impact rely on the music that accompanies them? Does it depend on the style of music?
3. Campion was a doctor of medicine as well as a poet and composer. Using the Internet and your library’s resources, research three poets who also were successful in other professions. Did having a steady job allow them to take greater creative risks in their writing? Did it stop them from fulfilling their artistic potential? Write a paper examining any similarities or striking findings.
4. Why do some people have a lasting impact in an artistic field, but others do not? Write a paper examining a contemporary popular writer, such as J. K. Rowling, Stephen King, or Sherman Alexie, and discuss why that writer will or will not be considered a significant artist in the future.

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Albert Camus

BORN: 1913, Mondovi, Algeria

DIED: 1960, Paris

NATIONALITY: Algerian, French

GENRE: Novels, essays, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Stranger (1942)

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942)

The Plague (1947)



Albert Camus Camus, Albert, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Literary scholars hail Albert Camus (also known as Albert Mathe, Bauchart, and Sactone) as North Africa's first writer of consequence. A *pied-noir*, or French citizen born in Algeria while it was still a colony of France, Camus emerged from an underprivileged background to become one of the leading writers of the twentieth century. Trained in philosophy, Camus wrote several acclaimed plays, essays, and short stories, but is best remembered for two novels: *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Algeria and Parents' Impact Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, outside Mondovi, a village near Bône (now Annaba), in eastern Algeria, then a French territory. When World War I began in summer 1914, Camus's father was called into military service and was wounded in the Battle of the Marne. He died in a hospital in autumn 1914. The tragedy caused Camus's already reclusive mother to become even more withdrawn.

Camus's family life and his early loss of his father is reflected in his writing. In Camus's works, fathers are often missing or shadowy; only in his unfinished autobiographical novel *The First Man* (1994) does a father appear directly and extensively. In contrast, a mother is a recurring figure throughout Camus's work. He wrote always of his own mother with respect and devotion, often connecting her to Algeria and the sense of home. In a letter to his friend Jules Roy, Camus commented, "What justifies life is our mothers; that's why I wish to die before mine"—a wish that was, in fact, granted. Based on his writings, it can be argued that Camus was haunted by the maternal idea; the word "mother" bears considerable weight in his prose, as when it is paired with "truth" in the original French: "ma mère et ma vérité." There are suggestions, however, that the relationship between Camus and his mother was not an easy one; as Camus wrote in his *Notebooks, 1942–1951* (*Carnets: janvier 1942-mars 1951*, 1964): "I loved my mother despairingly. I have always loved her despairingly." Clearly, Camus was somewhat torn in his feelings for his mother, or at least ambivalent. The beginning of his most famous novel, *The Stranger*, reflects this sort of ambivalence; it begins with the character Meursault unemotionally explaining: "Today, mother died. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: *Mother dead. Funeral tomorrow. Sincere condolences.* It doesn't say anything. It could have been yesterday."

Tuberculosis and the Absurdity of Life While in his early teens, Camus was an active sports enthusiast. He swam often and was an avid soccer player. However, Camus's sports activities came to a halt when, at seventeen, he contracted tuberculosis in his right lung. The

disease eventually spread to his left lung as well. With no method yet discovered of destroying the tubercle bacilli, Camus was to be afflicted with bouts of active tuberculosis on and off for the remainder of his life, making him a target for depression and respiratory illnesses. What emerged from Camus's struggle with tuberculosis was his development of his theory of the absurd. For Camus, the word *absurd* described the disparity between a young consciousness, hungry for experience and crying out for meaning, and a body condemned to illness. Camus found it absurd that he should be so full of life and curiosity while knowing that his life could soon end. As an adult, Camus would explore the absurdity of life in such novels as *The Stranger* and *The Fall* (1956).

Politics: Camus's Fight Against the Nazis By 1942, Camus had moved to Paris, where he became a part of the French resistance movement against German occupation. (The Nazi Army had marched into Paris in the summer of 1940 after easily overwhelming the French military.) He was writing *The Plague* and *The Rebel* (1951), while simultaneously writing anti-Nazi pieces for the underground newspaper *Combat* at night. Authors Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were also on the *Combat* staff. At *Combat*, Camus wrote clandestinely under various pseudonyms. Despite his precautions, Camus barely escaped being caught by the Nazi Gestapo (the internal security organization of the Nazi regime) at least once.

In *The Plague*, Camus deals with the theme of revolt. Complementing his concept of the absurd, Camus believed in the necessity of each person to revolt against the common fate of humanity by seeking personal freedom. Dr. Rieux, the protagonist of *The Plague*, narrates the story of several men in the plague-ridden Algerian city of Oran. Throughout the novel, Camus parallels the conflicting philosophies of Rieux and Father Paneloux over how to deal with the plague: Rieux, a compassionate humanist who repudiates conventional religion, maintains that human action can best combat the disease; Paneloux, a Jesuit priest who views the plague as God's retribution on the sinful people of Oran, holds that only through faith and divine intervention can the city be salvaged. Ultimately, the characters overcome their differences and unite to defeat the plague, at least temporarily, through scientific means. Many critics have interpreted *The Plague* as an allegory of the German occupation of France during World War II.

Nobel Prize Amidst Algerian Independence Controversy Following the release of *The Fall* in 1956, Camus's standing as a writer received a welcome boost when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957, especially since it came in the midst of the battle over his refusal to publicly take a side in Algeria's war for independence from France. Algeria's struggle against colonial control by France was part of a widespread independence movement in Africa and Asia. Many parts of Africa and Asia, in the years following World War II, sought to free

themselves from the political control of European countries that had dominated them for generations. Camus dedicated his Nobel acceptance speech to Louis Germain, his influential fifth-grade teacher, and in it, he attempted to explain his point of view on political struggles: “The artist fashions himself in that ceaseless oscillation from himself to others,” Camus said at the ceremonies, “midway between the beauty he cannot do without and the community from which he cannot tear himself. This is why true artists scorn nothing. They force themselves to understand instead of judging.”

Death in an Automobile Accident Camus had just emerged from a long-lasting writer’s block, full of ideas for future writings, when he died suddenly. On January 4, 1960, Camus was killed upon impact in an automobile crash. He was forty-six years old. “News of the death stunned the French literary world of which M. Camus was one of the brightest lights,” wrote the *New York Times*. In Francois Mauriac’s words, Camus’s death was “one of the greatest losses that could have affected French letters at the present time.” In general, newspapers commented that it was the absurd death of a man who recognized life as absurd.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired to read widely and deeply by his high school teacher, philosopher Jean Grenier, Camus was well versed in the classics of Western philosophy, including the works of Plato, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche—all of whom influenced his work.

Existentialism and the Absurd One of Camus’s most famous concepts is the idea that life is absurd, an idea that one can see prominently in *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus’s meditations on the “absurdity” of life sounded like “Existentialism” to many of his contemporaries. Existentialism is basically the belief that life in itself is meaningless and that it is only as valuable or meaningful as one makes it. Although Camus became known as an existentialist and as a philosopher, he himself rejected both labels. In *Actuelles I* he wrote, “I have little liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and to speak frankly, I think its conclusions are false.” He further asserted in *Actuelles II*, “I am not a philosopher and never claimed to be one.” Instead, he viewed himself as a moralist, by his own definition, “a man with a passion for the human heart.” But even above being a moralist, Camus perceived himself as an artist with a responsibility to mankind. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Camus said, “In my eyes, art is not a solitary pleasure. It is a means of moving the greatest number of men by offering them a privileged image of common sufferings and common joys.”

Works in Critical Context

Camus was widely acclaimed in his short lifetime, and almost all of his work—especially *The Stranger* and *The Plague* received critical praise. His philosophical work *The*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Camus’s famous contemporaries include:

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): Camus’s friendship with this French Existentialist philosopher and novelist ended over political differences.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): Author of the landmark feminist work *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir is also classified as a French Existentialist.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): The work of this Irish playwright and poet continued and enhanced Camus’s concept of the absurd.

Mohamed Ahmed Ben Bella (1918–): He is considered the father of the nation of Algeria.

Charles De Gaulle (1890–1970): De Gaulle was a leader of the Free French Forces and one of the leading Nazi resisters in France.

Myth of Sisyphus was dismissed as amateurish by some critics, but it remains popular with readers.

The Stranger When *The Stranger* first appeared in print, Jean-Paul Sartre predicted it would become a classic. Often required reading for literature classes, *The Stranger* has been viewed as “one of the first modern books—perhaps the very first—in which the Absurdist awareness of the absence of any settled moral truth is worked into all the details of the story.” To Henri Peyre, “the romantic condemnation of a bourgeois society whose judges sentence a murder too harshly is a little facile. But the young Camus had thus to begin by setting himself against the world as he found it; before he could discover how to change it or how to rethink it, he had to depict it as unsatisfactory.” R. Barton Palmer examined the form of the novel, noting in *International Fiction Review* that Camus rejects the cause-and-effect plotting typical of conventional narratives and instead presents “a slice of the daily routine, devoid of intention and plot as it must be, a procession of events linked only by chronology. Event succeeds event, perception replaces perception, without any values by which the process may be interpreted.”

The Plague *The Plague* has been viewed as Camus’s “most anti-Christian” novel. To the scholar Rima Drell Reck, Camus “suggests that faith is questionable, that man’s torments are unjustifiable, that religion offers no answers to the travail of quotidian existence.” Although it is clear that the text is metaphorical and, indeed, intended to be allegorical, Sartre and social commentator Roland Barthes identified a flaw in Camus’s allegory, observed biographer Patrick McCarthy. “Camus had asserted the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

What does it mean to be human? Does life have value or meaning in and of itself, or is life “absurd” in the sense Camus believes it to be? These questions have always plagued writers. Thinkers from the world’s leading religions try to answer them, often asserting that the meaning of life has to do with one’s faith, with one’s religion. Other secular writers have also tried to answer such questions in these works:

The Republic (360 B.C.E.), by Plato. Plato recounts the pursuit of the good life according to Socrates, particularly as it relates to rationality and the joy one can experience by living a rational life.

Beyond Good and Evil (1886), by Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche attempts to establish the meaning of life outside of the realm of traditional, religious morality.

The Pursuit of Happiness (1930), by Bertrand Russell. Russell, like Socrates, tries to introduce a way of making one’s life meaningful by following reason; however, the two thinkers reach very different conclusions.

need to act but he had not treated the more difficult problems of which action one chooses. . . . [T]he occupation was far from nonhuman [unlike Camus’s fictional plague] and it involved agonizing choices.” Nonetheless, many agree with Philip Thoddy that *The Plague* is Camus’s “most complex and probably his most satisfying work.”

The Myth of Sisyphus While many readers who first encounter *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*) (1942) are impressed by Camus as a thinker, his standing among professional philosophers and intellectuals was from the beginning much lower than his reputation among literary critics. Disparaging remarks made by Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir—the chief proponents of French existentialism—later contributed to the trend. Perhaps anticipating future criticism as well as defending himself against contemporary attacks, Camus often said that he was an artist or a moralist, not a philosopher. Left-wing intellectuals have not ceased attacking *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), Hayden White mocked Camus for “opposing ‘totalitarianism’ and holding up the prospect of an amiable anarchy as a desirable alternative.” Nonetheless, selections from *The Myth of Sisyphus* were included in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), a major mid-century anthology edited by Walter Kaufmann.

Responses to Literature

1. Research the definition and etymology of the word “sociopathy” using your library and the Internet.

Considering Camus’s view of absurdity, write a definitional essay in which you argue whether Meursault should or should not be considered a sociopath.

2. Epicurus argues that, while life is not meaningful in itself, there is no reason why it cannot be enjoyable. In *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus discusses how the most important—the most meaningful—aspect of life is happiness and that one should pursue those activities that bring one the most happiness. Epicurus especially advocated the appreciation of food as a way to happiness. Script a conversation among Epicurus, Camus, and Meursault in which each person argues against the other people’s philosophies of life.
3. Camus always writes in the first-person point of view. What effect does the use of the first person point of view have on the text? How would Camus’s work be different if he used a different point of view?

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Elias Canetti

BORN: 1905, *Russe, Bulgaria*

DIED: 1994, *Zurich*

NATIONALITY: *Swiss*

GENRE: *Novels, plays*

MAJOR WORKS:

Auto-da-fé (1935–1936)

Crowds and Power (1960)

The Tongue Set Free: Remembrances of a European Childhood (1977)

Overview

In 1981, Bulgarian-born author Elias Canetti received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his body of work that crossed many disciplines and contained insights and analyses of crowd dynamics and obsessive behaviors. His best-known books are *Auto-da-fé* (1935–1936) and *Crowds and Power* (1960).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Eastern European Roots Elias Jacques Canetti was born in Russe, Bulgaria, on July 25, 1905, the oldest of the three sons of Sephardic merchant Jacques Canetti and his wife, Mathilde, née Arditti. The Canettis and the Ardittis were descendants of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. Many of these Jews had settled in countries in eastern Europe. While the Jewish population in Bulgaria was small relative to other eastern European countries, Jews had a special status there with much self-administration led by a chief rabbi. Mathilde Canetti, the most influential person in her son's childhood and adolescence, used her enthusiasm for literature, notably dramas and novels, as a medium for Elias's education and inspired him to become an author and intellectual.

At home, Canetti's family spoke Ladino, the language of the Sephardim in the Balkan states and around the Mediterranean. Ladino is derived from medieval Spanish and contains elements of Hebrew and non-Jewish languages. In addition, Canetti was exposed to Bulgarian, Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Armenian, Romanian, and Russian. His parents spoke German with one another as their intimate language and as a code when they did not want their children to understand what they were saying. The German language thus assumed a special fascination for the young Canetti, and he later adopted the language for his intellectual and literary pursuits.

Literature at Heart of British Education When Canetti was six years old, his father escaped the oppressive situation of working in a family business in a small eastern European town by joining his brother-in-law's business in Manchester, England, then still a center of industry as it had been since the late eighteenth-century beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. Mathilde Canetti welcomed the move. She was eager to remove her children from the influence of her Orthodox in-laws, and she liked England because of its democratic tradition. Young Elias learned English without difficulty and was able to start school.

In Manchester, his father introduced him to literature and the life of the imagination, discussing what the boy read, including *The Arabian Nights* Grimm's fairy tales, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719–1722), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), tales from William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), the works of Dante, and Friedrich von Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). He later said that he was grateful to his father for never telling him that fairy tales were untrue.

Moved to Continent after Father's Death In October 1912, Jacques Canetti died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Around the same time, the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913 began, posing an increasing threat to the families in Bulgaria. The wars were fought in eastern Europe over who would control the balance of power in the area as

the Ottoman Empire reached its final decline. Unable to tolerate life with her husband's brothers, Mathilde Canetti moved the family to Vienna in May 1913. Convinced that Elias was destined to become a prominent author, his mother encouraged him in his intellectual aspirations.

In 1916, the family moved again to Zurich, Switzerland, to avoid the ravages of World War I. Caused by increased tensions in the Balkans, entangling alliances, and the final catalyst of the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand, the so-called Great War enveloped nearly the whole of Europe in the mid- to late 1910s and saw massive loss of life. Despite the horrors of the conflict, the Swiss capital was a safe haven for Canetti during his formative years. At the age of fourteen, he completed his first literary work, a historical tragedy titled "Junius Brutus."

Much to Canetti's dismay, in 1921, Mathilde Canetti moved to Frankfurt with her sons. Frankfurt introduced Canetti to the harsh postwar reality in the defeated Germany as the country was forced to pay harsh reparations as well as lose territory and admit guilt for starting the war. The economic terms of peace had a disastrous effect on the German economy. Canetti was shocked by the effects of inflation when he saw an old woman die of hunger in the street. In 1922, another event, a mass demonstration against the murder of the Jewish politician and industrialist Walter Rathenau by German racists because of his heritage, revealed to Canetti the power of a crowd.

Chemistry Abandoned in Favor of Literature In 1924, Canetti enrolled at the University of Vienna as a student of chemistry to satisfy his mother's wish that he establish himself in a lucrative profession. His actual interest being literature, he immediately came under the influence of Karl Kraus, Vienna's great satirist and polemicist, editor and to a large extent sole author of the famous journal the *Torch*. At his first Kraus lecture, Canetti met his future wife, Venetiana (Veza) Taubner-Calderon.

In 1928, frustrated by his studies and troubled by the July 1927 riots in Vienna over the dismissal of a court case against a right-wing party member accused of killing two socialists in an earlier riot, Canetti went to Berlin with his friend Ibbey Gordon, who introduced him to members of the literary and artistic avant-garde. In 1929, Canetti completed his chemistry doctorate in Vienna, but he never worked as a chemist. That same year, he began writing *Auto-da-fé*. Two years before *Auto-da-fé* was published, in February 1934, Canetti married Taubner-Calderon against his mother's wishes. His wife was an author in her own right. She had published a social-critical serial novel, *The Yellow Street* (1934), as well as short stories.

Wrote in Exile Canetti and his wife were only able to remain in Vienna for a few years because of the threat of the Nazis. In the years after World War I, Germany's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Canetti's famous contemporaries include:

- Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945): German politician and leader of the Nazi Party who led Germany during World War II.
- William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright who won the 1923 Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetry, including *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair, and Other Poems* (1929).
- Albert Einstein** (1879–1955): German-born scientist and writer who developed the theory of relativity and won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921.
- Joseph Stalin** (1879–1953): Autocratic leader of the Soviet Union who held a stranglehold on power until his demise.
- Helen Keller** (1890–1968): U.S. writer, feminist, and socialist. The deaf and blind author inspired many with her books and life story.

economic recovery had lagged. When Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich took power in the early 1930s with promises of a better Germany, the country soon became prosperous again. His plan included rebuilding Germany's military. Hitler used the army to secure his total power, and by the mid-1930s he was in control of the country. As Hitler began enacting his plan to take control of more territory in Europe, he also enacted in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws, which suspended the civil liberties of Jews.

Nazi Germany took control of Austria in 1938, and the Canettis left Vienna that November, fortunate to have been able to procure the necessary documents. They first went to Paris and from there to England, where they eventually took a modest apartment in the London suburb of Hampstead. Great Britain was a haven for exiles from Europe for much of World War II as one of the few countries not allied with or controlled by Nazi Germany.

Focus on Nonfiction In his London exile in the 1940s, Canetti worked on his major work of nonfiction, *Crowds and Power* (1960). The impetus for this ambitious study can be traced back to July 15, 1927, when Canetti observed the dynamics governing the crowd setting fire to the Palace of Justice during the Vienna riots.

To counterbalance the concentration required by his monumental project on crowds and power, Canetti took up writing his *Aufzeichnungen* ("notebooks") in the 1940s. Canetti's aphorisms and diaristic entries include incisive observations and insights on a broad range of topics, including different cultural myths, languages, wars and revolutions, Jewish history and experience, crowds and power, and individual authors and events. Eventually,

the *Aufzeichnungen* covered the years from 1942 to 1992 and were published in several volumes.

Nobel Prize Winner After the death of his first wife in 1963 and remarriage to art restorer Hera Buschor in 1971, Canetti had acquired an apartment in Zurich and had begun living alternately in Hampstead and Zurich. He continued to write, primarily nonfiction. In 1977, he published his autobiography, *The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood*. Winning the Nobel Prize in 1981 made Canetti financially independent for the first time in his life. Though he still lived modestly, primarily in Zurich, he was in demand as an author and lecturer and published two books at the end of his life: *The Secret Heart of the Clock: Notes, Aphorisms, Fragments, 1973–1985* and *The Agony of Flies* (1992), a collection of sketches, notes, and aphorisms. Canetti died in Zurich on August 14, 1994.

Works in Literary Context

Transcending traditional boundaries of genre and discipline, Canetti's literary and nonliterary texts are structurally and intellectually interconnected; they function as a complex and idiosyncratic network of ideas that call into question "big" systems such as Marxism, capitalism, and fascism.

Psychological Imbalance The most fascinating aspect of *Auto-da-fé* is the meticulous development of the main characters' psychological imbalance. Kien, Therese, Fischerle, Pfaff, and even Georg, suffer from their own brand of madness. The unveiling of each particular form of madness is carried out with great subtlety. In his only major work of fiction, a novel written at the age of twenty-five, Canetti exhibits an unusual mastery of storytelling.

Crowd Dynamics The impetus for this ambitious study, *Crowds and Power*, can be traced back to July 15, 1927, when Canetti observed the dynamics governing the crowd setting fire to the Palace of Justice in Vienna. Other experiences with crowd behavior, notably the seemingly inexplicable power that political leaders such as Adolf Hitler had over the masses in Nazi Germany, compelled Canetti to examine the origins, makeup, and behavior of crowds in a vast array of social settings and cultures.

Works in Critical Context

Canetti was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981 for "writings marked by a broad outlook, a wealth of ideas and artistic power." Even prior to this turning point in his career, Canetti had attracted a small but loyal following among Austrian, British, German, and American intellectuals without, however, being a "popular" writer.

Auto-da-fé Canetti's first novel follows a world-renowned scholar of Chinese culture, Peter Kien, whose life revolves around his library of twenty-five thousand books. When

published, the novel was well received by some critics and received praise from Hermann Broch, Alban Berg, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, and Hermann Hesse. After the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938, all publication venues there were closed to oppositional and Jewish writers, and the Nuremberg racial laws took effect. Distributing *Auto-da-fé* on the German-speaking market was impossible, leaving Canetti's book untouchable. When the novel was translated into English after World War II, many critics and reviewers initially labeled the work "too difficult." Little effort was made to promote the translation, and it soon went out of print.

Later critics of *Auto-da-fé*, as well as *Crowds and Power*, praised their insight into individual and mass psychology. In discussions of *Auto-da-fé*, some critics have complained that Canetti's characterization is superficial. Furthermore, they argue, the world of invariably deranged personalities depicted in Canetti's novel bears little resemblance to actual life. With the exception of Kien, the characters do not evolve, while Kien himself sinks into insanity before finally destroying himself. A particular point of objection to the novel is that none of its characters comes to any realization of his or her folly, and the reader is ultimately offered only a biting satire of dementia. In addition, critics describe the structure of *Auto-da-fé* as difficult because the narrative perspective shifts without transition or explanation from the viewpoint of one character to another or to an omniscient narrator.

Nevertheless, many commentators praise the book for its treatment of the dual nature of human beings as both individuals and members of a group. Critics observe that Canetti's portrayal of a world populated by cruel, obsessive personalities accurately reflects European society in the 1920s and 1930s, and his complex narrative technique provides a penetrating understanding of the characters' psychopathy.

Crowds and Power As with *Auto-da-fé*, many commentators consider *Crowds and Power* a flawed work, observing that its scholarship is unscientific and that the book advances assertions without the support of arguments or scientific proof. Moreover, critics maintain that without supporting arguments, readers have little reason to believe some of the premises on which Canetti grounds his explanation of crowds and crowd behavior.

Responses to Literature

1. In *Auto-da-fé*, Peter Kien obsesses over his library. In what ways is this obsession similar or different from the obsessions of the other characters? Research obsessive behaviors and determine what characteristics Kien exhibits and which ones he does not. What does it mean to have an obsession?
2. Give an overview of Canetti's concept of group dynamics and mass psychology. Choose a recent incident of group dynamics (a mass demonstration, riot, sports team celebration) and examine the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Canetti was profoundly intrigued by the power of group dynamics. Here are a number of other works that explore the workings of crowds.

"The Lottery" (1948), a short story by Shirley Jackson. This horrifying short story explores what happens when a mother is chosen for the town's ritual stoning.

"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1974), a short story by Ursula K. LeGuin. In this short story, the unthinking happiness of the town depends on the misery of one poor child.

Do the Right Thing (1989), a film directed by Spike Lee. In this movie, racial tensions run high on a hot day in New York City, and a series of irritations cause a full-scale riot.

behaviors through Canetti's perspective. Do Canetti's observations still hold true today?

3. Canetti was exposed to and spoke a wide variety of languages during his childhood and chose to write in German. Explore the role of language and words in Canetti's development as a writer.
4. In what ways did the events leading up to and including World War II affect Canetti and his work? What are some of the tactics that writers tend to use to reflect the history of their time? Does Canetti's style or content give you some idea of what were the trouble spots in history during his time?

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❏ Karel Capek

BORN: 1890, Malé Svatonovice, Bohemia

DIED: 1938, Prague, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS: *Rossum's Universal Robots*
(1921)

The Absolute at Large (1922)

An Atomic Phantasy (1924)

War with the Newts (1936)

Overview

Karel Capek is regarded as the most important Czech writer before World War II. He worked in many capacities: He was a man of the theater, a translator, a journalist, an essayist, a fiction writer, and an organizer of cultural activities. His views tended toward tolerant democracy and practical humanism, and he subscribed to the ideology of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) and to the views of its first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Despite his broad body of work, his most lasting contribution to international culture has proven to be a single word he coined for one of his plays: “robot.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Bohemia Karel Capek was born in Malé Svatonovice in northeastern Bohemia on January 9, 1890. His father, Antonín Capek, was a doctor who came from a family of farmers. His mother, Bozena Capek, collected folklore. The Capek children were all artistically gifted: Karel's sister, Helena, published several books, and his brother, Josef, was a well-known artist, fiction writer, and dramatist. Karel and Josef wrote several stories and plays together.

As a child Capek began showing a talent for science and art. From 1901 to 1905 he attended the grammar school at Hradec Králové, where he was an excellent pupil. He had to leave, however, when it was discovered that he was a member of a secret anarchist society; anarchists support the idea of society operating without a formal governing body, which allows for complete liberty of its citizens. He continued his schooling in Brno and Prague, finishing in 1909. Between 1909 and 1915 he was a student at Charles University in Prague, where he studied philosophy and aesthetics as well as French, German, and English philology. For eight months during 1910–1911 he took time off to visit the universities of Berlin and Paris, the latter with Josef. While they were in Paris they both became familiar with avant-garde art, particularly cubism and futurism, and after they returned home, they were instrumental in making these forms more widely known. In 1911, with other young artists, they founded the Society of Painters and Artists, which published a magazine



Karel Capek Capek, Karel, photograph. AP Images.

titled *Art Monthly*. In 1913 they organized the *Almanac for the Year 1914*. During this period, between 1908 and 1912, the short pieces that comprise *Krakonos's Garden* were published in magazines. (The collection did not appear in book form until 1918.)

World War I These avant-garde efforts were interrupted by World War I. Members of the avant-garde expressed admiration for technological advances but distrust of the dangerous powers of technology, the unheeding egoism of the capitalist world, and revolutionary, violent ideologies, especially communism and later fascism, that attempted to establish a new world order and a new kind of man. During the war Capek began to show signs of spondylitis, a serious disease of the spine that was initially diagnosed as terminal and that affected him for many years. In his work he began to explore man's inner nature and other epistemological and metaphysical questions, as he did in the important collection of stories *Wayside Crosses*. These stories always start out with a mystery that cannot be explained rationally—for instance, a solitary footprint in the snow or the disappearance of a young girl. Such mysteries lead the heroes toward a search for the truth, which transcends everyday experience. Capek's philosophy was inspired by Anglo-

American pragmatism, which he discussed in *Pragmatism: A Philosophy of Practical Life*. This philosophy had its roots in tolerance and humanism, which he actively supported in his writings and in his positive work ethic.

Then Invention of “Robot” In the 1920s Capek, at the height of his creative powers, began to win world fame as a dramatist. His most renowned work was the fantasy play *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*, published in 1920 and first performed in January 1921 as an amateur production. A few days later it was performed in the National Theatre. In the same year, it was performed in Germany, and in 1922 there were productions in Warsaw, Belgrade in Serbia, and New York; by then it had been translated into thirty languages. Capek was the first to use the word “robot” (from the Czech word *robotá*, meaning labor or drudgery) to mean an artificially constructed being, similar to a man but devoid of any kind of creativity or feeling. In *R.U.R.* the robots, basically modern slaves, increase in numbers throughout the world and gradually take over all human tasks. Meanwhile, however, because they are condemned to inactivity, humans become sterile and lose their natural position in the world. Finally the robots rise in revolt, slaughter the human beings, and seize power. This turn of events seems to seal the fate of humanity, for the robots are not capable of reproduction. In the end, however, human feelings of love and self-sacrifice appear unexpectedly among the robots, and the play ends on a note of hope for the future.

Czechoslovakian Politics When the independent state of Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 as one of the end results of World War I, Capek was deeply involved from the beginning in public and cultural life. Between 1921 and 1924 he was producer and repertory adviser for the Vinohrady Theatre in Prague. He was one of the founders and the first president of the Czech PEN Club, representing it at the world forum. In his apartment in Prague he organized gatherings of “The Friday Club,” a kind of debating society for intellectuals of all political affiliations; even President Jan Masaryk, whom Capek admired and whose views he adopted, attended these debates. As a result of his association with Masaryk, Capek wrote *President Masaryk Tells His Story* and its continuation, *The Silences of T. G. Masaryk*, exploring Masaryk’s life and setting out his philosophical and political ideas.

Capek’s Later Years

Capek’s literary work reached its peak with the novels *Hordubal* (1933), *MeteorPovetron* (1934), and *An Ordinary Life* (1936). These novels form a loose trilogy concerned with questions of morality and the limits of human knowledge. Defense of democracy forms the background to all of Capek’s work between the wars, particularly after 1933 when Czechoslovakia was threatened by Adolf Hitler’s Germany. This concern is evident

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Capek’s famous contemporaries include:

Irving Berlin (1888–1989): This Russian-born composer became an American citizen and wrote important songs like “God Bless America” and “There’s No Business Like Show Business.”

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): This English author wrote some of the seminal works of science fiction, a genre that Capek would later take up and help reach its full potential.

Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951): This American author of *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry* became the first American to earn the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930.

Manfred von Richthofen (1892–1918): This German fighter pilot is better known as “The Red Baron.” He was a very successful pilot who brought down approximately eighty other planes during World War I.

Satyendra Nath Bose (1894–1974): This Indian Bengali physicist played an integral role in the development of quantum mechanics.

Karl von Frisch (1886–1982): This Austrian zoologist won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1973, primarily for his work on communication among insects.

in his journalism—in his series of essays on the position and duty of intellectuals, for example—and in his literary works, in which once again he resorted to fantasy subjects. In the novel *War with the Newts* (1937) and in the drama *Power and Glory* (1938), he again envisages a catastrophe for civilization and asks who is responsible for it. Capek is also more pessimistic than in his earlier writing; both works finish without any hope of a solution.

By the Munich Agreement in the autumn of 1938, France and Britain agreed to German occupation of Czech border territories. Capek was bitterly disappointed at the capitulation of the democratic world. The first republic of Czechoslovakia, with which he had been in close sympathy ideologically, had collapsed. Capek died in Prague on December 25, 1938, after a short illness.

Works in Literary Context

Although there had been writers before Capek who could be described as having written a kind of early science fiction, no writer was more important for the development of the genre than Capek. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the genre without the robots that so often inhabit the books of that genre. As such, writers like Harlan Ellison, whose cyborgs inspired the *Terminator* films, and Isaac Asimov, who developed the Three Laws of Robotics in his text *I, Robot*, are deeply indebted to the author.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Artists and authors often find accidents and illnesses—either ones they themselves suffer from or ones that a loved one struggles with—inspirational, particularly when the illness is terminal or thought to be terminal, as in Capek’s case. Here are some examples of texts that deal with the life-changing effects of accidents and illnesses:

The Dive from Clausen’s Pier (2002), a novel by Ann Packer. This novel follows the reaction of friends and family to an accident that leaves a young man crippled.

Meditations from a Moveable Chair (1998), a work of nonfiction by Andre Dubus. Dubus wrote this collection of essays after he was struck by a car while trying to help a motorist on the side of the road. After his accident, Dubus—formerly a very active man—was confined to a wheelchair and suffered intense periods of depression.

Tuesdays with Morrie (1997), a memoir by Mitch Albom. In this text, Albom recounts the last months of one of his professors, who suffered from Lou Gehrig’s disease.

Science Fiction Capek based many works on fantastic catastrophes, notably the novels *The Absolute at Large* and *An Atomic Phantasy*. In *An Atomic Phantasy* young engineer Prokop invents an explosive capable of destroying the world. Only when his discovery is misused does he realize his responsibility. At the same time, he falls in love with more than one woman, with an equally explosive force. Two works in a similar vein are the play *The Makropulos Secret* and *Adam the Creator*, the latter written in collaboration with his brother. *The Makropulos Secret* was first performed in 1922. It deals with the possible immortality of man and inspired Leos Janáček’s world-famous opera of the same title in 1926. *Adam the Creator* is about the destruction of the “old” world and the emergence of “new” man.

With these works Capek became a pioneer of science fiction in literature. The attractive fantasy worlds of his plays, however, did not lead the author into sensationalism; he used them to pose universal human and moral questions. Capek puts a high value on “everyday normality” and on an approach to life that is unpretentious and constructive. It is truly in this light that the science fiction genre receives its best reading. While the genre is often misconstrued as describing a simply fantastical version of this or some other world, what the genre often addresses is essentially the problems of mankind—not just social but also personal.

Works in Critical Context

Today, critical evaluation of Capek’s work focuses primarily on his role as the progenitor of modern science

fiction, embodying the important step that the genre needed to take to get from H. G. Wells and other seminal science fiction writers to the force it is now. However, there was a time when Capek’s work was commented upon primarily for its political meanings, not its revolutionary use of images, mysteries, and fantasy. Indeed, little remains of the traditional literary criticism that Capek received during his lifetime. The success of his plays and their production in many, diverse countries—particularly *Rossum’s Universal Robots*—demonstrates his popularity.

The impact of the Nazi opposition to Capek’s views had a long-lasting effect on how his work was interpreted through the years. During the German occupation and again after the Communist takeover of 1948 Karel Capek was an author seldom published and not well respected. The democratic values he defended were at odds with the totalitarian regimes of fascism and communism. Things changed slightly after the publication of Sergei V. Nikol’ski’s Soviet study, in which he interpreted Capek as a friend of the Soviet Union and a writer who came near to being Communist in the 1930s. This perspective made it possible to publish Capek’s books more widely, with the omission of some parts, but to a certain extent it also misrepresented his ideas and work. It was not until after 1989, with the fall of the Communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and in Eastern Europe as a whole, that change came and his work could be published without distortion. In this way, politics became the most powerful comment upon Capek’s body of work, virtually rendering traditional—honest, fair, and objective—commentary impossible.

R.U.R. Capek’s play *R.U.R.* was the subject of immediate and almost unanimous international praise as it opened across Europe and the United States. When it premiered in New York, a reviewer for the *New York Herald* called it “murderous social satire done in terms of the most hair-raising melodrama.” A review in the *Evening Sun* praises the way “the dramatist frees his imagination and lets it soar away without restraint, and his audience is only too delighted to go along on a trip that exceeds even Jules Verne’s wildest dreams.” The *Evening Post* called the play “a veritable novelty full of brains and purpose.”

Responses to Literature

1. Capek did not live to see the development of the atomic bomb, much less to see it used in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan, in August 1945, but his work predicted weapons of mass destruction. In your opinion, what would Capek have to say about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? In forming your response, keep in mind that the goal of these bombings was to end World War II.

2. Read *Rossum's Universal Robots*. How is Capek's depiction of robots different from the way we view them today?
3. In Capek's fiction, he envisions a world in which the widespread use of robots essentially makes humans ineffectual—unable to do the tasks necessary to survive. In a short essay, discuss whether or not this vision seems plausible.
4. Read *War with the Newts*. In your opinion, does Captain von Toch take advantage of the newts? Support your response with examples from the text.

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Peter Carey

BORN: 1943, Victoria, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Fiction

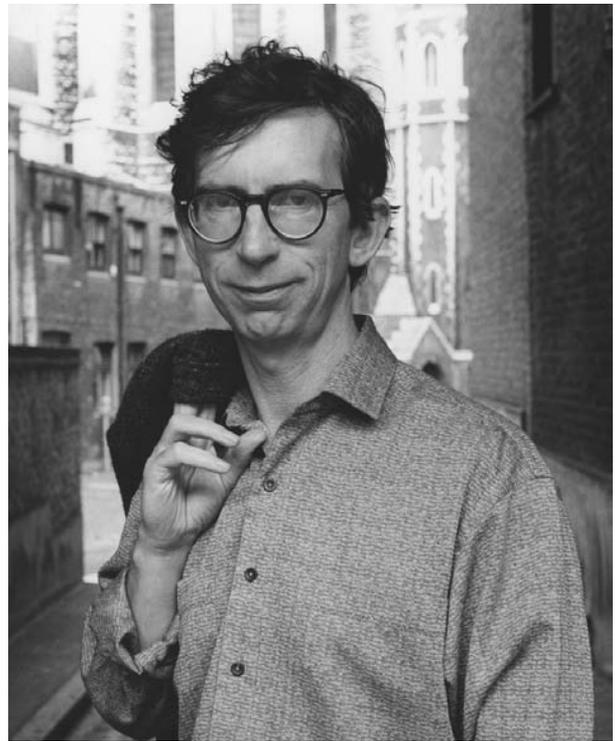
MAJOR WORKS:

Oscar and Lucinda (1987)

True History of the Kelly Gang (2000)

Overview

Peter Carey's novels and short-story collections have won virtually every major literary award in Australia. He also



Peter Carey Carey, Peter, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

has won two Booker Prizes, in 1988 and 2001—a feat equaled only by the South African writer J. M. Coetzee. Though he has been living in New York since 1989, Carey describes himself as an Australian writer, and his books explore the constraints and possibilities specific to Australian history and culture.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Beginnings Without Conclusions Peter Carey was born in Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, Australia, on May 7, 1943, to Percival Stanley and Helen Jean Carey, automobile dealers. In 1961 he began a science degree at Monash University but abandoned it in 1962 to work as an advertising copywriter. He married Leigh Weetman in 1964; the couple would separate in 1973.

Between 1964 and 1970, Carey wrote three novels that were not published, but was able to publish his first short stories. From 1967 to 1970, Carey lived in London and traveled extensively in Europe. From 1970 to 1973, he worked in advertising in Melbourne, Australia, and wrote in his spare time, completing a fourth novel, which was accepted for publication but was withdrawn by Carey before going to print. These early years were marked for Carey by a series of partial commitments, investments in both his personal and literary life that never quite came to fruition.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carey's famous contemporaries include:

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945–1982): German filmmaker, influential in the New German Cinema movement; many of his films examine the influence of power in human relationships.

Doris Kearns Goodwin (1943–): American historian, well-known for her biographies of U.S. presidents Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson, as well as the Kennedy political dynasty; awarded the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1995.

Les Murray (1938–): Australian poet, critic, and translator; openly inspired by Australia, his work gives voice to previously unheard aspects of the culture.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993): Australian Aboriginal poet, writer, and political activist; she was the first Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of poetry.

Patrick White (1912–1990): Australian novelist who used shifting viewpoints and stream of consciousness in his fiction; awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973.

Succeeding at Lying Carey's first major publication, the short-story collection *The Fat Man in History*, appeared in 1974. Most of the stories in this collection portray individuals who experience sudden anxieties when they encounter surreal events in ordinary situations. In other stories, Carey satirizes the effects of technology and foreign influences on Australian culture and society. *War Crimes* (1979), his next short-story collection, attracted favorable critical attention and won Carey his first literary prize; there, Carey responds not to the Australian presence in the war in Vietnam, but rather to some of the worst excesses of capitalist exploitation on "the home front." *Bliss*, his first published novel, was released in 1981. It portrays advertising as a dangerously addictive art form that colonizes and usurps the social roles of storytelling and mythmaking. The main character, an advertising executive named Harry Joy, reflects Carey's many years of experience working in the advertising industry, which included the co-creation of his own advertising agency in 1980.

Carey married Alison Margaret Summers in 1985, the same year his novel *Illywhacker* (1985) was nominated for the Booker Prize. The central focus of *Illywhacker* is the art of lying; the main character lies constantly in order to survive and improve his life, and Carey employs lying as a metaphor for writing fiction. Certainly, at this point, Carey had himself achieved an important degree of success in "the art of lying": first as an adman, and now as a novelist.

Negotiating Australia from New York Carey's novel *Oscar and Lucinda* (1987) was awarded the Booker

Prize in 1988. The novel portrays the odd romance between Carey's eccentric title characters, who are drawn together by their passion for gambling. As in *Illywhacker*, Carey endeavors in *Oscar and Lucinda* to reimagine Australian history. In particular, he responds to the outrages committed against the Aboriginal peoples inhabiting Australia long before the arrival of English adventurers and ne'er-do-wells.

In 1989, Carey moved to Greenwich Village in New York. *The Tax Inspector*, begun in Australia and completed in New York, was published in 1991. It sets a grimly detailed account of three generations of incest in the Catchprice family against a broader account of public corruption in Sydney, Australia. Carey's next novel, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1995), concerns themes of national and cultural identity. The novel's protagonist is a citizen of Efica, an imaginary island nation that loosely resembles Australia. Efica has been colonized and exploited by Voorstand, a colossal world power based more or less on the United States.

Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* (1997) is a rewriting of the story of Abel Magwitch, the convict in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). Here, Carey renegotiates the cultural dominance of England and its greatest writer over Australia, which was founded as a penal colony for British convicts.

Outlaws and Activists: Recent Perspectives Despite living in the United States, Carey still taps into the cultural heritage of his native land for many of his works. The author created a fictional autobiography of one of the most celebrated folk heroes of Australia in *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000); the novel was a runaway best seller and won Carey his second Booker Prize.

Throughout his career Carey has fictionalized Australia from a variety of perspectives and historical and allegorical distance. The mirror he holds up to late-twentieth-century Australian society and culture, and its international context, never simply reflects. It distorts, and it is designed to allow Carey's readers to see the country, its culture, and its myths as if for the first time. Since 2003 Carey has served as director of the graduate program in creative writing at New York City's Hunter College while continuing to write. His 2008 novel *His Illegal Self* follows a young boy in search of his radical activist parents, on the now-familiar path from New York to Australia. Incorporated here are ever more urgent questions about the nature of belonging and the imperatives of citizenship, along with a search for something like truth.

Works in Literary Context

Beyond Realism Peter Carey's early stories were influenced by science fiction, and his early novels by the modernist fiction of William Faulkner and the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Although the short story occupies a distinguished position in Australian literary

history, Peter Carey was not writing within that tradition. His introduction to literature came during his training as an advertising writer, and his work responds more to the classics of world literature than to his Australian contemporaries. Like the stories of Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, and J. G. Ballard, Carey's parables of imprisonment and change upset traditional constructions of fictional reality. The voice these stories articulate was a new one when Carey first began publishing, unlike anything previously heard in Australian fiction.

De-Mythologizing Australia Carey's more recent work has explored real and imagined episodes from Australian history, and mythology from a variety of revisionist perspectives, while maintaining a strong sympathy for, and identification with, the victims rather than the victors of history. His talents for placing extraordinary events in mundane contexts and for exposing the absurd and corrupt aspects of everyday life have drawn extensive praise from critics and comparison to such writers as Márquez, Samuel Beckett, and Jorge Luis Borges. Summarizing Carey's writing, A. J. Hassall has stated: "Like Beckett and Kafka...and also like [English satirist Jonathan] Swift, Carey defamiliarizes the stories from which 'reality' is constructed, exposing absurdities and corruptions so familiar that they customarily pass unnoticed and unchallenged." While this places him firmly within the tradition of authors trying to achieve what German playwright Bertolt Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt* or "alienation effect," it also puts him on the side of social theorists who have, in recent years, sought to revise or do away with racist mythologies of national origin. That is, in offering new perspectives on Australian history, Carey has pushed readers to see more clearly the tragedies and oppression that began centuries ago and that remain in play in certain ways right up to the present day.

Works in Critical Context

Commentators have often described Carey's works as metafictional—that is, fiction that deals with creating fiction. Two of his novels, *Bliss* and *Illywhacker*, for instance, deal explicitly with telling stories and the relationship between truth and fiction. Scholars have noted that Carey typically attacks the reader's sense of narrative coherence, order, time, and sequence by providing conflicting versions of his narratives. Arguing that Carey views history as an act of selection, Graeme Turner has stated that Carey's "fantastic, alternative worlds...can always be seen as alternative perspectives on an historical world, questioning it and exposing its constructed, arbitrary nature." This line of thought also influences the direction Carey takes in his exploration of individual characters. Turner argues that Carey's novels and stories "do not examine what lives mean as much as they examine how lives are constructed in order to produce their meanings."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Metafiction is a stylistic technique that involves the author commenting on the story-making process even as he or she tells a story. The author asks questions about fiction and reality—what is the difference? Who determines it? Here are some other works of metafiction:

"Elbow Room" (1977), a short story by James Alan McPherson. This short story, from the collection of the same title and by the first African American man to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, is about a biracial couple and their struggling relationship, as told by a writer friend of theirs; the friend's editor interrupts his tale with comments and requests for clarification, making the process of storytelling highly visible.

The Eyre Affair (2003), a novel by Jasper Fforde. Jane Eyre is kidnapped out of the book *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and being held for ransom. Tuesday Next, literary detective, must cross over into the fictional world and rescue her.

The Life of Pi (2003), a novel by Yann Martel. In this award-winning book, an Indian boy named Pi is stranded on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger; the author introduces himself as a character and claims to have actually met the other characters in the novel.

The Matrix (1999), a film directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski. In this science fiction movie, a man discovers that the world as he knows it is nothing but a computer simulation, created by machines that use humans as their energy source.

"Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" (1968), a short story by Donald Barthelme. This short story presents twenty-four short images of Robert Kennedy, the American politician and brother of the assassinated president; each short section presents a different version, reflecting the difficulty in truly knowing a public figure. (Robert Kennedy himself was assassinated a few months after this story was first published.)

Carey's fiction is about much more than simply its own creation, however. As Robert Towers has noted, "Carey's prose can hold the ugly, the frightening, and the beautiful in uncanny suspension. It is this gift, among others, that makes him such a strong and remarkable writer." That is, his talent lies in the ability to sustain true conflict, to understand and to communicate that a number of contradictory narratives—lies, even—can all be true at once.

True History of the Kelly Gang Although Carey had enjoyed a certain amount of critical success prior to the publication of *True History of the Kelly Gang* in 2000, it was this novel that brought his greatest renown and made

him an internationally best-selling author. Critical response was overwhelmingly positive, with much attention focusing on Carey's attempt at an authentic voice for his narrator, the infamous Australian criminal Ned Kelly, based on a letter the man wrote a year before he was executed in 1880. Douglas Ivison, in a review for the *Journal of Australian Studies*, calls Carey's narrative voice "a remarkable achievement" that is "simultaneously poetic and authentic; vernacular and idiomatic without being condescending or sentimental; ungrammatical and randomly punctuated but yet highly readable." Ivison does note, however, that the book paints Kelly as more of a romantic hero than a criminal, and he states, "The contradictions in Kelly's character, and in the socio-political role played by the Kelly gang, go largely unexamined." Robert Ross, in a review for *World and I*, observes that the novel treads the same territory as much of Carey's previous work—a search for a national Australian identity—but concludes, "If he is indeed writing the same novel again and again, he has done so with flair and infinite variety."

Responses to Literature

1. Peter Carey has said that lying is a metaphor for fiction. What does this mean? Explain your understanding with reference to Carey's own work. To what extent do you agree with him? How does this fit or contrast with the popular idea that fiction can serve as a route to the truth?
2. Former British prime minister Winston Churchill once said, "History is written by the victors." How does Carey's work serve to support or refute this statement?
3. In *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Carey based his writing style on the Jerilderie Letter, an actual letter written by the real Ned Kelly. Using your library or the Internet, find and read a copy of this letter and compare it to Carey's writing style in the novel. What characteristics can you find that Carey borrowed from the letter? In your opinion, did Carey create an authentic version of Ned Kelly's writing style? Is that the same as creating an "authentic version" of Ned Kelly himself? Why or why not?
4. Australia was settled by Europeans in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, with many of the colonists being convicts or outsiders who had difficulty succeeding in Great Britain. How is this "outsider identity" expressed and challenged in Carey's writing? Provide examples from at least one of his novels.

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Thomas Carlyle

BORN: 1795, Ecclefechan, Scotland

DIED: 1881, London, England

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

German Romance (1827)

Sartor Resartus (1836)

The French Revolution: A History (1837)

On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History (1841)

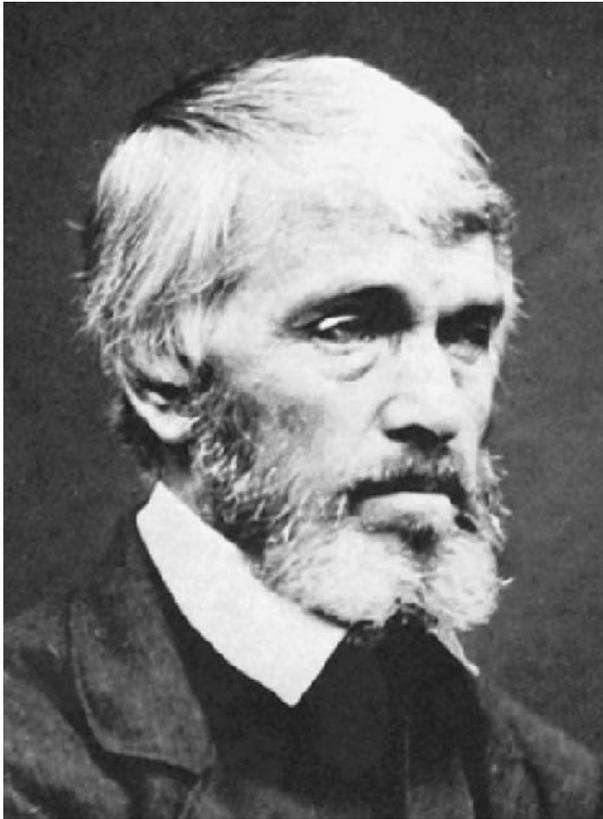
History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great (1858–1865)

Overview

Thomas Carlyle was an important biographer, historian, and essayist of the nineteenth century. Venerated for his wisdom and insightful thinking, Carlyle fell out of favor after his death and has only recently been revived as a subject of scholarly interest.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Strict Calvinist Upbringing in Scotland Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795, in the Scottish village of Ecclefechan to James and Margaret Aitken Carlyle. His father, who was a stonemason and later a farmer, instilled Scottish Calvinist principles of self-denial and hard work into his large family. Carlyle attended Annan Academy from 1806 to 1809 and Edinburgh University from 1809 to 1814, but left the university without taking a degree.



Thomas Carlyle Carlyle, Thomas, photograph. The Library of Congress

His parents hoped that he would become a clergyman, but he was already dreaming of literary fame and started his literary career by translating and by writing reviews and encyclopedia articles. In 1823 the *London Magazine* asked Carlyle to write a short biographical sketch of German poet and dramatist Friedrich Schiller; the essay expanded during the writing to book length and became Carlyle's first literary biography.

In 1824 Carlyle visited London for the first time. He stayed with his friend Edward Irving, who introduced him to London literary society; among those Carlyle met was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In 1821 he had met Jane Baillie Welsh, an ambitious and witty daughter of a doctor. They married on October 17, 1826, much to her family's dismay. In 1828 Carlyle and his wife moved to Craigenputtoch, an isolated farm.

Carlyle's 1833 *Sartor Resartus*, though fiction, tells much about Carlyle's ideas about the art of writing biography. The work sounds his message about the importance and pleasure of biography and the use of biography to find heroes: "Biography by nature is the most universally profitable, universally pleasant of all things: especially the Biography of distinguished individuals."

Friendship with Emerson In August 1833 Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Carlyle at Craigenputtoch. Their

friendship, conducted mostly by mail over the years, was beneficial for Carlyle: Emerson convinced a Boston publisher to publish *Sartor Resartus* in book form in 1836 (it did not appear in that form in England until 1838), funded the 1838 American edition of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (published in England in 1837), and introduced Henry David Thoreau to Carlyle's works and, in turn, Carlyle to Walt Whitman's.

In June 1834 the Carlyles moved to 5 Cheyne Row, London. For the next three years Carlyle worked on *The French Revolution*. During this time he met William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and the man who was to become his most cherished friend for the next nine years and the subject of one of his best biographies: the poet, novelist, and dramatist John Sterling.

From 1837 to 1841 Carlyle gave annual lectures on German literature, literature in general, revolution, and heroes. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*, the published version of the May 1840 lectures, delineates the unconscious and mysterious forces that underlie the personalities of great men.

Literary Circles and Biography Subjects During the late 1830s and early 1840s Carlyle formed friendships with members of a new generation of writers, including Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Richard Monckton Milnes, John Forster, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Edward FitzGerald. He planned a biography of Oliver Cromwell, the seventeenth-century Puritan leader who ruled England as a commonwealth after the English Civil War, during its period without a recognized king. However, the work stagnated and he decided instead to edit Cromwell's letters and speeches and let Cromwell speak for himself. The edition was published in 1845–1846.

In 1851 Carlyle began studying the life of Frederick the Great; in 1852 he traveled to Germany to continue his research. The first two volumes of the *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great*, were not published until 1858; Carlyle in the meantime had struggled with problems with sources, his own lack of enthusiasm about the project, and sorrow over his mother's death. In 1858 Carlyle traveled to Germany again, visiting battlefields to gather material for the remaining four volumes. It took seven more years, however, for Carlyle to finish the work.

In 1865 Carlyle was elected rector by the students of the University of Edinburgh, and on April 2, 1866, he delivered an inaugural address. While he was polishing the speech for publication, he received word that his wife had died. In 1868 Carlyle, with the help of his niece, Mary Aitken, organized Jane's letters, which he considered evidence of her brilliance; he also wrote annotations for a biography of her.

By 1871 Carlyle wrote only by dictation to Aitken. In the winter of 1871–72 he dictated a history of the early

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carlyle's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England, and the person for whom the Victorian age was named.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): British novelist of classics such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): American writer and philosopher who led the transcendentalist movement.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): naturalist and scientist credited with popularizing the concept of natural selection in his book *On the Origin of Species*.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865): British novelist and biographer of Charlotte Brontë.

kings of Norway, in which he found new heroes in Olaf Tryggveson, King Olaf the Saint, and Magnus the Good.

Carlyle died in his sleep on February 5, 1881. He was buried in Ecclefechan. Carlyle was one of the most influential figures of the Victorian age; his attitudes affected a wide audience, particularly the writers of his day. His convictions that modern life was too “mechanical” and analytical, that greed and selfishness had replaced feelings of blessedness and brotherhood, and that spiritual rebirth was needed to bring coherence to modern life drew many to regard him with awe and reverence.

Works in Literary Context

Carlyle's contributions to literary biography are both theoretical and practical. “Man is,” he says in “Biography,” “properly the only object that interests man.” The boundaries separating history, biography, literature, and social criticism are not rigid for Carlyle: In a sense all his works are a nineteenth-century epic poem. To him, history is a procession of great men rather than the interplay of economic, political, and social forces, and a good biography portrays both the character of the subject and the times in which he lived.

Radical and Experimental Format *Sartor Resartus* is in some ways a baffling work: Genuinely original in form and content, it combines biography, autobiography, essay, and political commentary with a layered structure and avoidance of final meaning which makes it seem well in advance of its time. It purportedly tells the story of a German academic (*Teufelsdröckh* or German for “Devil's Excrement”) who travels a path from struggling beginning and self-doubt to awakening sensitivity to a supernaturally alive universe.

Heroes and Biographies After *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle moved to London and began work on *The French Revolution*. While modern historians dispute the objectivity of Carlyle's view on the French Revolution, his carefully researched and vividly imagined work is a powerful evocation of what happens to a morally corrupt monarch and the accompanying abuse of social privilege and human exploitation. This method of scrupulous research and personal engagement with the subject helped establish Carlyle as a historian whose power was not just to recreate the past but also to use his historical works to disturb the present.

By the early 1840s Carlyle's works were selling well, and each new book conveyed an original mind at the peak of its powers. *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*—two volumes (1845) and a supplement (1846)—is a case in point. The English Civil War fascinated Carlyle for decades, and the personality of its great hero (and he certainly saw the Protector in this light, as the strong leader who saved the country from collapsing into anarchy) gave him the focus for a historical work which blends narrative with letters and documents of the period and intersperses all with the author's addresses to the figures he treats, especially Cromwell.

In the early 1850s Carlyle began working in earnest on his monumental history of Frederick the Great of Prussia. He, like Cromwell, was a ruler who earned Carlyle's approval for a job well done. Like Cromwell, too, he violated most of the civilized rules of freedom and justice to keep the machine of society running. The end, for Carlyle as for Frederick, clearly justified the means.

Works in Critical Context

Thomas Carlyle was an extremely long-lived Victorian author. He was also highly controversial, variously regarded as sage and impious, a moral leader, a moral desperado, a radical, a conservative, and a Christian. In the later twentieth century he was still far from being understood by a generation of critics awakening to his pivotal place in nineteenth-century Britain. He is coming to be seen as innovator and survivor, a man born in the eighteenth century who lived through most of the nineteenth, whose early work predated Victoria's reign, and whose longevity almost matched his monarch's. Alive, he was an enigma; dead, he remains a problematic figure for the literary historian as well as for the critic.

Sartor Resartus Carlyle's first major piece was a radical, nontraditional blend of fiction, biography, and political commentary rendered in both a serious and farcical tone. Perhaps due to its highly original content, *Sartor Resartus* is not easily understood. (Carlyle included comments from puzzled readers in later editions of the book.) His wife, Jane Carlyle, a perceptive voice among early readers, pronounced it “a work of genius,” however, and others took it as such (notably, the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson). Although it no longer

provokes the shock and confusion it did upon publication, *Sartor Resartus* remains a difficult book and has lacked the critical attention it perhaps deserves.

The French Revolution The appearance of the three volumes of *The French Revolution* in 1837 better acquainted readers with Carlyle's passionate style and his passionate belief in the need for society's rebirth, so that the seriousness of *Sartor Resartus* was more readily received, and now it is taken for a masterpiece, and rightly. While historians today have discredited much of the emphasis and interpretation Carlyle gave history in the volumes on France (and in the later works on Oliver Cromwell and Frederick the Great), few deny the power of Carlyle's view of the revolution. The historical research and annotation bespeak careful preparation, and the artistic impulse behind the finished work orders and selects, to orchestrate a pattern clearly of the author's choosing and to highlight his message of the inevitability of revolution in a France rotten with abused social privilege, skeptical freethinking, and human exploitation.

Legacy Several works published after Carlyle's death had a profound effect on his reputation. His confidant and executor was James Anthony Froude, a young historian and longtime admirer of Carlyle to whom his literary remains and papers were entrusted. Froude took his position seriously and was hard at work on biographical materials long before Carlyle's death. Hence the *Reminiscences* appeared soon after Carlyle's death, followed by four magnificent but badly flawed volumes of biography by Froude (1882, 1884) and *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1883), which had been partly annotated by Carlyle in the 1860s and 1870s. The effect of Froude's work in the years following Carlyle's death was extraordinary. Almost overnight, it seemed, Carlyle plunged from his position as Sage of Chelsea and Grand Old Victorian to the object of puzzled dislike, or even of revulsion, due to the image of the writer that emerged in personal writings selected by Froude.

Carlyle remained a neglected writer until the mid-1950s; since then, critical awareness of his work and its importance has risen steadily. With the publication of scholarly editions of his works, and above all of his letters, the reader stands a better chance than ever before of making an accurate and fair estimation of his importance.

Responses to Literature

1. Choose one incident from Carlyle's *The French Revolution* and research other accounts of the historical event. Look for places where Carlyle's account differs from other sources. How do you think Carlyle shaped his work to comment on the events of his time? Why do you think he did so?
2. Carlyle belongs in the literary period called "the Victorian age." Research Queen Victoria, and sug-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Carlyle was one of the first historians to vividly narrate historical material in an effort to comment on his own times. Here are a number of biographies and histories that also break new ground.

- The Life of Johnson* (1791), a biography by James Boswell. Boswell's biography of his close friend and English poet, Samuel Johnson, was revolutionary in his use of quoted material and vivid details to paint the picture of a living, breathing human rather than a dry historical figure.
- The Armies of the Night* (1968), a book by Norman Mailer. This Pulitzer Prize-winning book, about the 1967 march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam war, helped create a new type of nonfiction novel.
- Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003), a graphic memoir by Marjane Satrapi. Satrapi's memoir of growing up in Iran won many critics and readers over to graphic literature.

gest three ways her political reign influenced the literature of the time.

3. Carlyle was much influenced by concept of heroes, both historical and literary. Research how our concept of heroes has changed over time. Consider some of the heroes Carlyle writes about in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*. Compare these to modern examples of heroes. How are they similar? How are they different?
4. Carlyle believed it was important to imagine the historical details as vividly as possible and would visit battlefields and historic sites in order to get the details right. Is this an important, integral part of good historical scholarship or does it sacrifice objectivity by creating a personal connection between author and subject?

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■ Alejo Carpentier

BORN: 1904, Lausanne, Switzerland

DIED: 1980, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Music in Cuba (1946)

The Kingdom of This World (1949)

The Lost Steps (1953)

Explosion in a Cathedral (1962)

Overview

Alejo Carpentier is a commanding figure in Latin American literature and intellectual life: a novelist, literary theorist, musician and musicologist, journalist, publicist, and radio producer. After a brief association with the surrealist movement in Paris, he developed his own concept of "lo real maravilloso" (the marvelous real), a forerunner to the magical realist genre popular in Latin American fiction. Carpentier lived outside his homeland for many years, and his expatriate experience supplied the stimulus for his novels, which portray the encounter of European culture with the mysterious primitivism of the untouched New World.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Two Childhoods and the Struggle for Reconciliation Alejo Carpentier y Valmont inherited from his family background a Latin American cosmopolitanism. Born in Lausanne, Switzerland, on December 26, 1904,



Alejo Carpentier Joseph Fabry / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

he was taken to Havana as an infant, and later claimed he was born in Cuba. His father was a French architect; his mother was of Russian descent and had studied medicine in Switzerland. His parents were new arrivals in the Spanish-American republic but not poor immigrants. Carpentier would later recall roaming in his father's spacious library. Throughout his life, he struggled to reconcile the two worlds of his childhood: the sheltered European one of his home and the livelier world of Cuban blacks in the street.

The Afro-Cuban Avant-Garde Carpentier's first language was French, and he spoke Spanish with a French accent. He attended private schools, and received advanced musical training at a prestigious Parisian *lycee* as a teenager. He began studies in architecture at the University of Havana in 1920. His education ended abruptly, however, when his father deserted the family in 1922. Forced to leave the university, he supported himself as a journalist. He wrote music and theater reviews for Havana newspapers and at the age of nineteen became editor of the avant-garde weekly *Carteles*. Later, he helped to found another influential periodical, *Revista de Avance*.

By 1927 Carpentier had begun to distinguish himself as a promoter of the nascent Afro-Cuban movement, which introduced African elements into the arts. He

wrote librettos and collaborated in the creation of ballets, comic operas, and experimental theater pieces. Carpentier and his companions viewed black culture as a source of creative and political energy, a rejection of European values. For them, Afro-Cuban art spread the spirit of rebellion and helped uplift the faith of black people in their own culture.

The political situation in Cuba was becoming more chaotic. Rebellion was growing against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado y Morales, who had come to power in 1925. During a roundup of dissidents in 1927, Carpentier was arrested and held for forty days. While in prison, he began writing *Ecue-yamba-o!*, an Afro-Cuban novel that would later become his first published book. Upon his release, he knew he was blacklisted and under suspicion. A French poet, Robert Desnos, allowed the Cuban to use his papers to escape to France.

The Paris Years Carpentier spent eleven years in Paris. Through his connection with Desnos, he became associated with the surrealists. He also met many Spanish and Latin American writers in Paris and Madrid. Carpentier continued to write for *Carteles* and other Cuban publications; his reviews kept the Cuban public informed about the artistic revolution developing in Europe. He even published a column on women's fashion under the pseudonym Jacqueline.

Carpentier began to work in radio broadcasting as a writer, publicist, and sound-effects specialist. Radio and advertising would be his occupation for the next three decades. He wrote experimental radio plays and collaborated on musical programs with avant-garde composers. While he was in Paris, he published his first novel, *Ecue-yamba-o!* (1933). The book fared poorly with critics, and he did not attempt to publish fiction again for more than a decade.

Carpentier immersed himself in studying the history and culture of the Americas. He was fascinated with African religious and social practices, and the way these were transplanted to the Europeanized Cuban culture. Years later, Carpentier would attempt to reconcile the Spanish America that he discovered in books in Paris with another experienced firsthand; the gap between them would furnish the material for his greatest fiction.

The Lost Steps By 1939, the situation in Europe was growing tense, and Carpentier returned to Cuba. In 1945, he left Havana for Caracas, Venezuela, to work in advertising and radio. In Venezuela, he entered his most productive period. His first important publication, which he had started to research before leaving Cuba, was *Music in Cuba* (1946), a work of scholarship. In his attempt to trace the origins of Cuban music and the essence of Cuban culture, Carpentier reaches back to the first ballads sung by Spanish mariners of the sixteenth century and to the ritual music of Native Americans as well as Africans.

Some of the important features of Cuban music were contributed by the first Haitian exiles. Researching this

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carpentier's famous contemporaries include:

Fidel Castro (1926–): Cuban revolutionary leader and head of state from 1959 to 2008.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine writer whose works were banned in Cuba under Castro.

Jose Lezama Lima (1910–1976): Cuban poet and an influential figure in Latin American literature who wrote in a baroque style.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet and communist diplomat.

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat who also won the Nobel Prize.

Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906–2001): Senegalese poet, developer of the theory of negritude, and president of Senegal from 1960 to 1980.

early stage in Cuban history brought his attention to Haiti and its revolution. A trip there in 1943 brought him face to face with the “marvelous real” in the landscape, myths, and history of the Americas and inspired him to write his historical novel, *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). This story of Haiti, told largely from a slave's point of view, sets the values of the European Enlightenment up against the intensity of Caribbean culture, with its supernatural and magical aspects.

Origin of a Reflective Stance During vacations from his busy life in the metropolis of Caracas, Carpentier took trips to the jungles along the Orinoco River. Experiencing both a Latin America of the future and one of the remote past furnished him with the reflective stance found in *The Lost Steps* (1953), considered by many to be his greatest novel. The novel's narrator, a musician, travels into the Amazonian rainforest in search of indigenous musical instruments and explores the possibility of evading time and casting off civilization. This allegorical story casts doubt on whether modern man, with his diminished urban existence, can recover his authentic nature in any guise.

History and Revolution In Caracas, Carpentier succeeded in becoming one of the best-known Latin American writers, but it was not easy. He was forced to help finance the publication of his books. A second edition of *The Lost Steps* in 1959 was widely circulated in the Spanish-speaking world. That year, Cuba underwent a communist revolution, and Fidel Castro became the nation's political leader. Carrying the manuscript for his next novel in his luggage, Carpentier returned to his home country. He accepted the position of director of the state-run Cuban Publishing House in Havana.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Alejo Carpentier probed the tangled history of the New World in his novels, illuminating the connection between the past and present as few historical texts do. Here are some additional works in the relatively new genre of Latin American historical fiction:

The War of the End of the World (1981), a novel by Mario Vargas Llosa. A novel based on the true story of a religious fanatic and his followers, who provoke a civil war in Brazil in the 1890s.

The General in His Labyrinth (1989), a story by Gabriel García Márquez. A fictional account of the “Great Liberator” of South America, Simón Bolívar, in his final days.

All Souls’ Rising (2004), a novel by Madison Smartt Bell. The first installment of an epic trilogy about the slave uprising in Haiti that turned a colonial outpost into the world’s first black republic.

Inés of My Soul (2006), a novel by Isabel Allende. The story of the origins of Chile told through the life of Inés Suárez, a sixteenth-century *conquistadora* (female conquistador).

Malinche (2007), a novel by Laura Esquivel. A historical novel based on the love affair between conquistador Hernán Cortés and his Native American interpreter.

Carpentier completed the manuscript of *Explosion in a Cathedral* and published it in 1962. The book was a best seller and incited much political debate. It is a historical novel centering on the effects of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution on Latin America. It offers a model of Latin American fiction based on the history of the New World, expanding on the themes and problems posed in *The Kingdom of This World* and *The Lost Steps*.

After *Explosion in a Cathedral* there was a twelve-year hiatus in Carpentier’s fiction writing. However, in 1964 he published a book of essays, *Probes and Differences*, that had an enormous impact on Latin American literature. The book republished his prologue to *The Kingdom of This World*, his fullest statement of the theory of the “marvelous real.” Invoking the magical presence he found in Latin America’s indigenous interior, Carpentier argued for a mode of narration that could incorporate miraculous elements without seeming artificial. His theory, appearing in the wake of the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American boom, created rifts among critics of the Spanish-American novel. *Probes and Differences* also contained Carpentier’s ideas on the baroque style, an important quality in Latin American literature and in his own novels.

Later Career as a Controversial Figure Carpentier’s connection with the revolutionary Cuban government transformed him into a controversial figure in Latin American cultural politics. While artists and intellectuals became disillusioned with the repressiveness of the Castro regime and its dependence on the Soviet Union, Carpentier remained faithful to the revolutionary government, turned his back on friends who did not, and refrained from criticism about government policies. The Cuban government rewarded Carpentier with a privileged position. He spent from 1968 until the end of his life in France as a cultural ambassador. He was allowed to receive royalties and publish outside the island, as other Cuban writers were not.

Carpentier’s next work was his only satirical novel. *Reasons of State* (1974) concerns a dictator attempting to rule the fictitious Nueva Cordoba from his home in Paris, periodically returning to his country to control revolutionary outbreaks. A tragicomic figure of artificiality, he ends up with no control over anything. His final novel, *The Harp and the Shadow* (1979), is based on the life of Christopher Columbus. Readers find out that it was by seducing Queen Isabella that Columbus secured her help, thereby rendering the entire American enterprise part of an illicit love affair. Carpentier wrote the novel after being diagnosed with cancer; he died in Paris on April 24, 1980.

Works in Literary Context

Alejo Carpentier grew up in an affluent family and received a fine education. In his father’s library, he satisfied his curiosities as a young reader with classic French authors such as Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, as well as Pio Baroja, the modern Spanish novelist. While he spoke French at home, his association with Cubans of African, Indian, and Spanish origin influenced him as he sought to combine the European and American worlds of his childhood.

The “Marvelous Real” Carpentier’s studies in Latin American history exerted a profound influence on his writing. So did his firsthand experiences in the ruins of Haiti and the jungles of the Orinoco, from which arose his concept of the “marvelous real.” In his novels, the continent’s ancient past is forcefully alive, and the natural environment is sentient and magical. Critic Roberto Gonzales-Echeverría, in his book *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, writes: “Carpentier searches for the marvelous buried beneath the surface of Latin American consciousness, where African drums still beat and Indian amulets rule; in depths where Europe is only a vague memory of a future still to come.” Incongruity and paradox, according to Carpentier, are at the heart of Latin American life and the “marvelous real.”

Fueling the Boom Carpentier’s literary theory—and works such as *The Kingdom of This World*, which put his ideas into practice—influenced the writers who created

the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s. Two notables clearly influenced by Carpentier are Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia and Carlos Fuentes of Mexico. It is reported that upon reading *Explosion in a Cathedral*, García Márquez abandoned a draft of his most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and started over from scratch. More broadly, Carpentier is acknowledged among the originators of magical realism.

Works in Critical Context

Although considered a major literary force in Latin America, Alejo Carpentier did not achieve widespread recognition with the American reading public. Critics have asserted that the erudite quality of his prose—discouraging on such disparate subjects as anthropology, geography, zoology, history, philosophy, musicology, and cuisine—may repel many readers. On the other hand, his work has rated better among French readers and critics. Both *The Kingdom of This World* and *The Lost Steps* won literary prizes in France. Taken as a whole, his writing is considered without parallel in twentieth-century literature for having defined the special role of Latin America in global culture and its mythologies.

The Lost Steps When Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* was published in English in 1956, it commanded little attention from American readers, despite the success of the novel in other languages. The lack of American success was even more disappointing, since the main character of the novel is a Manhattan musician who journeys to the heart of the jungle in search of undiscovered musical instruments played by the indigenous people there. The reception from American critics was positive, though it did not translate into sales. An unnamed reviewer from *Time* calls it "one of the finest fictional forays toward an answer" of whether humans are happier in modern civilization or in a more primitive state of nature. The reviewer also notes that the author "is equipped with an elegance of perception and distinction of style," and that despite the lack of a clear-cut message, he proves to be "a more rewarding guide than many a more decisive pundit."

Responses to Literature

1. Carpentier spent many years studying music when he was young. How are these studies reflected in his published works?
2. In what ways does the character of Columbus in *The Harp and the Shadow* represent Carpentier himself?
3. Compare the "marvelous real" in Carpentier's fiction to magical realist authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende.
4. After the Cuban revolution, Carpentier became controversial for his acceptance of the Castro regime. What political issues and stances stand out in his novels?

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Roch Carrier

BORN: 1937, Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester, Québec

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968)

Floralie, Where Are You? (1969)

Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1971)

The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories (1979)

Heartbreaks Along the Road (1984)

Overview

With almost fifty books to his credit, Roch Carrier is one of the most prolific and original of contemporary Québec writers. He is best known for his writing of *le conte*—the very short story—but he insists that his interest in form is secondary to the more pressing need he feels to invent stories that reveal Québec to itself. A lifelong resident of Montreal, Carrier thinks of himself as a popular writer and maintains that his style and way of seeing things do not come from literature but from life in general and from the life of his native village in particular.



Roch Carrier *Carrier, Roch*, 1991, photograph by Randy Velocci. *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto. Reproduced by permission of the photographer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

French Canadian Roots Roch Carrier was born to Georges and Marie-Anna Tanguay Carrier on May 13, 1937. His birthplace, the village of Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester, southeast of Québec City near the Maine border, would become the setting for much of his fiction. Canada has a history with roots in both British and French culture. Explorers from both countries established territories there during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though France ultimately gave up claims to its territories during the eighteenth century. Despite officially becoming a dominion of the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century, parts of Canada retained their French roots and culture, particularly in the province of Québec where Carrier lived. This remains the only part of Canada where French is the sole official language. Cultural differences between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians have inspired much of Carrier's work.

Carrier came from a family of stonemasons and church builders, and his father, from whom he says he gets his gift

of humor, was a salesman. After several years of local schooling (described in *The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories*, 1979), and later having married Diane Gosselin in 1959, Carrier studied at Collège Saint-Louis in New Brunswick, then at l'Université de Montréal. There he received a bachelor of arts in French literature and wrote a master of arts thesis on Guillaume Apollinaire in 1961.

The Writing Evolution It was at the university that he began to write and have his first poems and short stories published. His stories grew from his poems, which tended to become more and more anecdotal; and his short, dense, episodically structured novels appeared to be built from interconnected stories. Carrier's first full-length book, *Jolis deuils: Petites tragedies pour adultes* (1964), won the Prix Littéraire de la Province de Québec in 1964. A year later the work was awarded the province of Québec award, Les Concours littéraires du Québec. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, he devoted most of his time to the novel, but he continued to write short fiction, including "Contes for a Million Ears," published in *Ecrits du Canada Français* in 1969. It was not until fifteen years after *Jolis deuils*, however, that he produced another full story collection.

The Trilogy From 1961 to 1964, Carrier studied at the University of Paris as he prepared a doctoral thesis on the French poet Blaise Cendrars. On his return to Québec he taught at Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean and at l'Université de Montréal. He began work on his first three novels—*La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (1968), *Floralie, Where Are You?* (1969), and *Is It the Sun, Philibert?* (1971)—intending to chronicle three of the "dark ages of Québec." The trilogy established Carrier's reputation in Québec and abroad with its presentation of a search for meaning in life and death, a search, according to *Canadian Encyclopedia Historica*, that permeates Carrier's work.

Commencing with *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (1968), his first and best-known novel, he began publishing his work at the rate of almost a book a year. *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* was published in English in 1970.

The Theater Years In 1970 Carrier left teaching to become secretary-general of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* was adapted for the stage that year and after a successful European tour was performed in an English translation at the Stratford Festival in 1972. The work has since been made into a film as well. Another film afforded by the 1972 National Film Board verifies Carrier's claim to make story form second to his subject, Québec. In the movie *The Ungrateful Land*, for which he wrote the scenario, Carrier returns to Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester and explains the village for the camera. Images of an enormous team of Percherons, or draft horses, failing to move a huge boulder in a weight-pulling contest express strength and frustration. Scenes of a proud local industry manufacturing thousands of baseball bats portray progress and humiliation as the camera pulls back, revealing them to be three-inch

miniatures. Many other comic but touching cameos tie in perfectly with what would later be known as classic Carrier paradoxical vision.

Carrier adapted his next novel, *Floralie, Where Are You?* (1969) for Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in 1974. Soon after, this loose trilogy consisting of Carrier's first three novels began selling better in English than in the original French. In 1975 Carrier left his job as theater administrator to return to teaching at Collège Militaire Royal and to continue writing. In 1980 he was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix Littéraire de la Ville de Montréal.

The Arts and Library Advocacy In 1999, Carrier was named National Librarian of Canada. As *Canadian Encyclopedia Historica* reports, Carrier was instrumental in addressing and even solving several problems experienced by Canada's contemporary libraries. To remedy the problem of inadequate housing for the miles of print material and the issue of costs associated with accessing digital media, Carrier initiated the launch of the Digital Library of Canada, "an online database that contains digitized copies of some of the most significant national treasures." He was also instrumental in the removal of the barrier fees first required for using AMICUS, Canada's national bibliographic database. Carrier's combined efforts were successful in increasing access to all Canadians. Carrier's hometown of Saint-Justine-de-Dorchester, which did not have its own library during his youth, now features a library named in honor of the author.

Works in Literary Context

Roch Carrier is an instinctive writer. He claims to write not so much to display as to discover what he knows. He continually experiments, not following any school but in an individualistic way, from book to book, capitalizing on new techniques without ever betraying the distinctive voice and vision that have marked all his work.

Le Conte In some respects, Carrier's imagination seems most fertile in the short-story form or, more precisely, in its brief Québécois version known as *le conte*. These fast-moving sketches begin in reality and quickly escalate into fantasy. The language is metaphorical, the development poetic. In a few hundred words a grotesque situation is exploited, a miniature moral is drawn, and an ironic commentary on human foibles is neatly and forcefully made. In "L'Encre," for example, from *Jolis deuils*, a general is signing a peace treaty. His pen catches and splutters. The ink spreads. It covers the paper, the table, the floor, the city, the country. It invades the neighboring nation. War is declared. The ink extends its empire. Fighting becomes futile and a cease-fire is ordered. A new treaty is drawn up. One of the generals initialing the clauses is nervous. His pen catches and splutters, and so on.

Exploring Dichotomies While many of his most loved works—such as his children's books—are rife with humor and light, Carrier's adult books celebrate oppo-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carrier's famous contemporaries include:

Frank Gehry (1929–): Canadian-born architect famous for his inventive and visually whimsical buildings.

Leonard Cohen (1934–): Montreal native famous as a songwriter, poet, and novelist; inducted into the American Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008.

Jacques Chirac (1932–): President of France from 1995 until 2007.

Joe Orton (1933–1967): English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies that shocked and amused his audiences.

Philippe Panneton (1895–1960): Working under the pen name Ringuet, this Canadian academic, physician, and writer cofounded L'Académie canadienne-française and was given title of ambassador to Portugal, among other titles.

sites of both light and dark: violence and laughter; gusto and defeat; man's potential grandeur and his faltering performance; life, or as Carrier would prefer to put it, love and death. In his first three novels, for example, the author set out to chronicle what he calls "three of the dark ages of Québec." *Floralie, Where Are You?* (1969) is set in the latter part of the nineteenth century at the time of the coming of the railroad to rural Québec. Here the dark is in the ignorance, superstition, guilt, and fear of a backward, isolated, church-dominated people. *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (1968) takes place during the second conscription crisis late in World War II. In this novel, the same forces operate, augmented by those of political oppression and racial prejudice and strife. *Is It the Sun, Philibert?* (1971) is set in Montreal during the heyday of Maurice "Rocket" Richard—Quebec's most famous hockey player—in the early 1950s. In this work, the darkness extends to social injustice, industrial abuse, and modern urban stress.

Though the three novels share some settings and characters, their underlying thematic unity and intensity of tone are their strongest bond. In this loose trilogy, Carrier staked out his fictional territory and established the creative attitudes and the narrative voice that characterize the rest of his work.

Works in Critical Context

Carrier has earned a critical reception as diverse as his audiences. At one critical extreme are novels such as *Heartbreaks Along the Road* (1984), his most ambitious work to date, and, at the other end of the spectrum, those works that display Carrier's humor and compassion at

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Carrier, have also written *contes*, fairy tales, or folk tales, often set in their homelands:

- “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1867), a short story by Mark Twain. Twain uses his considerable storytelling abilities and many folktale conventions in this humorous and widely anthologized story.
- Tales of My Mother Goose* (1867), a children’s book by Charles Perrault. This classic collection features the archetypal Mother Goose and several well-known characters including Puss in Boots.
- Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings. The Folklore of the Old Plantation* (1880), by Joel Chandler Harris. Harris repackaged African American folktales in the collection, which enjoyed wide readership among whites in both the North and South in the generations following the American Civil War. His work is controversial, as many African American writers of the twentieth century accuse Harris of appropriating black culture.
- The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943), a short-story collection by Eudora Welty. Welty mixed various mythologies with folk conventions in these masterful stories set in the American South.

their inventive best, such as the classic “The Hockey Sweater.”

Heartbreaks Along the Road In *Heartbreaks Along the Road*, written in the style of rough rural realism, Carrier paints a satiric fresco of village life in the 1950s under the regime of “le Chef,” Québec premier Maurice Duplessis. The village is Saint-Toussaint-des-Saints. The loose plot revolves around the building of a new road as the result of a campaign promise, although the road leads nowhere and is dismantled as soon as it is finished to make more jobs for the unemployed. Dozens of characters appear in single episodes or anecdotes and then melt into the background again. Such a broad comic panorama is unusual in Québec fiction, and *Heartbreaks Along the Road* has been heralded as the Québécois equivalent to Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories “The Hockey Sweater” owes something to the previous novel and recalls Carrier’s first published fiction. In this story for young readers, “a disastrous boyhood episode is fondly recreated,” says Horn Book reviewer Ethel L. Heins in *Contemporary Authors Online*. A young boy outgrows his fan jersey, which is emblazoned with the logo and colors of the Montreal Canadiens—“the best hockey team in the world.” His mother “writes to Mr.

Eaton” (orders from the Eaton’s catalog) for a new one. The eager fan is mortified when the package arrives and his mother hands him a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey instead, the very emblem of the much-hated rivals.

If adaptations and borrowings are any indication of positive reception, “The Hockey Sweater” has one of the highest reputations: The story was funded by the National Film Board of Canada and made into an animated short film, with Carrier as narrator of both the French and English versions. As one of Carrier’s most famous *contes*, it has been excerpted for the backside of the Canadian five-dollar bill. Considered by many to be an allegory, an exemplary story of the tensions existing between French and English Canada, *The Hockey Sweater* is also “a funny story,” according to *School Library Journal* contributor Joan McGrath. “But it is the fun of an adult looking indulgently back to remember a horrible childhood humiliation from the tranquil plateau of adulthood.”

Responses to Literature

1. Carrier writes on subjects that are as important locally as they often are globally. Investigate the history of hockey in Canada, starting in the 1940s when Carrier was a boy. Consider the influence of the Montreal Canadiens versus the Toronto Maple Leafs: What was the impact of their rivalry on hockey fans? What did their competition represent to Canadians?
2. Try your hand at a *conte*. Write a story, making it as short as you can. Try to have a situation, a rising action, a climax, and a resolution. Exchange *contes* with fellow students in an open-microphone reading session.
3. Much of Carrier’s writing is autobiographical. His stories of childhood moments and events are appealing and often funny because of this: Whether they are narrated in English or French, there is something most people can identify with that makes them laugh. Think of an event or incident in your childhood that you feel is relevant to most people, and write an autobiographical sketch (or memoir). Describe the event. Describe the characters involved. Narrate what someone did to cause an embarrassing moment. Add dialogue or other details to make it funny.

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 Added November 7, 2006.

Lewis Carroll

BORN: 1832, Daresbury, Cheshire, England

DIED: 1898, Guildford, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865)

*Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice
 Found There* (1872)

The Hunting of the Snark (1876)

Sylvie and Bruno (1889)

Overview

Few writers of fantasy have managed to permeate their own cultures as did Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a mathematician and amateur photographer who wrote children's books under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. Like other memorable characters who have taken on lives beyond their fictional sources, such Carroll creations as the Mad Hatter, the Red Queen, and the Cheshire Cat are known even to those who have never read his work. Among those with an enduring love of Carroll's work was Walt Disney, whose 1951 animated adaptation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been perhaps even more successful at sharing Carroll's unique ideas with modern audiences than the author's own books.



Lewis Carroll Charles L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Excellent but Unhappy Student The man known best as Lewis Carroll was born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson on January 27, 1832, in Daresbury, Cheshire, the oldest son of the Reverend Charles Dodgson and Frances Jane Lutwidge Dodgson. He was the third of eleven children, and his ability to entertain children likely began with his younger siblings, for whom he invented games. In his early childhood Dodgson was educated at home. His father became rector at another parish in 1843, prompting the family's move to Croft in Yorkshire. The following year Dodgson began attending Richmond Grammar School, and in 1846 he started studies at Rugby. He was a good student but was unhappy in the public school environment. In 1850, the year of his mother's death, he entered Christ Church, Oxford University, where he earned first-class honors in mathematics and second-class honors in classics before graduating in 1854. In the middle of his college studies he had been granted a Studentship, a research internship; it would provide a lifelong living, but to keep it Dodgson was required to take holy orders and remain celibate—neither of which he apparently found difficult.

Entrance into Academia and Religious Life In 1855 Dodgson was appointed a fellow at Christ Church and began lecturing on mathematics, the start of a long and fairly uneventful academic life. He completed his master's degree in 1857, and in 1861 he was ordained a deacon of the Church of England, making him officially the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. His stammer may have determined his decision not to follow his father into the next step; there were likely other personal reasons as well, such as his love of the theater. Still, occasionally Dodgson was called upon to officiate at religious ceremonies such as baptisms and funerals.

A Lifelong Bachelor A lifelong bachelor, Dodgson devoted his time not spent in academic pursuits to reading, writing, and taking photographs, a hobby he took up starting in 1856. He admired many contemporary writers of the day, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson and William Makepeace Thackeray, and he often persuaded writers to be photographed. Dodgson also befriended young girls in the Oxford community, frequently making them the subjects of his photographs. He was at ease with children, joking with them and entertaining them with stories, songs, puzzles, and games. The same could not be said for Dodgson as a lecturer: His students routinely found him clear and knowledgeable, but dry if not boring. Certainly the titles of his early mathematical publications give no indication of Dodgson's wit.

It is perhaps not surprising that Dodgson went on to create the Alice books during an era of invention and expansion. As the British Empire continued expanding under the rule of Queen Victoria, scientific inventions like the lightbulb, telephone, and automobile were making their way into the commercial markets.

The Alice Books The origins of Carroll's Alice books are well known. Dodgson was particularly interested in a girl named Alice Liddell, who was nine years old when he began telling her and her sisters a fantastic story during a boat trip and picnic with Robinson Duckworth, a canon, on July 4, 1862. The children begged him to write down the extemporaneous story, and this served as the basis for his two books about the fictional Alice. Dodgson completed the manuscript of his first novel, which he had titled *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* in 1864; at the urging of his friend George MacDonald's children, it was published the following year as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Though many others have illustrated the Alice books, the best-known illustrations are those by John Tenniel, which appeared in their original publications.

Meeting Queen Victoria Dodgson was a quiet, religious man, always somewhat embarrassed by his fame as Lewis Carroll (even to the point of returning any mail addressed to him under that name), but he had a rich sense of humor, as shown not only in his writings but also in a story related to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

After its publication he was invited to meet Queen Victoria, who exclaimed over the book and asked Dodgson to send her his next effort. This he dutifully did, and the queen received an inscribed copy of a book on mathematical determinants. Needless to say, she was not amused.

In 1869 Dodgson published another book as Lewis Carroll, *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*. It was not as successful, though, as either *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or his next Lewis Carroll book, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, which, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was both incredibly popular and critically acclaimed. Another Carroll work, *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits*, was published in 1876. Like the Alice books, it relies heavily on interesting characters and situations and on the use of nonsense. In this long comic poem, ten figures in search of adventure hunt for a beast called a Snark. The seeming silliness of it all is part of the appeal, as is Carroll's wit.

Lectureship Resignation Leaves More Time to Write In the 1880s Dodgson became increasingly more private. In 1880 he abandoned photography, and the following year, at age forty-nine, he resigned his lectureship in mathematics to devote himself to his studies and his writing. Although he supported his six unmarried sisters and helped to pay for relatives' education, he did not need much money himself (in fact, in 1880 he had requested that his salary be lowered since he was not teaching that much), and he apparently did not enjoy lecturing. However, he then accepted an appointment as curator of the Senior Common Room at Christ Church in 1882, a position he resigned ten years later.

Dodgson's other extended effort as Lewis Carroll appeared as two related books, *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893). Readers and critics generally find these works less appealing than the Alice books and *The Hunting of the Snark*, probably because they are more deliberately moralistic than Carroll's earlier fantasies. While the early books had avoided the Victorian tendency to use children's literature primarily to teach values, the Sylvie and Bruno books are hurt by this tendency. In these books he uses fantasy—here the elements of fairy romance—not for their own sake but for allegorical purposes.

Death and Publication of an Illustrated Manuscript Dodgson died on January 14, 1898, of a bronchial infection while visiting some of his sisters in Guildford, Surrey. That same year Alice Liddell Hargreaves, once the girl who inspired the Alice books and to whom Dodgson had given his illustrated manuscript "Alice's Adventures Under Ground" in 1864, had the manuscript auctioned for 15,400 pounds. At the time it was the highest price ever paid for a book in an auction in Britain.

Works in Literary Context

A clergyman, mathematician, and logician, Carroll is one of the foremost writers of fantasy in literary history. Carroll was encouraged to publish by his mentor George MacDonald, a Scottish author who also wrote fairy tales and fantasy novels. Prior to publishing, Carroll's social circle included a number of influential artists including John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Arthur Hughes. Lauded as a genius who fused his eccentric personal characteristics and opinions with a genuine love of children and childhood, he helped liberate juvenile literature from its history of didacticism and overt moralizing. The Alice books have a value beyond their appeal to children. They have also been interpreted as political satire and are highly esteemed as sophisticated treatises on mathematics and logic.

The Fantastic Several qualities of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* have contributed to their longevity. First is the books's success as fantasy: Through Carroll's prodigious imagination his fantastic worlds come to life, vibrantly filled as they are with bizarre places, people, and happenings, all seen through the experience of a girl who is sensible enough to find these things silly or scary but who is young enough to take pretty much everything in stride.

Linguistic Playfulness Supporting the fantasy is Carroll's playfulness with language. Second only to Edward Lear in the creation of nonsense words and verse, in his Alice books and elsewhere Carroll manages to incorporate many delightfully nonsensical words into his stories. This succeeds in large part because, as Humpty Dumpty points out to Alice in his explication of the poem "Jabberwocky," the words do make sense in a sort of distorted logic. Carroll's frequently twisted games with logic in the books are yet another reason why readers, young and old, have enjoyed Carroll's tales about Alice for more than a century.

Alice Lives On Since their publication, elements from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* have made their way into popular culture and influenced works in a variety of artistic media. While so-called "Alice imitations" were most popular at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, works like Maeve Kelly's *Alice in Thunderland* (1993) and Alison Haben's *Dreamhouse* (1995) continue to be published.

Works in Critical Context

The Alice Books Lewis Carroll's masterpieces, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, have not only endured in their own right, but have also been adapted many times on stage and screen; they have been alluded to in countless literary works, movies, television shows, and songs; and they have

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carroll's famous contemporaries include:

Sully Prudhomme (1839–1907): Winner of the first Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901, this French poet and essayist is best-known for his idealism and ability to synthesize themes from both the sciences and the arts.

Edward Lear (1812–1888): British nonsense writer who made the limerick popular.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): A key figure in the Irish Literary Revival and cofounder of the Abbey Theatre, this Irish dramatist and author remains one of the most significant literary figures of the twentieth century.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England for sixty-three years, a period known as the Victorian era, she was partly responsible for the success of the Industrial Revolution and is known for her role in the expansion of the British Empire.

George MacDonald (1824–1905): Scottish pastor and author of popular fairy tales, such as *The Princess and the Goblin*.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): One of the most popular authors of his day, this English writer is highly regarded for his contributions to the short story and children's literature genres; for this Kipling was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907.

inspired many other works of fantasy and science fiction, directly or indirectly. Critics have noted Carroll's playful exploration of the paradoxes of thought and language; poet W. H. Auden commented: "[In the Alice books], one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language. Alice, who had hitherto supposed that words were passive objects, discovers that they have a life and will of their own. When she tries to remember poems she has learned, new lines come into her head unbidden and, when she thinks she knows what a word means, it turns out to mean something else."

Early reviews of the Alice books concentrated on Carroll's magnificent invention and his skill as a linguist, parodist, and literary stylist. After his death, critics analyzed the stories from many points of view—political, philosophical, metaphysical, and psychoanalytic—often evaluating the tales as products of Carroll's neuroses and as reactions to Victorian culture. Because of the nightmarish qualities of Alice's adventures and their violent, even sadistic, elements, a few commentators have suggested that the Alice books are inappropriate for children; as a result, the stories are not always enjoyed by the audience for whom they were apparently intended.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the most notable things in the Alice books is the hallucinatory quality of the characters and plot, due to Alice's dreaming. The use of dream sequences as a plot device is common in most surreal literature; here are a few other works that may—or may not—be based simply on a dream.

Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce. In this notoriously difficult novel, plots and characters often change for no reason, and the title character is usually either dead or dreaming.

The Wizard of Oz (1939), a film directed by Victor Fleming. In this classic based upon L. Frank Baum's Oz books, farm girl Dorothy gets swept up in a tornado and lands in a magical land—or is she really just asleep back in Kansas?

The Mad Hatter (1978), an album by Chick Corea. Based specifically on the Alice books, this jazz fusion album features songs titled after Alice's dream and often sounds dreamy and discordant.

However, Carroll is consistently applauded as one of the world's foremost writers of nonsense, an author who successfully combined the logical with the illogical in two timeless novels that have fascinated children and adults alike.

Responses to Literature

1. Read one of Carroll's "nonsense" poems such as "Jabberwocky" or *The Hunting of the Snark*. Why are they considered nonsensical? In what ways do they, as Carroll asserted, display their own sort of logic and pattern?
2. How does Dodgson's knowledge of mathematics come into play in the Alice books? Find specific examples of logic or mathematical principles.
3. One notable characteristic of Carroll's Alice books is their focus on the rules of acceptable behavior in confusing and nonsensical worlds. One notable example is the tea party with the Mad Hatter. Find additional examples of this theme in either book. How do you think this reflects the rules of the Victorian society in which Carroll lived? How might these works be seen as a parallel to a child's learning the rules of the adult world?
4. Carroll first used his famous pen name on a poem written for adults and published in 1856. Why do you think Carroll used a pen name for many of his works? How does his pen name reflect his fondness for wordplay?

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Angela Carter

BORN: 1940, Eastbourne, England

DIED: 1992, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972)

Fireworks (1974)

The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories (1979)

Wise Children (1991)

Burning Your Boats (1995)

Overview

Angela Carter, who during her life was mainly known as an author of novels, nonfiction essays, plays, and children's books, was also a short-story writer. During her short life she published three collections of short stories—*Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories* (1979), and *Black Venus* (1985). Two additional collections, *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993) and *Burning Your Boats* (1995), were published posthumously. Each of these collections bears the originality that has determined Carter's place among the most highly regarded British



Angela Carter Carter, *Angela*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

writers of the end of the twentieth century. Her writing is noted for its vivid prose, gothic settings, eroticism, violence, use of fantasy and fairy tales, and surrealism that combine to form what Victoria Glendinning of the *New Statesman* called “the world of Freudian dream and futuristic fiction and pornography.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A “Gently Untidy” Childhood Angela Carter was born Angela Olive Stalker on May 7, 1940, in Eastbourne, England. Her father, Hugh Alexander Stalker, originally came from Scotland. He worked as a journalist and was in his mid-forties when Angela was born. Her mother, Olive Farthing Stalker, originally came from South Yorkshire. Because Eastbourne was located close to the English Channel, and therefore close to the occupying German army stationed along the French coast during World War II, Carter and her mother, brother, and grandmother moved to South Yorkshire to avoid being caught in German air attacks on England.

After the war, the family moved to Balham, South London, where Carter went to school. The picture Carter paints of her family life in Alison Lee’s book *Angela Carter* (1997) is warm and affectionate, and her descrip-

tion of her childhood home emphasizes a dreamlike atmosphere that would later be reflected in the surreal tone of her works: “Life passed at a languorous pace, everything was gently untidy, and none of the clocks ever told the right time.”

First Publications In 1960 Angela married Paul Carter. They moved to Bristol where, in 1965, Carter graduated from Bristol University with a degree in English literature. In 1966 she published her first novel, *Shadow Dance*, followed in 1967 by *The Magic Toyshop* and in 1968 by *Several Perceptions*. For *The Magic Toyshop* Carter received the Llewellen Rhys Memorial Prize, and for *Several Perceptions* she won the Somerset Maugham Award. In 1968 Carter separated from her husband and then divorced him in 1972. She used the money she received for her books to travel to Japan “to experience life in a culture that is not Judeo-Christian.” She lived and worked there for almost three years, from 1969 to 1972.

In 1974 she published her first collection of short stories, *Fireworks*, which was partly inspired by her stay in Japan. In the afterword, Carter explains the connection between Japan and the structure of her short stories: “I started to write short pieces, when I was living in a room too small to write a novel in. So the size of my room modified what I did inside it and it was the same with the pieces themselves.”

Finding a Niche In 1975 Carter began to write for *New Society*. Between 1976 and 1978 she worked as a fellow in creative writing at Sheffield University. In 1979 she published her second collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories*, which won the Cheltenham Festival of Literature Award. The stories “The Werewolf” and “The Company of Wolves” are variations of Charles Perrault’s fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood”. This twist earned her the reputation of being her era’s Mother Goose, albeit a much darker version. Carter continued to exploit traditional tales, exposing not only the tales’ inherent violence and chauvinism, but also revealing the nature of storytelling.

In 1977 Carter settled down with new husband Mark Pearce in Clapham, South London. Between 1980 and 1981 Carter worked as a visiting professor in the Writing Program at Brown University in the United States. In November 1983, when she was forty-three, she gave birth to her son, Alexander Pearce. Despite the birth of her child, between 1984 and 1988 Carter led a nomadic life. For three years, she taught part-time at England’s University of East Anglia. In 1984 she was also a writer in residence at the University of Adelaide, South Australia.

Last Years Carter’s last novel, *Wise Children*, published in 1991, was her acknowledged favorite. In 1991 Carter was diagnosed with lung cancer. She died at her home on February 16, 1992. In 1993 her fourth collection of short stories, *American Ghosts and Old World*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carter's famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): Prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990.

Queen Elizabeth II (1926–): Reigning queen of the United Kingdom, and a romantic and legendary figurehead.

Margaret Atwood (1939–): Canadian writer who emphasizes women's roles and also uses fairy tales and legends in her works.

Salman Rushdie (1947–): Controversial British-Indian writer who uses magic realism, particularly in his renowned *Midnight's Children*.

Wonders, was published, and in 1995 her last one, *Burning Your Boats*, appeared in print. Before her death, Carter provided extensive directions on how to deal with her literary estate. Her main concerns were related to her husband and her son—she desired for her works to provide an income for them, stating that “any one of her fifteen books could be set to music or acted on ice.”

Angela Carter's experiments with narrative form and her use of fairy-tale and real-life characters may have been the reason, as Salman Rushdie writes in his introduction to *Burning Your Boats*, that she was “dismissed by many in her lifetime as a marginal, cultish figure, an exotic hothouse flower.” Since her death, however, Carter has become, at British universities, one of the most studied of late-twentieth-century writers.

Works in Literary Context

Stories within Stories One of Carter's most lauded literary techniques is the doubling of narrative frames. Her celebrated tale “The Loves of Lady Purple,” for example, is a story within a story. The frame of the story is a puppet show, given in different cities and countries by “the Asiatic professor.” But the story itself is about a perverse, cruel vampire who, as a punishment for her perversities, forfeits her vitality and is transformed into a puppet, used for presentations by the Asiatic professor, who worships her as a puppet because she is an embodiment of his art. Perhaps the most interesting part of the story is the transition between the frame story and the story itself, when the frame story becomes part of the unreal illusory theatrical story. The puppet, the object of art, through love, power, and faith of the artist in his own art, returns to life to become once again what she had been, whereas the frame, the show, and the Asiatic professor cease to exist, overcome by the power of his

creation, which in this case is a destructive evil. This theme has recurred in art and literature since the Renaissance. The relationships between the artist, art, and art's destructive power have fascinated artists, poets, and writers through the centuries. In this story Carter finds her own original way to introduce this theme.

The Beauty and the Beast Carter also established her creative genius by reinterpreting fairy tales to reflect the concerns of her own time and gender. *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, for example, is based on the fairy tale “The Beauty and the Beast.” As in the original story, “the Beauty” saves “the Beast.” In another story, “The Tiger's Bride,” the Beauty becomes an animal in order to reunite with the Beast, the Tiger. The Beauty, when confronted with the choice of returning to a human state and to her father—who sent her to the Beast as payment for his gambling losses—chooses to stay with the animal, who is more noble and generous than the unworthy human.

Alternatively, in the story “The Lady of the House of Love,” the Beast is a young, beautiful girl who is also a vampire, and in this story, the Beauty is a young man with whom the young girl falls in love and through whose love she is saved from the unhappiness related to her nature, because of which she is forced to kill in order to survive, something that she hates to do.

Works in Critical Context

Overall Reception During Carter's life and after her death in 1992, literary critics tried to decide on the literary trend to which her works belong. Some perceive her as a writer of the gothic; others associate her with magic realism. Her short stories, however, are distinctly postmodern. As the critical responses to Carter's work multiply and the debate over its meaning and significance grows, however, it has become clear that her writing is more ambivalent, its implications darker, than a label such as “postmodern” suggests.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman In her 1972 novel—the product, like some of the *Fireworks* stories, of two years she spent in Japan—imaginary animals step out of paintings and reflections escape from mirrors to invade the realm of the real. Such fantastic plot elements made her early work difficult to characterize. While writers as diverse as Anthony Burgess and John Hawkes expressed great admiration for her writing, other reviewers were unimpressed. *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* was ignored or treated with incomprehension and contempt by most mainstream critics. For many readers, the presence of the fantastic was unacceptable when it demanded direct and sustained attention. The reception of Carter's writing had changed along with the writing itself between the 1960s, when despite being seen as strange she won two major British literary prizes, and the 1970s, when she returned from Japan more radically self-conscious and aggressive in her re-creation of her heritage.

Wise Children and Posthumous Success English theater culture is the territory of her last novel, *Wise Children*. It traces the history of the fictional Hazard theatrical dynasty. The Hazards are mirrored and mocked by the illegitimate, female branch of the family, represented by elderly twins Dora and Nora Chance, who had their own vaudeville careers and live in indecorous retirement on the wrong side of the Thames. Salman Rushdie, in an obituary for the author in the *New York Times*, states, “Angela’s last novel, *Wise Children*, was also her finest.” In her review for the *Nation*, Ann Saltow notes that the book “offers aesthetic pleasure like a gift to the reader. . . . Like Shakespeare, Carter is a crowd-pleaser.” Carter’s death from cancer, coming soon after its publication, hastened its acceptance as one of the canonical texts of the postmodern feminist sensibility.

Responses to Literature

1. Look up the terms and decide for yourself whether you think Carter’s writing is gothic, magic realist, or postmodern.
2. Carter and the Canadian author Margaret Atwood have often been compared with each other. Can you find similarities, perhaps in Atwood’s novel *Surfacing*, and Carter’s story “The Company of Wolves”?
3. Why do you think critics were apprehensive about Carter’s stories? Why do you think she won so many awards despite this criticism?
4. How does Carter portray animals in “The Company of Wolves”? What might the wolves represent?
5. Why does Carter choose to manipulate fairy tales? Is she hoping to educate us about something? What? Be sure to identify which elements of fairy tales Carter adopts and which she rejects.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Angela Carter played with traditional fairy tales, sometimes making them more violent or more beautiful than they initially were. Sometimes she merely elaborated on a common theme, and other times she used the original story to reveal something about our modern era. Here are some other works that use old tales to reveal new truths.

Bluebeard’s Egg (1983), a collection by Margaret Atwood.

In this collection, Atwood’s heroines are faced with duplicitous men modeled after the traditional scoundrel, Bluebeard.

Bluebeard (1987), a novel by Kurt Vonnegut. In this fictionalized autobiography of a painter, the narrator’s secrets are kept in a potato barn.

Stranger Things Happen (2001), stories by Kelly Link. In this collection of short stories, classical villains and heroes make an appearance in modern-day America.

Pan’s Labyrinth (2006), a film by Guillermo del Toro. In this movie, a young girl uses traditional fantasy elements—including dark woods and talking animals—to help her escape the harsh realities of the Spanish Civil War.

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❏ Rosalia de Castro

BORN: 1837, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

DIED: 1885, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Cantares gallegos (*Galician Songs*; 1863)

En las orillas del Sar (*Beside the River Sar*; 1884)

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Castro's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Victoria was the queen of England from 1837 until 1901, making her the longest-reigning British monarch in history.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): Dickinson is considered to be one of the most important nineteenth-century American poets, though almost none of her poems was published during her lifetime.

Eduardo Pondal (1835–1917): Pondal was a Galician poet who attempted to restore the status of the Galician language.

W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911): Gilbert, an English theatrical writer, is best known for his collaboration with Arthur Sullivan on comic light operas.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906): Cézanne, a French postimpressionist painter, marked a transition from nineteenth- to twentieth-century art.

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908): Machado was a Brazilian writer widely recognized as the most important figure in Brazilian literature.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): Hardy was an English writer whose poetry was part of the naturalist movement.

Overview

Rosalía de Castro was an acknowledged master of Spanish poetry who wrote intimate, musical verse mainly in her native Galician (a dialect similar to Portuguese), incorporating the folk themes, political problems, and longings of her people in her poetry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Personal and Political Turmoil Castro was born to an unwed Spanish noblewoman. Raised by an aunt to age eleven, she spent her teens in her grandparents' home, where she was educated in languages and the arts. Despite her talent in music, art, and writing (she composed her first poem at age twelve), Castro was an unhappy youth. Many critics attribute her melancholy, which deepened year by year, to the stigma surrounding her birth, which forced her to be separated from her mother.

Castro lived in an era of political turmoil in Spain. In the decades before her birth, France—under the rule of Napoléon Bonaparte—had taken control of the Spanish monarchy and ruled the country as a client state. While

Spanish rebels ultimately defeated the French occupying forces in 1814, Spain's economy was devastated by the occupation and conflict. Social unrest was common for the next fifty years, and in 1868 the Spanish monarchy was once again driven out—this time by rebels—during the Glorious Revolution. Such unrest may have fueled interest in traditional Spanish and Galician culture, which was viewed with nostalgia by those who longed for simpler times. This interest ultimately shaped Castro's work and enduring popularity.

The Flowering of a Galician Poet At age nineteen, Castro moved to Madrid, where she became involved with literary circles and published *La flor* (*The Flower*), an inconsequential collection of poems in Spanish. The following year, she married Manuel Murguría, a historian and a champion of the Galician literary renaissance. Although their marriage was troubled by financial difficulties, ill health, and the deaths of two of their six children, Murguría always encouraged his wife's writing. It was through his prompting that Castro agreed to publish *Galician Songs*, the Galician verses that brought her acclaim as an important poet.

Her skill increased in *Follas novas* (*New Leaves*), another book on Galician themes, which is tinged with a darker and more personal tone than *Galician Songs*. With *Beside the River Sar* (1884), written in Spanish rather than Galician, she won national attention. This collection, which was composed when Castro was suffering from cancer, reflects a more personal and subjective tone. She died in 1885.

Works in Literary Context

Galician Concerns Castro composed chiefly in her native Galician, writing poetry about the Galician countryside and longings of the Galician people. Castro added to these her own deep nostalgia, love of nature, and a pervasive melancholy. Her poetry, while simple in form, is mystical, religious, and highly symbolic in content. The subject matter of her works is primarily regional concerns, yet her poetry also probes the human soul in a manner that makes it universally relevant.

While her contemporaries adhered to a rigid poetic structure in their works, Castro used a lilting, fluid metrical style. Her simple, musical prosody, emotional themes, and natural symbols and motifs are seen by critics as influences on the work of such modern poets as Ruben Dario, Amado Nervo, and Federico García Lorca.

Works in Critical Context

Castro is widely considered one of the greatest practitioners of regionalism in Spanish literature. Critics consider that her studies of the Galician province, which

brought her into literary prominence, have broader value because of her universal concerns.

According to L. A. Warren, Castro “is the greatest of modern Spanish poets, [Gustavo Adolfo] Bécquer being the only alternative, and ranks level with the two greatest mystical lyrical poets of the golden century, Fray Luis de Leon and San Juan de la Cruz.” Gerald Brenan stated: “Had she written in Castilian rather than in her native Galician dialect, she would, I feel sure, be recognized as the greatest woman poet of modern times.”

Galician Songs Critics usually cite *Galician Songs* as the catalyst for the Galician cultural revival that took place in the nineteenth century. Recent critical attention has focused on feminist aspects of Castro’s writing. Michelle C. Geoffrion-Vinci points out that *Galician Songs* contains poems that “decry the mistreatment of women and Galicia, both of which occupied highly marginalized positions within the framework of 19th-century Spanish society.”

Responses to Literature

1. Castro wrote her final collection of poems *Beside the River Sar* while suffering from cancer. In what ways can you see despair over this illness in these works? What aspects of the poetry demonstrate her efforts to soothe herself and cope with dying?
2. Does Castro’s depiction of women as caregivers resonate with present-day women? In what ways are her female figures a product of the time, and in what ways are they universally relevant?
3. Castro’s admirers assert that she has universal relevance despite her regional Galician themes. Write an argumentative essay that defends or attacks this assertion.
4. Castro depicted outdoor settings with a strong sense of the peace and serenity that they brought. Write a poem or short descriptive essay that re-creates an outdoor setting in a similar manner.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Castro composed her final collection of poems while suffering from cancer; the poems in this collection show her attempting to make sense of this experience. Here are some other works that show authors attempting to deal with illness and dying:

“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (1951), a poem by Dylan Thomas. In this poem, the speaker urges his father to fight against his impending death.

“Kaddish” (1961), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. This poem is about the death of the author’s mother.

Can You Come Here Where I Am? (1998), edited by Rita Busch. This collection of poetry contains works by authors fighting and coping with breast cancer.

Constantine Cavafy

BORN: 1863, Alexandria, Egypt

DIED: 1933, Alexandria, Egypt

NATIONALITY: Egyptian, Greek

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

“Waiting for the Barbarians” (1904)

“The City” (1910)

“Ithaca” (1911)

“Exiles” (1914)

Overview

Constantine Cavafy is considered the first modernist Greek poet. He revolutionized Greek poetry while highlighting clear affinities with Hellenistic poetry of the Alexandrian era.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cosmopolitan Youth Constantine P. Cavafy was born Konstantinos Petrou Kavafis in Alexandria, Egypt, to a Greek family. His father was a successful importer-exporter whose business led him frequently to England. When Cavafy’s father died, the family moved to Liverpool, England. It was there that Cavafy began his poetic efforts. He took a liking to William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde and created verse in English. He was also fascinated by history, especially ancient Greek (Hellenistic) and ancient Roman (Byzantine) history; this fondness for ancient Greece and Rome figured prominently in Cavafy’s poetry.

Castro’s older brothers ultimately bankrupted the family business through mismanagement. Cavafy’s mother



Constantine Cavafy © Margot Granitsas / The Image Works

took him to Constantinople (now Istanbul), where they lived for three years. Then his mother returned to her Greek homeland with Cavafy and several of his siblings; his older brothers remained in Alexandria. The adolescent Cavafy continued writing poems, but he eventually joined his older brothers in Alexandria and found work as a newspaper correspondent.

A Private Poet In 1885, when Cavafy returned to Alexandria, he obtained a position as a clerk of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. He stayed at the ministry for the next thirty years, eventually becoming its assistant director. Cavafy was an obscure poet, living in relative seclusion and publishing little of his work. He preferred to circulate his verse among friends. A short collection of his poetry was privately printed in the early 1900s. In 1933, eleven years after leaving the ministry, he died of cancer.

Works in Literary Context

Cavafy's early poems exhibit the influence of the symbolist and decadent movements in late-nineteenth-century European literature. They often express the melancholy typical of *fin de siècle* (end of the century) poetry. Cavafy later repudiated this self-consciously poetic quality for a spare, prosaic style, which he developed to perfection in his mature poems. Often called a poet of old age, Cavafy denied his poetry displays of linguistic virtuosity, empha-

sizing instead his experience and perceptions stated with the greatest possible plainness. His language was flat and direct. He consciously avoided a dependence on metaphor and imagery, preferring a straightforward comment.

Classical Tragic Themes Cavafy drew upon the entire history of the Greek language, from its most elevated to its most vulgar forms. He did so to provide a simple reworking of a few tragic themes. Foremost among these themes is that of human mortality and the sense of beauty, frustration, and loss that derives from it.

Among his other major themes are art, politics, homosexuality, and the moral character and psychology of individuals. His poetry also displays a fatalistic existential nostalgia as well as an uncertainty about the future.

History and Politics with a Personal Vision

Cavafy was an avid student of history, particularly ancient civilizations, and in a great number of poems he subjectively rendered life during the Greek and Roman empires. Most of his poems are set in the outland regions under Roman conquest during the declining years of the empire. They feature both historic characters, such as Nero and Julius Caesar, and fictional ones, often Greek poets and artisans who commemorate some recurring theme in Cavafy's ancient world. Among these themes are the vanity of worldly triumph, the transient nature of human life, and the tragedy of a precarious existence relieved only by transcendent moments of romantic passion. Cavafy called himself "an historical poet," but his thematic concerns are nonetheless modern as well as being extremely personal.

In his poetry Cavafy was inspired by parallels between the modern age and that of the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods. George Seferis, among others, points out that in a Cavafy poem the past illuminates and illustrates the present, as well as documents the state of the poet's mind and spirit. Throughout the poetry, the hedonism of Rome comes to represent the pitfalls as well as the glorious moments of sensual indulgence, just as the new religion of Christianity represents an austere but satisfying alternative to the ultimate futility of a life based on eroticism. These opposing themes frequently arise in Cavafy's love poems, in which he portrays homosexual relationships without guilt or sentimentality.

Cavafy's most important poems, however, impart his personal vision on politics and history. In "Waiting for the Barbarians" for example, Cavafy documents the ironically enthusiastic response with which a civilized culture greeted insurgent barbarism. In "Ithaca" he conveys that the journey to one's destination is more important than the arrival, and in "The City" he warns that to leave one's city amounts to an unsuccessful escape from oneself.

Works in Critical Context

Cavafy has been recognized in Greece and the wider literary community as one of the great poets of the twentieth century. His poetry led to a revival of modern

Greek poetry as well as an upsurge in the international recognition of Greek poetry in general. Cavafy's reputation continued to grow after his death. His works are now taught in Greek schools and in universities throughout the world.

Critics often find Cavafy's value to reside in his particular tone of voice, which conveys a pagan sensitivity to physical pleasure and a painful sense of tragic futility. Some critics note the untranslatability of Cavafy's better elements, but his works have been translated by a number of prominent writers, including the American poets James Merrill and Robert Pinsky. W. H. Auden, who wrote an introduction to a translation of Cavafy's works, suggests that what is most distinctive about Cavafy's poetry is not what can be translated, but "a tone of voice, a personal speech." Auden acknowledges Cavafy's influence on his own work, even though he only ever read him in translation because Auden did not know modern Greek.

"Waiting for the Barbarians" "Waiting for the Barbarians" is generally recognized as one of Cavafy's most accomplished and enduring creations. C. M. Bowra, in an essay for *The Creative Experiment*, states that in the poem, "Cavafy produces a real myth, a story which stands firmly in its own right and yet is rich in universal significance." Kimon Friar in *The New Republic* writes, "*Waiting for the Barbarians* is deeply moving to those who understand the secret temptation in the hearts of free men to cast off their responsibilities and yield themselves to directing power." Many critics have commented on the tragic message of the work, despite its comic touches. Renato Poggiolo, writing in *Harvard Literary Bulletin*, states of the poem, "What renders its ending really unhappy is that there is neither release nor relief, or more simply, that there is no ending at all."

Responses to Literature

1. Cavafy sets most of his poems in the ancient world. How does this choice impact the themes he is able to explore? Would he be able to explore the themes he has chosen as successfully in a modern setting?
2. Cavafy lived an isolated and pained life, partly because of negative attitudes about homosexuality. How do you think this cultural isolation is reflected in his poetry?
3. "The City" can be read as a warning that leaving your hometown will be an unsuccessful escape from yourself. Write a first-person story about leaving home that follows this sentiment.
4. Read the poem "Waiting for the Barbarians" and discuss the poem's relevance in today's society.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cavafy's famous contemporaries include:

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904): Chekhov was a Russian playwright and short-story writer whose innovations influenced the development of the modern short story.

Edith Wharton (1862–1937): Wharton was an American novelist known for chronicling the high society of her time.

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949): Maeterlinck was a Belgian playwright who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911.

Constantin Stanislavski (1863–1938): Stanislavski, a Russian actor and theater director, founded the school of modern realistic acting that continues to dominate theater to this day.

Henry Ford (1863–1947): This American entrepreneur and industrialist is credited with bringing modern production methods to the manufacture of automobiles.

Erik Karlfeldt (1864–1931): Karlfeldt was a Swedish poet of the symbolist school who was granted the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1931 after his death.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Yeats was an Irish poet and dramatist widely considered one of the most important figures in twentieth-century literature.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Cavafy's works are set in ancient Greece and Rome. Here are some other modern works set in the same period:

Count Belisarius (1938), a novel by Robert Graves.

This novel is a fictionalized retelling of the life of a real Byzantine general who lived in the sixth century CE.

The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel (1938), a poem by Nikos Kazantzakis. This epic poem continues the adventures of Homer's classic character Odysseus.

Quo Vadis (1895), a novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz. This historical novel centers around the love between a young Christian woman and a Roman nobleman during the time of the emperor Nero.

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Smith, William Jay. *The Streaks of the Tulip: Selected Criticism*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1954.

Margaret Cavendish

BORN: 1623, Colchester, England

DIED: 1673, Welbeck, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems, and Fancies (1653)

Philosophicall Fancies (1653)

The Worlds Olio (1655)

The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle (1667)

Overview

Margaret Lucas Cavendish, first Duchess of Newcastle, remains one of the most remarkable authors of the mid-seventeenth century. Praised by the influential philosophers and university faculty of her day, ridiculed by contemporary literati and later biographers, she published thirteen separate volumes of poetry and prose

between 1653 and 1668, seeing most of her books through two or more revised editions during the same period. Although her works range from poetry, plays, and prose fiction to letters, orations, and natural philosophy, she has been noted most often as the writer of her husband's biography. Some three hundred years after her death, the range and complexity of Margaret Cavendish's writings are being reconsidered, especially in the context of social history, and she is being acknowledged as an important and underrated figure in the history of English literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up Royalist Records of the birth of Margaret Lucas were lost during the English Civil Wars in the 1640s, but she was probably born in 1623, just outside Colchester. She was the youngest in a family of eight children, consisting of three sons and five daughters. Her father, Thomas Lucas, died when she was two; the most formative influence upon her, therefore, was her mother, Elizabeth Leighton Lucas. Within the family, relationships were warm and loving, but strangers were kept at arm's length, perhaps because the Lucases were Royalists, whereas most of their neighbors supported Parliament. Royalists were those who supported the rightful rule of King Charles I of England; during the 1640s, a growing number of dissatisfied British citizens—mostly Puritans, a religious denomination the king sought to eliminate—favored the removal of the king and the establishment of a commonwealth. This eventually occurred in 1649, when King Charles I was executed and England came under the rule of Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell. Possibly as a result of her family's unpopular Royalist background, Margaret grew up to be afflicted by a terrible bashfulness that left its mark on both her practice and her theory of rhetoric. She received what little education she had at home from a governess and visiting tutors. Not a keen student, she greatly preferred to amuse herself by writing—scribbling, as she called it—and by designing her own clothes.

Flight and Exile Margaret's happy family life was violently disrupted in 1641, when the British political situation reached a crisis: never popular with their Puritan neighbors, the Lucases were attacked in their family home. In 1642 Margaret and her mother fled to Oxford, where King Charles held his court in exile; in 1643 Margaret became maid of honor to Queen Henrietta Maria, whom she accompanied in 1644 when the queen escaped to France. There, in the spring of 1645, she met William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle, whom she married in December of that year. Her husband was a great influence on her throughout her life. He encouraged



Margaret Cavendish Hulton Archive / Getty Images

her to write, supplemented her scanty education, paid for the publication of her books, and above all gave her confidence. He was himself a patron of the arts and sciences, and his brother Charles was a noted scholar. Childless, and without a great house and estate to care for, Margaret Cavendish amused herself in the early years of her marriage by writing, first in Paris, later in Rotterdam, and finally in Antwerp. The turning point of her career, however, was a visit to England begun in 1651. She had returned, escorted by her brother-in-law, to try to claim a portion of her husband's sequestered estates. During the eighteen months she spent there, she wrote constantly and also arranged for the publication of her first two books, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) and *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653).

Cavendish returned to her husband in Antwerp early in 1653. She completed work on her rhetorical theory in *The Worlds Olio*, published in 1655 but begun before her

departure to England at the end of 1651. It is a curious work, rather like an informal conversation, flitting from one subject to another in disconnected fashion, with no serious sustained discussion of any issue.

Return and Last Years In 1660, with the onset of the Restoration—the return of the traditional English monarchy, as well as those nobles who had also been exiled—Margaret Cavendish and her husband were finally able to return to England. For a while they lived in London, but they soon found the court of Charles II uncongenial and before the end of 1660 had retired to their estate at Welbeck. Once settled there, Cavendish resumed her life as a writer, publishing material she had worked on during her exile. She also made a serious effort to improve her overall education, studying philosophy and revising her philosophical works in the light of her new knowledge.

In *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puisant Prince William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle* (1667) Cavendish's love and admiration for her husband shine clearly through her prose, which is simple, direct, and sincere. In the preface she lays out what would now be called her methodology and her preference for the simple truth. This preface also makes it clear that even toward the end of her life Cavendish was still ambivalent about rhetoric—admiring of its power to adorn, suspicious of its power to deceive—and above all, unhappy about her own lack of training in it.

Margaret Cavendish's last years were clouded by disputes with her husband's children and false accusations from his servants. She died suddenly on December 15, 1673, and was buried in Westminster Abbey on January 7, 1674. Her husband was not well enough to attend her funeral and two years later was interred with her, on January 22, 1676. Before he died, however, he collected all the letters and poems written to celebrate her and arranged to have them published as *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Dutchess of Newcastle*, which demonstrated that universities, philosophers, and gentleman poets had showered her with flattering words, even as peers had ridiculed her in private letters and diaries.

Works in Literary Context

Gender Issues Cavendish's first collection of plays, though written during her exile, was not published until 1662, the original manuscript having been lost at sea. The prefatory material includes a discussion of gender: here, as in *The Worlds Olio*, Cavendish shows a clear recognition of the difference between masculine and feminine styles and their different uses. She does not suggest that women are naturally inferior. She argues that because discourse must be adjusted to particular audiences and circumstances, one cannot expect the orator to



Margaret Cavendish Cavendish, Margaret, photograph. © Bettmann / Corbis.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cavendish's famous contemporaries include:

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English playwright most famous for *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640): Flemish Baroque painter at whose house Cavendish stayed during her exile.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): English political philosopher known for his book *Leviathan*.

René Descartes (1596–1650): Seventeenth-century French rationalist and the founder of Cartesian philosophy.

use the same style in private conversation as in public speech. On the relationship between speaking and writing, she asserts that the best writers are not usually the best speakers; and women cannot be good writers because they talk too much.

Rhetoric and Speech Cavendish emphasizes the relationship between thought and speech, or *ratio* and *ora-*

tio, in the terms of Latin rhetoric used then. Like many of her contemporaries, she regards rhetoric as the art of expression only; she is contemptuous and, indeed, suspicious of it. The business of rhetoric is merely to dress thought; she compares the rhetorician to the tailor. Yet, dress and rhetoric have their own importance and must be appropriate to the occasion; and she acknowledges that “want of eloquence” can conceal or misrepresent the truth.

She rules that passionate speeches must be delivered in a tenor or even a bass voice, not a treble, to give due weight and solemnity. She even gives advice about the use of lips, teeth, and tongue to achieve the desired effect. Her dislike of the artificial style extends to a horror of the pedantic, the fussily correct: she even states that “it is against nature for women to spell right.” A good style has ease and simplicity, which are more important than mere accuracy.

Works in Critical Context

Cavendish's works were not well received in her own day. Two celebrated diarists made fun of her: Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, who wrote a rude ballad about her visit to the Royal Society on May 30, 1667. She also had admirers, however: Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, wrote a poem in her honor on the flyleaf of his copy of *Poems, and Fancies*; in addition, John Dryden congratulated Newcastle on his wife's “masculine style.” In the twentieth century Virginia Woolf valued her work, though she also made trenchant criticisms of it. Only in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, did Cavendish's importance begin to be recognized. Many contemporary scholars are now engaged in studying her works, and there is a flourishing Margaret Cavendish Society.

Natures Pictures and the Female Role A question that necessarily arises for contemporary scholars is whether or not Margaret Cavendish should be regarded as an early feminist. She certainly paved the way for the feminists who came later; however, she evinces little of that solidarity with other women that characterizes feminism. In fact, at the beginning of *Natures Pictures* she not only confesses to extraordinary ambition but also admits that she does not want to share her glory with other women: “I dare not examin the former times, for fear I should meet with such of my Sex that have outdone all the glory I can aime at.” An alternative approach is to see Cavendish in terms of the aristocratic culture of her own time, one that adopted an ideology of display. Hero Chalmers discusses Cavendish as an aristocrat in “Dismantling the Myth of 'Mad Madge': The Cultural Context of Margaret Cavendish's Authorial Self-Presentation” (1997). Diana Barnes reinforces this approach in “The Restoration of Royalist Form in Margaret Cavendish's Sociable Letters” (2001).

Responses to Literature

1. Take a look at some of Cavendish's writing and determine whether or not she is a feminist. What makes you think this? What do you think a feminist is?
2. Why do you think Cavendish was ignored in her day? Was it only because she was a female writer?
3. Cavendish is decidedly un-Aristotelian. Research his rhetorical work and determine where they differ.
4. How do Cavendish's royalist tendencies come into play in her writing and thinking? What do monarchs and aristocrats symbolize in her work?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cavendish was known for her preoccupation with rhetoric, with the idea of words and sentences as effective means of communication. Logic, law, and philosophy all rely heavily on rhetoric, and its practitioners have long been revered in Western culture. Here are some other works that explore the nature of communication and argument.

The Art of Rhetoric (fourth century BCE), a treatise by Aristotle. This famous work outlines the need for logos, ethos, and pathos in effective dialogue.

Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style (1512), a work by Desiderius Erasmus. A study of trends in style and an affirmation of the need for style in most writing.

Everything's an Argument (2006), a nonfiction work by Andrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz. This book identifies and discusses rhetoric in modern culture, with a special emphasis on the visual rhetoric used in current advertising.

Of Grammatology (1967), a nonfiction work by Jacques Derrida. A modern look at the functions and results of language and writing.

Camilo José Cela

BORN: 1916, Iria Flavia, Padrón, Galicia, Spain

DIED: 2002, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Family of Pascual Duarte (1942)

Journey to the Alcarria (1948)

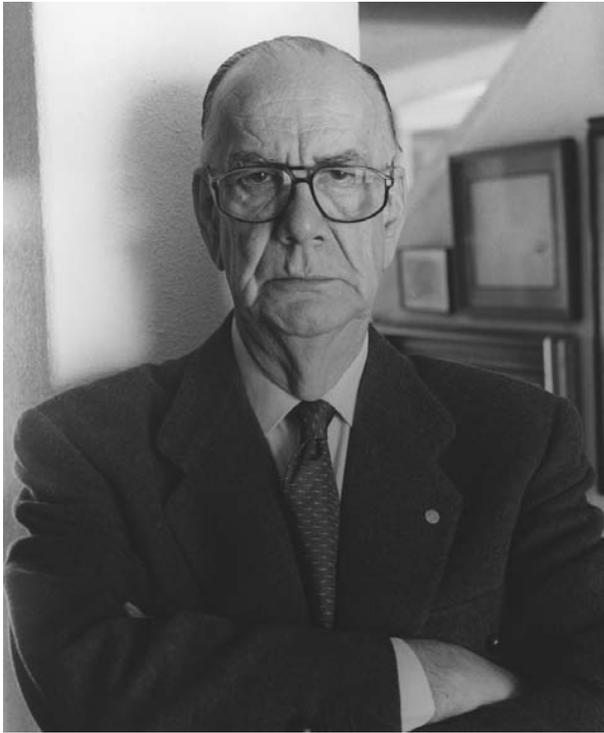
The Hive (1951)

Secret Dictionary (1968)

San Camilo, 1936 (1969)

Overview

A pivotal figure in twentieth-century Spanish literature, Camilo José Cela is best known for his stylistically diverse works of fiction that convey the social legacy of the Spanish Civil War. His first major novel, *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (1942), signaled the revival of Spain's tradition of literary excellence, and Spanish culture's gradual recovery from the civil war of 1936–1939. Throughout the repressive regime of General Francisco Franco, Cela suffered from governmental censorship. Nevertheless, he remained in Spain rather than going into exile and expressed himself audaciously in more than seventy works of literature, including essays, travelogues,



Camilo José Cela *Cela, Camilo Jose*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

short stories, dramas, and poetry. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Wounded in Civil War Camilo José Manuel Juan Ramon Cela y Trulock was born in Iria Flavia (O Coruna), Spain, on May 11, 1916, to a Spanish father and English mother. His father worked as a customs official, and in 1933 the family moved permanently to Madrid. His eccentricities began to take root in his university years (1933–1936 and 1939–1943), during which he began and abandoned studies in philosophy, medicine, and law, without earning a degree. In 1934 a severe bout with tuberculosis changed his life. During his recovery, he read a seventy-one-volume collection of Spanish literature, fostering his literary aspirations.

Cela began writing poetry. His first collection was written in 1936, the first year of the Spanish Civil War, but not published until 1945. After war broke out in Spain, he was drafted into Franco's Nationalist army, and wounded in battle. Franco defeated his antifascist opponents and established a dictatorship in April 1939. World War II started five months later.

Discharged from the military in 1939, Cela worked as a bullfighter, a painter, an actor, a civil servant in Franco's government—and even, briefly, as a censor.

From 1940, when he began to frequent the literary soirées at Madrid's Cafe Gijon, the way was paved for the prolific output of his next six decades.

The Family of Pascual Duarte and Early Acclaim

Cela earned critical acclaim at age twenty-six with his first novel, *The Family of Pascual Duarte*. The novel relates, in the form of a memoir written to a friend, the life of a convicted murderer awaiting execution. Pascual responds to a life of poverty and frustration by killing his dog, his horse, his wife's lover, and finally, his mother. He continually proclaims his repentance, but ultimately the reader must question Pascual's sincerity and the cause of his murderous acts. Contradictions, gaps, and ambiguities plague the narrative.

The brutal atmosphere of this novel resonated with a nation recovering from a brutal conflict. Upon publication, however, its shocking and sordid details were condemned by censors and critics alike. Government censors, deeming *Pascual Duarte* the product of a depraved mind, seized the novel's second edition in 1943 and held it for two years until it was again published in Spain. Since then, however, the book has gone through more than 250 editions, making it the second most widely read Spanish novel of all time, after Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*.

Cela later called his second novel the antithesis of his first. *Rest Home* (1944) examines the private anguish of tuberculosis patients confined to a sanatorium; the work admittedly stems from the author's firsthand experience with the illness. Even critics of Cela's first novel praised this one for its sensitivity and lyricism. *Rest Home* illustrates Cela's delight in structural symmetry: the novel is divided into two equal parts, each subdivided into seven chapters that correspond to the seven dying patient-narrators, six of whom are identified only by numbers.

Radical Nonconformity Following the publication of his second novel, Cela entered a period of great productivity. He published a modern update of a famous sixteenth-century picaresque novel, *New Adventures and Misfortunes of Lazarillo de Tormes* (1944), and rapidly produced several collections of short stories. *Journey to the Alcarria* (1948) was the first of several collections of travel sketches recounting his *vagabundajes* (vagabond journeys) through the Iberian Peninsula. It won accolades for its atypical approach to the travel genre.

The Hive (1951) is generally considered Cela's greatest work. It was first published in Argentina, because Spanish censors objected to its themes of depravity, hunger, and oppression. Set in Madrid in 1940, a time of severe wartime shortages, it is a social panorama chronicling three days in the lives of some three hundred characters who frequent a seedy cafe. Plunged midstream into the mundane conversations of Madrid's teeming masses, one gets the impression of overhearing clandestine sexual encounters, illicit propositions, and other private matters, amid the nervousness of a society just

getting used to a regime in which suspicious behavior or criticism of the new government warranted prosecution. A dead body turns up the first evening, and various incidents and bits of information begin to form story lines that might unravel the murder.

Cela's works, starting with *Pascual Duarte*, confirm his radical nonconformity. The repression and censorship that became a way of life under Franco's regime were catalysts for Cela's artistic boldness and penchant for scandal. Cela intentionally fashioned the public persona of a literary outlaw, and his work continually pushed the boundaries of propriety. The novel *Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son* (1953) shocked the Spanish reading public with its taboo-driven theme. In two hundred short chapters, an elderly Englishwoman's rambling letters to her dead son reveal her incestuous love for him.

Upholder of Obscenity Cela was now a leading literary figure. He moved to the island of Majorca in 1956, and founded a journal, *Papers from Son Armadans*, which became a vital outlet for young anti-Franco writers. In 1957, he was inducted into the Royal Spanish Academy of Language. He befriended artists such as Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso; the latter contributed drawings to Cela's *Bundle of Loveless Fables* (1962).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Cela furthered his iconoclastic departure from literary conventions and Catholic moral codes with works such as his *Secret Dictionary* (1968), a book of slang and obscene words, and *Encyclopedia of Eroticism* (1977). His innovative works, increasingly sexual and scatological, nevertheless received critical acclaim. As the Franco dictatorship waned, his topical essays began appearing in Spanish newspapers; these were later republished in numerous collections, into the 1990s.

Stylistic Experiments His later novels were consistently experimental, starting with *Eve, Feast, and Octave of St. Camillus's Day 1936 in Madrid* (1969; commonly called *San Camilo*, 1936). This work employs a hallucinatory, paragraph-free stream-of-consciousness narrative to examine the start of the Spanish Civil War. No capital letters appear in *office of darkness 5* (1973); *Christ versus Arizona* (1988) consists of one single sentence, over a hundred pages long.

Two years after Franco's death in 1975, Cela was appointed to the Spanish parliament by King Juan Carlos I. During the transition to democracy, he helped draft the Spanish constitution of 1978. He won several prestigious literary prizes in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989. In his later years, his private life and scandalous behavior drew more attention than his writing, which continued at a prolific rate. He died in 2002, at the age of eighty-five.

Works in Literary Context

Camilo José Cela's bold literary style is rooted in European realism of the nineteenth century, and especially in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cela's famous contemporaries include:

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): Cuban novelist and musicologist who was an early practitioner of magic realism.

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican poet and essayist; Nobel Prize winner (1990).

Albert Camus (1916–1960): French/Algerian existentialist novelist and philosopher.

Augusto Roa Bastos (1917–2006): Paraguayan novelist; author of the classic 'dictator novel,' *I the Supreme*.

José Saramago (1922–): Portuguese writer known for his subversive political and religious perspectives; Nobel Prize winner (1988).

Joan Miró (1893–1983): Spanish painter whose surrealist works challenged bourgeois cultural norms.

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): Spanish dictator, 1936–1975.

Spain's Generation of 1898, who attacked the moral hypocrisy of Spanish society after the nation's defeat in the Spanish-American War. *The Family of Pascual Duarte* was also inspired by the Spanish tradition of the picaresque—satirical adventure novels with roguish heroes, such as the sixteenth-century novella *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Critics also frequently compare Cela with American writer John Dos Passos; both wrote cinematic novels with shifting time sequences and a panoply of characters.

Tremendismo Cela's grotesque portrayal of illicit and repulsive aspects of Spanish society initiated a literary trend in Spain later called *tremendismo*. The term is vague, but it seems to denote a type of fiction that dwells on the darker side of life. For Cela, this emphasis on cruelty and graphic vulgarity, and subject matter that would customarily be off-limits for Spanish readers, reflects his commitment to defying Spain's traditionalist, Catholic moral codes. This devotion to free expression led to censorship trouble and charges of indecency within Spain, but was an essential characteristic of his body of work, in fiction and nonfiction alike.

Patterns Stylistic experimentation is a constant feature of Cela's fiction. His later work features a decreasing emphasis on plot—the sequence of cause and effect is largely discarded—and an increasing emphasis on artificial patternings of events. The fragmented narrative of *The Hive* and the short micro-chapters of *San Camilo, 1936* are examples. In his prologue to *Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son*, titled "A Few Words to Whoever Might Read This," Cela speaks of the "clock novel . . . made of multiple wheels and tiny pieces which work together in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Camilo José Cela's novel *The Family of Pascual Duarte* is a modern version of the picaresque, a genre incorporating social satire in an adventure format. The word *picaresque* comes from the Spanish word *pícaro* (rogue); the protagonist of a picaresque novel is frequently a rascal, or denizen of the lower ranks of society. It is an enduring literary genre, as these titles from the contemporary era attest.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. The story of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty (Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady) is the definitive work of the Beat generation and an influential piece of Americana.

Eva Luna (1985), a novel by Isabel Allende. This story of a poor orphan is both a romance and a portrait of a South American society undergoing revolution.

Harlot's Ghost (1992), a novel by Norman Mailer. A fourteen-hundred-page novel that sets one man's story against the early history of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Tipping the Velvet (1998), a novel by Sarah Waters. A young "oyster girl" falls for a music-hall male impersonator, and discovers her lesbianism, in this rollicking novel set in Victorian England.

Madonna from Russia (2005), a novel by Yuri Druzhnikov. In this recent novel by a respected émigré novelist, the character Lily Bourbon starts out as a Petrograd street-walker, becomes a leading Soviet poet, then escapes to America.

harmony." With this mechanical approach to constructing fiction, Cela imposes order upon what he perceives as a chaotic universe.

Spain's Debt to Cela Cela has had an enormous impact on succeeding generations of Spanish writers. Much of the Spanish intelligentsia fled into exile as Franco came to power; Cela stayed and revived the nation's literary tradition in a repressive era. At first, he collaborated with the regime, but later he served the cause of artistic freedom through his publication of *Papers from Son Armadans* and through his own literary provocations. The literature and art of contemporary, democratic Spain are indebted to the free expression Cela exercised.

Works in Critical Context

Despite the huge size of Camilo José Cela's body of work, his reputation rests on his two most celebrated novels, *The Family of Pascual Duarte* and *The Hive*. Both faced censorship in Spain, yet achieved critical and commercial success—phenomenal success in the case of *Pascual Duarte*.

Many of his other works were popular with readers, including his travelogues and the novel *Mazurka for Two Dead Men* (1983), which won Spain's National Prize.

Spanish Conservatism The conservative nature of Spanish culture, which has persisted into the nation's democratic era, affected critical reception to Cela at home. As Christopher Maurer wrote in the *New Republic*, "Cela has long been a household word in Spain, though not a polite one." Beyond the issues of censorship, Spanish conservatives condemned *Pascual Duarte* and *tremendismo* as offensive to the nation's moral sensibilities. A significant minority of critics continued to take offense to the rebellious and uninhibited nature of Cela's voice. Outside Spain, critics tended to view *tremendismo* as a legitimate attempt to depict the corrupt and violent nature of life under fascist dictatorship.

Later Reception Reaction to Cela's later books was also varied. Their stylistic innovations, while praised by postmodern critics, made them less accessible to the general reader; meanwhile, their ever-escalating obscenity, and Cela's controversial public behavior, led conservatives to declare him an embarrassment. Conservatives were not the only Spaniards unenthusiastic about Cela's winning the Nobel Prize. Some political leftists never forgave Cela for his early support for Franco and his regime. His political commitments were somewhat ambiguous, but his allegiance to moral and artistic freedom was unstinting. Many non-Spaniards familiar with his work view it as almost an embodiment of Spain's experience in the twentieth century.

Responses to Literature

1. Do some reading about the Spanish Civil War. Reflecting on Cela's fiction, write about the different ways he presents the war's impact on Spanish society.
2. Why do you think *The Family of Pascual Duarte* was banned in Spain? Conversely, why do you think its popularity has proven so enduring there?
3. Do you think Cela's fascination with obscenity represents a simple pursuit of shock value, or does it have a larger purpose?
4. Some critics say that the main character of *The Hive* is the city of Madrid itself. Do you agree, and in what respect does the novel portray Madrid as a character?
5. What do Cela's stylistic experiments, like the book-length sentence of *Christ versus Arizona*, contribute to the experience or meaning of his work?

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❑ Paul Celan

BORN: 1920, Czernovitz, Romania

DIED: 1970, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"Death Fugue" (1944)

The Sand from the Urns (1948)

Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream (1948)

Counter-Light (1949)

Poppy and Memory (1952)

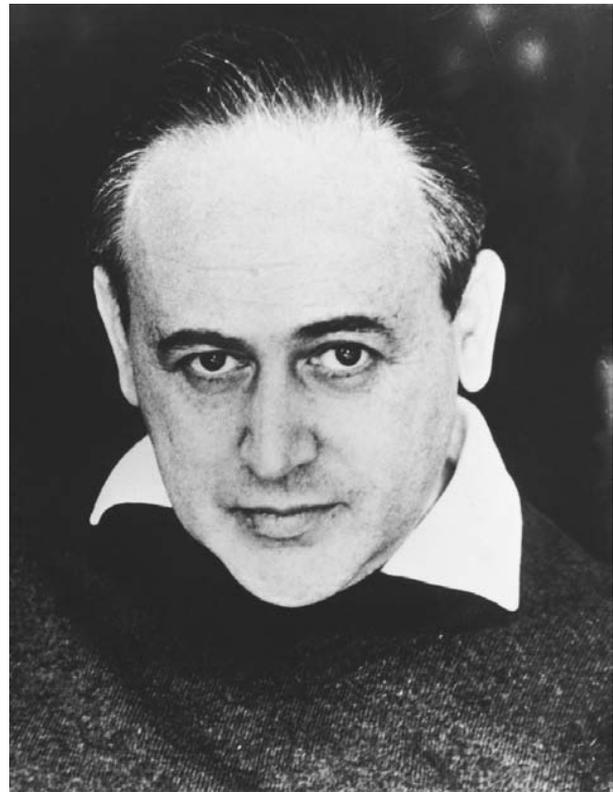
"Conversation in the Mountains" (1960)

Overview

Paul Celan (pronounced say-LAHN, the pen name of Paul Antschel), whom critic George Steiner has called "almost certainly the major European poet of the period after 1945," is known primarily for his verse. Yet his reputation as a lyric poet overshadows a small but significant body of prose works that deserve attention both for their close links to his poetry and as independent creations.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jewish Heritage and the Holocaust Paul Antschel, the only child of Jewish parents Leo Antschel-Teitler and Friederike Schragar, was born in Czernovitz, capital of



Paul Celan Imagno / Getty Images

the Romanian province of Bukovina, on November 23, 1920. He grew up in a multilingual environment. German, the language spoken at home and in some of the schools he attended, remained his mother tongue throughout his life, and Vienna was the cultural center of his youth; but his language of daily speech was Romanian. Before his bar mitzvah, he studied Hebrew for three years, and by the time he began a year of premedical studies at the École préparatoire de Médecine in Tours, France, in 1938, he was also fluent in French. Returning to Czernovitz shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he learned Russian at the university and, after Soviet troops occupied Bukovina in 1940, in the streets.

When German troops captured the city in 1941, Antschel's parents were deported and shot, but he survived. After eighteen months at forced labor for the Germans, he escaped to the Soviet Red Army and returned to Czernovitz, which was again under Russian control. There, sometime in late 1944, he wrote "Death Fugue," one of the most powerful poems written about the Holocaust. The work was based both on his own experiences in a labor camp in Romania and on reports he had heard of conditions in the harsher Polish concentration camps. The poem was included in his first two poetry collections, *The Sand from the Urns* (1948) and *Poppy and Memory* (1952).

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Celan's famous contemporaries include:

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970): Hebrew fiction writer and Nobel Prize–winning writer laureate who contributed much to Hebrew literature.

Margaret Burbidge (1919–): English astrophysicist known for several achievements, including discovering the nuclear process of stars and codeveloping the faint object spectrograph for the Hubble telescope.

Dorothy Dandridge (1923–1965): Actress, singer, and dancer; she was the first African American to be nominated for an Academy Award—for her starring role in *Carmen Jones*.

Nelly Sachs (1891–1970): German poet, playwright, and friend to Paul Celan, whom she called “brother.” She expressed the pain and suffering of the Jewish condition.

Prose and the Surrealist Circle Leaving Czernovitz in 1945 for Bucharest, Antschel joined a surrealist circle, became friends with leading Romanian writers, and worked as a translator and reader in a publishing house. For his prose translations from Russian into Romanian—primarily of Mikhail Lermontov, Konstantin Simonov, and Anton Chekhov—and for publication of his own poems, he used several pseudonyms before rearranging the letters of Ancel, the Romanian form of his surname, into Celan in 1947.

Sometime between 1945 and 1947, he wrote a two-page prose fragment that has survived under the title “A Stylus Noiselessly Hops . . .” (1980). This work is one of many that reveal his indebtedness to surrealism. Late in 1947, Celan went to Vienna, where he joined a circle of leading avant-garde painters, writers, and publishers. His friendship with painter Edgar Jené gave rise to a brief prose piece, “The Lance,” which he and Jené wrote jointly early in 1948 and circulated on photocopied sheets to announce a reading of surrealist texts as part of an exhibition of surrealist painters in Vienna.

A second prose piece, “Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream” (1948), written at about the same time as “The Lance,” purports to be a discussion of Jené’s paintings but is actually a confessional essay on what happens in the “deep sea” of the writer’s mind, the “huge crystal of the internal world” into which he follows Jené and where he explores his paintings. Leaving Vienna in July 1948, Celan settled in Paris and began studies in German language and literature. In March 1949 the Swiss journal *Die Tat* published a collection of his brilliant but enigmatic aphorisms—quick, pithy words of wisdom—titled “Counter-Light.”

German Translator Celan took his Licence des Lettres in 1950. In 1952 he married graphic artist Gisèle de Lestrangé, with whom he had a son, Eric, who was born in 1955. Though he wrote no original prose for almost ten years, the works Celan chose to translate into German were usually prose. He never gave up German as his mother tongue, telling a friend, “Only in one’s mother tongue can one express one’s own truth. In a foreign language, the poet lies.” Though all of these translations reflect Celan’s unique prose style, one reveals almost more of himself than of the original: his rendering of Jean Cayrol’s prose narration for Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog* (1956), a film on the Holocaust that Celan endowed with an authentic Jewish voice for German-speaking viewers.

The address he delivered upon receiving the Bremen Literary Prize in 1958 (translated in 1969) is Celan’s most personal prose work. After referring to the Bukovian landscape of his youth and his acquaintance with Martin Buber’s Hasidic tales in this world “where humans and books lived,” the address becomes a discussion of his relationship to the German language. This language, he says, “had to pass . . . through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech.” From its miraculous survival, he now attempts to write “in order to speak, to orient myself . . . to outline reality.”

German Reader In 1959 Celan became a reader in German language and literature at L’École Normale Supérieure, a position he held until his death. While in the Swiss Alps in July 1959 he was supposed to meet Theodor Adorno at Sils-Maria. Forced to return to Paris before they met, Celan composed “Conversation in the Mountains” (1960) the following month, a reflection on this missed encounter. He later called it a “jabber” or “schmooze” between himself and Adorno.

Suicide at Fifty In early May 1970, Paris officials found Celan’s body in the Seine River. He had been missing since the middle of April. Sometime before his suicide, Celan produced his final prose work, a brief address delivered to the Hebrew Writers’ Association in October 1969 during a trip to Israel; it was published in the Tel Aviv magazine *Die Stimme* in August 1970. In the address Celan expresses gratitude for discovering in Israel an “external and internal landscape” conducive to creating great poetry in the surrealist style. In his address, he compares these two landscapes: “I understand . . . the grateful pride in every homegrown green thing that stands ready to refresh anyone who comes by; just as I comprehend the joy in every newly won, self-felt word that rushes up to strengthen him who is receptive to it.”

Works in Literary Context

The Salvation of Language For Celan after the Holocaust, language was the only thing that remained

“reachable.” Through language he sought to verify his existence. He felt the only way language could make sense of the world was by way of contradiction, paradox, or ambiguity. One way he felt he could achieve this was through surrealism. “The Lance,” for instance, consists of typical surrealist images: “rainbowfish” flying through the sky, a giant hammer in the air, and waves beating against treetops. It ends with speakers casting nets into the water—an image also found in Celan’s early poems. The work also contains a dialogue, the format that became a hallmark of his later prose works.

Creative extensions and elaborations of his poetry, Celan’s prose works also express the struggle to reclaim language in a nonpoetic age and the need for dialogue as a means of connecting oneself with and orienting oneself in the modern world. His Bremen Literary Prize acceptance speech given in 1958 and reproduced in *The Meridian* (1961) demonstrates these aims. It is written as a dialogue with his listeners, punctuated by reservations or uncertainties about the poet’s craft, leading the listener/reader through a labyrinth of images relating to the poet’s quest for speech in an age when speech has become nearly impossible.

Influences A speaker of several languages and a man of profound experiences, including great loss, Celan was influenced by many things. He had great appreciation for Israel and his Jewish heritage. He also carried an unshakable feeling of persecution after the devastation he experienced in Nazi labor camps. After he read the works of authors like Martin Buber and Franz Kafka, and with his knowledge of languages, he was inspired to develop one of his most important relationships—with the German language, one of the few elements of his spiritual existence that he did not lose and that he believed offered a security against further loss. As scholar Joan Peterson suggests, “The ways in which [his] poems represent mourning and address rage and despair place[s] [him] at the center of artistic response to the Holocaust, and [he] continues to influence those who write about it.”

Works in Critical Context

Celan’s earlier poetry was harshly criticized by peers such as the members of Group 47, a postwar literary group that challenged modern conventions. That which he read aloud in a vocal style in the tradition of Hungarian folk poems, for example, was poorly received by his German audiences. But because it was difficult to write poetry after the Holocaust and equally difficult to approach it with any unaffected criticism, Celan decided that the best way to write was to set language free from history. As *Books and Writers* notes, Celan made the conscious decision and “went with my very being toward language.” Both his poetry and his prose work soon became not only respected but revered, known, adds *Books and Writers*, “for its broken syntax and radical minimalism, expressing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other post–World War II writers who were also deeply affected by the Holocaust:

Collected Later Poems (2003), a poetry collection by Anthony Hecht. In this collection of three volumes of poetry, the expressions of Hecht’s experiences as a World War II liberator who witnessed the atrocities firsthand reveal an intense focus and profound sentiment.

Night (1955), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. In this brief but powerful memoir, the author recounts his experiences as a young Orthodox Jew imprisoned at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

The Shawl (1990), a collection of fiction by Cynthia Ozick. In this small volume that includes two novellas, the author tells the intimate story of Holocaust survivor Rosa Lublin, who loses her children and her soul.

Man’s Search for Meaning (1945), a nonfiction work by Viktor Frankl. In this nonfiction book, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist retells his experiences as a Holocaust victim and puts forth a philosophy and a therapy of existential healing.

his perception of the shattered world in which he lived.” By the end of his life, Celan had developed a reputation as a German surrealist writer, a linguistic craftsman, and a poet of Jewish concerns with several awards to his credit—a reputation that continues today. These talents are demonstrated in such works as “Counter-Light,” as well as his most famous poem, “Death Fugue.”

“Counter-Light” (1949) In this collection, what are considered by some scholars as brilliant but enigmatic aphorisms appear surrealistic in their subversion of conventional time and of space and object relationships: trees fly to birds, hours jump out of the clock, a woman hates a mirror’s vanity. Behind them lies a Kafkaesque awareness that the world makes no sense. These pieces express Celan’s understanding that it seems that only in the paradox of new language combinations can the world be made coherent. Only in a dialectic of contradictions can truth be rendered.

“Death Fugue” Despite the many works that followed, “Death Fugue” is widely considered Celan’s most powerful and most successful work. However, scholar Rex Last has described the poem as “somewhat untypical of his work at large, in that it is rhythmical, fluent and relatively accessible: image succeeds image in bold and fluent patterns which contrast strikingly with the sparse and almost inscrutable verses of the more mature Celan.”

Last also states, “This incantatory, hypnotic fugue of death is one of the pinnacles of twentieth-century German poetry. . . .” The most notable negative assessment of the poem, in fact, comes from the author Celan himself, who in later years regarded it as too direct in its message.

Responses to Literature

1. Do an Internet search for cultural, historical, and political links that will enhance your understanding of the background and forces that influenced Paul Celan. For example, you may want to investigate the conditions in Romania during World War II. Or you may choose to research Group 47, the German literary association with which Celan was briefly associated.
2. Celan is considered a surrealist poet. Surrealism contains a number of unique characteristics, including:
 - an intermingling of dreams and reality
 - “impossible” environments that could not exist in the real world
 - objects becoming animated or combined with other things
 - objects appearing in unexpected places or in unexpected scale
3. Go to the Louvre Web site or another major metropolitan museum online. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dali, Giorgi De Chirico, Edgar Jené, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about the work (or a particular work) of these artists. Then, using the same list of surrealist characteristics, find as many examples of surrealism as you can in Celan’s work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, noting examples that are different from the ones you came up with.
4. Visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage online. Investigate the artifacts, art, and diary entries found on the second floor, which features the Holocaust Memorial material. Decide on one particular aspect of the Holocaust that interests you and that you would like to become the group “expert” on. Each person in the group will do the same. Then, each person should print out information on the chosen aspect, print out a poem that has relevance, and write a preliminary report that will be shared with the group along with the chosen poem.
5. Write a poem influenced by a major event in your life or in your community. For instance, you may choose to write about the events of September 11, 2001, or express your feelings and opinions about the 2008 presidential race. Choose anything that you feel passionately about, much like Celan wrote with

profound feeling about the genocide of his Jewish compatriots.

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Louis-Ferdinand Céline

BORN: 1894, Courbevoie, France

DIED: 1961, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Journey to the End of the Night (1934)

Death on the Installment Plan (1936)

Castle to Castle (1957)

North (1960)



Louis-Ferdinand Céline © Apis / Sygma / Corbis

Overview

French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline is considered a clear, honest voice of the 1930s and 1940s. It was not until the 1960s, however, that the literary community began to accept Céline as a major figure and to evaluate his work in unbiased terms. Openly vocal about his anti-Semitism, Céline was accused of collaborating with Nazis during World War II, and he faced an opposition so strong that his work faded into obscurity. Only when Céline's name was cleared twenty years later were the French allowed exposure to his life and work. When his writing became available to the public, readers learned that Céline was a skilled artist whose experiments with language and the structure of the novel have influenced writers all over the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cosmopolitan Upbringing Louis-Ferdinand Destouches, who adopted the pseudonym Céline from his grandmother's maiden name, was born in Courbevoie, France, a suburb of Paris, on May 27, 1894. He was the only child of Ferdinand-Auguste Destouches, an insurance executive, and Marguerite-Louise Guilloux Destouches, a business owner. At the age of thirteen, Céline was sent to schools in England and Germany to learn the languages of those countries; such cultural exposure was unusual for a middle-class French boy.

World War I Céline enlisted in the French cavalry in 1912, and soon after, Europe erupted in war. Beginning

with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe aligned with Germany on one side and the Allied powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. France provided over 8 million troops to the cause, two-thirds of whom were either killed or wounded during combat.

Céline was one of these, sustaining a grave injury to his arm while he was on the front line in Flanders. Afraid that doctors would amputate his arm instead of trying to save it, Céline refused anesthesia so that he could monitor the doctors' work. Because of his arm injury, as well as severe damage to his hearing, Céline was granted a three-month convalescent leave in January 1915 and underwent surgery on his injured arm. Soon afterward, he was judged unfit for further combat duty and released from military obligation with a medal for heroic conduct under fire. His right arm remained partially paralyzed for the rest of his life.

Céline Becomes a Doctor In 1915–1916, Céline worked in the passport office of the French Consulate in London. He then spent a year working for a French lumber company in Africa before returning to France and taking a position with the Rockefeller Foundation. On behalf of the foundation, he toured the French province of Brittany and gave lectures on tuberculosis. At the same time, he studied medicine at the University of Rennes, where he received a degree in 1919. He married that same year.

After earning a medical degree in 1924, Céline entered private medical practice and settled in Rennes with his wife and young daughter. Conventional married life, however, did not appeal to him, and he left his family in 1925 to work for the League of Nations—a precursor to the United Nations created after World War I—traveling throughout Europe and North America on its behalf. By the late 1920s, Céline was practicing medicine in France again. He took a position with a municipal clinic in 1931, where he worked almost exclusively with the poor. From that point until the end of his life, Céline practiced medicine only among the needy, despite the financial hardships associated with that choice. He argued that he could not in good conscience make money from the suffering of others.

Céline Turns to Literature When he was thirty-two, Céline began writing fiction while working as a doctor. His first work, a novel titled *Journey to the End of the Night*, took him five years to write. When it was finally completed in 1932, the one-thousand-page manuscript was submitted to two French publishing houses, Gallimard and Denoel. Gallimard found the book too controversial, but Robert Denoel, a new publisher who had debuted several other controversial manuscripts, accepted Céline's novel. In an effort to separate his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Céline's famous contemporaries include:

Henry Ford (1863–1947): American automobile maker who is credited with making his Model T affordable enough for the average person by using an assembly-line construction process that reduced the time it took to produce a car.

Robert Graves (1895–1985): English poet, novelist, and scholar who won the James Tait Memorial Prize in 1934.

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist who introduced the idea of archetypes—sets of basic ideas and concepts that he felt all humans shared—to the field of psychiatry.

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935): Considered one of the greatest Portuguese poets of all time.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Preeminent Spanish artist who worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics.

Khalil Gibran (1883–1931): Lebanese poet and artist whose best-known work is *The Prophet*.

medical career from his literary one, the author published the work under his Céline pseudonym.

When the Soviet Union would not send him royalties from the Russian translation of *Journey to the End of the Night*, Céline visited the country in 1936. As a result of that trip, Céline wrote the first of four political works that attacked the Soviet Union, calling it a vicious dictatorship based on materialism. According to Céline, citizens of the Soviet Union lived in filth and were exploited by a corrupt new ruling class—the Communist Party.

During World War II, as France became largely occupied by German forces, Céline wrote several pamphlets that were viewed as anti-Semitic, or negative toward Jews. When Allies landed in Normandy in June 1944, Céline decided to leave Paris because he predicted he would soon be arrested, denied a fair trial, and quite possibly be executed on charges of collaborating with the enemy due to his anti-Semitism and hostility toward communism. After Céline and his third wife, whom he had married the year before, left Paris in July 1944, his apartment was ransacked, and his library and papers destroyed. Céline visited hospitals in Berlin and settled in a town north of the city. In November 1944, Céline moved to the German town of Sigmaringen, where the wartime French Vichy government, which operated under the authority of the Germans, fled after the liberation of France. There he worked as a physician until he traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1945, supposedly to recover money that he had hidden in a friend's backyard before the war.

In April 1945, a French court issued a warrant for Céline's arrest as a Nazi collaborator. When French officials in Copenhagen demanded that Céline be exiled immediately, the Danes responded by imprisoning him for fourteen months and his wife for two. In poor health, Céline was hospitalized in February 1947. When he recovered four months later, he was freed on the condition that he would remain in Denmark, where he lived until he was granted amnesty in April 1951. He spent the last ten years of his life just outside of Paris, where he worked as a physician until he died from a stroke in July 1961.

Works in Literary Context

Céline's contribution to literature is primarily a result of his use of the French language—including all the grit and grime of street slang—and unconventional plotting. His novels are long and composed of crude first-person narration and disjointed plots, oftentimes disorienting the reader.

Revolutions in Form and Language Céline's controversial novels are marked by misanthropic narrators, free-wheeling verbal attacks, ferocious humor, and squalid settings ranging from the jungles of Africa to the factories of Detroit. His unrestrained language is a unique combination of French slang, profanity, street grammar, and near-delirium, while his episodic plots are laced with acidic satire. Céline's work has often been compared to that of earlier writers, including Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. Some argue that Céline's novels are unmatched in their anger and depravity.

While it is true that other writers had tackled topics like madness and rage, most of these representations had been drawn from the language of the educated and confined by the limits of the traditional novel form. Céline's peculiar approach—to match the language and form of the novel to its theme and to the characters themselves—led to new interpretations of the novel as a literary form. No longer could readers observe the delirium of characters with the protection of refinement and convention. In Céline and other writers such as Mark Z. Danielewski, who also uses slang and unconventional plotting techniques, one is immersed in the world of the delirious—in the exact way the novelists choose—through the language the novelists use.

Art as a Powerful Force Although *Fairy-Tale for Another Time* is not considered a strong novel in itself, it presents Céline's concept of artistic creation. Amidst a backdrop of World War II, *Fairy-Tale* is Céline's attempt to incorporate other arts, including painting, film, and ballet, into a novel. He portrays art as a force that can make or unmake the universe; art's evil, destructive quality is tempered by a character whose purpose is to restore harmony and balance. The success of *Fairy-Tale* is in Céline's construction of a work of art that is not restricted

by one form or point of view. Because of this freedom, it invites readings from a variety of perspectives.

Legacy By the time of his death in 1961, Céline had claimed a place in contemporary French literature. Céline is widely known for his influence on other writers because he created new possibilities for what the novel as form could be. In *Céline and His Vision*, Erika Ostrovsky noted that Céline's work "consists of the creation of a new tone, a literary ambience which pervades an entire sector of modern letters and exceeds the limits of national boundaries or personal orientation and background." Among those he is credited with influencing are Henry Miller, William Burroughs, and Thomas Pynchon.

Works in Critical Context

Despite his influence on many reputable writers, Céline's literary significance is still questioned by some critics. One critic harshly commented that Céline was "an angry old man talking, talking," and that "it will take a critic more patient than most of us to sift through his ravings and decide if there is anything in it." Also doubtful of Céline's achievement is Henri Peyre who, in his book *French Novelists of Today*, criticized "the monotony of Céline's inspiration, the artificiality of his language and the 'pompiérisme' of his tawdry sentimentality."

Journey to the End of the Night According to Irving Howe in his book *A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics*, *Journey to the End of the Night* is composed "as a series of loosely-related episodes, a string of surrealist burlesques, fables of horror and manic extravaganzas, each following upon the other with energy and speed." Writing in the *New York Times*, Anatole Broyard claimed that "in his first and best book, *Journey to the End of the Night*, Céline had hardly a good word for anybody, yet you felt that he was in closer touch with the human race, with people in the depths of their souls, than any other author in this century. And though *Journey* was distilled out of disgust, the aftertaste was not sour—as it so often is with modern French novels—but bittersweet. His disgust was a kind of curdled love."

Journey to the End of the Night was extraordinarily popular throughout Europe. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Mavis Gallant explained that "Céline's dark nihilism, his use of street language, the undertow of mystery and death that tugs at the novel from start to finish were wildly attractive to both Left and Right; both could read into it a prophecy about collapse, the end of shoddy democracy, the death of sickened Europe." Leon Daudet of the reactionary newspaper *L'Action Française* fought unsuccessfully to have Céline awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt. Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* that Céline "walked into great literature as other men walk into their own homes." The reading public made *Journey* a best seller. "Céline's cynicism and denunciations seemed to speak for everyone . . ." Allen Thiher wrote in his *Céline: The Novel as Delirium*, "[His]

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Céline used French slang in his novels to brilliant effect, much like William Shakespeare exploited the English slang of his time. As long as a distinction between "proper" language and "slang," has existed, authors have explored the differences between the two. Listed below are several other works distinguished by their contrasts of slang and traditionally appropriate language:

The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007), a novel by Junot Diaz. Written in the first-person point of view, this novel captures the Spanish-English slang of its Dominican American narrator.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595), a drama by Shakespeare. This play introduces characters whose language is virtually incomprehensible to other characters because of its combination of slang and botched attempts at "proper" language.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. Twain took extreme care to represent the language of his characters accurately in this American classic, even pointing out his efforts in his introduction to the book.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. In this work, Faulkner attempts to capture the language of the South, including that of a developmentally disabled protagonist.

popular, obscene language was like a violent gust of fresh air breaking into the literary climate." Attacks against the book's obscenity merely provoked more interest and increased sales.

Responses to Literature

1. Slang is a nonstandard variation of a language, and using slang in a novel drastically alters the overall effect—the tone and sometimes even the meaning—of the work. In order to understand how the use of slang changes the meaning and mood of a text, choose a passage from a classic novel written in proper English—something by Charles Dickens or Jane Austen would be appropriate—and rewrite it in a slang of your choice. For example, you could take the opening page or two of *A Tale of Two Cities* and rewrite it in text-message language.
2. Read *Journey to the End of the Night*. In what ways does Céline challenge popular conceptions of "good" and "bad" characters? Is the novel moral or immoral? Cite specific examples from the text.
3. *Journey to the End of the Night* was praised by both left- and right-wing political extremists. Consider

Céline's controversial political beliefs. Why do you think Céline's novel appeals to both groups? What evidence can you find to determine if he presents a clear-cut political stance, both in his life and in his work.

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❑ Luis Cernuda

BORN: 1902, Seville, Spain

DIED: 1963, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Reality and Desire (1936)

The Clouds (1940)

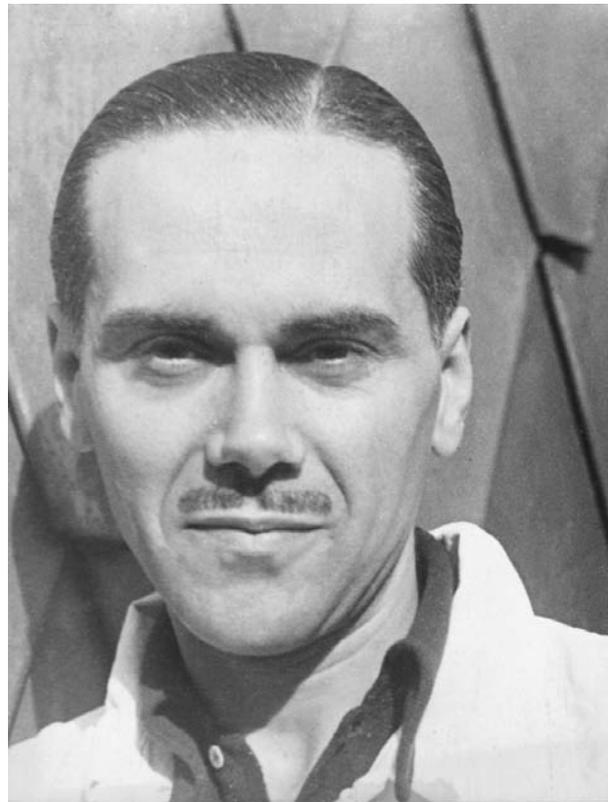
Desolation of the Chimera (1962)

Overview

A member of the "Generation of 1927" of Spanish modernist poets, Luis Cernuda wrote frank verses of both homosexual love and deep pessimism. His poetry is distinguished by its starkly solitary and individualistic spirit, its sharp social criticism, and its unrelenting self-examination in both spare and colloquial language. Famed Mexican poet Octavio Paz observed in a critical essay titled *On Poets and Others* that Cernuda's work, "is one of the most impressive personal testimonies to this truly unique situation of modern man: we are condemned to a promiscuous solitude and our prison is as large as the planet itself."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Desire, Love, and Alienation While Cernuda's pessimistic worldview has often been attributed to an intro-



Luis Cernuda Archivo de la Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid

verted and sensitive character, critics also speculate that his melancholic, defiant poetic voice resulted from a painful sense of isolation brought about by his open homosexuality and years spent in exile abroad. Cernuda began writing poetry while still a law student at the University of Madrid. He became a protégé of the poet Pedro Salinas, who helped him publish his first verse collection, *Perfil del aire* (*Profile of the Air*) in 1927. The poet's highly refined lyric verses showed the influence of Salinas and his contemporary, Jorge Guillen, among others, and received only a lukewarm reception. Cernuda began finding his own voice in two collections of surrealist-influenced poetry, *Un río, un amor* (*A River, a Love*, 1929) and *Los placeres prohibidos* (*The Forbidden Pleasures*, 1931). In these books, the poet experimented with incongruous word juxtapositions and spontaneous derivations from chance stimuli to express his sexual and metaphysical turmoil.

These verses also introduce a number of recurrent themes in Cernuda's work: desire and its relationship to love and reality; the hopeless search for wholeness and a yearning for oblivion; a deep hostility to the city and its imprisoning social conformity; and a keen appreciation of the transcendent mystery of nature. Also present in the poetry is the poet's negotiation of his experiences of homosexual love, in defiance of his time and culture.

“For Cernuda, love is a break with the social order and a joining with the natural world. He exalted as man’s supreme experience the experience of love” wrote Octavio Paz. In still-Catholic Spain of the early twentieth century, this exaltation of homosexual love as a joining with the natural world—while hardly without important poetic predecessors (for example, Walt Whitman)—met with much resistance.

Cernuda published two additional important, surrealist-influenced collections in the mid-1930s, *Donde habite el olvido* (*Where Forgetfulness Dwells*) and *Invocaciones* (*Invocations*), before issuing the first edition of his definitive work, *La realidad y el deseo* (*Reality and Desire*), in 1936. A collection of new and previously published verse, this book was revised and expanded in subsequent editions to include most of Cernuda’s poetry. Critics have pointed out that *La realidad y el deseo* can be read as the poet’s emotional and spiritual autobiography. The book also chronicles Cernuda’s stylistic development over the years.

War and the Pain of Exile A predominant theme in *La realidad y el deseo* is exile—both the spiritual exile Cernuda felt in Spanish society and the physical exile he experienced after the Spanish Civil War. The poet denounces such hallowed Spanish institutions as the patriarchal family and the Catholic Church, and decries the backwardness, intolerance, and violence he finds in his homeland. Yet in many poems from the subsequent collections *Las nubes* (*The Clouds*) and *Como quien espera el alba* (*As One Awaiting Dawn*), Cernuda also reveals a deep, nostalgic longing for the Andalusian gardens and sea of his childhood. Along with many of his contemporaries in literature and the arts, Cernuda left Spain shortly before the Republican defeat of 1939—the triumph of General Franco’s dictatorship—and spent the remainder of his life in exile in Europe, the United States, and Mexico.

Las nubes (1940), Cernuda’s first volume published abroad chronicles his concerns for Spain and the alienation he felt as a result of his separation from it. During his years as an expatriate, Cernuda was greatly influenced by the meditative poetry of Robert Browning and T. S. Eliot. In the collections *Como quien espera el alba* (1947), *Vivir sin estar viviendo* (*To Live without Being Alive*, 1949), and *Con las horas contadas* (*With the Hours Counting Down*, 1956), he increasingly shifted his ongoing search for self-knowledge through alternative voices and colloquial speech free of more flowery rhetoric. Cernuda’s final collection, *Desolacion de la quimera* (*Desolation of the Chimera*, 1962), reflects his growing preoccupation with death in its summary of his lifelong search for self-affirmation. Critics observe that in these poems the perfect state of desire pursued in earlier collections loses its significance, while the quest itself becomes the primary motivation for Cernuda. Derek Harris has asserted: “The resolution with which he pursued his self-analysis, is, in the last resort, more important

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cernuda’s famous contemporaries include:

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963): One of the most celebrated U.S. poets of all time, Williams was associated with both modernism and imagism and was also a practicing physician for many years.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): The quintessential surrealist painter, Dalí was born in Spain, but was fond of highlighting his Arab descent, tracing his lineage to the Moors who occupied southern Spain for close to eight hundred years.

Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973): Military dictator of Cuba until his 1958 ousting by Fidel Castro’s guerrilla movement; his downfall signaled the success of the Cuban Revolution.

James Joyce (1882–1941): One of the most highly regarded literary figures of the twentieth century, this Irishman is best known for his short stories and novels. These include *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Borges’s novels are beloved around the world, and he is considered by many to be the preeminent Argentine writer and thinker of the twentieth century.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969): Eisenhower was the thirty-fourth president of the United States, from 1953 to 1961; prior to his presidency, he commanded the Allied forces in their defeat of the Axis powers in Europe during World War II.

than his success or failure to find his ideal of harmony between reality and desire. . . . The clash between reality and desire in Cernuda’s own life was the stimulus that led him to seek to come to an understanding of himself through his poetry, and by doing this, so to create himself in his poetry.”

In addition to his verse, which appears in English translation in *The Poetry of Luis Cernuda* (1971) and *Selected Poems of Luis Cernuda* (1977), Cernuda published several highly regarded critical texts on modern Spanish poetry, including *Estudios sobre poesia espanola contemporanea* (*Studies on Contemporary Spanish Poetry*, 1957) and *Poesia y literatura* (*Poetry and Literature*, 1960).

Works in Literary Context

The Generation of 1927 Cernuda was a controversial member of the Generation of 1927, a group of important writers who revolutionized Spanish poetry by introducing innovative approaches and modern techniques to what had

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The experience of exile—so central to Cernuda's life and poetry—has been characterized by some as the quintessential experience of modernity. Between two world wars, famines, and environmental catastrophes of unprecedented magnitude, and work-related, semi-forced migration at levels never before seen, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have produced more experiences of—and more ways of experiencing—exile than any other period in human history. Here are a few other works by writers trying to come to terms with the experience of exile:

Doctor Faustus (1947), a novel by Thomas Mann. Nobel Prize winner Mann wrote this book in the United States, after fleeing both Nazi Germany and Switzerland during World War II. This novel is a fictional return to the Germany Mann left, and an attempt to come to terms with the society that had forced him out.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962), a novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Drawn from the author's experiences in internal exile within the Soviet Union, this novel traces the steps of a prisoner in one of Joseph Stalin's forced-labor camps and focuses on the human response to a reduction to bare survival.

The Stone Face (1964), a novel by William Gardner Smith. *The Stone Face* is the story of an African American man who has fled the oppressive racism of the United States, only to find that what had seemed a safe haven in France is predicated on his complicity in French racism against Algerians. Though an exile in France, Smith's protagonist realizes that solidarity with the oppressed is the only viable option, even when that threatens his own status.

become a staid poetic tradition. Described as solipsistic in its incessant self-examination and universal in its moralistic vision, Cernuda's poetry promotes sexual desire, creative expression, and the recognition of natural beauty as the means of transcending mundane existence. In 1964, Octavio Paz asserted: "If it were possible to define in a phrase the place Cernuda occupies in modern Spanish-language poetry, I would say he is the poet who speaks not for all, but for each one of us who make up the all. And he wounds us in the core of that part of each of us 'which is not called glory, fortune, or ambition' but *the truth of ourselves*."

The poems in Cernuda's first two collections, *Perfil del aire* (1927) and *Egloga, elegia, oda* (*Eclogue, Elegy, Ode*, 1928), reflect his early interest in both Symbolism and classicism. While initially dismissed as facile, these works have been reassessed as impressive evocations of ambivalent adolescent emotions. After Cernuda became aware of his homosexuality during the late 1920s, he

began to express through surrealist verse the turmoil that he was experiencing. In many of the poems contained in *Un río, un amor* (1929), *Los placeres prohibidos* (1931), and *Donde habite el olvido* (1934), Cernuda utilizes free association of images and events to express particular emotions and to voice his reaction to society's hostility toward his erotic desires. Stephen J. Summerhill commented: "Surrealism 'humanized' [Cernuda's] poetry in the sense that it encouraged him to speak his deepest passions for the first time; and it gave him an artistic form with which to control these feelings, which were always on the verge of being inexpressible."

A Return to the Real, and Beyond Influenced by early nineteenth-century German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin, Cernuda abandoned surrealism in *Invocaciones* (1934) in order to present his increasing personal alienation as a metaphor for the modern human condition. Cernuda's wider scope is further elaborated in *La realidad y el deseo* (1936), which critics term his "spiritual autobiography." Consisting of previously published and unpublished collections, this volume was revised on three occasions and ultimately encompassed nearly all of Cernuda's poetic work. As reflected in the title, which translates as "Reality and Desire," these poems reflect Cernuda's attempt to transcend reality and to achieve self-affirmation through understanding and fulfilling personal desires. Philip Silver commented: "As Cernuda employs it, *deseo* is *eros*, a 'desirous longing for.' It is the product of the radical solitude, the gesture of seeking to bridge the gulf between the poet and 'otherness,' for to desire is, in Cernuda's vocabulary, to long to be one with, and to *be*, the object of that desire." In Cernuda's poetry, sexual love ultimately gives way to poetic expression and nature as vehicles for eternal transcendence.

Works in Critical Context

Luis Cernuda's relationship with the reading public was uneasy from the outset of his poetic career. Although some reviews of his first book were encouraging, even enthusiastic, most were decidedly negative. Cernuda's reaction was bitter, though understandable in light of his total commitment to his craft—a craft that involved deep challenges to some of Spain's most cherished and intolerant institutions. Such an early and unflinching commitment also explains what was at times described as his fragile temperament and his unusual sensitivity to criticism. On the other hand, Cernuda was not only a most gifted poet but also a very acute reader of poetry—that of others as well as his own—and perceptive enough to realize that his continued experiments in poetic innovation would eventually earn him the attention of critics.

Residing in His Myth José Angel Valente places Cernuda at the forefront of the Generation of 1927, noting that "two poets, the two greatest of their generation, already reside in their myth: Lorca and Cernuda." This is not an isolated judgment. The important journal *La caña*

gris dedicated a 1962 issue to Cernuda, in which key critics were unstinting in their praise. Jacob Muñoz, editor of the issue, remarks on Cernuda's decisive impact on younger generations of poets; Juan Gil-Albert affirms that Cernuda "has become fully what he already was incipiently for many: the greatest Spanish poet of his time"; and Francisco Brines recalls his discovery of Cernuda's *Como quien espera el alba* (*Like Someone Waiting for the Dawn*, 1947), which he read "slowly and amazed." More recently, in considering the poem "Otras ruinas" ("Other Ruins"), literary critic Cecilia Enjuto-Rancel has noted that Cernuda "eschews the romantic vision of ruins, where the external landscape is a melancholic reflection of the speaker's internal conflicts, his ruined self. By contrast, these poems historicize the process of destruction, which is often caused by war and progress, not time and nature."

Desolation of the Chimera In *Luis Cernuda: A Study of the Poetry* (1973), Derek Harris describes *Desolacion de la quimera* as "an attempt to summarize the lessons [Cernuda] has learnt from the long investigation of himself. This final collection of poems is his own conclusion to his life, produced under the shadow of a presentiment that he was soon to die, a presentiment that turns this book into a poetic last will and testament designed to leave behind him an accurate self-portrait and a duly notarized statement of his account with life." Besides the occasional pieces and personal reminiscences, the principal topics dealt with in the collection are still love, Spain, and exile, as well as a series of poems on artists and on aesthetic experience. Love and art had been the central facts of Cernuda's existence. It was of fundamental importance at this late stage of his life for him to reassert them as the sufficient, powerful justifications of his being.

Responses to Literature

1. It is often mentioned as a mark in a poet's favor that his or her poems are universal. But much of what poets write about—such as Cernuda's experience of being homosexual in early twentieth-century Spain—is deeply personal. What do you make of Octavio Paz's assertion that Cernuda "is the poet who speaks not for all, but for each one of us who make up the all"? Is this different from writing "universal" poems? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Research the significance of Spanish settings and history for Cernuda's poetry. Why do you think Cernuda was so drawn to the traditions of a culture from which he felt deeply alienated? Support your thesis with detailed analyses of two to five poems.
3. Consider *Desolation of the Chimera* as a capstone to Cernuda's career. Does this seem like an intentionally "final" book? Why or why not?
4. Read the poem "Otras ruinas" alongside two other modern poems about cities (by poets other than

Cernuda—perhaps Octavio Paz or Charles Baudelaire). Compare and contrast "Otras ruinas" with the other two poems you have chosen, considering the poets' differing attitudes toward time, the city, and modernity.

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Miguel de Cervantes

BORN: 1547, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

DIED: 1616, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Don Quixote (1605–1615)

Overview

Miguel de Cervantes had an enormous impact on the development of modern fiction. His novel *Don Quixote* represents the first extended prose narrative in European literature in which characters and events are depicted in



Miguel de Cervantes Cervantes, Saavedra Miguel de, engraving.

accord with modern realistic tradition. It is considered the original European novel, one from which all others, in some sense, are descended.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Life Miguel de Cervantes was born on or about September 29, 1547, in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid, Spain, to Rodrigo de Cervantes Saavedra and Leonor de Cortinas. His father was a pharmacist and surgeon, and the family traveled frequently as he looked for work. Cervantes went to school in Madrid, where he probably wrote his first known works, poems on the death of Spanish queen Isabel de Valois, which were published in 1569.

Soldier and Prisoner At that point, Cervantes had moved to Rome to serve as steward to Guilio Cardinal Acquaviva, a high-ranking clergyman. The following year, he enlisted with the Spanish army. In 1571, Cervantes fought in a naval battle off the coast of Greece. Although shot twice in the chest and once in his left hand—an injury that left him permanently crippled—Cervantes gloried in the victory for the rest of his life.

His military career ended in 1574 and was followed by royal commendations.

While returning from the Tunisian coast to Spain the following year, Cervantes and a group of fellow Spaniards were captured by Algerian pirates; for the next five years they remained imprisoned in North Africa. After four failed escape attempts organized by Cervantes and numerous setbacks to efforts on their behalf at home, the prisoners were finally ransomed, and the group returned to Spain as national heroes late in 1580.

Early Writing With a faltering Spanish economy, jobs were few and far between. The Spanish government spent vast sums on foreign wars and the flow of money from New World territories was being interrupted by enterprising British privateers who seized Spanish treasure ships in the name of Queen Elizabeth I of England. In hopes of fame as well as fortune, Cervantes began writing plays for the Spanish stage in the classical Greek tradition of Euripides and Aeschylus, though he focused on contemporary national concerns. It is believed that during the course of only a few years Cervantes wrote some thirty full-length plays, although only one was produced.

In 1585, he wrote his first pastoral romance, *Galatea* and married Catalina de Salazar y Palacios. The following year, he took a position as requisitioning supplies for the Spanish Armada, a fleet of ships assembled for a planned invasion of England. The Spanish Armada was dealt a crushing defeat by the British navy in the English Channel in 1588. Historians speculate that this costly defeat marked the end of Spain's power and influence in Europe. During the 1580s and 1590s, Cervantes found himself on the wrong side of the law for various reasons (debt, tax fraud, even suspected murder), and was imprisoned and released several times.

Don Quixote Throughout this period, he had continued to write both well-received poetry and unsuccessful plays. He began to write *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* (*Don Quixote*) in order to capitalize on the public's overwhelming interest in chivalric romances by writing a lively, salable parody of the genre. Part 1 was published in 1605 to popular and critical praise and was an immediate best seller. Part 2 (1615) was equally popular. The chivalric romances Cervantes poked fun at were tales of knights and ladies told by traveling storytellers of the earlier Middle Ages. By Cervantes's day, the idea of a gallant knight setting off on a quest was considered an entertaining notion of a bygone era.

Cervantes published a few more tales after *Don Quixote*, and was finishing a new novel when he died in 1616.

Works in Literary Context

The First Modern Novel *Don Quixote* is widely considered the first modern novel. The term "novel" in this case means a long work of fiction written in prose featuring

realistic characters and settings. *Don Quixote* was, in fact, a self-conscious break from the popular prose genre of the time, the “romance,” which featured heroic characters and mythic settings. Cervantes used his work to poke fun at the popularity of these romances.

Don Quixote has had a vast influence on the development of the modern novel. It remains a watershed work of art that exerted undeniable impact on the fiction of Henry Fielding, French writer Alain Rene Le Sage, Scottish writer Tobias Smollett, and other early novelists. The novel also anticipated—through its treatment of the comic outsider, satire of social convention, and exploration of the human psyche—countless later fictional masterpieces.

Illusion and Reality Although the structural components in this long novel are numerous, perhaps most important is its novel-within-a-novel scheme. Cervantes’s representation and examination of the fine line between real and imagined worlds, between sanity and insanity, between the world of the creative artist and the actual world, becomes the book’s central theme.

Works in Critical Context

The general trend in criticism has been overwhelmingly favorable toward *Don Quixote*. From the seventeenth century onward, the work has progressively been regarded as more than a comic entertainment. Ultimately, critics have viewed the novel as an epic masterpiece in which the abnormal psyche of the human mind, the friendship between individuals, and the struggle to create lasting art out of ordinary existence are dramatized in modern language and form. As ardent as the proponents of the work are, however, it has had prominent detractors. English Romantic poet Lord Byron, for example, claimed that Cervantes was responsible for extinguishing the chivalric spirit in Europe through his parodies of chivalric encounters, a charge repeated by English novelist Ford Madox Ford in 1938.

Critics often claim that, had Cervantes not written *Don Quixote*, he would undoubtedly be an obscure writer in world literature today. What largely elevates the novel to greatness, according to many scholars, is the close and complex bond that develops between the two characters, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Don Quixote is commonly understood as a composite of the tragic idealist, the unbridled imaginative genius; Sancho, on the other hand, is the ardent skeptic, the simple-minded advocate of rationality.

Responses to Literature

1. Think about Don Quixote as the idealistic genius and Sancho Panza as the rational skeptic. Write an informal essay in which you describe the character you are more like. Do you have a close friend who is the opposite type?

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cervantes’s famous contemporaries include:

Tycho Brahe (1546–1601): Danish nobleman, astrologer, and alchemist whose observations of planetary and stellar positions enabled the discovery of the laws of planetary motion.

William Byrd (c. 1543–1623): English Renaissance composer well known for his liturgical music and works for harpsichord.

Caravaggio (1571–1610): Italian Baroque artist whose use of naturalism was radical for his time.

Philip II of Spain (1527–1598): King of Spain, Naples, Portugal, and Chile, as well as husband of Queen Mary I of England. He led the Spanish Empire to become a global power through expansion and exploration.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English poet and dramatist considered by many to be the greatest English-language writer, he died on the same date as Cervantes.

2. *Don Quixote* was adapted for stage as the musical *Man of La Mancha*, and its 1965 Broadway production garnered numerous awards. The musical was adapted for film in 1972. Read the novel, then watch the film version. Bearing in mind that Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* to satirize popular chivalric romances, what do you make of the characterization of Don Quixote in the film? What aspects of Don Quixote does the film highlight? Why do you think this version of Don Quixote would appeal to modern viewers?
3. Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, considered a classic of American literature, but she has published nothing since. Cervantes’s reputation arguably rests on one novel as well. Do you think someone should be considered a “classic” writer for just one work, or should a reputation be based on multiple works of high quality? Write an essay arguing your point of view, being sure to use specific reasons.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is noted for its humor, its social satire, and its psychological analysis. Here are some other works with similar traits:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), a novel by Mark Twain. An enterprising Southern boy rises to wealth and high society through a series of unlikely adventures.

A Confederacy of Dunces (1980), a novel by John Kennedy Toole. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, this novel follows Ignatius Reilly, a thirty-year-old man who still lives with his mother, as he seeks a job in 1960s New Orleans.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749), a novel by Henry Fielding. This comic classic chronicles the adventures and misadventures of a well-intentioned but unwise orphan, Tom Jones, after he is banished from his guardian's estate.

The Idiot (1868), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Prince Myshkin embodies innocence, but when he is caught up with a rich merchant's son obsessed with a woman, tragedy ensues.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. Emma Bovary's romantic imagination and longing for an aristocratic life lead to adultery and her downfall.

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▣ Aimé Césaire

BORN: 1913, Basse-Pointe, Martinique, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Return to My Native Land (1942)

And the Dogs Were Silent (1956)

The Tragedy of King Christophe (1963)

A Season in the Congo (1966)

A Tempest, Based on Shakespeare's The Tempest—Adaptation for a Black Theatre (1969)

Overview

Martinican author Aimé Césaire is not only responsible for *Return to My Native Land* (1942), a widely acknowledged masterpiece documenting the twentieth-century colonial condition, but he is also an accomplished playwright. Like his poetry and polemical essays, his plays explore the paradox of black identity under French colonial rule. Césaire's shift to drama in the late 1950s and 1960s allowed him to integrate the modernist and surrealist techniques of his poetry and the polemics of his prose.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Aptitude, Early Ambition Aimé Césaire was born in Basse-Pointe, in the north of the island of Martinique. He was the second of the six children of Fernand Césaire, a minor government official, and his wife, Eléonore, a seamstress. Although the family was poor, Césaire received a good education and showed early aptitude for studies. He first attended the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, and then he received a scholarship to attend the prestigious Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris. There he met a Senegalese student, the future poet and African politician Léopold Senghor. In 1934 Césaire, with Senghor and Guyanan poet Léon Damas, founded the student journal *Black Student*. This group of black Francophone intellectuals also developed the concept of "Negritude," the embrace of blackness and Africanness as a counter to a legacy of colonial self-hatred.

In 1935 Césaire entered the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. During this time he traveled to Dalmatia and began work on his *Return to My Native Land*. He eventually passed the *agrégation des lettres*, the national competitive examination that leads to a career in teaching. In 1937 he married fellow Martinican student Suzanne Rossi. Their son, Jacques, the first of Césaire's four sons and two daughters, was born in 1938. In 1939 Césaire and Suzanne returned to Martinique to take up teaching positions at Lycée Schoelcher. In 1939 Césaire



Aimé Césaire Césaire, Aimé, photograph. AP Images.

published his first version of *Return to My Native Land*. The long autobiographical poem has since become one of the best-known French poems of the twentieth century.

Active Anticolonialism Césaire and his wife returned to the Caribbean as World War II began. Although Martinique was far removed from Europe, as a French territory it suffered economically from a German blockade, then later from censorship imposed by a representative of the Vichy government—the interim French regime that cooperated with Nazi Germany in order to prevent total German occupation of France. Césaire became increasingly critical of the Vichy government and established himself as a political voice in Martinique. In 1941 he and Suzanne founded the anticolonialist journal *Tropics* to promote Martinican culture; he was able to publish the journal in spite of the censors. That year Césaire received a visit from the founder of surrealism, André Breton, who had read Césaire’s poetry and crossed the Atlantic to try to convince him to join his movement. Under the influence of surrealism, Césaire wrote his second collection of poetry, *Miraculous Arms* (1946), and later *Sun Cut Throat* (1948).

French Communism Césaire became active in regional politics and was elected mayor of Fort-de-France and deputy to the Constituent National Assembly on the French Communist Party ticket in 1945. He then suc-

cessfully fought to have Martinique and Guadeloupe recognized as overseas departments of France, which, as scholar Janis Pallister explains, the Communists believed would give the islands greater power within the political system. Dividing his time between Paris and Martinique, in 1947 he became cofounder of another journal, *African Presence*, which published the works of black Franco-phone writers.

Politics and Poetry During the 1950s and 1960s, Césaire remained active in both politics and literature. He turned his attention to the African diaspora—the spread of African peoples throughout the New World due to the slave trade—in his poetry collection *Lost Body* (1950) and wrote several important political essays, including “Discourse on Colonialism” (1950) and “Letter to Maurice Thorez” (1956), the latter of which explains his break with the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In 1957 he founded the Martinique Progressive Party, and in 1959 he participated in the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Rome. While maintaining his duties as the elected deputy from Martinique to the French National Assembly in Paris, he wrote two collections of poetry on Africa and the slave experience, *Iron Chains* (1960) and *Cadastre* (1961).

Leaving Communism, Entering Theater The year that Césaire left the Communist Party coincides with his earliest experiment in drama, *And the Dogs Were Silent* (1956). He had turned to theater in an effort to make his literary themes more accessible. The play is adapted from a long poem of the same title that appeared at the end of *Miraculous Arms*, and clearly marks Césaire’s transition from poetry to theater. Described by Césaire as a “lyric oratorio,” according to scholar Clive Davis, the play features the surrealism of his poetry and is difficult to stage. It was aired as a radio drama in France, but unlike later plays, has not enjoyed revivals. Nevertheless, it was an important precursor to Césaire’s later theatrical works.

Although *And the Dogs Were Silent* is a political play, its commentary remains largely on the level of allegory and is deliberately obscure. In contrast, Césaire’s next dramatic efforts, the plays he calls his “political triptych,” comment more directly on specific historical situations of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the context of postcolonial nationhood, leadership, and identity. The first of these plays, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963) is also the first of Césaire’s plays to be written expressly for the theater. It was directed by the avant-gardist Jean-Marie Serreau, who, as Davis reports, “master-minded the première production at the Salzburg festival” in 1964 “and subsequently took it to the Théâtre de l’Odéon in Paris.” Césaire’s relationships with French left-wing intellectuals and artists Michel Leiris and Pablo Picasso helped the play circumvent bureaucratic obstacles, and it was a huge success.

In *The Tragedy of King Christophe* Césaire provides an ironic commentary on postcolonial leadership, beginning a commentary that he develops further in *A Season*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Césaire's famous contemporaries include:

Édouard Glissant (1928–): Martinican writer who worked to help establish a unique Caribbean identity for people of African descent.

Józef Garliński (1913–2005): Polish historian, he was known for his popular books on World War II, including such best sellers as *Fighting Auschwitz* (1974).

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961): Martinican psychiatrist and author known for his studies of the effects of colonialism.

Langston Hughes (1902–1967): American poet who was one of the key figures in the Harlem Renaissance; he has been recognized as America's favorite poet in a survey by the Academy of American Poets.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977): American civil rights leader, she was an influential voting rights activist who was instrumental as a facilitator of Mississippi's Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and later as the Vice-Chairperson of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Mahalia Jackson (1912–1972): American gospel singer, she was regarded the best of the genre and considered the Queen of Gospel.

in the Congo (1966). This second play of Césaire's political triptych recounts the rise, fall, and assassination of Congolese political leader Patrice Lumumba and the Congo's declaration of independence from Belgian colonial rule. The play's topical nature—including the Congo's rise to independence as Zaire under the leadership of Lumumba, and its neocolonial subjection under an ambitious but corrupt leader—affected its production history: As Davis reports, the Belgian authorities tried to suppress the production of the play, which was first staged in Brussels. Césaire's supporters among the intellectuals of Paris intervened and, according to Davis, "succeeded in circumventing these obstacles." When the play was staged in Paris under the direction of Serreau, Davis claims that it "provoked unease" among the "educated Zairian population."

Celebrated Author and Activist After 1970 Césaire published the third play of the political triptych, another volume of poetry, *I, Laminary* (1982), and several more political and historical essays. In 1982 French president François Mitterrand appointed him president of the regional council for the French Overseas Departments, a position that allowed him to encourage the economic and cultural development of his native Marti-

nique. In 1993 he retired from national political life in Paris to Fort-de-France, Martinique, which acknowledged the island's debt to a great champion of its liberation and culture with a municipal celebration of his ninetieth birthday in 2003.

Works in Literary Context

Embracing African Culture and Rejecting Colonialism Césaire's writing consistently investigates the personal and public themes of black social and political culture. His poetry and plays work to honor the black race and defend its solidarity. In his autobiographical poem, *Return to My Native Land*, Césaire rejects European culture, accepting his African and Caribbean roots. Juxtaposing historical data, descriptions of nature, and dream imagery, he praises the contributions of the black race to world civilization. In what he describes as his "triptych" of plays, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963), *A Season in the Congo* (1965), and *A Tempest* (1969), Césaire again explores a series of related themes, especially the efforts of blacks—whether in Africa, the United States, or the Caribbean—to resist the powers of colonial domination.

His plays in particular oscillate between lyricism, realism, and allegory, manipulating the conventions of the theater to provide a general political commentary on racism, colonialism, and decolonization in the specific context of recurring themes: anger against colonial power; the painful memories of slavery and the middle passage; placing the West Indies within a global pan-African context; and the impossible situation of black political leadership in the age of decolonization. Hilary Okam of *Yale French Studies* further maintains that "it is clear from [Césaire's] use of symbols and imagery, that despite years of alienation and acculturation he has continued to live in the concrete reality of his Negro-subjectivity."

Influences Locales, events, attitudes, writers, and writing helped shape Césaire's work. At the École Normale Supérieure in Paris Césaire began his lifelong study of American black writers, especially the Harlem Renaissance poets. With Senghor, Césaire read and discussed the ethnologist Leo Frobenius's *History of African Culture* (1933). With the 1941 visit from founding surrealist André Breton, Césaire not only developed a style influenced by surrealism but wrote essays such as "Poetry and Knowledge" (1945) espousing the surrealist principle of poetry as a means of liberating subconscious truth.

Works in Critical Context

Early criticism was appropriately directed at Césaire's poetry and on his personal investment as a black French anticolonialist in search of true identity. Hilary Okam of *Yale French Studies* contends that "Césaire's poetic idiosyncrasies, especially his search for and use of uncommon

vocabulary, are symptomatic of his own mental agony in the search for an exact definition of himself and, by extension, of his people and their common situation and destiny.” A poetic work demonstrating this is his first and best-regarded *Return to My Native Land*:

Return to My Native Land (1942) The concerns found in *Return to My Native Land* ultimately transcend the personal or racial, addressing liberation and self-awareness in universal terms. Critic Judith Gleason calls the work “a masterpiece of cultural relevance, every bit as ‘important’ as [T. S. Eliot’s] *The Waste Land*,” and concludes that “its remarkable virtuosity will ensure its eloquence long after the struggle for human dignity has ceased to be viewed in racial terms.” André Breton, writing in *What Is Surrealism?*, also sees larger issues at stake in the poem. “What, in my eyes, renders this protest invaluable,” Breton states, “is that it continually transcends the anguish which for a black man is inseparable from the lot of blacks in modern society, and unites with the protest of every poet, artist and thinker worthy of the name . . . to embrace the entire intolerable though amendable condition created for man by this society.”

Writing in the *CLA Journal*, Ruth J. S. Simmons concludes that although Césaire’s poetry is personal, he speaks from a perspective shared by many other blacks. “Poetry has been for him,” Simmons explains, “an important vehicle of personal growth and self-revelation, [but] it has also been an important expression of the will and personality of a people. . . . [It is] impossible to consider the work of Césaire outside of the context of the poet’s personal vision and definition of his art. He defines his past as African, his present as Antillean and his condition as one of having been exploited. . . . To remove Césaire from this context is to ignore what he was and still is as a man and as a poet.”

Césaire’s plays have garnered as much international acclaim as his poetry. Serge Gavronsky stated in *New York Times Book Review* that “in the [1960s, Césaire] was . . . the leading black dramatist writing in French.” Clive Wake, critic for the *Times Literary Supplement*, remarked that Césaire’s plays have “greatly widened [his] audience and perhaps tempted them to read the poetry.” Again touching upon political themes from the history of a postcolonial world, one such play of interest is *A Tempest*:

A Tempest, Based on Shakespeare’s The Tempest—Adaptation for a Black Theatre (1969) The title page of *A Tempest* announces its revisionary relationship with William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. The title also advertises the overturning of what Janis Pallister calls the “master-slave dynamic” of that play: Césaire keeps his promise and revises, racializes, and politicizes the relationships Shakespeare creates among Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban. His use of the phrase “black theater” is significant in its claim for a black transnational identity. *A Tempest* makes reference to the postcolonial relations

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also succeeded in exploring identity in the context of political oppression and/or racism:

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia (1992), a nonfiction work by Peter Hopkirk. This survey closely considers the “great game” played between czarist Russia and Victorian England for supremacy in central Asia.

Midnight’s Children (1981), a novel by Salman Rushdie. The focused story of an Indian protagonist, born with 1,001 others on August 15, 1947, (India’s Independence Day) amid magic realism and political turmoil.

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel depicts the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

This Earth of Mankind (1991), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Indonesian political dissident and novelist Toer offers an intriguing story of love and colonialism in turn-of-the-century Java.

of the French Caribbean and the *métropole*, the postcolonial struggles of Africa, and the struggles of the Black Power and civil rights movements in the United States.

A scholar for *International Dictionary of Theatre* summarizes the larger essence of Césaire’s dramatic works:

Contemporaneity is one of the great strengths of Césaire’s theatre. But the contemporary is ephemeral. Even the traumas of decolonization will fade from the collective memory, if they have not already done so. Those of Césaire’s plays which deal exclusively with this period of history will, perhaps, have less appeal for a broad public, despite the fact that they are accessible and attractive as theatre. *A Tempest*, which addresses the broader and more enduring question of cultural relativity, may consequently prove to be Césaire’s most durable play.

Responses to Literature

1. Césaire’s poetry is a mix of modernism and surrealism. What surrealistic characteristics can you identify in his poems? Compare his first work, *Return to My Native Land*, with one of his follow-up works. Is there a difference in the surrealistic characteristics between the two? Explain.
2. One characteristic of Césaire’s work involves the anger aimed at colonialism. Africans were frustrated with the inconsistencies, the clashing of ideals, the hypocrisies. Africans were unnerved by colonial efforts to assimilate them. As Césaire defined it, “We

didn't know what Africa was. Europeans despised everything about Africa, and in France people spoke of a civilized world and a barbarian world. The barbarian world was Africa. . . . Therefore, the best thing one could do with an African was to assimilate him: the idea was to turn him into a Frenchman with black skin." Research colonialist assimilation of Africans. What areas of African life—education, religion, home and family—were impacted? How was African identity affected? What was nationalism? What were the motives behind assimilation efforts? Was conversion successful? What is Africa's place in the world today? If a group chooses to survey colonialism, each individual might take on a different aspect of colonialism and report back in order to better understand the history and concepts of colonialism.

3. For Native Americans from the 1900s through the 1960s involved coercive assimilation by the U.S. government. Many Native Americans experienced identity crises "due to the differences between cultures, values, and expectations of their tribal traditions and those of mainstream American social and educational systems," says scholar Michael Tlanusta Garret. For Africans, colonialism had a similar dreadful effect. In a group effort, research the two cultures and the government movements that changed them. How are they similar? What did the white culture want from them? What life changes did each have in common? How did each respond to the invasion of governments? Who resisted? Who protested?

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■ Mary Challans

SEE *Mary Renault*

☒ George Chapman

BORN: *c. 1559, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, England*

DIED: *1634, London*

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Poetry, drama, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

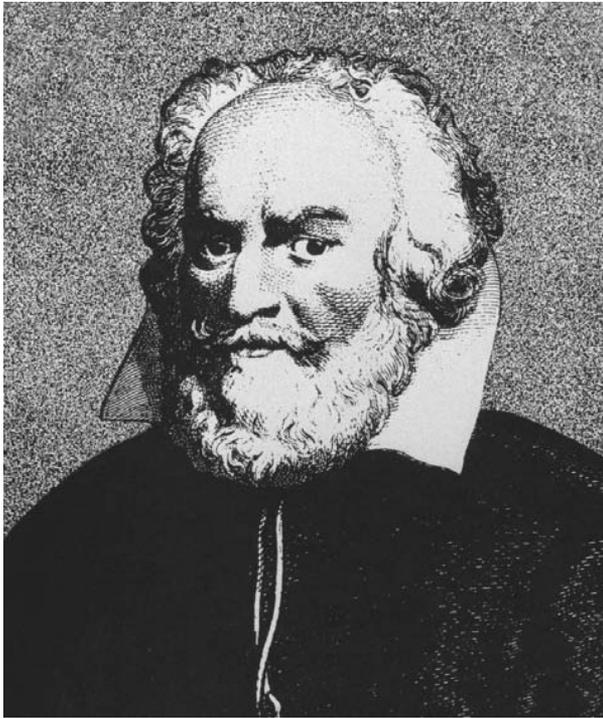
- The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596)
- All Fools* (1605)
- Eastward Ho* (1605)
- Bussy D'Ambois* (1607)

Overview

Dramatist, poet, and distinguished translator, George Chapman embodied the Renaissance ideal of the sophisticated man of letters capable of writing competently in a wide range of genres. He was as much at ease writing dramatic poetry as he was writing farcical comedies or philosophical tragedies. Chapman's dramas achieved moderate success in his lifetime, though they are now rarely performed. Many critics consider his translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* his most important achievement.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years and Military Service Chapman's life is not well documented. He was born at Hitchin in Hertfordshire, England, around the year 1559, the second son of Thomas Chapman and Joan Nodes, the daughter of a



George Chapman Chapman, George, photograph.

royal huntsman at the court of Henry VIII. Very little is known about Chapman's early education, though it is presumed he attended the grammar school at Hitchin. He attended Oxford beginning in 1574, where he is said to have excelled in Greek and Latin. Following his time at Oxford, Chapman entered into the service of a prominent nobleman, Sir Ralph Sadler, from 1583 to 1585. He subsequently served with the military expedition of Sir Francis Vere in the United Provinces, which were then engaged in the Eighty Years War.

"School of Night" Chapman returned to England in 1594, established residence in London, and published his first work, *The Shadow of Night: Containing Two Poeticall Hymnes*. Around this time, Chapman entered Sir Walter Raleigh's circle, a literary group devoted to scientific and philosophical speculation that occasionally dabbled in the occult. Termed "The School of Night" by William Shakespeare for their esoteric ideas, the circle's influence, especially its metaphysical orientation, is evident in Chapman's writings of the 1590s, including both the poetry collection *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* and his completion of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

Professional Success, Financial Hardship Toward the end of the 1590s, Chapman debuted as a dramatist with a pair of comedies, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* and *A Humorous Day's Mirth*, written for the Lord Admiral's Men, a major theatrical company in London. Other comedies followed, written for similar private theatrical com-

panies. By the close of the Elizabethan period, Chapman was widely recognized as a leading dramatist and poet, yet the meager income from the production of his plays forced him to live in poverty. Increasingly strained circumstances led to desperate solutions: In 1599, Chapman relinquished his claim to the family estate for a small cash settlement. The following year, Chapman was imprisoned for debt, the unwitting victim of a fraudulent moneylender.

Return to Prison With the accession of James I in 1603, Chapman's fortune suddenly changed when he was given a position in the household of Prince Henry. At the time, many artists survived by securing funding from a wealthy patron, a sponsor of their work who usually received dedications in the creator's work as well as increased social standing for helping to bring great art into being. With Prince Henry as his patron, Chapman continued composing dramas, including his last major comedy, *Eastward Ho*, written in collaboration with Ben Jonson and John Marston. The play's sarcastic political insults against policies favored by James I resulted in swift imprisonment for Chapman and Jonson, though both were soon released. Afterward, Chapman turned to writing tragedy. His best-known works from this period are *Busy D'Ambois* and the two-part *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron*.

Without a Patron Chapman's career is also notable for his ambitious plan to translate into modern English the classical Greek works of Homer. His translation of the first twelve books of the *Iliad* appeared in 1609, prefaced by a dedication to Prince Henry, who had endorsed the work with a promise of three hundred pounds and a pension. However, when the young prince died suddenly in 1612, the prince's father failed to fulfill Henry's promise to Chapman. A similar fate befell Chapman's hope in Robert Carr, later Earl of Somerset, whose career at court was effectively terminated due to a series of marital scandals. In effect, Chapman remained without a patron for his entire literary career, the financial and professional consequences of which were disastrous. He completed a translation of Homer's poetry and a pair of classical tragedies around 1615 that were never performed during his lifetime. By 1624, Chapman's last years were spent in relative obscurity. Nonetheless, when he died on May 12, 1634, Chapman was honored by the elite, including the fashionable architect Inigo Jones, who constructed his funeral monument.

Works in Literary Context

Chapman's approach to literature was similar to that of his famous contemporary, Ben Jonson. Like Jonson, Chapman was strongly influenced by the artistic theories of Italian Renaissance writers, who held that the works of classical antiquity defined true artistic principles. However, while Jonson was specifically concerned with matters of literary style, Chapman was more interested in theoretical

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chapman's famous contemporaries include:

- Miguel de Cervantes** (1547–1616): Spanish author of *Don Quixote*, often cited as the first novel ever written.
- Ben Jonson** (1572–1637): English dramatist and poet, Jonson is best known for his play *The Alchemist*.
- Ishida Mitsunari** (1560–1600): This famous samurai led the Western Army during the Battle of Sekigahara.
- Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642): Galilei was an Italian astronomer who championed Copernicus's heliocentric theory—the belief that the planets of the solar system revolve around the sun—despite its unpopularity at the time.
- Michel de Montaigne** (1533–92): This French author pioneered the essay as an art form.
- Sacharias Jansen** (c. 1585–c. 1632): Jansen was a Dutch spectacle-maker who was one of two people likely to have invented the telescope.

and philosophical problems. The Neoplatonic theories of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, which said that artistic endeavors should aim to represent an ideal realm of truth, formed the basis of Chapman's poetics. The Stoic philosophy enunciated in the works of Seneca and Epictetus also influenced Chapman, particularly with regard to his tragic vision.

Ovid's Influence Like most writers of the English Renaissance, Chapman recognized narrative poetry as an important genre of classical literature and imitated such Latin poets as Ovid. His first poem, *The Shadow of Night*, consists of two books addressed to the figure of Night and the pagan goddess of the Moon, Cynthia. *The Shadow of Night* is written in the form of a complex allegory, exploring different levels of meaning—philosophical, political, and poetic—in an attempt to rationalize man's condition on earth. Perhaps Chapman's most highly regarded poem, *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* depicts Ovid's encounter with Julia, the daughter of the Roman emperor Augustus, who inspires him to write *The Art of Love*.

Chapman's next major work, his completion of Christopher Marlowe's first two books of *Hero and Leander*, is viewed by most critics as an austere corrective to Marlowe's sensual imagery. In the final lines of *Hero and Leander*, Chapman writes again from an allegorical perspective about the meaning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Nonetheless, some critics link Chapman's poetic canon to seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry because of his use of dense imagery to illuminate philosophical questions. Others maintain that his narrative poems were

intended as ironic commentary on the philosophical dilemmas posed by poets during the Augustan Age in Rome.

Low Comedy Chapman's career as a dramatist was divided fairly evenly between comedy and tragedy, with his early years largely devoted to comedies patterned after classical Roman models by Plautus and Terence. Chapman's first comedy, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, is specifically modeled on the low comic theater of Plautus. It is an irreverent sexual farce wherein the title character succeeds in seducing a series of women through role-playing and manipulation. Certain critics consider the play the first example of the "Comedy of Humours," a type of comedy traditionally attributed to Ben Jonson. Also considered an example of low comedy, *A Humorous Day's Mirth* features a plot of great complexity that revolves around the clever romantic intrigues of a courtier named Lemot. *All Fools*, an adaptation of Terence's *Heauton Timoroumenos*, is similarly a romantic farce focusing on the rituals of courtship and marriage. *Eastward Ho* is perhaps Chapman's best-known dramatic achievement. Produced in 1604 and intended to capitalize on the success of Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho*, the play explores the social milieu of London's middle class and is considered an excellent example of the city-comedy genre. Chapman's last noncollaborative comedy, *The Gentleman Usher*, is cited by many commentators as his finest work in that genre.

Legacy While the plays and poetry of Chapman have largely fallen out of favor, his status as a true Renaissance man marks him as an inspirational figure in the vein of Leonardo da Vinci. Indeed, it was Chapman's diverse interests—from philosophy to poetry to drama to history—that eventually led to his translating the works of Homer. It is in this role, much more than in his prodigious output as dramatist and poet, that Chapman influenced later generations, particularly the Romantic poets, especially John Keats, who immortalized Chapman's work in the well-known sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

Works in Critical Context

Overall, the verdict on Chapman's dramatic work is varied. While many critics note Chapman's competence in plot and characterization, as well as his philosophical depth, others disparage his style as obtuse and overly elaborate. While Chapman is frequently praised as an adept technician, his inability to entertain has been criticized just as often. Referred to by many as genius, the works that have received the most attention are Chapman's translations.

Chapman as Dramatist Critics agree that Chapman's finest dramatic achievement was in tragedy. In his best-regarded works, he turned to French history for appropriate subjects. His first and most important tragedy, *Bussy D'Ambois*, is based on the life of Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, a notorious duelist and

adventurer at the court of Henry III. Bussy is cast as a classical hero, echoing Hercules, Prometheus, and other mythical archetypes. Recently, critics have explored the relation of Bussy to the title hero of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, arguing that both characters personify the Herculean hero type admired by the Italian Humanists. Chapman wrote a sequel, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, considered a far weaker play. The work is completely imaginary; none of the characters and events relates to French history as in the original. The play's indecisive protagonist, Bussy's avenging brother Clermont, is generally assumed to be patterned after Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron deals with the intrigues and eventual execution of a prominent courtier serving Henry IV. An early performance in 1608 aroused the wrath of the French ambassador, who ordered the arrest of three actors because of a scandalous scene between the king's wife and his mistress. The play was so heavily censored by government authorities that the 1625 reprint bore little resemblance to the original. Chapman's final tragedies, *Caesar and Pompey* and *The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France*, further elaborate on the theme of the stoic hero, but they have received less critical attention.

Chapman the Translator Chapman's translations of Homer's epic poetry have received significant critical attention, not only during his own lifetime, but also during the Romantic period in particular. The degree to which his translations successfully communicate Homer's language and meaning is now widely disputed because of Chapman's limited knowledge of classical Greek and his free interpretation of Homer's original text. Proponents of Chapman's translations suggest that their value must be measured by their ability to capture the spirit of the original, which was, without question, one of Chapman's greatest strengths. Scholars argue that Chapman's achievement as a translator must be assessed in light of his own poetic theories. As Raymond B. Waddington puts it, Chapman "regarded his job as *translation*, making the universal values of Homer comprehensible and therefore relevant to his own time and culture." In that sense, the popularity of his translations attests to their success, both during his lifetime and more than two hundred years after his death.

Responses to Literature

1. As noted above, Chapman's translations of Homer have been defended because they catch the spirit of the original text in the English of Chapman's time. Imagine you have written a novel that is to be translated into another language five hundred years from now. Would you rather the translator "get the spirit" of your novel or that the translator faithfully translate each and every word?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chapman adapted the stories of past masters for contemporary audiences. This spirit of recasting familiar classics in contemporary settings is common throughout the history of literature, art, and film. Here are a few more works that attempt to tell familiar stories to new audiences:

Clueless (1995), a film directed by Amy Heckerling. This film attempts to update Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma* about a matchmaking debutante and all the problems her meddling causes.

A Thousand Acres (1991), a novel by Jane Smiley. A retelling of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, this novel takes place on a farm in Iowa in the twentieth century rather than on the windswept plains of twelfth-century England.

O, Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), a film directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Homer's *Odyssey* is changed into a comedy about three prison escapees in Mississippi during the Great Depression who encounter modern representations of classic Homeric characters, including the Sirens and a Cyclops, on their way home.

2. Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston were imprisoned for their play *Eastward Ho*. Do you think Chapman and the others had any idea they would provoke such an extreme reaction? What other artists have been imprisoned because of their work? Do you think controversial writers know ahead of time that they will be punished in some way for their art? Make a list of at least five issues of today that cause strong, sometimes violent, reactions from people. Beside each issue, include a brief explanation of why you think people have such strong reactions to it. (Think about animal-rights rallies or abortion protests.)
3. Read Chapman's *Bussey D'Ambois*. A number of Chapman's dramas have been described as "overly elaborate," in the sense that the text is unnecessarily complex. Based on your reading of *Bussey D'Ambois*, do you think the plot is "overly elaborate?" Support your response with examples from the play.

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René Char

BORN: 1907, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Vaucluse, France

DIED: 1988, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, prose-poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Furor and Mystery (1948)

Search for the Base and the Summit (1955)

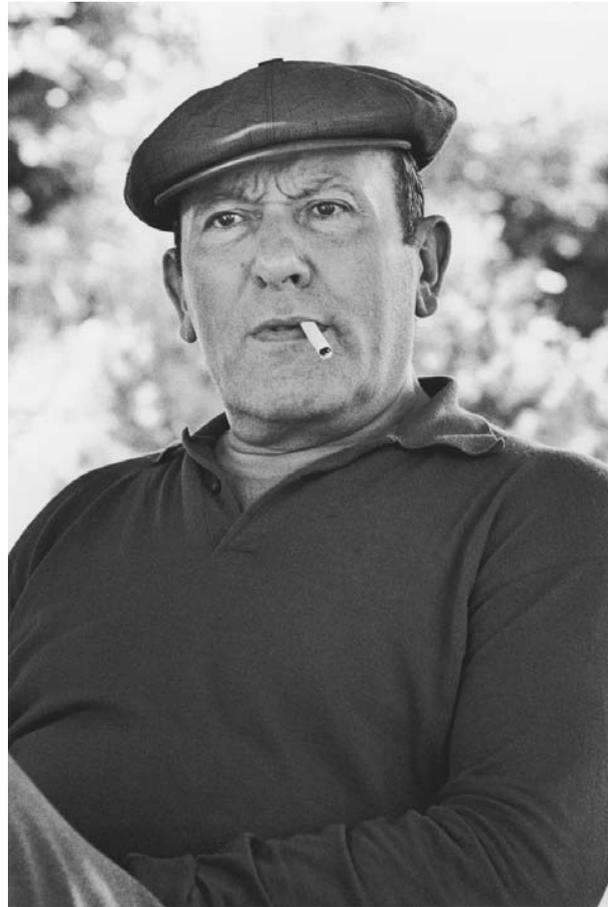
Overview

During his lifetime René Char was regarded by many as France's greatest living poet. Although his early association with the surrealists liberated his imagination and colored his imagery, Char's poetry also reflects the rusticity of life in the countryside of his native Provence. His experiences during World War II profoundly affected his poetry and led him to reflect on enduring human values. In addition to "anecdotal," Char's poetry has been labeled "hermetic," for it often suggests the poet as prophet and poetry as a kind of religion. His work has been illustrated by such notable contemporaries as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and set to music by Pierre Boulez. Albert Camus once called Char "a poet of all time who speaks for our time in particular."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Childhood in the Hill Country of France

René-Émile Char was born in the French town of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, in the department (province) of the Vaucluse, on June 14, 1907. His poetry does celebrate sites outside his native region—such as Autun, Lascaux, and Alsace—and occasionally these become major symbols of creativity, love, or war, but the hill country of southeast-



René Char Jean-Regis Roustan / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

ern France dominates his poetic topography. Char is by no means a regionalist poet, however: he generally uses his native locale to stage epic struggles of justice versus injustice, in which the individual resists a repressive, conformist society. One of his major symbols, Mont Ventoux, is linked directly to Italian Renaissance poet Petrarch, and his portrayals of the southern countryside seek always the universal within the particular.

Char was the youngest of four children born to Joseph-Émile Char, businessman and town mayor, and his second wife, Marie-Thérèse Rouget Char. Émile Char's first marriage had been to Marie-Thérèse's older sister Julia, who died of tuberculosis after barely a year of marriage. Char plays on this endogamy in poems such as "Jacquemard et Julia," in the collection *Fureur et mystère* (*Furor and Mystery*, 1948), where the first marriage stands in idyllic counterpoint to the poet's own tense relationship with his mother. During Char's childhood, his family lived in the Névens, a large house surrounded by a park.

A Fatherless Soldier Char's father died on January 15, 1918. This event had a profound effect on the boy, who was not yet eleven, and many poems—such as "Jouvence des

Névons” (“Youth at the Névens”), from *Les Matinaux* (1950; translated as *The Dawn Breakers*, 1992)—bear witness to Char’s subsequent sense of dispossession and existential solitude. Such feelings characterize a significant portion of his poetry, though they temper rather than overwhelm his basic optimism. As the critic Christine Dupouy notes in her 1987 monograph on Char, the family house and the extensive park surrounding it galvanized Char’s poetic and psychological energies: the property symbolized the beauty of nature in his father’s former realm and by contrast underscored the poet’s rebellion against maternal authority. Shortly after his father’s death, Char became a student at the lycée of Avignon but never completed the *baccalauréat*, a prestigious diploma that crowns secondary studies in France. Instead, in 1925 he enrolled in a business school at Marseilles and in 1926 took a job in Cavaillon, a few kilometers south of L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. From 1927 to 1928 he did his military service in an artillery unit at Nîmes and published his first book of verse, *Les Cloches sur le coeur* (*Bells on the Heart*, 1928), most copies of which he later destroyed. This work is the only book published under his given name of René-Émile Char.

Char fought on the side of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and organized a resistance unit against the Nazi-controlled Vichy regime in France at Céreste during World War II. Although he continued writing, he did not publish during the German and Italian occupation of France, being fully engaged with the resistance movement—with duties ranging from organizing Allied parachute drops in the Alps to helping organize the Allied invasion of Provence from Algeria. After the war, he was lionized by a France eager to forget its complicity in Nazi atrocities, and he alternated between living in Paris and Provence. He continued writing poetry until his death of heart failure in 1988.

Works in Literary Context

Polarity and Wisdom Char’s philosophical master was the philosopher Heraclitus, whom he described as a “vision of a solar eagle” who embraced opposites. Char believed that “the poem is always married to someone,” and the technique of his poetry can be expressed in the Heraclitean saying, “The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither expresses nor conceals, but indicates.” “I am torn,” Char explained, “by all the fragments there are.” Yet his mind could “polarize the most neutral objects,” writes Gabriel Bounoure. And Camus noted Char’s right to “lay claim to the tragic optimism of pre-Socratic Greece. From Empedocles to Nietzsche, a secret had been passed on from summit to summit, an austere and rare tradition which Char has revived after prolonged eclipse. . . . What he has called ‘Wisdom, her eyes filled with tears,’ is brought to life again, on the very heights of our disasters.”

Poetry as Warfare *Seuls demeurent* and *Feuillets d’Hypnos* reflect his wartime experiences of violence, killing, and fear. For instance, the poem “L’Extravagant”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Char’s famous contemporaries include:

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): A Ukrainian-born Marxist, Trotsky was one of the leaders of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia and developed a school of Marxist thought deeply opposed to the totalitarian corruption of communism espoused and practiced by Stalin in the Soviet Union.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): The surrealist painter par excellence, the Spanish-born Dalí was fond of highlighting his Arab lineage, claiming to be descended from the Moors who had occupied southern Spain for close to eight hundred years.

André Breton (1896–1966): A French poet who defined surrealism as “pure psychic automatism” in the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, he collaborated with Char and others on significant early works.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Celebrated Argentine author, recognized around the world as one of the most important writers and thinkers to come out of Latin America in the twentieth century.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): The thirty-seventh president of the United States, Nixon was the only American president to voluntarily step down from office; he resigned in disgrace and amid scandal in August 1974.

was inspired by an order, which Char had given as a guerrilla commander in Spain, to have two young men executed. The war years influenced his later poetry by tempering his attitude toward humanity with compassion and brotherhood, and by reinforcing his conception of poetry as a mode of guerrilla warfare and resistance.

Works in Critical Context

Char’s poetry is widely read and highly regarded both in his native France and in other countries. Some critics have detected a tension between “separateness” and “communal presence” throughout his canon. Nancy Kline Piore notes that although Char was a “deeply private man,” he “participated actively in two of the most important communal efforts of the century, Surrealism and the Resistance, and both have marked his work.” There is some critical debate, however, as to how much the surrealist movement influenced his writing. Some critics believe that Char’s broken syntax, striking imagery, unusual vocabulary, and deliberate defiance of the rules of logical coherence conspire to make his poetry unnecessarily difficult.

Blinding Light and Unbearable Darkness In 1952, France’s most prominent novelist, Albert Camus, wrote, “I consider René Char to be our greatest living poet, and *Fureur et Mystère* to be the most astonishing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Char's work is perhaps most strongly characterized by a sense of struggle—an awareness that all life is unresolved opposition that brings both uncertainty and delight. Here are some other works that celebrate conflict, not for the sake of conflict, but for the sake of life:

The Subtle Knife (1997), a novel by Philip Pullman. This fantasy tale draws on Keats's idea of negative capability in chronicling the interworld adventures of Lyra Silvertongue.

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), a novel by Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon, one of the United States' premier postmodern fiction writers, provokes and confounds interpretation in this short novel, insisting that the unresolvable conflict of perspectives makes it more or less impossible for meaning to "truly" determine actions or ideas.

"Song of Myself" (1860), a poem by Walt Whitman. The American poet captures the idea of unresolved conflict in this epic poem, a part of *Leaves of Grass*, his life's work. He writes, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes."

Poetics (c. 335 BCE), a nonfiction work by Aristotle. Classical Greek philosophy, exemplified in Aristotle, saw the universe as an endless pattern of conflict, or *agon*, in which opposing forces struggled for dominance.

product of French poetry since *Les Illuminations* and *Alcools*." Gabriel Bounoure likewise responded strongly to Char's work: "I remember when I first read Char's poetry I was drawn by its evident greatness. . . . Char's universe is the kingdom of the open air."

Many of Char's poems are aphoristic—short, stabbing distillations of language for maximum meaning. Emile Snyder writes: "A poem by René Char is an act of violence within which serenity awaits the end of violence." The concentrated lucidity he attains is, in Char's own words "the wound closest to the sun." Camus remarked that this poetry "carries daytime and night on the same impulse . . ."

Responses to Literature

1. List and discuss two or three themes from Char's *Furor and Mystery*. How do "furor" and "mystery" pervade Char's treatment of these themes?
2. Compare the poetic vision of Char with those of Paul Éluard, André Breton, and one more surrealist poet of your choice. Using one or two poems by each (all from the same period), consider the ways in which Char both was and was not a good representative of the surrealist movement.
3. Char was one of a number of poets and fiction writers to participate in the Spanish Civil War, which was perhaps the most popular war of all time among intellectuals and artists—many of whom fought or served in the ambulance corps for the Republicans, the troops opposing the authoritarian dictator-to-be General Franco. Research the Spanish Civil War and consider what it was that drew Char and others to participate in this conflict. Discuss, in a thesis-driven essay, the significance of this war for the development of Char's poetic sensibilities and those of his generation of artists.
4. Consider two to three of Char's later poems alongside two to three of his earlier poems. What similarities and differences do you see in his treatment of conflict and opposition? Do you see his later approach to this theme as more of a continuation of his earlier approach, or more of a break from it? Support your thesis with careful analysis of specific poetic devices and themes.

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Thomas Chatterton

BORN: 1752, Bristol, England

DIED: 1770, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

"A Hunter of Oddities" (1770)

"Memoirs of a Sad Dog" (1770)



Thomas Chatterton Chatterton, Thomas, painting. The Library of Congress.

Alla: A Tragycal Enterlude (1777)

“Excelente Balade of Charitie” (1777)

Goddwyn: A Tragedie (1777)

Overview

Of all English poets, Thomas Chatterton seemed to his great Romantic successors to most typify a commitment to the life of the imagination. For a variety of reasons, which to a large extent relate to the state of letters in his time, he achieved the status of a myth. The victim of starvation and despair, his suspected suicide in a London garret at the age of eighteen enhanced his social and literary significance to an archetypal level.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in a Household of Women Thomas Chatterton was born on November 10, 1752, in Bristol, England. He was the son of a schoolmaster, also named Thomas, a man of an eccentric disposition but with strong musical and poetic abilities and antiquarian interests. His mother, who was widowed four months before Chatterton’s birth, kept the home running with her work as a needlewoman. Chatterton grew up in a household of women—his mother, sister, and paternal grandmother. At an early age, Chatterton was judged to be “stupid” due to his early inability to learn to read. However, at the

age of six, he became deeply interested in an illuminated manuscript at Saint Mary Redcliffe Church, after which he did little but read and demonstrate his precocity.

Saint Mary Redcliffe Church Chatterton’s ancestors had been sextons of the Church of Saint Mary in the parish of Redcliff for generations. It was the Church of Saint Mary Redcliffe that became the young Chatterton’s favorite place to spend time. Elsewhere, he was prone to outbursts of rage alternating with tearful episodes. The constant proximity of the old and beautiful church, however, with whose fabric his ancestors had been so closely connected, nurtured his extraordinary sensibility.

Solitary Brooding Yields First Publication at Age Eleven At the age of eight Chatterton was sent to Colston’s charitable foundation, a Hospital School, where his education was geared to the vocational requirements of his community—commerce and law—rather than to encouraging the development of his imagination through classical training. Chatterton began to read voraciously. He frequently haunted local bookshops, and he was equally eager about writing. Chatterton collected all the remnants of parchment he could find and took them to a lumber room that he appropriated for his own use. There, his solitary brooding, combined with the discontents of his daily life, encouraged the young prodigy to express himself in writing. At the age of eleven, he had his first poetry published in the January 8, 1763, edition of *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*.

Suffered Beatings for Poetry At the end of his schooling he was indentured to a local lawyer, John Lambert, as a scrivener, or copy clerk. Upon finding out that he wrote poetry in his spare time, his employer beat him and, tearing up what he had written, forbade him to continue. However, there were other like-minded young men with whom Chatterton gossiped and for whom he produced verse exercises of various kinds. Thomas Phillips, the usher at Colston’s, had been regarded as a remarkable versifier, but Phillips died in 1769; Chatterton’s three elegies to Phillips show he had been to some extent a fellow spirit.

Rowley Is Born Chatterton returned to the Church of Saint Mary Redcliff in Bristol for his greatest (and most talked-about) writing efforts. Using documentation he found there, he created fictions based upon the lives of people from the church’s history. The church had been founded in the fifteenth century by William Canning, mayor of Bristol and a romantic figure of enormous wealth and property. Among Canning’s contemporaries had been Thomas Rowley, at one time sheriff of Bristol. In his solitude, Chatterton wrote works that he attributed, upon submission for publication, to Rowley.

With his first successful submission to the local newspaper, Chatterton attracted the attention of William Barrett, a surgeon and local antiquary. Barrett’s encyclopedia-style *History of Bristol* (1789) was to include much of

Chatterton's "Rowley" material as genuine. Modern readers should keep in mind that the clear distinction between fact and fiction in written works only found its codification with the rise of the novel itself. Histories written prior to the emergence of the novel as a genre often included fanciful material. In this case, Chatterton cunningly offered material that would attract an antiquary and reinforced the forgery with sophisticated critique, also forged, to enhance its supposed authenticity. Not only was none of the Rowley poetry published as Chatterton's during Chatterton's lifetime, but his "friends" were among the most adamant after his death in asserting that the boy they had known could not possibly have written the Rowley poems.

Fooling Horace Walpole Chatterton became even more creative to convince his next patrons. The "Account of the De Berghams from the Norman Conquest to This Time" earned him a small sum of money, but his work was soon exposed as a hoax. Chatterton then targeted famous author Horace Walpole. What better ploy than to have Canning send Rowley to catalogue the paintings of the fifteenth century in a journey around Britain in order to whet Walpole's appetite for unknown artists? Walpole welcomed Chatterton's opening gambit, a piece titled "The Rise of Peyncteyng y n Englande, wroten bie T. Rowleie, 1469 for Mastre Canynge." Walpole gave courteous encouragement, offering to print them if they had not been printed before.

Chatterton not only sent poems but disclosed the truth of his own situation—that he was the son of a poor widow and wished to be released from his drudgery as an attorney's apprentice. The obviously modern tone of the specimens Walpole received (particularly of the pastoral poems) and his embarrassment at being tricked and consequently ridiculed made Walpole at first neglect to respond to Chatterton. He then made brusque dismissal of any hopes Chatterton might have had from this particular great man. After Chatterton's suspected suicide, Walpole was cast in the role of persecutor of the indigent and youthful genius.

One Final Hoax So ripe must the time have seemed for his new life to begin that Chatterton found a way to extricate himself from his apprenticeship. On April 14, 1769, he devised a last will and testament and specified memorials to be placed on the tombs of his ancestors and on his own. His scheme succeeded: the largely fictitious emotions were assumed to be authentic, and Lambert released him from his apprenticeship. Chatterton was free to go to London to make his fortune. He left Bristol on April 17 for the first and last time. He had already written to booksellers and publishers in London, and he visited them promptly on the evening of his arrival.

Writing Opportunities Change From then on, the pace of his life and the hectic qualities of his letter writing increased. He took lodgings with a relative in Shoreditch and there wrote glowing accounts of his fashionable

acquaintance and of his influence with London publishers. He had established connections with the editors of the *Town and Country Magazine*, the *Middlesex Journal*, and the *Freeholder's Magazine*. It is reported, however, that when the government clamped down on their activities and imprisoned the editor of the *Freeholder's Magazine*, Chatterton's market became constricted. Chatterton earned a little money from periodical stories such as "Letter of Maria Friendless" and "Memoirs of a Sad Dog," both published in *Town and Country*. About the time Chatterton moved from Shoreditch to the house of Mrs. Angel, a dress maker on Brooke Street, he must have written, or more likely improved, his "Excelente Balade of Charitie," the only poem of this period written in the Rowleian style. It was not accepted for publication by the *Town and Country*, which merely printed an acknowledgment of its receipt, having already accepted as much material as it could publish.

Mrs. Angel The sentiments of the rejected poem have long been supposed those of Chatterton himself as his fortunes sank even lower. He wrote to his old Bristol acquaintance William Barrett for support in gaining a position as a ship's surgeon, but, since Chatterton had no medical training, Barrett could only refuse. The last presents for home were sent with confident and affectionate letters to his mother and sister, the two women who remained the center of his emotional concern. He promised more gifts and future good fortune, but in fact he was being beset by the ironically named Mrs. Angel.

At this date, he was still hoping that Barrett might help him to the post of ship's surgeon. The near fifty percent increase in his rent is deduced to have been the final blow to his finances. "A Hunter of Oddities," published in September in *Town and Country*, includes an exchange in which a lodger asks his landlady what he may be given for dinner, and it concludes "Your score is now seven and thirty shillings; and I think it is time it should be cleared." Mrs. Angel told a neighbor that, knowing Chatterton had not eaten for two or three days, she begged him to take a meal with her on August 24, but that he refused. The same day he was reputed to have tried to beg a loaf from a baker he knew.

Suspected Suicide at Age Eighteen In the course of the night of August 24, 1770, Chatterton swallowed both opium and arsenic in water. The general conclusion was that the eighteen-year-old had committed suicide. A neighboring chemist, Mr. Cross, noted after Chatterton's death that he was using vitriol to cure himself of venereal disease. Scholars of late, however, are also considering the possibility that the arsenic (or the combination of opium and arsenic) accidentally killed him. At the time he died, Oxford scholar Dr. Thomas Fry had just started to inquire about the Rowley poems.

Works in Literary Context

In his reading, Chatterton encountered the Ossian fragments and epics of Scottish poet James Macpherson—

works which had become the rage of the polite world in the 1760s. He also read Thomas Percy's works, where differences between ancient and modern ballads were discussed. Equally important, as scholar Bertrand Bronson has shown, was Elizabeth Cooper's *The Muses Library* (1737), a four-hundred-page account of such older English poets as Edward the Confessor, Samuel Daniel, William Langland, John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Occleve, Alexander Barclay, and the Earl of Surrey. If one adds to these *Old Plays* (1744) by Robert Dodsley; the works of the antiquarians of the previous century; eighteenth-century dictionaries and encyclopedias; and the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, William Collins, and Thomas Gray, one can see that Chatterton's imaginative resources were rich indeed.

Forging Medieval Poetry William Canning's name had been featured in leases, heraldry, buildings, grants of property, and bequests in documents housed in chests in a room of Saint Mary's Redcliff. Chatterton was so enthralled by the romantic figures that he made Thomas Rowley a sort of alter ego: Rowley was to be cast as priest, poet, and chronicler, and Canning was to become enshrined in the role of patron to Rowley. Chatterton began his writing efforts by "forging" medieval poetry—using the passionate voice of his heroes and heroines to develop surrealistic, dreamlike narratives and vigorous, dramatic, and evocative poems. Chatterton also found a way to use the mythical qualities of his homeland, Bristol. The strategic role of Bristol as the gateway for the men who ventured from Bristol to fight in patriotic struggles against the invaders who threatened English independence was to be one of "Rowley's" primary themes.

As the martyred poet, Chatterton left an enormous impact with his untimely death. Alfred de Vigny, Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Francis Thompson wrote about him. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a monody—a poem of lament—about him. Robert Southey edited his poems (1803). John Keats dedicated *Endymion* (1817) to him. George Meredith posed for Henry Wallis's painting of Chatterton's death, *Adonais*. William Wordsworth, listing in "Resolution and Independence" (1807) those poets to whom he owed most, described Chatterton as "the marvellous Boy, The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride" (1821). Chatterton also had a formidable influence on English, French, and German literature through his "Rowley" poems.

Works in Critical Context

Rowley Poems Elicit High Praise Chatterton has elicited high praise from writers, scholars, and critics of all literary periods, particularly when his *Rowley Poems* are juxtaposed against his premature death. While some of his contemporaries, like Horace Walpole, were less appreciative of his works, which had fooled them, Romantic poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley ranked Chatterton with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chatterton's famous contemporaries include:

Francis Fanny Burney (1752–1840): British diarist, novelist, and playwright, she was not only a prolific writer but is also considered to be a precursor to such writers as Jane Austen and William Makepeace Thackeray.

Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784): She was the first African American woman poet to publish and is said to be one of the first to influence the genre of African American literature.

John Wilkes (1725–1795): English writer and radical, he fought for the rights of citizens, rather than the House of Commons, to decide their representatives.

Giacomo Casanova (1725–1798): Venetian adventurer and author most famous for his womanizing.

Oliver Goldsmith (1730–1774): Anglo-Irish writer, poet, and physician known for works including *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768).

Sir Philip Sidney as "inheritors of unfulfilled renown." For Rossetti, "Not to know Chatterton is to be ignorant of the *true* day-spring of modern romantic poetry." Keats wrote that "Chatterton . . . is the purest writer in the English Language . . . 'tis genuine English idiom in English words." Chatterton ultimately came to represent to the Romantics and their successors a kind of idealism in the face of the rationalizing materialism of the eighteenth century. Modern scholar Linda Kelly describes Chatterton in *The Marvellous Boy* (1971) as a mythical figure evoking something beyond his achievement, a haunting reminder of the fascination and power of the imagination.

Responses to Literature

1. Consider Chatterton's reputation as an intentional literary imposter and a clever jokester who forged documents. Read his last writings (which you can find at Project Gutenberg and elsewhere on the Net). Consider whether the young man's last will and testament was a brilliant way to escape a dreary job, a hint at the poet's mental instability, or an actual goodbye.
2. In the context of Chatterton's life, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of publishing under someone else's name. What political, social, or psychological factors need to be considered?
3. Evaluate the "authenticity" of the poems Chatterton attributed to Rowley, citing examples from the works. In other words, what about these poems made them compelling enough to fool authors like Horace Walpole?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chatterton's later satiric verse relied more heavily on literary precedent, particularly the examples of Alexander Pope and Charles Churchill, for its study of society's inequity and evil. Here are a few works by authors who also wrote satires about their social sphere:

The Importance of Being Ernest (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. In this comedy of errors, the etiquette of high society is mocked.

Main Street (1920), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. In this work the author makes a commentary on contemporary American values.

The Miser (1668), a play by Molière. In this comical drama, grown children seek to get away from their miserly loan-shark father.

A Modest Proposal (1729), a pamphlet by Jonathan Swift. In this satire the author offers a unique solution to the problem of poverty.

4. If you were to choose a pen name for yourself, what would it be and why? Would it have a hidden message behind it? Would there be a symbolic meaning? Would the name speak to who you are, something you like, something you value?

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Geoffrey Chaucer

BORN: c. 1343, London, England

DIED: 1400, London, England

NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Book of the Duchess (c. 1368–1372)

The Parliament of Fowles (c. 1378–1381)

Troilus and Criseyde (c. 1382–1386)

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1386–1400)

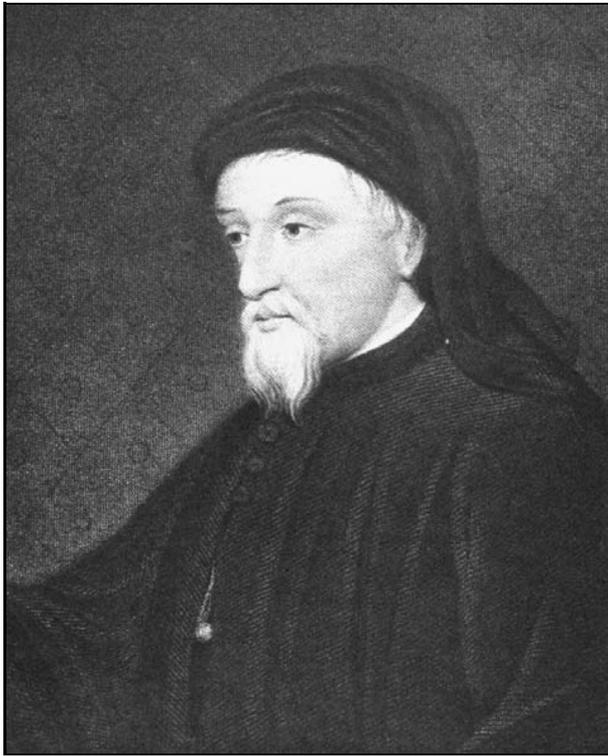
Overview

Widely regarded as the "father of English poetry," Geoffrey Chaucer is considered the foremost representative of Middle English literature. The originality of his language and style, the liveliness of his humor, the civility of his poetic demeanor, and the depth of his knowledge are continually cited as reasons for the permanence of his works. Due to his familiarity with French, English, Italian, and Latin literature, Chaucer was able to combine characteristics of each into a unique body of work that affirmed the rise of English as a literary language.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The son of John and Agnes (de Copton) Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer was born into a family of London-based wine merchants sometime in the early 1340s. He would serve three successive kings—Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV.

Chaucer first appears in household records in 1357 as a page in the service of Elizabeth, the Countess of Ulster and wife of Prince Lionel, the third son of Edward III. By 1359 he served in King Edward's army in France during the early part of the Hundred Years' War, a protracted territorial struggle between England and France that persisted throughout the fourteenth century, but was captured during the unsuccessful siege of Rheims. The king contributed to his ransom the following year, freeing him from the French, and Chaucer must have entered the king's service shortly thereafter.



Geoffrey Chaucer Chaucer, Geoffrey, illustration.

In the Company of John of Gaunt By 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Pan, another courtier who attended the Countess of Ulster. She was the sister of Katharine Swynford, who became mistress and subsequently wife to John of Gaunt, Edward III's fourth son and the primary power behind the throne. John of Gaunt appears to have become Chaucer's patron, because the pair's fortunes rose and fell together for the next three decades. Chaucer traveled to Spain in 1366 on what would be the first of a series of diplomatic missions to the continent over the next decade. In 1368, the death of John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster, occasioned Chaucer's composition of the *Book of the Duchess*, which was circulating by the time he went to France in 1370. Blanche had most likely died of the bubonic plague, a pandemic that started in central Asia and spread to Europe beginning in the 1340s, killing twenty to sixty percent of the population by the end of the century.

In this, his first major work, Chaucer attempts to soothe John of Gaunt's grief. Although most of the lines have parallels in other French court poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* never reads like "translation English," since it converts the insincere language and sentimental courtly romance imagery of the French models into a poignant reality—a beautiful woman is dead, and the Knight mourns her.

Italian Influences Chaucer traveled in Italy in 1372–1373, stopping in Genoa to negotiate a trade agreement and visiting Florence concerning loans for Edward III. He then returned to England and was appointed a customs official for the Port of London, a post he would hold until 1386. Chaucer's career as a civil servant continued to flourish; he visited France and Calais in 1376 and 1378, and Italy again in 1378, and he gained additional customs responsibilities in 1382.

Critics believe that Chaucer next wrote the *House of Fame* and the *Parlement of Foules* (c. 1378–1381). Although the exact sequence of these works is indeterminate, both are thought to comment upon the efforts to arrange a suitable marriage for the young Richard II, John of Gaunt's nephew: the *Parlement* on the unsuccessful efforts to gain the daughter of Charles V of France, and *Fame* on the actual betrothal of Richard with Anne of Bohemia in 1380.

Chaucer's love affair with the Italian language, nurtured by his visits in 1372–1373 to Genoa and Florence and in 1378 to Lombardy, flowered in the following decade with his composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*. By 1385, Chaucer was living in Kent, where he was appointed a justice of the peace. The following year he became a member of Parliament.

A Critique of Church Corruption *The Canterbury Tales*, started sometime around 1386, is considered Chaucer's masterpiece. Organized as a collection of stories told by a group of travelers on pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, *The Canterbury Tales* reflects the diversity of fourteenth-century English life. Notable in the work are thinly veiled, and sometimes not-so-thinly veiled, criticisms of the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The Friar, for example, is a greedy man more concerned with profit than saving souls. The Summoner and the Pardoner are both villainous characters who prey on the genuine religious devotion of common people. Such characters are reflections of the growing concern over the corruption of the church—concerns that would ultimately lead to the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century. The work also reflects the intellectual curiosity that characterized medieval Christianity. The character the Clerk, an impoverished young student from Oxford University, for example, is presented as highly sympathetic.

Bawdy Humor *The Canterbury Tales* is also filled with humor that can be considered bawdy, if not crude, even by modern standards. Some historians have speculated that the seemingly endless war between France and England and the terrible devastation of the bubonic plague prompted many people to seek simple physical enjoyment in life in any way they could, including in drinking, eating, and sex. Discussions of those types of pleasures, and jokes about them, are peppered throughout Chaucer's text. Chaucer originally planned to write more than one hundred stories for his *Tales*, but he died without finishing.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chaucer's famous contemporaries include:

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375): Italian writer and poet, best known for *The Decameron* and for writing in the Italian vernacular.

Petrarch (1304–1374): Italian scholar and poet, famous for his love sonnets.

William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1386): probable author of *Piers Plowman*, an allegorical narrative poem.

Wat Tyler (1341–1381): leader of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 in England, a protest against high taxes and poor conditions for serfs; Tyler was killed by King Richard II's men, and the rebellion was put down.

John Gower (c. 1330–1408): English poet; wrote in French, Latin, and English.

Political Turmoil in England and Later Years

The end of the fourteenth century was full of political turmoil in England. Young King Richard II assumed full control of the government in 1381, but his uncle John of Gaunt remained highly influential. Richard proved an inept ruler. He was eventually deposed in 1399, and John of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, became King Henry IV. Meanwhile Chaucer, buffeted by the constantly changing political winds, held and lost a variety of government posts. In December of 1396, he leased a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey because a house on church grounds granted him sanctuary from his creditors, and lived there for the remainder of his life. Geoffrey Chaucer died on October 25, 1400. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, primarily because his last residence was on the abbey grounds. So important was he deemed as a poet that the space around his tomb was later dubbed the Poets' Corner, and luminaries of English letters were laid to rest around him.

Works in Literary Context

Chaucer is renowned as a pioneer in English language literature primarily because he was one of the first writers of literature in English. Latin had long been the standard language for writing in Europe, although Chaucer had read and appreciated the works of such Italian-language writers as Boccaccio and Petrarch, both of whom influenced his work.

Vernacular Literature: Writing in English In the fourteenth century, England had little literary reputation and English was not considered a "literary" language. English was considered a rough tongue, strictly a spoken language for the common people. Critic Jeffrey Helterman

explains, "It would have been surprising in the fourteenth century for anyone to think of writing in his native tongue, and this was particularly true for Chaucer's role models. The first impulse for a medieval writer who was writing something he wanted remembered was to write it in Latin." Chaucer, however, chose to write his major works in English, perhaps striking a blow for the common man. If Chaucer himself had not erased all doubt as to the power and beauty of the English language, fellow Englishman William Shakespeare would, two hundred years later, with brilliant plays written in blank verse English. Shakespeare followed consciously in the footsteps of Chaucer, and his debt to the earlier writer is widely noted by critics.

The Frame Tale *The Canterbury Tales*, although unfinished, is a brilliant advance on the frame tale as practiced by Boccaccio in *The Decameron*. A framed story is one which one or more stories are set within a situation that is laid out at the beginning: for example, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the narrative frame is the pilgrimage being made by all the characters. The stories told about and by the characters are set within this narrative frame. It should be noted that there is no certainty that Chaucer knew of *The Decameron's* existence. In the days before printing presses, fragments of a manuscript were gathered with no concern for a whole work or even an individual author; Chaucer may have known a tale from *The Decameron* without being aware of the whole book.

In *The Decameron*, the tales of the day hang statically on the pegs of a topic; not even the black plague impacts much on Boccaccio's tale-telling. His tales, clever as they are, remain isolated in the narrative. Not so in Chaucer—each character uses his tale as a weapon or tool to get back at or even with the previous tale teller.

Boccaccio and Chaucer were not the earliest or the only writers to use the frame tale. Plato's *Symposium* (written around 385 B.C.E.) uses an elaborate frame, but it is doubtful Chaucer was familiar with Plato's work (he mentions Plato in some of his writing, but his knowledge of Plato appears to come from secondary sources). Using a narrative frame has remained a popular literary technique by writers as diverse as Mary Shelley (see *Frankenstein*, 1818), Mark Twain (see "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," 1865), and Joseph Conrad (see *Heart of Darkness*, 1899).

Works in Critical Context

Chaucer is generally considered the father of English poetry, and *The Canterbury Tales* has been required reading for countless students over the generations. The influence of his work on generations of English-language writers is undisputed.

The Canterbury Tales Some critics have worried that such wide and shallow exposure of the reading public to Chaucer's work has diluted full appreciation for his complex contribution to literature. Critic Derek Traversi

says, “The appreciation of Geoffrey Chaucer has suffered a good deal in the past from his reputation as the ‘Father of English poetry.’ It has been easy to think of him as a ‘naïf,’ the possessor of a charming simplicity of outlook which tends to convey itself, for a modern reader, through language considered ‘picturesque’ or simply childish, alternately ‘quaint’ or redolent of innocence for readers who think of themselves as more sophisticated and more psychologically complex.” However, this view is not correct, Traversi argues: “His early poems show him engaged in exploring the possibilities of the English language as an instrument for sophisticated literary creation.”

Chaucer’s carefully, economically drawn characters have won praise from multiple readers and critics. As poet William Blake put it, over four hundred years after the book’s first publication: “Of Chaucer’s characters, as described in his *Canterbury Tales*, some of the names are altered by Time, but the Characters themselves for ever remain unaltered and consequently they are the Physiognomies or lineaments of Universal Human Life beyond which Nature never steps.” Phyllis Hodgson agrees: “The confessions of the Reeve, the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner complete a portraiture as elaborate and subtle as could be expected of later fiction.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *World Without End*, by Ken Follett, a novel that takes place in England during the Black Death. Is that a world you wish you could live in? Why or why not? What is the starkest difference between that world and this one? How different are the values?
2. Around 1595, William Shakespeare wrote *Richard II*, which is about the same king who was Chaucer’s patron. In a group, read the play, or parts of it, aloud. Alternatively, watch the BBC’s production of *Richard II* starring Derek Jacobi, with an eye looking out for the politicking of the time. How does the medieval politics portrayed in it compare to today’s political battles? What is essentially the same, and what is the most dramatic difference?
3. Chaucer chose to write in English at a time when educated people wrote in Latin or French. Write a one- or two-paragraph story using either text message abbreviations or the slang of your choice. Do you think writing like that will catch on throughout society? Is there a hierarchical perspective on language usage today? Does any one particular language get more respect than another? Why might that be so?
4. Using the Internet and your library’s resources, research pilgrimages in the Middle Ages and today. Write an essay comparing the ideology behind them, the actual method and style of the pilgrimages, and their purpose. How have pilgrimages changed? How have they stayed the same? In a brief paragraph, imagine you are writing as an anchor person of a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The setting for *The Canterbury Tales* is a pilgrimage, a trip to visit a holy place. Here are some other texts that deal with various pilgrimages.

On Pilgrimage (1998), a nonfiction work by Jennifer Lash. A lapsed Catholic travels to pilgrimage sites in Europe after a battle with cancer.

One Thousand Roads to Mecca (1997), a nonfiction work by Michael Wolfe. A compilation of one thousand years’ worth of pilgrimages to Mecca, told by two dozen Muslims.

Sacred Koyasan (2007), a nonfiction work by Philip L. Nicoloff. The author details a Buddhist’s pilgrimage to an important Japanese religious center.

Travels with My Donkey (2004), a nonfiction work by Tim Moore. Humorous nonfiction account of the author’s attempt to follow the five hundred-mile pilgrimage road to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, with a donkey.

major news program and describing the “typical” pilgrimage that you are watching as it proceeds down the streets where you live.

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Anton Chekhov

BORN: 1860, Taganrog, Russia

DIED: 1904, Badenweiler, Germany

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Cherry Orchard (1904)

Uncle Vanya (1899)

The Three Sisters (1901)

Overview

Celebrated for his innovative methods in prose fiction and drama, Anton Chekhov is known for his ability to combine both tragedy and comedy in works that substitute dialogue for action and ambiguity for moral finality. While his most characteristic works begin with revelations of personal feelings and observations, they ultimately balance emotion with stylistic control. This detached, rational artfulness distinguishes his work from that of his Russian predecessors—namely, from the confessional abandon of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and the psychological fantasies of Nikolai Gogol. Though praised as an early



Anton Chekhov Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

master of the short-story genre, Chekhov also helped initiate a new era in European theater, and his works continue to serve as models for the finest American and European writers of the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Responsibility Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 16, 1860, in Taganrog, a Russian port city. Unlike the majority of well-known Russian writers who preceded him (who were aristocrats), Chekhov was only one generation removed from serfdom, a background that troubled him for many years. Serfs were Russian peasants who, in essence, were like slaves in that their lives were completely controlled by the aristocratic landowners whose fields they worked. Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861. Chekhov's grandfather had bought freedom for his family, and had established himself as the keeper of a shop. According to a collection of letters edited by Simon Karlinsky, Chekhov wrote friend and publisher Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin in January 1889 about the difficulty of “squeeze[ing] the slave’s blood out of himself” in order to attain self-respect and independence not only as a man, but also as an author.

When his grocery store went bankrupt in 1876, Chekhov's father moved to Moscow to escape debtors' prison. The rest of the family soon joined him, with the exception of Anton, who remained until 1879 in Taganrog to complete his secondary education. Chekhov received a scholarship to Moscow University, where he studied medicine and, because his father was incarcerated, began to provide his family with their main source of income. He carried this moral and financial responsibility for the rest of his life.

Humor and Suffering Encouraged by his older brother, Chekhov began submitting short, humorous pieces to popular magazines to earn money. In 1880, his first story was published in *Dragonfly*, a St. Petersburg journal. “A Letter from the Don Landowner Stepan Vladimirovich N. to His Learned Neighbor Dr. Fridrikh” parodies ridiculous pseudoscientific ideas held by the pompous, poorly educated gentry. For the next several years, Chekhov looked to the streets of Moscow for the characters and themes he would then capture in anecdotes, jokes, character sketches, dialogues, and spoofs on authors of romance and adventure for humor magazines in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Chekhov's adoption of material from his own life, a method that he would use throughout his career, offended many of his friends and family.

After graduating in 1884, Chekhov went into medical practice, but because most of his patients lived in poverty, writing became increasingly important to him for financial reasons. From 1883 to 1886, Chekhov wrote more than three hundred pieces for Nikolai Aleksandrovich Leikin,

the publisher of the St. Petersburg journal *Fragments*. Although he and Leikin often had editorial differences, Chekhov was maturing and developing his writing skills, as evidenced by a newfound seriousness in his stories. In fact, many scholars consider Chekhov's time under Leikin as extremely valuable formative years, for it was during this time that Chekhov came to the conclusion that suffering is a part of everyday existence. Unfortunately, Chekhov was to become very familiar with suffering: during this time, he began to exhibit symptoms of the tuberculosis that eventually killed him. Tuberculosis, also historically referred to as consumption, is an infectious and highly contagious disease that often causes bleeding lesions in the lungs, but can also affect most other parts of the body. In Chekhov's time, the disease was one of the greatest health threats in Europe; as late as 1918, one in six deaths in France was caused by tuberculosis. Doctors did not fully understand how the disease was spread until the 1880s, and the disease was not curable until effective antibiotics were developed in 1946.

Serious Writing In 1885, Chekhov moved to St. Petersburg and became friends with A. S. Suvorin, editor of the influential journal *New Times*. Impressed by Chekhov's literary talent, Suvorin encouraged the young writer to expand his gift with words, so Chekhov gave up writing for comic journals and began publishing more worldly stories in the *New Times*. In 1888, Chekhov published his first major literary short story, "The Steppe," in the *Northern Messenger*. In addition to publishing short stories during the 1880s, Chekhov was also writing dramas, beginning with such popular one-act plays, or, as he referred to them, "jokes," as *The Bear* (1888) and *The Wedding Proposal* (1888).

Social Responsibility In 1890, feeling restless and dissatisfied with his life, Chekhov traveled across Siberia to visit a penal colony on Sakhalin Island. Passionate about doing something practical to address the evils of Russian society, he based the book *Sakhalin* (1893), which calls for prison reform, on his observations there. Up to that point, the majority of Chekhov's works had been profoundly influenced by Leo Tolstoy's moral code, which included concepts of Christian love and nonresistance to evil; however, after his time on the island of Sakhalin, Chekhov rejected Tolstoy's ideas on the grounds that they provided an insufficient, unrealistic answer to human suffering. Chekhov was impatient with intellectual groups who only philosophized instead of taking action.

Major Dramas Beginning in 1892, Chekhov worked on *The Sea Gull*, his first major dramatic work, while treating peasants outside of Moscow during a cholera epidemic. When *The Sea Gull* was produced in St. Petersburg in 1896, it was a complete failure, primarily because audiences, directors, and actors alike did not appreciate Chekhov's concept of drama: that plot and action are

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chekhov's famous contemporaries include:

Edith Wharton (1862–1937): Author of the American classics *The House of Mirth* and *Ethan Frome*, Wharton's primary preoccupation was with the conflict between social obligation and individual fulfillment.

Knut Hamsun (1859–1952): This Norwegian writer is best known for *Hunger*, a novel based on his experience as a laborer on the verge of starvation.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): Freud is the father of psychoanalysis, which has had a profound impact on literature and literary theory.

Henry James (1843–1916): Many novels written by James explore the impact of European civilization on American development.

George Santayana (1863–1952): Santayana was a prominent philosopher who believed that reason does not lie in idealistic dreams, but in logical activity based on fact.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924): Wilson was the twenty-eighth president of the United States and oversaw the country's involvement in World War I and the creation of the Federal Reserve system.

secondary to mood and dialogue. In spite of this negative reception, Chekhov soon earned the reputation as the innovator of modern Russian drama, in part because of the formation of the Moscow Art Theatre.

The Moscow Art Theatre staged a new production of *The Sea Gull* in 1898 that proved highly successful. During rehearsals, Chekhov met actress Olga Knipper, whom he later married. He continued to write for the Moscow Art Theatre, which premiered *The Three Sisters* in 1901. Despite complications from tuberculosis and his doctor's advice to rest, Chekhov pushed himself to complete *The Cherry Orchard* and then to attend rehearsals for the play. He suffered a complete collapse in the winter of 1903 and died on July 15, 1904, in a health resort in Badenweiler, Germany.

Works in Literary Context

While his short fiction owes much to such literary greats as Guy de Maupassant, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev, Chekhov's own influence on Western literature has proved vast. Writers from E. M. Forster to Virginia Woolf were inspired by Chekhov's prose style, especially his mastery of mood and setting, and his methods of developing character sketches that highlight the character's faults and human weaknesses. By developing innovative techniques, Chekhov reinvented the short-story genre. For example, he often

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In 1861, Tsar Alexander II emancipated all serfs, initiating a new social order in Russian history. Although only a year old when the serfs were granted their freedom, Chekhov, the grandson of a former serf, explored the issue of class barriers in much of his writing. Listed below are other works in which plots revolve around social classes:

Miss Julie (1888), a drama by August Strindberg. In this naturalistic drama, the love affair between Miss Julie and Jean, her father's valet, demonstrates the often tragic consequences of breaking class barriers.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert.

Flaubert's story investigates how striving for higher social status results in the destruction of Emma Bovary.

A Passage to India (1924), a novel by E. M. Forster. Set in India in the mid-1800s, this work tells the story of two Englishwomen who break social and cultural barriers when they become friends with an Indian man.

ends stories with a “zero ending,” a conclusion born from realism that is anticlimactic. Other stories, however, have surprise endings. Because of Chekhov's originality, readers for over one hundred years have admired his works, particularly for their humanity and authenticity.

Indirect Action Climate, environment, furniture, sound effects, costumes, characters—every element in Chekhov's plays enhances mood and meaning. Such intricacy has made his dramas popular with both audiences and actors and almost impossible to imitate effectively. Chekhov's four major dramas are distinguished principally for their technique of “indirect action,” a method in which violent or intensely dramatic events take place offstage. Therefore, the main action consists of conversations alluding to the unseen moments in the characters' lives. In this way, Chekhov more precisely conveys the effects of crucial events on a character's personality. The first drama written in this manner was *The Sea Gull*, which was a complete failure when it debuted in St. Petersburg. Nonetheless, it was produced successfully in Moscow two years later under the direction of Constantin Stanislavsky, who contributed to the play's artistic success with a subtle interweaving of theme and character. As a result, action is reduced to a minimum, thereby allowing nuances of pacing and mood to become paramount to the full realization of dramatic tension.

Works in Critical Context

In comparison with works of other great Russian authors, Chekhov's writings often depict situations of boredom, hardship, and suffering. *Uncle Vanya*, for example,

focuses on the influence of economic and social conditions on everyday life and people's inability to change. Chekhov portrays the ordinariness of life, bringing to the stage a realism that avoids the epic scale of traditional drama, yet also demonstrates previously unrealized possibilities for the stage. In an essay in *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage*, Francis Fergusson writes, “If Chekhov drastically reduced the dramatic art, he did so in full consciousness, and in obedience both to artistic scruples and to a strict sense of reality. He reduced the dramatic art to its ancient root, from which new growths are possible.”

Art of Melancholy Emphasizing the darker aspects of Chekhov's work, some critics believe his art is one of melancholy. Oftentimes, for instance, the mood and meaning of Chekhov's drama hover between the tragic and comic, imparting the idea that life is futile and absurd. Viewing Chekhov as a total pessimist, though, has often been met with opposition, especially from those critics who approach his work from a historical perspective, seeing him as a writer who has chronicled the degeneration of the land-owning classes during an era of imminent revolution. Scholars have long tried to determine the degree to which the somber spirit of Chekhov's stories and plays reflects his personal philosophy; however, Chekhov's importance in world literature is not so much a result of his philosophical worldview as of the artistry that transformed literary standards for the genres of fiction and drama.

The Cherry Orchard Since its first production, controversy has surrounded the interpretation of Chekhov's last play, *The Cherry Orchard*, which he subtitled “A Comedy,” intending for it to be viewed as such. Often perceived as a nostalgic parable about the dissolution of an older class in Russian history, this work displays one of Chekhov's most important themes: the triumph of ignorance and vulgarity over elegance and nobility. Referring to what he called Chekhov's “tragic humor,” Maksim Gorky comments, “One has only to read his ‘humorous’ stories with attention to see what a lot of cruel and disgusting things, behind the humorous words and situations, had been observed by the author with sorrow and were concealed by him.” Despite the bleakness of the characters' situations, some critics recognize the inescapable humor of the play. For example, in a piece included in *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays* Dorothy Sayers writes that “the whole tragedy of futility is that it never succeeds in achieving tragedy. In its blackest moments it is inevitably doomed to the comic gesture.”

Responses to Literature

1. Research the Russian class system that evolved after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. How do the new social classes relate to the characters in *The Cherry Orchard*?
2. Explore the rise of the Moscow Art Theatre and its importance to Chekhov. Also, investigate the

influence of its director, Constantin Stanislavsky, on the school of method acting that was taught by Sanford Meisner and Lee Strasberg in America and popularized by such actors as Robert De Niro, Jane Fonda, and Dennis Hopper.

3. Chekhov intended for *The Cherry Orchard* to be a comedy. Nevertheless, when it was produced at the Moscow Art Theater, it was presented as a tragedy. Chekhov was so frustrated by the failure of the director and critics to view the play as a comedy that he burned all but one copy of the manuscript. After evaluating *The Cherry Orchard*, write a review of the play in which you explain whether you agree with Chekhov or the director as to the kind of play it is. Include a paragraph in your review discussing why you believe Chekhov reacted so extremely to the play's depiction as a tragedy.
4. Chekhov said that the city of Perm was a model for the type of provincial city that provides the setting for *The Three Sisters*. Research what daily life would have been like in a provincial Russian town at the turn of the century, and then compare it with what life in Moscow would have been like at the same time. Where would you have preferred to live? Why?

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G. K. Chesterton

BORN: 1874, London, England

DIED: 1936, Buckinghamshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Wild Knight and Other Poems (1900)

The Man Who Was Thursday (1908)

Orthodoxy (1909)

The Innocence of Father Brown (1911)

Overview

Regarded as one of England's premier men of letters during the first third of the twentieth century, Chesterton is best known today as a colorful character who created the Father Brown mysteries and the fantasy novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*. His witty essays have also provided delight and inspiration to generations of readers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Joyous Childhood in Kensington Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born in the London borough of Kensington to Edward Chesterton, who owned a real estate business, and Marie Louise Grosjean Chesterton. The religious atmosphere of his middle-class family was more liberal and Unitarian than Anglican, and religion seems to have played no important part in his early life. At the same time, Chesterton's childhood was a time of intense happiness, and he always claimed that this happiness provided him with an essential religious insight into the meaning of adult life.

His early schooling and his years at St. Paul's School (1887–1892) seem to have been in general a continuation of the undisturbed happiness of childhood. He was not regarded as a good student, but he made friends at school and did a good deal of writing for a school paper called the *Debater*, the journal of a debating club he had organized. But his real talent was believed to be his ability to draw. Consequently, instead of following the rest of his friends to university, he went to a drawing school, first at St. John's Wood and then in 1893 to the Slade School of Art.

From Pictures to Letters: A London Career When he left the Slade School in 1895, Chesterton worked as a publisher's reader for two different companies and contributed an occasional poem, article, or art criticism to journals such as the *Clarion*, the *Speaker*, and the *Academy*.

Chesterton was first noticed in 1899 for his contributions to the *Speaker*, a radical liberal magazine. By early 1901 Chesterton was also established as a regular Saturday columnist for another liberal journal, the *Daily News*, where his weekly article quickly became a feature of Edwardian journalism. The enormously popular "Notebook" articles in the *Illustrated London News* began to appear soon afterward and continued almost without interruption from September of 1905 until his death in June of 1936. At the same time, he began to produce biographies, novels, and books of literary and theological criticism that consolidated his reputation as a literary journalist and religious teacher.



G. K. Chesterton Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Christianity and Chesterton's World of Fiction

The best known works of this time were his 1908 fantasy novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and the very popular series of short stories involving a ministerial sleuth, the "Father Brown" mysteries, first introduced in 1910. Both were reflections of Chesterton's own experiences with religion and spirituality. In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a man secretly working for Scotland Yard infiltrates a group of anarchist masterminds in an effort to destroy the organization. Though the book is superficially about anarchists—those who reject laws and governments in favor of complete free will—the book relies heavily on Christian symbolism and imagery. This same preoccupation with Christianity is found in Chesterton's most famous character, Father Brown. The clever priest who uses his reasoning and intuition to solve crimes was based on an actual priest Chesterton knew named Father John O'Connor. O'Connor ultimately convinced Chesterton to convert to Catholicism in 1922.

Witnessing and Politics Although he met his friend and colleague Hilaire Belloc in 1900 and was married to Francis Blogg in 1901, the years immediately prior to

World War I were a time of political crisis and personal strain for Chesterton. In 1913 his brother Cecil was convicted of the criminal libel of Godfrey Isaacs in connection with a press campaign waged by the *New Witness* magazine against various politicians and stockbrokers involved in the Marconi insider trading scandal. As Maisie Ward points out in her biography of Chesterton, the case became almost an obsession with him for the rest of his life. His disillusionment with official English political life was now complete, and the tone of his political writing became increasingly bitter and acrimonious.

A good example of this is "A Song of Strange Drinks" (1913), which first appeared in the *New Witness*. Although this poem is usually read as an example of pure nonsense verse, in fact it is sharply satirical, and its publication led to Chesterton's dismissal from the *Daily News*.

A Decline in Health and England's March Toward War

The bitterness of these years also affected Chesterton in other ways. His health began to deteriorate rapidly. Many events contributed to this breakdown. He became more and more alarmed at events in Ireland, where a situation close to civil war

had been developing. In 1913 he began writing a series of articles for the *Daily Herald*, which are among the most violent articles he ever wrote. The outbreak of war in August added even more serious worries. By late autumn of 1914, under the double burden of anxiety and overwork, his health began to fail. The last of the *Daily Herald* articles appeared in September of 1914, and by November he was critically ill. The collapse of his health was both physical and mental. By the end of November he had fallen into a coma, which seems to have been caused by some form of kidney and heart trouble. He did not begin to recover until Easter of 1915.

Chesterton's return to health was very gradual. His illness marks a great division in his life as a writer and an even greater division in his life as a poet. From 1915 onward, he devoted himself more and more to a different kind of journalism that left him little time for imaginative writing. Almost as soon as Chesterton fully recovered from his illness in 1916, his brother Cecil joined the army. In his absence, Chesterton took over the editorship of the *New Witness*, and he continued to edit this magazine and others until his death in 1936.

Although he did not participate directly in World War I himself, Chesterton bore witness to a generation of young men returning from mainland Europe spiritually and physically broken. His own life ended suddenly on June 14, 1936. He had again gradually fallen ill during the preceding years, even though there had been few signs of any slackening of his literary activity during that period.

Works in Literary Context

As a literary journalist, Chesterton was very much in the tradition of the Victorian sage. He was at once a teacher and a literary artist. He sought to change society through his teaching, using symbol, parable, and religious allegory as the most effective way of doing so. Chesterton's verse, therefore, must be read as part of the vast journalistic effort whereby he sought to influence the thinking and the feeling of his age. At the same time, it is important to understand the special character of this influence.

A Spiritual Literary Figure Like his close friends George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, he preferred the role of teacher and prophet to that of literary man, but unlike them his vision of life was fundamentally Christian and even mystical, and the influence he sought to exercise through his writings was directed toward a social change that would be thoroughly religious. In this sense, he may be more aptly compared to the tradition of spiritually oriented literary journalism later represented by C. S. Lewis. Hence, the themes of many of his most characteristic poems are religious; likewise, his religious verse also has a strongly political tone.

In his poetry, as in his other writings, Chesterton saw himself as a spokesman for the poor and the exploited, whom he regarded as the mystical symbols of God's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chesterton's famous contemporaries include:

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Irish playwright who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925 and is best known for his wit and social satire.

Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953): This English poet was a good friend and collaborator of Chesterton's.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965): Schweitzer, a French theologian and Nobel Peace Prize winner, put his "Reverence for Life" philosophy to work by building a hospital in Gabon, Africa.

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Drawing heavily on the work of Sigmund Freud and of anthropologists looking at social symbol systems and mythologies, this Swiss psychiatrist was the founder of analytical psychology.

Clarence Darrow (1857–1938): An American lawyer and civil rights advocate best known for his work with unions and his defense of Tennessee teacher John Scopes at the famous Scopes "Monkey" trial of 1925, in which Scopes was brought up on charges for teaching the theory of evolution in his classroom.

presence in the world. The purpose of his verse and of all his writings was to help create a society that would have a deep religious respect for ordinary people.

Distributism A centerpiece of this purpose was the social philosophy that Chesterton called *Distributism*. Economically, distributism meant a property-owning democracy in which private property would be divided into the smallest possible units. Socially, distributism aimed at creating a feeling of community and neighborliness among ordinary people, in contrast to the feeling of alienation created by huge impersonal systems such as state socialism and monopoly capitalism (to be succeeded by modern corporate capitalism). Such systems, in Chesterton's view, treated ordinary people as interchangeable units. Chesterton's perspective on such matters anticipated the sort of Catholic socialism that would become particularly prevalent in Latin America over the course of the twentieth century.

Irreverent Paradox Chesterton is recognized as a master of the irreverent paradox, and a recognition of this is crucial to understanding his work. Through paradox, the seemingly self-evident is turned upside down, causing readers to view their initial beliefs in a different light. The shedding of a different light was part of Chesterton's purpose, and the irreverent or humble paradox was, he said, his "chief idea of life." His essay "A Defense of Nonsense" perhaps best summarizes his views on this

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Chesterton's defining characteristics was his use of paradox to illustrate his point. Here are a few other works that use irreverent, sometimes even silly paradoxes to communicate and explore important points about life.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), a play by Sir Oscar Wilde. Rhetorical and situational paradoxes abound in this drawing-room comedy by the great Irish wit.

"The Library of Babel," (1941), a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. In this fantastical story, a library contains every possible variation of a single 410-page book. In the same vein, Borges writes elsewhere about a map so large that it covers precisely, in 1:1 detail, everything it attempts to represent, so that it lays like a gigantic carpet over the land.

Gargantua (1534), a novel by Francois Rabelais. This novel by French writer Rabelais satirizes monasteries as places of leisure rather than spirituality.

method: "Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook." In this, Chesterton finds himself in the very good company of philosophers ranging from Erasmus to Søren Kierkegaard.

Works in Critical Context

Despite Chesterton's lasting popularity, critics generally agree that between his wide spectrum of subjects, his self-proclaimed role as a "mere journalist," and his tendency toward irreverence, Chesterton is a "master who left no masterpiece."

Something of a Poet, but Perhaps Not Much W. H. Auden argued that Chesterton was by natural gift a comic poet and that none of his serious poems is as good as his comic verse. "I cannot think of a single comic poem by Chesterton," Auden wrote, "that is not a triumphant success." Auden particularly praised *Greybeards at Play*, writing, "I have no hesitation in saying that it contains some of the best pure nonsense verse in English, and the author's illustrations are equally good."

Auden notwithstanding, Chesterton's reputation as a poet, which never rose particularly high during his lifetime, declined still further after his death. The conventional view of him as a poet has been that he wrote a few exquisite lyrics; helped popularize, through his satirical ballads, an effective kind of comic verse; and in his most

important narrative poem, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, wrote an imperfect but partly successful English epic poem. The revival of critical interest in Chesterton during recent years has also made it possible to view his verse in a new light, revealing the close connection between his poetry and his everyday journalism.

The Father Brown Mysteries Father Brown remains, in the minds of most readers, Chesterton's greatest creation, although his other contributions to the art of mystery writing are also recognized. "If Chesterton had not created Father Brown," scholar Thomas Leitch declares, "his detective fiction would rarely be read today, but his place in the historical development of the genre would still be secure." "Long before he published his last Father Brown stories," Leitch continues, "Chesterton was widely regarded as the father of the modern English detective story. When Anthony Berkeley founded the Detection Club in 1928, it was Chesterton, not [Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur] Conan Doyle, who became its first president and served in this capacity until his death." In addition, Leitch asserts, Chesterton "was the first habitual writer of detective stories . . . to insist on the conceptual unity of the form, a criterion he expounded at length in several essays on the subject."

Under the influence of Chesterton's Father Brown, the mystery story became less a portrait of the detective's personality, and more a puzzle that the detective and the reader could both solve. "Chesterton's determination to provide his audience with all the clues available to his detectives," observes Leitch, "has been so widely imitated as to become the defining characteristic of the formal or golden age period (roughly 1920–1940) in detective fiction. . . . Modern readers, for whom the term *whodunit* has become synonymous with detective story, forget that the concealment of the criminal's identity as the central mystery of the story is a relatively modern convention." Chesterton was, however, much more than "merely" a mystery writer. As American Chesterton Society president Dale Ahlquist notes, "Chesterton wrote about everything."

Responses to Literature

1. Much of Chesterton's work was either implicitly or explicitly political. "A Song of Strange Drinks" is one example of personal politics inspiring what appears to be a work of silliness. Examine any of his light verse for political statement. Do you think the underlying messages in Chesterton's light verse diminish or strengthen its importance as poetry? Why?
2. Chesterton has been called "the master who left no masterpiece." Does the lack of a "masterpiece" detract from his stature as a writer? Should it? Why or why not?

- Chesterton often employed the literary device of paradox in his work. What is paradox and how is it used in Chesterton's work?
- The Father Brown character is Chesterton's most beloved creation. In what ways is he similar to and different from his near contemporary, Sherlock Holmes?

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☒ T'ao Ch'ien

BORN: 365, *China*

DIED: 427, *China*

NATIONALITY: *Chinese*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Poetic Works (1883)

T'ao the Hermit: Sixty Poems (1952)

Works (1956)

Overview

Also known as Qian Tao or Ch'ien T'ao, T'ao Yüan-ming T'ao Ch'ien was one of China's foremost poets in the five-word *shih* style. He was not recognized as a major poet until the T'ang dynasty (618–907). By the Song times (960–1279), however, his status as one of China's greatest lyrical poets had become generally recognized, and his poetry has never ceased to fascinate the Chinese since.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ch'ien's famous contemporaries include:

Alaric (370–410): King of the Visigoths who sacked Rome in 410.

Theodosius I (347–395): The last emperor of both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, he made Christianity the official state religion.

Attila the Hun (406–453): Infamous leader of the Hun horde and enemy of the late Roman Empire.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Secluded Life T'ao Ch'ien lived during the Eastern Chin and Liu Sung dynasties of the fourth and fifth centuries. He was born in Ch'ai-sang in present-day Kiangsi Province, the great-grandson of T'ao K'an, a famed Chin general. Both his grandfather and father had served as prefects, but by T'ao Ch'ien's time the family must have become poorer, and despite his preference for a life of seclusion, he held at least four different posts during some dozen years (393–405) in order to support his family.

T'ao did not serve very long, however, in his last post as magistrate of P'eng-tse. According to a famous anecdote recorded in his official biographies, he resigned when summoned to appear before a superior so that he did not have to bow in obeisance for the sake of a meager salary. Upon returning home afterward, he wrote a sequence of five-word poems as well as a long poem titled "On Returning Home" in celebration of his liberation from the shackles of official life. He was then only forty years old. Subsequently, many eminent men sought him out for an official appointment, but he declined. He apparently enjoyed the remainder of his life as a gentleman farmer, reading his favorite books at leisure, exchanging visits with his neighbors, and observing the lack of promise of his several sons.

Like much of Chinese lyricism, T'ao's poetry is an expression of personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is thus important to remember that he was also an ardent visionary forced by political and social ills to choose a hermit's life for his last twenty years. Virtually isolated in the political and artistic ethos of the day, T'ao was largely left in oblivion for three centuries after his death before being recognized by the poets of the High T'ang period, and it was another three centuries before he was fully appreciated by the Song era writers. It was at this point that the Chinese lyric vision of nature came to maturity.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though T'ao Ch'ien was certainly cerebral, he also celebrated pastoral, humble ideas. He was impressed by the fields and blossoms and by farmers and their flocks. Here are some other works that consider the value of the simple, natural life:

Idylls (third century BCE), a poetry collection by Theocritus.

Probably the first collection of pastoral poetry, this book centers around the mythical Greek gods who are, in this instance at least, very down to earth.

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1590s), a poem by Christopher Marlowe. This poem begins with the famous line "Come live with me and be my love."

As You Like It (1599–1600), a play by William Shakespeare. Set in the forest of Arden, this comedic play involves love, disguises, and intrigue.

Lycidas (1638), a poem by John Milton. Herdsmen, pipes, and sheep populate this poem, an elegy written for the poet's friend.

Works in Literary Context

Taoism and Confucianism T'ao Ch'ien is often described as a Taoist nature poet with a fondness for wine and chrysanthemums. Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy that sees the universe as a whole and stresses the connection between humans and nature. He is also, however, a meditative poet. He represents the culmination of the five-word poetry of the Han dynasty and its obsession with life's meaning. Additionally, his poetry is infused with a strong attraction to the teaching of Confucius, another Chinese philosophical system based on the teaching of Confucius (551–479 B.C.E., a philosopher who stressed the importance of right action and self-control.

A Contented Solitude The view of T'ao Ch'ien as a Taoist recluse is supported by some of his most celebrated works. In a brief autobiography, he styles himself "Mr. Five Willows" and speaks of his contentment with poverty, his fondness for wine, and his joy in reading, though he makes no attempt to probe the deeper meanings of books. His prose description of the Peach Fount Colony living in happy oblivion of the outside world has been celebrated since his time as the Taoist vision of a simple, good life unrealizable on earth.

The Pastoral Life Many of T'ao Ch'ien's earlier poems show an appreciation of the freedom and vulnerability of rural existence—from the delights of work and familial contentment to material privation and plaintive reflection. They feature not rustic or aesthetic shepherds but real farmers worried about their crops. Tao's farm-

stead poetry is marked by plain, lucid language and a simple, direct voice. These poems have as their objects hills, birds, fish, pines, and chrysanthemums.

Works in Critical Context

The simplicity and seemingly effortless ease of T'ao's poetry are artistic attributes reflective of his own nature and determined by his ideals. Poetry, for T'ao, became witness and companion to his life, the sustaining mainstay of his idealism, and the fortifying inspiration that enabled him at times to attain a spiritual transcendence.

Farmstead Poetry T'ao is best known for his "farmstead poetry" (*tianyuan shi*), which has often been called "pastoral." Certainly some of his poems—especially those from the earlier years after his permanent withdrawal from society, such as "Return Home"—sing of the peacefulness of country dwelling, the harmony of domestic life, and of a return to nature that is also a return to the natural Way (Tao) and original human nature. Vibrant with a conversational vitality and immediacy, his "farmer's words" blend life and art into a presentation lacking embellishment. The concerns of his livelihood—concerns that constitute what, until then, was assumed to be "unfitting" content for verse—and the "inelegant" language of such concerns, which infuses his style, mark the literary and cultural originality of a poetry that records heartfelt experience.

Responses to Literature

1. Compare T'ao Ch'ien's earlier poetry to his later works. What changes do you notice, both in content and style? What do you think accounts for these changes?
2. Look up what *pastoral* means and determine if T'ao Ch'ien's works should be placed in this category.
3. Research the history of Chinese dynasties and identify the cultural characteristics of each. Why do you think T'ao Ch'ien's poetry was ignored until the T'ang dynasty?
4. T'ao Ch'ien's "Peach Blossom Spring" has often been described as the poet's version of a utopia. Can you find other descriptions of utopia in more recent works of art? Do visions of perfection seem to change over time?

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▣ Agatha Christie

BORN: 1890, *Torquay, England*

DIED: 1976, *Wallingford, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Fiction, Drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926)

Murder on the Orient Express (1934)

The Mousetrap (1952)

Witness for the Prosecution (1953)

Overview

Agatha Christie is the most commercially successful woman writer of all time and probably the most widely read author of the twentieth century. A master of the murder mystery, her dozens of novels, stories, and plays have been translated into more than one hundred languages and have sold a phenomenal two billion copies—a record topped only by the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare. Her drama *The Mousetrap* opened on the London stage in 1952 and has yet to close; it is the longest-running play in theater history. Her ingenious plots, usually involving a mysterious



Agatha Christie Christie, Agatha, photograph. The Library of Congress.

death among a group of upper-middle-class British characters, invariably stumped crime buffs and largely defined the popular genre of the whodunit.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Christie was born by the name of Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller on September 13, 1890, in the English seaside resort of Torquay, in Devon. She was the youngest of three children of Frederick Alvah Miller, an American from New York, and Clarissa Boehmer Miller. Her father died when she was a child, and until she was sixteen she was educated at home by her mother. She became an avid reader as a child, enjoying mysteries and often improvising them with her sister, Madge. She attended finishing school in Paris and initially considered a musical career.

Begins Career on a Dare In 1912, Agatha Miller became engaged to Archibald Christie, a colonel in the Royal Air Corps; they were married on Christmas Eve, 1914. The couple was separated for most of the war years. Agatha Christie continued to live at Ashfield, her family's Victorian villa in Torquay. She volunteered as a nurse and worked as a pharmaceutical dispenser in local hospitals. Her knowledge of poisons, evident in many of her mysteries, developed through these experiences. After the war, her husband went into business in London, while Christie remained at home with their daughter, Rosalind, born in 1919.

Christie wrote her first novel after her sister challenged her to try her hand at writing a mystery story. The result, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published in 1920. Like many of her subsequent classics, it features the detective Hercule Poirot, a former member of the Belgian police force. Although this maiden effort only sold some two thousand copies, the publication encouraged her to continue writing mysteries. Throughout the 1920s she wrote them steadily, building a loyal following among mystery aficionados for her unfailingly clever plots.

With her eighth book, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Christie gained notoriety, and her deceptive plotting caught the attention of the general reading public. The sheer audacity of the novel's resolution—in which the murderer is ultimately revealed to be the narrator of the story, a character traditionally above suspicion in mystery novels—prompted a heated debate among mystery devotees. Christie's violation of the crime genre's conventions outraged some readers, but delighted many more. From that point, her reputation was established. For the next half-century, she was rarely absent from the best-seller lists.

Divorce and Remarriage Christie's personal life had become troubled, however. Shortly after her mother's death, her husband asked for a divorce so that he could marry another woman. These emotional blows brought on a nervous breakdown. In December 1926 she disappeared for ten days, attracting great publicity. After this incident, Christie shunned the public eye for the rest of her life. Her divorce was finalized in 1928.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Christie's famous contemporaries include:

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): British novelist and essayist, author of *To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One's Own*.

Raymond Chandler (1888–1959): American crime novelist, creator of the private detective Philip Marlowe.

James N. Cain (1892–1977): American novelist, master of "hard-boiled" detective fiction; author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957): British novelist and dramatist, creator of the amateur detective Lord Peter Wimsey.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Popular British filmmaker and producer, the "master of suspense."

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904–1972): Irish poet, author of mystery novels under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake.

Two years after her divorce, however, while traveling on the Orient Express to see the excavations at Ur in Turkey, she met archaeologist Max Mallowan, whom she married the same year. During the 1930s, the couple divided their time between their several homes in England and many archaeological expeditions in the Middle East. Christie acted as her husband's assistant on these digs, but she never stopped writing during her travels. This period provided Christie with experience of other cultures and a valuable distance from her own British one. She set several of her best-known works, including *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937), in exotic locales. Many of her other novels and plays are set in the British countryside, where corruption and crime lurk beneath the placid surface of middle-class life.

Poirot and Miss Marple Christie was most famous for the literary creation of Hercule Poirot, one of detective fiction's most famous sleuths. In his black jacket, striped trousers, and bow tie, the diminutive Belgian appeared in thirty-three novels and more than fifty short stories. Poirot regularly referred to the "little grey cells" of his brain; he relied primarily on reason in solving crimes, shunning the more physical and laborious tactics of A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and other investigators. Christie grew distinctly sour on the pompous Poirot over the years—an occupational hazard for authors in the detective genre—yet she continued to crank out Poirot mysteries to meet the demands of her readers. She did, however, eliminate him from the stage versions of several of her stories, believing that Poirot was a more effective character in print.

In the novel *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Christie introduced her other well-known detective: Miss Jane Marple, a genteel, elderly spinster who resides in a

rural English village. Miss Marple is in many ways the antithesis of Poirot. Miss Marple works largely by intuition to solve crimes, often finding clues in village gossip. One of her most effective traits is her shrewd skepticism, which prevents her from taking anyone she meets at face value.

World War II brought about a major change in Christie's life. Her husband served as an intelligence liaison officer in North Africa while Christie remained in London, working again as a volunteer dispenser. In her off hours, she was busy writing.

During the war years, Christie published ten novels and adapted two of her earlier works for the theater. Two of her wartime manuscripts were not published until decades later; these were the final Poirot and Miss Marple mysteries. Their author secreted them in a vault, to be published after her death.

Stage Triumphs Christie's work for the theater has proved as enduringly popular as her fiction and as full of cleverly constructed plots and surprise endings. Most of her plays are adaptations of her own stories or novels. One such work, originally titled *Ten Little Niggers* and subsequently retitled *Ten Little Indians* (1943), uses a children's nursery rhyme to build suspense. Ten strangers assemble for a holiday on a small island, where, one by one, they are murdered. The combination of terror and orderly predictability creates a memorable theatrical mechanism.

The success of her early plays pales before the phenomenon of *The Mousetrap* (1952), which is now in its sixth decade of uninterrupted performances on the London stage. Despite the success of the work, Christie received no royalties for it. She gave the rights to her nine-year-old grandson when the play first opened; the grandson, it is estimated, has since earned well over fifteen million pounds Sterling from his grandmother's gift. The year after *The Mousetrap* opened, Christie scored another smash with *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953).

Christie's powers gradually declined in the decades after World War II, but she retained her towering popularity and reputation as the "Queen of Crime." In 1971, she was made a Dame of the British Empire. Her last formal appearance was in 1974, at the opening of the film version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. As her health failed, her publishers persuaded her to release the final Poirot and Marple mysteries. *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1975) takes the detective back to Styles Court, the location of Christie's first mystery. Poirot's pursuit of an elusive killer leads to his inadvertent suicide. The death of Poirot caused a sensation, making the papers even in the People's Republic of China, and spurring the *New York Times* to publish, for the first time, an obituary for a fictional character. Christie herself died the following year.

Works in Literary Context

Agatha Christie enjoyed a wide selection of literature in her youth. The novelist Eden Philpotts, a neighbor,

visited frequently and became a mentor to the home-schooled child. The Sherlock Holmes mysteries by A. Conan Doyle were a mainstay of her teenage years. Christie followed Doyle's formula to some extent early on; for example, in her first mysteries, she gave Poirot a Watson-like sidekick, Captain Hastings. Other literary influences upon Christie were Edgar Allan Poe, G. K. Chesterton (who wrote the Father Brown detective stories), and the American detective novelist Anna Katherine Green.

Mystery Puzzles Gamesmanship and subtle deception were the secrets of Christie's success. The best of her novels are intricate puzzles, presented in such a way as to misdirect the reader's attention away from the most important clues. The solution of the puzzle is invariably startling, although entirely logical and consistent with the rest of the story. Like a magician's sleight of hand, a Christie mystery dispenses red herrings, ambiguities, shadings, and other subterfuges that keep the attentive reader baffled, until the story culminates in a satisfying surprise. In works such as *Ten Little Indians* and *The A. B. C. Murders* (1936), Christie uses nursery rhymes and other children's games, uncovering their more sinister implications.

Straightforward Style As befits this most commercial of novelists, her writing style was supremely unpretentious. She told stories in a straightforward manner, rarely injecting any thoughts or feelings of her own. She usually sketched her characters with the lightest of touches so that readers from any country could flesh them out to fit their own backgrounds. Her novels are frequently set in the English countryside, and usually focus on a group of upper-middle-class British characters and the detective who reveals the perpetrator at a final gathering of the suspects. One common theme that emerges from this genre formula is a concern with appearances, such as the respectable facade of parochial life, and the corruption and criminality that surface appearances conceal.

The Detective Another important factor in Christie's popularity is surely her ability to create charming and enduring detective characters. Both of her primary sleuths, Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple, gain reader sympathy from the way they are underestimated by other characters. Poirot, with his small stature, Belgian background, and amusing pomposity, arouses derision and, occasionally, ethnic prejudice. Similarly, Christie plays on Miss Marple's eccentricities, in addition to her age and gender, to manipulate the reader into trivializing her capabilities. When the detective defies expectations and solves the crime, the resolution is that much more delicious.

Works in Critical Context

Agatha Christie began writing at the start of what became known as the golden age of the detective story, when mysteries were attaining worldwide popularity. As she continued to turn out books, her name became in the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Agatha Christie was one of the most prominent practitioners of a very popular literary genre, the murder mystery. Below are some of the more memorable titles, and heroes, of the whodunit.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), by Edgar Allan Poe. Often considered the first detective story, Poe's "tale of ratiocination" established some of the conventions of crime fiction.

The Maltese Falcon (1930), by Dashiell Hammett. A detective novel with a dizzying plot, made into a classic motion picture starring Humphrey Bogart as the morally ambiguous private eye Sam Spade.

Maigret at the Crossroads (1931), by Georges Simenon. Maigret, the pipe-smoking inspector, is the protagonist of seventy-five novels and one of the best-known characters in popular French literature.

L.A. Confidential (1990), by James Ellroy. Three Los Angeles police officers, investigating the same homicide case, slowly uncover their own precinct's connections to organized crime, in this suspense novel made into a celebrated film.

A Ticket to the Boneyard (1991), by Lawrence Sanders. The hero of this detective story, private investigator Matt Scudder, struggles with alcoholism while tracking down a psychotic criminal released from prison.

public mind almost a shorthand expression for the genre as a whole. Her bankability made her a literary institution long before the end of her extended career; the success of her brand with the reading and theater-going public made critical appraisal of her work largely moot.

The Ackroyd Controversy Christie first drew critical attention with *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which created a sensation upon its publication in 1926. Christie's choice to make the novel's narrator the murderer inspired vitriolic criticism from some reviewers—the *London News Chronicle* called it a "tasteless and unforgivable let-down by a writer we had grown to admire." Other critics heaped extravagant praise on Christie for pulling off this narrative coup. British mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, a rival of Christie's, defended her in the controversy. *Roger Ackroyd* certainly helped establish Christie's name among the reading public, and in retrospect, it is considered one of her finest works. The prominent literary critic Edmund Wilson later attacked the genre as a whole with his controversial 1945 article in the *New Yorker*, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Apparently, many people did.

Such books as *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The A. B. C. Murders*, and *Ten Little Indians* have been

especially singled out by critics as among Christie's best work and indeed, among the finest examples of the mystery genre. The literature available on Christie's life and work is extensive, from armchair companions on her fictional characters, through numerous biographies and autobiographies, to more recent academic studies. Christie's body of work has been of particular interest to contemporary feminist theorists. Although her work is lacking in overt social commentary, her challenges to traditional constructions of class, race, gender, and age have led to a reconsideration of her popularity. Some detractors of her work point to her workmanlike style, the formulaic structure of her novels, and the stereotyped nature of some of her characters. There can be no doubt, however, that her ingenious and intricate narrative puzzles have brought enjoyment to millions of readers.

Responses to Literature

1. There have been many great detectives throughout literary times, yet Poirot stands out as being unique. How so? What features illustrate his uniqueness? How is he different from, say, Sherlock Holmes? What makes each of them classics in their own right?
2. Write a character study of Miss Marple. How does she meet, and/or subvert, conventional expectations of the detective hero?
3. Closely analyze the mechanics of plotting in one of Agatha Christie's novels. What techniques does she use to mislead the reader?
4. What insights into the class structure of British society can you gain from reading Agatha Christie?

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Winston Churchill

BORN: 1874, Oxfordshire, England

DIED: 1965, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Lord Randolph Churchill (1906)

The World Crisis (1923–1931)

Marlborough: His Life and Times (1933–1938)

The Second World War (1948–1953)

A History of the English-Speaking Peoples
(1956–1958)



Sir Winston Churchill Churchill, Winston, photograph.

Overview

Winston Churchill is best remembered as Britain's prime minister during World War II. He was also one of the century's outstanding historians, and received the Nobel Prize for Literature. In several multivolume works, including monumental histories of the two world wars, he revealed his vast knowledge of British history and intimate understanding of European political and military affairs.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Privilege Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire—the home of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough—on November 30, 1874. His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was a prominent parliamentarian, while his mother, born Jennie Jerome, was the daughter of an American millionaire.

Soldier and War Correspondent As a boy, Churchill was an undistinguished student with a speech impediment. Lord Randolph decided his son was destined for a military career. On his third attempt, Churchill passed the admission exam and entered the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, where he graduated with honors in 1894. He was then appointed to the Fourth (Queen's Own) Hussars as a sub-lieutenant.

Assigned to observe Spanish forces trying to contain a revolt in Cuba in 1895, he supplemented his military income by writing dispatches from the battle. Cuba was then a Spanish territory but had been fighting for independence for several decades. Cubans also resented the harsh policies Spain had put in place. The ongoing hostilities eventually resulted in the Spanish-American War of 1898, which won Cuba its freedom from Spain.

Churchill then participated in, and reported on, military campaigns in India and the Sudan. In India, then still a colony of Great Britain, Churchill was part of Sir Bindon Blood's punitive expedition to deal with the siege of a British garrison in the Malakand region by the local Pashtun tribal army. The Pashtun were upset by the division of their lands. In the Sudan, Churchill took part in the Sudan campaign of 1898, which saw numerous British, Egyptian, and Sudanese forces march together into the Sudan to again occupy and control the country for strategic purposes. His first two books—*The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898) and *The River War* (1899)—consist of revised reports from these expeditions.

Captivity Results in Popular Book and Political Career In a similar capacity, Churchill went to South Africa after the outbreak of the Boer War. The war was a conflict between the British Empire and the independent Boer countries of the Orange Free State and the South Africa Republic in which the British won control of the Boer territories. He was captured during the conflict in

November 1899. His dramatic escape from a Pretoria prison gained him a great deal of attention in England, as did his account of the event in his book *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (1900). His fame helped him secure election to Parliament in 1900, as a member of the Conservative Party. Since members of Parliament were not paid, Churchill's writing income facilitated his entrance into politics, beginning a career in public service that would last more than six decades.

His first major literary undertaking began in 1902, when the family trustees gave him his father's papers. The result was a two-volume biography, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906). An act of homage to a somewhat estranged parent, the biography is also a penetrating political study. Lord Randolph had tried, and failed, to move the Tories (Conservatives) toward social reform. Churchill decided to adopt his father's principles and in 1904 defected to the Liberal Party.

Successful Politician to Failed Military Leader

From 1905 to 1915, Churchill held government positions, rising from undersecretary for the colonies to president of the board of trade, a cabinet office, then to home secretary. In the reform government of Lord Asquith between 1908 and 1912, Churchill sponsored progressive legislation such as old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and national health insurance. His book *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (1909) provides the intellectual foundation for these domestic policies.

Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, and brilliantly retooled the British armed forces for the looming war. However, his career suffered a blow once World War I broke out after the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in 1914. Because of entangling alliances, nearly the whole of Europe became involved in the conflict, which saw massive devastation and heavy casualties where the war was fought. During the war, Churchill advocated for Britain and its allies to attack Turkey through the Dardanelles strait in an attempt to gain control of the strait and western Turkey. This strategy failed and produced many casualties in the battle, which took place at Gallipoli. As a result, Churchill was demoted and lost favor with his party. Resigning from the government in 1916, he spent several months commanding troops in the trenches of the Western Front in France. The prime minister, David Lloyd George, soon recalled him to become minister of munitions.

Churchill in The World Crisis After the war, Churchill returned to high office as secretary of state for war and secretary of state for air. He lost his seat in the House of Commons in 1922, but in 1924, he rejoined the Conservatives and was immediately named chancellor of the exchequer. Meanwhile, he had begun work on his first large-scale historical study, *The World Crisis: 1911–1918*, which examined World War I in six volumes (1923–1931). In the books, Churchill analyzes bloody battles in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Churchill's famous contemporaries include:

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): Austrian-born dictator of Nazi Germany, 1933–1945.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945): American president elected four times and serving from 1933 to 1945.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): British historian, philosopher, Nobel Prize-winning author, and political activist whose books include *Principles of Mathematics* (1903).

Charles A. Beard (1874–1948): American historian, known for his progressive interpretation of U.S. history in books such as *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927).

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): German-born physicist known for his theory of relativity, but who also wrote on humanitarian and political issues.

George Orwell (1903–1950): British novelist and essayist; author of the influential novel *1984*.

the military sphere and tense struggles in the political, writing in the vivid, if somewhat overblown, style of a master storyteller. As in his subsequent works, he is an active participant in the events he records, lending an element of personal narrative to his sweeping world history. Through his writing, he attempted to vindicate himself for his disgrace over the Dardanelles campaign.

From the Wilderness to the Summit The Conservative government went down to defeat in 1929. Churchill again became estranged from his party, and in the 1930s his political career reached a low point that he later called his “wilderness years.” Out of office, he concentrated on writing, devoting five years of study to *Marlborough* (1933–1938), a four-volume biography of his distinguished forebear, an eighteenth-century military commander. He also drafted *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956–1958), for which he had received a large advance but which would not see publication until years later. Its four volumes chronicle the rise of the British Empire and the English-speaking world from the time of Julius Caesar to the First World War.

In *The Gathering Storm*, the first of his six volumes on the Second World War, Churchill describes himself as something of a lone voice calling for Britain to counter the growing threat of Nazi Germany. (After World War I, Germany had suffered an economic and identity crisis caused in part by the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler gained power in part because he promoted the idea of a new, stronger Germany that sought to control much of Europe.) The truth is more ambiguous—Churchill praised some of

Nazi leader Hitler's qualities in print and in the House of Commons—but then his predictions were vindicated. When war broke out in September 1939 after Germany invaded Poland and Great Britain and other countries declared war on Germany, Churchill returned to the war cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. The following May, Neville Chamberlain resigned as prime minister, and King George VI asked Churchill to lead a new administration.

In the early 1940s, it became clear that Churchill was the right leader for this dark moment in his nation's history as Nazi Germany gained control over more of Europe and began pounding Great Britain with bombs by air with the intent of taking it over as well. With steely resolve, while the nation was under attack, he declared that Britain's only objective was complete victory. His speeches in Parliament and on the radio offered the inspiration the country needed in the anxious months of the Blitz. He secured the aid—first economic, then military—of the United States and embraced the Soviet Union as a powerful European ally.

Later Career To end World War II in Europe, Churchill, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin orchestrated the Allied victory in Europe over Germany and Italy, which came in 1945. When the Russians marched into Berlin ahead of the Americans and British, Churchill had to face the reality of a great Communist power controlling part of Europe. He proposed to divide the continent into spheres of influence: Eastern Europe to the Soviets, Western Europe to Great Britain and America. The “Iron Curtain,” as Churchill dubbed it, had fallen, and his decisions were largely responsible for the Cold War that followed.

While Churchill himself was extremely popular, the British public had not forgiven his party for supporting a policy of appeasement with Hitler. After a landslide victory for the Labour Party, Clement Attlee replaced Churchill as prime minister in July 1945, days before the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war in the Pacific. For the next six years, reduced to the minor roles of opposition leader and elder statesman, Churchill returned to the other part of his life's work. He wrote his six-volume history, *The Second World War*, which became a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic. The series interweaves a general history of the war with Churchill's recollections and analysis of military and diplomatic events he personally witnessed and directly influenced.

In 1951, Churchill returned to the prime minister's seat and served a relatively uneventful four-year term. In June 1953, he suffered a severe stroke, news of which was kept from the public. Later in 1953, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Essentially retired from the mid-1950s on, he only gave up his parliamentary seat in 1964. He died the following year at his home in London days after suffering another severe stroke.

Works in Literary Context

Winston Churchill's career as a historian coincided with his military and political roles. While his military education was formal, his historical training was self-acquired. He immersed himself in historical study while in India, reading steadily through the books his mother sent him. First came the volumes of Edward Gibbon and Thomas Babington Macaulay, which had an impact on his speeches and writing, followed by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Plato's *Republic*, and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The influence of Darwin can be seen in Churchill's belief that life is a struggle in which the fit and courageous are most likely to survive.

The Personal Element A great deal of what Churchill wrote contains his personal views and interests. This includes not only his histories of the two world wars but also the biographies of his father and the Duke of Marlborough as well as his autobiographical writings, such as *My African Journey* (1908) and *My Early Life* (1930). His books of essays, *Thoughts and Adventures* (1942) and *Great Contemporaries* (1937), concern his adventures and the men he had known who made an impact upon him. Even *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* serves as a vehicle for Churchill's ideas about politics, history, and tradition. His type of history is based on the personal element of his life.

Storytelling Churchill was mainly a storyteller. In his military histories, he uses short, breathless sentences to suggest the feeling of combat. His histories emphasize politics and wars because these were the subjects that interested him most and were most conducive to his penchant for lively narrative. He wrote in a conversational manner, creating the impression that he was talking to the reader—often because that was actually what he was doing, since he tended to dictate his work to others rather than write or type it himself.

Orality and Morality While Churchill's historical tomes are of lasting value, his achievements in political oratory have been still more influential. Many of his most memorable phrases—"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat"; "Never . . . was so much owed by so many to so few"; "the iron curtain"—have assumed a permanent place in our language and culture.

Another major legacy of Churchillian rhetoric is his vision of politics as a matter of morality, a struggle between right and wrong, between freedom and tyranny. He insisted that Hitler had to be confronted, not appeased; political leaders have been citing this lesson ever since as a justification for aggressive foreign policies.

Works in Critical Context

Churchill's early books, based on his war dispatches, brought him critical and financial success in England. The vigorous and colorful descriptions of military actions and the emphasis on the courage of British troops became

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Winston Churchill's histories of the First and Second World Wars are universally regarded as classic works of literature. Here are some other important historical accounts of the two world conflicts.

The Struggle for Europe (1952), by Chester Wilmot. An important military history of the Second World War in Europe, it was written by one of the principal reporters present at the D-Day landing.

The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (1960), by William Shirer. The first major history of Nazi Germany written in English, it is based largely on documents captured from German archives at the end of the war.

The Guns of August (1962), by Barbara Tuchman. An enormously influential and popular account of the origins and fateful first days of World War I by a popular American historian.

The Great War and Modern Memory (1975), by Paul Fussell. This brilliant work of intellectual history probes the ways that writers and artists responded to the First World War and thus shaped the modern understanding of that earth-shattering event.

A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II (1994), by Gerhard L. Weinberg. A comprehensive history of the Second World War in a single volume, it illuminates the connections between far-flung events in the war's many theaters.

the hallmarks of his military books. Once he had established himself as a statesman, the success of his literary endeavors was assured. His six-volume *Second World War* sold in numbers unprecedented for a nonfiction work. Critics, however, have had a more mixed reaction to his work. Critics attribute some of the success of his writing to his habit of dictating his work. Many argue this helped to infuse his writing with the spirit of "fireside chats," thereby easily garnering public interest and sympathy.

Weaknesses as a Historian Churchill's histories have not been without their critics, both immediately after they were published and up to the present. He was an amateur historian, not academically trained. He tended to overdramatize events, and his works contained factual errors and questionable interpretations. His works were chockablock with primary documents, which made them longer than many felt was justified. Perhaps the most damning criticism made of his historical works is that they were self-serving—intended to justify his policy failures, such as the Dardanelles attack, or in the case of his biographies, to whitewash the reputations of his father and the Duke of Marlborough.

It is unlikely that many of Churchill's readers have been or are bothered by the shortcomings perceived by his critics. Many readers appreciate his remarkable ability to amass and organize huge quantities of information and to communicate it with eloquence and excitement. His writings remain highly popular, and their critical prestige has only grown with time. *The Second World War* has appeared on numerous lists of the greatest nonfiction works of the twentieth century. Even Churchill's detractors concede the immense historical value of this series, because of its author's proximity to the momentous events described.

The World Crisis Critics had a similar reaction to *The World Crisis*. Reviewing the book in 1927, John Freeman wrote in the *London Mercury*, "A petty scrutiny of his prose style would be inept and it is necessary to take a larger view, truly identifying the style with the whole man. . . . Mr. Churchill's narrative is told in a way which satisfies the most exorbitant appetite. Every page is full of himself. . . ."

Responses to Literature

1. How does Winston Churchill's biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, prefigure his own political career?
2. Write about the storytelling aspect of Churchill's prose, citing several examples.
3. In what ways do Churchill's political speeches and his historical narratives serve similar purposes? Write a paper in which you explain your views.
4. Churchill's history of the Second World War is both a memoir and a comprehensive narrative of a major world event. Evaluate how Churchill handles these dual purposes and how the author's personal voice affects the overall success of the work.
5. Write about literary and persuasive elements in one or two of Winston Churchill's classic speeches.

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Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo

BORN: 1935, *Kiagbodo, Nigeria*

NATIONALITY: *Nigerian*

GENRE: *Poetry, drama, essays*

MAJOR WORKS:

Song of a Goat (1961)

Poems (1961)

America, Their America (1964)

The Example of Shakespeare (1970)

A Decade of Tongues (1981)

Overview

Nigerian-born J. P. Clark-Bekederemo has been called one of the central figures of West African drama, and he is equally respected as one of his country's foremost poets. In both roles, he combines classical Western style and structure with stories, characters, and themes rooted in his native Ijaw tradition to create a body of work that is both universal and culturally unique.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Nigeria: From Colony to Independent Nation

When Clark-Bekederemo was born on April 6, 1935, Nigeria was a colony of the British Empire. The British government had designated Nigeria as a protectorate in 1901, though the varied cultural makeup of the region—along with the independent and nationalist nature of its people—led to increasing independence from Britain over the years, culminating in the country's formal establishment of independence in 1960. Because of the strong British influence in the region, Nigerians such as Clark-Bekederemo were immersed in a rich mix of both West African and European culture.

A Precocious Talent Clark-Bekederemo was one of many sons of the Ijaw chief Clark Fuludu Bekederemo of



J.P. Clark-Bekederemo *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

Kiagbodo in the western Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Perhaps due to the influence of his mother, Clark-Bekederemo had educational opportunities unusual for Kiagbodo children, who did not have a local grammar school. Clark-Bekederemo was christened Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, but upon the publication of *Song of a Goat* (1961) his name was shortened to John Pepper Clark by the designer of the cover. Clark-Bekederemo's subsequent publications used "John Pepper Clark" and "J. P. Clark" somewhat indiscriminately, until the publication of *State of the Union*, by "J. P. Clark-Bekederemo" in 1985. In his preface to that volume, Clark-Bekederemo wrote, "These works mark for me my assumption of my full family name, after waiting several years to do so jointly with my elder brothers. It is time to identify the man behind the mask so often misunderstood and speculated about."

Clark-Bekederemo emerged as a formidable force in Nigerian literature at an extremely young age. Both his first volume of poetry, *Poems*, and his first play, *Song of a Goat*, were written while he was a university undergraduate—and both are still studied and celebrated today. A novel he wrote while still in secondary school has never been published, and he abandoned fiction—not, it seems,

because he lacked talent, but because of his conviction that the novel and the Western short story, unlike poetry and drama, are alien to the African experience.

Clark-Bekederemo's earliest serious publication was in a journal called the *Horn*, which he and a small group of fellow students began in late 1957. In the poems Clark-Bekederemo has chosen to preserve from this early period (he has declined to republish many), three features recur: a basis in some occasion or concrete object (as, for example, the illness of his grandmother or a photograph in a magazine); imagery drawn from his home country or from a traditional story or belief; and intense fear or dissatisfaction. The imagery, of course, is not limited to the river country or mythology, nor is each occasion of each poem equally clear. But a sense of dissatisfaction is virtually omnipresent, sometimes as anxiety, sometimes as anger. His early major extended poem "Ivbie" is at times an outright cry of rage. It was originally published in *Poems*, was excerpted in *A Reed in the Tide*, and then reappeared complete in *A Decade of Tongues* (1981).

Recovering Traditions After he graduated with a BA in English from University College, Ibadan (UCI), in 1960, Clark-Bekederemo became a feature writer and editor for the *Express* newspaper in Lagos, began research into the traditions of the Ijaw people of the western Niger Delta, and also wrote a critical book about experiences he had had on an exchange at Princeton University (*America, Their America*, 1964). Then he accepted an academic position at the University of Lagos, where he first became professor of English and then served as head of the department until his retirement in 1980.

Since his undergraduate years at UCI, a dominant theme in Clark-Bekederemo's work has been the vitality of traditional life and art. He has devoted many years to recording, translating, adapting, and celebrating different traditional ways, while at the same time persistently critiquing colonial and postcolonial circumstances and external influences in Nigerian politics and affairs. Throughout, however, his has been an acutely personal art, expressive of a personal pain. In his earliest, most naive poetry, the personal was often obvious, leading Romanus N. Egudu to call "Grief, chaos, insecurity, and irredeemable loss" Clark-Bekederemo's "hallmarks" (in *Four Modern West African Poets*, 1977). In Clark-Bekederemo's later work, the immediacy and overwhelming quality of this personal pain shifted, to be replaced at times by an ironic detachment. Since his retirement from the University of Lagos in 1980, Clark-Bekederemo has held teaching appointments at various universities, including such prestigious schools as Yale and Wesleyan University in the United States. He is currently the director of the PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos, which he and his wife, Ebun Odutola Clark, founded in 1981.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Clark-Bekederemo's famous contemporaries include:

Léopold Senghor (1906–2001): Senghor, a poet and cultural theorist of international repute, was better known as Senegal's first (and longest-serving) president after independence from France. Senghor remained in office from 1960 to 1980.

Lee Kuan Yew (1923–): Yew was the first prime minister of Singapore after the tiny island nation gained its independence in 1959.

Alain Badiou (1937–): One of the most prominent French thinkers of the late twentieth century, the Marxist-influenced Badiou is known for trying to develop an idea of "truth" that addresses the challenges of postmodernist and relativist philosophies.

George H. W. Bush (1924–): The forty-first president of the United States, Bush presided over the First Gulf War in 1991, which was the beginning of an intensification of United States military involvement in the Middle East.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Probably the best-known African author of the twentieth century, Achebe's most famous novel is *Things Fall Apart* (1958). He is also a spokesman for a generation of literary critics, and his attack on Joseph Conrad's alleged racism in *Heart of Darkness* spurred great controversy among scholars of colonial and postcolonial literature.

Works in Literary Context

Negotiating the Linguistic Legacy of Colonialism Intellectually, a central concern of Clark-Bekederemo's art has been the use of an alien language, English, as a means of expressing indigenous African speech and thought. Like others of his generation, he has found himself constricted by his education in English. While still an undergraduate, he characterized himself in his poem "Ivbie" as the "bastard child" of two cultures (in *Poems*, 1962). To write as he and others similarly situated have done has required adaptation, a reconceptualization of the function of the artist. In an essay titled "The Legacy of Caliban" (in *The Example of Shakespeare*, 1970) Clark-Bekederemo defines the issue for the African writer by asking if the colonial subject (represented by Caliban) has "acquired just the right dose of language and technique to cope with his trade, to practise the art of Prospero" (the colonialist).

Clark-Bekederemo lays out three approaches African writers can take to producing art. He writes, "As the erector or assembler of an outfit that should act upon the reader as a catalyst, is [the artist] himself serving as the medium to the experiment, or should he merely

describe the process, or wholly leave the exercise to independent demonstrators to carry out? The first course entails the projection of the subject upon the screen of himself and consequently the production of a lyric piece. The second makes him something of a commentary man supplying a narrative. And the third leaves him completely out of the show, for then, having formulated what may be called a theoretical truth, the artist makes way for other experts to put it to the test, and the result is drama."

As Clark-Bekederemo goes on to imply, he has opted for all three courses, which are by no means discrete: "No work," he says, "is so impersonal that it does not at some point carry upon it the pressure of the personality of the author and none is so personal that it does not possess an independent life of its own." More personally, in "Aspects of Nigerian Drama" (in *The Example of Shakespeare*), he says of playwriting that "the task for the Ijaw . . . artist, writing in . . . English, is one of finding the verbal equivalent for his characters created in their original and native context."

Works in Critical Context

Critics have found ample evidence of Clark-Bekederemo's bifurcated background in his plays and poetry. They often note the presence of Ijaw myths, legends, and religion, masks, pantomimes, drumming, and dancing alongside poetic dialogue that seems distinctly Shakespearean, within epic tragedies styled after Sophocles or Euripides. Commenting in *English Studies in Africa*, T. O. McLoughlin observes, "The interesting point about John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo is that his awareness of what he calls 'traditional' and 'native' influences has come to dominate what he has learned from western literature."

From a High Point to a Low: Song of a Goat to The Masquerade Clark-Bekederemo's first dramatic work was the 1961 play *Song of a Goat*. In this play the fisherman Zifa's sexual impotence causes his wife, Ebiere, to seduce his younger brother, Tonye—on the advice of the Masseur, a doctor-mystic. Ultimately, Zifa walks into the sea to drown, and Ebiere is left pregnant, setting the stage for *The Masquerade*, Clark-Bekederemo's 1964 sequel to this tragic family drama.

African American playwright LeRoi Jones asserts in *Poetry* that *Song of a Goat* "is English, but it is not. The tone, the references . . . belong to what I must consider an African experience. The English is pushed . . . past the immaculate boredom of the recent Victorians to a quality of experience that is non-European, though it is the European tongue which seems to shape it, externally." Acknowledging that cultural background affects how an audience experiences *Song of a Goat*, Clark-Bekederemo once told a group of American students, "The idea of sacrifice is a universal one, but the theme of impotence is something that doesn't have the same kind of cultural significance for you as it has for me. The business of

reproduction, of fertility, is a life and death matter in my home area. If a man doesn't bear, he has not lived. And when he is dead, nobody will think of him."

The follow-up to *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade*, is a lyrical, fairy-tale tragedy that has been compared with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play Ebicere's son, Tufa, is a grown man who woos Titi, a popular village girl who has refused all other suitors. When the groom's family history is discovered, however, everyone, including the innocent Tufa, is shocked into nearly (or quite) insane behavior. Critic William Connor praises *The Masquerade*, saying, "I can think of no other modern play which in its compactness, the power of its tragic irony and the neatness of its resolution comes as close to duplicating the achievement of Clark-Bekederemo's models, the classical Greek tragedies." Nevertheless, the play has most frequently been dismissed by other critics as second-rate, having unbelievable storytelling, and as something that began in the playwright's mind as a classically modeled tragic trilogy but was never completed.

Responses to Literature

1. Research and discuss Clark-Bekederemo's role in founding the *Horn* magazine and in coediting the influential journal *Black Orpheus*. What do his editorial commitments suggest about his attitudes toward English as a language for African literature? How was his engagement in these projects influenced by his theoretical positions regarding English? Among other sources, you may wish to consider Clark-Bekederemo's own critical work, especially *The Example of Shakespeare*.
2. Consider several of what seem to be Ijaw traditions and themes in *Song of a Goat*. What comment, overall, does the play seem to be making about this cultural legacy and about its survival? Research the reception of the play. Consider the different critics who have praised and condemned Clark-Bekederemo for his fidelity to and bastardization of his own cultural history, respectively. What links can you draw between the message of the play and the conflicting messages in the criticism of the play? What does the play's overall cultural impact seem to have been, to date?
3. Compare two or three poems from Clark-Bekederemo's early collection of poetry, *Poems*, with two or three from a later collection, such as *A Decade of Tongues*. How do Clark-Bekederemo's themes and stylistic devices seem to have changed over time? What philosophical shifts do you think these changes represent in Clark-Bekederemo himself? Structure your response as a thesis-driven essay, in which you explore your argument with detailed and specific references and analysis of different poems.
4. Read one of Clark-Bekederemo's plays in the context of the genre of tragedy in general and of Shakespeare's tragedies in particular. In what ways does Clark-Bekederemo stay within the boundaries

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the themes Clark-Bekederemo has most frequently considered is the practice and ongoing legacy of colonialism: its linguistic and social impacts, both in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. As such, he is a writer of what is often termed postcolonial literature. Here are several important works of postcolonial literature by other authors:

The Hungry Tide (1960), a novel by Amitav Ghosh. This sixth novel by the Indian author puts the colonial legacy—as seen in a government with little or no interest in the welfare of its poorer citizens—in striking juxtaposition with the beauty, fragility, and danger of the Sundarbans, one of India's lushest and most complex ecosystems.

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), a novel by Jean Rhys. Dominican author Rhys's most successful novel, this book deals with themes of racial inequality and displacement, setting itself up as a prequel—beginning in Jamaica—to Charlotte Brontë's 1847 *Jane Eyre*.

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. Nigerian author Achebe's short masterpiece chronicles the life of Igbo leader Okonkwo, tracing the tragic influences of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on his ability to live a life that is meaningful.

marked out for this genre, and in what ways does he transgress those boundaries? Would you describe his plays as tragedies in the classic or Shakespearean sense? Why or why not? If yes, what does this suggest about Clark-Bekederemo as a Nigerian poet? If no, how would you classify the play?

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■ Samuel Clemens

SEE *Mark Twain*

☒ Jean Cocteau

BORN: 1889 *Maisons-Laffitte, Paris*

DIED: 1963 *Milly-la-Forêt, France*

NATIONALITY: *French*

GENRE: *Fiction, plays, poetry, screenplays*

MAJOR WORKS:

Les Enfants Terribles (1929)

The Infernal Machine (1934)

Beauty and the Beast (1946)

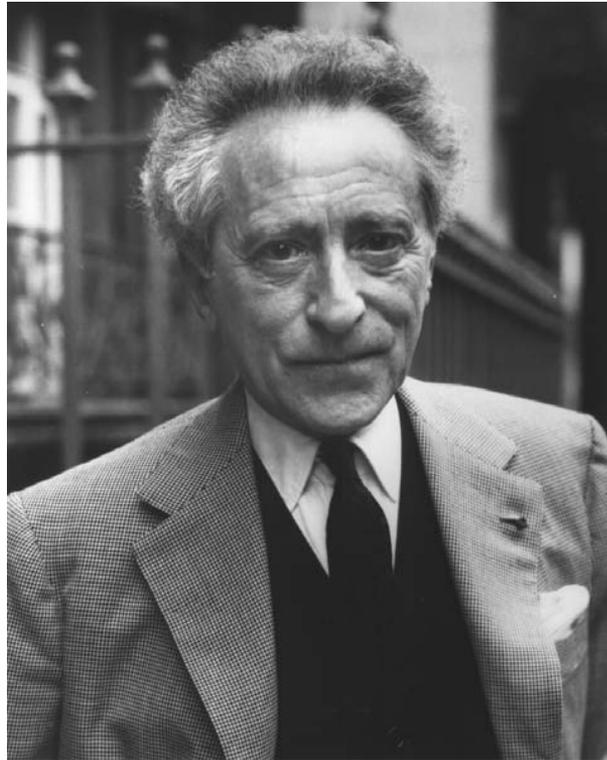
Orpheus (1950)

Overview

Novels, poetry, lyrics, painting, movies, plays, and acting were all part of Jean Cocteau's artistry. A conversationalist, dandy, and outspoken public personality, he considered these elements of his life to be necessary to personal expression. Cocteau believed his art and his public life were inextricably bound. Like Oscar Wilde, he championed style in matters of great importance.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Wealthy Family Jean Cocteau was born on July 5, 1889, at Maisons-Lafitte, a suburb of Paris, to Georges and Eugénie Cocteau. He was brought up in a well-to-do



Jean Cocteau *Cocteau, Jean, photograph. AP Images.*

home frequented by notable artists of the day. He would be supported by family wealth through his youth and into his early forties.

The France of Cocteau's youth and most of his adulthood was known as the Third Republic, a democracy run by a parliament instead of a king or an emperor as had usually occurred in France's past. Though the Third Republic was relatively successful in terms of longevity—it lasted from 1870 until the German occupation of France in 1940—it was rarely considered ideal, which resulted in many different political groups vying for the support of the people and control of the government. This mix of political and philosophical ideas may have created the fertile environment in which Cocteau and his contemporaries flourished.

As a schoolboy at the Lycée Condorcet, Cocteau was anything but a model pupil, but he charmed his teachers with his verve and brilliance. His official debut as a writer was at the age of eighteen, when the renowned actor Édouard de Max gave a lecture on Cocteau's poetry. Cocteau soon visited Edmond Rostand, Anna de Noailles, and Marcel Proust; everybody and everything fashionable attracted him.

Surrealism and Scandal When the Russian ballet performed in Paris, Cocteau attended. Soon thereafter he proposed to director Sergei Diaghilev a ballet of his own.

The resulting *Blue God*, run in 1912, was not a success. Undaunted, Cocteau started the ballet *David*, for which he hoped Igor Stravinsky would do the music. Although that work did not materialize, *Potomak*, dedicated to Stravinsky, did get written, and texts composed for both works were finally incorporated in a ballet called *Parade*. Composer Erik Satie and artist Pablo Picasso collaborated with Cocteau on this production, for which Guillaume Apollinaire, in a program note, coined the word “surrealistic” (though Cocteau would defy any such categorization).

Parade debuted at the Théâtre du Châtelet on May 18, 1917. Some witnesses reported that the opening-night audience was scandalized; others claimed the public was unimpressed and indifferent. Whatever the case may have been, the production clearly proved unpopular, shutting down a week after opening. Although Diaghilev and others recognized *Parade* as original and exciting, it was not until the first revival in 1920 that it gained a wide appreciation. It was consistently performed in those ensuing years by the Ballets Russes in Paris, London, and across Europe.

Tragedy and Spectacle The period after World War I was a most productive time for Cocteau. In addition to theater work and poetry, he wrote his first novels, working them in tandem with two of Raymond Radiguet’s. During this period he and Radiguet lived and worked together personally and professionally until, on a vacation to Toulon, Radiguet ate bad oysters, contracted typhoid, and died shortly after in Paris in 1923. Cocteau was so grief-stricken he was unable to attend the funeral.

During his time with Radiguet, Cocteau produced two spectacles for the Paris stage, one of which he conceived from a musical sketch provided by Darius Milhaud. It included the scenery of Fauvist painter Raoul Dufy titled *Le Boeuf sur le toit, or The Nothing Doing Bar* (1920)—comprised of “moving scenery” (actors with giant cardboard heads), a beheading, and a ballerina who, as she moves, smokes, drinks, and shakes the severed head “like a cocktail.” The piece was a success, running for one hundred performances, a significant number for a ballet. More importantly for Cocteau’s career, the spectacle established him as a serious collaborator for contemporary composers.

Mourning and Addiction After these early dance collaborations, Cocteau turned to ancient Greece for inspiration, producing a one-act version of *Antigone* (1922). However, still despondent over Radiguet’s death, in January of 1924 he left Paris for Monte Carlo. There he met musicologist Louis Laloy, a meeting that marked a turning point in Cocteau’s life: Laloy suggested opium might ease Cocteau’s depression, and, while there is evidence Cocteau had tried opium before, during this period he became an addict. The rest of his life was punctuated by “cures” and relapses.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cocteau’s famous contemporaries include:

Jean Anouilh (1910–1987): Surrealist playwright who, like Cocteau, explored the division between reality and ideality and is credited along with others for experimental theater.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Leader of the Indian independence movement and a spiritual founder of the Satyagraha philosophy.

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper (1906–1992): U.S. computer scientist who is considered a technological pioneer as one of the first Harvard Mark calculator programmers.

Edith Piaf (1915–1963): Popular French singer who sometimes collaborated with Cocteau.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French philosopher, writer, and critic associated with modern existentialism.

The Harshes Years In 1934 Cocteau wrote his last major play based on Greek mythology. *The Infernal Machine* (*La Machine infernale*, 1934), an adaptation of the Oedipus myth, is generally considered to be one of Cocteau’s finest dramas.

The period between the composition of *The Infernal Machine* and the end of World War II is considered to be a low point in Cocteau’s career as an artist. During this time his opium addiction grew more severe, and he began to have financial trouble. These events coincided with a move toward plays with greater commercial appeal. While critics found Cocteau’s plays less original and less appealing, his fame continued to grow. Three more plays brought more attention, and a relationship with actor Jean Marais was Cocteau’s saving grace.

The Restful Years *The Knights of the Round Table* (*Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, 1937) took Cocteau three years to get produced. In the interim, he earned money through journalism, and began a new project: a journalistic re-creation of Jules Verne’s *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1872; *Around the World in Eighty Days*, 1873). Cocteau and friend Marcel Khill retraced the path of Phileas Fogg and Passepartout and in the process—on a Pacific steamer—ran into British actor and director Charlie Chaplin. Cocteau’s writings about the trip were published in the newspaper *Paris Soir* (*Paris Evening*), then collected in the volume *Round the World Again in Eighty Days* (*Mon premier voyage: Tour du monde en 80 jours*, 1936).

Despite repeated “cures,” Cocteau’s opium addiction was at its worst. Marais attempted to rescue him from it. Marais abhorred opium and pressured Cocteau to give it

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Cocteau's most famous works was the 1950 film *Orpheus*, a modern version of the Greek myth of Orpheus, a young musician who travels to the underworld to rescue his beloved Eurydice, but fails. Many artists, musicians, and writers have been fascinated by the myth of Orpheus and the general idea of reclaiming a dead loved one. Other works that treat this theme include:

Orpheus in the Underworld (1858), a comic opera by Jacques Offenbach. This popular opera stands apart from other interpretations of the Orpheus myth by virtue of its riotous humor. The opera features the well-known "Can-Can" tune.

Black Orpheus (1959), a film directed by Marcel Camus. This winner of the Cannes Film Festival Palme D'Or and an Academy Award for best foreign film is a modern retelling of the Orpheus myth set in the African-American community in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"Orpheus and Eurydice" (2002), a poem by Czeslaw Milosz. In his last published poem, Milosz contemplates the death of his wife and the pain of loss.

The Amber Spyglass (2000), a novel by Philip Pullman. In this last book of the *His Dark Materials* fantasy trilogy, the young heroine Lyra (seemingly named after the lyre, the musical instrument Orpheus played) travels to an underworld drawn from Greek myth and leads its inhabitants out.

up, though Cocteau never did so entirely. During their time together Marais also inspired Cocteau to create plays and movies for him to star in. These included visually inventive versions of classic tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and *Orpheus* (1950), both widely considered by film critics to be cinematic masterpieces.

Cocteau spent the last thirteen years of his life in semiretirement on the French Riviera, after charming wealthy patroness Francine Weissweiler, who invited Cocteau and his last companion, Edouard Dermithe, to live with her at her villa in Saint Jean Cap Ferrat. Cocteau decorated the house, engaged in several municipal projects, wrote less, and produced only one more work, the movie *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1959), which was partially financed by French filmmaker François Truffaut. It received mostly negative reviews.

Yet Cocteau was also celebrated in his final years. He was elected to the Académie française (The French Academy), and received an honorary doctorate at Oxford. He was knighted, becoming a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honor) in 1949, and was made a member of the Belgian Académie Royale de Langue

et de Littérature françaises (Belgian Royal Academy of French Literature and Language). When he died October 11, 1963, he was widely mourned.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Although Cocteau refused to classify himself as belonging to any literary movement, his early career was greatly influenced by surrealism and Dadaism. However, surrealists such as André Breton disdained Cocteau's dandyism and refused to take him seriously. In fact, Breton became one of Cocteau's harshest critics throughout the 1920s, instigating Cocteau's constant need to justify himself to his peers, critics, and public.

Style Cocteau's attention to style served him well in all areas of artistic production, but most notably in the theater. In a career as a dramatist that spanned forty years, Cocteau wrote plays set in such disparate locales as ancient Greece, King Arthur's court, and contemporary Paris. Throughout these plays, there is an emphasis on the status of the play as an event rather than as a text. Further, Cocteau was a contemporary of Antonin Artaud, who played the role of Tiresias in the first production of Cocteau's *Antigone* and who shared what appears to be a mutual influence of dramatic practice and thought. In the 1920s and 1930s, he was experimenting in the ways that Artaud later proposed in his essay *Theater and Its Double* ("Le Théâtre et son double") (1938).

In the theater, as in most of his artistic endeavors, Cocteau was part of the avant-garde. Yet, after an initial period of dramatic rule-breaking, Cocteau began writing plays that conformed more closely to the standards established by traditional French dramaturgy. This change of approach may have made his later plays more palatable to the audiences of his day, but most are no longer performed.

Impact Cocteau insisted he be called "poet" above all, believing poets existed in a realm removed from politics, a theory that was beneficial to his art but that led to criticism for some of his actions during World War II. He called his dramaturgy "poésie de théâtre" (Theater Poetry) and his novels "poésie de roman" (Novel Poetry), but remained wary of labels that would limit his capacity as an artist. This concern is one of the reasons he never allied himself with any of the major artistic movements of his day. Yet, as an important innovator of what Guillaume Apollinaire termed "surrealism," he had significant influence on other artists, including the group of composer friends in Montparnasse known as Les Six. Again, however, Cocteau denied being part of any such movement.

Works in Critical Context

Cocteau was a true visionary, producing innovative works in more genres than any other single artist of the twentieth century. But his career as a dramatist was uneven.

Some of the characters of Cocteau's later works reveal interesting aspects of human psychology, but they generally inhabited untidy plots that prevented critical success. One reason for the sloppiness of Cocteau's drama was that he had shifted his attention to cinema, winning such prizes as those at the 1950 Venice Film Festival and the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. Thus, while his later theatrical pieces are widely dismissed, he added universally acclaimed motion pictures to his list of artistic achievements, left an enduring legacy built upon his revolutionary contributions to ballet, spectacle, and drama, and had an important and lasting effect on the dramatic arts in France and around the world.

While several of his works have earned greater recognition with time, some are considered his finest, among them *The Infernal Machine*.

The Infernal Machine Based on Greek mythology, this adaptation of the Oedipus myth directed by the famous Louis Jouvet and set-designed by Christian Bérard was widely praised by critics. Francis Fergusson, in a 1949 lecture at Princeton (published in book form in 1950), calls the play "at one and the same time chic and timeless—rather like the paintings of Picasso's classic period, or his illustrations for [Roman poet] Ovid." Neal Oxenhandler, writing in 1984, offers a more modern view of the play's enduring quality: "In the age of nuclear threat, mass murder, and terrorism, Cocteau's *Infernal Machine* remains wholly contemporary. It is a play for all time." Although it is not the most oft-performed Cocteau theatrical work—that honor probably goes to *The Human Voice*—*The Infernal Machine* remains his most highly praised play.

Responses to Literature

1. Cocteau often insisted on defying categorization. Yet he is known as one of the eminent surrealist writers of his time. Visit the Web site of a major metropolitan museum. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dalí, Giorgi De Chirico, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about their work (or a particular work). Then, find as many incidences of surrealism as you can in Cocteau's work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, so that you might each point out something the others in the group did not see and so you can collectively come up with your own understanding of surrealism.
2. Why does Cocteau's Oedipus seem to have so many more faults or flaws than Sophocles's Oedipus? Why do you think Cocteau made Oedipus so prone to error?
3. Considering Cocteau's opium addiction, research opium production and use (or abuse) in the early twentieth century. Was Cocteau alone in his addiction? Did others use opium for depression, as a medicine, or for other purposes? If so, how did they use opium for physical and psychological purposes?
4. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the culture of post-World War I Paris. Select a prominent artistic figure of this period, and write a short biographical article on that person.

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Andrei Codrescu

BORN: 1946, Sibiu, Romania

NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

License to Carry a Gun (1970)

The History of the Growth of Heaven (1971)

The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius (1975)

Comrade Past and Mister Present (1986)



Andrei Codrescu Photograph by Brian Baiaomonte. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Andrei Codrescu is a Romanian-born American novelist, poet, editor, and radio commentator. Noted for his command of everyday American English in his writings, Codrescu writes spare, forthright poetry noted for its exacting language and imagery and playful, irreverent wit. His poetry, which reveals the influences of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements, has been likened to the works of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams for its replication of American vernacular.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth in Communist Romania Born Andrei Ivanovitch Goldmutter on December 20, 1946, in Sibiu, Romania, Codrescu was raised in the turbulent political atmosphere that followed World War II. By the end of the war, Romania was fighting with the Allies against Germany, but because it was under the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, it became a Communist country led by Premier Petru Groza. As part of the Soviet-

influenced Eastern bloc, Romania was Communist and followed a pro-Soviet agenda. Codrescu began writing poetry at the age of sixteen and continued to do so while attending the University of Bucharest, where he changed his name to Codrescu. He became involved with his country's literary intelligentsia prior to publishing several poems critical of Romania's Communist government.

Escape to the West Expelled from the University of Bucharest for his criticism of the Communist government, Codrescu fled his homeland before being conscripted into the army. Traveling to Rome, the young writer learned to speak fluent Italian and earned his master's degree from the University of Rome. He then went to Paris and finally to the United States with his mother.

Arriving in America in 1966 without any money or knowledge of English, Codrescu was nonetheless impressed with the social revolution that was occurring around the country as Americans changed how they looked at themselves, each other, and the world. At this time, there was a strong call for increased individual rights, including the civil rights movement, which sought to increase equitable treatment for African Americans and a burgeoning feminist movement that wanted rights for women. There was also a powerful antiwar movement protesting American involvement in the on-going Vietnam War.

Poetry Influenced by Life in America As *Village Voice* contributor M. G. Stephens relates, Codrescu quickly "hooked up with John Sinclair's Artist Workshop. Within four years he learned to speak American English colorfully and fluently enough to write and publish his first poetry collection, *License to Carry a Gun* (1970). The collection was hailed by many critics who recognized Codrescu as a promising young poet.

Codrescu then published his acclaimed second collection of poetry *The History of the Growth of Heaven* (1971), and followed it with two books of autobiographical prose, *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* (1975) and *In America's Shoes* (1983). In the early 1980s, Codrescu was also influential in that he founded the literary journal *Exquisite Corpse* and became a weekly commentator on *All Things Considered*, a popular show on National Public Radio. The same year, he published a collection of his broadcast essays *Craving for Swan* (1986), he published *Comrade Past and Mister Present*, a highly regarded collection of prose, poetry, and journal entries.

Return to Romania Codrescu returned to Romania after twenty-five years to observe firsthand the 1989 revolution, which shook dictator Nicolai Ceaușescu from power. Ceaușescu had gained power in the early 1960s, and while a Communist, moved the country away from Soviet influence over the next few decades. However, the dictator ruled his country with an iron fist and was not open to reform. A popular uprising removed Ceaușescu

from power with the help of Romania's army, and he and his family were executed. The range of emotions Codrescu experienced during this time, from exhilaration to cynicism, are described in the volume *The Hole in the Flag: A Romanian Exile's Story of Return and Revolution* (1991).

Initially enthusiastic over the prospects of a new political system to replace Ceaușescu's repressive police state, Codrescu became disheartened as neo-Communists, led by Ion Iliescu, co-opted the revolution in the early 1990s. Though he agreed to ban the Communist Party and institute reform, Iliescu himself exhorted gangs of miners to beat student activists "who represented to Codrescu the most authentic part of the revolution in Bucharest," according to Alfred Stepan in the *Times Literary Supplement*. "It seemed to him the whole revolution had been a fake, a film scripted by the Romanian Communists." As Codrescu wrote of his impression and opinions of his mother country in the book, Romania remained unstable, marred by civil unrest and corruption, and economically impoverished for at least the next decade.

Continued Literary Career in the United States

In preparation for his 1993 book and documentary film *Road Scholar: Coast to Coast Late in the Century*, Codrescu drove across the United States in a red Cadillac accompanied by photographer David Graham and a video crew. Encountering various aspects of the American persona in such cities as Detroit and Las Vegas, Codrescu filtered his experiences through a distinctively wry point of view. "Codrescu is the sort of writer who feels obliged to satirize and interplay with reality and not just catalogue impressions," observed Francis X. Clines in the *New York Times Book Review*, who compared Codrescu's journey with the inspired traveling of 1950s "road novelist" Jack Kerouac.

While Codrescu continued to publish poetry volumes such as *Alien Candor: Selected Poems, 1970–1995* (1996) and *It Was Today—New Poems by Andrei Codrescu* (2003) as well as several collections of essays, including *The Muse Is Always Half-Dressed in New Orleans* (1995), the author branched out into other literary genres. He published his first novel in 1995, the Gothic thriller *The Blood Countess*, and a collection of short stories in 1999, *A Bar in Brooklyn: Novellas and Stories, 1970–1978*.

The novel drew on both his Eastern European background as well as his life in the United States. The title of *The Blood Countess* refers to Elizabeth Bathory, a sixteenth-century Hungarian noblewoman notorious for bathing in the blood of countless murdered girls. Codrescu tells Bathory's gruesome story alongside a contemporary narrative about the countess's descendant, Drake Bathory-Kereshtur, a U.S. reporter of royal lineage working in Budapest who meets up with various manifes-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Codrescu's famous contemporaries include:

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): Best remembered in popular culture for his role as a poet in the 1950s Beat generation, Ginsberg wrote the poem "Howl."

Nicolai Ceaușescu (1918–1989): Leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989, he was deposed during the widespread revolutions that swept Eastern Europe that year.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–): Russian politician, winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, Gorbachev was the last head of state of the Soviet Union. His program of reforms and his efforts to reach out to Western leaders contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Bob Dylan (1941–): American singer-songwriter, poet, and author, Dylan first made his mark as a highly influential folksinger in the early 1960s. His lyrics and musical explorations blazed a trail for a generation of musicians.

Robert Bly (1926–): American poet and author, he was best known for his involvement in the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, a self-help movement based on the writings of Joseph Campbell.

tations of Elizabeth before he is seduced by her spirit to commit murder.

An English professor at Louisiana State University, Codrescu also continues to contribute to National Public Radio program *All Things Considered*.

Works in Literary Context

Codrescu writes spare, forthright poetry noted for its exacting language and imagery and playful, irreverent wit. His subject matter is largely autobiographical, often consisting of recollections of his youth in Communist Romania and his experiences as an expatriate living in Rome, Paris, and the United States. Codrescu eschews controversy in favor of a mock-revolutionary pose and a disillusioned yet resistant attitude. He is frequently commended for perceptive insights into American culture as viewed from a foreigner's perspective.

Oppression Although Codrescu enjoys the freedoms that exist in the United States, he is still as critical of bureaucracy in his adopted country as he was in his native Romania—a skepticism that is made evident in his poetry and his autobiographies, *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* and *In America's Shoes*. The author uses his poetry and essays to focus on the idea of oppression, something which he fearlessly confronts.

Cultural Differences Just as *Comrade Past and Mister Present* compares East and West through poetry, in *The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto for Escape*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Codrescu uses his unique outsider perspective to make keen observations on the spirit of America in his poetry through the use of contemporary speech and keen insight. Other works by poets and novelists to explore similar themes include:

Leaves of Grass (1855), by Walt Whitman. A lifelong project first published in 1855 and revised several times, this collection of poetry was highly controversial when first released due to its thematic focus on the sensual world and its natural use of language.

Pictures from Brueghel, and Other Poems (1962), by William Carlos Williams. An American modernist poet, Williams wrote in a style influenced by Walt Whitman, utilizing the idiomatic language of the everyday person in his search for what he called “the American grain.”

On the Road (1957), by Jack Kerouac. One of the leading lights of the Beat generation, Kerouac wrote this stream of consciousness travelogue of America in the early 1950s.

Ham on Rye (1982), by Charles Bukowski. Known for his gritty, street-level poetry and prose, Bukowski wrote this semiautobiographical novel about growing up in Los Angeles during the Great Depression. The book is filled with realistic, almost crude dialogue and characters, earning it comparisons with *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Codrescu discusses the matter in direct prose. He addresses such subjects as the mind-numbing effects of television and mass marketing, the sexual and political implications that are a part of language, and the use of drugs and alcohol in contrasting life in both parts of the world.

Works in Critical Context

Although Codrescu’s earliest poems caused his expulsion from the University of Bucharest, critical reception in the West has been generally favorable. From the publication of his first poetry collection, he has been considered a rising talent. His self-denigrating sense of humor, his keen insight on contemporary culture, and his mastery of American idiom in his essays and memoirs have also won him accolades. According to Thomas A. Wassmer in *Best Sellers*, Codrescu is now “considered by many writers to be one of this country’s most imaginative poets, with talents similar to those of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams.” His 1995 debut novel, *The Blood Countess*, was warmly received and described as being “beautifully written and meticulously researched.”

Codrescu’s Poetry Echoing this comparison with Whitman and Williams, a *Choice* critic attests that like

these American writers, Codrescu “writes poems as if no one had written one before,” but unlike them he is more interested in the “introspective, internal.” John R. Carpenter, in a *Poetry* review, notes that the poet “gains in spontaneity, but loses in participation; the freshness is specialized.”

Another feature of Codrescu’s poetry is his unique perspective and interest in American English. His “greatest strength,” asserts *New York Times Book Review* contributor John Krich, “lies in his outsider’s appreciation for the succulence of American idioms. Where language is reinvented daily on billboards, it offers liberation from the chains of connotation.”

“In line with his literary modernism,” writes Josephine Woll in the *Washington Post Book World*, “[Codrescu’s] tastes run to the whimsical, the surreal (about which he writes with great understanding), even the perverse. He means to provoke, and he does. His ideas are worth thinking about.” Codrescu’s skill as an observant commentator about life in America has led critics like Wassmer to conclude that Codrescu has given his audience “a clearer penetration into the soul of America by a foreigner than any by a native American poet.”

The Blood Countess While some reviewers comment on the horrific aspects of *The Blood Countess*, Bettina Drew points out in the *Washington Post Book World* that “Codrescu has done more than tap into a Western fascination, whipped up by Hollywood Draculas and vampires. . . . He has written a vivid narrative of the sixteenth century . . . [and] has made the history of Hungary and its shifting contemporary situation entertaining and compelling.”

Although Robert L. McLaughlin observes in the *American Book Review* that *The Blood Countess*’s “historical foundation is interesting; the incidents of its parallel plots keep one turning the pages; it has much to say about our world.” R. Z. Sheppard observes in *Time* that “*The Blood Countess* offers stylish entertainment” while *Entertainment Weekly* contributor Margot Mifflin finds the book “beautifully written and meticulously researched.”

Responses to Literature

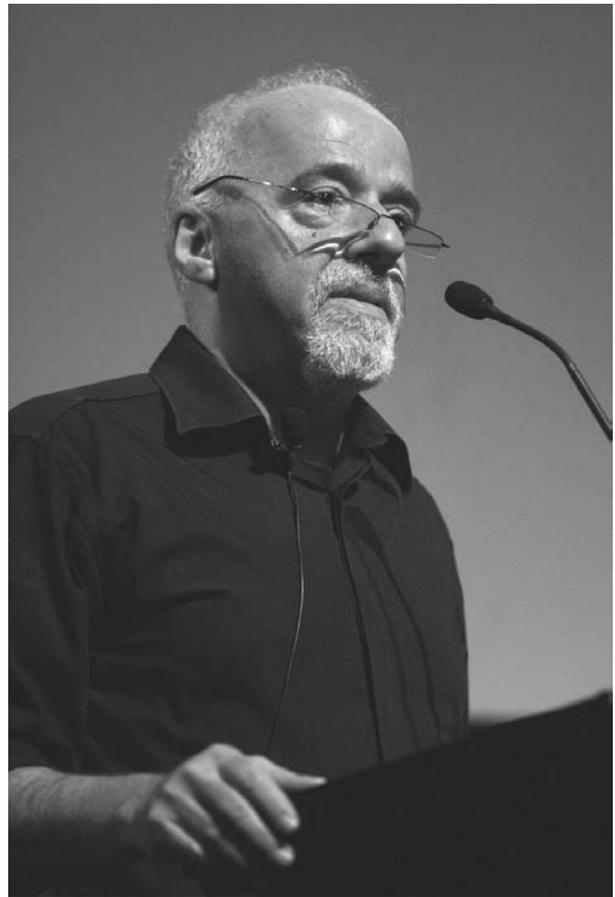
1. Although Codrescu has lived in the United States for most of his adult life, he still holds strong opinions on eastern European literature. Using past interviews and essays, research Codrescu’s views on the literature of his homeland and neighboring countries and write a paper analyzing your findings.
2. Examine old copies of Codrescu’s literary magazine *Exquisite Corpse*. Is there a theme or pattern to the types of poems published in the magazine? How do you think Codrescu has influenced the magazine as editor? Create a presentation of your findings.

3. Compare Codrescu's New Orleans stories with those of another author who sets his or her stories in that city—such as Anne Rice—in a presentation. How do the portrayals of the city differ between the two? What elements of life in New Orleans does each author highlight?
4. Listen to some of Andre Codrescu's National Public Radio dispatches and compare them to his essays in a paper. How does his spoken-word work differ from his written work? What stylistic changes does he make to his language? Do you think his spoken or written work is more effective? Why?

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Times Literary Supplement (August 5, 1988); (October 9, 1992).
Village Voice (December 31, 1970); (September 22, 1975).



Paulo Coelho Gareth Cattermole / Getty Images

▣ Paulo Coelho

BORN: 1947, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Pilgrimage (1987)

The Alchemist (1988)

The Gift (1991)

Veronika Decides to Die (1998)

Overview

Brazilian author Paulo Coelho has penned several books that have been translated into English and numerous other languages. They include *The Diary of a Magus*; *The Road to Santiago* and *The Alchemist*. According to a reviewer writing in the *Economist*, Coelho's "stories are packed with proverbs, parables and advice (or 'sharings' as he prefers) that resemble entries in a New Age self-help manual: pursue your dreams, resist temptation, banish 'negative thoughts,' listen to your heart."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Troubled Youth Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947. He was raised to be a devout Catholic, and this strictness could be partly responsible for his seeking other forms of spirituality. In addition, he was raised to be a lawyer, but he decided relatively early on to pursue other interests.

As a young man, Coelho was committed to mental hospitals on three occasions by his parents, who did not understand their son's wish to become an artist. In his novel *Veronika Decides to Die*, Coelho questions his involuntary commitment. His protagonist, twenty-four and working in a library in Ljubljana, Slovenia, despairs over her inability to make changes in her life and the world. She overdoses on sleeping pills in a suicide attempt and finds herself in Villette, the infamous asylum for the insane. As Veronika meets other patients and becomes aware of their diagnoses and treatments, she questions the definitions of mental illness and the use of drugs to alter people who fall outside descriptions of what is considered normal. Following the original publication of the book in Brazil, new laws were put in place to restrict involuntary commitment. In 1998,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coelho's famous contemporaries include:

Elena Poniatowska (1932–): Mexican author and journalist best known for her work commemorating the 1968 massacre in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Coelho based *The Alchemist* on this famous Argentine writer's *Tale of Two Dreamers*.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Nobel Prize-winning Colombian novelist and magic realist writer.

Raul Seixas (1945–1989): Popular Brazilian songwriter who collaborated with Coelho.

with book sales exceeding twenty-seven million in over one hundred countries, Coelho became the second-best-selling author worldwide.

Wide-Ranging Interests Coelho has worked as a journalist, a director, and a songwriter. He wrote many songs but is most famous for those written with musician Raul Seixas in the seventies. In addition to his jobs and creative endeavors, Coelho has traveled a great deal, most notably on the lengthy, ancient Spanish Road to Santiago, which he writes about in *The Pilgrimage*.

Brazil was transformed from a democracy into a military dictatorship following a coup in 1964 and remained a dictatorship until 1985. Coelho was imprisoned (and reportedly tortured) in 1974 for antigovernment activities, including his musical collaborations with Seixas and their unconsummated plans for an anarchistic society. He was a recording executive in the late 1970s, first for Polygram, then CBS, and he founded the Instituto Paulo Coelho, a nonprofit organization to help underprivileged Brazilians, with his wife, Christina Oiticica, in 1996. He is currently an adviser to UNESCO and active on the Web and in film. He and his wife split their time between Brazil and France.

Works in Literary Context

Journeys *The Alchemist* concerns the journey of a young Spanish shepherd to Egypt. As his odyssey progresses, the shepherd undergoes a spiritual transformation and receives advice from various old sages, gypsies, desert people, and an alchemist he encounters. Coelho used the short tale *Thousand and One Nights* to lead him, as he explained in a *UNESCO Courier* interview: "I took four guiding ideas from it: the personal legend, the language of signs, the soul of the world, and the need to listen to one's heart." Coelho also remarked on the

journey of writing the book: "The rest was vague, like being in a fog. The only thing I knew was that the boy would eventually return to his starting point."

Obsessions Coelho calls upon his interest in the spiritual world in *The Zahir: A Novel of Obsession*. In Arabic, the title word means "the obvious" or "unable to go unnoticed"; essentially an object that inspires fanatical focus and pursuit, or obsession. The novel revolves around a writer whose wife has disappeared with someone who is most likely her lover. The writer's search to find out exactly what happened to his wife takes him from Paris to Kazakhstan, but it is in reality a journey of self-discovery as he learns that he really can never find his wife until he finds himself. In an interview for HarperCollins, Coelho explains the emotional difference between reaching for a personal goal and becoming fixated on an object, fantasy, or idea: "If you pursue your dreams as Santiago did in *The Alchemist*, you are enjoying each step. But if you are searching for the Zahir, not only you do not arrive there, but your life will be full of anxiety."

Works in Critical Context

Despite being a favorite of readers, Coelho often endures criticism from reviewers, who, as one *Economist* contributor noted, "denounce him as a charlatan, a bore, a seller of snake oil." Although critics recognize readers' interest in Coelho's ideas, they often fault his writing.

The Alchemist *The Alchemist* did not receive widespread critical attention in the United States, although the novel did garner some favorable reviews. *School Library Journal* contributor Sabrina Fraunfelter commented that "this simple, yet eloquent parable celebrates the richness of the human spirit." A reviewer asserted in *Publishers Weekly* that the book "has the comic charm, dramatic tension and psychological intensity of a fairy tale." *Booklist* contributor Brad Hooper noted: "Beneath this novel's compelling story and the shimmering elegance with which it's told, lies a bedrock of wisdom about following one's heart."

Veronika Decides to Die "Employing his trademark blend of religious and philosophical overtones," wrote a *Publishers Weekly* contributor, "Coelho focuses on his central question: why do people go on when life seems unfair and fate indifferent?" The reviewer added that *Veronika Decides to Die* "will appeal to readers who enjoy animated homilies about the worth of human existence."

Responses to Literature

1. Look up the definition of *new age* and write a two- to three-page essay describing how this term applies to a particular work you have read by Coelho. Use specific examples from the text to support your ideas.
2. Read Borges's *Tale of Two Dreamers* and *The Alchemist*. Write a six- to seven-page essay exploring how Borges's work seems to have inspired *The*

Alchemist. Use specific examples from each text to illustrate your findings.

3. With a few of your classmates, come up with a list of books, such as *Veronika Decides to Die*, that have helped shaped policy or alter laws and trends. You may use resources from the Internet or your library to aid in your search.
4. Write an informal essay explaining how a particular piece of Coelho's fiction, like *The Alchemist*, can be viewed as nonfiction. Discuss how seeing the messages or themes in the book as conveying "truth" affects the reader differently than seeing those same messages or themes as mere authorial creations.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coelho explores the theme of humankind's spirituality and quest for alternate forms of faith and knowledge. Here are some other works that emphasize some people's search for wisdom via mystical means and physical journeys:

- The Dharma Bums* (1958), a novel by Jack Kerouac. In this novel, the famous Beat writer chronicles his journey to a remote mountain, where he finds peace and wisdom in solitude.
- The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968), a book by Carlos Castaneda. This controversial novel/memoir claims to be about the author's journey with a knowledgeable shaman.
- Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), a novel by Robert M. Pirsig. In this novel, the narrator and his son question the nature of reality and delve into metaphysics while on a cross-country motorcycle trip.

✠ J. M. Coetzee

BORN: 1940, Cape Town, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

In the Heart of the Country (1977)

Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)

Life and Times of Michael K (1983)

Foe (1987)

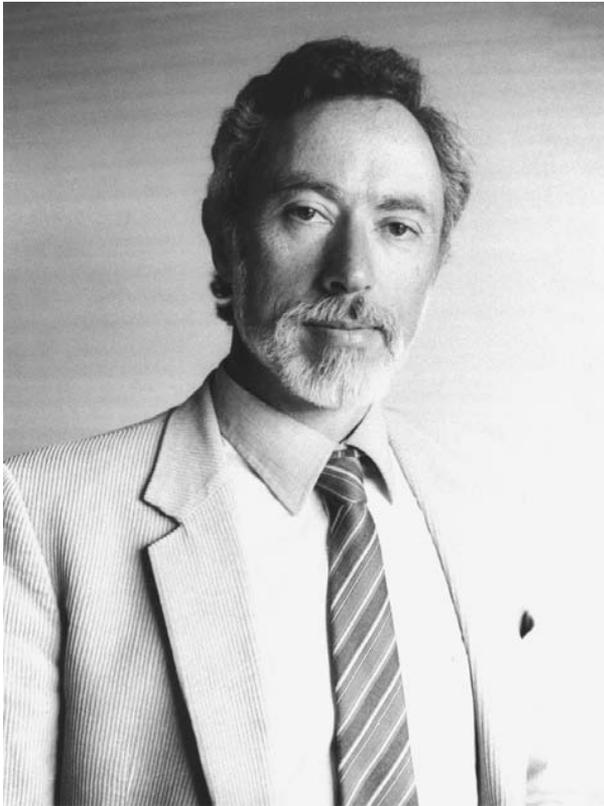
Disgrace (1999)

Overview

Widely regarded as one of South Africa's most accomplished contemporary novelists, Coetzee examines the effects of racism, oppression, and fear. While addressing the brutalities and contradictions associated with the South African policy of apartheid, Coetzee writes from an apolitical viewpoint that extends beyond geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance. This effect is enhanced through his use of such literary devices as allegory, unreliable narrators, and symbolic settings.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Cape Town John Maxwell Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa, on February 9, 1940, to an attorney father and a schoolteacher mother. He spent most of his childhood in Cape Town and



J.M. Coetzee Coetzee, J.M., photograph by Jerry Bauer. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Worcester—a period of his life that he recalls in his autobiographical work *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997). A section of *Boyhood* is devoted to the holidays that Coetzee spent as a child on his uncle's farm in the Karoo, the semidesert region of the Cape Province. In all probability, his perennial fascination with the primeval aspect of the South African landscape stems from his boyhood visits to this region, which forms the main setting of his novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983).

Coetzee's parents were *bloedsappe*, Afrikaners who supported General Jan Smuts and dissociated themselves from the Afrikaner nationalist movement that eventually came to power in South Africa in 1948. Afrikaners are the descendants of Dutch colonists who settled in South Africa in the seventeenth century, and fought for territory and power against indigenous Africans as well as rival British colonists until their 1940s political victory. When they took power, the Afrikaner-based National Party began implementing the policy of apartheid, which legally separated people by color.

Although Coetzee came from an Afrikaans-speaking background, he attended various English middle schools and, after graduating from a Roman Catholic boys' school in 1956, went on to study English literature and mathematics at the University of Cape Town, receiving

his BA in 1960 and MA in 1963. This bilingual upbringing has enabled Coetzee to depict English- and Afrikaans-speaking characters in his fiction with equal skill—an uncommon occurrence in South African literature, which, as part of the legacy of a divided society, usually is riddled with ethnic stereotypes.

Life Abroad Having found his studies tedious at the University of Cape Town, particularly in English, Coetzee left South Africa for England in 1962 to pursue a career as a computer programmer, working for International Business Machines (IBM) for two years and then for International Computers from 1964 to 1965. Coetzee completed his master's thesis in 1963 and married Philippa Jubber the same year; the couple had two children, Nicolas, born in 1966, and Gisela, born in 1968. Evidently, computer programming did not prove rewarding, and he left after four years. Under a Fulbright exchange program, Coetzee went to the United States and commenced work on a doctoral thesis in English at the University of Texas at Austin.

The time Coetzee spent at the University of Texas crucially influenced his development as a novelist. His doctoral research on the fiction of Samuel Beckett, for example, made a definite impression, as is evident in his use of minimalist scenarios and a limited number of characters. Moreover, in Texas, Coetzee first encountered reports and accounts of the Khoi people, written by early European explorers, travelers, and missionaries in South Africa. These documents provided the germ for his first work, the novellas of *Dusklands* (1974). Another important influence from this period on his writing was the Vietnam War, which reached its height during his stay in the United States. The war affected Coetzee deeply, and, besides prompting him to take part in an antiwar demonstration (for which he was arrested), it impelled him to make a comparison of U.S. imperialism and South African colonialism.

International Success Coetzee stayed in the United States while writing his dissertation, which he completed in 1969. As an assistant professor, he taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo from 1968 to 1971. *Dusklands* was published two years after Coetzee's return to South Africa, where he took up a lecturing position in English at the University of Cape Town in 1972 before becoming a full professor in 1982. Apartheid continued to be a powerful force in South Africa, though there was some effort, even among Afrikaners, to do away with the policy. By the mid-1970s, black nationalist groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) and other rebel movements sometimes resorted to violence to protest apartheid.

In the Heart of the Country (1977) was the first of Coetzee's novels to be published in both South Africa and the United States. Coetzee's strong international reputation was established with *In the Heart of the Country* and solidified with his next novel, *Waiting for the*

Barbarians (1980). *Life and Times of Michael K* corresponds thematically to Coetzee's earlier works but includes a new dimension in its focus on the oppression of a single character. Michael K is a slow-witted outcast who searches with his mother for a home during a turbulent period of an unnamed country's civil war. Although Coetzee has denied the similarities, critics frequently compare Michael K and the character K in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*. Like Kafka's K, Michael K is victimized by social forces he can neither control nor understand.

End of Apartheid In his collection of essays, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988), Coetzee continues to investigate the power of language by analyzing the works of white South African writers. Attempting to expose the relationship between language and cultural identity, Coetzee focuses on how European values and conventions are reflected in South African policies and attitudes concerning property and government. The novel *Age of Iron* (1990) traces the experiences of Elizabeth Curren, a white South African woman suffering from cancer who writes long letters to her daughter in the United States. While representing Coetzee's abiding concerns with human suffering and the dissolution of oppressive and racist regimes, *Age of Iron* also reflects recent positive changes in South Africa. Some legal aspects of apartheid were abandoned by the South African government in the mid-1980s, and violent political protest continued until more reforms were put in place in the late 1980s. Apartheid essentially ended in the early 1990s, and South Africa became a democracy in the mid-1990s.

Coetzee's publications in the 1990s and early 2000s often reflected these changes. The essays in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996) looks at how censorship affects writers under three regimes, including apartheid. Coetzee became more personal in two volumes of autobiography, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* and its follow-up, *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002). In the first book, he recounts his childhood while commenting on the contradictions of apartheid and subtle distinctions of class and ethnicity. Postapartheid South Africa is fictionally examined in the critically praised *Disgrace* (1999). Because of Coetzee's constant and sensitive attention to the issues of his time and place led to his receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003. He continues to teach English at the University of Cape Town and to produce new works.

Works in Literary Context

The South African environment in which Coetzee was raised and spent much of his life profoundly shaped his work and moral compass. In both his fiction and non-fiction, he often explores apartheid, its effect on all South Africans, and the fallout after its demise. While addressing the brutalities and contradictions associated with both colonial oppression and apartheid, Coetzee often writes

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coetzee's famous contemporaries include:

Alan Paton (1903–1988): South African writer and activist most famous for his novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): Former president of South Africa and antiapartheid activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

Stephen Biko (1946–1977): South African antiapartheid activist who died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody.

Barbara Kingsolver (1955–): American novelist whose *Poisonwood Bible* (1998) won the National Book Prize of South Africa.

from an apolitical viewpoint that extends beyond the geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance.

Apartheid Often using his native South Africa as a backdrop, Coetzee explores the implications of oppressive societies on the lives of their inhabitants. Coetzee's second novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, explores racial conflict and mental deterioration. A spinster daughter, Magda, tells the story in diary form, recalling the consequences of her father's seduction of his African workman's wife. In *Age of Iron* Coetzee addresses the crisis of South Africa in direct rather than allegorical form. It's the story of Mrs. Curren, a retired professor dying of cancer and attempting to deal with the realities of apartheid in Cape Town. As her disease and the chaos of her homeland progress, Mrs. Curren feels the effects her society has had on its black members. The book takes the form of a letter from Mrs. Curren to her daughter, who lives in the United States because she cannot tolerate apartheid.

Muteness and Speech *Foe*, a retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, marked a transitional stage for Coetzee. Central to this story are the mute Friday, whose tongue was cut out by slavers, and Susan Barton, the castaway who struggles to communicate with him. Daniel Foe, the author who endeavors to tell Barton's story, is also affected by Friday's speechlessness. Both recognize their duty to provide a means by which Friday can relate the story of his escape from the fate of his fellow slaves who drowned, still shackled, when their ship sank, but also question their right to speak for him.

Works in Critical Context

Often using his native South Africa as a backdrop, Coetzee explores the implications of oppressive societies for the lives of their inhabitants. As a South African, however,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coetzee's *Foe* retells the classic saga of the shipwrecked *Robinson Crusoe* by borrowing a character from the older novel. Here are a few other works that "borrow" characters.

The Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), a novel by Jean Rhys. It tells the sad story of the first Mrs. Rochester, from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Grendel (1971), a novel by John Gardner. It retells the classic tale of *Beowulf*—but from the monster's point of view.

Young Frankenstein (1974), a film directed by Mel Brooks. It spoofs Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* by having the title character, also a scientist, embarrassed to be Dr. Frankenstein's grandson.

Coetzee is "too intelligent a novelist to cater for moralistic voyeurs," Peter Lewis declared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. "This does not mean that he avoids the social and political crises edging his country towards catastrophe. But he chooses not to handle such themes in the direct, realistic way that writers of older generations, such as Alan Paton, preferred to employ. Instead, Coetzee has developed a symbolic and even allegorical mode of fiction—not to escape the living nightmare of South Africa but to define the psychopathological underlying the sociological, and in doing so to locate the archetypal in the particular."

Waiting for the Barbarians In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee, "with laconic brilliance, articulates one of the basic problems of our time—how to understand . . . the mentality behind the brutality and injustice," Anthony Burgess wrote in *New York* magazine. In the story, a magistrate who attempts to protect the peaceful nomadic people of his district is imprisoned and tortured by the army that arrives at the frontier town to destroy the "barbarians" on behalf of the empire. The horror of what he has seen and experienced affects the magistrate in inalterable ways, bringing changes in his personality that he cannot understand. Doris Grumbach, writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, found the novel a book with "universal reference." "The intelligence Coetzee brings us in *Waiting for the Barbarians* comes straight from Scripture and Dostoevsky."

Responses to Literature

1. Ask a few classmates to read *Robinson Crusoe* along with *Foe*. In your reading group, discuss why Coetzee might have chosen to alter *Robinson Crusoe* in

the way that he did. Which book is a more entertaining read? Why?

2. Ask a classmate who is also reading *Waiting for the Barbarians* to join you in listening to Philip Glass's operatic version of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Discuss whether you think it captures the emotions of the book.
3. Read Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Coetzee has denied that his Michael K is influenced by Kafka's Josef K. Write a short essay explaining whether you think there is a connection.
4. Many of Coetzee's novels take the form of diary entries or letters. In a letter to your teacher, explain why you think he chooses this form rather than just tell the story outright.

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Samuel Taylor Coleridge

BORN: 1772, Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England

DIED: 1834, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Lyrical Ballads (1798, rev. ed., 1800)

Christabel (1816)

Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions (1817)

Overview

British author Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a poet, philosopher, and literary critic whose writings have been enormously influential in the development of modern



Samuel Taylor Coleridge Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, photograph. The Library of Congress.

thought. In his lifetime, Coleridge was renowned throughout Britain and Europe as one of the Lake Poets, a close-knit group of writers including William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. Today, Coleridge is considered the premier poet-critic of modern English tradition, distinguished for the scope and influence of his thinking about literature as much as for his innovative verse.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unfocused Youth Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772, in the village of Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England, where he lived until the age of ten, when his father died. The boy was then sent to school at Christ's Hospital in London. Later, he described his years there as desperately lonely; only the friendship of future author Charles Lamb, a fellow student, offered solace. From Christ's Hospital, Coleridge went to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he earned a reputation as a promising young writer and brilliant conversationalist. He left in 1794 without completing his degree.

Coleridge then traveled to Oxford University, where he befriended Robert Southey. The two developed a plan for a "pantisocracy," or egalitarian agricultural society, to be founded in Kentucky. By this time, the American

colonies had completed their revolution, and the United States was in its infancy. Kentucky became a state in 1792. For a time, both Coleridge and Southey were absorbed by their revolutionary concepts and together composed a number of works, including a drama, *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), based on their radical politics. Since their plan also required that each member be married, Coleridge, at Southey's urging, wed Sara Fricker, the sister of Southey's fiancée. Unfortunately, the match proved disastrous, and Coleridge's unhappy marriage was a source of grief to him throughout his life. To compound Coleridge's difficulties, Southey lost interest in the scheme, abandoning it in 1795.

Focused on Poetry Writing Career Coleridge's fortunes changed when in 1796 he met the poet William Wordsworth, with whom he had corresponded casually for several years. Their rapport was instantaneous, and the next year, Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey in the Lake District, where he and Wordsworth began their literary collaboration. Influenced by Wordsworth, whom he considered the finest poet since John Milton, Coleridge composed the bulk of his most admired work. Because he had no regular income, he was reluctantly planning to become a Unitarian minister when, in 1798, the prosperous china manufacturers Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood offered him a lifetime pension so that he could devote himself to writing.

Aided by this annuity, Coleridge entered a prolific period that lasted from 1798 to 1800, composing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Frost at Midnight*, and *Kubla Khan*. In 1798, Coleridge also collaborated with Wordsworth on *Lyrical Ballads*, a volume of poetry that they published anonymously. Coleridge's contributions included *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, published in its original, rather archaic form. Most critics found the poem incomprehensible, including Southey, who termed it "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity." The poem's unpopularity impeded the volume's success, and not until the twentieth century was *Lyrical Ballads* recognized as the first literary document of English Romanticism.

Focus on Criticism As Coleridge was working with Wordsworth and publishing key poems, Great Britain was undergoing changes. While the British Empire had lost the thirteen American colonies, British settlement of Australia had increased, and New Zealand's soon began. In 1800, the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland formally brought the United Kingdom into being. Following the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge traveled to what later became Germany, where nationalism was on the rise. He developed an interest in the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich von Schelling, August Wilhelm, and Friedrich von Schlegel. Coleridge later introduced German aesthetic theory in England through his critical writings.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coleridge's famous contemporaries include:

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): Coauthor with Coleridge of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was one of the founding fathers of the Romantic movement.

Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821): French general and emperor, Napoleon's ambitions brought the French Revolution to a close and directly influenced the course of European and American history for more than a century to come.

Eli Whitney (1765–1825): American inventor remembered for inventing the cotton gin, a device that greatly increased the productivity of cotton farmers.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): German composer Beethoven was highly influential at the end of the Classical era of music. His compositions were popular with the new generation of Romantic artists.

George Walker (1772–1847): English Gothic novelist who wrote in the antireform style, his works were reactions against the work of writers William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft.

Upon his return in 1799, Coleridge settled in Keswick, near the Lake District. The move to Keswick marked the beginning of an era of chronic illness and personal misery for Coleridge. When his health suffered because of the damp climate, he took opium as a remedy and quickly became addicted. (Opium is a drug derived from poppy juice, which was commonly used for many ailments from fever to sleeplessness and pain management in Western medicine in this period. Many artists and writers of the Romantic period used opium.) His marriage, too, was failing; Coleridge had fallen in love with Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson. He was separated from his wife, but since he did not condone divorce, he did not remarry.

End of Close Friendship with Wordsworth In an effort to improve his health and morale, Coleridge traveled to Italy but returned to London more depressed than before. He began a series of lectures on poetry and Shakespeare, which helped establish his reputation as a critic, yet they were not entirely successful at the time because of his disorganized methods of presentation. Coleridge's next undertaking, a periodical titled the *Friend*, which offered essays on morality, taste, and religion, failed due to financial difficulties. He continued to visit the Wordsworths, yet was morose and antisocial. When a mutual friend confided to him Wordsworth's complaints about his behavior, an irate Coleridge, perhaps fueled in part by his jealousy of Wordsworth's pro-

ductivity and prosperity, repudiated their friendship. Although the two men were finally reconciled in 1812, they never again achieved their former intimacy.

Productive Years Late in Life Coleridge's last years were spent under the care of Dr. James Gilman, who helped him control his opium habit. Despite Coleridge's continuing melancholy, he was able to dictate the *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817) to his friend John Morgan. The *Biographia Literaria* contains what many critics consider Coleridge's greatest critical writings. In this work, he developed aesthetic theories, which he had intended to be the introduction to a great philosophical opus that was never completed.

Coleridge published many other works during this period, including the unfinished poems *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, as well as a number of political and theological writings. This resurgence of productivity, coupled with his victory over his addiction, brought Coleridge renewed confidence. His newfound happiness was marred by failing health, however, and he died in 1834 of complications from his lifelong dependence on opium.

Works in Literary Context

Readers of Coleridge have always been confronted with a daunting problem in the sheer volume and incredible variety of his writings. His career as an intellectual figure spans several decades and encompasses major works in several different fields, including poetry, criticism, philosophy, and theology. Because of the richness and subtlety of his prose style, his startling and often profound insights, and his active, inquiring mind, Coleridge is now generally regarded as the most profound and significant prose writer of the English Romantic period.

Spiritual Symbolism The poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* perhaps best incorporates both Coleridge's imaginative use of verse and the intertwining of reality and fantasy. The tale of a seaman who kills an albatross, the poem presents a variety of religious and supernatural images to depict a moving spiritual journey of doubt, renewal, and eventual redemption. The symbolism contained in this work has sparked diverse interpretations, and several commentators consider it an allegorical record of Coleridge's own spiritual pilgrimage. Critics also debate the nature of the Mariner's salvation and question whether the poem possesses a moral.

Influence of German Romantic Philosophy Coleridge's analyses channeled the concepts of the German Romantic philosophers into England and helped establish the modern view of William Shakespeare as a master of depicting human character. The *Biographia Literaria*, the most famous of Coleridge's critical writings, was inspired by his disdain for the eighteenth-century empiricists who relied on observation and experimentation to formulate their aesthetic theories. In this work, he turned

to such German philosophers as Kant and Schelling for a more universal interpretation of art. From Schelling, Coleridge drew his “exaltation of art to a metaphysical role,” and his contention that art is analogous to nature is borrowed from Kant.

Definition of Imagination Of the different sections in the *Biographia Literaria*, perhaps the most often studied is Coleridge’s definition of the imagination. He describes two kinds of imagination, the primary and the secondary: the primary is the agent of perception, which relays the details of experience, while the secondary interprets these details and creates from them. The concept of a dual imagination forms a seminal part of Coleridge’s theory of poetic unity, in which disparate elements are reconciled as a unified whole. According to Coleridge, the purpose of poetry was to provide pleasure “through the medium of beauty.”

Shakespeare Criticism Coleridge’s other great critical achievement is his work on Shakespeare. His Shakespearean criticism is among the most important in the English language, although it was never published in formal essays; instead, it has been recorded for posterity in the form of marginalia and transcribed reports from lectures. Informed by his admiration for and understanding of Shakespeare, Coleridge’s critical theory allowed for more in-depth analysis of the plays than did the writings of his eighteenth-century predecessors. His emphasis on individual psychology and characterization marked the inception of a new critical approach to Shakespeare, which had a profound influence on later studies.

Influence As a major figure in the English Romantic movement, he is best known for three poems, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel*. Although the three poems were poorly received during Coleridge’s lifetime, they are now praised as classic examples of imaginative verse. The influence of *Ancient Mariner* rings clear in Shelley and Keats in the next generation, and in Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, and Swinburne among their Victorian inheritors. In the title of W. H. Auden’s *Look, Stranger!* (1936), the echo of the Mariner’s exhortation, “Listen, Stranger!” from the text of 1798, shows how far Coleridge’s voice would carry.

Coleridge was also influential as a critic, especially with *Biographia Literaria*. His criticism, which examines the nature of poetic creation and stresses the relationship between emotion and intellect, helped free literary thought from the neoclassical strictures of eighteenth-century scholars.

Works in Critical Context

Critical estimation of Coleridge’s works increased dramatically after his death, but relatively little was written on them until the twentieth century. Opinions of his work vary widely, yet few today deny the talent evident

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coleridge claimed *Kubla Khan* was inspired by an opium-induced dream. Here are some other works that were inspired by dreams, opium experiences, or flights of imagination:

Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1822), a memoir by Thomas de Quincey. Coleridge’s friend and fellow opium addict wrote of his experiences with addiction.

The Castle of Otranto (1764), a novel by Horace Walpole. The first Gothic novel, this story set the genre’s conventions, from crumbling castles to secret passageways to melodramatic revelations. A sensation upon its publication, it single-handedly launched a genre.

Compendium of Chronicles (1307), a literary work by Rashid al-Din. This fourteenth-century Iranian work of literature and history includes the detail that the inspiration for Kubla Khan’s palace was given to the Mongolian ruler in a dream. The book was published in English for the first time twenty years after the final revision of Coleridge’s masterpiece.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790–1793), a poem by William Blake. This poem explicitly explores the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious minds and the role of imagination as prophecy.

in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel*.

The Coleridge phenomenon, as it might be called, has been recounted in every literary generation, usually with the emphasis on wonder rather than disappointment, though sometimes—among moralizing critics, never among poets—with a venom that recalls the disillusionment of his associates. Henry James’s story, “The Coxon Fund” (1895), based on table talk of the genius who became a nuisance, is indicative of both attitudes. The Coleridge phenomenon has distorted Coleridge’s real achievement, which was unique in scope and aspiration if all too human in its fits and starts.

Kubla Khan For many years, critics considered *Kubla Khan* merely a novelty of limited meaning, but John Livingston Lowes’s 1927 study, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, explored its imaginative complexity and the many literary sources that influenced it, including the works of Plato and Milton. Though Coleridge himself dismissed the poem as a “psychological experiment,” it is now considered a forerunner of the work of the Symbolists and Surrealists in its presentation of the Unconscious.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner *Lyrical Ballads* was deliberately experimental, as the authors insisted from the start, and *Ancient Mariner* pointed the way.

The largely negative reviews that the book excited on publication concentrated on *Ancient Mariner*, in part because it was the most substantial poem in the collection, but also because of its self-consciously archaic diction and incredible plot. The poem was considered strange, and the character of the Mariner also caused confusion.

Despite the problems, the poem flourished on the basis of strong local effects—of its pictures of the “land of ice and snow” and of the ghastly ship in the doldrums, in association with a drumming ballad meter. Wordsworth frankly disliked it after the reviews came in, but Lamb led the way in appreciating its odd mix of romance and realism. Showing its influence, satires were also published in leading periodicals.

Responses to Literature

1. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a poem steeped in symbolism. Choose an aspect or character of the poem (such as the Albatross) and discuss its symbolic meanings.
2. Featured in Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, Xanadu has since entered the English language as another word for paradise or utopia. Describe your own personal Xanadu in a poem.
3. Like *Kubla Khan*, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Ozymandias* describes a fantastical ancient kingdom. Compare the two kingdoms and how they influence the tone of their respective poems.
4. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the killing of an albatross represents a crime against nature. What crimes against nature might a modern person commit to bring about similar punishment as suffered by the Mariner?
5. How does the historical Kublai Khan compare with Coleridge’s dream-inflected vision of the Mongol leader?

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Colette

BORN: 1873, Saint-Sauveuren-Puisaye, France

DIED: 1954, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Novels, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Claudine at School (1900)

Chéri (1920)

Gigi (1945)

Overview

French author Colette was also a mime and dancer who appeared on stage scantily clad. Most significantly, Colette was a great writer whom Marcel Proust called “maître” (master).



Colette Colette, 1948, photograph. John Craven / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Happy Childhood Colette was born on January 28, 1873, in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye in the département of Yonne, as Sidonie Gabrielle Colette, daughter of Jules and Sidonie Colette. Her mother, the daughter of journalists and writers, had been married before and had two children from her first marriage. Sidonie was a remarkable woman who later figured importantly in Colette's autobiographical works and, as Sido, was the model Colette idealized in the later part of her life. Her father was more remote and so preoccupied with his obsessive love for his wife that the child felt he had little time for her.

An Early Marriage Colette had a happy childhood. She grew up in an era commonly referred to as the *Belle Époque* (Beautiful Era), during which Europe—particularly France and Germany—experienced an extended period of peace and prosperity. This lasted until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The Colettes, however, were plagued by increasing financial difficulties, and when Colette reached the age of seventeen, her future seemed threatened. In France at the end of the nineteenth century the only prospect for a respectable middle-class girl was marriage, but the Colettes could offer no dowry, and it would be difficult to find a husband to accept a woman with no dowry. The solution to this problem was thirty-five-year-old Henry Gauthier-Villars, son of a well-known publisher and with whom Jules Colette had been acquainted.

Henry Gauthier-Villars, better known as Willy, was a music critic, journalist, and manager of a writing mill. Though notorious for womanizing, he had been living for three years in a stable relationship with a woman named Germaine Servat who had recently died and left him with a small son. Because of his dubious reputation, Willy could not hope to marry a rich socialite, and was happy to marry the young Colette. For her part, Colette was dazzled by the worldly Willy and eager for the adventure a life with him seemed to promise.

Becoming Madame Willy In 1893 Colette became Madame Willy, but her life for the next thirteen years in Paris would be one of frequent disillusionment, for Willy soon reverted to his old ways. For a long time she was seriously ill with an unexplained malady. It was soon after her recovery that Willy suggested she write down some of her stories about her childhood, including some potentially scandalous details—which she obediently did. At first he put the stories aside, but he later decided that he had made a mistake and rushed them to print under his own name. *Claudine à l'école* (1900, published as *Claudine at School* in 1930) thus became the first of the Claudine series. Sidonie Gabrielle Willy became Colette the writer.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Colette's famous contemporaries include:

Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923): Parisian Sarah Bernhardt was the most famous actress of her era, renowned for her tragic roles.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955): African American educator who founded Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Marchese Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937): Pioneer of the radiotelegraph system who shared a Nobel Prize in Physics with Ferdinand Braun in 1909.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): Profound and prolific essayist and novelist who spent his life on one of the most revered works of the century: *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927).

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901): French painter who depicted the bohemian and other lifestyles of Paris. For this he was known as the "soul of Montmartre."

Featured in the Claudine series was a wild, clever, sensual, outspoken, and both tender and cruel girl who was a version of Colette herself. The girl discovers lesbian affairs between headmistresses and teachers, has visits by a lascivious doctor, and has many racy conversations. The series became so popular it extended to Claudine collars, scent, haircuts (modeled on Colette's), and a play Willy directed based on the second book of the series. In the starring role was the Parisian music-hall actress Polaire, whom Willy called one of his "twins." He was often seen on opening nights with Polaire on one arm and her "twin," Colette, on the other.

Seeking Independence *Claudine s'en va: Journal d'Annie* (1903, published as *The Innocent Wife* in 1935), clearly marks the beginning of the end of Claudine. The first-person narrative is transferred to a new heroine, Annie, one of Claudine's friends and an alter ego of both Claudine and Colette. This parallels Colette's plans to leave Willy and find her independence. From 1904 to 1907 Colette prepared to leave Willy. However, because Willy's name was on her works and he was receiving almost all her royalties, Colette could not afford to leave. Instead, she set about training herself for a new career as a dancer and mime.

Female Friends and Lovers After leaving Willy, Colette found comfort among new friends and in liaisons with Natalie Barney and the Marquise de Belbeuf, known as Missy. In the 1932 *Ces Plaisirs* (published as *The Pure and the Impure* in 1933), Colette wrote about the way in which women who are hurt by men defend themselves by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Colette's fiction often treated the subject of unconventional love affairs. Here are some other works that focus on difficult relationships:

Wuthering Heights (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. In this classic, the two main characters love each other deeply but are torn apart by class differences.

Another Country (1962), a novel by James Baldwin. African American author Baldwin details the lives of young bohemians in New York's Greenwich Village neighborhood during the 1950s.

Rubyfruit Jungle (1980), a novel by Rita Mae Brown. In this much-acclaimed book, tomboy Molly falls in love with another woman.

Forbidden Love: A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan (2003), a novel by Norma Khouri. In this book, an Arabian Muslim woman falls in love with a Catholic man with dire consequences.

turning toward other women for affection and sympathy. In writing it was risqué enough, but expressed on stage at the Moulin Rouge—mimed as a female-to-female embrace, danced nearly naked—it brought the curtain down. Colette was the new scandal of Paris.

New Themes Liberation became the theme of the next Colette work, which confirmed her talents. *La Vagabonde* appeared in serial form in *La Vie Parisienne* (1910), was published in book form the same year, and was later translated as *Renée la Vagabonde* in 1931 and again as *The Vagabond* in 1954. It is considered by most critics to contain her best writing. In the work she found her voice, gave nods to the earlier characters of the Claudine series, and gave birth to an anagram-like name and protagonist, Renée Néré—clearly Colette's double.

New Family While her protagonists rejected the love offered by suitors, Colette was succumbing to it. In December 1910, having had the short story "Le Poison" recently published in the daily paper *Le Matin*, Colette met subdirector Henry de Jouvenel. Jouvenel was of aristocratic descent and, like Willy, ambitious and a womanizer. In September 1911, Colette moved in with him, and in December of the following year married him, when she was two months pregnant and three months into grieving the loss of her mother, who had recently died.

Still, Colette seemed content. She had continued doing mime and was still writing, particularly short stories, and *Entrave* (1913, published as *Recaptured* in 1931), sees a once-free Renée now "hobbled" by needs,

nostalgia, and regret, as well as a male foil who is inferior in talent and brains and who is a "big, dense male." Colette gave birth to Colette-Renée de Jouvenel, whom she nicknamed Bel-Gazou, on July 3, 1913.

The collection of short stories *L'Envers du music-hall* (1913, published as *Music-Hall Sidelights* in 1957) was well received, but Colette's marriage began to come apart soon after Jouvenel was mobilized as a reserve officer in August 1914, at the start of World War I. The couple divorced in 1924.

Wide Acclaim and Lasting Love Affair After World War I, a conflict that devastated Europe, Colette's career blossomed. She published *Chéri* in 1920, and soon became friends with avant-garde writer Jean Cocteau. In 1925 Colette met Maurice Goudeket, a businessman turned journalist sixteen years her junior, with whom she was to have her longest and happiest liaison. By the end of the 1920s, Colette was considered one of France's greatest living writers, a reputation she cemented with *Sido* (1929), a book whose heroine was based on her mother.

Colette and Goudeket were married on April 3, 1935. Colette stirred controversy yet again for her actions during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II. The Nazi-controlled French government, called the Vichy government, was reviled by members of the resistance movement. Colette, however, cooperated with the government, perhaps out of concern for the safety of her Jewish husband, whom she hid in her attic during the war. In 1944 she published the popular novel *Gigi*, which was adapted as a successful Broadway play in 1951 and, in 1958, a major Hollywood musical.

Colette was awarded France's Legion of Honor in 1952. She died in 1954 and was given a state funeral.

Works in Literary Context

Colette's Influences Her mother Sidonie—Sido for short—was Colette's greatest influence and strongest supporter; in Colette's book entitled *Sido*, Colette writes of her childhood and her mother's nurturing and powerful influence.

Theatrical Style The theater had obviously had a potent influence on Colette, for *Chéri* her best-known work, reflects the shapes and sounds of theater experienced by Colette. The same penchant for rhythm is found in all of her writing, though it is more mature in the later works, just as is her projecting of herself onto her characters. These characters, like Colette, search for love and autonomy, but they come to accept their solitary destinies by embracing fate. They sacrifice happiness of love through love of liberty.

Colette's Influence and Impact Writers like Proust, so affected by works like *Chéri*, would express their gratitude and admiration. Proust, in fact, admitted to being "moved to tears," both out of awe and envy that

particular scenes had made his own attempts at similar scenes look pathetic. Proust declared his admiration for Colette's insight and sureness of touch. In general, as an exemplar of her time, Colette engaged in the "hothouse atmosphere of the fin de siècle," the changing of both moral standards and women's roles. Colette was a part of the influence on such change, in person and through her writing, until her death. For example, her state funeral was the first given a divorced woman by the French Republic. Six thousand people walked by her bier in the Palais-Royal to pay their respects. Most of them were women. Whether they realized it or not, Colette had in some way influenced the way they dressed, thought, felt, and lived.

Works in Critical Context

The Vagabond While several of her works have earned accolades, many others also stand out as most often read, studied, and discussed—among them *The Vagabond*. *The Vagabond* was perhaps the first work to evidence overall harmony of construction, and it was the first to receive wide acclaim as a major literary achievement—a classic example of the *roman d'analyse* (novel of analysis), both restrained in tone and tightly knit in structure. It also has a lively and convincing setting, and is a moving and profound study of a very individual woman, one who has characteristics which remain significant today. Hers is a continuing feminine dilemma, but it is as well that of any human being who, in isolation, faces up to the realization that he or she is responsible for his or her own destiny. The final part of the novel in particular exudes a poignant existential sadness that moved readers and critics alike. The critic and journalist André Billy declared at the time that Colette merited the terms of praise that had once been applied to François-Auguste-René Chateaubriand: "She has invented a new way of being sad," he wrote.

Responses to Literature

1. What do you think Colette means when she uses the word "freedom" in her work? Where does she describe or tell a story of freedom? How does this match your understanding of the word?
2. Colette's 1944 novel *Gigi* was made into an Academy Award-winning musical in 1958. Read the novel and then watch the film. Do you notice any major differences between the two? Why do you think the film version was so popular?
3. The "Belle Époque" is a period in European history lasting from the end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of World War I marked by a flowering in the arts and sciences. Use your library and the Internet to find out more about art, science, culture, and politics during this period. Select one major scientific advancement or artistic work and describe and explain it in the context of Belle Époque Europe.
4. Like Colette, author Zelda Fitzgerald published some of her work under her famous husband's name. Use your library and the Internet to find out more about Zelda Fitzgerald's work. What were the consequences of her decision to let her work be credited to F. Scott Fitzgerald? How do those consequences differ from what Colette experienced?

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Wilkie Collins

BORN: 1824, London, England

DIED: 1889, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

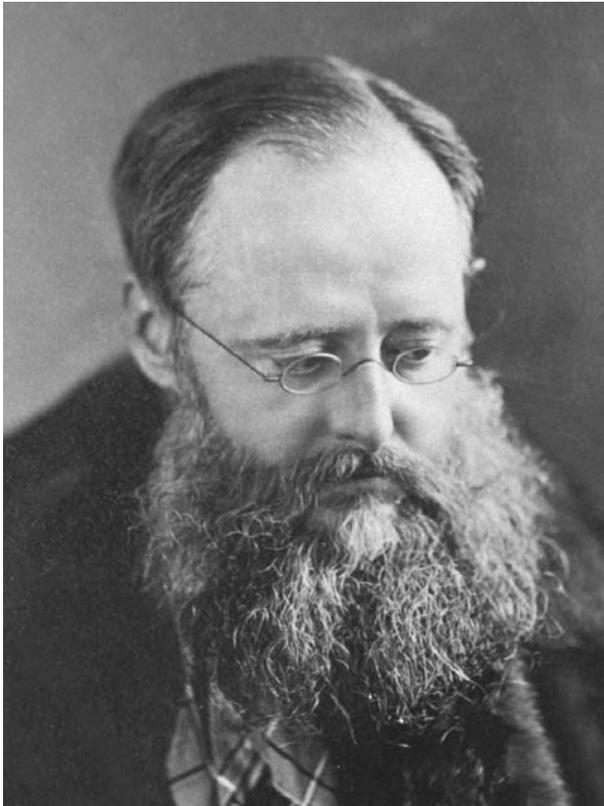
MAJOR WORKS:

The Woman in White (1860)

The Moonstone (1868)

Overview

Wilkie Collins combined the romantic and the realistic in his mystery stories and provided a model for subsequent suspense and mystery fiction. He experimented with existing genres by introducing the principle of fair play, the formula of the least likely suspect being the criminal, multiple narrative styles, and the depiction of the crime as flowing naturally from the personality of the criminal. He also developed the character of the eccentric detective, accompanied by a faithful chronicler, who succeeds through rational methods where the police have failed.



Wilkie Collins Collins, William Wilkie, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Italian Travels Lead to Critical Attitude Toward Victorian England William Wilkie Collins was born on January 8, 1824, in London, England, to William Collins, a successful painter, and Harriet Geddes Collins. His father emphasized the importance of religious faith and aristocratic connections, but the biting attacks in Collins's novels upon religious hypocrisy and social pretentiousness reveal a break from his father's principles. From 1836 to 1838, he and his family traveled through Italy. This glimpse of Italian culture was a vivid alternative to the narrowness of British Victorian society and perhaps provided a basis for the critical attitude toward that society he was later to display.

Collins lived most of his life in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with advances in industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in urban factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with proper behavior in

society and domestic life, a topic that figures prominently in the works of Collins and other Victorian writers.

In 1841, after he had finished school, Collins was apprenticed to a firm of tea merchants. Two years later, his first short story was published. At his father's prompting, he began to study law in 1846, which later would influence the narrative structures of his two best-known novels.

Collins and Dickens Early in 1851, Collins and Charles Dickens became close friends, and Collins became a paid contributor to Dickens's *Household Words* magazine in 1853 and an editor in 1856. Dickens considered Collins the most promising young writer of his time, and his encouragement and the association with *Household Words* were influential in shaping Collins's approach to fiction and his career as a popular author.

Early Novels *Basil* is Collins's most significant novel of the 1850s. It concerns a man who becomes infatuated with a woman below his social station. The novel was condemned by many contemporary critics because it did not "elevate and purify" the reader. With *The Dead Secret* (1857), Collins moved closer to sensation fiction, a genre critic Kathleen Tillotson has aptly christened the "novel-with-a-secret." Two volumes of short fiction, *After Dark* (1856) and *The Queen of Hearts* (1859), display Collins's increasing preoccupation with suspense and an innovative approach to detection.

Unconventional Personal Life In 1859 Collins began living with Caroline Graves, a widow with a daughter. This was a highly unconventional choice and was met with the disapproval of the majority of his friends. In 1868, Graves married Joseph Clow, a plumber, and Collins began a relationship with Martha Rudd, with whom he would have three children. By the early 1870s, Graves was again living with Collins. He never married either woman but kept two separate households. At his death he left the income from his estate divided between the two women and his three children, who were acknowledged in his will. Collins's sympathetic fictional treatment of illegitimacy and the problems of fallen women, as well as his frequently cutting comments about those who confused morality with respectability, no doubt reflect his personal situation and his sensitivity to the difficulties faced by the two women in his life.

The Woman in White *The Woman in White* (1860) was Collins's most popular book and one of the most popular novels of the century, although it was not reviewed positively by critics. Collins's use of a witness as narrator not only enriches the novel but also emphasizes the legal predicament of the female protagonist and the desperate position of married women who were, as Victorian philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill said, "legal slaves." As well as being superb suspense fiction, it embodies serious comment on contemporary

society. Deception is the key to its mystery, as it is in his next two novels, *No Name* (1862) and *Armada* (1866).

The Moonstone In 1868 the second of Collins's great novels, *The Moonstone*, appeared. No novel considered a detective story has received such praise or held its public over such a long period of time. Again using multiple narrators, Collins limited the focus of this novel to one event, the disappearance of the fabulous Indian diamond of the title.

Later Work and Death After Charles Dickens died, Collins's work declined in quality, although it was still popular. Integrating suspense and social criticism proved a difficult and often impossible feat. A continued decline in his health, constant pain relieved only by laudanum—a derivative of opium—and the effects of long-term addiction resulted in increasing reclusiveness in the late 1870s and 1880s.

Despite the inferior quality of Collins's later works, he continued to be popular with the public and was widely reviewed in influential periodicals and newspapers. His last years, marred by deteriorating eyesight and the constant pain of gout, were not happy, but he continued working until his death on September 23, 1889, from a stroke.

Works in Literary Context

Domesticated Crime The significance of Collins's work lies in its fusion of the romantic and the realistic and its creation of suspense and terror in ordinary, middle-class settings. Collins's influence on mystery and detective fiction, from writers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle through Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers to the present, reveals the crucial importance of his domestication of criminal activities and the great debt that subsequent authors owe to his emphasis upon the actual.

E. F. Bleiler writes: "While Collins was aware of the work of Poe and Gaboriau, he paid little heed to their contributions and worked in the mainstream of Victorian domestic and social fiction." By integrating accurate depictions of contemporary manners and customs with the secrecy and romance of crime, he established a pattern that modern writers of mystery fiction still follow.

Works in Critical Context

The obituaries that followed Collins's death emphasized his skill as a storyteller and expressed gratitude for the delight he had given audiences for forty years. Algernon Charles Swinburne called him a "genuine artist" of the second rank, comparable in merit to novelists Anthony Trollope and Charles Reade. Although his reputation, like that of many other Victorian writers, was in eclipse during the early twentieth century, it began to revive in the 1920s when T. S. Eliot turned critical attention to his work. Today Collins's reputation is secure with both academic critics and the mystery story-reading public.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Collins's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): Considered the leading Victorian novelist, Dickens integrated social criticism into his popular books; his best-known works include *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930): Scottish writer who created the Sherlock Holmes detective stories.

Stonewall Jackson (1824–1863): American Confederate general during the Civil War; one of the Confederate army's best generals, his death by pneumonia was a severe blow to their cause.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863): British novelist famous for *Vanity Fair*, a satirical look at English society.

Jules Verne (1828–1905): French writer who helped pioneer the genre of science fiction; novels such as *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* explored underwater and space travel before either was technologically possible.

According to E. F. Bleiler, "Wilkie Collins is generally considered the greatest Victorian master of mystery fiction." Critic and poet T. S. Eliot and mystery writer Dorothy Sayers have called *The Moonstone* the best-ever English detective story.

Subjectivity and Individual Perception The Victorian distinction between the novel of incident and the novel of character worked to Collins's disadvantage, and although he himself professed contempt for such criticism, it is significant that in the preface to *The Moonstone* he wrote that he was attempting "to trace the influence of character on circumstances" rather than "the influence of circumstances upon character" as he had previously done. Modern criticism, following Henry James, sees plot and character as inseparably interrelated and is perhaps better able to understand Collins's achievement than either Collins or his contemporaries. This is especially true of the narrative technique used in both *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. Contemporaries recognized that multiple narrators contributed to the dramatic development of the story and to its "life-like" quality without, apparently, seeing that Collins, in making subjectivity and individual perception central to his method, had made not only a major advance in the possibilities of narrative but had also devised a method for the revelation of personality that is inextricable from plot.

The Woman in White When it was published in 1860, *The Woman in White* brought sharply divided

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Collins examined social issues within the mystery story, expanding its range as a tool for social criticism. Here are some other works that do the same:

Blanche Cleans Up (1999), a novel by Barbara Neely. In this novel, an African American housekeeper working for a wealthy white family gets involved in a murder case affecting her employers; along the way to solving the crime, she comments on race and class issues in contemporary America.

The Dead Sit Round in a Ring (2004), a novel by David Lawrence. In this novel, a London detective must find the link between a group suicide and eastern European human trafficking.

The Ghostway (1992), a novel by Tony Hillerman. In this story, a Navajo detective must solve a shooting and must also decide between moving off the reservation because of his love for a white woman or becoming more deeply involved in his Navajo culture.

Hard Time (1999), a novel by Sara Paretsky. A Chicago-based private investigator ends up in jail in this novel, revealing what life is really like on the inside of a woman's prison.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" (1861), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. A "diary" of a woman slowly going mad, this short story examines both the medical profession and women's subservient role in Victorian society.

reviews. An unnamed reviewer for *Dublin University Magazine*, for example, states that the author's work is "nothing that would entitle him to a higher place among English novelists, than the compiler of an average school-history would enjoy among English historians." The reviewer also states, "There is not one lifelike character: not one natural dialogue in the whole book. Both hero and heroine are wooden, commonplace, uninteresting in any way apart from the story itself." The author's attempts at modern realism are compared to "the pages of a nursery tale." In contrast, a reviewer for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* calls it a "remarkable novel," and "the elaborate result of years of labor." The reviewer concludes, "[Collins] has improved upon all his early works to an extent which proves in only too edifying and complete a way the benefits of perseverance and painstaking."

Responses to Literature

1. Do you think that current detective shows on TV examine social issues as they examine crime, like Wilkie Collins did in his work? Does the current

focus on the scientific side of crime solving take away from the psychological side, or does it add to it?

2. Collins's personal life was scandalous for his time, with his long-term relationships with two women, neither of whom he married. Yet his fiction was still extremely popular, and the public probably did not know many personal details about his relationships. How does knowing the messy details of an artist's personal life affect how you view their work? Do you think it should be public knowledge, or should domestic issues remain private?
3. Collins used multiple narrators with shifting points of view. Do you find it effective when movies or TV shows present various points of view, making the truth more difficult to figure out, or do you find it confusing?
4. Mystery and detective fiction are hugely popular genres. Why do you think that is? What makes reading about crime so popular? How is our reaction to crime different today than it was in the Victorian period?
5. Collins examined crime as following naturally from someone's personality. There have been many theories of how criminals are created, from genetics to social conditions. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research some theories of criminality and write an essay comparing and contrasting them. Which makes the most sense to you? Why?

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❏ Padraic Colum

BORN: 1881, County Longford, Ireland

DIED: 1972, Enfield, Conn.

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Land (1905)

Wild Earth: A Book of Verse (1907)

Thomas Muskerry (1910)

Dramatic Legends, and Other Poems (1922)

The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland (1960)

Overview

Padraic Colum was a major figure in Ireland's Literary Revival period in the early twentieth century. It was Colum—writing out of his childhood experience of life in the midlands of Ireland—who most accurately expressed the sensibility of the Irish peasant that larger figures like W. B. Yeats and John M. Synge saw as the bedrock of a new literature for Ireland.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unstable Early Years The oldest of the eight children of Patrick and Susan MacCormack Collumb, Colum (as he spelled his name later) was born on December 8,



Padraic Colum Colum, Padraic, photograph. AP Images.

1881, in a County Longford workhouse, where his father was master. At the time, Ireland was still under British rule. Poverty and hunger remained widespread among the Irish in the decades after the devastating effects of the potato famine of the 1840s, while their British landlords and rulers controlled the land and continued to export crops to England. In 1889, his father, in an effort to improve the family fortunes, left the family for the United States, to participate in the Colorado gold rush. After the great famine, many Irish immigrated to America to seek a better life and economic prosperity. Colorado was a destination for people desiring to find a fortune in gold, silver, and lead, and mining towns were common throughout the state in the late nineteenth century.

When Patrick Collumb went to America, the children went to live with a grandmother and her family in a rural area of neighboring County Cavan. Here, Colum experienced the life of the Irish countryside that later figured in his best work. He came under the influence of an uncle, Micky Burns, who traveled through the country with Colum in tow, buying fowl to sell for export. Burns passed the time by using his inexhaustible

store of local ballads and legends to entertain the young Colum.

Life in Dublin Sparks Literary Career When Colum's father returned in 1890, he took a job as a railway stationmaster, and the family moved to Sandy Cove, just south of Dublin. Padraic attended the Glashtule National School in Sandy Cove until he was seventeen and worked with his brother delivering parcels for the railway. In 1898, he took a job as a clerk in the Irish Railway Clearing House in Dublin. Colum also began writing in his spare time and frequenting the various literary circles in Dublin.

It was an exhilarating time to be in Dublin, especially for a young man interested in literature, for several reasons. The effort to establish an Irish theater was underway. New literary and political periodicals were springing up as many Irish continued to seek home rule, if not outright independence from Great Britain. An interest in Gaelic literature (Gaelic is the native language of Ireland) and folk traditions was being kindled through various groups. Writers such as Yeats, George Russell, and George Moore were gathering to discuss the possibilities for a new kind of Irish literature.

Early Poems and Plays Emphasize Rural Life Colum saw several of his poems published in the new *United Irishman*, run by his friend Arthur Griffith, later the leader of Sinn Féin. Some of these poems—including “A Drover” and another of Colum's best-known lyrics, “A Poor Scholar of the Forties”—attracted the attention of Yeats, who came to be an important friend and mentor to Colum.

Although it was Colum's poetry that first attracted Yeats's eye, it was Colum's interest in the theater that eventually placed him in the center of the literary revival. Through his membership in *Cumann na nGaedéal*, a nationalist group that undertook to produce patriotic plays, Colum met, in 1901, Willie and Frank Fay, the amateur actors who later played a significant part in the success of the Abbey Theatre. Colum became an active member of the Fays' dramatic group, writing several plays and even acting in a few productions. In the next few years, Colum wrote several successful plays that, like his poetry, reflect his vision of rural and provincial Irish life.

By his description, Colum was determined to write poetry that was anchored “close to the ground.” Nowhere is this effort more evident—or more successful—than in his first volume of poems, *Wild Earth: A Book of Verse*, published in 1907 and revised and augmented in 1916 as *Wild Earth, and Other Poems*. This work demonstrates as well how his early poetry stands at the opposite end of the poetic spectrum; opposite the deliberately mythic and symbolic poetry that Yeats was writing early in his career.

Radical Changes in Personal Life Between the first publication of *Wild Earth* in 1907 and the publica-

tion of the expanded version in 1916, Colum's life changed radically. In 1912, he married Mary Catherine Gunning Maguire, a young university graduate who later had a distinguished career as a literary critic. In the same time period, there were startling changes in the political life of Ireland as well, and Colum was very much caught up in these. He joined the Irish Volunteers, a militant nationalist group led partly by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and took part in a bloody gun-running episode at Howth, near Dublin, in July 1914. The Brotherhood was a secret nationalist society that wanted Ireland to become an independent republic and used violence to help achieve its goal. Shortly after the gunrunning incident, Colum and Mary accepted a long-standing invitation to visit Colum's aunt in Pittsburgh. What was planned as a visit of a few months turned out to be lifelong residence in the United States. Consequently, Colum was not present during the Easter Rising of 1916. During the Easter Rising, the Volunteers' poorly coordinated attempt to seize and control a government building in Dublin went awry and led to five days of bloody fighting in the streets between Irish insurgents and the British forces sent to quell the rebellion.

In Pittsburgh, Colum was offered the chance to give some lectures on Irish literature, and later he received other offers for similar appearances in New York. It soon became clear—partly because World War I was drying up most of Colum's potential sources of income from writing for British periodicals—that economic survival for the Colums depended on their staying in the United States; so they stayed. Meanwhile, World War I raged through Europe, leaving 10 million soldiers dead, including many Irish soldiers who fought alongside British forces. The war had begun in 1914 and had ground to a bloody stalemate on the Western front by 1916. The United States abandoned its isolationist stance in 1917, entering the war and tipping the scales in favor of the Allied forces of France, England, and Russia. The war ended in 1919.

A Growing Reputation Colum's next collection of poetry, *Dramatic Legends, and Other Poems*, appeared in 1922. The book contains some new poems in the vein of the peasant poetry of *Wild Earth* and a considerable number of love lyrics, including several that demonstrate Colum's connection with the Gaelic tradition of love poetry dealing with loss.

During his early years in the United States, Colum's American reputation flourished, especially as a writer of prose. Partly to meet economic needs, Colum wrote Irish folk stories for children, and the result, *The King of Ireland's Son*, published in 1916, marked the first of many such collections in Colum's career. In 1923, his first novel appeared, *Castle Conquer*. Like his early plays, it deals with rural Ireland, specifically with the land war of the 1880s fought on behalf of poor tenant farmers by the Irish Land League. The group sought fair rents as well as ownership of the land for those who worked it. In 1923,

Colum and his wife traveled to Hawaii at the invitation of the Hawaiian legislature, to collect a volume of authentic Polynesian folk poems, stories, and legends. The Hawaiian venture produced two books, published in 1924 and 1925. In 1926, Colum produced a group of essays about Ireland and another collection of similar pieces, *Cross-Roads in Ireland*, that appeared four years later.

Assisting Joyce In the 1920s and 1930s, the Colums lived first in New Canaan, Connecticut, and then settled in New York City. During several visits to Paris in these years, Colum renewed and deepened his earlier friendship with James Joyce, also an Irish-born author. In those early years, Colum had helped raise money for Joyce to try to get Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) published in Ireland. He continued to help Joyce however he could, including offering his knowledge of Irish history and topography, which proved of great assistance to Joyce in the latter's work on *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Colum and his wife later collaborated on a book on Joyce, *Our Friend James Joyce* (1958).

The last thirty years of Colum's life offer little evidence to counter the argument that the best of his poetry was written early in his career, but Colum remained productive. He and Mary both began teaching at Columbia University in 1939, and Colum continued to lecture widely in the United States and to write children's stories and folktales. His second novel, *The Flying Swans*, appeared in 1957.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Colum wrote five plays based on the tradition of Japanese Noh drama that Yeats had drawn on earlier. Two more volumes of poetry came out in 1953 and 1954, *The Collected Poems of Padraic Colum* and *The Vegetable Kingdom*, respectively. It was not until 1960 that the most important volume of poetry in this final period of Colum's career was published. *The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland* collects poems from his earlier books but presents them as part of a larger vision of the Irish poet. A contract for children's literature with Macmillan Publishers set Colum up financially for the remainder of his life. He divided his later years between the United States and Ireland and died in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1972 at age ninety.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Colum's most successful plays—including *The Land* (1905), *The Fiddler's House* (1905), and *Thomas Muskerry* (1910)—are marked by a directness of style and a realistic vision that identify him as a writer of peasant dramas. These plays also locate him at the opposite end from John W. Synge, Lady Gregory, and Yeats on the spectrum of peasant drama.

Irish Themes Colum's early poetry also shares his commitment to realism and to the life of rural Ireland. Much of the atmosphere in Colum's poetry stems from his acquaintance with the Gaelic tradition and his admiration for several nineteenth-century Irish poets, espe-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Colum's famous contemporaries include:

Josephine Baker (1906–1975): African-American entertainer and singer who found fame on the Parisian stage in the 1920s. She was later a Civil Rights activist in the United States.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945): The preeminent Hungarian pianist and composer, recognized as one of the most significant musicians of the twentieth century and remembered for his cofounding of the field of ethnomusicology.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American author considered one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Faulkner was known for his experimental style and his complex explorations of the culture of the Deep South.

Eamon de Valera (1882–1975): A leader of the Irish Easter Rising, and later President of Ireland.

cially James Clarence Mangan and Samuel Ferguson, who worked to incorporate into English verse the intricate sound patterns and rhythms of Gaelic poetry, something very different from the metered norm of the English tradition. This tendency can be seen in poems such as "A Drover."

Irish traditions flow through most of Colum's work. In *Dramatic Legends*, a second theme of loss is given Irish dimensions, especially in a group of poems titled *Reminiscence*, that documents the passing away of old traditions and ways of life in rural Ireland. *The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland*, a long, mostly blank verse poem that introduces the volume, details the growth of a poet's mind, in this instance of an Irish poet's mind, and insists on the relationship between the Irish poet and the land and its traditions.

Works in Critical Context

The poetry that Colum produced during the 1920s and 1930s is, on the whole, considered unimpressive. But later and earlier work has been honored by scholars and critics alike. His early poems were often called works of genius by his contemporaries. One example of an important lauded early work was the collection *Wild Earth*.

Wild Earth (1907) A number of the poems in *Wild Earth* are translations of Gaelic poems or restorations of traditional Irish songs, and some of the best of these are love lyrics. An early critic of *Wild Earth*, Mary C. Sturgeon, linked the work of Colum with that of another Irish poet deeply committed to the native peasant tradition, Joseph Campbell. Sturgeon argued that in the poetry of Colum

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Colum, also wrote in the style of realism on themes involving their homelands:

A Book of Saints and Wonders (1901), a collection of folktales by Lady Gregory. In this volume, the author shapes stories based on those told to her at Ireland's Gort workhouse.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this volume the poet depicts childhood, reflects on identity, and describes the setting of rural Ireland.

Dubliners (1914), a short-story collection by James Joyce. In this volume, the author explores members of the middle class in early twentieth-century Ireland.

The Playboy of the Western World (1907), a play by John M. Synge. In this three-act drama set in an illicit bar in Ireland, Christy Mahon is on the run—claiming to have murdered his father.

and Campbell one can distinguish “the almost subconscious influence of race. Whether from inheritance or environment, it has ‘bred true’ in these poets; and it will be found to pervade their work like an atmosphere.”

Responses to Literature

1. If anything influenced Colum very early on, it might have been his father's leaving to participate in the Colorado gold rush—to make money for the family. Investigate the circumstances of the Colorado gold rush (also known as Pike's Peak gold rush). How many people, and what types of people, participated in it? Regardless of whether Colum's father was successful or not, how would this event have affected the young boy?
2. In his writing, Colum has a commitment to Irish folk tradition. Research Irish folk mythology or history to get a deeper sense of the people of Colum's writings and find paintings of traditional folk culture (such as Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* [1885]). As you look over the works of art, choose one you believe would best go with a Colum poem and share your reasons for your choice.
3. Besides being committed to Irish folk tradition, Colum maintained a faith in humanity in general. This is evident in many of his portrait poems. Choose a person to write about, someone who inspires your faith. Write a portrait poem. Include physical characteristics of the person, special features, bits of dialogue, or actions of the person to show your readers the greatness of this person.

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Ivy Compton-Burnett

BORN: 1884, Piner, Middlesex, England

DIED: 1969, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A House and Its Head (1935)

Elders and Betters (1944)

Manservant and Maidservant (1947)

The Present and the Past (1953)

Mother and Son (1955)

Overview

British novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett was a prolific writer, regarded during her lifetime as one of the most original writers of fiction in England. She attracted a small but devoted following of readers who appreciated



Dame Ivy Compton-Burnett *Compton-Burnett, Dame Ivy, 1955, photograph. Picture Post / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.*

her epigrammatic prose style and delighted in plot structures that were more often than not outrageously complex. The link between biography and fiction is crucial to an understanding of Compton-Burnett and her work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in a Large Victorian Family Born on June 5, 1884, in Piner, Middlesex, England, Compton-Burnett was the eldest daughter of James Compton Burnett and his second wife, Katherine. She was reared in a Victorian household of twelve children that included the numerous domestics whom she later cast as characters in her novels. Her father was a successful homeopathic physician. His second wife was a beautiful woman fifteen years his junior. To mark her own status, and that of her children, she introduced the hyphen into the Compton-Burnett name, thus distinguishing herself from her husband and his children by a previous marriage.

A Victorian Family Life James Compton-Burnett's medical practice in London kept him away from the family home in Hove during the week, leaving his wife in charge of the household. In the Victorian era—the nineteenth-century decades when Queen Victoria ruled over Great Britain—women were idealized as the helpmates of men and the keepers of the home and were seen as the “weaker sex.” A woman's proper sphere of influence was considered

her home and her children. Compton-Burnett's mother created an atmosphere of family tension and encouraged the sibling rivalries and secret alliances that were later to be analyzed with such clinical precision in her daughter's fiction. From the materials of her upbringing, Compton-Burnett would re-create this world of her childhood, inverting and subverting its values.

Except for the years spent at Howard and Royal Holloway Colleges, Compton-Burnett spent her life within the confines of this family until she was thirty years old. The children from her father's first marriage left home as early as possible. After their father's sudden death in 1901, the children of the second marriage were left in the care of their mother, but her mental and physical health degenerated so severely in the period leading up to her death in 1911 that Compton-Burnett was called upon to take increasing responsibilities in the rearing of her younger siblings. These responsibilities suited neither her interests nor her natural abilities. She was more interested in writing, and found some success at it, published her first novel *Dolores* in 1911.

Multiple Tragedies Compton-Burnett's attempt to establish a writing career were halted by events at home. Between the death of her father and the eventual breakup of the family home in Hove in 1915, the entire family lived “under the shadow of death.” They passed these years in mourning, first for their father and later for their brother Guy, who died of pneumonia in 1905. Her other adored brother, Noel, was killed while serving in World War I at the Battle of the Somme (a five-month British and French assault on the German position in Somme, which led to six hundred thousand casualties on the Allied side alone) in 1916. Two younger sisters, Topsy and Baby, killed themselves in a suicide pact in 1917. During these difficult years Compton-Burnett became increasingly withdrawn, and her jovial spirit gave way to bitterness. She retreated behind a mask of reserve, carefully watching the behavior of those around her.

Fourteen-Year Hiatus Between the publication of *Dolores* and *Pastors and Masters* (1925), there was a fourteen-year silence during which she recuperated from the trauma she suffered because of the deaths of her parents and four siblings. During this time, she also tried—unsuccessfully by her own account—to recover from the effects of the World War I. The Great War was fought primarily in continental Europe but greatly affected Britain. While it began with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia, the war soon encompassed much of the continent as diplomatic alliances and long-simmering tensions came to a head. Britain lost nearly an entire generation of young men who fought in the conflict, with casualties topping two million.

During these years, Compton-Burnett did not write. After her sisters left the house in Hove, she lived with various women—including the widow of her brother Noel—eventually meeting Margaret Jourdain, a strong,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Compton-Burnett's famous contemporaries include:

Wallis Simpson (1895–1986): An American socialite who married King Edward of England. Edward had to abdicate in order to marry the twice-divorced woman, and they lived as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor thereafter.

Jane Edna Hunter (1882–1971): The African-American attorney and social worker renowned for founding the Phyllis Wheatley Association of Cleveland, Ohio.

Alice Paul (1885–1977): An American suffragette remembered as the one who was most instrumental in ensuring the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote.

A. A. Milne (1882–1956): British author best known for his beloved children's books about Winnie the Pooh.

independent professional writer whose expertise was English antiques and period furniture. The two women began to live together when Jourdain was forty-three and Compton-Burnett thirty-five. Jourdain was in large part responsible for Compton-Burnett's return to health and her renewed interest in writing.

About this time, Compton-Burnett discovered the writings of British-born author Samuel Butler, who wrote such novels as *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). Here she found the great theme and succinct style for her novels that were to follow. After *Pastors and Masters*, she published *Brothers and Sisters* (1929). Like its 1925 predecessor and most of the novels to follow, *Brothers and Sisters* restricts its subject to family life and draws heavily on events from the author's own personal life. There are recognizable portraits of her, her brothers and parents, and her mother's father.

Limited Book Sales Between the publication of *Men and Wives* (1931) and *More Women than Men* (1933), Compton-Burnett and Jourdain moved to a spacious first-floor flat in South Kensington—the residence they would occupy until their respective deaths. Though Compton-Burnett realized she was becoming well known as a novelist and well reviewed as a writer, she began to worry about the sales of her books. She grew concerned about her earning power as a novelist, becoming dissatisfied with more than one publisher because her novels, though they sold steadily, continued to sell in only a small market.

Gap in Writing during World War II Between *Parents and Children* (1941) and *Elders and Betters* (1944), there is a gap in Compton-Burnett's writing brought about by England's involvement in World War

II. In Europe, the war was primarily fought to thwart the territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany and its dictator, Adolf Hitler, who sought to control the whole of the continent. Germany had nearly achieved its goal by 1941 and then subjected Great Britain to intense bombing in preparation for what was believed to be an invasion to take over the island nation. To escape the intense bombing of London in 1941, Compton-Burnett and Jourdain went to Hartley Court, near Reading, for the duration of the war. *Elders and Betters*, her only novel of the war period, is one of her darkest works—in which every character but one (Jenny) is marred by selfishness and greed, and every action tends to deceit and cruelty.

After World War II ended in the mid-1940s with a victory for Great Britain and its allies, Compton-Burnett's country faced rebuilding challenges with vigor and the author was able to write again. *Manservant and Maid-servant* (1947) represented the zenith of her career as a writer of comic fiction. In contrast, however, *Darkness and Day* (1951) was published ten days after Margaret Jourdain's death from a lung ailment, marking the moment when Compton-Burnett's life again returned to the shadow of loneliness, recalling the years of despair that followed the breakup of her own family.

New Recognition By the 1950s, the brilliant middle period of Compton-Burnett's creativity had passed. It was in these later years of her life, though, that she was discovered and appreciated by other writers and literary officials. The 1960s marked a decade of national and international recognition of her work. She was named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1967. Compton-Burnett spent the last years of her life with only the closest of friends. She suffered from a weak heart and two broken hips, the effects of several bad falls that made entertaining and traveling nearly impossible. She died of bronchitis on August 29, 1969, leaving unfinished the manuscript of her last novel, whose title suggests her keen awareness of its place in the canon of her writings: *The Last and the First*.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Novelist Samuel Butler's philosophy and prose style heavily influenced Compton-Burnett's works. Among the various passages she underlined from Butler's *Note-Books* several point to her attitude toward the tyrannical and claustrophobic aspects of family life that constitute her artistic subject matter. She also discovered in Butler's work a succinct and skeletal prose style that she imitated, refining it to an elegance previously unknown in the English novel.

Unique Style Difficult to classify, either in terms of genre or historical period, Compton-Burnett's works are both modern and outdated, both typical and atypical of the English novel tradition in which she wrote. Her novels expose various characters' efforts to attain and maintain power in the family. They also often dissect

the artificiality of the society they examine in an equally artificial speech. In addition, her works reveal the secret passions of family members through acts of theft, murder, blackmail, incest, and violence.

Men and Wives demonstrates her introduction of the more heinous crimes central to her fiction—matricide, fratricide, and infanticide—showing that while such crimes may never result in retribution (no Compton-Burnett criminal is ever brought to court, as such secrets are kept within the family), neither do they succeed in significantly altering the balance of power. The author introduces here the first of a long series of charming baronets (Sir Godfrey Haslam) and the first of her articulate, comic, and irrepressible butlers (Buttermere). Buttermere begins the long line of servants whose pungent observations on events and ability to “manage” their managers, constitute a classic level of Compton-Burnett comedy.

Complicated Themes In many of Compton-Burnett’s novels, there seems to be no easily extractable moral from the story. Indeed, the inversion of moral values is perhaps the central theme of her work. Rather than providing solutions to moral dilemmas, she merely sets in motion events that lead to such dilemmas, allowing the reader to juggle and balance ethical distinctions. Instead of ignoring or displacing legal and religious strictures that would ordinarily be placed upon the actions of characters like those she creates, she pushes the moral questions of her novels beyond the limits imposed on human action by church and state. Her novels complicate the ethical issues they treat, making it impossible to find easy solutions to the problems posed by her characters’ efforts to establish power and dominion over other human beings.

Works in Critical Context

Compton-Burnett shared nothing with other novelists of her time, and she remained as highly individualistic and anachronistic as her fictional subjects. This rendered her works nearly impossible to classify. Scholar Pamela Hansford Johnson has suggested that it is this very impossibility of classifying her work that has ensured a continuing interest in it. Johnson wrote, “Miss Compton-Burnett’s great strength lies in the fact that we cannot place her; and so also does her weakness.” Of such works as *Pastors and Masters*, for example, critics agreed with Johnson.

While Compton-Burnett’s readership was limited in the early years, perhaps more than any other critic, Robert Liddell was responsible for bringing Compton-Burnett’s work to a larger reading public. In 1953, he addressed the problems of her novels and excused her style and choice of themes (of family tyranny). He wrote, “She is . . . able to depict a world unshaken by modern warfare, a community rooted in a single place, and lives still ruled, and even laid waste, by family tyranny. She can do this, because she need only take a period of fifty years ago, when she was herself already alive—therefore she can recreate this age without the artificiality and falsity of the historical novelist.”

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also scrutinized family values:

Agnes Grey (1847), a novel by Anne Brontë. In this Victorian novel, the author explores her own family as well as those families for which she served as governess.

Long Day’s Journey into Night (1956), a play by Eugene O’Neill. In this modern drama, excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

Song of Solomon (1977), a novel by Toni Morrison. This contemporary tale focuses on the dynamics of the Southern African American family.

Wuthering Heights (1847), by Emily Brontë. In this Gothic romance, the family itself plays a predominant role in the tale.

Pastors and Masters When Compton-Burnett increased the complexity and enhanced the action, she also increased the passion with which critics reviewed that work. *Pastors and Masters* is the most complicated of the early novels, exploiting the tensions of family life through a fast-paced plot that relies almost solely on dialogue. Critical response reflected the strains that Compton-Burnett placed on her readers. The *New Statesman* review of the book acclaimed it a “work of genius,” while the reviewer admitted that there was “nothing of which to take hold” in the work, that there was virtually no “story” in the novel.

Responses to Literature

1. Compton-Burnett scholars believe that the writers’ work and life are inextricably bound. Consider the comments and excerpted dialogue by Compton-Burnett that follow. How do you interpret each comment? If you didn’t know her general life story, what do you think the comments say about the woman herself?

“Time has too much credit. . . . It is not a great healer. It is an indifferent and perfunctory one. Sometimes it does not heal at all. And sometimes when it seems to, no healing has been necessary.”

“You are clutching at a straw. And when people do that, it does sometimes save them.”

“You cannot eat your cake and have it.” “That is a mean saying. You could, if you had enough cake. It is sad that it has become established. It throws a dark light on human nature.”

“Pride may go before a fall. But it may also continue after.”

“I think it nearly always rains. We only notice when it pours.”

“People are only human. But it really does not seem much for them to be.”

“To know all is to forgive all, and that would spoil everything.”

2. Compton-Burnett wrote about the late-Victorian family. Research the nature of the typical family in the late 1800s and early 1900s in England, and compare the Victorian family to a typical family in your culture. What do the two still have in common? What to you seems drastically different? To what do you attribute these differences?

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☒ Maryse Condé

BORN: 1937, Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe

NATIONALITY: West Indian

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Heremakhonon (1976)

Segu (1984)

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (1986)

Crossing the Mangrove (1990)



Maryse Condé. Condé, Maryse, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

West Indian author Maryse Boucolon, who writes under the name Maryse Condé, is a prolific novelist, playwright, and critic, whose books explore the clash of cultures and races, particularly in Caribbean settings. A French-language author not widely known outside of France and her native Guadeloupe, Condé writes novels that are rich in historical detail and political discussion.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Private Life and Education Born February 11, 1937, in Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe, Condé is the youngest of eight children born to Auguste and Jeanne (Quidal) Boucolon. Guadeloupe is an archipelago, a group of islands, located in the Caribbean Sea and governed by France. It is part of the European Union. In 1953, Condé's parents sent her to study abroad for several years, at Lycée Fénelon and Sorbonne in Paris. While abroad Condé focused her studies on English literature. Five years later, in 1958, she married an African actor, Mamadou Condé.

Restless Years and Move to London The early 1960s were difficult for Condé. To avoid arrest, she was

forced to move from country to country, never safe enough to settle in one place. While difficult, Condé saw the advantages of frequently changing perspectives and seized these opportunities to enrich her writing. Professionally, Condé worked as an instructor at École Normale Supérieure in Conakry Guinea; at the Ghana Institute of Language in Accra; and the Lycé Charles de Gaulle in Saint Louis, Senegal. Eventually, she fled to London and earned her doctorate degree in comparative literature in 1976 after completing research on black stereotypes in West Indian literature.

First Novel, Divorce, and Remarriage Condé's first novel, *Heremakhoon* (1976), relates the journey of Veronica, an Antillean student searching for her roots in a newly liberated West African country. During her stay Veronica becomes involved with both a powerful government official and a young school director opposed to the new regime. In 1981 Condé divorced Mamadou and shortly after, in 1982, married Richard Philcox, her translator.

Constructing Characters of Resilience Subsequent Condé novels have varied in scope and setting from more sweeping historicals such as *Children of Segou* (1984) and *The Last of the African Kings* (1997), to character-driven narratives such as *Crossing the Mangrove* (1990) and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1986). In the *New York Times Book Review*, Howard Frank Mosher observed that one thread uniting all of Condé's work is the creation of "characters [who] not only survive the worst that life can throw at them but also often prevail, on their own terms, against overwhelming odds." Tituba is one such character. Much information about the historical Tituba—a female slave who was accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts—remains a mystery but Condé weaves a fully fleshed tale about the remarkable woman and her triumph over a wealth of adversity. Between 1692 and 1693 more than 150 people were arrested on suspicion of practicing witchcraft in several counties across Massachusetts. Of those accused, nineteen were hung, at least one man was crushed to death under heavy stones, and others died in prison. Tituba was the only one, of three women initially accused, to confess her alleged guilt, although scholars speculate that she was coerced to confess with physical abuse.

Retelling a Classic In *Windward Heights* (1998), Condé retells the classic *Wuthering Heights* (1847) story by Emily Brontë. Set at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Cuba and Guadeloupe, the novel explores the corrosive, obsessive love between dark-skinned Rayze, a foundling, and the mulatto Cathy Gagneur, who shuns Rayze for a lighter-skinned Creole husband. As with the novel upon which it is based, *Windward Heights* plays itself out over a series of generations, as Rayze's fury shapes his children and their choices into adulthood.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Condé's famous contemporaries include:

Warren Beatty (1937–): Academy Award- and Golden Globe-winning American actor, screenwriter, producer, and director.

Kamau Brathwaite (1930–): Barbadian poet and a major figure of the Caribbean literary scene.

Derek Wolcott (1930–): West Indian poet responsible for *Omeros*, a retelling of the *Odyssey*, set in the Caribbean.

Philip Glass (1937–): Three-time Academy Award-nominated American composer. Glass is widely considered one of the most influential composers of the late twentieth century.

Bob Marley (1945–1981): Revered Jamaican musician whose legacy lives on via his musical children and his famous dreadlocked image.

Desirada *Desirada* (1998) looks at the problems facing West Indians but from the perspective of those engaged directly with ideas of European rather than African culture. Marie-Noelle, born on Guadeloupe to a fifteen-year-old mother in mysterious circumstances, begins a voyage of self-discovery that takes her first to France and then to the United States. Yet Marie-Noelle is never able to resolve the central question surrounding her birth. Condé explained in a *World Literature Today* interview with Robert McCormick, "Marie-Noelle, who only wants to know the answer to some simple questions—Who is my father? Who am I? What happened?—won't ever find out. Because everyone lies. Not in a conscious and malicious way. Because, ultimately, to tell a story is to embellish it, to fabricate it according to one's tastes and desires, to create fiction."

The literary culture of the Caribbean from which Condé writes is rooted both in the oral traditions of the West African griot and in the scripted literature of Europe. Critics of *Desirada* and Condé's other works have honored the author's use of French as a medium for relating the West Indian experience.

Although she has retired from her career as professor emeritus at Columbia University, Condé continues to publish her writings, travel, and speak publicly about her work.

Works in Literary Context

Emphasizing the effects of transition upon ordinary individuals, Condé places her protagonists in situations where they must choose between the existing West African social order and cultural changes prompted by Western influence. The thematic content of her work reflects both

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though she is West Indian, much of Condé's work takes place in Africa, where she has spent a great deal of time. Perhaps she is drawn to the continent for its diverse natural landscape or its complicated political landscape. In either case, she is not alone; here are some other works that are set in Africa:

Out of Africa (1937), a memoir by Isak Dinesen. The Dutch narrator describes her often idyllic—though sometimes heartbreaking—life on a coffee plantation in Kenya.

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton. A preacher searches for his son amid the streets of Johannesburg, South Africa, on the eve of apartheid's implementation.

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. Set in Nigeria, this work deals with the family of an athlete and leader as they struggle under the yoke of British rule.

The Poisonwood Bible (1999), a novel by Barbara Kingsolver. Set in the Belgian Congo in 1959, this work tells the story of Nathan Price, a Baptist missionary from Bethlehem, Georgia, who takes his family to Africa to spread the Word in a remote jungle village.

her education in the Western world and the diverse cultural experiences of her travels. Condé is praised for her authentic rendering of such diverse locales as the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe as well as for the lyrical qualities of her prose.

Difficult Politics Condé's first novel *Heremakhonon*, like many of her later works, is concerned with people placed in or near the seat of political power and affected by the applications of that power. The narrator, Veronica, is the eyes of the reader, but she turns those eyes inward as well as outward. As a free narrator, she can and does jump from time period to time period, but the drama of the whole book is encompassed in a battle between her lover, Ibrahim Sory, and her institute associate and revolutionary, Saliou—a battle waged in and against the name of the titular ruler, Mwalimwana. Veronica does not recognize the fact of the battle early on and she never fully understands it. For the most part, Saliou and Sory impinge upon her nonpolitically—as do other characters caught in the struggle. The political issues force themselves upon her, and upon us, the readers, and it is for political reasons that her stay in Heremakhonon is terminated. The reader may feel that he knows more than Veronica does about the power struggle, yet he always remains dependent upon her for confirmation or refutation of his judgments.

Obviously, Condé sees politics as very much a part of life. However, she does not confuse drama and fiction

with analysis and history. Whatever her literary objective, she strives for integrity, so much so that in anticipation of adverse criticism she has remarked, "I do not believe writing is meant to please people." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Anderson Tepper declared that Condé "has created an impressive body of work . . . that gives voice to the dispersed and historically silenced peoples of Africa and the Caribbean."

Works in Critical Context

Segu Some critics fault Condé for an excess of detail in *Segu*. *Washington Post* contributor Harold Courlander, for example, commented that "the plethora of happenings in the book does not always make for easy reading." The critic explained that "the reader is sometimes uncertain whether history and culture are being used to illuminate the fiction or the novel exists to tell us about the culture and its history." While Howard Kaplan concurred with this assessment, he added in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* that *Segu* "glitters with nuggets of cultural fascination. . . . For those willing to make their way through this dense saga, genuine rewards will be reaped."

Most agree that Condé expands her scope in *Segu*. In tracing three generations of a West African family during the early and mid-1800s, notes *New York Times Book Review* contributor Charles R. Larson, "Condé has chosen for her subject . . . [a] chaotic stage, when the animism (which she calls fetishism) native to the region began to yield to Islam . . . The result is the most significant historical novel about black Africa published in many a year." Beginning with Dousika, a Bambara nobleman caught up in court intrigue, *Segu* trails the exploits of his family, from one son's conversion to Islam to another's enslavement to a third's successful career in commerce, connected with stories of their wives and concubines and servants. In addition, Condé's "knowledge of African history is prodigious, and she is equally versed in the continent's folklore," remarks Larson. "The unseen world haunts her characters and vibrates with the spirits of the dead."

Crossing the Mangrove Condé returns to her native Guadeloupe in *Crossing the Mangrove*. The title of this novel raises the image of an impossible act, crossing the thick jungle/swamp found along many Caribbean coasts. Behind the image is the story of Francis Sancher, a writer with a mysterious past who comes to live in a small village in Guadeloupe. As a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer explains, "Sancher, a handsome mulatto on an island besieged by concerns over skin color, turns everyone's hatreds and passions inside out." Through Sancher and the characters that he touches, Condé "vividly evokes the complexities of a color caste system . . . in a struggle for power and status," Paul E. Hutchinson remarks in *Library Journal*. Even after Sancher dies mysteriously, he dominates the lives of the villagers. At his wake, Condé follows the

villagers as they discuss the departed. “Condé . . . intends to portray island life through Guadeloupeans talking among themselves,” writes J. P. Slavin in the *Washington Post Book World*. “She magnificently succeeds in bringing realism to a novel which also portrays the rich spiritualism of the West Indies.”

Responses to Literature

1. Compare and contrast *Windward Heights* (1998), Condé’s retelling of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), with Jean Rhys’s retelling of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).
2. Condé has said she is not a political writer. Find evidence to the contrary and explain why you think she is.
3. Do you trust Veronica as a narrator in *Heremakhonon*? Why or why not?
4. Do you think, as some critics have complained, that *Segu* is too dense? If you were Condé’s editor, what would you suggest she cut out?
5. Compare Condé’s character Tituba with Arthur Miller’s version in his play *The Crucible* (1953).

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☒ Confucius

BORN: c. 551 BCE, Tsou, Shantung, China

DIED: 479 BCE, Ch²-Fu, Shantung, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

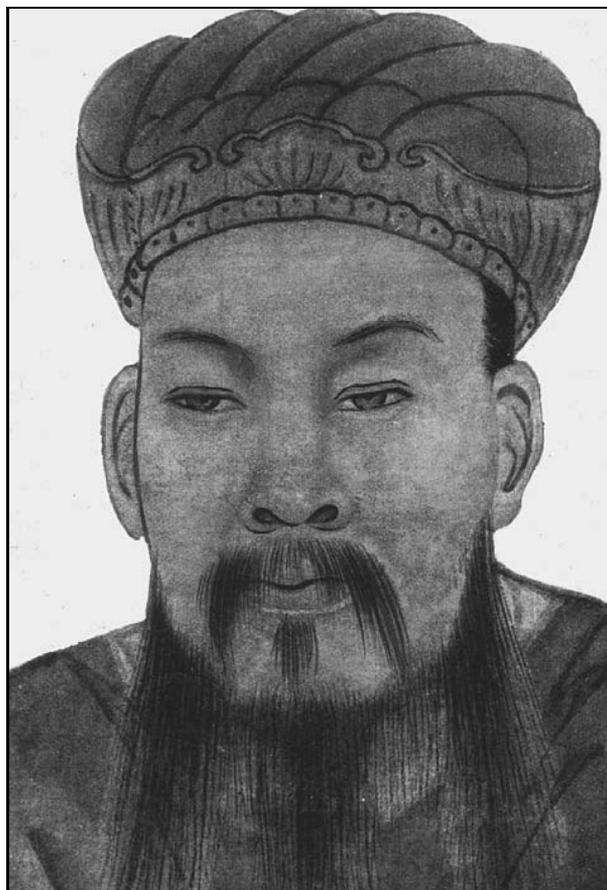
GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Analects

Overview

A philosopher of unmatched influence in Eastern civilizations, Confucius was a teacher and minor government official whose philosophy has been immortalized in *The Analects*, a collection of sayings attributed to him and his disciples. *The Analects* offers insight into a wide variety of subjects, including government, personal conduct,



Confucius Popperfoto / Getty Images

warfare, family, and the spirit, and has been subject to diverse, and even completely opposite, interpretations over the centuries. In spite of attempts to modify or corrupt its doctrines, Confucianism has endured as the foundation of philosophy and religion in China and is an integral element of the national identities of Korea and Japan as well.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Self-Taught Scholar The job of Confucius’s biographers has been considerably difficult due to the muddled accumulation of stories about the great sage. It is generally believed that Confucius was born in the state of Lu during the Chou dynasty. His given name was Kong-Qui, but his disciples called him “Kong the Master,” which was Latinized into “Confucius” by Jesuit missionaries. Confucius was three when his father died, and twenty-three when his mother died. By the age of fifteen, Confucius had decided to become a scholar, and he began to educate himself in music and ancient history. Confucius’s first occupation appears to have been as supervisor of the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Confucius's famous contemporaries include:

Pythagoras (c. 572–c. 490 BCE): The famous theorem of this Greek mathematician is still the cornerstone of modern geometry.

Shakyamuni (563–483 BCE): A spiritual leader in India, Shakyamuni is better known simply as “the Buddha.”

Cyrus The Great (c. 576–c. 429 BCE): Cyrus the Great founded the ancient Persian Empire and expanded its borders to include large portions of Asia.

Zoroaster (c. sixth or seventh century BCE) Zoroastrianism, the religion born from the teachings of Zoroaster, a Persian, had a major impact on the early teachings of Christianity.

Xenophanes (570–480 BCE): This Greek poet and philosopher is perhaps best known for suggesting that human beings fashion their gods after their own images.

granary in Lu. Some accounts say that Confucius married when he was nineteen but divorced his wife four years later so that he would have more time for his intellectual pursuits. He had one son.

Political Ambition Unhappy with the disunity of the Chou regime, Confucius sought to restore the political harmony described in ancient texts, but he never achieved the elevated post within the Lu administration necessary to effect the changes he envisioned, which included tax reductions and peaceful interaction with neighboring states. Although his own political ambitions were thwarted—he may have served for a time in an insignificant position of a regional bureau—he was able to disseminate his views by teaching students, some of whom would become future leaders, about the principles he felt were necessary to influence the political scene of his time.

Teaching Career Confucius never claimed to have divine revelations. He was not born, he declared, with knowledge, but was fond of antiquity, and earnest in seeking knowledge there. Somewhere around the age of thirty, Confucius began his teaching career. Using an informal, discursive teaching style, Confucius became extremely popular with his students. Although one can only guess what the students studied, undoubtedly they received instruction in ritual, music, history, and poetry. In 518 BCE Confucius is reported to have met the famous teacher Lao Tzu, who supposedly criticized Confucius for his stuffiness and arrogance.

Confucius thought that basic teaching should be uncomplicated. In fact, much of his philosophy is the

result of logical deduction, reasoning, and inference. In its historical setting, *The Analects* reveals essentially simple ideas: a vision of a cooperative world; the conviction that antagonism and suspicion, strife and suffering, were largely unnecessary; a profound faith that people's true interests did not conflict but complemented each other.

Travels In the eyes of Confucius, China was drifting on a sea of storms “to hideous ruin and combustion.” His solution was to gather and preserve the records of antiquity, illustrating and augmenting them with his own teachings. With such intent, Confucius lectured his disciples on the histories, poems, and constitutional works of the nation.

Around 498 BCE, Confucius, accompanied by several of his disciples, left Lu and embarked on a journey through eastern China. As they wandered throughout the states of Wei, Sung, and Ch'en, their lives were threatened more than once. For instance, Confucius was almost assassinated in Sung. On another occasion, he was mistaken for the adventurer Yang Hu and was arrested and held until his true identity was learned. For the most part, Confucius was received with great respect by the rulers of the states he visited, perhaps even receiving occasional payments from them.

Later Years In 484 BCE Confucius was invited back to Lu. While he was warmly received there, it does not appear that he was given a position of political power. Confucius's favorite disciple, Yen Hui, died the very year of his return to Lu, and in 480 BCE another disciple, Tzulu, was killed in battle. Also during this period in his life, Confucius's only child died. Confucius felt all of these losses deeply, and his sadness and frustration must have been intensified by the realization that his political ideas had found no support among the rulers of his own state. Confucius died in 479 BCE.

Works in Literary Context

In all likelihood, Confucius's philosophies were documented by his disciples and distributed after his death. Confucius, like Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus Christ, made a reputation for himself as an instructor while he was alive, and, like these thinkers, he felt it unnecessary to preserve his own words. Despite his lack of literary production, however, Confucius's influence on future generations of thinkers was tremendous. Because of this, a look at his work in literary context necessitates a description of the evolution of the importance of Confucianism through the years.

Confucianism Through the Years Considered by some as philosophy and others as religion, Confucianism has undergone a complex evolution since the death of its namesake. The first important thinker to expand upon Confucius's work was Meng-tzu, better known by his Latinized name, Mencius. Active during the fourth century BCE, Mencius, like Confucius, was a teacher and

counselor. In the collection of his teachings, Mencius furthered the concept of *Jen*, roughly meaning “good,” arguing that the potential for exemplifying such an honorable trait exists in every human being. In direct contrast, the teachings of Hsun-tzu, a prominent Confucian thinker of the third century BCE, stressed the evil nature of humanity. For Hsun-tzu, *Li* functions to suppress selfish instincts.

Subsequent philosophers of the ancient world incorporated mystical schemes, numerology, and aspects of Taoism into traditional Confucian thought. Although the resulting philosophy was in many ways a diluted and contradictory imitation of Confucianism, it was during this period that Confucianism gained widespread prominence. It became the official state religion of China in the second century BCE and eventually spread to other Asian nations.

Wang Ch’ung, a logician of the first century CE, is credited with eliminating the mystical and supernatural elements of Confucianism. It was also during the first century that, after several competing versions circulated, the standard text of *The Analects* emerged. Although scholars question its reliability as the direct transcription of Confucius’s sayings, the work is nonetheless acknowledged as the best possible summation of his thought. *The Analects* is composed of twenty books, each made up of aphorisms, questions, and notes attributed to Confucius and twenty of his disciples, most notably Master Tseng, who is credited with twelve sayings of his own; Jan Ch’iu, who became a lieutenant in the powerful Chi Family; and Tzu-kung, who became a prominent diplomat.

Most of the first millennium CE is regarded as a period of relative dwindling of Confucianism’s influence in China, a time during which Taoism and Buddhism flourished. Neo-Confucianism arose in the eleventh century largely owing to the scholarship of Chu Hsi, whose historical writings focused on what are now known as “Classical Confucian” texts, thirteen works of ancient origin that address a wide range of topics pertaining to Confucianism. Chu Hsi also explored the metaphysical side of Confucianism, engineering a path to spiritual enlightenment that has been viewed as a response to the challenge posed by Buddhism. During the seventeenth century, a second wave of Neo-Confucianism arose; comparable to the earlier efforts of Wang Ch’ung, its aim was to reestablish the original intent of *The Analects*.

Twentieth-Century Influence The influx of Western civilization into twentieth-century China considerably altered the nation’s political, cultural, and philosophical traditions. When Sun Yat-Sen founded the Chinese Republic in 1912, he advocated a form of statesmanship balanced between Confucian values and pragmatic methodology learned from the West. Mao Tse-Tung’s organization of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, however, neglected Confucius in favor of Marxist ideology, effectively removing the Confucian tradition from

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

History records the lives of many instructors who had a profound impact upon their students, and Confucius was no exception, as he and his students shared a deeply personal and affectionate connection. Often, knowledge of beloved instructors is gleaned from the writings of their pupils themselves. Here are a few works written by students to honor their teachers:

New Testament (c. first century CE), testimony by the disciples of Jesus Christ. Although the authors of the New Testament cannot be definitely determined, it is clear that the text is a collection of writings elucidating the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Republic (c. 360 BCE), a philosophical treatise by Plato. In this text, Plato outlines much of the political theory of his teacher, Socrates.

Cloud Atlas (2004), a novel by David Mitchell. In this work, an aspiring composer studying under his aging hero realizes that his master has lost his genius.

political discourse, although its principles survive in literature and philosophy.

Works in Critical Context

In some ways, it is difficult to separate critical response to Confucius from the literary tradition in which it is classified because the literary tradition—including the political and social impact of Confucianism—forms a kind of critical response to the text. A great deal of modern scholarship has focused on the clarification of three main principles: *Jen*, *Tao*, and *Li*. The meaning of each term has engendered a multitude of interpretations, resulting in diverse readings of Confucius. Further scholarship has attempted to discern how much of *The Analects* is from Confucius and how much belongs to his disciples. Today, Confucius’s work—no matter how one interprets its principles or speculates its origins—is considered a valuable and complex philosophical collection of ideas rivaling those of Socrates and Buddha.

The Three Principles Alternately translated as “good,” “love,” and “reciprocity,” *Jen* is more particularly, according to Arthur Waley, “a sublime moral attitude, transcendental perfection attained to by legendary heroes . . . , but not by any living or historical person.” This opinion contradicts the belief often espoused by earlier scholars that all humans are endowed with *Jen*.

Tao, translated as “the way,” had been used before Confucius to describe both positive and negative ways of doing things. Confucius’s innovation, according to H. G. Creel, was to recast the word as “the way . . . that individuals, states, and the world should conduct themselves

and be conducted.” Taoism, the philosophical school based upon the *Tao te Ching* of Lao Tzu—who may have been a contemporary of Confucius—provides a similar interpretation of the term, albeit in a more mystical and personal context.

Scholar Benjamin I. Schwartz defines *Li* as “all those ‘objective’ prescriptions of behavior, whether involving rite, ceremony, manners, or general deportment, that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within human society, and with the numinous realm beyond.” Historically, the discipline required strict adherence to *Li* and inspired some political leaders to impose dictatorial rule on their subjects in the name of Confucius, despite the contention of scholars that a state designed to serve the people is one of Confucianism’s central tenets.

The Analects: Whose Are They, Anyway? As in the case of the Gautama Buddha and Socrates, it is not easy to separate the founder’s vision from the interpretations of his disciples. The group of statements attributed to Confucius in literature of the centuries following his death is large but often suspect, and *The Analects* remains the focus of fierce controversy. Compiled long after Confucius’s death, the work contains not only the Master’s aphorisms, but also those from his disciples. Of the twenty “books” now in existence, linguistic analysis indicates that some may belong to a much later period. Waley and others find many passages which they call non-Confucian and even anti-Confucian. In his view, examinations of how language relates to reality must be later additions, since the “language crisis” in ancient China belongs to a much later development of thought. Tsuda Sokichi, a radical and iconoclastic critic of *The Analects*, finds the work so permeated with contradictions and anachronisms that he believes it is unusable as a source for the thought of Confucius.

Confucianism in the Western World Ironically, as Western scholars in the twentieth century began to recognize the depth and sophistication of Confucianism—indicated by numerous English translations of *The Analects*—Confucianism in China was on the decline. Many scholars have observed similarities between the teachings of Confucius and those of Socrates and Jesus. D. Howard Smith celebrated the profundity of Confucius as a thinker: “He was convinced that there was a divine order which worked for love and righteousness, and taught that in obedience to that divine order man will find his highest goal.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Analects*. Based on your reading, what do you think the *Jen*, *Tao*, and *Li* are all about? What does Confucius have to say about each? Support your response with some passages from the text.

2. Confucius was essentially a political thinker. After having read *The Analects*, how do you think Confucius would seek to change the world in which you live? For example, would Confucius advocate “going green”? Write at least ten of your own aphorisms for society today.
3. Confucius, Buddha, and Zoroaster, according to the traditional dates of these figures, all lived at the same time and all founded philosophical movements that have been transformed into religions. Why do you think that the sixth century BCE was such a fertile time for the founding of religions? Research the peoples and cultures of that time to help you formulate your response.
4. The thoughts of Confucius himself remain unclear because he never actually wrote them down. Instead, what we know of Confucius’s teaching is gathered from what his students told about him and his life. Imagine someone has decided to collect your thoughts in a book similar to *The Analects*. What would this book say? What are your basic principles of living and thinking?

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William Congreve

BORN: 1670, Yorkshire, England

DIED: 1729, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd (1692)

The Old Batchelour (1693)

Love for Love (1695)

The Mourning Bride (1697)

The Way of the World (1700)

II. A reader of dramatic theory, Congreve was most likely more familiar with the theater than most young men of his era by the time he moved to London around 1689.

The English Restoration and the Golden Age of Satire Congreve was born at a time when England had only recently recovered from a violent civil war, during which the ruling English monarchy was removed from power. In its place, a commonwealth led by Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell was created. Under Cromwell's strict rule, theaters throughout England were closed down due to their alleged debasement of moral values. When the monarchy was finally restored to power in 1660 under the rule of Charles II—hence the term “Restoration”—theaters were once again opened, and the exuberant feelings of the day made their way into the comedies that became popular during that time. Accordingly, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century are often referred to as The Golden Age of Satire.

London Drama In 1691 Congreve entered the Middle Temple, London, to study law; however, the literary community in London proved to be more appealing to him. With the novel *Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd*, he established himself as a gifted writer of pointed, intelligent wit and soon became John Dryden's friend, legal adviser, and literary protégé. While his legal expertise enabled him to negotiate agreements between Dryden and his publisher, Congreve's educational background helped him make a number of important contributions as a translator to Dryden's editions of classical authors. In addition to Congreve's gift for translation, Dryden recognized the younger writer's ear for the nuances of his own language and predicted that Congreve would be a great literary success.

Congreve's first real success came in 1693 with the drama *The Old Batchelour*. Like most of the plays produced during this period, *The Old Batchelour* was written with specific actors in mind. Most biographers believe that Congreve created the role of Araminta, the virtuous and witty ingénue, for actress Anne Bracegirdle, the object of his lifelong—and unrequited—affection.

Attempt at Tragedy Despite glowing endorsements from such notable writers as Dryden and Swift, 1693's *The Double-Dealer* was met with much less enthusiasm than its predecessor. However, the overwhelming success of Congreve's next drama, *Love for Love*, revived his popularity and earned him a full share in a new acting company under William III's protection. Traveling with dramatist Thomas Southerne the next year, Congreve visited Ireland, where he received a master of arts degree from Trinity College and was briefly reunited with his parents. The author of several successful tragedies, Southerne may have encouraged Congreve to try his hand at what most critics of the time considered a higher dramatic form. Ignoring jeers from friends and fellow writers who were certain his attempt would fail, Congreve wrote

Overview

Examining the social conventions of love and marriage with wit and subtlety, William Congreve is hailed as the master of Restoration comedy. His brilliant depictions of human behavior are concentrated in the skillful banter of characters in such plays as *Love for Love*, *The Mourning Bride* and *The Way of the World*. Still performed today, Congreve's dramas have come to represent the standard against which all other comedies of the period are measured.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Beginning Rich in Opportunities Congreve was born into an old family of wealth in Bardsey, West Yorkshire, England. After his father received a lieutenant's commission, the family moved to Ireland, where Congreve was educated, along with friend and future satirist Jonathan Swift, at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin, his curriculum focusing on theology as well as Greek and Latin classics. Congreve often visited Dublin theaters and was exposed to the most celebrated dramas of the time, including Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and Thomas Durfey's *The Boarding House*, before these kinds of performances were banned during the reign of James

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Congreve's famous contemporaries include:

William Wycherly (1641–1715): Wycherly wrote plays of sharp social criticism, particularly of marriage and sexual morality.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): Famous for his operas and oratorios, this German-born composer lived in England most of his adult life.

Joseph Addison (1672–1719): Writer of the opera libretto *Rosamond*, Addison also founded the *Spectator* with Richard Steele in 1711 with the intent of presenting morally instructive stories of gallantry, foreign and domestic news, and poetry with satirical undertones.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): After writing several poems, Swift turned to prose satire directed against philosophers, intellectuals, politicians, and aristocrats, culminating in his most famous work, *Gulliver's Travels*.

Joseph I (1678–1711): Son of Leopold I, Joseph I served as king of Hungary (1687), King of the Romans (1690), and Holy Roman Emperor (1705–1711).

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): Pope was well-known for his satirical poetry and his mastery of the heroic couplet, notably in *The Rape of the Lock*.

The Mourning Bride (1697), a tragedy that received praise for both its morality and literary merit.

Public Feud Having received, for the most part, accolades for his work, Congreve was unprepared for clergyman Jeremy Collier's attack in *A Short View of the Immortality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). Collier condemned Congreve's work as shamelessly immoral, prompting Congreve to refute those claims in *Amendments to Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* (1698), which asserts that all well-crafted art is innately moral. While Congreve's rebuttal was witty and cogent, his emotionally charged approach against Collier's self-righteousness and social standing provoked further arguments. Tired of these exchanges, Congreve concentrated on writing his last comedy, *The Way of the World*, a drama that enjoyed moderate success.

Literary Output Hindered by Illness Afflicted with gout and advancing blindness early in the eighteenth century, Congreve composed a libretto, or the text for an opera—in this case, *The Judgment of Paris*. It was well-received despite opera's unpopularity during that time. He joined with dramatist John Vanbrugh to establish a new theater, the Haymarket, a project financed by members of the Kit-Kat Club, a literary-political society that included members of Whig nobility and renowned authors Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Although

the Haymarket soon closed, Congreve's association with influential members of the Kit-Kat Club gained him two government posts and a lifelong appointment as secretary of Jamaica, both positions of financial security. By 1706, however, bad health limited Congreve's literary output. Living a quiet life in London entertaining family and friends but publishing little, Congreve died in 1729 after a carriage accident.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired as a writer by such extraordinary thinkers as Plato, Aesop, Miguel de Cervantes, and William Shakespeare, Congreve's career as an author of Restoration comedy was influenced by the satirical plays of Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, and Ben Jonson. In addition, the French playwright Molière provided Restoration dramatists a model for comic relief through dialogue, along with ideas for many themes and plots. Perhaps what had the most impact on Congreve's writing life was Restoration society itself—that rigid, artificial, refined world of eighteenth-century England. For the most part, Congreve's work was well-received by his contemporaries, the condemnation from Jeremy Collier's notwithstanding.

Comedy of Manners A comedy of manners is a witty form of dramatic comedy that satirizes the manners and pretentiousness of society. In calling attention to ridiculous schemes and frivolous conversation, this literary form attacks the superficiality and materialism by which people judge others. By presenting the question of whether characters meet certain social standards—standards that are often morally inconsequential—the comedy of manners reveals the conflict between self-interested motives and refined behaviors. Aware of the shallowness of decorum, the protagonist manipulates situations to his own advantage. Because aristocratic audiences were not interested in didactic lessons being aimed directly at them, the purpose of the comedy of manners was to entertain.

As do most all comedy of manners dramas, *The Way of the World* consists of comic material revolving around intimate relationships and farcical situations. For instance, marriage occurs for the sake of convenience, characters brazenly carry on affairs, jealousy is commonplace, gallantry is feigned, and women are falsely demure. In this play, Congreve's message is clear: The way of the world may be humorous, but it is not kind. Like all romantic comedies, *The Way of the World* has a happy ending; however, the avenue to a joyful resolution is one of cruelty, degradation, and treachery.

Congreve's mastery of Restoration comedy influenced his contemporary playwrights and made a significant impact on the genre. In addition, Congreve's words resonated with audience members such that several phrases from Congreve's play *The Mourning Bride* (1697) have made their way into common parlance including "music has charms to soothe a savage breast"

and “heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.” Congreve’s influence continues to be felt today and his plays are still performed.

Works in Critical Context

From the time of Jeremy Collier’s attack to the twentieth century, Congreve’s critical reception has been influenced by moral perception. Despite his controversial ideas of sexual morality, as well as his shortcomings as a playwright, Congreve has maintained a reputation of being the master of the English comedy of manners. Although some critics judge Congreve’s work to be impenetrable and his dialogue nothing more than babble, others, including Bonamy Dobrée, disagree. Dobrée states, “If you cannot translate the idiom of a past time—the idiom of behavior as well as of language—into that of your own, it may seem dull; if you can do so it appears highly relevant. Trivial? Only if you cannot see through the universality that underlies every phase of the social mask.” Recent academic criticism transcends the brilliant dramatic language in favor of deconstructing the distinctive manner by which Congreve transforms the material of his plays into a body of coherent actions.

The Way of the World Despite its lukewarm reception by his contemporaries, *The Way of the World* has long been considered Congreve’s masterpiece. It deviates not only from comedies of the period but also from comedic drama in general, giving some critics reason to deem the play’s intricate plots and counterplots difficult to follow. Scholar Edmund Gosse emphasizes the fact that the plot is one of inaction, remarking that the audience “wishes that the actors and actresses would be doing something. In no play of Congreve’s is the . . . human interest in movement and surprise so utterly neglected.” Every revival of *The Way of the World* is met by theater reviewers who declare its plot incomprehensible, but they also praise the subtlety and sophistication of its dialogue. Even Gosse concedes, “*The Way of the World* is the best-written, the most dazzling, the most intellectually accomplished of all English comedies, perhaps of all the comedies of the world.”

The Way of the World depends on the conventional devices of misunderstanding and deception to impart Congreve’s cynical view of love, relationships, and the institution of marriage, common themes in Restoration comedy. Still, the drama embraces the ideas of human principles and real love. Like the earlier *Love for Love*, *The Way of the World* demonstrates, according to Dobrée, “Congreve’s insistence that the precious thing in life—affection in human relations—must be preserved at all costs.” As a comedy of manners, *The Way of the World* has the purpose of exposing social behaviors—passion and foolishness—during Congreve’s time to public scrutiny and laughter. Because of its success in doing so, *The*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Congreve is renowned for his skill in producing witty and intricate conversations between characters. In fact, so essential is brilliant dialogue in his work that Congreve thought of a scene as a unit of dialogue affected by the arrival or departure of a character. Other works recognized for clever dialogue include:

- Amphitryo* (186 BCE), a play by Plautus. The comedies of the Roman playwright are characterized by bright, amusing dialogue and humorous, boisterous incidents.
- A Fine and Private Place* (1960), fantasy fiction by Peter S. Beagle. Retelling fables in contemporary settings, Beagle is known for his clever dialogue and sophisticated character development.
- Rameu’s Nephew and First Satire* (1761), satire by Denis Diderot. Through a fictional meeting between two friends in Paris, Diderot exposes the corruption of society during the French Enlightenment with brilliant and witty dialogue.

Way of the World is regarded as the classic example of the comedy of manners.

Responses to Literature

1. Though he fathered a daughter, Congreve never married. Assess Congreve’s portrayal of the external influences that jeopardize love or marriage. Do you feel that Congreve was fundamentally opposed to marriage? Support your answer with evidence from at least one of his dramas.
2. Evaluate the complex plot of *The Way of the World*. Based on what you discover, write a summary of events that occurred before the beginning of the play. Would it have been helpful for Congreve to show these events in the play as well? Why do you think he chose not to?
3. Research the political upheaval in England from the civil war in the 1640s that led to the downfall of the English monarchy and to the “restoration” of Charles II in 1660. In what ways did political change help shape Restoration drama? How did political events contribute to the popular appeal of the comedy of manners?
4. In *The Way of the World*, Congreve gives his characters unusual names based on actual words. Some examples include Foible, Wilful, and even Mirabell, which is derived from the Latin word *mirabilis*. Make a list of all the unusual character names you can find, offer a definition for each, and state why

you think Congreve used the name for that particular character.

5. How close to reality do you believe the society in *The Way of the World* is in reference to Congreve's time? Does his presentation conform to English society during the Restoration?

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Joseph Conrad

BORN: 1857, *Berdiczew, Podolia, Russia (now Poland)*

DIED: 1924, *Bishopsbourne, Kent, England*

NATIONALITY: *Polish*

GENRE: *Novels, short stories*

MAJOR WORKS:

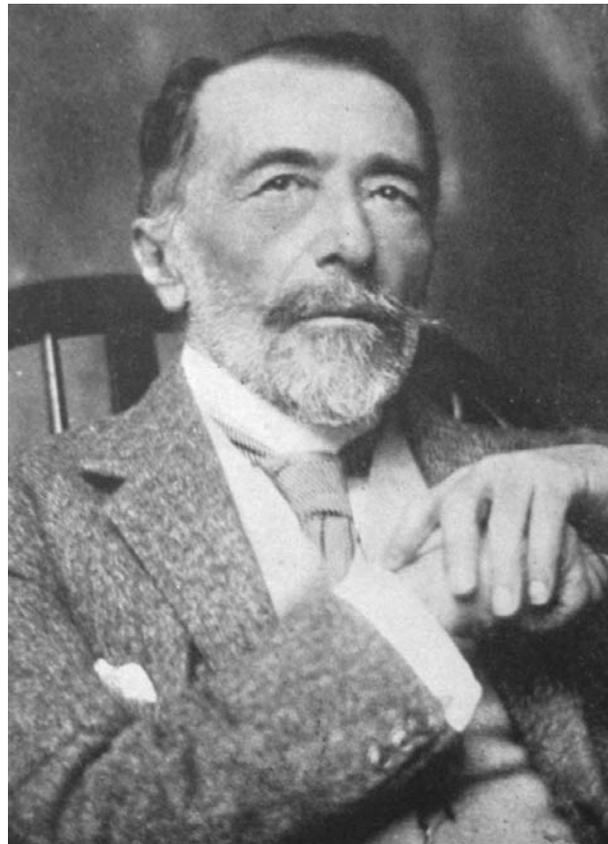
Heart of Darkness (1899)

Lord Jim (1900)

The Secret Sharer (1909)

Overview

Joseph Conrad is widely regarded as one of the foremost prose stylists of English literature—no small achievement for a man who did not learn English until he was twenty. A native of what is now Poland, Conrad was a naturalized British subject famous both for his minutely described adventure tales of life on the sea (he drew on his own maritime experience for these) and his darker examinations of European imperialism in action.



Joseph Conrad *Conrad, Joseph, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Exile Conrad's childhood was harsh. His parents were both members of families long identified with the movement for Polish independence from Russia. In 1862 Conrad's father, himself a writer and translator, was exiled to Russia for his revolutionary activities, and his wife and child shared the exile. In 1865 Conrad's mother died, and a year later he was entrusted to the care of his uncle Thaddeus Bobrowski.

In 1868 Conrad attended high school in Lemberg, Galicia; the following year he and his father moved to Cracow, where his father died. In early adolescence the future novelist began to dream of going to sea, and in 1873, while on vacation in western Europe, Conrad saw the sea for the first time. In the autumn of 1874 Conrad went to Marseilles, where he entered the French merchant-marine service. Conrad's experiences at sea would figure prominently in his writing.

A Career on the Sea For the next twenty years Conrad pursued a successful career as a ship's officer. In 1877 he probably took part in the illegal shipment of arms from France to Spain in support of the pretender to the

Spanish throne, Don Carlos. There is evidence that early in 1878 Conrad made an attempt at suicide, most likely because of a failed love affair. In June 1878 Conrad went to England for the first time. He worked as a seaman on English ships, and in 1880 he began his career as an officer in the British merchant service, rising from third mate to master. His voyages took him to Australia, India, Singapore, Java, Borneo, to those distant and exotic places which would provide the background for much of his fiction. In 1886 he was naturalized as a British subject. He received his first command in 1888.

Journey to the Congo In 1890 he made a difficult journey to the Belgian Congo that inspired his great short novel *Heart of Darkness*. At the time, the Belgian Congo was a corporate “state” privately controlled by King Leopold II of Belgium—in effect, he owned the country. In pursuing personal profits from the natural resources of the Congo, most notably rubber, Leopold ruthlessly exploited the Congo natives, subjecting them to slavery, rape, mutilation, and mass murder. By 1900, an international uproar over the horrors in the Congo was erupting, partly thanks to the publication of *Heart of Darkness*.

First Writing Efforts In the early 1890s Conrad had begun to think about writing fiction based on his experiences in the East, and in 1893 he discussed his work in progress, the novel *Almayer’s Folly*, with a passenger, the novelist John Galsworthy. (Galsworthy was the first of a number of English and American writers who befriended this middle-aged Polish seaman who had come so late to the profession of letters.) *Almayer’s Folly* was published in 1895, and its favorable critical reception encouraged Conrad to begin a new career as a writer. He married an Englishwoman, Jessie George in 1896, and two years later, just after the birth of Borys, the first of their two sons, they settled in Kent in the south of England, where Conrad lived for the rest of his life.

Financial Struggles Though Conrad had achieved a positive critical reputation by the early 1900s, he lacked financial security. Forever in debt to friends and his agent, James Pinker, he and his family moved to Pent Farm in Kent in 1898, renting a brick cottage from a young writer named Hueffer, later known as Ford Madox Ford. While living in Kent, Conrad and Ford collaborated on two novels, *The Inheritors* and *Romance*, and Conrad came into contact with other writers nearby, including Stephen Crane, H.G. Wells, and Henry James, whom Conrad greatly revered. Other literary friends, including John Galsworthy and George Bernard Shaw, loaned him money and helped further his literary career by promoting his works to publishers and critics. The birth of a second son in 1906 made an already strained financial situation even worse. Ford and Conrad fell out over rent Conrad owed, and in 1907 the Conrad family moved to Bedfordshire, and from there in 1909 to Aldington, where they occupied four rooms over a butcher shop.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Conrad’s famous contemporaries include:

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): This Austrian neurologist founded psychoanalysis.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900): Like Conrad, this American writer (author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, 1895) was a master stylist who led an adventurous life.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): An American novelist, Fitzgerald is best known for his critique of high society in the 1920s, as exemplified in *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914): The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, set in motion a series of events that ultimately led to World War I.

Samuel Clemens (also known as Mark Twain) (1835–1910): This American novelist, like Conrad, received much acclaim for a novel about life on a river.

By 1910, Conrad’s debt had grown to be more than \$100,000 in late-twentieth-century values.

All the while, Conrad managed to keep writing. During these difficult years, he turned out some of his finest novels, including *Nostramo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*, as well as his short-story masterpiece, “The Secret Sharer.” While the novels leave the sea behind for more political and social issues—a critique of materialism in *Nostramo*, an anarchist bombing in *The Secret Agent*, and the world of a double agent in *Under Western Eyes*—a love of the sea remained in Conrad’s blood. It was once again the setting for “The Secret Sharer.”

Success and Security With his 1913 novel, *Chance*, Conrad finally achieved not only celebrity but also financial security. He carried on a lively social life, increasing his circle to include French writer André Gide. Conrad, who had been such a roamer in his youth, traveled little in his later years, though he did visit the United States in late 1922 at the request of his American publisher, Doubleday. Despite claiming he was never a man for awards—Conrad refused knighthood in May 1924—he did harbor a desire for a Nobel Prize. He never received one. On August 3, 1924, Conrad died of a heart attack, leaving unfinished the novel *Suspense*.

Works in Literary Context

Conrad was, according to Kingsley Widmer in the *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, “a major figure in the transition from Victorian fiction to the more perplexed forms and values of twentieth-century literature...” He was simultaneously one of the last Victorian

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

It is difficult to read Conrad without seeing the influences of the sea on his writing and thinking. Indeed, the isolation an individual faces on a ship and pitting oneself against both nature and others on the ship, has been a common theme in literature, at least as old as Homer's *Odyssey*. Here are some more works that analyze the effects of the sea on humankind:

- Moby-Dick* (1851), by Herman Melville. This novel retells the story of Captain Ahab, who seeks Moby-Dick, a whale that has destroyed one of Ahab's ships.
- Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), by Jules Verne. The mysterious Captain Nemo and his famous vessel the *Nautilus* take a fantastic journey through the world's oceans in the science-fiction classic.
- Kon-Tiki* (1950), by Thor Heyerdahl. Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl, intrigued by Polynesian folklore, sets off across the Pacific Ocean in a raft in 1947. This book tells the true story of his adventure.
- The Old Man and the Sea* (1951), by Ernest Hemingway. In this piece, an aging Cuban fisherman struggles to catch an exceptionally large marlin.
- Master and Commander* (2003), a film directed by Peter Weir. This film, based on the novels of Patrick O'Brian, recounts the battles between two ships in the South Atlantic and South Pacific Oceans.

writers and one of the first modernist writers. Along with writers like Mark Twain, Conrad was able to incorporate traditional story forms—such as travelogues or journey stories—into novels with a more contemporary sensibility.

Personal Quests *Heart of Darkness* is not so much about the enigmatic character Kurtz as it is about Marlow and his discovery of good and evil in each individual; his quest is not so much for Kurtz, but for truth within himself. As such, the novella has been compared to Virgil's *Aeneid* as well as Dante's *Inferno* and Goethe's *Faust*.

Reading *Heart of Darkness* as a journey story in which a man comes to understand his own soul will help one understand why the filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola felt the novella would be a good model for his representation of the Vietnam war in *Apocalypse Now*. In Coppola's retelling of *Heart of Darkness*, an American soldier in Vietnam must face great suffering and is forced to understand the devastation wrought by the war of which he is part.

The Distanced Narrator With the invention of his character Marlow, Conrad broke new ground in literary technique, establishing the distancing effect of reported narration, a narrative frame in which the story is told at

one or more removes from the actual action. To achieve this effect, Conrad employs a character within the story who relates the action after the fact. Such a technique helped Conrad avoid what would otherwise be painfully intense subjectivity.

Works in Critical Context

Conrad's work met with immediate success and praise. Not only is his skill noteworthy, but the fact that Conrad wrote in English, which was not his native language, made his use of delicate and original phrasings that much more astounding. As time progressed, however, Conrad picked up his fair share of negative critics, including novelist Chinua Achebe, who felt that Conrad's portrayal of the native Africans in *Heart of Darkness* is racist. Achebe noted that not one of the natives is portrayed as a fully fleshed out character, thereby, in Achebe's estimation, reducing the characters to a subhuman level. Additionally, Achebe cited Conrad's use of white symbols to represent that which is good and black symbols to represent that which is bad as further evidence for his intrinsic racism. *Lord Jim* is another of Conrad's books that has been deemed racist because of his associating people of color with the darker forces of chaos. However, many critics contend that Conrad was no more susceptible to racist thought than others of his time and was in fact ahead of his time in calling attention to the ravages caused by colonialism.

Heart of Darkness Contemporary reviewers praised Conrad for his insight and vivid use of language. "The art of Mr. Conrad is exquisite and very subtle," observed a reviewer for the *Athenaeum*, who went on to note that *Heart of Darkness* cannot be read carelessly "as evening newspapers and railway novels are perused—with one mental eye closed and the other roving. Mr Conrad himself spares no pains, and from his readers he demands thoughtful attention." A reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* considered the concluding scene of the novella "crisp and brief enough for Flaubert." Conrad's novella quickly entered the canon, eliciting response from critics on both sides of the Atlantic. In an essay originally published in 1917, the American critic H.L. Mencken focused on the character of Kurtz, concluding that he was "at once the most abominable of rogues and the most fantastic of dreamers."

As Lillian Feder noted in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, the novella has "three levels of meaning: on one level it is the story of man's adventures; on another, of his discovery of certain political and social injustices; and on a third, it is a study of his initiation into the mysteries of his own mind." Critics still debate to what degree Marlow finds his evil double in Kurtz and how far, in fact, he identifies with him. Conrad would employ this theme of doubling in later works also, most notably in *Lord Jim* and "The Secret Sharer."

Other critics have remarked about the psychological aspects of the work as well as its tone. The American novelist and critic, Albert J. Guerard, in his *Conrad the Novelist*, noted not only Conrad's "dramatized psychological intuitions," but also the "impressionist method" and the "random movement of the nightmare," which works on the "controlled level of a poem." Guerard pointed to the contrasting use of dark and light by Conrad as a conscious symbol, and to his vegetative images, which grow to menacing proportions. "*Heart of Darkness* . . . remains one of the great dark meditations in literature," Guerard wrote, "and one of the purest expressions of a melancholy temperament." As Frederick R. Karl noted in his *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad*, *Heart of Darkness* is one of the world's greatest novellas: "It asks troublesome questions, disturbs preconceptions, forces curious confrontations, and possibly changes us." Conrad's novella is where, according to Karl, "the nineteenth century becomes the twentieth."

Lord Jim From its earliest reviews, *Lord Jim* has been considered perhaps Conrad's greatest novel and has been favorably compared to the best that Western literature has to offer. A reviewer in the *Spectator* noted that *Lord Jim* was "the most original, remarkable, and engrossing novel of a season by no means unfruitful of excellent fiction," while an *Academy* critic pronounced that "*Lord Jim* is a searching study—prosecuted with patience and understanding—of a cowardice of a man who was not a coward." A *Bookman* contributor acknowledged that the novel "may find various criticism." However, the anonymous reviewer concluded that, "Judged as a document, it must be acknowledged a masterpiece."

Political and social issues aside, *Lord Jim* is a fascinating case study of a romantic idealist. Some scholars take a more biographical approach to the novel. From this perspective, Jim is a representative of Conrad himself who jumped the Polish ship of state at its most difficult moment to settle in England. The Polish Nobel poet, Czeslaw Milosz, in *Atlantic Monthly*, pointed out that the name of Jim's ship, *Patna*, is intended to resonate with the Latin patria or "fatherland." Other, more psychoanalytically minded reviewers note the fact that *Lord Jim* was published the same year as Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, both books heralding a new century of unconscious forces at work. Still others, including Ira Sadoff in the *Dalhousie Review*, credit Jim with being a proto-existential hero. "Camus's greatest novel, *The Stranger*, written forty-two years after *Lord Jim*, is the epitome of the existential novel," Sadoff noted. "Yet Meursault, the hero of the book, is not so different from Jim." But beyond all these interpretations is the simple fact that the book presents a great yarn. As G.S. Fraser commented in *Critical Quarterly*, "It is, in fact, part of the interest and range of Conrad that he appeals not only to the sort of reader who enjoys, say George Eliot or Henry James but to the sort who enjoys Robert Louis Stevenson, Rider Haggard, or Conan Doyle."

Responses to Literature

1. Chinua Achebe criticized Conrad's portrayal of the native Africans in *Heart of Darkness* as being racist. Read several passages from Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, taking note of the ways Achebe characterizes Africans. Based on your readings of both authors' works, do you think Conrad's novel is, either overtly or subtly, a racist text? Why or why not?
2. After reading *Heart of Darkness*, watch Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. Compose an interview with Coppola in which he answers a reporter's questions about the conception and making of the movie.
3. Read *Lord Jim*. In your opinion, is Jim portrayed as a courageous man? Why or why not?

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❏ Pierre Corneille

BORN: 1606, Rouen, France

DIED: 1684, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Le Cid (1636–1637)

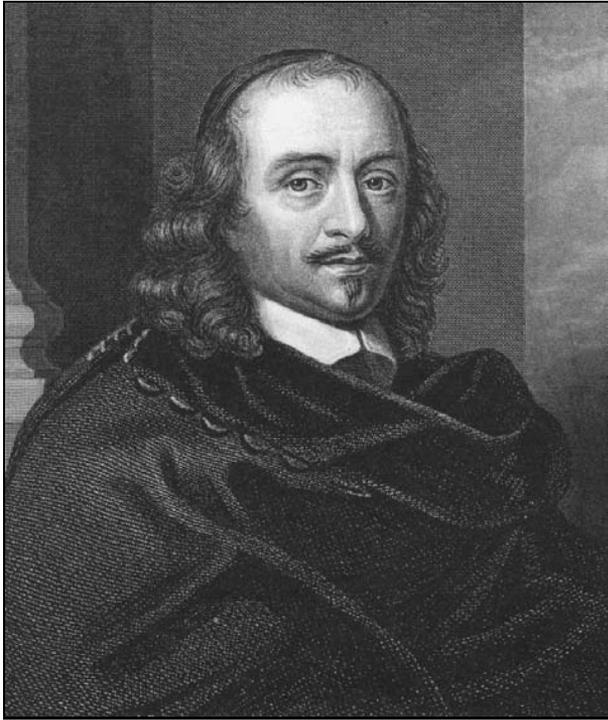
Horace (1640)

Cinna; or, The Mercy of Augustus (1642–1643)

The Martyr Polyucte (1643)

Overview

Pierre Corneille was the first great tragic dramatist of France. Although many of his thirty-four plays are comedies



Pierre Corneille Corneille, Pierre, illustration. Picture Collection, The Branch Libraries, The New York Public Library.

or works of mixed type, he is particularly known for creating the genre of French classical tragedy with his innovative and controversial masterpiece, *Le Cid*. His work dominated the French stage during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jesuit Education to Legal Career Corneille was born June 6, 1606, in Rouen, Normandy, France, into a middle-class family. His father worked as an administrator of natural resources for the viscount of Rouen. His education at a Jesuit school, with its emphasis on the Latin classics and on the importance of the role of free will in man's search for a moral life, profoundly affected his later works.

Receiving his law degree in 1624, Corneille acquired two positions in government—one in the administration of natural resources and the other with the maritime court of Rouen, which was a major port and at that time the second biggest city in France and often visited by traveling theater companies. In 1641, he married Marie Lampérière, and the couple would have six children. Throughout his life, Corneille preferred an uncomplicated, suburban family life to the verbal sparring of Paris literary salons. At the time, France was ruled by king Louis XIII, who was guided in his decisions first by his

powerful mother, Marie de Médicis and later by his minister, Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu worked to enhance the crown's absolute rule at home. As a Catholic, Corneille was more free than his Protestant counterparts, who lost political power through censorship.

Successful Early Plays In this environment, success came fairly early to Corneille as an author of comedies of young love, with plots based largely on misunderstandings and misinformation spread about by jealous rivals. In 1629, he offered his first play, the comedy *Mélite; ou, Les fausses lettres* (*Mélite; or, The False Letters*), to well-known actor Montdory and his theatrical company while they were performing in Rouen. The play was a great success when staged in Paris, launching Corneille's theatrical career.

Over the next several years, Corneille wrote five comedies—including *The Palace Corridor; or, The Rival Friend* (1631) and *Place Royale; or, The Extravagant Lover* (1633–1634)—and the tragedy *Medea* (1634–1635). During this period, he attracted the attention of the powerful and influential Richelieu, who enlisted him as a member of the “Society of Five Authors,” a group of acclaimed writers who composed plays under Richelieu's direction. Although Corneille contributed the third act to the joint effort *The Comedy of the Tuileries* (1635), he reportedly became involved in disputes with the cardinal and soon resigned from the group.

Controversy over *Le Cid* *Le Cid* (1636–1637) was a great popular success and a sensation at the royal court but gave rise to a heated controversy known as “La Querelle du *Cid*.” The play is based in part on a historical Spanish character—the national hero and military leader who was known for defeating enemies despite overwhelming odds, Rodrigo de Bivar (1040?–1099)—and tells the story of the young lovers Rodrigue and Chimène, whose apparently perfect match is disrupted by their fathers' political rivalry. *Le Cid* is often called the first great French classical tragedy, and its dramatic power resides in Corneille's skillful manipulation of the conflict of honor and love.

The play's numerous violations of the neoclassical “rules” of tragic design prompted published attacks by Corneille's rivals as well as defenses by Corneille and his supporters. The matter was eventually submitted by Richelieu to the newly formed French Academy, responsible for overseeing French language and literature to ensure absolute control by the crown, which issued a negative judgment of the play. Wounded and discouraged, Corneille ceased writing plays for the next three years.

Success Again with *Cinna* Corneille's three-year silence ended in May 1640 with the presentation of his second tragedy, *Horace*, quickly followed by two more tragedies, *Cinna; or, The Mercy of Augustus* (1641), and (*Polyeucte*) (1642). *Horace* continues the theme first

broached in *Le Cid*. *Cinna*, a political tragedy, and *Polyeucte*, a religious tragedy, were both based on Roman sources and definitively established Corneille's literary reputation.

Cinna has often been argued to be Corneille's finest play after *Le Cid*, principally because of its strict faithfulness to classical form and the depiction of the slow evolution of Augustus's character from apparent tyrant to magnanimous hero. In contrast with *Cinna*, *Polyeucte* incorporates a relatively complex plot with equally complex relationships between pagan and Christian characters of third-century Rome. By this time, there had been a change in leadership in France as both Louis XIII and Richelieu had died in the early 1640s. Child king Louis XIV took power, and his mother, Anne of Austria, acted as regent, guided by Cardinal Mazarin, until 1661, when her son began actively reigning.

Rejected by Playgoing Public In 1647, Corneille moved with his family to Paris and was elected to the French Academy. He continued to write, but soon the public turned against him. Corneille was sufficiently crushed by the chilly reception that he ceased writing for the stage for seven years. As the public turned to younger playwrights such as Molière and Jean Racine, Corneille was not only rejected, but forgotten. As France emerged as the leading power in Europe, he made a last attempt in 1674 with *Suréna*, a tragedy in which mutual love undermines the hero's political position and leads to his death. After the failure of this play, Corneille accepted that his career as a playwright was over. He died in obscurity on October 1, 1684, at age seventy-eight at his home in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

Though the controversy surrounding *Le Cid* created great stress for Corneille, it resulted in the establishment of a clearer sense of the definition of tragedy and comedy. The debate set the stage for the creation of the mature masterworks of Corneille himself as well as those of Jean Racine and Molière later in the century.

Corneille's Tragedies Most plays in the seventeenth century followed the theatrical "unities" of Aristotle; that is, the story must be coherent and believable, and the action should take place within one day and one city. According to Corneille, great tragedies are those that produce intense emotion in the audience through response to corresponding displays of passion and conflict on the stage. The subjects of such tragedies must always be implausible, yet, the playwright needs to persuade the audience to believe in this implausible subject. Some major character of each tragedy should, in this view, engage in a significant and implausible transgression of ethical norms, particularly those concerning family, friendship, or love. With this view Corneille produces the theoretical foundation for *Le Cid*.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Corneille's famous contemporaries include:

Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642): French religious leader, politician, and patron of the arts who strengthened the power of the king and established the French Academy.

Louis XIV (1638–1715): King of France, known as the Sun King for his belief that the royal court and all of France should revolve around him like the planets revolve around the sun.

Molière (1622–1673): French dramatist who revolutionized French comedy; well known for his satires, including *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670).

Jean Racine (1639–1699): French playwright and rival of Corneille's; well known for his graceful use of the standard French poetic form, the alexandrine, a specific type of twelve-syllable line.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669): Dutch artist, widely regarded as one of the best painters and printmakers in European history; well known for his use of chiaroscuro, or dramatic use of light and dark.

In discussing the one action that was allowed in each tragic plot, Corneille had the new idea of simply counting how many times the hero risked death, and he thus renamed the unity of action the "unity of peril." Once the hero had survived (or failed to survive) one mortal danger, the play should be finished. By this standard, Corneille's *Horace* fails to observe the rule, and the rule in turn is tied to the audience's emotional investment in seeing the hero risk death and escape.

With regard to the one day's time that Aristotle had allotted to tragedy, Corneille, following a contemporary trend, felt that the perfect tragedy should have a story that took as much time to happen as to present on stage. Therefore, if a stage performance, including intermissions, takes roughly two hours, then the play should ideally represent two hours in the lives of the characters. As a practical matter, Corneille recommends being as vague as possible about time passing and allowing the audience to imagine time to suit themselves. He does say, however, that there should be a slight distortion of time in the last couple of acts of the play, since the audience will be caught up in the suspense, and the actions on the stage should be accelerated. Corneille recommends similar vagueness about the single place, usually a room in a palace, where the action of the tragedy takes place.

Works in Critical Context

Corneille's work is noted for its great diversity, brilliant versification, and complexity of plot and situation.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The fundamental tension throughout all of Pierre Corneille's great tragedies is the eternal human struggle to balance personal sentiment with duty to family and society. Here are some other works that deal with this struggle:

Antigone (c. 442 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This drama explores the importance of duty to family versus civic duty. It tells the story of Antigone's fight to bury her brother suitably, against the wishes of her uncle, the king of Thebes.

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. This Gothic novel explores ambition versus social responsibility in its tale of a scientist and the semihuman creature he creates.

Like Water for Chocolate (1989), a novel by Laura Esquivel. This novel follows a young Mexican woman, forbidden by her mother to marry, as she struggles to express herself while remaining an obedient daughter.

The Remains of the Day (1988), a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. In this novel, an English butler reviews his life and considers what he has sacrificed in the name of duty to his employer and to his country.

Winterset (1935), a play by Maxwell Anderson. This tragedy is based on the true story of two Italian immigrants to the United States who were executed for their radical political beliefs. Moral duty conflicts with romantic love, and the main characters must choose between their responsibilities to their families and their love for each other.

Although the decline in his reputation, which began in his own lifetime, continued throughout the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century saw a reappraisal of his place in literary history. Today, he is situated in the front rank of French dramatists. Corneille's great tragic personages, the grandeur of his style, and his relentless focus on the conflict between passion and moral obligation to society have also established his place in world literature.

His reputation among the larger public continues to rest on the four great tragedies written between 1636 and 1642, but modern scholarship suggests that both his early comedies and late tragedies, taken in context and viewed as a whole, reveal a continuous movement toward experimentation, on both poetic and thematic levels. Such works as the early *The Comic Illusion* (1635) and the late *Suréna* testify to the dramatist's persistent attempts to dazzle his public with innovative responses to old dilemmas. Often going against the grain of established literary conventions of the times, Corneille's genius for invention led him to both great success and total failure with critics, scholars, and audiences alike.

Le Cid

Despite its popular success, the play angered many of the conservative critics of the day. The ensuing stormy "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns" over literary form lasted for nearly a year, and it was officially resolved at the request of Richelieu by the forty *doctes* (learned men) of the newly formed French Academy. The largely negative judgment of the academy dealt Corneille a severe blow. Although the academy quibbled with some of Corneille's versification and with his laxity in strictly maintaining the classical unities of time, place, and action, the central issue involved a rather academic determination of what was tragic, thus establishing those elements that could be properly included in a tragedy and those that could not.

The classicists, or ancients, of the Academy supported the Aristotelian distinction between *le vrai* (the real) and *le vraisemblance* (the simple appearance of the real, or the verisimilar). History, the *doctes* maintained, is full of true events that conflict with common moral decency and thus are not the proper basis of art. Thus from the *docte* perspective, Chiméne's marriage to her father's killer, though based in fact, was morally reprehensible and consequently an improper use of the real.

Responses to Literature

1. How are Corneille's themes of honor, duty, and revenge applicable in today's society? Find examples from his works and present your ideas in small groups.
2. Corneille twice stopped writing for several years because of bad reviews, yet now he is considered the founder of French classical tragedy. In groups, discuss how criticism affects an artist. Does criticism motivate people or does it discourage their creativity?
3. Read one of Racine's plays. Then compare Racine with Corneille. Which of the two playwrights do you think is better? Support your response with examples from specific works.
4. Read *Horace* and create a list of your ten favorite quotes. Share your list with the class and tell why you find the quotes memorable.
5. Every period has certain rules to follow for various kinds of art. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research the painter Paul Cézanne. Write an essay analyzing what rules he broke in his art and how his works were viewed, both during his lifetime and today.

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Julio Cortázar

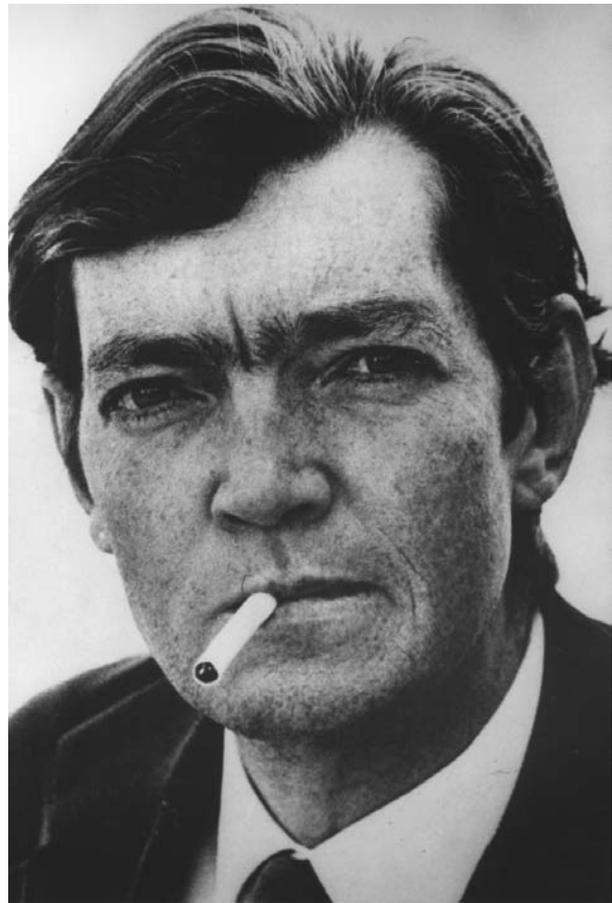
BORN: 1914, Brussels, Belgium
 DIED: 1984, Paris, France
 NATIONALITY: Argentine, French
 GENRE: Fiction
 MAJOR WORKS:
Bestiario (1951)
Final del juego (1956)
Las armas secretas (1959)
Hopscotch (1963)
Blow-Up, and Other Stories (1968)

Overview

Spanish literary innovator Julio Cortázar played a key role in the growth of twentieth-century Spanish American literature as one of the seminal figures of the "Boom," a surge of excellence and innovation in Latin American literature during the 1950s and 1960s. Like Gabriel García Márquez and other contemporary Latin American writers, Cortázar combined fantastic and often bizarre plots with commonplace events and characters. Much of his fiction is a reaction against the Western tradition of rationalism and is an attempt to create new ways in which literature can represent life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Writing Career in Buenos Aires Cortázar was born on August 26, 1914, in Brussels, Belgium, to Argentine parents, Julio José Cortázar and his wife, María Herminia Descotte de Cortázar. His parents were on a business trip when they became caught up in World War I, as Belgium was invaded by Germany and occupied during the war. In 1918, after the main fighting of the conflict ended, Cortázar moved with his parents to their native Argentina, where they settled in a suburb of Buenos Aires. An excellent student and voracious reader, Cortázar began writing at a young age, completing a novel by the time he was nine years old.



Julio Cortázar Cortazar, Julio, photograph. AP Images.

After attending school in Buenos Aires, Cortázar was certified in 1935 as a secondary and preparatory school teacher. He then attended the University of Buenos Aires but left after a year to help with the financial situation at home by teaching high school in two towns in the province of Buenos Aires. In 1938, he published *Presence*, a collection of poems, under the pseudonym Julio Denis. In 1944, he was hired to teach French literature, including surrealism (a movement in the visual arts and literature that produced fantastic images using unnatural juxtapositions and combinations and that was popular between the 1910s and 1940s), at the University of Cuyo. At the time, Argentina was politically as well as militarily unstable and suffered a series of military coups in the 1930s and 1940s. Cortázar was arrested for participating in a demonstration against president-to-be Juan Domingo Perón. Perón was the secretary of labor during the unpopular presidency of General Pedro Pablo Ramirez and had built up his own support through organized labor before being removed from power in October 1945. Perón was to have been elected president of Argentina in February 1946.

After the arrest, Cortázar resigned his position and returned to Buenos Aires, where he became the manager of a publishing association. In 1946 his first short story, "House Taken Over" was published in the journal *Anales de Buenos Aires*, edited by Jorge Luis Borges. At this juncture, Cortázar began his studies in public translating, a field combining languages and law. The combination of work and school was so exhausting that Cortázar suffered from stress-related ailments, including nausea, that would later provide inspiration for some of his classic stories.

Literary Career Continues with Life Abroad In 1949, Cortázar published "The Kings," a dramatic poem based on the classical legend of Theseus, the Athenian king who slew the half-bull, half-human Minotaur. Cortázar reversed the outcome of the story, making the Minotaur the hero. Although "The Kings" was greeted with indifference, Cortázar's first collection of short stories, titled *Bestiary*, was well received. Nevertheless, Cortázar left Argentina to take advantage of a government scholarship to study in Paris. In 1952, he began work as a translator for UNESCO, the educational agency of the United Nations, a job he continued throughout his life. The following year, he established permanent residency in Paris, becoming a French citizen in 1981 while retaining his Argentine citizenship as well. In 1953, Cortázar married Aurora Bernandez, with whom he later collaborated in the translation of the prose works of Edgar Allan Poe.

End of the Game, Cortázar's second collection of short stories, was published in his early days in France in 1956. It included "Blow-Up" as well as a longer short story, "The Pursuer." In 1960, Cortázar published *The Winners*, his first novel. *The Winners* concerned a group of Argentines on a cruise. In the novel, the passengers are denied access to the ship's stern and must decide whether or not to challenge the authorities. He followed *The Winners* with *Cronopios and Famas*, a collection of miscellaneous fables and flights of fancy. The "Instruction Manual" section of *Cronopios and Famas* was inspired by a conversation Cortázar had with his wife about a staircase. In "The Instruction Manual" Cortázar describes in precise detail such everyday occurrences as crying, singing, climbing stairs, and combing hair. "Cronopios" and "famas" are two types of people he created for the book, with the cronopios being the playful innovators, while the famas are the respectable traditionalists.

Experiments with Novels Cortázar next published *Hopscotch* (1963), an experimental novel that included a "Table of Instructions" informing the reader to read the first fifty-six chapters before leapfrogging to chapter 73 and thus "hopscotching" all around. The main character in this elaborate design is Horacio Oliveira, an Argentine expatriate adrift in Paris. Oliveira surrounds himself with a small circle of friends, including his female companion La Maga (The Magician) who, although more intuitive and straightforward than the other members of the

group, is perceived by herself and others as intellectually inferior. After La Maga's son dies unattended while the adults are discussing the meaning of life, Oliveira journeys to Buenos Aires, either to look for La Maga or his own identity, before stopping off at a one-room circus and an insane asylum. Interspersed with this quest for identity is a plot about reconstructing the novel as an art form.

Cortázar conceived *62: A Model Kit* (1968) as a sequel to *Hopscotch*. This experimental work required that readers assemble their own novel. Cortázar found *62: A Model Kit* his hardest novel to write because of the rigors of its precise instructions.

Political Coming of Age *A Manual for Manuel* (1978), Cortázar's next novel, reflected the author's growing political awareness. Cortázar interspersed the narrative of *A Manual for Manuel* with reprints of news clips, merging story with history, and donated proceeds from the book to two Argentine organizations that aided families of political prisoners. The novel, however, presented an ambivalent view of political protest. The main character, Andres Fava, an Argentine exile in Paris, attends meetings of a group of revolutionaries in exile called the Screwery but is less committed than the others. Finally, as the police close in on the group, Andres finds his cause: compiling a scrapbook of clippings for Manuel, the young son of two Screwery members.

By the time Cortázar wrote this novel, Perón had been removed from power for over two decades in favor of yet another military coup, but watched his country from exile in Spain. While several corrupt administrations followed, and by the early 1970s, Argentina's constitution had been suspended, and acts of terrorism became common. While revolutionaries were common, Cortázar, like Andres, refused to sacrifice his personal and creative freedom to a revolutionary cause. He did not completely ignore political events, however. Although Cortázar supported the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro in the 1950s to remove the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, he, like other prominent Latin American intellectuals, signed a letter in 1971 protesting the imprisonment of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla for writing poetry deemed counterrevolutionary. Under Castro, life in Cuba became more repressive, and there was widespread restriction of any protest against the government.

In the 1970s, Cortázar frequently took part in the Thursday demonstrations outside the Argentine Embassy in Paris. These demonstrations were held to protest the Argentine government's involvement in the disappearance of thousands of Argentines, a common occurrence in this period, as many who opposed the government were imprisoned, tortured, and executed by the military. The Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 (which saw the corrupt regime of Anastasio Somoza overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front and a more leftist government take its place) gave Cortázar new hope for a socialism that encouraged, rather than squelched, creative

freedom. He believed that fine literature itself was revolutionary. Some of Cortázar's experiments in form were so revolutionary they defied categorization. *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds* (1967), *Final Round* (1969), and *A Certain Lucas* (1979) were particularly daring collections of miscellaneous short stories, essays, poems, photographs, and vignettes.

Final Book Continuing to be concerned about others, 1983, Cortázar made his final trip to New York to address the United Nations Commission on International Humanitarian Issues. Cortázar wrote what became his last book, *Nicaragua, So Violently Sweet* (1984), with his companion Carol Dunlop shortly before her death from leukemia in 1982. After Dunlop's death, Cortázar's own health declined. He died on February 12, 1984, of leukemia and heart disease in Paris at the age of sixty-nine.

Works in Literary Context

Together with fellow writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes, Cortázar helped bring Latin American literature and politics to international prominence. Author of the short story that inspired Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* (1966), Cortázar was also well-known for his novel *Hopscotch*. With its elaborate structure, *Hopscotch* evoked comparisons with the works of Marcel Proust and James Joyce.

Influence of the Avant-Garde Cortázar was a constant experimenter and a member of the literary avant-garde. His works probed the connections between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the individual and the state. Although Cortázar advocated socialism and supported the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, he also upheld the need for individual freedom. Strongly influenced by the works of the French surrealists, Cortázar experimented with literary form to challenge the reader's view of everyday reality. He countered conventional adult logic with a childlike sense of wonder, professing a lifelong affinity with J. M. Barrie's character Peter Pan.

Many of Cortázar's short stories are representations of the surreal, metaphysical, horror-filled worlds that prevailed upon his imagination. In these works, he often expressed a conflict between real and unreal events by allowing the fantastic to take control of the mundane in the lives of his characters. Significant in this transformation from the ordinary to the bizarre is the compliant acceptance of extraordinary events by Cortázar's characters. In "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris," for example, the narrator-protagonist, a man staying in the apartment of a friend who is out of town, begins to inexplicably vomit rabbits. Cortázar's own phobias also inspired his work. For example, he had a fear of eating insects hidden in his food, which gave rise to the surreal short story "Circe," a tale about a woman who feeds her suitors cockroaches in the guise of candies.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cortázar's famous contemporaries include:

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro led the 1959 revolution in Cuba that overthrew the U.S.-backed regime of Batista and installed a Communist government that he would head until his retirement in 2008.

Che Guevara (1928–1967): A Marxist revolutionary and ally of Castro, the Argentine Guevara played a central role in the Cuban revolution and later in guerrilla insurgencies throughout Latin America, until his execution by the Bolivian military.

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981): A French psychologist, Lacan exerted a strong influence over French intellectuals because of his interdisciplinary approach, which combined psychoanalysis, philosophy, linguistics, literary study, and critical theory.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): One of the leading poets of the American Beats, Ginsberg's poem "Howl," was a direct attack on contemporary consumerism, conformity, and complacency.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): One of the premier surrealist artists, Dalí also worked in film, photography, and sculpture. His eccentric personality often captured as much attention as his art.

Works in Critical Context

In *Julio Cortázar*, Terry J. Peavler writes, "Julio Cortázar thus sought, as he himself declared, to be a Che Guevara of literature." Cortázar viewed writing as a game of sorts—"a contest with words." Critics believed that his novels and short stories bore the Latin American literary stamp of richness in language and imagery.

The Invading Creature Cortázar's stories are filled with examples of invading creatures such as a tiger that roams through the house of a middle-class family and a dead character who is more alive than the living. Rather than using supernatural forces to fuel readers' fears, Cortázar, according to Jaime Alazraki in *The Final Island: The Fiction of Julio Cortázar*, used "the fantastic" to expose "overly naive forms of realism."

Hopscotch *Hopscotch* met with mixed reviews. While the *New Republic* hailed it as "a spiraling, convulsive, exploding universe of a novel . . . the most powerful encyclopedia of emotions and visions to emerge from the postwar generation of international writers," the *New York Review of Books* called it "monumentally boring." Published during an era of student protests in the United States, France, Mexico, and elsewhere, *Hopscotch*, according to Peavler, "reflects the dissatisfaction of the time,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cortázar's writings constituted but one facet of the Latin American literary renaissance of the twentieth century. Here are some other works of that rebirth:

The Magnetic Fields (1920), by André Breton. Written in collaboration with Philippe Soupault, this was one of the founding texts of the Surrealist movement, utilizing a spontaneous "automatic writing" approach. Breton's work would exert a major influence on later Latin American writers.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), by Jorge Luis Borges. One of Borges's best-known short stories, establishing his international reputation with a philosophical inquiry into the nature of time disguised as a traditional detective mystery.

Love in the Time of Cholera (1985), by Gabriel García Márquez. This novel by the Colombian author explores a love triangle spanning fifty years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and themes of suffering in the name of love.

Aura (1962), by Carlos Fuentes. Written in second-person narrative, this novel plays with perceptions of past, present, and future, blending the three into an indistinguishable whole.

and the search, no matter how futile, for something better."

Responses to Literature

1. Research the government of Argentina during the 1950s as led by Juan Perón. How did it treat artists and writers? From Cortázar's writings, can you conclude what his political opinions may have been?
2. What is "magical realism"? Could Cortázar's work fit that label? Explain why or why not. Also, some writers object to the term "magical realism." Why do you think that is?
3. As part of a group, read several short stories by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, such as "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941). In discussions, talk about these questions: How does Cortázar compare with Borges, who was considered the master of Latin American fiction when Cortázar began writing? Do the compatriots have similar interests, and do they explore similar themes? How are they different? What was the relationship of the two writers?
4. Research some of the French theorists that were influential during the 1950s, such as Jacques Lacan

and Claude Lévi-Strauss. How would you describe their theories? What do they say about art, metaphysics, and time? Discuss what Cortázar's stories say about psychology, philosophy, language, and time. How are these themes influenced by French critical theory from the 1950s?

5. Cortázar was writing around the same time as the American Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Read some Beat poems or prose such as Kerouac's *On the Road*. What do the Beats have in common with Cortázar? How are they different? Consider the authors' philosophies, influences, approaches to music and other forms of culture, as well as styles and themes in order to construct your answer. Create a presentation for the class of your findings.

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William Cowper

BORN: 1731, Great Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England

DIED: 1800, Norfolk, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Olney Hymns (with John Newton, 1779)

Poems (1782)

The Task (1785)

The History of John Gilpin (1785)

The Life, and Posthumous Writings, of William Cowper, Esqr. (edited by William Hayley, 1803–1804)

Overview

William Cowper was one of the most popular English poets of the eighteenth century and is considered one of the forerunners of Romanticism. His comic ballad "The Journey of John Gilpin" established his literary reputation; his *Olney Hymns* were incorporated into Evangelical



William Cowper Cowper, William, engraving. The Library of Congress.

liturgy; and his satires enjoyed widespread popularity. Contemporary critics especially value his correspondence, ranking him among the English language's finest letter writers. A frail personality hounded by severe depression, he expressed complex psychological currents in his verse.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Lifelong Melancholia Cowper was born on November 15, 1731, in Berkhamsted, England, where his father, John Cowper, was the rector of St. Peter's Church. His background was aristocratic. His father's ancestors held prominent public positions in government and law. His mother, Ann Donne Cowper, was a descendant of the Elizabethan poet John Donne. Her death from childbirth complications in 1737 was the first source of William Cowper's lifelong melancholia, or bouts of depression. The second source came the following year, at Dr. Pitman's School in Markyate, where Cowper was mercilessly bullied by older boys. At age eight, he developed an eye ailment and was sent to live for two years in the home of an oculist.

"Delia" Cowper recuperated and became a successful student at the Westminster School, following which he was sent to learn the legal profession with a London

solicitor named Chapman. While working at Chapman's office, Cowper frequented the home of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, and three female cousins. By the summer of 1752, he was infatuated with his cousin Theadora. They courted for several years, but her father forbade them to marry. Heartbroken, he penned a sequence of love poems to "Delia"; they were released in 1825 as part of Cowper's second posthumous poetry collection.

Although the law did not enthrall him, he was called to the bar in 1754 and served later as Commissioner of Bankruptcy Courts. The young barrister enjoyed the fashionable London life, dining every Thursday with several school friends who called themselves the Nonsense Club. Two of these chums edited a publication called the *Connoisseur*, to which Cowper began contributing satirical pieces.

This life disintegrated in 1763. Ashley Cowper secured for his nephew a lucrative parliamentary clerkship and even promised Theadora's hand once he obtained the post. However, Cowper had to face a public examination before the House of Lords, and this prospect unnerved him completely. Before the fateful day, he attempted suicide. He ended up at the Collegium Insanorum in St. Albans, where he gradually recovered and experienced a religious epiphany that led him to Evangelicalism.

Retreat to the Countryside When he left the hospital in 1765, he lived in Huntingdon as a boarder at the family home of an Evangelical minister, the Reverend Morley Unwin. He was drawn to the maternal figure of Mary Unwin, the minister's wife. After the sudden death of Rev. Unwin in 1767, Cowper and the rest of the household moved to Olney. Cowper enjoyed the peace of this rural town and began to concentrate on writing, starting with an autobiography (that would be published after his death). He came at once under the influence of the Reverend John Newton, an Evangelical and former slave trader. The two men collaborated on the *Olney Hymns* (1779), of which the most famous is "Amazing Grace," written by Newton. Cowper's lyrics place him in the first rank of English hymnodists; several remain in regular congregational use.

In late 1772, partially in response to local gossip about two unmarried people living together, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin became engaged. Biographers speculate that this betrothal caused him tremendous anxiety, for that winter he succumbed again to mental illness; he was haunted by a dream that God had damned him. The engagement was broken, though the pair continued to live together. Cowper never again attended public worship. He lived for years as an invalid; his animals, his garden, and his poetry were his mainstays against depression.

In 1780 a relative of Cowper's, the Reverend Martin Madan, published a curious treatise named *Thelyphthora*, an argument for polygamy as a social alternative to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cowper's famous contemporaries include:

Adam Smith (1723–1790): Scottish philosopher and economist; author of *The Wealth of Nations*.

John Newton (1725–1807): Anglican clergyman; coauthor of *Olney Hymns* and author of “Amazing Grace.”

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774): Anglo-Irish poet, novelist, and playwright.

Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802): English scientist, philosopher, and poet; grandfather of Charles Darwin.

Joseph Priestley (1733–1804): British philosopher, theologian, scientist, and author; credited as the discoverer of oxygen.

George III (1738–1820): King of Great Britain (and subsequently the United Kingdom) from 1760 until his death.

prostitution. At John Newton's urging, Cowper responded with *Anti-Thelyphthora* (1781), a long poem deftly combining satire with religious fervor. The same combination infused Cowper's *Poems* (1782), which became known as the “Moral Satires.” These didactic verses were praised for their vigor, spontaneity, and hard-hitting enunciation of Evangelical doctrine.

The Task Cowper's next volume, *The Task* (1785), won him universal critical esteem. This five-thousand-line poem, written in a relaxed blank verse, is considered his masterpiece. A broad investigation of man, nature, and society, it is also the first extended autobiographical poem in English. The scope of its satiric and patriotic interests, alongside its explorations of rural and domestic life, make *The Task* a truly national poem. The public aspects of the poem, however, are interwoven with distinctly personal ones. Cowper extols the skill of the gardener, who represents harmony with nature, and the imagination of the poet, who provides access to beauty and wisdom. Finding joy and peace in the presence of nature, Cowper proclaims, is the touchstone of spiritual wholeness.

The Task made Cowper's a household name for the next few decades. Augmenting his fame, in the same volume, was “The Journey of John Gilpin,” a narrative ballad ostensibly about the adventures of a tailor, but in reality a raucous parody of poetic conventions. The poem was spectacularly successful, and its appeal as an artifact of popular culture lasted for generations. Beneath the farce, though, lie bleak undertones consistent with Cowper's previous work.

The success of *The Task* largely vanquished Cowper's need to write confessional poetry, but it unleashed his ambition. From 1785 to 1790, he sought literary immor-

ality by working on a blank-verse translation of Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He hoped to surpass Alexander Pope, whose famous versions of Homer had made him the most commercially successful poet in English history. Published in 1791, his translation was a mixed success. He followed up by working on translations of Italian and Latin poems by John Milton.

Cowper's Letters William Cowper's letters are widely admired, especially those he wrote to William Unwin, Mary's son, and his cousin Harriot Hesketh, Theadora's sister. The private audience of these cultivated friends released the sparkling wit, disarming candor, and astute observations that make his correspondence a unique literary phenomenon.

Cowper suffered several more breakdowns in his later years. The lengthy illness and death of his longtime companion Mary Unwin in 1795 sent him into despondency. He was unable to blot out the voice of God's condemnation. He died in 1800.

Works in Literary Context

William Cowper's prose and poetry both display an elegant, convivial style. He absorbed a range of literary influences, perhaps beginning with two books he acquired as a child: the light verse of John Gay's *Fables*, and the Calvinist *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. Cowper's satirical writings are in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele. His religious verse follows after George Herbert and his ancestor John Donne. He admired John Milton above all poets, and *The Task* shares some characteristics with Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*.

Fear and Fervor Cowper's mental illness, and constant fear of God's wrath, influenced the thematic content of his writing, from his *Memoir* to his religious poetry. His *Olney Hymns* describe inward states of conflict, insecurity, and agony in a hostile universe occasionally relieved by a glimmer of hope for salvation. Even light, satirical pieces such as “The Journey of John Gilpin” are touched with melancholy and a sense of man's inexorable loneliness. Lord David Cecil named his biography of Cowper after a telling image from *The Task*: “The Stricken Deer.” It is a suitable summation of Cowper's poetic stance.

Contemplating Nature Cowper's poetry is distinguished in its fresh appreciation and precise observation of wilderness and the countryside. In *The Task*, his interest in nature unites with his religious concerns. The poem argues that the depth of one's response to nature represents, more or less directly, a person's spiritual worth. For Cowper, the natural world is to be contemplated from an aesthetic point of view, as one would peruse a work of art, albeit one created by an “artificer divine.” Cowper delights in the position of observer, rather than participant, in

the world; his poetry reflects his preference for life viewed from a window.

Bequests to the Romantics This spiritual and philosophical reverence for nature became a central tenet of the Romantic movement in British poetry, starting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. It was not the only legacy Cowper left to the Romantics. Coleridge praised *The Task* for its originality in uniting “natural thoughts with natural diction” and “the heart with the head.” He was probably referring to Cowper’s unprecedented use of blank verse as a vehicle for the flow of consciousness, of Cowper as the progenitor of an “interior” mode in which the poetry is a continual outgrowth of the mind and the emotions. This inwardness, and the poet’s emphasis on autobiography and confession, also are what make Cowper an important precursor of Romanticism in England.

Works in Critical Context

William Cowper was the foremost English poet of the generation between Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth. For several decades, he had probably the largest readership of any English poet. From 1782, when his first major volume appeared, to 1837, the year in which Robert Southey completed the monumental *Life and Works of Cowper*, more than a hundred editions of his poems were published in Britain and almost fifty in America. *The Task* received especially favorable notices for its depth of feeling, fluency, and descriptive realism.

Cowper’s position as a transitional figure between the neoclassical and Romantic periods in English literature has inspired critical interest in his life and works. Many scholars, including the nineteenth-century critics Walter Bagehot and George Saintsbury, argue that Cowper’s satiric and didactic tendencies place him closer to the eighteenth-century moralists than to the Romantics. Others surmise that his use of blank verse, his interest in nature and everyday life, and the emotional core of his poetry link him to Romantics like Wordsworth and Robert Burns.

Of Cowper’s poetry, *The Task* has inspired the most critical commentary; however, the majority of recent critical interest in Cowper has centered on his *Memoir* and his correspondence. Discussions of the *Memoir* have largely explored the construction of Cowper’s narrative persona. Some scholars have questioned the connections between Cowper’s mental illness and certain characteristics of his work. Cowper’s letters have won admiration and serious study from numerous scholars. Robert Southey, poet laureate and editor of Cowper’s complete works, declared Cowper the best letter writer in the English language.

Responses to Literature

1. Write about the balance between personal and political concerns in *The Task*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

William Cowper wrote several lyrics for the *Olney Hymns* that are still sung regularly in Evangelical congregations. The Christian hymn is among the most enduring of musical forms, as the following titles demonstrate:

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (c. 1527), a hymn by Martin Luther. The best-known hymn by the foremost Protestant leader; sometimes called “The Battle Hymn of the Reformation.”

“Amazing Grace” (1779), a hymn by John Newton. The most famous song of the *Olney Hymns* and one of the most popular of all Christian hymns.

“Silent Night” (c. 1818), a hymn by Josef Mohr; music by Franz Xaver Gruber. One of the most popular Christmas carols; in the original German, “*Stille Nacht*.”

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (c. 1860), a hymn by Wallace (often spelled “Wallis”) Willis. An African American spiritual, often sung at English rugby matches.

“In the Upper Room” (1947), a hymn by Lucie Campbell. Written by the first woman among the great gospel composers, this song is indelibly associated with the powerful voice of the late gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.

2. Many have praised Cowper’s mastery of the art of letter writing. Identify some of the most effective techniques Cowper applies in his correspondence. How does he develop his voice in the letters? Does his voice change depending on the recipient of the letter?
3. Is it fair to say that Cowper’s worldview was anchored in fear? How do you perceive the relationship between fear and Christian faith in Cowper’s writing?
4. Is it appropriate to link Cowper with the Romantic poets? What is, or is not, Romantic in his outlook and style?
5. What do you think accounts for Cowper’s considerable popularity during his lifetime?

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D-E

☒ Roald Dahl

BORN: 1916, Llandaff, South Wales

DIED: 1990, Oxford, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Novels, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying
(1946)

James and the Giant Peach (1961)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964)

The BFG (1982)

Matilda (1988)

Overview

A writer of both children's fiction and short stories for adults, Roald Dahl (1916–1990) is best known as the author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Dahl's works for children have been praised as skillfully crafted, with fast-paced plots, captivating detail, and onomatopoeic words that lend themselves to being read aloud. His adult-oriented short stories are noted for their dark humor, surprise endings, and subtle horror. Whether writing for juveniles or an adult audience, Dahl has been described as a master of story construction with a remarkable ability to weave a tale.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

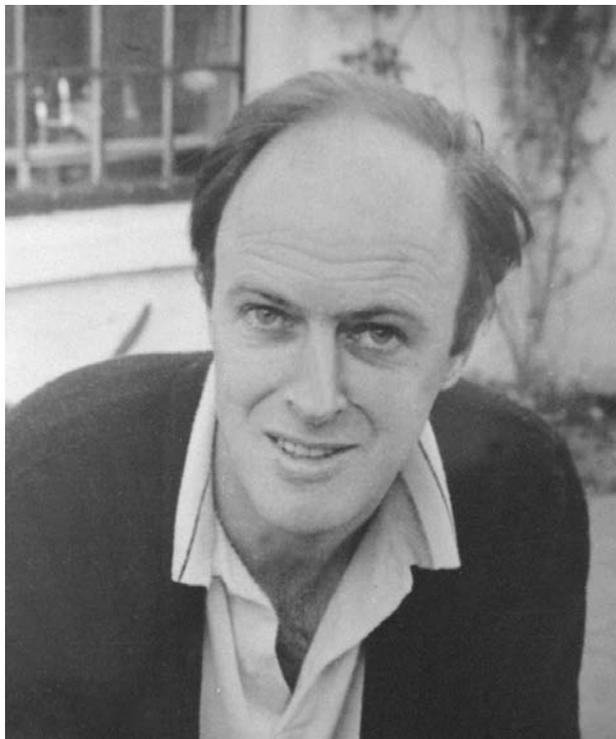
Boarding School: Source of Darkness Dahl was born in Llandaff, South Wales, to Norwegian parents and spent his childhood summers visiting his grandparents in Oslo, Norway. After his father died when Dahl was four, his mother honored her late husband's wish that Dahl be sent to English schools. Dahl subsequently attended Llandaff Cathedral School, where he began a series of academic misadventures. After he and several

other students were severely beaten by the headmaster for placing a dead mouse in a cruel storekeeper's candy jar, Dahl's mother moved him to St. Peter's Boarding School and later to Repton, a renowned private school.

Later, Dahl recalled in his short autobiographical story "Lucky Break" that the "beatings at Repton were more fierce and more frequent than anything I had yet experienced." Standing six feet, six inches tall, Dahl played soccer and served as the captain of the squash and handball teams but did not excel in academics. One teacher commented on the fourteen-year-old boy's English composition work: "I have never met a boy who so persistently writes the exact opposite of what he means. He seems incapable of marshaling his thoughts on paper." One year later, another comment on an English composition of Dahl's read: "A persistent muddler. Vocabulary negligible, sentences mal-constructed. He reminds me of a camel." Dahl would later describe his school years as "days of horrors" that inspired much of his macabre fiction.

Plane Crash: An Unusual Beginning Dahl was flying over the African desert for the Royal Air Force during World War II when he was forced to make an emergency landing. He was rescued by another pilot and transported to a hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. His skull was fractured and plastic surgery was necessary to repair the damage to his nose. Six months later, he had recuperated to the point that he could fly a Hurricane fighter with his squadron in Greece against the Germans. Dahl shot down four enemy planes, and his own plane was one of the four out of the thirty Hurricanes in that campaign to survive. Then, as Dahl's old injuries began to cause dangerous blackouts when he flew, he returned to England. At a club one night, he met the undersecretary of state for Air, Harold Balfour, and Balfour gave Dahl his next post as an assistant air attaché in Washington, D.C.

While it took Dahl six months to recover—and he would live with the recurrent pain of his injuries for the rest of his life—Dahl's crash landing set him on a course



Roald Dahl Dahl, Roald, photograph by Eli Wallach. The Library of Congress.

that led him to his career as a writer. Wanting to write about Dahl's most exciting war experience for a *Saturday Evening Post* article, reporter C. S. Forester interviewed Dahl over lunch one day in Washington. Because Forester could not eat and take notes at the same time, Dahl offered to write some notes later for the journalist. Those notes became the story "A Piece of Cake," the first of Dahl's work to bring him money and recognition. Dahl went on to write a number of stories for adults about being a fighter pilot.

In Dahl's first book for children, he did not stray far from the fighter-pilot stories he had created for adults. *The Gremlins* tells the story of evil little men who caused war planes to crash. After these beings are discovered, they are convinced to work for the pilots instead of against them. *The Gremlins* was a popular success. After First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt read the book to her children, she invited Dahl to dinner at the White House. Walt Disney was so taken with the story that he planned to transform it into a motion picture. In the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, May Lamberton Becker advised her readers to preserve *The Gremlins* "as a firsthand source book on the origin of a genuine addition to folklore. That is, preserve it if the children in the family don't read it to bits . . ."

Father and Storyteller The births of Dahl's children provided him an opportunity to tell the children bedtime stories, a practice that allowed the author to develop his

understanding of the kind of stories children enjoyed. In an article for *The Writer*, Dahl observed that children love suspense, action, magic, "new inventions," "secret information," and "seeing the villain meet a grisly death." According to Dahl, children "hate descriptive passages and flowery prose," and "can spot a clumsy sentence." As Dahl's children grew older, he wrote both *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the story of a poor boy who is selected to be the new owner of a world-famous chocolate factory, and *James and the Giant Peach*, which recounts the fantastic tale of a young boy who travels thousands of miles in a house-sized peach with as bizarre an assemblage of companions as can be found in a children's book.

Works in Literary Context

Revenge and Violence One way that Dahl delights his readers is by exacting often vicious revenge on cruel adults who harm children. In *Matilda*, the Amazonian headmistress Miss Trunchbull, who deals with unruly children by grabbing them by the hair and tossing them out windows, is finally banished by the brilliant Matilda. *The Witches*, released as a movie in 1990, finds the heroic young character, who has been turned into a mouse, thwarting the hideous and diabolical witches' plans to kill all the children of England. But even innocent adults receive rough treatment. In *James and the Giant Peach*, parents are eaten by a rhinoceros, and aunts are flattened by the eponymous giant peach. In *The Witches*, parents are killed in car crashes, and pleasant fathers are murdered in *Matilda*.

However, Dahl explained in the *New York Times Book Review* that the children who wrote to him "invariably pick out the most gruesome events as the favorite parts of the books. . . . They don't relate it to life. They enjoy the fantasy. And my nastiness is never gratuitous. It's retribution. Beastly people must be punished."

Dahl's Writings for Adults *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* is a collection of Dahl's early stories. One tale especially, "They Shall Not Grow Old," is a much more polished story than one would expect from a relatively inexperienced writer. A notable aspect of this piece, also seen in several of the other stories in the book, is the clear influence of Ernest Hemingway on the young writer's style.

Critics have compared much of Dahl's adult-oriented fiction to the works of Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry, and Saki. Praised by commentators as well crafted and suspenseful, Dahl's stories employ surprise endings and shrewd characters who are rarely what they seem to be. Dahl also experimented with comic themes in his novel *My Uncle Oswald*. The title character, Oswald Hendryks Cornelius, is a charming man of the world who embarks upon a business venture to collect and preserve semen samples from geniuses and royalty, hoping wealthy women who desire superior offspring will want to be his clients. Like Dahl's short stories, *My Uncle Oswald* features duplicitous characters, and some critics have

observed that it shares a common theme with much of his short fiction: a depiction of the superficial nature of modern civilization.

Works in Critical Context

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Dahl's most popular and most controversial children's story. Many critics have censured this work for its alleged stereotyping and inhumanity, and have accused Dahl of racism for his portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas. In the original version of the story, the Oompa-Loompas are described as black pygmies from deepest Africa who sing and dance and work for nearly nothing. In a revised edition, Dahl changed their appearance and gave them a mythical homeland. Still, claims of prejudice persist. In *Now Upon a Time: A Contemporary View of Children's Literature*, Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker criticized *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for its "ageism": "The message with which we close the book is that the needs and desires and opinions of old people are totally irrelevant and inconsequential."

The publication and popularity of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* evoked criticism from experts in children's literature who thought that the violence, insensitivity, or supposed racism in the text was offensive or inappropriate for children. Many critics have objected to the rough treatment of adults. Eleanor Cameron, for example, in *Children's Literature in Education*, found that "Dahl caters to the streak of sadism in children which they don't even realize is there because they are not fully self-aware and are not experienced enough to understand what sadism is." "It is difficult to avoid the feeling that Dahl . . . enjoys writing about violence, while at the same time condemning it," remarked David Rees in *Children's Literature in Education*, adding: "Dahl . . . parades his own irritations—television addiction . . . overindulgence in sweets, gum-chewing, shooting foxes, beards, ugly faces, fat bodies, cranky old people, spoiled children—and presents them as moral objections." Dahl's supporters have argued that in *Charlie*, as in his other children's books, Dahl follows the traditional fairy tale style, which includes extreme exaggeration and the swift and horrible destruction of evildoers; they contend that children are not harmed by this approach. Critic Alasdair Campbell, writing in *School Librarian*, argued that "normal children are bound to take some interest in the darker side of human nature, and books for them should be judged not by picking out separate elements but rather on the basis of their overall balance and effect."

If critics disagreed about the suitability of some of Dahl's books for children, most agreed that Dahl was a talented writer. According to Michael Wood of *New Society*, "Dahl is at his best when he reveals the horrible thinness of much of our respectability; at his worst and most tiresome when he nudges us towards the contemplation of mere naughtiness . . . what is striking about Dahl's work,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dahl's famous contemporaries include:

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962): First Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt was a key figure in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal policy, which helped the United States survive the Great Depression.

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963): Lewis is best known for *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1965), which present the adventures of children who play central roles in the unfolding history of the fictional realm of Narnia, a place where animals talk, magic is common, and good battles evil.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Just as Dahl's earliest work was inspired by his experience in World War II, this American novelist's writing is largely inspired by his service in World War I.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): This Spanish artist worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics, and he is often associated with the cubist art movement.

both for children and adults, is its carefully pitched appeal to its different audiences He has tact, timing, a clean, economic style, an abundance of ingenuity . . . above all he knows how to manipulate his readers."

Responses to Literature

1. Read one of Dahl's children's books and read one of his short stories written for an adult audience. What are some of the key differences between the "voices" of these texts? (Consider the words Dahl uses, the themes the works focus on, and the action within the texts.)
2. Read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Consider why Willy Wonka decides to give the chocolate factory to Charlie? If you were Willy Wonka, would you have chosen Charlie? What would have happened to the factory if Willy Wonka had chosen another child?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Roald Dahl suffered a terrifying crash while a member of the Royal Air Force during World War II. Much of his adult-oriented literature deals with war and its effects on human beings. Following is a list of other texts that focus on the mental and emotional toll of war:

"I Will Fight No More Forever" (1877), by Chief Joseph. This famous speech was given by Nez Percé chief Joseph upon his surrender to the U.S. Army.

"Dulce Et Decorum Est" (1920), by Wilfred Owen. Owen, a soldier in World War I, wrote this poetic rebuttal to a line from Horace that claimed it is "sweet and appropriate" that a young man should die in war for his country.

The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), a film directed by William Wyler. This Academy Award-winning film tells the story of three servicemen and the complications and struggles they face upon returning home after World War II.

In the Lake of the Woods (1994), by Tim O'Brien. In this novel, the protagonist, John Wade, is a Vietnam veteran who continues to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which causes him to experience bouts of rage, perhaps resulting in the murder of his wife.

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Gabriele d'Annunzio

BORN: 1863, Pescara, Italy

DIED: 1938, Gardone, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

New Song (1882)

The Child of Pleasure (1888)

The Daughter of Jorio (1904)

Halcyon (1904)

Overview

Italian novelist, poet, dramatist, and political agitator, Gabriele d'Annunzio is one of the most flamboyant personalities of twentieth-century literature. The press reported his romantic scandals, and scholars criticized the moral delinquency of his works. Nevertheless, d'Annunzio was celebrated in his lifetime as one of Italy's greatest authors, an accomplished stylist who combined the poetic splendor of Dante and other classical writers with such literary movements as naturalism, Symbolism, and Decadence.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Father's Influence Provides Opportunities for Education D'Annunzio was born March 12, 1863, in the small town of Pescara on the Adriatic coast in central Italy. His father, a prosperous landowner and a dealer in wine and agricultural products, became mayor of the town. His wealth and influence allowed d'Annunzio the opportunity to study with private tutors and to be educated in Latin by priests of the local diocese. Later, d'Annunzio was educated in a prominent boarding school in Prato: the Liceo Cicognini.

Uninhibited Poetry Brings Success A precocious child, d'Annunzio excelled at Latin and Greek. At the age of sixteen, he wrote his first collection of verse, *Primo Vere* (1879; In Early Spring), which was published by his father. Because of its uninhibited approach to sexual themes, the poems were a commercial hit; because of their linguistic skill, they were a critical success. After graduating from Cicognini in 1881, d'Annunzio attended the University of Rome and began writing for newspapers. The following year, he published *Terra vergine* (1882; Virgin Land), a collection of regional stories, and *Canto novo* (1882; New Song), a collection of poetry that contains details of his first romantic relationship. In 1883, he married the duchess Maria Hardouin de Gallese, with whom he had three sons. D'Annunzio wrote popular stories, light verse, and a society news column, all under pseudonyms, in order to support his family. In 1888, after determining that his journalistic writing was consuming too much time, d'Annunzio quit his job as a reporter so that he could finish his first novel, *The Child of Pleasure* (1888–1889).

During the 1880s in Rome, d'Annunzio perfected his metamorphosis into what some have called a fop, or dandy. Often writing under a pseudonym, a penchant he extended by immediately renaming women acquaintances, d'Annunzio sharpened his writing and shamelessly blended his flamboyant image and experiences into his sensual poetry and stories; the frank depiction of his seduction of his wife, Maria Hardouin, here named "Yella," in *Intermezzo de rime* (1883), brought accusations of pornography, but boosted sales.



Gabriele D'Annunzio D'Annunzio, Gabriele, photograph. The Library of Congress.

D'Annunzio's literary career flourished in overlapping phases, each dominated by a genre. Following sensual verse and naturalistic short stories, the second phase began with the publication of his novel, *Il piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*), an examination of the sexual and sensual pleasures of the facile lover Count Andrea Sperelli, a fictionalized d'Annunzio. His other novels, including the psychological study *L'innocente* (1892; *The Intruder*), the basis for Luchino Visconti's film (1979), also incorporate autobiographical elements and descriptions of the crumbling urban world of the aristocrats and reflect d'Annunzio's growing interest in Nietzsche's concept of the superman.

Public Affairs Throughout the 1890s, d'Annunzio began writing for the theater. The leading roles typically featured Eleonora Duse, a noted actress of the day whose relationship with d'Annunzio was widely discussed. By 1891, his marriage with Maria Hardouin had ended. In 1904, *The Daughter of Jorio* garnered a great deal of attention for both d'Annunzio and Duse, and the drama was commonly imitated. Duse was also the inspiration for the character Foscarina in the novel *The Flame of Life* (1900). A fictionalized account of his liaison with Duse, this novel created a great furor when it was published. In 1910 he and Duse separated, and Duse would no longer perform in his plays. D'Annunzio continued to live extravagantly

even though he did not have much income. As a result of accumulating large debt, he fled to France in 1910, where he remained until the advent of World War I.

War and Politics: Defying Orders D'Annunzio was elected to the Italian parliament in 1897 and became a nationalist of high profile. When he returned to Italy at the outbreak of World War I, d'Annunzio reentered the political scene, delivering speeches and writing pamphlets. He joined the air force and became one of Italy's most popular heroes. During a forced landing, d'Annunzio was blinded in one eye by a fragment from the plane's propeller. While recovering from the injury, he composed *Notturmo* (1921), a collection of prose meditations. In 1919, believing that the Allies had shorted Italy in the postwar division of land, d'Annunzio defied Italian government orders and led several thousand volunteer troops to reclaim the town of Fiume (present day Rijeka, Croatia). He held his position and even declared war on Italy before being overthrown by Italian troops in 1921. After Fiume, d'Annunzio was allowed to retire to a villa on Lake Garda, where he spent his last years writing. In 1924, with Benito Mussolini's approval, d'Annunzio was named Prince of Montenevoso and, in 1937, he was made president of the Italian Royal Academy. On March 1, 1938, d'Annunzio died of a cerebral hemorrhage while writing at his desk.

Works in Literary Context

D'Annunzio's tendency to adopt artistic trends resulted in his being influenced by a number of writers and movements throughout his career. *Primo Vere*, for instance, was inspired by *Odi Barbare* (1877; *Barbarian Odes*), a volume by Giosué Carducci, an Italian winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. D'Annunzio's early short stories are regional tales influenced by French writer Guy de Maupassant, Italian writer Giovanni Verga, and the naturalist movement of the late nineteenth century. The stories are characterized by a conviction that the everyday life of the middle and lower classes deserve serious literary treatment. Because of his artistic fickleness, d'Annunzio's work often reflects contradictory movements and themes. For example, his novels were influenced by Decadence, which encouraged sensationalism and held that art was superior to nature, a movement contrary to naturalism. *The Child of Pleasure* is written in the style of such French novelists as Joris-Karl Huysmans, while *The Maidens of the Rock* (1898) carries echoes of French Symbolism.

The Superman Nietzsche's philosophy includes the concept of the superman, an individual who discovers that it is in his best interests to reject any outside ideas about ethics, trusting instead what he finds within himself. Ultimately, the superiority of the superman sets him apart from others, as he has created his own realm of good and evil. It follows, then, that the superman is contemptuous of the masses, as well as any democratic system of government. Intrigued by the model of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

D'Annunzio's famous contemporaries include:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941): Revered in India for his poetry and songs, Tagore helped introduce Indian art and philosophy to the Western world.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): Conrad's works, which include the story "Heart of Darkness," (1899) lead readers into morally dark worlds.

Thomas Mann (1875–1955): Some critics believe that the main character in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) represents the whole of German culture during Nazism.

Ernest de Sélincourt (1870–1943): A professor of poetry at Oxford, Sélincourt's work as an academic includes his well-respected editions of the letters and poetry of Dorothy and William Wordsworth.

Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890): While in a mental institution, van Gogh painted *Starry Night* (1889), one of his most famous works.

William Taft (1857–1930): As the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Taft supported strengthening America's position in the Caribbean and the Far East by expanding private American investments.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Mussolini was the Fascist dictator of Italy from 1922 to 1943.

Nietzsche's superman, d'Annunzio personifies the motif in several characters who act outside the limits of decency and the law. Their amorality is supposedly justified by their superhuman capabilities. Throughout his novels and dramas, d'Annunzio perverts the superman persona by creating characters who perform atrocious acts of violence.

Dramatizing the Superman Almost all of d'Annunzio's plays elaborate on the superman rationale. While often dreadful, the plays are also interesting. Such works include d'Annunzio's third novel, *The Intruder* (1893), whose characters exemplify qualities of the superman taken to horrific extremes, *Glory* (1899), which depicts Ruggero Flammo, a Roman dictator who rules with cruelty until he is assassinated, and *More Than Love* (1906), which focuses on a heroic explorer who, in addition to seducing his best friend's sister, is revealed to be a fraud. *The Ship* (1908) is another drama that typifies an unethical superman. In this play, the character of Marco Gatico is presented as a hero who is not bound to the moral standards of lesser mortals. In all of d'Annunzio's Nietzsche-inspired dramas, neither the restraint nor the plight of the common man is of concern to the superman.

Discussing d'Annunzio's immense popularity, Giuseppe Prezzolini writes that many Italians suffered from

"d'Annunzianism," the "Italian disease" of imitating his extravagant lifestyle. They copied his neckwear and goatee, adopted his diction and scorn for creditors, walked dogs with languorous eyes, and associated with ladies with high sounding names. In addition to the influence he had on his contemporaries, d'Annunzio holds an important place in twentieth-century literature today and continues to be a topic of study for scholars in the field.

Works in Critical Context

No critical consensus about d'Annunzio's writing exists. Though rejected for his moral depravity by some, others praise him for bringing an unknown vitality to Italian literature. In general, d'Annunzio is commended for his semiautobiographical novel, *The Child of Pleasure*, and his poetry is noted for its linguistic virtuosity. Unquestionably, though, the dramas are regarded to be d'Annunzio's most offensive and least successful works. Today, d'Annunzio's works, as a whole, are largely forgotten, and his plays are rarely performed. Instead, it is his life, especially his political affiliations, that has fascinated academics.

Ties to Myth From the onset, d'Annunzio's work shocked critics and audiences alike. While several scholars have praised their inventive use of classical mythology, other academics disagree. According to Benedetto Croce, a critic during d'Annunzio's time, "Ancient Greek tragedy and mediaeval mysteries are the means used in a vain attempt to excite violent and troublous moods." Instead of achieving literary magnificence, "feelings supposedly heroic are contaminated," continues Croce.

The Child of Pleasure The preface of d'Annunzio's first novel, *The Child of Pleasure*, is a letter addressed to his friend Francesco Paolo Michetti in which d'Annunzio says that his work is, in essence, a study of corruption, depravity, and of "many other subtleties and falsities and vain cruelties." From one perspective, the novel is an attempt to define what love is. The answer, of course, is disheartening, as love seems to be "nothing more than a masochistic or sadistic experience, a form of punishment inflicted upon another human being—an experience utterly devoid of any uplifting elements," claims Croce. Indeed, even the narrative of the novel assesses Andrea Sperelli, the main character, accordingly: "Each of these loves brought him to a new degradation; each inebriated him with evil rapture, without satisfying him; each taught him some special subtlety of vice yet unknown to him. He had in him the seeds of all infections. He corrupted and was corrupted."

Cruel Dramas D'Annunzio's dramatic works are most commonly criticized for lacking humanity and for their excessive depictions of such ferocities as sadism, murder, and mutilation. Frank Moore claims that *The Dead City*, one of d'Annunzio's earliest plays, offends "not our morals but our taste" with its eye-gouging, decapitation, and

incest. In such plays as *More Than Love* (1906) and *The Ship* (1908), affection and kindness are, according to Croce, “submerged by the sensuality which steadily prevails and dictates to the author, forcing him to delineate not persons but bodies, and not even idealized bodies but bodies heavily fleshy, radiating attraction for the senses but also that disgust and recoil which flesh does sometimes excite.” Surely much of the repulsiveness of d’Annunzio’s plays is a result of the characters’ desensitized view of the people and violence surrounding them.

Responses to Literature

1. Decadence as a literary movement has multiple explanations and definitions. With the help of a dictionary of literature, compose a working definition of Decadence as it relates to the work of d’Annunzio. What sort of connotations has *decadence* come to have in contemporary society?
2. Early in his career, d’Annunzio was criticized for writing works that were imitative of other writers. Discuss why you think he felt the need to rely so heavily on other authors. What did his critics say about his imitative style? Do you agree or disagree with their assessments of his work?
3. Critic Benedetto Croce claims that d’Annunzio’s works “pass criticism on themselves” because of their wantonness, ferocity, and violence. What is d’Annunzio’s purpose for including violent or repulsive acts in his dramatic works? Compare these works to movies produced today, which often are filled with gratuitous violence and torture.
4. Read *The Child of Pleasure*, which treats love and pleasure as processes of corruption, and consider what statements the novel is making about the nature of corruption. What is corruption, for d’Annunzio? What is its source? Is this another way of trying to understand the source of “evil” in humanity? Why do you think d’Annunzio takes “love” as his vehicle for an exploration of evil and corruption?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Viewed by some critics as representations of d’Annunzio himself, the protagonists of d’Annunzio’s novels and dramas frequently consider themselves beyond ordinary rules of society. In these works, d’Annunzio’s interest in Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the superman is evident. Other works of art that demonstrate an interest in the disregard for the values of society include the following:

- The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), a novel by Tom Wolfe. Set in New York, this novel features a variety of amoral characters: corrupt politicians, dishonest lawyers, self-serving activists, and greedy stockbrokers.
- The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), a novel by Patricia Highsmith. The manipulative, murderous actions of Tom Ripley defy all moral standards as he assumes the life of the wealthy Dickie Greenleaf.
- Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita* (1992), a poetry collection by Kim Morrissey. Based on Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Lolita* (1955), the poems in this volume are told in the voice of twelve-year-old Lolita, the girl who becomes the object of obsession for her stepfather.
- Carmen* (1875), an opera by Georges Bizet. For an audience accustomed to moral plots and sentimental happy endings, *Carmen* was considered scandalous with its amoral characters and tragic ending.

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Dante Alighieri

BORN: 1265, Florence, Italy

DIED: 1321, Ravenna, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

New Life (c. 1293)

The Divine Comedy (1307–1321)

Overview

Considered the finest poet that Italy has ever produced, Dante Alighieri is also celebrated as a major influence on western European culture. He wrote *The Divine Comedy* (*La Divina Commedia*, 1307–1321), the greatest poetic composition of the Christian Middle Ages and the first



Dante Dante, illustration by Gustav Dore

masterpiece of world literature in a modern European language. Called “the Supreme Poet” in Italy, he forms, along with Petrarch and Boccaccio, one of “the three fountains,” so called because from them all later literature seemed to flow. His championing of using Italian instead of Latin in his writings has also led to his being called “the father of the Italian language.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Dante lived in a restless age of political conflict between popes and emperors and of strife within the Italian city-states. In particular, Florence was torn apart by strife between two warring political factions: the Guelphs, who were loyal to the pope, and the Ghibelines, who were loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor. Even within these factions, however, there were factions, and Dante’s relationship with the various power brokers of Florence had a direct impact on his fortunes. Dante may be considered the greatest and last Italian medieval poet, although he paved the way for the great artistic and scientific flowering known as the Italian Renaissance, which would take root in Florence late in the fourteenth century.

Early Life in Florence Dante was born in Florence, the son of Bellincione d’Alighiero. His family descended, he tells us, from “the noble seed” of the Roman founders

of Florence. His great-grandfather Cacciaguیدا had been knighted by Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III and died about 1147 while fighting in the Second Crusade.

Although his family was reduced to modest circumstances, Dante was able to live as a gentleman and to pursue his studies. It is probable that he attended the Franciscan school of Santa Croce and the Dominican school of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, where he gained the knowledge of the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and of the mysticism that was to become the foundation of his philosophical culture. It is known from his own testimony that in order to perfect his literary style he also studied with Brunetto Latini, the Florentine poet and master of rhetoric. Perhaps encouraged by Brunetto in his pursuit of learning, Dante traveled to Bologna, where he probably attended the well-known schools of rhetoric.

Dante does not write of his family or marriage, but his father died before 1283, and soon afterward, in accordance with his father’s previous arrangements, he married Gemma di Manetto Donati. They had several children, of whom two sons, Jacopo and Pietro, and a daughter, Antonia, are known.

Lyric Poetry Dante began early in life to compose poetry, an art he taught himself as a young man. Through his love lyrics he became known to other Florentine poets, and most important to him was his friendship with Guido Cavalcanti, which resulted from an exchange of sonnets.

Both Dante and Guido were concerned with the effects of love on the mind, particularly from a philosophical point of view. Only Dante, however, began gradually to develop the idea that love could become the means of spiritual perfection. While Guido was more interested in natural philosophy, Dante assiduously cultivated his knowledge of the Latin poets, particularly Virgil, whom he later called his guide and authority in the art of poetry.

The Love of Beatrice During his youth Dante had known a young, noble Florentine woman whose grace and beauty so impressed him that he immortalized her in his poetry as the idealized “Beatrice,” the “bringer of blessings,” who seemed “a creature come from heaven to earth, a miracle manifest in reality.” Dante’s Beatrice is believed to have been Bice, the daughter of Folco Portinari, and later the wife of Simone dei Bardi. Dante had seen her for the first time when both were nine years old; he had named her in a ballad among the sixty fairest women of Florence. But it was only later that idealized “Beatrice” took on the role of Dante’s muse, or inspiration, and became the guide of his thoughts and emotions.

When the young Beatrice died on June 8, 1290, Dante was overcome with grief but found consolation in thoughts of her glory in heaven. He was prompted to gather from among all his poems those that had been written in her honor or had some bearing on his love for her. This plan resulted in the small volume of poetry and

prose, the *New Life* (*Vita nuova*, c. 1293), one of the first important examples of Italian literary prose.

Political Intrigues Dante's literary interests did not isolate him from the events of his times. On the contrary, he was involved in the political life of Florence. In 1289 he had fought with the Florentine cavalry at the battle of Campaldino. In 1295 he joined the guild of physicians and pharmacists (membership in a guild being a precondition for holding public office in Florence). A year later he participated in a citizens' government known as the Council of the Hundred; and in 1300 he was elected to one of six offices of prior, or president, of the Florentine guilds.

As a prominent politician, Dante aligned himself with the "White" Guelphs. The Guelphs were the Florentine political faction that supported the pope, but the White Guelphs disagreed with some of the pope's policies. The "Black" Guelphs remained uncritically supportive of the pope. In October 1301 Dante was sent in a delegation from Florence to Pope Boniface VIII, and during his absence the Blacks gained control of Florence. In the resulting banishment of the Whites, Dante was sentenced to exile. Despite various attempts to regain admission to Florence, he was never to enter his native city again.

Exile In exile, Dante traveled from city to city, biding his time and hoping outside forces would change the political climate in Florence so that he might return. His hopes were raised when Emperor Henry VII's forces descended into Italy in 1310 to restore justice and order among the cities and to reunite church and state. When Henry VII, whose efforts proved fruitless, died in Siena in 1313, Dante lost every hope of restoring himself to an honorable position in Florence. His Latin treatise *De monarchia*, is a statement of Dante's political theories and as a practical guide toward the restoration of peace in Europe under a temporal monarch in Rome. This work was probably written around the time of Henry VII's military efforts in Italy, and was written in anticipation of or in response to the campaign.

In 1315 Dante twice refused pardons offered him by the citizens of Florence under humiliating conditions. He and his children were consequently condemned to death as rebels. He spent his last years in Tuscany, in Verona, and finally in Ravenna. There, under the patronage of Guido da Polenta and joined by his children and possibly also by his wife, Dante was greatly esteemed and spent a happy and peaceful period at work on his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. This brought together all of the literary and philosophical influences of Dante's life. Dante's goal in the work, he revealed, was "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity." He achieved his goal: the work was an immediate sensation, and its perceived value and importance has grown with each passing generation. Dante died on September 13 or 14, 1321, still in exile,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dante's famous contemporaries include:

Petrarch (1304–1374): Often called the father of Italian humanism, Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch, as he is known in English) was the first to seriously advocate the use of Italian in works of literature and was largely responsible for popularizing the sonnet.

Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337): A painter and architect from Florence, Giotto is usually credited with being the first artist to break away from the artistic traditions of the Middle Ages, thus setting in motion that which would eventually mature into the artistic Italian Renaissance.

Pope Boniface VIII (1235–1303): Patron of Giotto, Boniface is mentioned in both *The Decameron* and *La Divina Commedia*; in neither case in a flattering light due to his political activities. Dante goes so far as to imagine meeting Boniface in Hell, condemned for practicing simony, or the selling of holy offices.

but in 1373, more than half a century after Dante's death in exile, the city of Florence honored its native poet by appointing Giovanni Boccaccio, the eminent writer and scholar, to deliver a series of public lectures on *The Divine Comedy*.

Works in Literary Context

Dante's work can be seen as the climax of the late medieval period in Europe. Dante's masterpiece was also an historic triumph for the Italian language, which, owing to the undisputed primacy of Latin as the idiom of medieval science and literature, was considered vulgar. Despite Dante's universality and cosmic view of life, there is something quintessentially Italian about *The Divine Comedy*. Probing the expressive resources and expanding the horizons of the Italian language, the poet created what is widely considered the foundation of Italian literature and a point of reference for scores of later writers, including Geoffrey Chaucer, Lord Tennyson, T.S. Eliot, and Jorge Luis Borges.

The Spiritual Journey The literal narrative of the work involves Dante's journey through Hell and Purgatory on his way to Paradise. Thus, *The Divine Comedy* is part of a long tradition of stories about journeys through temptations and "evil" toward ultimate redemption. The ancient Greek epic the *Odyssey* by Homer and Virgil's epic *The Aeneid* (directly influenced by Homer's work) are both pre-Christian tales of spiritual journeys. Christian writers have used the idea of the spiritual journey to describe the path of mankind in a state of sin moving away from

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Decameron (c. 1353), a collection of stories by Giovanni Boccaccio. A medieval allegory of one hundred short tales told as the Black Death ravages the countryside, the bawdy tales of love's rising and falling fortunes satirizes Dante's literary style.

Canterbury Tales (c. 1380s), a collection of stories by Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer is often compared to Dante, for he too chose to write in the vernacular, in his case English. Borrowing the frame structure of *The Decameron*, Chaucer's unfinished masterpiece presents a series of tales told along a pilgrimage route to Canterbury Cathedral.

The Song of Hiawatha (1855), a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. This epic poem is written in the form of an ancient Finnish saga.

temptation and toward salvation. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is an example of a personal narrative about a spiritual journey to salvation. Numerous works of fiction follow the pattern of the spiritual journey, too, including Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*, Somerset Maugham's 1944 novel *The Razor's Edge*, and Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian's 2000 novel *Soul Mountain*.

Allegory Dante constructs an allegory of a double journey: his experience in the supernatural world points to the journey of all humankind through earthly life. An allegory is a mode of literature in which the elements of a story are meant to be read figuratively, as symbols. In *The Divine Comedy*, for example, the poet finds himself in a dark wood (a symbol of sin); he tries to escape by climbing a mountain illuminated by the sun (symbolizing God). Impeded by the sudden appearance of three beasts, which symbolize the major divisions of sin in the Inferno, he is about to be driven back when Virgil (representing human reason) appears, sent to Dante's aid by Beatrice. Virgil becomes Dante's guide through Hell, in a descent which is the first stage in his ascent to God in humility.

The most famous examples of ancient, pre-Christian allegories include Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave" and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524 C.E.), which Dante studied. Another Christian writer famous for his use of allegory was John Bunyan, author of *A Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which was distinctly Protestant in its outlook and was read widely by the Puritan settlers of North America. American author Nathaniel Hawthorne also made frequent use of allegory, especially in short stories such as "Young Goodman Brown." More recent examples of allegorical fiction include William

Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980).

Works in Critical Context

Dante is known primarily for his masterwork *The Divine Comedy*, which has earned almost universal acclaim since its publication.

The Divine Comedy Victor Hugo summed up the nineteenth-century romantic view of *The Divine Comedy* thus: "Dante has constructed within his own mind the bottomless pit. He has made the epic of the spectres. He rends the earth; in the terrible hole he has made, he puts Satan. Then he pushes the world through Purgatory up to Heaven. Where all else ends, Dante begins. Dante is beyond man." The general enthusiasm of the Romantic era for *The Divine Comedy*—also evidenced by tributes from such philosophers as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—secured Dante's preeminent position in world literature. Throughout the nineteenth century, *The Divine Comedy*—especially the *Inferno*—became the subject of extensive and detailed literary, historical, philological, theological, and philosophical analysis.

The eminent twentieth-century poet and essayist Jorge Luis Borges has recognized the relevance of *The Divine Comedy* for modern readers, asserting that it "is a book that everyone ought to read. Not to do so is to deprive oneself of the greatest gift that literature can give us; to submit to a strange asceticism."

Dante's Other Works The monumental success of *The Divine Comedy* has all but overshadowed Dante's other works, which were also highly influential in his day. These include a collection of early canzoni published in *New Life*. Critics have praised these lyrics for their *stil nuovo*, or "new style," a refreshing and innovative approach to love poetry that equates the love experience with a mystical spiritual revelation.

Responses to Literature

1. In addition to his epic poetry, Dante wrote many sonnets as well. The Italian sonnet is one of the most popular and enduring forms of poetry. Research the properties of the Italian sonnet and write one of your own. The traditional subject is about love, but you can write about anything that interests you!
2. In *The Divine Comedy* Dante is led by the ancient Roman poet Virgil. What were some of the circumstances in Dante's life and the times he lived in that led him to use a pagan instead of a Christian guide in his narrative?
3. What were Dante's views of religion when he wrote *The Divine Comedy*? How did he feel about the papacy? Why did he meet some popes in Hell? What was the state of the Church during Dante's lifetime?

4. Dante's view of the afterlife is certainly one of the more gripping and imaginative interpretations. Research other views of the afterlife held by other Christian writers over the centuries. How are their views different? How are they the same?

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Bei Dao

BORN: 1949, Beijing, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Waves (1985)

The August Sleepwalker (1990)

Old Snow (1991)

Forms of Distance (1994)

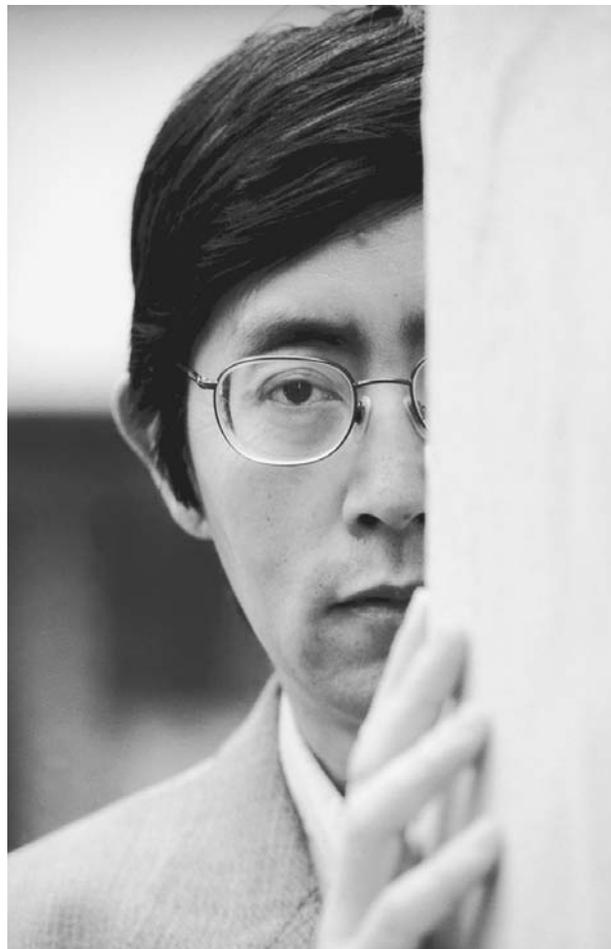
Landscape over Zero (1996)

Overview

Bei Dao is a Chinese poet whose groundbreaking works critiqued the Chinese Cultural Revolution and influenced the development of the pro-democracy movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Cultural Revolution Bei Dao was born as Zhao Zhenkai on August 2, 1949, in Beijing, China. It was the same year that the Chinese Communists came to power. During his teen years, Bei Dao belonged to the Red Guards, a group that supported the Communist leader Mao Zedong. During this period, China underwent what Mao called a “cultural revolution,” the purpose of which was to erase, often through violent means, all traces of European influence and all traces of upper-class, middle-class, and intellectual Chinese culture of a traditional nature, unless it was deemed by the authorities



Bei Dao © Rossano B. Maniscalchi / Alinari / The Image Works

to serve the new Communist state in a practical and unmistakable way. Bei Dao developed misgivings about the Cultural Revolution and was “reeducated” as a construction worker. He later founded and edited the underground literary magazine *Jintian* (Today).

Life after Mao When the Cultural Revolution came to an end with the death of Mao in 1976, China began to rebuild its culture and educational system. Bei Dao wrote the first and most celebrated novella to appear after Mao's death, *Waves*. The stories in the book deal with the years of social and political strife caused by the Cultural Revolution. *Waves* was published briefly after Mao's death, and the government permitted such unauthorized publications to be distributed. When some of Bei Dao's work was circulated during the pro-democracy student movement that erupted in the 1989 demonstration at Tiananmen Square, the government banned the novella, accusing Bei Dao of inciting the demonstration.

Bei Dao was at a writer's conference in Berlin during the Tiananmen massacre and was not allowed to return to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bei's famous contemporaries include:

- Andrzej Sapkowski** (1948–): Polish fantasy writer best known for *The Witcher* saga.
- William Gibson** (1948–): American Canadian writer who pioneered cyberpunk science fiction.
- Haruki Murakami** (1949–): Japanese writer whose novels are both humorous and surreal.
- Martin Amis** (1949–): English author who caricatures the absurdity of the postmodern condition.
- John Sayles** (1950–): American director and screenwriter whose independent films are noted for their reality and social commentary.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bei's most influential work revealed the ruthlessness of Communist dictatorship. Here are some other works of fiction that make similar revelations:

- Animal Farm* (1945), a novella by George Orwell. This novella is an allegory that satirizes Soviet totalitarianism.
- One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), a novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This novel, set in a Soviet labor camp during the 1950s, demonstrates the brutality of Stalinist repression.
- Wild Swans* (1991), a novel by Jung Chang. This novel tells the story of three generations of Chinese women who survive the political turmoil of twentieth-century China.

China. He remained in exile and took teaching positions in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Currently, he lives in California and continues to write poetry, though his work is not available in China.

Works in Literary Context

Bei Dao is the most prominent member of the Misty Poets, a group of Chinese poets who reacted against the restrictions of the Cultural Revolution and inspired pro-democracy movements, particularly among students, during the 1970s and 1980s. Bei Dao was described in the *New York Times Book Review* as “the guiding voice for young Chinese” during China’s Democracy Movement.

The Impact of Waves Much of Bei's impact came from the circulation of his revelatory novella, *Waves*. *Waves* was a sensation in a China that had been required to revere and obey Mao Zedong for the previous thirty years. The novel was the first work of literature that had been allowed to appear since Mao assumed control of China that openly criticized Maoist socialist principles. Thus, it was the only such work that the vast majority of Chinese readers had ever seen. Its readers saw for the first time a fierce condemnation of a Cultural Revolution whose effects had set the Chinese people adrift in a sea without faith or tradition.

The effect of *Waves* was to open up to its readers worlds with which they had no experience. Unfortunately, its effect was too great, and when Deng Xiaoping came to power, the book, which had been under continual attack by old party-liners, was suppressed. It is widely acknowledged, both inside and outside of China, that *Waves* paved the way for the student movement that erupted in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Works in Critical Context

Bei Dao first came to prominence in China with his novella *Waves*. One critic praised *Waves* by commenting that “at their best, [Dao's] stories are almost unbearably poignant. . . . [He] has found a way to speak to all of us.”

Bei Dao's poetry collections *Old Snow* and *The August Sleepwalker* have also met with critical praise. Carol Muske acknowledged the author's “ability to personify and objectify simultaneously the images of historical terror.” She has also described Bei Dao's verse as “mysterious poetry, abstract yet hauntingly personal.” *New Republic* contributor Stephen Owen wrote, “When Bei Dao's poetry succeeds—and sometimes it succeeds wonderfully—it does so not by words, which are always trapped within the nationality of language and its borders, but by the envisagements of images possible only with words.”

Bei Dao has won numerous literary awards and has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times.

Responses to Literature

1. Bei Dao's most influential work, *Waves*, was at first allowed in China and then banned. Do you think that the impact of this work would have been greater or less had it never been banned? Explain your response in a short essay.
2. What kinds of images does Bei Dao use to evoke terror? Do these images adequately capture the experiences he is trying to convey? Discuss how poetry can effectively transmit a message to its readers.
3. Choose a major event in history and write a poem or short story that focuses on one person's experience of this event.

4. As a teen, Bei Dao first supported and then opposed Mao's Cultural Revolution. Based on research about the Cultural Revolution, write an essay explaining why Bei Dao probably had this change of heart.

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▣ Rubén Darío

BORN: 1867, *Metapa (now Ciudad Darío)*, Nicaragua

DIED: 1916, *Leon, Nicaragua*

NATIONALITY: *Nicaraguan*

GENRE: *Poetry, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Blue (1888)

Profane Hymns and Other Poems (1896)

Songs of Life and Hope (1905)

The Autumn Poem and Other Poems (1910)

Overview

One of the great names of Hispanic poetry, Rubén Darío is widely recognized as the embodiment of modernism in Spanish letters. He is best remembered for his innovative poetry, which blended experimental rhymes and meters with elements of classical literature and mythology. He spent most of his life outside his home country, working as a journalist and diplomat. A sense of tragic despair can be found in Darío's poetry and in his life, which he devoted to poetry in a way that called for almost religious sacrifice.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Child Poet Rubén Darío was born Felix Rubén García Sarmiento on January 18, 1867, in Metapa (later renamed Ciudad Darío in his honor), Nicaragua. His parents separated when he was two, and he was mostly raised by aunts and uncles because of his mother's poverty. He displayed a precocious talent for poetry, and one aunt in particular nurtured his literary aspirations. He was a writer by age fourteen; by seventeen, he was working as



Rubén Darío Hulton Archive / Getty Images

a clerk in the office of the Nicaraguan president, writing for the capital of Managua's press, and giving public poetry readings. When his first book, *Epistles and Poems: First Notes* (1885), was completed, he published it under the pseudonym Rubén Darío.

Darío's early interest in journalism led to his association with members of the intelligentsia. In 1886, he became manager of a Nicaraguan daily newspaper, then embarked for Chile, where he contributed reviews and creative pieces to the daily *La Epoca* (The Epoch). In 1887, he won a prize in a poetry contest in Valparaiso for his "Epic Song to the Glories of Chile," a patriotic ode honoring Chile's military victory over Peru in 1879. This victory presaged Chile's 1881 occupation of Lima, the turning point in the War of the Pacific and an event that secured Chile's dominant position in Latin America for years to come.

Darío's first critically acclaimed work, *Blue* (1888), was released when he was twenty-one. This volume of prose and verse brought about a revolution in Spanish letters: a bold experimentation with line and meter construction, and a deliberate break with the conventions of Romanticism. Sonnets in unusual meters, the use of alliteration, and a rich association of metaphors, conceits, and wordplay reflect a mastery of the musicality of the poem. *Blue* marked, as Octavio Paz has written, "the official birth of modernism."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Darío's famous contemporaries include:

Antonio Machado (1875–1939): Spanish poet, leader of a literary movement called the Generation of '98.

Juan Ramon Jimenez (1881–1958): Spanish poet who helped Darío publish work in Europe; Jimenez won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1956.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet whose works were fundamental to the Irish literary revival; Yeats won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

Paul Claudel (1868–1955): French poet and diplomat known for his passionately Catholic writings.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963): African American intellectual and activist, author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and cofounder of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

Antonio Gaudí (1852–1926): Spanish architect influenced by modernism.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919): American politician, hero of the Spanish-American War, and president of the United States from 1901–1909.

A Bohemian Vagabond and a Diplomat, Too In 1889, Darío left Valparaíso for Central America. Over the next two years, his journalism work took him from Nicaragua to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. On diplomatic assignments, he sailed to Europe in 1892 and again in 1893. By this time, the vagabond poet, roving correspondent, and diplomat had become a symbol of a new bohemianism in Latin America. The fall of 1893 found him in Buenos Aires, serving as Colombian consul general to Argentina, writing for the daily *La Nación*, and partaking of the cosmopolitan capital's nightlife.

One of Darío's key poetic works, *Profane Hymns and Other Poems*, appeared in Buenos Aires in 1896. An expanded edition was published in Paris five years later. This collection, which includes some of Darío's most celebrated verses, would confirm his leadership of the Modernismo movement in both Spain and the Americas, and his revival of the stagnant poetic tradition in the Spanish language. Thematically, *Profane Hymns* is a multifaceted work that includes poems about creative freedom, love and eroticism, Christianity and paganism, and the poet's critical attitude toward materialism and modernity. Stylistically, the book takes liberties with stanza forms and employs free verse, a form that later became prevalent in Hispanic poetry.

Falling Apart and Falling Together While Darío was traveling and writing, his life was falling to pieces. His

first wife died in 1893, after two years of marriage. And very soon after, he was tricked into marrying his first girlfriend, the unfaithful Rosario Murillo. The marriage quickly deteriorated, but they were never divorced. Rosario continued to pursue him, however, and to extract a portion of his income, for many years. In 1899, covering the aftermath of the six-month Spanish-American War of 1898 for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, he fell in love with a young woman from the Spanish countryside, Francisca Sanchez. The couple had several children, two of whom died in infancy. Darío took to drink, a habit that gradually reduced his faculties and would ultimately lead to his untimely death. These circumstances of his life underlie the poetics of despair in Darío's verse.

Darío collected his reports from Spain at the cusp of the twentieth century into the book *Contemporary Spain* (1901). As Nicaraguan consul to France, he resided in Paris from 1903 to 1907. During this period, he wrote perhaps his most important book of poetry, *Songs of Life and Hope* (1905). In this work, Darío has reached his artistic maturity: No longer ensconced in an idealistic ivory tower, he expresses concern for political unity and explores the tenets of a practical humanism. Poems such as "To Roosevelt" convey the theme of Hispanic cultural solidarity, while other verses insist on the possibility and importance of a future for humanity. Amid the life-affirming verses, however, there is also an undercurrent of disenchantment and despair, movingly expressed in the concluding poem, "What Gets You."

Final Years In the final decade of Darío's life, he continued to travel across the Atlantic between Europe and South America, despite economic hardship, and continued to compose verse. As a dedicated spokesman for Hispanic concerns, he urged Spain and Spanish America to unite against the imperialism of the United States. U.S. imperialism was driven, as Darío saw it, by the arrogance of such leaders as Theodore Roosevelt, who far exceeded his mandate during the Spanish-American War, ordering the invasion of the Philippines. He had praise for some aspects of U.S. culture, however, as he reveals in "Salute to the Eagle," published in *The Wandering Song* (1907).

The outstanding achievement of Darío's final years, however, is the "Autumn Poem," included in *The Autumn Poem and Other Poems* (1910). The poem is an exhortation to live, an invitation to the sensual world, and an embrace of death as the pinnacle of life. Here, if nowhere else, Darío has reconciled his persistent melancholia with his own desire for hope and life.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Darío left Europe for the last time, bound for New York. While there, he fell ill with pneumonia. His book *Song to Argentina and Other Poems* was published in 1914. A year later, his health declined; he returned to Nicaragua with Rosario Murillo, and died of cirrhosis of the liver in February of 1916.

Works in Literary Context

As a result of Rubén Darío's education and early interest in poetry, he became familiar with the Western literary canon. French poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine were an important influence on Darío's work; the Parnassian movement represented by Verlaine and Stephen Mallarmé, for example, with its emphasis on art for art's sake, is a direct precursor to Darío's aesthetic. The Cuban poet-revolutionary José Martí, another father of Modernismo, is a significant precursor to Darío. In his youth, Darío also wrote some verses in the style of the Spanish Romantic poet Gustavo Becquer.

Modernismo Darío became the leader of a new Hispanic literary movement called Modernismo, which should not be confused with Anglo-American modernism. This movement responded to a perception that Spanish letters had reached a low point; the new cultural and artistic attitude dominated the arts in Spain and Spanish America as the twentieth century opened. Modernismo adapts and blends the Romantic, Parnassian, and Symbolist movements current in Europe at the time. Its distinct quality is the expression of inner passions in a rhythmically stylized verbal music. Darío revived Spanish poetics with his vibrant language and novel technique, but his contribution goes beyond the formal. He demonstrated that poetry could be more than an aesthetic pleasure, but a vehicle for understanding all of human existence, an adventure in spiritual, social, erotic, and metaphysical experience.

Spiritual Syncretism One important theme in Darío's poetry, notably in *Songs of Life and Hope*, is the relationship between Christianity and paganism. Darío at times believed in God, and at other times did not. Essentially Catholic, he did not reject a deep religious syncretism—or merging of different belief systems—that could allow him to search for an understanding of what he experienced as the mysterious human presence in the universe. He sometimes tried to escape the existential despair that also dogged his footsteps through esoteric doctrines and the occult. And he found some comfort in a belief in the union of all nature, seeing all things as penetrated by a universal soul, in keeping with Eastern mysticism.

Spiritual Sensuality These spiritual concerns also relate to the pervasive eroticism in Darío's poetry, for the erotic is often presented in a transcendent or mythological light, as in "In Spring" and "Venus" from *Blue*. One of Darío's most celebrated poems is "Flesh, Celestial Flesh of the Woman. . ." Darío described this poem in *The Story of My Books* (1912) as "a hymn to the mysterious feminine enchantment." The poem likens female flesh to "divine bread / For which our blood is our wine!" Such references unite elements of pagan and Christian traditions. Darío considered women's bodies as a source of the absolute, with the power, like the food of the gods, to bestow immortality. The profane and the sacred, from this perspective, are indistinguishable.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rubén Darío's writing conveys a "poetics of despair," a distilled and crafted essence of pain. Poetry is often the preferred medium for cries of anguish, as in the following well-known works.

"Dover Beach" (1867), a poem by Matthew Arnold. This poetic lament for the human condition—"And we are here as on a darkling plain"—is one of the most famous poems of the nineteenth century.

"The Waste Land" (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. This long, dissonant cry of universal despair is now regarded as a classic of modernist literature.

"It Was Not Death, for I Stood Up" (1924), a poem by Emily Dickinson. This brief poem describes a devastation so complete that it cannot even "justify despair."

Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924), a poetry collection by Pablo Neruda. The most famous book of verse by one of the most distinguished twentieth-century poets.

"Howl" (1956), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. The signature poem of the Beat Generation, a furious and freewheeling lament for the stagnant state of American culture.

Poetics of Despair Darío's body of work can be studied in terms of a modern, existential, tragic despair; it is one of the terms that best define Darío and other tormented authors of Modernismo. While the Romantics rhapsodized about boredom and ennui, Darío developed the more modern concept of anguish, which opened the path to twentieth-century literature in Spanish. Darío's biography surely reveals causes for his profound despair: the death of his young wife, his subsequent forced matrimony to Rosario Murillo, and her relentless pursuit of him; the deaths of two of his children; his economic woes; the loss of his Christian faith; and the debilitating effects of alcohol. He felt homeless and rejected from his own society, and even out of sorts with the era in which he lived. He perceived how art and poetry were devalued in the crassly materialistic process of modernization. All these sources of personal anguish are transformed into a finely wrought aesthetic form in his poems.

The Founder In the prologue to *Profane Hymns*, Darío asserts his unwillingness to serve anyone as a model, much less to imitate anyone else—all in the name of total freedom, of the artist's need to create. Nevertheless, a century of Spanish poetry has followed in his wake. Most critics credit Darío with initiating a movement with enormous influence on literary works written in the Spanish language. Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, for instance, referred to him as "the founder" of contemporary Spanish poetry.

Works in Critical Context

Darío achieved critical success very early in his career. The second edition of *Blue*, published in Europe in 1890, provided him with transatlantic recognition, mainly thanks to praise from Spanish novelist Juan Valera. No provincial writer had ever made such an impact on the European literary scene. Some early critics failed to find transcendent meaning behind his exotic imagery and stylistic virtuosity, but by the time of Darío's death, he was eulogized worldwide as the fundamental Hispanic poet. Roberto González Echevarría writes, "In Spanish, there is poetry before and after Rubén Darío. The Nicaraguan was the first major poet in the language since the seventeenth century."

Off the English-Speaking Radar Although the volume of writings devoted to Darío is one of the most impressive in the history of Spanish and Spanish American literature, Darío remains largely unknown among English-speaking readers. The unique rhythms and linguistic nuances of his writings make them difficult to translate. In 1974, Keith Ellis published a groundbreaking study that presents the range of methods and perspectives employed by critics to study Darío's life and works. The need for further editorial interest in Darío's works is evidenced by the fact that there is no available critical edition of his complete poetry. To date, the only book of his poems to be translated in its entirety is *Songs of Life and Hope*.

Songs of Life and Hope Recent critical interest among English-speaking readers spurred Duke University Press's 2005 bilingual edition of *Songs of Life and Hope*, to which the response has been positive. Janet St. John observes, "Translators [Will] Derusha and [Alberto] Acereda have clearly worked hard to present the real Darío, an innovative writer worthy of further examination," noting also that "Darío's work is multifaceted and thought provoking."

Responses to Literature

1. In what ways does Hispanic literary movement known as Modernismo differ from the Anglo-American version of modernism?
2. What attitudes does Darío express toward modernity, progress, or the future in his work?
3. Syncretism is the merging of different beliefs or principles into a single worldview. Identify and discuss religious imagery and religious syncretism in Darío's poetry.
4. Contrast "To Roosevelt" with "Salute to the Eagle." What is Darío's attitude toward the United States?
5. What is the significance of Darío's technical and stylistic innovations in poetry?

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Robertson Davies

BORN: 1913, *Thamesville, Ontario, Canada*

DIED: 1995, *Orangeville, Ontario, Canada*

NATIONALITY: *Canadian*

GENRE: *Letters, journalism, plays, criticism, novels*

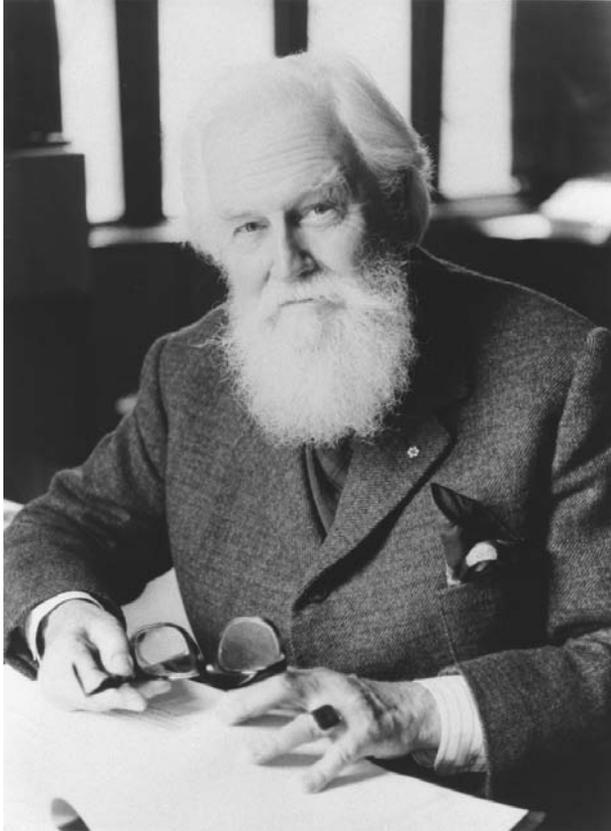
MAJOR WORKS:

The Diary of Sam Marchbanks (1947)

The Fifth Business (1970)

The Manticore (1972)

World of Wonders (1975)



Robertson Davies *Davies, Robertson*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer.
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Overview

Robertson Davies (also known as Samuel Marchbanks and William Robertson Davies) is admired for writing novels that skillfully combine accessibility and literary merit with an intriguing dash of the obscure, including such subjects as alchemy, saints' legends, Gypsy wisdom, tarot cards, shamanistic rituals, Anglo-Catholicism, and Jungian psychology. Most of his work explored the dangers of personal and cultural repression, and his sprawling, intellectually rich novels also exhibit a developing interest in Canadian identity. Davies was a writer of grand ideas and fertile imagination who excelled in a variety of literary disciplines. As a journalist, his humorous observations about life amused newspaper readers over two decades. His comic plays addressed the plight of the Canadian artist to great effect. With his bushy white beard and flowing mane of hair, Davies looked the part of a grizzled, ancient storyteller—which to his millions of devoted readers is exactly what he was.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Career in Drama Davies developed an interest in drama early in life. At the age of three, he made his

stage debut in the opera *Queen Esther*. He maintained a diary throughout his school years in which he preserved his reactions to the stage performances he saw. Davies completed his higher education in 1938 at Balliol College, Oxford, where he earned a literature degree. His thesis, entitled *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, attracted the attention of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, a legendary drama teacher, and Guthrie hired Davies to work with him at London's famous Old Vic theater.

Davies spent a year there working at a variety of jobs, from bit player to stage manager. He gained valuable stage experience in productions of Shakespeare, working alongside world-renowned actors including Ralph Richardson and Vivien Leigh. He also fell in love with the Old Vic's stage manager, Australian-born Brenda Mathews, whom he married on February 2, 1940. The couple moved to Canada, where Davies took a job as literary editor of the Toronto magazine *Saturday Night*.

Davies, the Columnist After two years with *Saturday Night*, Davies took a position with the *Peterborough Examiner*. He remained with that paper for the next twenty years. In the early days there, he wrote a whimsical column under the pseudonym "Samuel Marchbanks." These witty observations were later collected into the books *The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks*, *The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks*, and *Marchbanks' Almanack*. Another of his regular columns, "A Writer's Diary," which consisted of observations about the literary scene, helped establish Davies as a major new voice in criticism.

The 1940s were a fertile period for Davies. Besides his weekly columns, he was also writing and directing plays at the Peterborough Little Theatre. In 1946, his one-act comedy *Overlaid* was awarded a prize by the Ottawa Drama League. The fantasy *Eros at Breakfast* won the Gratien Gelinus Prize for best Canadian play at the Dominion Drama Festival. The year 1948 saw the production of Davies's first full-length play. *Fortune, My Foe* deals with the plight of the Canadian artist and was awarded the Gratien Gelinus Prize at the 1949 Dominion Drama Festival. Another three-act play, *At My Heart's Core*, deals with similar themes. Set in provincial Canada in 1837, this work shows Davies's growing mastery of historical material.

Davies Turns to Novels Frustrated by his inability to get his plays produced outside of Canada, Davies turned to novel writing in the 1950s. His first novel, *Tempest-Tost*, was published in 1951. Set in the small Canadian town of Salterton, the book details the reactions of townsfolk to a troupe of Shakespearean actors in their midst. *Leaven of Malice* is set in the same locale and revolves around the confusion that ensues when an erroneous engagement announcement is printed in a local newspaper. The final book in the Salterton trilogy, *A Mixture of Frailties*, concerns a young girl who returns to the town after a sojourn studying music in Europe.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Davies's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Pynchon (1937–): American writer Pynchon's fiction and nonfiction writings encompass a vast array of subject matter, styles and themes, including the fields of history, science, and mathematics.

Cormac McCarthy (1933–): This American novelist has been widely credited with reviving and reinventing the genre of the Western novel.

J. D. Salinger (1919–): This American novelist achieved great critical success when he published *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): British prime minister whose career was defined by his firm leadership during World War II.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954): This French artist was a major figure in the "Fauvist" movement in art, which was marked by the use of bright, undiluted colors.

The books received many positive critical notices and established Davies's reputation as a novelist.

The Deptford Trilogy In 1970, Davies published a new novel, *Fifth Business*, the first installment of his Deptford Trilogy. The book chronicles sixty years in the life of Dunstan Ramsey, an assistant headmaster at a Canadian prep school. Davies weaves into the story many religious and psychological themes, prompting L. J. Davis of *Book World* to brand the novel "a work of theological fiction that approaches Graham Greene at the top of his form." Its rich plot helped make it a best seller in America, cementing Davies stature as an international author of the first rank.

Davies followed *Fifth Business* with another Deptford novel, *The Manticore*. Again set among the Canadian upper classes, the book follows David Staunton, an alcoholic attorney, on a spiritual odyssey of self-discovery. Another highbrow hit with readers, *The Manticore* received the Canadian Governor General's Award for excellence.

Rounding out The Deptford Trilogy was *World of Wonders*. Telling the story of Paul Dempster, a character who appears in the previous two novels, the book was judged "a novel of stunning verbal energy and intelligence" by Michael Mewshaw of the *New York Times Book Review*. Readers and reviewers alike generally found it a satisfying conclusion to the trilogy, only one of the many works that have led critics in both his homeland and abroad to describe Davies as a national treasure, securing his place in the Canadian literary canon.

Works in Literary Context

Many of Davies's novels are marked by the psychological transformations of the main characters. As such, his novels may be considered reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in which the protagonist transforms into a giant cockroach, illustrating his growing awareness of how unhappy he is with his life. The specific nature of Davies's approach to his characters, however, is highly influenced by Jungian psychology.

Jungian Psychology The recurring theme of self-discovery in Davies's work follows the pattern established by psychologist Carl Jung, although Davies does not adhere strictly to Jungian psychology. While Roger Sale suggested in the *New York Review of Books* that, in common with the Jungian belief in archetypal influence on the human mind, Davies's fictional characters "discover the meaning of their lives, by discovering the ways those lives conform to ancient patterns," Davies explores a number of models for complete human identity. Patricia Monk claimed in her *The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies* that though he had a "deep and long-lasting affinity with Jung . . . Davies eventually moves beyond his affinity . . . to a more impartial assessment of Jungianism as simply one way of looking at the universe, one myth among a number of others." Peter Baltensperger, writing in *Canadian Literature*, saw "the conquest of one's Self in the inner struggle and the knowledge of oneself as fully human" as a consistent theme throughout Davies's fiction.

Novel Melodrama Because he wrote a number of plays, had been a teacher and actor with the Old Vic Company, and had served on the board of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival for many years, it is no surprise to find that Davies employed many theatrical elements in his novels. Theatricality is one technique Davies uses to move his story along at a quicker pace. About *World of Wonders*, a *Time* magazine critic stated that the characters "are brilliant talkers, but when they natter on too long, the highly theatrical author causes a grotesque face to appear at a window, drops someone through a trap door or stages a preposterous recognition scene." These melodramatic touches come naturally to Davies who, L. J. Davis remarked, "is a player in love with the play, and the kind of play he loves is melodrama." In his collection of lectures, *The Mirror of Nature*, Davies makes his case on behalf of melodrama and attempts, as Alberto Manguel wrote in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, "to save melodrama's lost honor." Davies's lectures argue that "theatre is a coarse art. . . . It appeals immediately to primary, not secondary elements in human nature." Melodrama's emphasis on creating an emotional response in its audience, Davies contends, is true to theater's fundamental purpose.

Davies's Legacy Many critics have labeled Davies a traditionalist who was a bit old-fashioned in his approach to writing. I. M. Owen of *Saturday Night*, for example,

placed Davies “curiously apart from the mainstream of contemporary fiction.” A critic for the *Washington Post Book World* characterized Davies as “a true novelist writing imagined stories, wonderful stories full of magic and incandescence, thought and literary art,” something the critic did not find in other contemporary fiction. With such conflicting opinions, it is difficult to determine Davies’s long-term impact on literature.

Works in Critical Context

Davies, the Magician Calling Davies “a compellingly inventive storyteller” who garnered an “affectionate following,” James Idema noted in the *Chicago Tribune Book World* that the appeal of Davies’s fiction lies in “his way of placing ordinary humans in the midst of extraordinary events, of bringing innocent, resolutely straight characters into contact with bonafide exotics.” Idema added that “the ‘real world’ interests [Davies] only as a starting point. Enigma, myth, illusion and magic are the stuff of his elegant stories.” Similarly, William Kennedy observed in the *New York Times Book Review* that Davies “conveys a sense of real life lived in a fully imagined if sometimes mythical and magical world.” Comparing the role of the novelist with that of a magician, because both “mean us to believe in what never happened and to this end use many conjuror’s tricks,” Prescott defined Davies as one writer “who takes seriously his magician’s role.”

The Deptford Trilogy Davies was already well established on the Canadian literary scene when his Deptford Trilogy brought him international attention. “These novels,” Claude Bissell stated in *Canadian Literature*, “comprise the major piece of prose fiction in Canadian literature—in scope, in the constant interplay of wit and intelligence, in the persistent attempt to find a pattern in this [as Davies states in the trilogy] ‘life of marvels, cruel circumstances, obscenities, and commonplaces.’”

Davies did not intend to write a trilogy when he first began *Fifth Business*. His initial story idea prompted him to write the novel, he told *Time* (Canada), “but he found almost as soon as he had finished that it wasn’t all he wanted to say.” So Davies wrote *The Manticore* to tell more of his story. Reviewers then asked “to hear about the magician who appeared in the other two novels,” Davies explained, “and I thought ‘Well, I know a lot about magicians’ and I wrote the third book.”

Despite the unplanned development of the trilogy, it garnered extensive critical praise and each volume has been an international best seller. The first volume, *Fifth Business*, is, Sam Solecki maintained in *Canadian Forum*, “Davies’s masterpiece.”

Responses to Literature

1. Both Davies and Kafka use transformation as a key theme in their work. Discuss the difference between Kafka’s use of transformation in *The Metamorphosis*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Davies’s novels are marked by their theatrical nature, which makes sense for an author who was first a part of the theater at the age of three. Authors often make observations about other art forms through works of their own. Any art form that comments upon or utilizes the conventions of another art form is broadly categorized as “metafiction.” Here are some more examples of metafiction.

Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. This book purports to tell the true tale of an Indian boy who survives a shipwreck and spends more than seven months sharing a lifeboat with a wild Bengal tiger.

House of Leaves (2001), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski. In this novel, Danielewski uses extensive footnotes not only to further the plot of the novel, but also to make remarks about it.

Don Quixote (Part 1–1605, Part 2–1615), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. In this novel, the hapless Don Quixote and his companion Sancho Panza imagine their lives as if they were characters in a romance novel and behave accordingly.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003), a novel by Mark Haddon. In the process of writing a detective story about the murder of his neighbor’s dog, the autistic young narrator of this work discusses what is necessary to make a novel good, thereby commenting on the nature of storytelling.

and Davies’s use in the Deptford Trilogy. What prompts transformation in these novels, how is the transformation shown, and what changes internally for the transformed characters?

2. Read *The Cunning Man*. The chronology of this novel is disjointed, continually jumping from here to there. What do you think Davies was trying to accomplish by using this nonlinear approach to his story? How did the technique affect your ability to enjoy the text?
3. Although Davies’s novels are often described as old-fashioned, his work as a columnist is altogether different. Take the time to read some of Davies’s journalistic work and compare it to that of a contemporary columnist, like Dave Barry. Compare the two in terms of ideas, structure, vocabulary, and concerns.

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☒ Simone de Beauvoir

BORN: 1908, Paris, France

DIED: 1986, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

She Came To Stay (1943)

The Second Sex (1949)

The Mandarins (1954)

Overview

Simone de Beauvoir is one of the best-known French writers and thinkers of the twentieth century, and among the best-known female writers of all time. Her study of the oppression of women throughout history, *The Second Sex* (1949), is a founding text of modern feminism. De Beauvoir was prominent in the circle of left-wing Parisian intellectuals associated with the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Interest in her long-term relationship with Sartre and controversies around *The Second Sex* have often eclipsed recognition of de Beauvoir's fiction. Yet she was an acclaimed and popular novelist; *The Mandarins* (1954) received the prestigious Prix Goncourt. De Beauvoir was a perceptive witness to the twentieth century whose works span from her childhood days before World War I to the world of the 1980s.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Young Diarist Simone de Beauvoir was born in the fourteenth *arrondissement*, or district, of Paris in 1908, and lived there most of her life. Her mother was a devout Catholic; her father, a lawyer, was agnostic. Despite a comfortable childhood, she rebelled against



Simone de Beauvoir *Beauvoir, Simone de*, photograph. Evening Standard / Getty Images

her parents' values at an early age, declaring that she would never become a housewife or mother. She also began to write when young, penning her first story at age eight and keeping a diary that would evolve into four published volumes of memoirs, starting with *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958).

Alliance with Sartre In 1925, she began studying philosophy at the Sorbonne. Four years later she met Jean-Paul Sartre, beginning an intimate personal and intellectual relationship that would continue until his death in 1980. They studied together and passed the *agrégation de philosophie* in 1929, placing first and second on the exam that provided their teaching credentials. At twenty-one, de Beauvoir was the youngest student ever to receive this prestigious degree. From 1931 to 1943, she taught philosophy at secondary schools in Marseilles, Rouen, and Paris.

Sartre and de Beauvoir were lovers and developed an unwavering partnership, but they never lived together. They rejected the institution of marriage, and neither wanted children. Furthermore, they did not exclude what

they called “contingent” affairs, some of which became important in their lives. In 1933, the pair attempted a *ménage à trois* with one of Sartre’s students, Olga Kosakiewicz. This experiment, and the anguish it caused, became the basis for de Beauvoir’s first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943). The novel captures the hothouse atmosphere generated by the trio as the indolent intruder Xavière slowly destroys everything that surrounds her.

In the 1930s, de Beauvoir’s life was essentially that of a provincial professor with intellectual leanings, a wide circle of friends, and a somewhat bohemian lifestyle. Sartre was drafted to fight in the French army during World War II, and spent nine months as a prisoner of war. When he returned in 1941, he and de Beauvoir determined to become more involved in public life during the German occupation of France. Both abandoned their teaching to devote themselves to writing and often to political activism. De Beauvoir provides one of the most vivid accounts of life in France during the war in her memoir *The Prime of Life* (1960).

Existentialism and Responsibility The war was also central to her second novel, written during the German occupation. *The Blood of Others* (1945) alternates between the point of view of Jean Blomart, an active member of the Resistance fighting against the Nazis, and Helene Bertrand, who is shaken out of complacency when she sees the Gestapo, or Nazi secret police, snatch a Jewish child from her mother. After the death of a young friend he inspired to participate in a political demonstration, Jean wrestles with his responsibility for the deaths of others.

The theme of responsibility is a crucial element of the existentialist philosophy developed by Sartre. De Beauvoir agrees with Sartre that human beings are free, without a God to give meaning or purpose to their lives, in a world without preordained values. This freedom leads to anguish, because people can rely only on themselves and are thus responsible for everything that happens to them. De Beauvoir attempted to explain and popularize existentialism in several essays, including *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) and *Existentialism and the Wisdom of the Ages* (1948). The simplicity of her writing style makes these texts more accessible than the abstruse, sometimes impenetrable prose of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

The Second Sex and The Mandarins When de Beauvoir set out to begin her autobiography, she realized that she first needed to understand the extent to which being born female had influenced her life. She spent hours in the library seeking documentation for each section of the book that was to become the foundation of her international reputation. *The Second Sex* examines the historical, biological, and sociological origins of the oppression of women. The opening statement of the section on childhood, “One is not born a woman, one becomes one,” has become familiar throughout the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

De Beauvoir’s famous contemporaries include:

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French philosopher, novelist, and dramatist.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): French-Algerian novelist and philosopher who won the Nobel Prize in 1957.

Nelson Algren (1909–1981): American author of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and lover of Simone de Beauvoir.

Anaïs Nin (1903–1977): French-Cuban author famous for her voluminous diaries and relationship with Henry Miller.

Marguerite Duras (1914–1996): French author of experimental fiction.

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): French army general, leader of the Free French Forces during World War II, and later, president of France (1959–1969).

world. The book advises women to pursue meaningful careers and to avoid the status of “relative beings”—implicit, in de Beauvoir’s view, in marriage and motherhood.

When *The Second Sex* appeared in 1949, reactions ranged from the horrified gasps of conservative readers to the impassioned gratitude of millions of women who had never before encountered such a frank discussion of their condition. Reactions to the sections discussing the female anatomy and homosexuality were especially hostile. Nevertheless, the book was widely translated and served as a battle cry of feminism in the 1960s and afterward.

De Beauvoir’s best-received novel, *The Mandarins*, returns to the subject of the Nazi occupation of France. It presents the euphoria of Liberation Day in Paris as German troops were driven out, and the subsequent disillusionment of French intellectuals who found themselves dividing into factions as the glow of Resistance companionship and victory over the Nazis dimmed. De Beauvoir always denied that *The Mandarins* was a *roman à clef*, or a thinly-veiled memoir offered as fiction, with Robert Dubreuilh, Henri Perron, and Anne Dubreuilh representing Sartre, Albert Camus, and herself. Nonetheless, echoes of the developing rift between Sartre and Camus, and of the concern of French intellectuals over the Soviet work camps, are clearly audible throughout the novel.

Her Life and Deaths Most of the writing de Beauvoir produced after *The Mandarins* was nonfiction, beginning with her remarkable series of memoirs, invaluable documents for following the development of her career. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* examines her early years and growing rebellion against bourgeois tradition. *The Prime of Life* treats the continuing dialogue between

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Second Sex has a prominent place in the literature of women's liberation. Here are a few other landmark texts of modern feminism.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), a treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft. A passionate argument in favor of granting educational opportunities to women.

A Room of One's Own (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. For a woman to write creatively, this famous novelist argues, she needs only two things: money and a room of her own.

The Feminine Mystique (1963), a nonfiction work by Betty Friedan. This influential American book from the 1960s encourages women to look beyond homemaking and childrearing in search of their real identity and potential.

In a Different Voice (1982), a nonfiction work by Carol Gilligan. A psychologist questions the relationship between gender and ethical reasoning.

de Beauvoir and Sartre from 1929 to 1944, including the development of the existentialist movement. *The Force of Circumstance* (1963), focuses on the postwar years and reflects the author's political awareness; it is written with anguish over the French military involvement in Algeria.

The Force of Circumstance reveals its maturing author's concerns with aging and death. In the year of its publication, 1963, de Beauvoir's mother died from cancer. In the moving pages of *A Very Easy Death* (1964), the author recaptures the warmth of her childhood relationship with her mother, and shares with her readers the anxiety of knowing more about her mother's condition than she could reveal to her, as well as the pain of helplessly watching a life ebb away. Sartre considered *A Very Easy Death* de Beauvoir's best work. De Beauvoir also published an important study of the social conditions of aging, entitled *Old Age* (1970).

Seventeen years after the passing of de Beauvoir's mother, Jean-Paul Sartre died. De Beauvoir wrote *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1981), a companion piece to *A Very Easy Death*, to cope with the anguish of watching age and illness take their toll on her companion of fifty years. De Beauvoir notes that *Adieux* differs from her previous work in that Sartre did not read it before its publication.

Simone de Beauvoir died in a Paris hospital on April 14, 1986. She was buried in the same grave as were Sartre's ashes. Five thousand people attended the funeral, and flowers sent by women's organizations around the world attested to the renown of this beloved woman of letters.

Works in Literary Context

As de Beauvoir recounts in her autobiography, she was a precocious writer and avid reader of female authors such as George Eliot and Louisa May Alcott. In her adolescence, a cousin introduced her to French authors such as André Gide, Jean Cocteau, and Alain-Fournier. Her mother, scandalized by such literature, pinned together pages of books she did not want her daughters to read. De Beauvoir later acknowledged the influence of John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway on her novelistic techniques.

Obviously, her intellectual partner Sartre provided a shaping influence on all her published prose. The pair wrote about the same ideas, and reflected on their shared experiences. For example, it is tempting to compare de Beauvoir's first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943), and Sartre's famous play *No Exit* (1944). Both texts were written in the wake of the couple's liaison with Olga Kosakiewicz. Both have three main characters, two women and a man, and both convey the fundamental theme that hell is the way other people would have us see ourselves.

Philosophy in Fiction De Beauvoir's fiction illustrates in concrete terms the major themes of her philosophical essays, although her fiction is more ambiguous and its tone less authoritative. Her characters are determined neither by heredity nor by childhood experiences. They are free at each moment to choose their destiny. But they must recognize that they are free. Rather than offering a psychological explanation of their acts, de Beauvoir gives them an existential dimension.

Freedom and Bad Faith For readers familiar with de Beauvoir's memoirs, several of her characters are more or less transparent versions of the author herself, such as Françoise in *She Came to Stay*. Another character present in each of the novels is the unloved woman who would abdicate her freedom to possess the man she loves: Helene in *The Blood of Others*, who is in love with Jean; and Paule in *The Mandarins*, who loves Henri. These characters represent, in de Beauvoir's fictional world, those members of the "second sex" who accept the image imposed on them by society, and suffer as a consequence. They portray the existentialist notion of bad faith because they deny their freedom to stray from conventional female roles.

An Icon of Women's Liberation Although the novels of Simone de Beauvoir successfully dramatize the main ideas of her thinking, it is *The Second Sex* that has had the most profound influence. This pioneering work of scholarship has touched the lives of millions of women, setting the terms for the explosion of feminist theory and activism since the 1960s. Most of the leading advocates for women's rights in the West have heralded her leadership. Gloria Steinem, for example, remarked in the *New York Times* that "More than any other single human being, she's responsible for the current international women's movement."

Works in Critical Context

De Beauvoir's literary career was very successful. Her first two novels, and most of her subsequent books, were critically and commercially well received. *The Blood of Others*, published in 1945, is remembered as the first French novel to speak openly about the Resistance movement. Critical examinations of de Beauvoir's novels, however, often focus more on their autobiographical details rather than on their literary merits, because of de Beauvoir's status as a historic figure of the twentieth century, and the many illustrious contemporaries who pepper the pages of her novels and memoirs.

Since 1973, when de Beauvoir publicly declared herself to be a feminist, her novels have tended to receive less critical attention than her nonfiction and, to a lesser extent, her memoirs. Most scholarly commentary has been directed at *The Second Sex*. If the novels have been examined, it is to analyze the ways female characters were represented. An interest in de Beauvoir's feminism seems to have overshadowed concern for her existentialism.

The Second Sex Several critics have taken de Beauvoir to task for her apparently negative presentation of women and their values. Jean Leighton perceives an antifeminine bias in *The Second Sex* that extends to the portrayal of femininity in de Beauvoir's novels. Biographer Carol Ascher speaks of her subject's "grim view of women's condition." More incisively, Mary Evans perceives in de Beauvoir an assumption that "traditionally male activities (the exercise of rationality, independent action, and so on) are in some sense superior, and are instances almost of a higher form of civilization than those concerns—such as childcare and the maintenance of daily life—that have traditionally been the preserve of women." Conversely, others have argued that de Beauvoir's depiction of women reveals anger at their circumstances, not their inherent inferiority. Regardless of this criticism, de Beauvoir is considered one of the most important champions of women's rights, and one of the century's foremost intellectuals.

Responses to Literature

1. Explain de Beauvoir's argument, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, that "woman is the Other." What does that mean and how is that concept manifested in everyday life?
2. Write about de Beauvoir's insights on the subject of death, citing two or more of her works. Can this insight be traced throughout de Beauvoir's works? Can you put this perspective into a succinct phrase that summarizes de Beauvoir's thoughts?
3. Simone de Beauvoir wrote extensively about her life, in four volumes of memoirs. The events and characters of her life story also show up, thinly disguised, in her novels. Locate one or two pivotal events in her

life, and contrast how she portrays them in her fiction and in her autobiography.

4. Write about the variety of women characters in de Beauvoir's fiction. Collectively, what do they indicate about her perspective on women's experience? Select two that have made an impact on you; describe them and explain what makes them unique.

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Daniel Defoe

BORN: 1660, London, England

DIED: 1731, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, essays, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719)

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1721)

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722)

A Fortunate Mistress (1724)



Daniel Defoe *Defoe, Daniel, drawing. The Library of Congress.*

Overview

Daniel Defoe has been called the father of both the novel and modern journalism. In his novels, Defoe combined elements of spiritual autobiography, allegory, and so-called “rogue biography” with stylistic techniques including dialogue, setting, symbolism, characterization, and, most importantly, irony to fashion some of the first realistic narratives in English fiction. With this combination, Defoe popularized the novel among a growing middle-class readership. In journalism, he pioneered the lead article, investigative reporting, advice and gossip columns, letters to the editor, human interest features, background articles, and foreign-news analysis.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Persecution, Plague, and Fire Defoe was born sometime in 1660, the youngest of three children, to James and Alice Foe in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, just north of the old center of London. The year 1660 also marked the restoration of the monarchy in England. King Charles I had been executed in 1649, and the British monarchy was abolished. The English king was considered head of the Anglican Church, so the execution of Charles I had religious meaning as well. England was ruled by a representative, and Puritan, government

for the first time, headed by Oliver Cromwell. Defoe’s parents were Presbyterians and Cromwell supporters. Thus the return of the Royalists (supporters of Charles II) was something of a tragedy for them and others of their faith, for they were Nonconformists or Dissenters to the established Church of England. The Royalists established a series of punitive laws against Dissenters, much as the Puritans had done to Anglicans during Cromwellian times. Thus young Daniel Defoe was plagued from his earliest years by a sense of ostracism and discrimination on account of his beliefs.

Little is known of Defoe’s youth, but it is highly likely that he was on some level influenced by the Great Plague of 1665, which at its peak killed one thousand people a week in London, and the Great Fire of London in 1666, which halted the plague but devastated the city. Defoe would later write of the plague, although it is doubtful whether he actually experienced it on a personal level. The Great Fire, however, certainly touched Defoe more closely, for it transformed London from a city of wood to a modern metropolis rebuilt in brick and stone.

A Scholar and Businessman When he was sixteen, Defoe attended an academy in Newington Green, north of London, operated by the Reverend Charles Morton. As Dissenters, members of the Foe family were barred from attending the elite universities at Oxford or Cambridge, but at Morton’s academy Defoe gained an enduring love of science. He also developed an ability to write with not only clarity but also “Energy,” as he termed it.

After three years there, he set out into the world of business. Off and on for the rest of his life, Defoe would work as a businessman in England and Scotland. In his career, he sold stockings, speculated in land, expeditions, and inventions, imported goods from Continental Europe and the New World, and operated brick and tile works. He was at times successful, at others careless, and often unfortunate. By 1703, his business dealings had forced him to suffer several lawsuits, two terms in prison, and two bankruptcies.

In 1684 he married Mary Tuffley, the daughter of a successful merchant. They would have seven children together (though by some accounts Mary is believed to have given birth to at least eight), yet little is known about Mary and the relationship the couple shared.

Politics and Intrigue During the 1680s and 1690s, Defoe’s activities centered on two fronts: commerce and political involvement. His far-flung business and investment ventures culminated in bankruptcy in 1692, and he was left owing his creditors the monumental sum of seventeen thousand pounds. Before this point he had already spent two terms in debtors’ prison; with bankruptcy he sought refuge in London’s Whitefriars, the site of a former monastery that remained a sanctuary where warrants could not be served. There he came into contact with thieves and prostitutes, characters who would later fill the pages of his fiction.

In 1697 he published his first important work, *Essay upon Projects*, and four years later made his name known with his long poem *The True-Born Englishman*, his effort to counter a growing English xenophobia, or hatred of foreigners. This poem, which satirized the prejudices of his fellow countrymen and called the English a race of mongrels, sold more copies in a single day than any other poem in English history. It was about this time that Daniel Foe began calling himself Defoe.

In 1702's *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*, Defoe wrote anonymously in the voice of those who would further limit the rights of Dissenters, exaggerating their positions in an attempt to make them appear absurd. Unfortunately, Defoe's satire was grossly misunderstood. He won scorn from both sides of the issue and was accused of seditious libel, lying to stir up rebellion against the government. Once arrested, he was forced to spend three consecutive days in the stocks, each day in a different part of London. The authorities thought that such a punishment might lead to death for the headstrong writer, as did Defoe, who attempted to mellow public sentiment against him by writing another poem, *A Hymn to the Pillory*. It was published on the very day he was put into the stocks; instead of stones, those who came to see his punishment threw flowers.

Defoe's time in hiding and his prison term sent his business into chaos, forcing him to declare bankruptcy for a second time. Thus, when a proposal to work for the Tories was put to him, Defoe readily agreed. His prison term was cut short on condition that he work for the Catholic monarchy, turning his considerable propaganda powers to the service of the state rather than the criticism of it. Among other duties, he spied on fellow Dissenters and others who were against the ruling government.

Working for Secretary of State Robert Harley for a fee of two hundred pounds a year, Defoe founded the *Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Transactions at Home* in 1704 and continued writing it for over nine years. That the paper promoted Harley's views—pro-Anglican, anti-Dissenter, against foreign entanglements—did not seem to bother Defoe, who had the ability to write from different perspectives. He produced the journal two to three times per week for almost a decade, laying it to rest in June of 1713. During that period he sowed the seeds for modern journalism, exploring the issues of the day through reporting and commentary while including poetry, letters to the editor, advice columns, and schedules for local events.

Robinson Crusoe Defoe's lasting fame for most readers lies with the book that he published in 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, better known to modern readers simply as *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe had long been developing the tools of his trade: point of view, dialogue, characterization, and a sense of scene. With *Robinson Crusoe* he put these together for the first time in a continuous creative

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Defoe's famous contemporaries include:

William Kidd (c. 1645–1701): Scottish sailor and pirate who allegedly left buried treasure in either Japan or the Caribbean.

Louis XIV (1638–1715): French king known as the Sun King; he centralized state authority and was a patron of the arts.

Catherine I (1684–1727): the first woman to rule Russia; wife and widow of Peter the Great.

Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723): English architect and astronomer; rebuilt much of London after the Great Fire, including St. Paul's Cathedral.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): Anglo-Irish poet, political writer, and satirist; best known for *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729).

product. Employing the form of a travel biography, the work tells the story of a man marooned on a Caribbean island. He quickly followed it with *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720).

Like all great creative works, *Robinson Crusoe* lends itself to myriad interpretations: as an allegorical representation of the British Empire, an attack on economic individualism and capitalism, a further installment in the author's spiritual biography, and as a lightly veiled allegory of Defoe's own life. Most importantly, however, is the fact that the novel was read widely by Defoe's contemporaries in England. It was the first work to become popular among the middle and even lower classes, who could identify with Crusoe's adventures.

With the success of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe saw that he might turn even a better profit than he had with his poetry and pamphlets. As a result, the period 1719–1724 saw an enormous output of work.

1722–1724 In 1722, Defoe published *Moll Flanders* as well as *Journal of the Plague Year* and *Colonel Jack*. He was not content, however, with this achievement, but interspersed the fiction with several nonfiction books of history and social and religious manners. Another fictional biography, *Moll Flanders* is told by Moll herself to a rather embarrassed editor who cleans up her language. In its pages, Defoe was able to use the criminals and prostitutes he had rubbed shoulders with during his time in hiding and in jail.

A Journal of the Plague Year is a historical novel set during the London Plague of 1665 and 1666. The novel is narrated by one "H. F.," a man likely modeled on

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Robinson Crusoe is a meditation on the human condition and an argument for challenging traditional notions about that condition. With this work, Defoe applied and thereby popularized modern realism. Modern realism holds that truth should be discovered at the individual level by verification of the senses. The following titles represent other modern realist works.

Candide (1759), a novel by Voltaire. This novel parodies German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz's philosophy of optimism, which states that since God created the world and God is perfect, everything in the world is ultimately perfect.

Don Quixote (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. One of the great comic figures of world literature, drawn with realist and humanist techniques, Don Quixote is an idealistic but delusory knight-errant with an illiterate but loyal squire, Sancho Panza.

Peer Gynt (1867), a play by Henrik Ibsen. This play, originally a long poem, pokes fun at then-emerging trends about getting back to nature and simplicity and asks questions about the nature of identity; the main character longs for freedom in a world that demands commitment.

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. A political satire in the form of an adventure, this novel examines the question of rationality being the greatest human quality, versus humankind's inborn urge to sin.

Defoe's own uncle, Henry Foe. *Colonel Jack*, another biographical novel, is set in the underworld of thieves and pickpockets, and traces Jack's fortunes as he tries to succeed through honest work. *A Fortunate Mistress* (1724), better known as *Roxana*, the last of Defoe's novels, introduces Defoe's first introspective narrator, foreshadowing the psychological novels that would someday follow. Many critics claim *Roxana* to be Defoe's most complex and artistic work, though it has not retained the same popularity as has *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.

Later Years After *Roxana*, Defoe concentrated almost exclusively on longer nonfiction works. By the mid-1720s, his journalistic career came to an end when it was discovered that Defoe had been working as a government agent all the while, spying on other publishers. Over the years, he founded several journals, but these also had ceased publication by 1725. In 1729 legal proceedings were initiated against Defoe; with creditors on his track again, the writer once more went into hiding to avoid jail. Leaving his family behind in the suburbs, Defoe took lodgings in a section of London near where

he was born, but he suffered from gout and kidney stones. Defoe died in hiding on April 26, 1731. Obituaries of the day spoke of Defoe's varied writing abilities and his promotion of civic and religious freedom, but none mentioned that he was the author of either *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.

Works in Literary Context

An English Breed of Novel *Robinson Crusoe* is considered by some to be the first true English novel and by others to be the immediate precursor to the novels of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. John Robert Moore notes that before *Robinson Crusoe* "there was no English novel worth the name, and no book (except the Bible) widely accepted among all classes of English and Scottish readers." Irish author James Joyce also recognized *Crusoe* as a model of the Englishman, commenting that "the whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in *Crusoe*: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity."

Rogue Biography Not considered quite decent in its day, *Moll Flanders* was nonetheless popular with the reading public. As with Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*, Defoe brings the criminal element vibrantly to life within its pages. Its form is an extension of what was known as rogue biography. Naturalistic novels such as Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) opened up the possibilities of a critical evaluation of *Moll Flanders*, just as the relaxed moral standards of the 1960s made possible the republication of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1749), which was influenced by Defoe's work.

Precursor to the Gothic Novel *Journal of the Plague Year* developed new fictional ground that would later be taken over by the gothic novel. Defoe's prose style conveys a sense of gripping immediacy; he frequently works with loose sentences that tend to accumulate in the manner of breathless street gossip and unpremeditated outcome, thus making his *Journal* a compelling work of art that possesses, as Anthony Burgess has noted, "the truth of the conscientious and scrupulous historian, but its deeper truth belongs to the creative imagination." Along with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Journal of the Plague Year* formed a model for the exploitation of dramatic and sublime scenes in the novel, effects that the gothic novel would later borrow to good effect.

Works in Critical Context

"Defoe's literary reputation is probably higher today than it has ever been," Maximillian Novak has stated. "Many modern critics look to *Robinson Crusoe*, along with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, as a key work in the formation of

the novel; and *Moll Flanders*, *Journal of the Plague Year*, and *Roxana* have been praised as masterpieces.”

Robinson Crusoe Despite its popular acceptance, *Robinson Crusoe* received a mixed reception from scholars of Defoe’s time, who found the novel to be un-Christian in tone. Academics also attacked it for being wildly improbable. Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the first to applaud *Robinson Crusoe* as a highly instructive book, in 1762. Novelist Sir Walter Scott in 1827 praised *Robinson Crusoe* for its realism. Defoe’s stature continued to grow during the nineteenth century. His eighteenth-century reputation as a literary hack who was willing to write for any cause was replaced by a close study of his work that showed he was the equal of his contemporary Jonathan Swift and one of the fathers of the English novel. Virginia Woolf, in her *Collected Essays*, called *Robinson Crusoe* “a masterpiece,” and went on to note that “it is a masterpiece because Defoe has throughout kept consistently to his own sense of perspective.” Crusoe has been seen as a representative of mankind at struggle with nature, or religion, or himself. Karl Marx and others have found much to do with the economic nature of man in Crusoe’s experience on the island. Although James Joyce explored the colonialist theme of *Robinson Crusoe* as early as 1911, his comments were not published until 1964. Since then, writers such as Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott, and Edward Said have viewed the novel as an allegory of colonialism.

Moll Flanders Most modern criticism of *Moll Flanders* focuses on the sense of sin and repentance in the novel. On the surface, Moll repents the sinful ways of her past, yet Defoe’s realistic tone in describing these past events seems to contradict this high moral purpose. Some critics attribute conscious irony to Defoe and maintain that Defoe was satirizing the puritanical rules of his day. On the other side of the argument are critics such as Ian Watt, who believes that if there is irony in Defoe, it is unintended.

Responses to Literature

1. Much of Defoe’s success as a journalist—and as a spy—came from being able to argue in favor of issues he did not support. How important is it to be able to argue the other side of an argument? Does it lead to a better understanding of the issues, or is it simply a sign of someone who cannot make up his or her mind?
2. Defoe worked undercover as a spy and lived in hiding or in jail for long periods of time. Do you think that changed how he saw the world? If you had to be separated from your family for a long time, how would that change you?
3. The popular TV show *Survivor* implies that the only way to survive is by “playing a game” and deceiving other people. Research Karl Marx’s ideas about capitalism. Keeping in mind that the point of *Survivor* is to win money, write an essay examining how Marx and Defoe would view the show.
4. *Robinson Crusoe* sparked interest in adventure stories set on desert islands. Research two or three adventure stories from different periods, such as *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Treasure Island*, and *Lord of the Flies*. Are they just exciting stories, or do they have a serious point? Write an essay discussing the point of these stories, and how that point changes over time.

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Anita Desai

BORN: 1937, Mussoorie, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Cry, the Peacock (1963)

Voices in the City (1965)

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)

In Custody (1984)

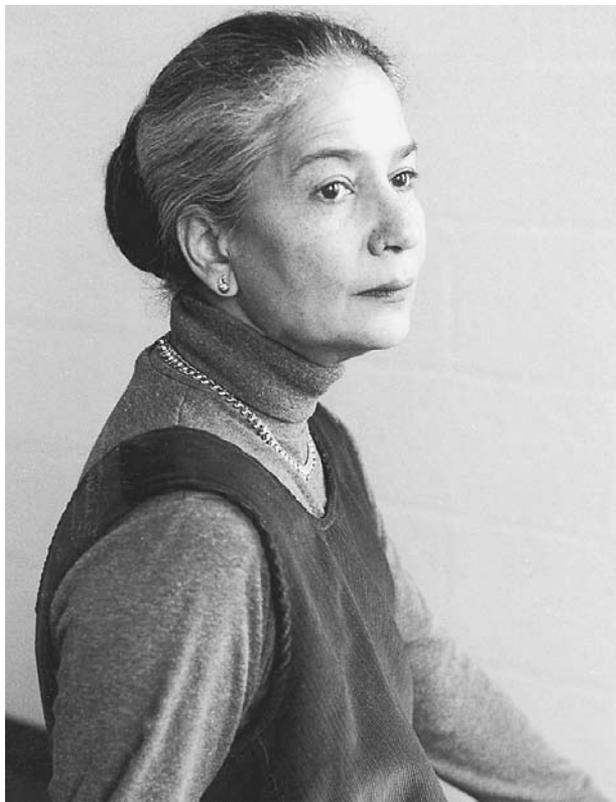
Journey to Ithaca (1995)

Overview

Anita Desai is a leading member of a generation of writers who have carved out a niche for Indian fiction in English—today a burgeoning literary arena with writers of Indian descent or origin chiming in from around the world. Through sensitive psychological probing and sharp social critique, her novels chart the emotional lives of people struggling to find meaning and stability within the framework of a society in transition.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Cosmopolitan Childhood in Northern India
Anita Mazumdar was born on June 24, 1937, in the hill resort of Mussoorie in northern India, to Dhiren N. Mazumdar, a businessman, and his German wife, Antoinette Nime Mazumdar. Because of her mixed parentage, Mazumdar learned German, English, and Hindi. Early in childhood, she did not experience her hybrid identity as a



Anita Desai Desai, Anita, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

clash of cultures, although at the time questions of hybrid identity were particularly pertinent in India, which gained its independence from Great Britain and separated from largely Muslim Pakistan in 1947 (when Anita was ten). The young Anita's mother lent a European element to what Desai would later describe as the family's otherwise "very, very Indian home": she told the children German fairy tales, sang and played "O Tannenbaum" on the piano at Christmas, and played recordings of the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Edvard Grieg on the gramophone. Books by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and Heinrich Heine were on the bookshelves. The parents' friends included Germans, Hungarians, French, Russians, and Britons, and the young Anita's early years were thus shaped by an unusually lively cultural interplay—even for India, itself vibrantly multicultural.

The Writer of the Family As a German married to an Indian, Antoinette Mazumdar was twice removed from the English "raj," whom both she and her husband hated. She rejected the English practice of sending children away to boarding schools at "home" in England, and Anita was educated by the Grey Sisters of the Cambridge Mission at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School. Anita wrote her first story at seven. Her early

scribblings were viewed with some amusement by her family. Later, when she began to publish, amusement gave way to pride. In 2002, long after her marriage and change of name, Desai recalled being labeled "the writer in the family," a role she accepted because she "really never considered another." After completing her schooling at Queen Mary's, Mazumdar attended Miranda House, a women's college on the campus of Delhi University. She published occasional pieces in the college magazine, and in 1957 her short story "Circus Cat, Alley Cat" appeared in the New Delhi periodical *Thought*. That year, she obtained a bachelor's degree with honors in English literature and won the Pershad Memorial Prize for English. For the next year she worked at Max Müller Bhavan, the German cultural institute in Calcutta (now known as Kolkata). During this period, tensions between India's Hindu and Muslim populations ran high, as the division of British India into India and Pakistan had been a historically traumatic event—with perhaps half a million people killed and over 12 million left homeless—from which the country has still today not entirely recovered.

The Secret Writer On December 13, 1958, she married Ashvin Desai, a business executive, with whom she had four children: Rahul, Tani, Arjun, and Kiran. Recalling this marriage, she later wrote, "The world I entered on marriage was completely uncomprehending of a life of literature. I continued to write but almost in secret, without anyone observing me at work at my desk so as not to create an open conflict."

After publishing two pieces in local magazines, Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963. From her first work, readers see the stream-of-consciousness influence of Virginia Woolf on a writer who was seeking to create above-average characters "driven to some extremity of despair," she once told interviewer Yashodhara Dalmia. Such despair is also experienced by the protagonists of Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City* (1965). In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971), Desai moved away from the existential angst of her first two novels to explore the clash of Eastern and Western cultures in an English setting.

International Acclaim and Concerns with Globalization Desai's fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) brought her international fame. The British Royal Society of Literature awarded her the Winifred Holtby Prize for the novel in 1978, and the work won the National Academy of Letters Award in India the same year.

In 1978, Desai published *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*. The book was well received in the United Kingdom, and in 1979 the novel won Desai the Sahitya Akademi award. In 1980 Desai published *Clear Light of Day*, perhaps her most autobiographical work to date. The novel was short-listed for the prestigious British Booker Prize. In 1982 Desai published *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story*. In an interview with

Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dassenbrock, she elaborated on her sense of an altered India, calling it “a place of increasing violence and of tremendous change . . . an economic revolution, of course, more than a political one at the moment, a place where life has become extremely difficult to endure.” The revolution she was responding to, both in the interview and in the book, was the revolution brought about in Indian life by economic globalization—a process that many have criticized for its insensitivity to the lives of the people who are being “modernized.”

A particularly notorious example of this insensitivity was the Bhopal disaster of 1984, when a Union Carbide pesticide plant released tons of gas into the air, killing somewhere between three and eight thousand people instantly, and an estimated twenty thousand or so more over the long term (with another one to six hundred thousand still injured today, over two decades later). Union Carbide paid some minimal reparations, and Dow Chemical Company, which now owns Union Carbide, has refused to revisit the issue, disavowing any responsibility for the history of its subsidiary. Although *Village by the Sea* was published before the Bhopal disaster, it was prescient in its concern with the effects of international economic pressures in an India desperate for capital. The novel won the *Guardian Prize for Children's Fiction* in 1983 and was adapted for television by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1992.

Whereas her novels had been primarily woman-centered up to this point, in her next novel, *In Custody* (1984), Desai moved to write from a male point of view. While focusing on the protagonist's process of incurring resentment and being exploited as he takes a hiatus to seek out his guru, the novel addresses the politics of language in postcolonial India, where the dominance of Hindi threatens the Urdu language and culture with extinction. *In Custody* was also short-listed for the Booker Prize.

No More Secret Writing Sessions Desai has been honored with accolades that include fellowships, visiting professorships, and prestigious awards such as the Tara-knath Das Award for Contributions to Indo-American Understanding in 1989 and the 1990 Padma Shri, one of the highest national awards in India. After her third novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize, *Fasting, Feasting* (1995), and the 1999 Moravia Prize for Literature in Rome, Desai continued to explore Indian issues in an international context.

Early in her career, Desai was compelled to write in secret to avoid conflict with her husband's family; today her daughter Kiran is also a novelist. “This makes,” Desai has explained, “for a great intimacy and companionship between us, the first I have ever experienced.” Today, Desai spends most of the year in the United States, where she is a professor emeritus of humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Having left India

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Desai's famous contemporaries include:

Sawako Ariyoshi (1931–1984): This Japanese writer was a prolific novelist. Her works concerned significant social issues such as environmental pollution and treatment of the elderly.

Graham Chapman (1941–1989): An English comic actor who was a core member of the comedy troupe Monty Python.

Joan Crawford (1937–): This American basketball player has been inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame, the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and Amateur Athletic Union Hall of Fame.

Roberta Flack (1937–): This American jazz and blues singer is a Grammy Award winner for such songs as the 1974 “Killing Me Softly with His Song,” which the Fugees remade in 1996.

only late in life, she does not consider herself part of the Indian Diaspora, but she is certainly seen by many as one of contemporary India's greatest literary figures.

Works in Literary Context

Desai was a voracious reader of the books on her parents' shelves, including the works of the Brontës, Jane Austen, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Marcel Proust. Gradually she gravitated toward poetry, which became a major influence on her work. From Japanese and Chinese poetry she absorbed the art of fine detail and subtle description. Sufi poetry, especially that of Rumi, and the work of modern Russian poets, including Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelstam, figure in her list of favorites. In an interview with Pandit, Desai described these writers as the “gurus” from whom she learned the art of writing.

Suggestion Versus Statement As a stylist, Desai is known for her intense and suggestive use of imagery. In *In Custody*, for example, backward, decaying, and dreary Mirpore functions as an image of contemporary India. The most powerful element in *Voices in the City* is that of Calcutta, with its many evocative landmarks. At times the imagery lends a poetic quality to her prose. Madhusudan Prasad remarks that Desai's novels have a “mosaic textual density” because “Desai's imagery is wedded to her rich lyricism.” Images recur with cumulative effect as Desai eschews blunt, direct statements, instead using suggestion to highlight thematic issues.

Toward an Environmental Psychology Desai evokes the sights, sounds, and smells of Calcutta and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other authors who have treated key aspects of Indian culture and the politics of gender roles:

The English Teacher (1945), a novel by R. K. Narayan. In this semiautobiographical work, English teacher Krishna seeks to evolve from his humdrum life to a place of enlightenment.

Kanthapura (1938), a novel by Raja Rao. In this work, the author closely explores the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi as a passive resistor of British rule and investigates the mythologizing of the great leader.

Nectar in a Sieve (1955), a novel by Kamala Markandaya. In this award-winning work, the author presents an in-depth look at the culture clashes between urban and rural Indians.

A Room of One's Own (1929), an exposition by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, the author explores the early politics of women writers and writing.

other cities, but her focus remains psychological: The city is often a force that controls the mental states of its inhabitants. Desai calls up internal states of mind while recording sharply detailed impressions of social interactions. She uses imagery to create a sharply defined concrete reality that suggests more abstract possibilities.

Over the course of her novels, Desai has evolved from chronicling the inner lives of her characters to an awareness of the links between individual psychology and the social and cultural environment. The protagonists of her novels are often caught in a struggle between desire for freedom and the call of duty or responsibility, often expressed through family relationships. She also explores the problems faced by women in contemporary India, particularly middle-class women expected to lead lives of quiet domesticity in a rapidly changing world. In *Voices in the City*, for example, Otima, who is associated with the powerful, destructive Hindu goddess Kali, explodes the myth of motherhood by rejecting her children and retreating to her childhood home in Kalimpong.

Works in Critical Context

As the *Encyclopedia of World Biography Supplement* (2005) suggests, “Despite the fact that Desai does not view herself as a political writer, her social commentary is considered to be powerfully and accurately rendered in her fiction.” Yet Desai perhaps has not gotten the critical attention her novels merit. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971) received a mixed response from critics, who had come

to expect intense psychologizing and rich, poetic prose from Desai. In *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, Prasad complains that the novel lacks dense imagery, while others, including S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal, recognized that the novel places Desai within the ranks of postcolonial writers impelled to explore the politics of the Indo-British cross-cultural encounter. The more recent *Journey to Ithaca* also received mixed reviews.

***Journey to Ithaca* (1995)** *Journey to Ithaca* is set during the hippie influx into India in the 1970s. Sophie, a German woman, accompanies her Italian husband, Matteo, on his journey to India in search of peace. In this novel, Desai’s shift from an individual to international perspective is even more pronounced—the narrative spans three continents and traces the lives of protagonists from Egypt, Europe, and India. *New York Times* critic Richard Bernstein praises Desai’s “remarkable eye for substance, the things that give life its texture.” But others—like Gabriele Annan in the *Times Literary Supplement*—complain that “The narrative is full of gaps and improbabilities, as well as clichés . . . the dialogue is stagey and unconvincing.” Bhaskar Ghose, however, argues in *Biblio* that the elegance of Desai’s craft “ultimately gives a definition to the story which could have been diffuse, or drearily familiar in the hands of a weaker artist. Within the body of her work, this novel must rank as one of the most ambitious and most tightly crafted works that Anita Desai has undertaken.”

Responses to Literature

1. Several of Desai’s favorite themes include youth, age, and death; the minutiae of human relationships; art and life; illusion and reality; time and change; cultural differences; and the pressures of survival in an increasingly difficult world. Desai considers these themes in the context of Indian cultures and histories. In your study group, choose a theme and investigate its real-life context in Desai’s India. Share your findings with peers. For instance, who in a given context “should” be the repository of wisdom? What happens (or what is expressed differently) when a story is told from the perspective of an individual not expected to be a purveyor of wisdom? How do characters display feelings of alienation as Indians in a mixed culture?
2. Desai centers much of her writing on postcolonial India and the politics of the Indo-British cross-cultural encounter. What makes an encounter truly “cross-cultural”? Consider Desai’s descriptions of interactions between a variety of different characters; what makes some of these interactions cross-cultural and others not? How do you think Desai would define the boundaries of culture, and why? Support

your thesis with detailed analysis of concrete passages from Desai's fiction.

- Desai has noted that most of her novels describe the lives of women before the feminist movement gathered momentum in India. Investigate the goals of feminist literary criticism, and consider how you might apply such a reading to a Desai novel. What has this mode of reading helped you to notice that you might not have otherwise?

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■ Ramón del Valle-Inclán

BORN: Villanueva de Arosa, Spain, 1866

DIED: Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1936

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Drama, Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Femeninas: Seis historias amorosas (Feminines: Six Love Stories) (1895)

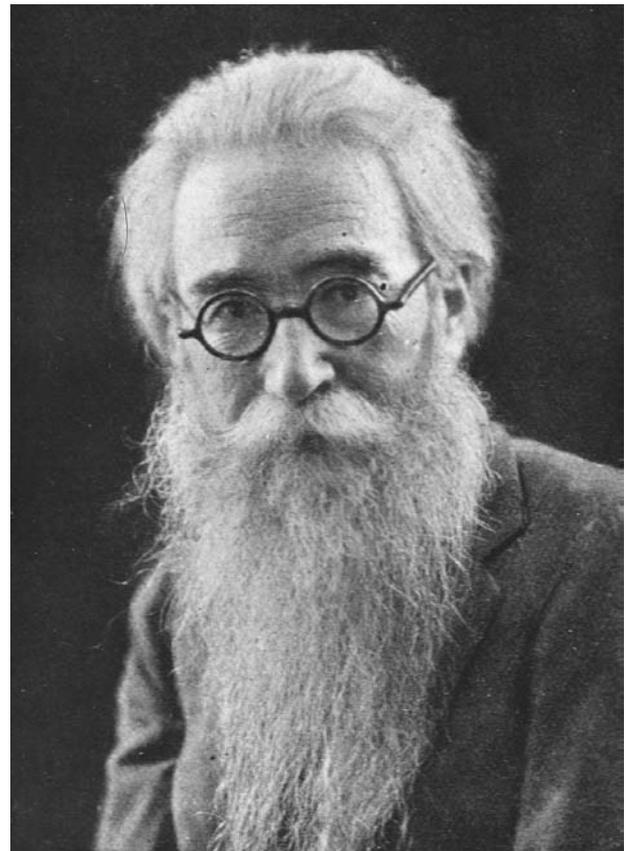
Romance de lobos (1908)

Lights of Bohemia (1924)

The Tyrant (1926)

Overview

An acknowledged master of prose style, Ramón Maria del Valle-Inclán was one of the great modernizers of twentieth-century Spanish drama. He invented a new genre: the *esperpento*, in which all the elements of drama are



Ramon Maria del Valle-Inclán Roger Viollet Collection / Getty Images

satirically distorted to create Goyaesque images of horror and comedy. Conveying a sense of dehumanization and senseless struggle in an irrational world, the *esperpentos* are now seen as the forerunners of absurdist works such as those of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. In addition to his *esperpentos*, he is also known for his novels, particularly the *Sonatas*, a collection of elegantly styled, fictive memoirs of the rakish Marquis de Bradomin.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Restless Spirit in Need of Adventure Valle-Inclán was born to a family of disinherited aristocrats at Villanueva de Arosa in the region of Spain known as Galicia, and spent his youth in this rugged land of primitive Celtic customs. Educated in Pontevedra, he studied law briefly at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where he also began to write poetry and prose. Often described as restless and eager for adventure, he left for Mexico in 1890, claiming that he went there because “it was the only country whose name is written with an X.” He worked as a journalist in America for three years, then returned to Galicia. In the interim, he transformed his physical appearance: Valle-Inclán now wore long hair, a beard, and a cape, often carried a cane, and presented himself as an eccentric, bohemian writer. After publishing his first book, *Femeninas: Seis historias amorosas* (1895), he traveled to Madrid and began to move in the capital’s literary circles. By the turn of the century, Valle-Inclán had begun work on his *Sonatas*, the series of four novels that brought him fame in the early twentieth century. He recorded his impressions of World War I in *La media noche* (1917), a collection of essays written while he served as a newspaper correspondent on the Western Front.

Dramatic Shift in Style Valle-Inclán’s literary development is generally divided into two periods. The first, extending from 1895 until World War I, is characterized by an end-of-the-century decadence, reminiscent of Barbey d’Aurevilly and Gabriele d’Annunzio. In *Femeninas*, a collection of love stories, Valle-Inclán employs an exquisite, romantic style while treating erotic themes. Similarly, in the *Sonata de otoño: Memorias del Marques de Bradomin* (1902; *Autumn Sonata: Memoirs of the Marquis of Bradomin*) he projects an overtly romantic portrait of himself as the Marquis of Bradomin. Also in this period, Valle-Inclán wrote the novel *Flor de santidad* (Flower of Sanctity; 1904) and the first two dramas known collectively as the *comedias barbaras*, *Aguila de blason* (1907) and *Romance de lobos* (1908), which draw on the traditions and folklore of his native Galicia.

Carlism Stirs Controversy A controversial aspect of Valle-Inclán’s life is his adherence to Carlism. The Carlists were a branch of the Bourbon dynasty who claimed the right to the Spanish throne and held the most conservative positions with regard to absolutism, Catholicism, and

traditionalism. Although Valle-Inclán expressed his support for Carlism in many ways, some critics believe that his commitment to the cause was an aesthetic pose. His *La guerra carlista* trilogy (1908–1909; *The Carlist War*), historical novels of the Carlist Wars in Spain—the last major European civil wars—mark a first departure from the eroticism of his earlier works. Included in the trilogy were the novels *Los cruzados de la causa* (1908, *Crusaders of the Cause*), *Gerifaltes de antaño* (1909, *Gerifalcons of Yore*), and *El resplandor de la hoguera* (1909, *The Glow of the Bonfire*). In the first novel, which is set in Galicia, Bradomin is a committed Carlist trying to convey weapons to the soldiers. The following novels are set in the Basque and Navarre regions, where the hostilities actually took place. The unforgettable protagonist of *El resplandor de la hoguera*, the priest Santa Cruz, is a cruel warrior who is depicted as a fanatical and epic hero.

Following World War I, a drastic change took place in Valle-Inclán’s writing. In 1916, he outlined his new aesthetic theory in *The Lamp of Marvels*. Discarding the Decadents’ notion of the artist as one who finds pleasure in beauty, Valle-Inclán enunciated a disillusioned vision, which he hoped would achieve an objective view of reality and allow things to, in the words of Manuel Salas, “reveal their flaws and imperfections, their absurdities and dissonances.” Following the war, Valle-Inclán wrote his first *esperpento*, *Lights of Bohemia* (1924), and also composed dramas and novels, wherein he incorporated the satirical and grotesque elements of the *esperpento* form.

Esperpentos In *Lights of Bohemia* and the *esperpentos* that followed, Valle-Inclán pursued this aesthetic, producing seriocomic distortions of reality. These later dramas focus on society and its conventions and deal with contemporary life, satirizing institutionalized vice, militarism, political corruption, and human frailty—all of which aligned Valle-Inclán more closely with the socially progressive Generation of 1898. His novels continue in the same spirit, as in *The Tyrant* (1926), the story of a rebellion in the fictional Latin American state of Tierra Caliente, wherein he analyzes the failures of Spanish society. This is also shown in the first novels of the *El reudo iberico* cycle, which indict Isabella II’s government. He also composed dramas and novels, wherein he incorporated the satirical and grotesque elements of the *esperpento* form. He began his *El reudo iberico* cycle, a projected series of nine novels, in the late 1920s, but finished only two of the works—*La corte de los milagros* (1927) and *Viva mi dueño* (1928)—before his death. Ramón del Valle-Inclán and his wife were divorced in 1932. Valle-Inclán died of bladder cancer on January 5, 1936. He had chosen to return to die in Santiago de Compostela, where he had many friends, and to be buried, rejecting Catholic rites, in its small cemetery.

Works in Literary Context

Ramón del Valle-Inclán was one of the most controversial literary figures in Spain in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. He was a reformer of the modern Spanish stage, an inventor of new narrative and dramatic modes, and a highly original re-creator of the Spanish language. Although Valle-Inclán wrote in Spanish, his ties to Galicia and the Galician language are discernible in the themes, vocabulary, and rhythms of his writings.

Generation of '98 Although a writer of poems, essays, short stories, plays, and novels, Ramón del Valle-Inclán is most renowned as the prose stylist of the Generation of '98 whose works most clearly approach the modernist mode. For him there was no clear demarcation between prose and poetry, so his earlier critics argued about whether he should be classified as a modernist or as one of the members of the Generation of '98, who analyzed Spain's internal problems in their writings. Though these writers also experimented with aesthetics, they were more motivated to inspire a national consciousness. Because Valle-Inclán exhibited both characteristics in his writings, recent criticism has placed him within both literary camps. With his considerable emphasis on poetic style, it is ironic that only a few collections of poetry appear in his long list of credits; however, these works fit both thematically and stylistically within his overall literary production.

Esperpentos The term *esperpento* merits definition. Properly speaking, an object reflected in a concave mirror produces an *esperpento*—that is, an image distorted, hence grotesque and ridiculous. The *esperpento* is to reality what the caricature is to the portrait. This term is used by Valle-Inclán to characterize the product of his second style, essentially a humorous caricature of contemporary life. Such a deformation of a realistic genre descends directly from the picaresque. Like the picaresque or rogue novel, it has for its characters every social type from the highest to the lowest. The *esperpentos* are written in a broken Spanish filled with slang, dialect, interjections, and discordant elements; the dehumanized characters react mechanically in mean and vile ways.

In this form of literature Valle-Inclán shows himself the resolute foe of vice and ignorance, of injustice and oppression, in whatever guise; he takes us with him to visit palace and prison, café and saloon, street and square, church and cemetery. Through his pages flit kings and ministers, poets and novelists, Bohemians, and even Valle-Inclán himself, like shadows. He tells us that this form of caricatural vision was invented by the artist Francisco Goya in his sketches included under the motto: "The sleep of reason engenders monsters." The select and musical diction characteristic of the *Sonatas* is replaced in the *esperpentos* by the ampler and more varied speech of common life. The language is rich in slang and the jargon of gypsies and thieves. The grotesque element of the *esperpento* affords freer scope for the use of the comic, and wider range for the tragic.

An Inspiration to Absurdist Drama Valle-Inclán's reputation grew in foreign countries after his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Valle-Inclán's famous contemporaries include:

Bram Stoker (1847–1912): Irish novelist, short story author, and theater manager who wrote the horror classic *Dracula* (1897), the most influential interpretation of the vampire myth ever written.

Jack London (1876–1916): American novelist and short-story writer who was one of the first writers to make his living exclusively from his stories. Famous chiefly for his realist, naturalist tales of adventure and man versus the elements in such stories as *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), and *White Fang* (1906).

Gustave Charpentier (1860–1956): French composer, whose first opera, *Louise* (1900), is also his best known. The opera, depicting the life of the working class, was part of the *verismo*, or realist, school of opera developing at the time.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): English novelist and poet who enjoyed tremendous success in his own lifetime for his tales of colonial India and the British Empire. He wrote both children's and adults' stories; today his children's books are generally considered his best work.

Alfonso XIII (1886–1941): Alfonso ruled Spain from his birth to 1931, when the monarchy was abolished and the Second Republic was established. His reign saw the loss of the last of Spain's great overseas colonies in the Spanish-American War and the dictatorship of Primo Rivera.

death and in Spain during Francisco Franco's dictatorship from 1939 to 1975, even though censorship kept the full meaning of his work from being known. Since the political transition to democracy in the 1970s, Valle-Inclán's work has increasingly attracted the attention of critics, translators, and the general public. However, his success among English-speaking audiences is still greatly limited by a lack of available translations of his works. Despite this, Valle-Inclán is credited with being an important precursor to absurdist theater, inspiring authors such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Tom Stoppard.

Works in Critical Context

Valle-Inclán's oeuvre has been discussed by critics largely in terms of temporal divisions. His early works, especially the *Sonatas*, won him popularity, though some critics disparaged their eroticism. By contrast, other critics regarded Valle-Inclán as one of the most significant writers of his time. Critic L. A. Warren, a contemporary of Valle-Inclán writing in 1929, comments on Valle-Inclán's place in literature: "Valle-Inclán comes after Ruben Dario as the leading modernistic writer. He is the most important man of letters

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos* have been called precursors to the Theater of the Absurd—a designation pertaining to the work of particular European playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the absurdist works influenced by Valle-Inclán include:

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett.

Perhaps the seminal, if not most well-known absurdist work, this play revolves around the cast of characters waiting for the appearance of a central figure who fails to materialize by play's end.

Rhinoceros (1959), a play by Eugene Ionesco. Set in a small French town in which every resident but the main character turns into a rhinoceros, this play is a meditation on conformity and the herd mentality.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. This absurdist tragicomedy follows the exploits of two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

in Spain today and is equal in aesthetic merit and interest to Gabriel d'Annunzio." Reaction to Valle-Inclán's later writing was also mixed. Some scholars objected to the grotesqueness of his *esperpentos* and the severity of the political satire in his later writings; however, his contemporaries, such as the writer José Martínez Ruiz, the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, admired Valle-Inclán for his adept, innovative style and unique use of language. Modern critics have followed these writers in appraising Valle-Inclán: Manuel Salas, for example, has called him "a musician with words, a sovereign artist, a master stylist."

Lights of Bohemia

In an edited volume of the work, *Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Luces de Bohemia*, its editor, A. Zamora Vincente, expresses the view that one of the most outstanding characteristics of the play is its portrayal of society as a whole, which subsumes the plot and development of individual characters. Literary scholar A. R. Pastor characterizes the novel as "a powerful and dreamlike vision of the literary underworld of Madrid," and it seems clear that as recent translations make the work more accessible to an English-reading public, admiration for Valle-Inclán's writing and his "lonely place in the social literature of our time" will only continue to grow.

Responses to Literature

1. In what ways does the term *esperpento* accurately describe Valle-Inclán's works? Cite specific examples from his work to support your response.
2. What social and political movements and sentiments are evident in Valle-Inclán's dramas?

3. What is the significance of the title *La Marquesa Rosalinda, farsa sentimental y grotesca*? Why do you think Valle-Inclán chose it?
4. Research the Generation of '98. Who were the other notable members of the group? What principles or common stylistic traits united them? What qualities, if any, did Valle-Inclán have that made him unique among the group?

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Charles Dickens

BORN: 1812, Portsmouth, England

DIED: 1870, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Oliver Twist (1837–1839)

A Christmas Carol (1843)

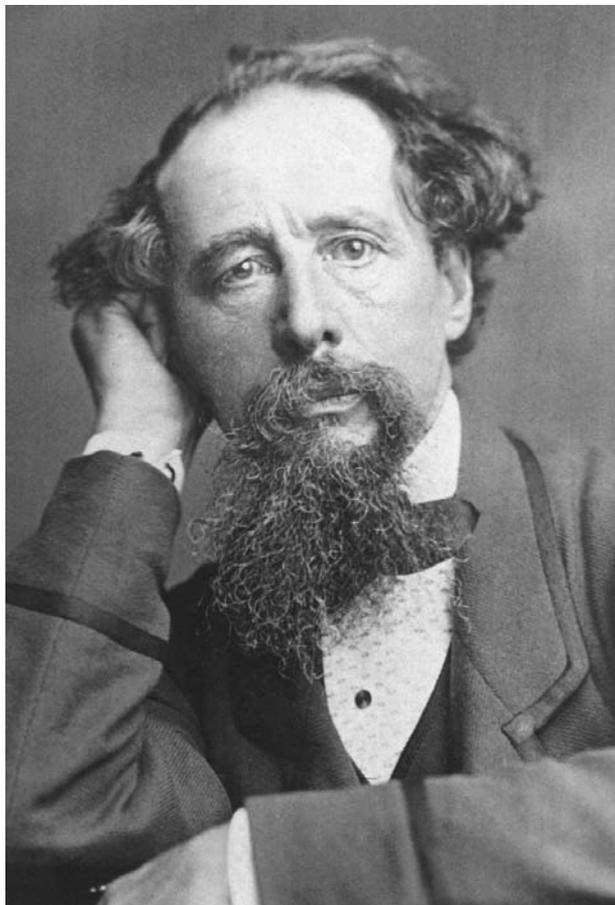
Bleak House (1852–1853)

A Tale of Two Cities (1859)

Great Expectations (1860–1861)

Overview

Charles Dickens wrote fourteen full novels as well as sketches, travel, and Christmas books, and was at work on his fifteenth novel when he died. He took chances, dealt with social issues, and did not shy away from big ideas. Almost all of Dickens's novels display his comic



Charles Dickens General Photographic Agency / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

gift, his deep social concerns, and his talent for creating vivid characters. Many of his creations, most notably Ebenezer Scrooge, have become familiar English literary stereotypes, and today many of his novels are considered classics.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Poverty and the Birth of Boz Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, at Port-sea (later part of Portsmouth) on the southern coast of England. He was the son of a lower-middle-class father whose lack of financial foresight Dickens would later satirize in *David Copperfield*. Dickens's father constantly lived beyond his means and was eventually sent to debtor's prison, a jail specially reserved for people who could not pay back their debts. This deeply humiliated young Dickens, and even as an adult he was rarely able to speak of it. At the age of twelve he was forced to work in a factory for meager wages. Although the experience lasted only a few months, it left a permanent impression on Dickens.

Dickens returned to school after an inheritance relieved his father from debt, but he became an office boy at the age of fifteen. He learned shorthand and became a court reporter, which introduced him to journalism and aroused his contempt for politics. By 1832 he had become a reporter for two London newspapers and, in the following year, began to contribute a series of impressions and sketches to other newspapers and magazines, signing some of them "Boz." These scenes of London life helped establish Dickens's reputation and were published in 1836 as *Sketches by Boz*, his first book. On the strength of this success he married Catherine Hogarth. She eventually bore him ten children.

Early Works

In 1836 Dickens began to publish *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in monthly installments. *Pickwick* became one of the most popular works of the time. The comic heroes of the novel, the antiquarian members of the Pickwick Club, scour the English countryside for local points of interest and become involved in a variety of humorous adventures that reveal the characteristics of English social life. Later, however, the chairman of the club is involved in a lawsuit that lands him in debtors' prison. The lighthearted atmosphere of the novel changes, and the reader is given hints of the gloom and sympathy with which Dickens was to imbue his later works.

During the years of *Pickwick's* serialization, Dickens became editor of a new monthly, *Bentley's Miscellany*. When *Pickwick* was completed, he began publishing his new novel, *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839), in its pages—a practice he later continued. *Oliver Twist* traces the fortunes of an innocent orphan through the streets of London. It seems remarkable today that this novel's fairly frank treatment of criminals, prostitutes, and "fences" (receivers of stolen goods) could have been acceptable to the Victorian reading public. But so powerful was Dickens's portrayal of the "little boy lost" amid the low-life of the East End that the limits of his audience's tolerance were stretched.

Dickens was now firmly established in the most consistently successful career of any nineteenth-century author after the Scottish novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott. He could do no wrong as far as his readership was concerned, yet for the next decade his books would not achieve the standard of his early triumphs. These works include *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), still cited for its exposé of brutality at an English boys' school; *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1841), remembered for hitting a high (or low) point of sentimentality in its portrayal of the sufferings of Little Nell; and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), still read as a historical novel, set as it is amid the anti-Catholic riots of 1780. Dickens wrote all these novels before he turned thirty, often working on two or three at a time.

In 1842 Dickens, who was as popular in America as he was in England, went on a five-month lecture tour of the United States, speaking out strongly for the abolition of slavery and other reforms. He returned to England deeply disappointed, dismayed by America's lack of support for an international copyright law, its acceptance of slavery, and what he saw as the general vulgarity of American people. On his return he wrote *American Notes*, which sharply criticized the cultural backwardness and aggressive materialism of American life. In his next novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844), the hero retreats from the difficulties of making his way in England, only to find that survival is even harder on the American frontier. During the years in which *Chuzzlewit* appeared, Dickens also published two Christmas stories, *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Chimes* (1844), which became as much a part of the Christmas season as the traditional English plum pudding.

First Major Novels

After a year in Italy, Dickens wrote *Pictures from Italy* (1846). After its publication, he began writing his next novel, *Dombey and Son*, which continued until 1848. This novel established a new standard in the Dickensian tradition and may be said to mark the turning point in his career. As its full title indicates, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son*, the novel is a study of the influence of the values of a business society on the personal fortunes of the members of the Dombey family and those with whom they come in contact. It takes a somber view of England at midcentury, and its mournful tone becomes characteristic of Dickens's novels for the rest of his life.

Dickens's next novel, *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), combined broad social perspective with an effort to take stock of himself at the midpoint of his literary career. This autobiographical novel fictionalized elements of Dickens's childhood degradation, pursuit of a journalistic and literary vocation, and love life. It shows the first comprehensive record of the typical course of a young man's life in Victorian England.

In 1850 Dickens began to edit a new periodical, *Household Words*. His editorials and articles for this magazine cover the entire span of English politics, social institutions, and family life. The weekly magazine was a great success and ran to 1859, when Dickens began to conduct a new weekly, *All the Year Round*. He published some of his major novels in both these periodicals.

“Dark” Novels

In 1851 Dickens was stricken by the death of his father and one of his daughters within two weeks. Partly in response to these losses, he embarked on a series of works that have come to be called his “dark” novels. The first of these, *Bleak House* (1852–1853), has perhaps the most complicated plot of any English novel, but the narrative twists create a sense of the interrelationship of all seg-

ments of English society. The novel offers a humbling lesson about social snobbery and personal selfishness.

Dickens's next novel is even more didactic in its criticism of selfishness. *Hard Times* (1854) was written specifically to challenge the common view that practicality and facts were of greater importance and value than feelings and persons. In his indignation at callousness in business and public educational systems, Dickens laid part of the charge for the heartlessness of Englishmen at the door of the utilitarian philosophy then much in vogue. This philosophy held that the moral worth of an action is defined by how it contributes to overall usefulness. But the lasting applicability of the novel lies in its intensely focused picture of an English industrial town in the heyday of capitalist expansion and in its keen view of the limitations of both employers and reformers.

The somber tone of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* reflected the harsh social reality of an England infatuated with industrial progress at any price. Ironically, many of the societal ills that Dickens wrote about in such novels had already been righted by the time of their publication.

Some claim *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) is Dickens's greatest novel. In it he provides the same range of social observation he had developed in previous major works, but he creates two striking symbols as well. Dickens sums up the condition of England both specifically in the symbol of the debtors' prison, in which the heroine's father is entombed, and also generally in the many forms of personal servitude and confinement that are exhibited in the course of the plot. Second, Dickens raises to symbolic stature the child as innocent sufferer of the world's abuses. By making his heroine not a child but a childlike figure of Christian loving kindness, Dickens poses the central question of his work—the conflict between the world's harshness and human values.

The year 1857 saw the beginnings of a personal crisis for Dickens when he fell in love with an actress named Ellen Ternan. He separated from his wife the following year, after many years of marital incompatibility. In this period Dickens also began to give much of his time and energy to public readings from his novels, which became even more popular than his lectures on topical questions.

Later Works

In 1859 Dickens published *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel of the French Revolution. While below the standard of the long and comprehensive “dark” novels, it evokes the historical period and tells of a surprisingly modern hero's self-sacrifice. Besides publishing this novel in the newly founded *All the Year Round*, Dickens also published seventeen articles, which appeared in 1860 as the book *The Uncommercial Traveller*.

Dickens's next novel, *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), tells the story of a young man's moral development in the course of his life—from childhood in the provinces to gentleman's status in London. Not an

autobiographical novel like *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* belongs to the type of fiction called, in German, *Bildungsroman* (the novel of someone's education or formation by experience).

The next work in the Dickens canon took an unusual three years to write, but in 1864–1865 Dickens published *Our Mutual Friend*. In it, the novelist thoroughly and devastatingly presents the vision of English society in all its classes and institutions.

In the closing years of his life, Dickens worsened his declining health by giving numerous readings. He never fully recovered from an 1865 railroad accident, but insisted on traveling throughout the British Isles and America to read before wildly enthusiastic audiences. He broke down in 1869 and gave a final series of readings in London in the following year. He also began *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* but died in 1870, leaving it unfinished. His burial in Westminster Abbey was an occasion of national mourning. His tombstone reads: "He was a sympathiser with the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."

Works in Literary Context

Charles Dickens's death on June 9, 1870, reverberated across the Atlantic, causing the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to say that he had never known "an author's death to cause such general mourning." English novelist Thomas Carlyle wrote: "It is an event world-wide, a *unique* of talents suddenly extinct." And the day after his death, the newspaper Dickens once edited, the London *Daily News*, reported that Dickens had been "emphatically the novelist of his age. In his pictures of contemporary life posterity will read, more clearly than in contemporary records, the character of nineteenth century life."

Oliver Twist With *Oliver Twist*, Dickens chose to write a kind of novel that was already highly popular, the so-called Newgate novel, named after London's well-known Newgate prison. Two previous stories of crime and punishment had been Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830) and Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* (1834). Inevitably, Dickens did lose some readers who found the criminal aspect to be "painful and revolting," as one said. A different kind of reader was put off by the prominence of the social criticism in the opening chapters, in which Dickens exposes the cruel inadequacies of workhouse life as organized by the New Poor Law of 1834. The law made the workhouses, where people who could not support themselves were forced to live and work, essentially prisons with degrading conditions, and mandated the separation of families upon entering.

Bleak House This work boils with discontents sometimes expressed in fiery abuse, discontents that are also prominent in other Dickens novels of the 1850s and 1860s. What is strange about the chronology is that the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dickens's famous contemporaries include:

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910): Born in Italy, this Englishwoman was a nursing pioneer who headed a volunteer nursing staff during the Crimean War and worked for more sanitary living conditions. She was awarded the Order of Merit in 1907.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): American writer, humorist, and satirist.

Louis Daguerre (1787–1851): French artist who invented an early form of photography, the daguerrotype.

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850): French novelist and playwright. He is regarded as one of the founders of the realist school of literature.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Russian novelist and philosopher. He is one of the masters of realist fiction.

Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898): Prime minister of Prussia and later chancellor of the German empire. As chancellor, von Bismarck promoted anti-Catholic and anti-Polish sentiment but also pushed through a federal old-age pension and an accident insurance plan.

1850s and 1860s, economically and in other areas, were not a dark period, but rather decades when the English seemed at last to have solved some of the big problems that had looked to be insoluble in the 1830s and 1840s.

Works in Critical Context

Dickens preferred to write as an angry outsider, critical of the shortcomings of mid-Victorian values. Predictably, his "dark period" novels cost him some readers who felt that the attacks on institutions were misguided, unfair, and finally, tiresome. Obviously, not all of Dickens's contemporaries felt the same, for among the reading public, from *Bleak House* onward, his novels fared well, as they have continued to do. In fact, these are the novels that have been chiefly responsible for the remarkable "Dickens boom," as author Hillis Miller called it, of the 1960s and after.

Oliver Twist

The English critic and writer Angus Wilson noted that "perhaps more than any other," *Oliver Twist* "has a combination of sensationalism and sentiment that fixes it as one of the masterpieces of pop art." Critics of the day, such as that at the *Quarterly Review*, were quick to point out that Dickens dealt in hyperbole: "*Oliver Twist* is directed against the poor-law and workhouse system, and in our opinion with much unfairness. The abuses which [Dickens] ridicules are not only exaggerated, but

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Themes of social injustice usually result from the author's own experiences or observations and most often reflect the author's dissatisfaction with the way a certain class or group is treated. Here are some works that deal with issues of social injustice.

Nickel and Dimed (2001), a nonfiction book by Barbara Ehrenreich. This memoir provides an account of the author's attempt to live off minimum-wage earnings in various U.S. states in 1998.

The Kingdom of God Is Within You (1894), a nonfiction work by Leo Tolstoy. This work by the Russian novelist argues that nonviolence is the only answer to oppression. It was a major influence on the thinking of Indian activist Mohandas Gandhi.

To Sir, with Love (1959), a novel by E. R. Braithwaite. This semiautobiographical novel tells of a black teacher from Guyana and his working-class white students in a poor neighborhood of London.

Black Beauty (1877), a novel by Anna Sewell. This novel exposes the hardship and mistreatment during the life of a horse in Victorian England.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2000), by J. K. Rowling. In the fourth installment in the Harry Potter series, Hermione Granger takes up the cause of rights for the oppressed house-elves, forming the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare, to the dismay of her friends.

in nineteen cases out of twenty do not exist at all." Jack Lindsay in *Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study* wrote that "the last word . . . must be given to Dickens's power to draw characters in a method of intense poetic simplification, which makes them simultaneously social emblems, emotional symbols, and visually precise individuals." The book is also one of the more enduring classics of the Dickens canon, immortalized both by its 1948 film adaptation and the 1968 musical comedy *Oliver!*.

Great Expectations

Many Victorian readers welcomed this novel for its humor after the "dark period" novels. But most critical discussions since 1950 argue that the Victorians were misled by some of its great comic scenes and also by Pip's career. Unlike the Victorians, modern critics see *Great Expectations* as a brilliant study of guilt, another very sad book—another "dark period" novel, that is. Dickens, author Philip Hobsbaum noted, "warns us to put no trust in the surface of illusions or class and caste. Our basic personality is shaped in youth and can never change. . . . Every hope of altering his condition that Pip, the central character, ever entertained is smashed over his head."

Responses to Literature

1. The idea of childhood as a formative period is relatively modern. In the Victorian era and before, children were thought of as mini versions of adults and were expected to behave as such. Do you think that the relative freedom you have as a teenager helps you develop your strengths and sense of self, or does it encourage irresponsible behavior?
2. Using the Internet and library sources, research utilitarianism. On what basis do you think actions should be judged? Is the good of society more important than the happiness of specific individuals?
3. Dickens was deeply ashamed of his father's time in debtor's prison, but transformed it through his art. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the concept of "psychological resilience," the ability to recover from difficult experiences. Write an essay outlining how a person can become more resilient, using specific examples of situations that you may have experienced yourself.
4. The Victorians believed that owing money and being unable to pay it was a moral failing. Research the current mortgage crisis in the United States, and write an essay examining modern-day attitudes toward owing money. Is owing money still seen as a moral issue, or just bad luck? Where do you think personal responsibility lies?
5. Nike was one of several companies whose manufacturers were exposed as using child labor in 2001. Nike has since changed their labor practices. Research what changes they have made, and write an essay analyzing whether they have done enough to ensure that their products do not result from exploitative labor practices. Where should a company's standards lie—with the countries that produce its products, which might have laxer regulations, or with the country it is based in, which might result in more expensive products?

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Isak Dinesen

BORN: 1885, Rungsted, Denmark

DIED: 1962, Rungsted, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Seven Gothic Tales (1934)

Out of Africa (1937)

Winter's Tales (1942)

Babette's Feast (1950)

Overview

Isak Dinesen is best known for *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) and the autobiographical novel *Out of Africa* (1937). Acclaimed for her poetic prose style, complex characters, and intricate plots, Dinesen was concerned with such themes as the lives and values of aristocrats, the nature of fate and destiny, God and the supernatural, the artist, and the place of women in society. Hailed as a protofeminist by some critics, scorned as a colonialist by others, Dinesen is chiefly regarded as a masterly storyteller. Ernest Hemingway once remarked that the Nobel Prize in Literature he received in 1954 should have been awarded to her.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Tragedy Born Karen Christenze Dinesen on April 17, 1885, in Rungsted, Denmark, Dinesen led a happy childhood until tragedy shattered her comfortable existence. In 1895 her father, Wilhelm, hung himself. Dinesen had always been very close to her father, and his suicide was a shock. Dinesen later reflected: "It was as if a part of oneself had also died." Dinesen's brother



Isak Dinesen Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Thomas, with whom she remained close as an adult, later speculated that their father had suffered from syphilis, a disease that Dinesen herself would contract years later.

Literature for Fun Tutored at home by a series of governesses, Dinesen showed early artistic promise and as a teenager studied drawing, painting, and languages at a private school in France. In 1903 she was admitted into the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. There she developed her affinity for painting, an interest that would later be reflected in the rich descriptive style of her writing. Dinesen dropped out of the academy after several year's study and soon thereafter took up writing. Mario Krohn, an art historian Dinesen had met at the academy, read her work and encouraged her to take writing seriously. Krohn also arranged to have some of her stories read by Valdemar Vedel, editor of one of Denmark's most distinguished literary magazines, *Tilskueren*.

During these years Dinesen spent much of her time in the company of her upper-class relatives and soon found herself deeply but unhappily involved with her second cousin, Hans Blixen-Finecke. The failed love affair had a great impact on Dinesen. Extremely depressed, she left Denmark in 1910 to attend a new art school in Paris. When Mario Krohn visited Dinesen in Paris and asked her about her literary ambitions she answered that she wanted "all things in life more than to be a writer—travel, dancing,

living, the freedom to paint.” When she returned to her family estate at Rungstedlund several months later, Dinesen turned to writing as a pleasant diversion.

When Blixen-Finecke abandoned her for a fiancée eight years younger, Dinesen decided to marry Hans’s twin brother, Bror. Bror is said to have been competitive, the kind of man who would enjoy winning his brother’s sweetheart. This rash determination to reach the object of her desire through a substitute would later be represented allegorically in many of Dinesen’s stories, which deal with the theme of vicarious achievement.

Africa and Syphilis With the encouragement of relatives, Dinesen and Bror embarked on a grand plan to start a pioneer coffee farm in East Africa. Little is known about their courtship, except that Bror later gave Dinesen credit for the idea of going to Africa. They were married in 1914 in Mombasa, on the coast of British East Africa. They set up housekeeping on seven hundred acres of woodland, twelve miles southwest of Nairobi. The farm lay at an elevation of sixty-two hundred feet, near the Ngong Hills, a range of low mountains forming a barrier against the Rift Valley. Only a year after her marriage, sometime in the early months of 1915, Dinesen learned she had contracted syphilis, a venereal disease. Later she told her family that her husband had given her the illness; he had evidently been unfaithful to her. The couple separated for a time after this incident.

Her letters suggest that she made a suicide attempt in February of that year. Several weeks later she turned up in Paris, looking for a specialist in venereal diseases. She eventually made her way through war-torn Europe back to Denmark, where a venereologist found her to be suffering from syphilis and poisoning from the treatment (mercury tablets, an earlier form of syphilis treatment) given to her in Nairobi. Through a series of injections of intravenous arsenic Dinesen grew better. Reexaminations in 1919 and 1925 revealed no further evidence of syphilis; however, despite the doctor’s assurances, Dinesen continued to believe she would never recover from the illness. Syphilis appears time and again in Dinesen’s writings and features prominently in the popular myth that gathered around her after she rose to literary prominence. She could not escape the irony that she had been victimized by the same illness that had led to her father’s suicide. She spent much of her later life developing a philosophy to cope with the implications of the diagnosis. In 1926 she wrote to her brother Thomas: “If it did not sound so beastly I might say that, the world being as it is, it was worth having syphilis in order to become a Baroness.” Dinesen was later proved right: her disease flared up again later in her life.

After spending most of 1915 and 1916 in Denmark, Dinesen reconciled with her husband. They returned to their African farm with a new bankroll provided by her relatives. A series of droughts precluded any profits from the large capital input. Bror was frequently absent from

home, chasing other investments. Toward the end of 1918 Dinesen found consolation in a new friendship, with Denys Finch Hatton, an Englishman recently returned from World War I. Shortly after the war ended, Dinesen separated permanently from Bror (they divorced in 1925). The immediate cause was not Finch Hatton, but Bror’s continuing infidelities. After Bror left, she protected herself from loneliness by writing stories. Several notebooks filled with outlines and jottings survive from her years in Africa; many of these stories were later revised and published in *Seven Gothic Tales*.

In 1924 Finch Hatton began staying in her house while working in Nairobi—a few months out of every year. She miscarried his child in 1922 and another in 1926. He was not interested in marriage. In 1928 he entertained his friend, Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward V until he abdicated and became Duke of Windsor) at her house—an event described in *Out of Africa*. He also bought an airplane and flew Dinesen over her farm, which she describes as her “most transporting pleasure” in Africa.

By 1929 a cascade of events had begun that would bring an end to Dinesen’s farming life. A loan promised by Finch Hatton never materialized. The collapse of major stock markets sent coffee and land prices spiraling downward. Locusts descended on the land, and drought exhausted Dinesen’s last hopes for recovery. Finally, she had to sell the farm to a developer in Nairobi. A few weeks later, on May 14, 1931, Finch Hatton died in an airplane crash. Dinesen looked on Africa for the last time that month and returned to her homeland for good.

Literature for Profit Once home at Rungstedlund, Dinesen began to write almost immediately, working in her father’s old office. Now, however, her motives were serious. “I could not see any kind of future before me. And I had no money; my dowry, so to say, had gone with the farm. I owed it to the people on whom I was dependent to try to make some kind of existence for myself. Those Gothic Tales began to demand to be written,” she later wrote in *Daguerreotypes, and Other Essays*. Two years later, at age forty-eight, Dinesen completed her first collection of stories, *Seven Gothic Tales*.

Although *Seven Gothic Tales* was written in English, Dinesen experienced some difficulty getting the book into print; few publishers were willing to bet on a debut work by an unknown Danish author. Several British publishers rejected the manuscript before it came across the desk of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a friend of Thomas Dinesen and member of the Book-of-the-Month Club selection committee. Impressed with the collection, Fisher sent it to publisher Robert Haas, who was equally impressed and released *Seven Gothic Tales* the following year.

An aura of mystery surrounded the book’s publication. When it offered *Seven Gothic Tales* as its April 1934 selection, the Book-of-the-Month Club newsletter stated simply, “No clue is available as to the pseudonymic

author.” Dinesen herself confused matters by preceding her maiden name with a man’s first name—Isak, Hebrew for “one who laughs.” Her true identity was not revealed until over fifty thousand copies of *Seven Gothic Tales* were in print. With this collection Dinesen began a long and rewarding relationship with American readers, as five of her books became Book-of-the-Month Club selections.

In spite of poor health and repeated hospitalizations, Dinesen continued to work on a book of memoirs titled *Out of Africa*. Considered by many to be the greatest pastoral romance of the twentieth century, *Out of Africa* enjoyed immediate and lasting critical acclaim, particularly from British and American critics. The book became a hit movie in 1985 and won seven Academy Awards.

Winter’s Tales and Last Tales In 1940 Dinesen was commissioned by the Copenhagen daily newspaper *Politiken* to spend a month in Berlin, a month in Paris, and a month in London and to write a series of articles about each city. Although the advent of World War II caused the cancellations of the Paris and London visits, Dinesen’s recollections of Hitler’s Germany were later compiled in the posthumous collection *Daguerreotypes, and Other Essays*. About this time Dinesen also began work on her second set of stories, although completion of the volume was delayed by complications arising from tertiary syphilis, a late stage of the disease. Dinesen eventually finished this second collection, and, in 1942, *Winter’s Tales*, a book that derives its title from one of Shakespeare’s plays, was published in the United States, England, and Denmark.

Winter’s Tales, along with *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Out of Africa*, are generally considered to be Dinesen’s masterpieces. Between their publication and the 1957 publication of *Last Tales*, there was a fifteen-year hiatus during which she published only one book: *The Angelic Avengers*, a thriller novel released in 1946 under the pseudonym of Pierre Andrezel. Dinesen was never proud of *The Angelic Avengers* and for many years refused to acknowledge herself as the book’s author. Even after such acknowledgment, Dinesen criticized the book, claiming that she wrote it solely for her own amusement as a diversion from the grim realities of Nazi-occupied Denmark.

Although she suffered from chronic spinal syphilis and emaciation, Dinesen continued to lecture and give interviews. She became a founding member of the Danish Academy in 1960 and died in Rungsted in 1962.

Works in Literary Context

Gothic Decadence In *Seven Gothic Tales* Dinesen introduced stylistic and thematic motifs that are to be found throughout much of her subsequent work. She derived these motifs largely from two nineteenth-century literary movements—the Gothic and the Decadent. As in the novels written in these genres, Dinesen’s tales are

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dinesen’s famous contemporaries include:

Howard Hughes (1905–1976): One of the world’s richest men, Hughes initially became famous for his work as an aviator and film producer, as well as his glamorous playboy lifestyle, but went on to become an infamous recluse and eccentric, eventually cutting himself off from the outside world altogether.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt was elected to four terms, serving from 1933 to 1945. His presidency spanned two of America’s darkest hours, the Great Depression and World War II, and his policies and leadership are widely credited by historians with successfully steering the country through both events.

Wallis Simpson (1895–1986): An American socialite, Simpson was divorced from one husband and in the process of divorcing another when she began a relationship in 1934 with Edward, Prince of Wales, causing a scandal. By 1936, with Edward crowned king of England, his plans to marry Simpson led to a constitutional crisis, and Edward abdicated rather than end his relationship. After Edward’s abdication, Simpson continued to stir controversy thanks to rumors that she was a Nazi sympathizer.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973): An Oxford professor and academic specializing in Anglo-Saxon studies, Tolkien was also interested in mythology and fantasy. To this end he began imagining a mythical world incorporating elements of ancient Saxon folklore and his own invented languages. The resulting works, notably *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, were directly responsible for popularizing high fantasy as a literary genre.

often characterized by an emphasis on the emotional and spiritual, a nostalgia for the glory of past ages, a predilection for exotic characters, and an overriding sense of mystery, horror, and the supernatural. Eric O. Johansson noted in *The World of Isak Dinesen* that “the spinechilling tale of terror, with its persecuted women, its ghosts, and its mysterious convents and castles, as well as the cruel tale, with its atmosphere of perversity and artificiality, have served as sources of inspiration for Dinesen.”

Interdependence *Seven Gothic Tales* also introduces Dinesen’s preoccupation with the principle of interdependence, which she further develops in later works. In *Seven Gothic Tales* there are interrelationships among individual stories in the volume as well as the existence of stories within stories. Comparing such constructions to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works that examine the theme of destiny, and characters' struggles against it, include:

- The Golden Compass* (1995), a novel by Philip Pullman. The first book in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, this work of fantasy examines destiny, and the struggle to eliminate it in favor of free will, as a central theme.
- Silas Marner* (1861), a novel by George Eliot. A central theme of this tale of love and redemption is the just reward and punishment of characters according to their place in a strictly delineated moralistic order.
- Oedipus the King* (429 BCE), a play by Sophocles. Perhaps the archetypal tale of a character attempting to alter his destiny—and in so doing fulfilling his preordained fate—this classic Greek drama tells the story of a man prophesied to murder his father and marry his mother, which is exactly what he ends up doing without realizing it.

“a complex kaleidoscope,” Elizabeth Ely Fuller wrote in the *New Boston Review* that “each character and each event works as a little bit of mirror reflecting another character or event, and then turning slightly to catch some other reflection. To reinforce this overall plot structure, Dinesen uses mirror images and similes repeatedly as the characters muse on their own nature and on their relation to others. To any one of them, the story makes no sense, but taken as a whole, the stories, like a piece of music or a minuet, form a complete pattern of movement.” The principle of interdependence works on a thematic level in *Seven Gothic Tales* as well, as such disparate concepts as good and evil, comedy and tragedy, and art and life are intricately linked.

Destiny Destiny, more specifically one's control over it, is one of Dinesen's major themes. In her view, such a coming to terms involves an acceptance of one's fate as determined by God. “Dinesen's tales, like the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, proclaim the belief in the all but magic power of the story to provide man with a new vision and a renewed faith in life,” Johannesson wrote. “Her figures are often Hamlet figures, melancholy men and women who wait for fate to lend them a helping hand, who wait for the storyteller to provide them with a destiny by placing them in a story.”

Works in Critical Context

Dinesen's writings have been widely praised and enthusiastically received. Critics applaud her prose style, her facility with complicated plots and characters, and her

“natural” gift for storytelling. While many scholars have claimed that her picture of Africa in *Out of Africa* is romanticized, they note that the story is engaging and well-structured, and presents a detailed picture of life among British expatriates.

Out of Africa In a *Chicago Tribune* review, Richard Stern called the work “perhaps the finest book ever written about Africa,” claiming that “it casts over landscape, animals, and people the kind of transfixing spell [James Joyce's] ‘Ulysses’ casts over Dublin.” Katherine Woods, writing in the *New York Times*, praised the book's absence of “sentimentality” and “elaboration” and averred, “Like the Ngong hills—‘which are amongst the most beautiful in the world’—this writing is without redundancies, bared to its lines of strength and beauty.” Even those critics who found fault with the book's structure commended Dinesen's style. “The tale of increasing tragedy which fills the latter half of the book seems not quite so successful as her earlier chapters,” noted Hassoldt Davis in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. “But,” he added, “her book has a solid core of beauty in it, and a style as cadenced, constrained, and graceful as we have today.” Hudson Strode seemed to capture the sentiments of many critics when he wrote in *Books*: “The author casts enchantment over her landscape with the most casual phrases. . . . Backward, forward, she goes, a spark here, a flare there, until she has the landscape fairly lit up before you with all its inhabitants and customs in place. The result is a great naturalness.”

Winter's Tales With *Winter's Tales* Dinesen broke from the relative realism of *Out of Africa* and returned to the highly imaginative style that characterizes *Seven Gothic Tales*. “Suffused with vague aspirations toward some cloudy ideal,” noted Clifton Fadiman in the *New Yorker*, “with a longing for the impossible, with a brooding delight in magnificent and absurd gestures, with a quality of sleepwalking, they are as far removed from 1943 as anything can well be.” Some critics, however, found fault with Dinesen's unique writing style: In a *Commonweal* review J. E. Tobin claimed, “The characters lack even the vague shape of ghosts; the atmosphere is that of stale perfume; the writing, called quaint by some, is downright awkward.” The general consensus, however, was one of commendation for both the form and content of *Winter's Tales*. Struthers Brut, writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, summed up such a reaction when he maintained: “Often as you read the tales you wonder why you are so interested, so constantly excited, for the tales themselves, all of them symbolic, are not especially exciting in their plots, and the characters are frequently as remote as those in fairy tales, and a great deal of the time you are wandering in a fourth dimension where nothing is clear. But the final effect is unforgettable, just as the moments of reading are unforgettable.”

Responses to Literature

1. Dinesen's novella *Babette's Feast* became an award-winning film in 1986. Read the book and watch the film. The feast Babette creates is, indeed, spectacular. What does the feast mean for the various characters? What is different after the feast? Do you think all the effort that went into it was worthwhile?
2. What are Dinesen's views of love and marriage? Based on these, would you consider Dinesen a feminist?
3. Dinesen is often accused of classism. How does she represent both aristocrats and the lower classes in her novels and stories? For example, what is Dinesen's attitude toward her Kenyan servants and workers in *Out of Africa*? How does race influence her concept of class?
4. Discuss the theme of destiny in Dinesen's fiction and nonfiction. Can you relate her concept of destiny to a modern work of art with a similar theme?

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■ Charles Lutwidge Dodgson

SEE *Lewis Carroll*

☒ John Donne

BORN: 1572, London, England

DIED: 1631, London, England

NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

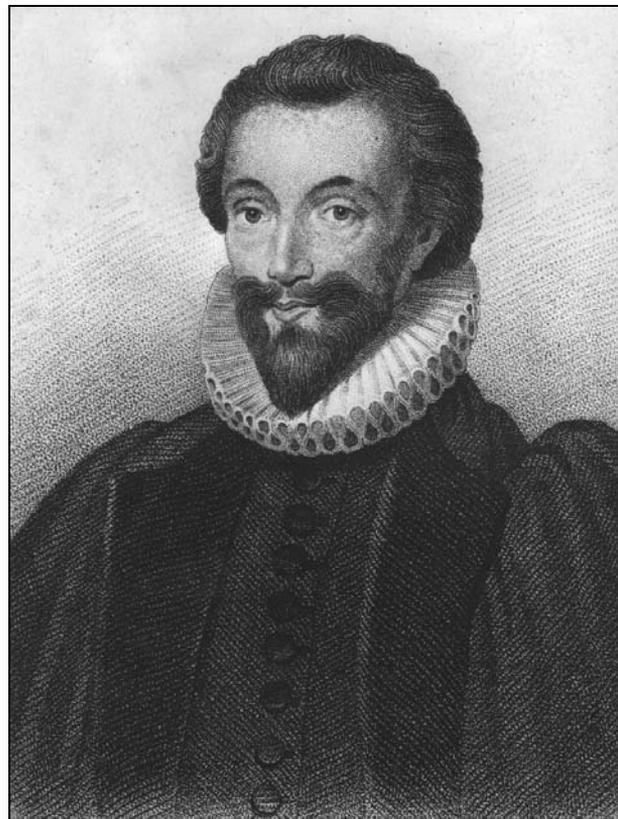
MAJOR WORKS:

Holy Sonnets (1609–1610)

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1611)

Deaths Duell (1631)

Essays in Divinity (1651)



John Donne Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

An accomplished master of both prose and poetry, John Donne was a controversial seventeenth-century English poet whose life and work are often perceived as a study in contrasts. His secular verses portray him as a man who celebrates the joys of physical union. His poems of divinity, however, reveal him to be a serious Christian humanist who contemplated mortality and humanity's submissiveness to God's will. Donne led the Metaphysical poetry movement and was a major influence on modernist writers of the first half of the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Catholic Upbringing John Donne was born in 1572 in London, England, into a devout Roman Catholic family. His father was a prosperous London merchant, and his mother was a relative of Catholic martyr Sir Thomas More. Donne was educated at home by Catholic tutors until age eleven, when he went to Hart Hall, Oxford. Donne attended Oxford University but he did not take a degree. Graduation required signing an oath of allegiance to the English monarch, which would have compromised his Catholic beliefs requiring him to swear

allegiance only to the pope. He entered law school at Lincoln's Inn in 1592.

Donne was born during the reign of Elizabeth I, an era now recognized as one of the most bountiful periods of art and literature in the history of England. The Elizabethan era was characterized by exploration in foreign lands and expansion of the British Empire, relative peace between Protestants and Catholics (though she decreed that all citizens were required to attend a Church of England Sunday service), and a flowering of English poetry and theater. Some writers who lived during this time were William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Milton, and Edmund Spenser.

Donne may not have been the first to imitate classical satire, but his pieces constitute the finest from the outpouring of satiric verse in the 1590s. Behind his satire lies a contempt for the shallowness and hypocrisy of contemporary life, particularly life at court. In "Satyre 3," having observed the activities and goals of his countrymen, Donne concludes that his compatriots, content with false achievement, have the "courage of straw." Nowhere in society does he find dedication to what he considers life's only meaningful quest: the quest for religious truth. This search took on new meaning for Donne when, in 1593, his youngest brother died in prison after being arrested for harboring a Catholic priest. It was around this time that Donne renounced his Catholic faith.

Sonnets and Sails It was also in the 1590s that Donne wrote many of his love poems, most of which are dramatic monologues. In these poems, Donne explores different conceptions of love, ranging from cynical realism to platonic idealism and presents the extremes of both physical and spiritual love in a favorable light. During these years, Donne also composed letters, elegies, wedding songs, and epigrams that were published after his death as *Songs and Sonets* (1635).

Donne volunteered to sail with the Earl of Essex to sack Cadiz in 1596 and with Sir Walter Raleigh to hunt Spanish treasure ships in the Azores in 1597. Donne celebrated these experiences in the poems "The Storm" and "The Calm." One of his companions on these voyages was the son of Sir Thomas Egerton, a judge and adviser to Queen Elizabeth. The young Egerton helped Donne gain employment as his father's secretary.

Marriage and Jail In December 1601, when he was nearly thirty, Donne eloped with Anne More, Egerton's seventeen-year-old niece. He severely underestimated the reaction and influence of his wife's father, Sir George More, who was a member of Parliament and a favorite of the queen. More was enraged not only because Donne had obtained his daughter in an underhanded way, but also because Donne had an unsavory reputation, and his family was identified with the Catholic underground. More had Donne thrown into jail, and he destroyed Donne's career by forcing Egerton to dismiss him. Released from prison in 1602, Donne had little chance

of obtaining gainful employment. He spent the next thirteen years in poverty, desperately seeking patronage to support his wife and rapidly growing family. (Anne Donne died while giving birth to the couple's twelfth child in 1617.)

The Church of England After embracing the Church of England—the only church officially recognized by King James I and his wealthy supporters—Donne gained the patronage of Sir Thomas Morton, a prominent member of the Protestant clergy, who hired him to write anti-Catholic pamphlets. *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), Donne's first published guide, was written to persuade English Catholics to renounce their allegiance to Rome and instead take the oath of allegiance to the British crown. This work captured the attention of King James I. The anti-Jesuit polemic *Ignatius His Conclave* followed in 1611. Donne then wrote *Biathanatos*, a treatise defending suicide, for which Donne admitted a "sickley inclination." (The subject matter of this poem made it unsuitable for publication at the time; it was not published until 1646.)

The Anniversaries "An Anatomie of the World" and "Of the Progres of the Soule," together known as the *Anniversaries* (1611), were poems composed for Sir Robert Drury on the first two anniversaries of his fifteen-year-old daughter's death. These poems earned Donne the patronage of Drury, who took the poet to France in 1611 on a diplomatic mission. It was during this time in France that Donne, missing Anne, wrote "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1611).

The Priesthood Upon his return to England, Donne was increasingly pressured by King James to become a priest in the Church of England. Despite his reluctance, the former Catholic was ordained an Anglican priest in 1615. For some time, he wrote no poetry but focused on his new duties, writing and delivering sermons in a style that impressed many members of the royal court. Donne's mastery of prose is directly linked to his evolution into a great preacher. His unique blend of verbal command, emotional and psychological insight, expansive knowledge, and imaginative range set him apart from his clerical peers. In 1621 he was appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, where he soon began attracting large crowds with his brilliant oratory.

When he suffered an attack of spotted fever in 1623, Donne believed that he was dying. This attack prompted him to write *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in My Sickness*, a collection of somber meditations that includes the prose work "No Man Is an Island" and the poems "Hymn to God the Father" and "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness." Despite his fears, Donne escaped death on this occasion, but such would not be the case a few years later. During Lent in 1631, Donne delivered his last sermon, "Deaths Duell." He died on March 31, 1631.

Works in Literary Context

Metaphysical Poetry Reacting against the traditions of Elizabethan love poetry, Donne and other Metaphysical poets shunned classical or romantic allusions, attempting instead to portray the complexities and uncertainties of everyday life. Metaphysical poetry is characterized by complex, witty, and far-fetched sudden—even jarring—paradoxes and contrasts; strong imagery that combines the ornate with the mundane; and contemplations of the natural world’s unity with the divine. A metaphysical conceit is an extended metaphor or simile in which the poet draws an ingenious comparison between two very unlike objects.

Peggy Nightingale found “A Valediction” to be a good example of the elements found in Donne’s style: “An expression of intense feeling carried by a series of clever and witty comparisons; the speaking voice of the poem addresses an imagined listener directly; and generally that voice employs a fairly natural syntax, frequently settling for half-rhymes.” “A Valediction” ends with one of Donne’s most famous Metaphysical conceits: The lover compares their souls to the feet of a drawing compass, parting and then coming together again.

“Holy Sonnet 14” is also characteristic of metaphysical poetry, showing wit, energy, and psychological drama. However, this sonnet in particular goes beyond those qualities in its outrageous daring. “Holy Sonnet 14” addresses God in blatantly sexual terms—as the bridegroom of the soul. Highly dramatic, the poem begins with both an angry demand that God remake the speaker and a complaint that God has so far not been using all his force to eliminate the speaker’s sinfulness. Proclaiming deep love and desire for God, the speaker resorts to tenderness and pleading and confesses to being “betrothed” to God’s enemy and, therefore, in need of rescue. The speaker then prays urgently for such release in clearly sexual terms, using sexual love as a metaphor for spiritual love amidst several paradoxes that shows the power of God, who resolves all paradoxes.

Donne apparently loved the intellectual challenges of paradox, one of the key characteristics of metaphysical poetry. He constructs “Holy Sonnet 10” around one of the central paradoxes of Christianity: that Christ’s sacrifice will ultimately mean the death of Death. Systematically, the poem instructs Death to give up its pride, since it will ultimately be defeated. Further, even though Death has power, its power is severely limited. Death unknowingly does God’s work, since only through Death can humanity achieve the eternal life God promises.

Works in Critical Context

Once considered the story of an abrupt transformation from worldly audacity to Christian conformity, Donne’s life and career are today seen in terms of an artistically sensitive man’s spiritual growth in a lifelong search for meaning and wholeness. Undeniably, there was the younger Donne who wrote the lighthearted *Songs and*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Donne’s famous contemporaries include:

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English Renaissance playwright and poet, Jonson is known for his lyric poems and satirical plays.

Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603): During her reign, the Queen reestablished Protestantism (the Church of England) as England’s official religion.

Henry Hudson (1560–1611): Hudson, an English explorer, discovered present-day Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay, and the Hudson River.

William Laud (1573–1645): Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged King Charles I to believe in a “divine right” to rule (which suggested the monarchy was accountable only to God, not to the people).

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643): An English Puritan dissenter, Hutchinson immigrated to the New World, where she was one of the first settlers of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687): This Dutch poet and composer was one of the major intellectuals of the Dutch Golden Age.

Sonets, the Donne of middle years who wrote to please his patrons and gain favor with influential readers, and the older Donne concerned with the meaning of sanctity.

Criticism Through the Years The critical history of Donne’s works is, noted A. J. Smith, “the most remarkable of any major writer in English; no other body of great poetry has fallen so far from favor for so long and been generally condemned as inept and crude.” The first collection of Donne’s poetry was not published until two years after the author’s death. Entitled *Poems* (1633), this collection was prefaced with elegies by contemporaries of Donne, who represented one side of early criticism of Donne’s poetry—those who honored Donne as a master. Thomas Carew eloquently lamented the passing of “a King, that rul’d as hee thought fit / the universall Monarchy of wit.”

A different view was first voiced by Ben Jonson in his famous recorded conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden in 1618 or 1619. While praising Donne’s poetry, Jonson also faulted it for its profanity and innovative meter. He disparaged the *Anniversaries* as obsequious. Jonson’s criticisms were adopted by critics of Donne’s poetry for nearly next two centuries. In “A Discourse on the Original and Progress of Poetry” (1693), John Dryden used the term “metaphysical” for the first time to describe Donne’s poetry, characterizing Donne as more a wit than a poet.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Donne is famous for his love poems. Here are some other works of poetry that address love in a variety of ways:

“Ode to Aphrodite” (c. 600 BCE), a poem by Sappho. This poem is a plea to the goddess Aphrodite to make Sappho’s beloved return her passion.

Il Canzoniere (1327), a poetry collection by Petrarch. This collection of 366 poems was written about Laura, the Italian poet’s object of unrequited love; the first section is devoted to Laura in life, and the second is to Laura in death.

Divan (1368), a collection of poetry by Hafiz. Hafiz was a Persian poet who creates an ambivalent lyrical world of love in which readers can sense both love of God and passion for a romanticized person.

“Come as You Are” (1913), a poem by Rabindranath Tagore. This poem urges the beloved to hurry to him, even if her appearance is not perfect.

“Episode” (1968), a poem by Zbigniew Herbert. In this poem, the speaker mourns an argument with his beloved.

Over the next decades, scholars declared more negative criticism, with Samuel Johnson eventually writing a crushing critique of Donne’s poetry in his “Life of Cowley” (1779). In this famous essay, Johnson used the term “metaphysical” as a term of abuse to describe poets whose aim, he believed, was to show off their own cleverness and learning and to construct paradoxes so outlandish and pretentious as to be ludicrous, indecent, or both. Predominantly negative assessments of Donne’s poetry continued into the early nineteenth century.

The early nineteenth century saw growing interest in Donne’s poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Browning, and Thomas De Quincey were especially instrumental in focusing a favorable light on the works. Coleridge praised the power and vivacity of the poems; Browning publicly acknowledged Donne as a major influence; and De Quincey hailed Donne’s skill as a rhetorician. When Donne’s complete works were published in 1839, his sermons and devotions began to be discussed. Edmund Gosse’s *Life and Letters of Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul’s* (1899), the first biography of Donne since 1640, prepared the way for a definitive edition of the poems, which were published in 1912. Major literary figures reviewed these works at length, bolstering a period of popular and critical interest in Donne.

In 1921, T. S. Eliot wrote a major article, “The Metaphysical Poets,” in which he focused attention on Donne and the Metaphysicals as poets of stature who had

been to their age what the twentieth-century modernists were to theirs. Like the modernists, who were constructing complex, distanced poetry to reflect the spiritual vacuum at the center of modern life, Eliot argued, the Metaphysicals had written complex, emotionally charged celebrations of the joys, sorrows, and dilemmas of their own age, an age of both fleshliness and faith. Not all criticism of Donne’s work was favorable at this time, however. C. S. Lewis, for example, a literary traditionalist and longtime nemesis of Eliot, found Donne’s love poetry vastly overrated. From midcentury to the present day, Donne’s canon has been scrutinized according to the methods of various critical schools, with representatives of the New Critics, the deconstructionists, and others offering diverse interpretations of the works. Twentieth-century writers have used phrases from Donne’s poetry to adorn their own works in the form of epigrams and titles. A phrase from Donne’s best-known religious devotion was adopted by Ernest Hemingway as the title of his novel of the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

Holy Sonnets Donne’s best religious poems are found in *Holy Sonnets*, written during periods of meditation and concerned with the individual believer’s efforts at making peace with God. The line “What if this present were the world’s last night?” typifies the intense, personal, and desperate tone of these sonnets. Frank J. Warnke argued, “The *Holy Sonnets* are, to be blunt about it, not edifying from an orthodox Christian point of view.” He continued, “There is little hope in Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*, and not very much trust. What one encounters, rather, is naked fear: the speaker desperately wishes to go to Heaven and—even more markedly—to escape Hell. The concentration on the self is extreme, and the terrified eloquence of that self, unforgettable.”

Responses to Literature

1. In every culture, great works of literature, art, and architecture have been created to honor religion. However, religion has also been the cause of much warfare and bloodshed. In today’s world, do you think having an official religion for a country, as in Donne’s time, is a good idea? Would it bring people closer together or create divisions in society?
2. It can be difficult to live up to our family’s expectations of us. John Donne was descended from a famous Catholic martyr, but Donne eventually converted to Protestantism. For you, would having a famous relative—for example, in politics, art, literature, sports, science—make you more or less interested in that person’s world?
3. Look up the definition of “epigram.” Research examples of epigrams from Donne’s time to the present and take note of what these poems might have in common. Then, write an original epigram on

the topic of your choice. It should be at least five lines long.

4. Read some of Donne's love poetry, as well as some of the poems listed in "Common Human Experience." In your view, what makes an effective love poem? Should it praise only the beloved, or should it include some conflict? Write an essay arguing your point of view. Include examples from these works, as well as examples of contemporary song lyrics if you like.

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☒ José Donoso

BORN: 1924, Santiago, Chile

DIED: 1996, Santiago, Chile

NATIONALITY: Chilean

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

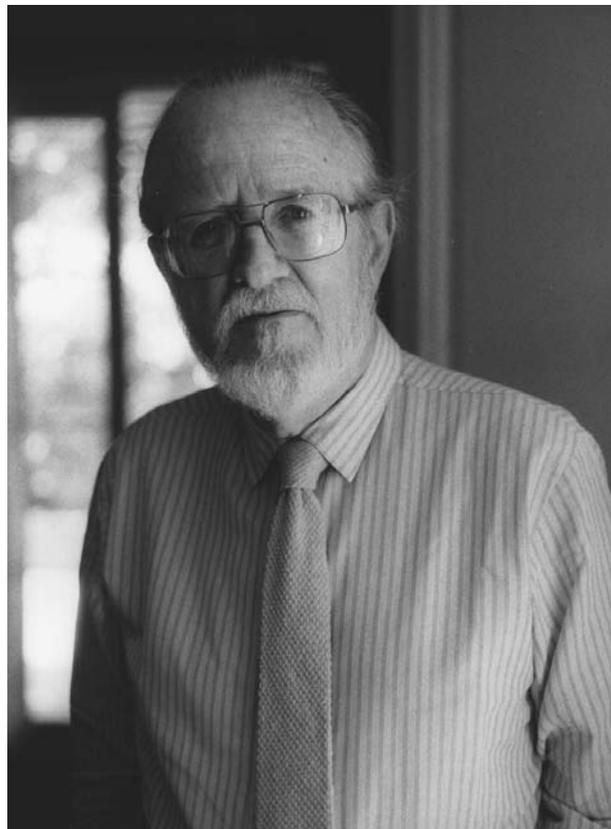
Summertime and Other Stories (1955)

Coronation (1957)

Hell Has No Limits (1966)

The Obscene Bird of Night (1970)

A House in the Country (1978)



José Donoso Donoso, Jose, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

José Donoso is the most prominent Chilean novelist of the twentieth century and one of a select group of Latin American writers who achieved international notoriety in the 1960s. This was the decade of the Latin American novel's modernization by cosmopolitan writers well versed in the most significant experiments of modernist fiction in Europe and the United States.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Rich Cultural Background José Donoso Yáñez was born in Santiago on October 5, 1924, into a family belonging to the professional middle class but with strong ties to Chilean aristocratic culture. His father, José Donoso, and both of his grandfathers were physicians, and his two brothers became lawyers. His mother was the former Alicia Yáñez. His genealogy includes politicians, historians, writers, and literary critics, and he himself holds a university degree, thus continuing a family tradition lasting four generations.

Though Donoso's parents were not themselves wealthy, his father in particular had a literary culture he shared with his son, who spent the first ten years of his schooling

in the Grange—a prestigious private school in Santiago—and who at seven years of age had a private English teacher at home. Donoso's school years were significant in ways not having to do with actually going to classes. In a 1973 article for *Review*, Donoso links his remembrance of that period of his life (1932–1942) to several themes that later were to play major roles in his fiction. Donoso emphasizes the many times he feigned stomach illness to play hooky and the way in which this deception, which fooled even his father, in time became a real ulcer, intimately linked to the creative process, either slowing or nourishing it. He remembers collapsing from a hemorrhage upon completing the manuscript of his first novel, *Coronation* (1957), and he recounts the emergency surgery performed during the long process of writing one of his later works, *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973), which actually includes a heightened version of the incident.

Donoso's autobiographical recollections also recount how in 1929 his family moved downtown, into a large house owned by three great-aunts “who were rich, bedridden, widowed, and ‘alone in the world’ although each was surrounded by her own court of relatives and servants.” The year 1929 was the year of Black Tuesday and the stock market crash in the United States and elsewhere around the world. The ensuing Great Depression, which contributed to hyperinflation in Germany and, ultimately, to the Second World War, also led to the rise of fascist regimes throughout much of Latin America. When in 1938 the family moved back to their earlier home, its garden was to become a major symbol for Donoso—not only of renewal and growth, but strongly linked to family sentiments and fears, especially in *The Garden Next Door* (1981).

Limited Early Recognition Donoso's first book, a collection of short stories titled *Summertime and Other Stories* (1955) was a vanity publication, published at his expense and with the collaboration of friends, family, and subscribers. The book nonetheless made an impression on the Chilean literary scene and won the 1956 Municipal Prize for Short Stories. The following year Donoso moved away from the bustle of the city and the workaday world and lived with a fisherman friend's family in Isla Negra, the fishing village in southern Chile popularized by Pablo Neruda, who had begun to use it as a retreat in the early 1950s. When *Coronation* was published in 1957, once again Donoso had to display creative energy and muster the support of family and friends to ensure distribution.

Mexico, the United States, and Spain In 1963 *Coronation* was selected by the Faulkner Foundation as the best Chilean novel published in the postwar period. Shortly afterward, in 1964, Donoso and his wife—María del Pilar Serrano, whom he had met in Buenos Aires and married in 1961—accepted an invitation by the Inter-American Foundation to participate in a writers' congress in Mexico. They planned to be gone for only a few weeks,

but they did not return to Chile until 1980. In Mexico, Donoso made a living writing literary criticism for *Always* and, more importantly, wrote his next two novels, *Hell Has No Limits* (1966)—written between December of 1964 and February of the following year—and *This Sunday* (1966). *Hell Has No Limits* was the first novel published by Donoso outside of Chile—though the book is still set in Donoso's native country—and *This Sunday* was his last novel to be originally published in his native country.

After leaving Mexico, Donoso divided his time for a while between the United States (where he taught writing at the University of Iowa and at Colorado State University) and Spain, where he eventually settled in Calaceite, in the Teruel region, until 1980. He spent the years between 1965 and 1969 trying to finish a project he had started in 1963, which was to become his greatest novel to date and one of the most recognized novels of the Latin American literary boom: *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973). One of the key elements of the book is the myth of the Imbunche, a creature taken from the folktales of the people of Chiloé Island. This island lies just off the coast of southern Chile, not far from where Donoso stayed in the 1950s.

After 1970 Donoso shifted gears in the direction of the postmodern novel, with *Sacred Families: Three Novellas* (1973). The trilogy may be considered a minor work, but Donoso's next novel, *A House in the Country* (1978), proved a major effort comparable in scope to *The Obscene Bird of Night*. In 1980 Donoso was to make his definitive return to Chile, writing in the meantime two vastly different novels—a brief, mock-erotic novel, *The Mysterious Disappearance of the Marchioness of Loria* (1981), and *The Garden Next Door* (1981), a somber and bitter semi-autobiographical narrative.

Father of the Modern Chilean Novel In 1986 Donoso published *Curfew*, a sober and disenchanted novel dealing with the contemporary Chilean politics Donoso witnessed firsthand. The dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet had left its mark on Donoso personally, and his response to the evils perpetrated by Pinochet's military junta earned him public recognition when Pinochet fell from power in 1990. That year, Donoso was awarded the Chilean Premio Nacional de Literatura. His break with nativism—the movement concerned with social conditions—and with the social novel of an earlier generation, shortly before he died six years later, powerfully ushered in the modern Chilean novel.

Works in Literary Context

Influences on Content and Style Donoso's earliest influences were childhood games that later played major roles in his fiction. For example, he remembers a fascination with dressing up and the games he and his brothers used to stage—until parental authority intervened and

brought them to a halt. This early display of costume and playacting is evoked in the later fiction and is a model for the narration process of Donoso's most important novels.

Donoso also looked back and saw that his experiences in school, and especially of organized sports, brought out in him an incapacity to belong to any group whatsoever: political, social, or literary. As he grew older, this outsider began to make the acquaintance of the hobos and prostitutes who made their living on the outskirts of the city. These characters populate some of Donoso's novels.

Other works by Donoso show influences of the social movements of the time. Donoso's portrayal of Andrés Abalos in *Coronation*, for instance, betrays the influence of the philosophy focused on existence: existentialism. Still other earlier works show the impact of the author's interest in the well-being of the cultures—the movement called nativism during the period in literature known as the modern era, or modernism. Here Donoso's style often functions as a sort of verbal mask for the workings of historical reality. Often the narrative offers a kind of coded rendering of contemporary Chilean history, complete with veiled references and actual speeches.

The Well-Being of Society Donoso's themes align with the literary movements in which he played a part: Some of his work, such as *Curfew* (1988), for example, expresses the effort to retrieve one's origins yet to create a new identity with the materials of one's history (memories and past experiences). This theme involves the human in particular and the nation as a whole, which the author calls on to take steps in favor of society's well-being and to not become mired in fantasy and cut off from present-day reality. *Curfew* and earlier works also highlight the despair of humans—whether on individual levels or on the collective level. There is an effort to believe in the promise of freedom from social codes, yet a feeling of the inescapability of some radical nothingness—of looming anarchy or lawlessness.

The Body as Symbol Figuratively, Donoso often used some form of the body to represent his themes. In *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973), the body of the author becomes a metaphoric equivalent for the body of the text. This body is one of voluntary action or ability and is involved in degrees of power—social, political, or economic. It reappears as the body of a house, a physical body, or part of a body of work (such as a painting), and runs through much of Donoso's fiction—whether emphasizing the body politic, the human body, or a body of people.

Works in Critical Context

From the publication of his first novel, *Coronation*, Donoso was embraced by intellectuals and critics throughout Chile and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Although his reputation was sometimes uneven—he was criticized by some for his sympathetic portrayal of prostitutes and homosexuals in *Hell Has No Limits*, for

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Donoso's famous contemporaries include:

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Mexican author whose best-selling works include *Old Gringo* and *Christopher Unborn*.

Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006): Chilean military leader who led a coup of the Chilean government and who served as the dictatorial president of Chile from 1973 until 1990.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Colombian author who achieved popularity during the Latin American boom and whose works *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* are among the best-known examples of magic realism.

John Updike (1932–): Award-winning novelist, essayist, and literary critic who is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): The thirty-seventh president of the United States, Nixon remains infamous for his criminality while in office, and is widely suspected of having supported dictator Augusto Pinochet's coup and deposing of Marxist Chilean president Salvador Allende.

example—and he spent many years in self-imposed exile, he was always considered one of the most important writers to ever emerge from Chile. Donoso dreaded simplicity and aimed to convey the complexities of society in his own often complex way, gaining criticism that revered his efforts: Walter Clemons of *Newsweek* exclaims, “He is an extraordinarily sophisticated writer in perfect control of time dissolves, contradictory voices, gritty realism and hallucinatory fugues.”

The Obscene Bird of Night When *The Obscene Bird of Night* was published in 1970, reviewers were both impressed and confounded. Wolfgang Luchtig, in *Books Abroad*, asks rhetorically, “How do you review a dream?” and John J. Hassett, writing for *Review*, argues that this is not “a novel simply to read, but one to experience in which we are continuously called upon to give the text some order by discovering its unities and its repetitions.” Robert Coover, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, praised the work as “a dense and energetic book, full of terrible risk-taking.” In the years since its publication, *The Obscene Bird of Night* has come to be viewed as one of Donoso's most important and masterful works.

Responses to Literature

1. In general terms, Donoso's nativism involved a concern for society's well-being. More specifically,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Donoso's ongoing focus on the social good and on principles of communal well-being was both striking and admirable. Here are a few works by writers who have also concerned themselves with the social welfare of people in communities:

The Birthday of the World (2003), a short-story collection by Ursula K. LeGuin. This collection explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are "God."

The Human Condition (1958), a nonfiction book by Hannah Arendt. This work, which is central to the writer's philosophy, concerns activities in realms most important to her—labor, work, and action—in the context of society, politics, and the public and private sectors.

Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998), a nonfiction book by Giorgio Agamben. This work is an exhaustive social study by the Italian philosopher of the how the "near-sacrificial" human functions politically.

The Polish Revolution (2002), a nonfiction book by Timothy Ash. In this factual narrative, the author tells of the 1980 Polish shipyard workers who defied the oppression of their communist rulers.

Sovereign Bones (2007), a book of short stories edited by Eric Gansworth. In this short-story collection, contributing Native American authors write on the imperative of keeping a homogenous identity.

dictionary definitions describe nativism as a kind of "policy of favoring native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants." Discuss how Donoso's many moves and experiences abroad contribute to his focus on natives versus immigrants. What is his attitude or thesis concerning this general topic, precisely? Support your argument with detailed analysis of one or more of Donoso's texts.

- Like many writers throughout history, Donoso wrote about his impressions of family. Consider Donoso's comments in *Sacred Families*. To what extent do you agree with his view of the family? What is the strongest argument in favor of the perspective he offers? Against that perspective?
- In Donoso's early works, such as *Coronation*, he was credited with offering a realistic portrayal of upper-class Chilean society. Find some examples in *Coronation* that describe upper-class life or characters. Based on these, how do you think Donoso viewed the upper class? Why?
- On encountering *The Obscene Bird of Night*, many readers are perplexed, even confounded. What two

to three aspects of the book do you find most difficult, challenging, or simply annoying? Why are these aspects challenging? In what ways do such difficulties rub up against you and ask you to revise your own perspectives? What does the fact that you find these things disturbing or irritating suggest about the expectations you bring to the text? Is there a way for you and Donoso to come to an agreement of sorts? If so, how? If not, why not?

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Fyodor Dostoevsky

BORN: 1821, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1881, St. Petersburg, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

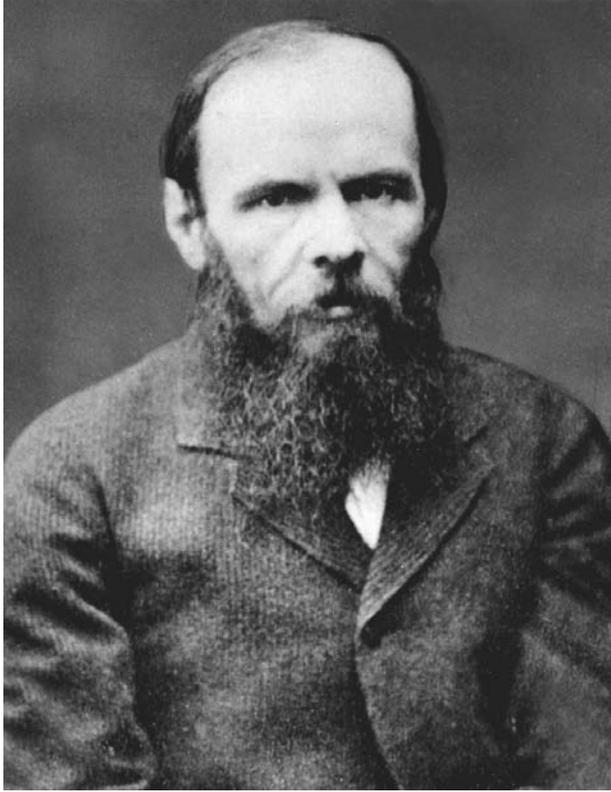
Notes from the Underground (1864)

Crime and Punishment (1866)

The Idiot (1869)

The Possessed (1872)

The Brothers Karamazov (1880)



Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky Russian novelist Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, photograph. © POPPERFOTO / Alamy.

Overview

Among European writers of the nineteenth century, Fyodor Dostoevsky is the preeminent novelist of modernity. In his masterworks *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), he explored the far-ranging moral, religious, psychological, social, political, and artistic ramifications of the breakdown of traditional structures of authority and belief. He chronicled the rise and fall of the modern secular individual and traced the totalitarian potential of the new ideologies of his time, including socialism. His personal and literary engagement with the ongoing political and social issues of his time makes his work particularly interesting from a historical perspective. However, Dostoevsky's work is much more than a window into the world of nineteenth-century Russia. Modern readers continue to find Dostoevsky's work compelling because of the way he examines, as no one had previously and few have since, the potential for violence and the abuse of power in all forms of human interaction. His perfectly drawn psychological portraits of common people in distress resonate with all readers who struggle to find meaning in the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Noble Family Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born on October 30, 1821, in the Moscow Mariinskii

Hospital, where his father, Mikhail Andreevich Dostoevsky, was a staff doctor. The second of seven children, he was closest to his older brother, Mikhail. Dostoevsky later wrote with warmth about his mother, Mariia Fedorovna, but wrote nearly nothing about his father and is reported to have said that his childhood was difficult and joyless. The Mariinskii Hospital served the indigent, so Dostoevsky was exposed at an early age to the results of urban poverty. The plight of the poor made a strong impression on the budding writer.

In 1828 Mikhail Andreevich Dostoevsky was granted a nobleman's rank, and shortly thereafter the family purchased an estate at Darovoe. In 1837 Dostoevsky's mother died, and in the same year Dostoevsky's father enrolled him in the Military Engineering Academy in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky's formal education before this time was limited to a boarding school in Moscow. An episode from his journey to St. Petersburg made an overwhelming impression on Dostoevsky. While traveling by coach, he saw a courier beat the coachman on the back of his neck with his fist and with every blow the coachman whipped the horses. Dostoevsky used this scene later in *Notes from Underground* (1864) and indirectly in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in Raskolnikov's dream of the peasant who beats his mare.

In addition to engineering, the training at the Military Engineering Academy focused on parade and drill. Dostoevsky was not a brilliant student. Dostoevsky's letters to his father from the Military Engineering Academy are mostly requests for money, but to his older brother, Mikhail, he wrote about his love for literature, especially the works of German author Friedrich Schiller and ancient Greek epic poet Homer. Dostoevsky compared Homer to Christ, arguing that in the *Iliad* Homer's vision with regard to the ancient world was similar to Christ's with regard to the new world. At the end of his life, in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), and his speech on Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, Dostoevsky returned to the idea of universal organization and harmony, carving out a special role both for himself and for Russia in achieving these ends.

Upon completing his training and receiving his officer's rank, Dostoevsky served for one year in the draftsman's section of the engineering department in St. Petersburg before retiring in 1844 in order, as he said, to devote himself to literature. In the same year his anonymous translation of French author Honoré de Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* appeared in print.

Father's Death In 1839 Dostoevsky's father died in mysterious circumstances, giving rise to a set of conflicting versions of his death. According to one account, Mikhail Andreevich was killed by his own peasants in revenge for his harsh treatment of them. The other, more likely version is that he died of a stroke. The death or absence of the father is a significant theme in Dostoevsky's work from his early fiction to his last novel. Ivan

Karamazov's line "Who does not desire the death of his father?" in *The Brothers Karamazov* has added fuel to psychoanalytic interpretations of Dostoevsky's epilepsy, which psychiatrist Sigmund Freud famously diagnosed as "hystero-epilepsy," a form of neurosis. According to this theory, Dostoevsky felt so guilty about his own desire for his father's death that he had to inflict on himself a form of punishment, which took the form of epileptic attacks. According to the account left by Dr. Stepan Dmitrievich Ianovsky, who treated Dostoevsky in the first part of his life, Dostoevsky did not experience severe attacks of epilepsy in the late 1830s, when his father died, but in the late 1840s.

Poverty in Russia In 1844 Dostoevsky had begun work on his first work of fiction, *Poor Folk* (1846). Dostoevsky later wrote to Mikhail that he had revised and refined the work and that he was pleased with its overall structure. It was published in 1846 to great critical acclaim.

In *Poor Folk*, an epistolary novel, Makar Devushkin, a timid and gentle clerk (his name suggests girlishness), cannot save Varvara from what he thinks is an unwanted marriage. In a letter written to his brother after the publication of the novel, Dostoevsky complained that the public "was used to seeing the author's face in his characters and could not conceive that Devushkin and not Dostoevsky was speaking." This problem was not limited to *Poor Folk*. Dostoevsky's readers continued to identify the author with the ideological positions taken by his characters and sometimes with their criminal acts.

Psychology and Urbanization Near the end of *Poor Folk*, Makar Devushkin remarks to himself that "everything has doubled" within him. Dostoevsky's next work, *The Double* carried on this theme. It was also published in 1846, but was not well received at the time. *The Double* tells the bizarre story of another little clerk, Iakov Petrovich Goliadkin. Goliadkin encounters his double in the form of Goliadkin Junior, an insolent and more daring version of himself. Goliadkin Junior insinuates himself into the hero's good graces, discovers his weaknesses, including his social ambition and resentment, and finally usurps his position entirely.

Characters driven to madness or near madness were a fixture of Dostoevsky's early "Petersburg" stories. Dostoevsky blamed the dehumanizing effects of the urban, bureaucratic Petersburg in part of the destruction of his characters' personalities. Dostoevsky continued to explore this "Petersburg" theme in such works as "The Landlady" (1847), "White Nights" (1848), "A Weak Heart" (1848), and *Netochka Nezvanova*. He never finished *Netochka Nezvanova*; he was arrested and imprisoned for anti-government political activity in 1849.

Near Death and Hard Labor Dostoevsky and other members of the reading circle of radical Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashevsky were arrested in 1849. A court

appointed by Czar Nicholas I in November of that year condemned Dostoevsky to death. In early December the death sentence was commuted, and in Dostoevsky's case the punishment was reduced first to eight years and then to four years of hard labor, to be followed by service in the army with a restoration of civil rights. On December 22, 1849, Dostoevsky and his fellow-prisoners were told, however, that they would be executed by firing squad. At the last moment, the execution was stopped, and the prisoners were informed of their real sentences. Mock executions were the norm when death sentences were commuted by the czar, but usually prisoners were informed in advance that the execution would be nothing more than a ceremony. What made this one unusual was that the prisoners did not know that their lives were to be spared. Czar Nicholas I wanted to make a great impression on the prisoners.

He succeeded. In subsequent works Dostoevsky wrote about the horror of certain death. In *The Idiot*, for example, Prince Myshkin describes how the prisoner greedily takes in his last impressions as he is being driven to the execution and counts the seconds as the guillotine blade falls.

Dostoevsky served four years in a hard labor stockade in Omsk, followed by six years of army service in Semipalatinsk. He wrote two novellas in Siberia, neither of which has received much critical acclaim. Nevertheless, all the experiences that flowed from Dostoevsky's arrest—his imprisonment in St. Petersburg, the mock execution, life in the stockade in Omsk, and army service afterward in Semipalatinsk—had a profound impact on his later writing.

Return to St. Petersburg In February of 1857 Dostoevsky married Mariia Dmitrievna Isaeva. Her husband, an alcoholic, had recently died, leaving her with a young son and without income. The marriage was, by all accounts, not congenial. The severity of Dostoevsky's epileptic attacks had increased in severity after his release from the labor stockade, and he used his illness as grounds to petition the czar for a swifter return to St. Petersburg. Alexander II had ascended the throne in 1855, and the usual expectations about amnesty were heightened by his reputation for gentleness. The restoration of Dostoevsky's rights, the freedom to retire from army service, permission to publish, and permission to return to the capital progressed very slowly. He was allowed to return to St. Petersburg in December of 1859, under the watch of the secret police.

Christianity and Aesthetics Dostoevsky's experience in prison and in Siberia led him to embrace Christianity. His intense study of the New Testament, the only book the prisoners were allowed to read, contributed to his rejection of his earlier antireligious political views and led him to the conviction that redemption is possible only through suffering and faith, a belief which informed his later work. Dostoevsky also stressed the morally uplifting

power of beauty and art, which he came to associate with Christianity.

House of the Dead, Dostoevsky's thinly fictionalized account of his experience in the Omsk fortress, takes the form of loosely strung together impressions, vignettes, and scenes from prison life, beginning with first impressions and ending with release from the "house of the dead." The narrator is the nobleman Gorianchikov, imprisoned for the murder of his wife. Dostoevsky later wrote that some readers believed he had committed Gorianchikov's crime. One of the most powerful scenes concerns the prisoners' bathhouse. The filth and steam, the "roaring" of the prisoners, on whose heat-reddened bodies the scars of endured floggings stand out, and the sound of their chains make Gorianchikov think that he has entered hell. He also remarks on the morally uplifting qualities of the prisoners' theater—a living proof of what Schiller called the "aesthetic education of mankind."

Rejection of Radicalism In 1863 Dostoevsky made a second trip to Europe, this time to pursue his love affair with Apollinaria Prokofevna Suslova, a writer whose life fit the literary model of the emancipated woman of the times. Mariia Dmitrievna, Dostoevsky's wife, died in 1864, the same year that he lost his brother Mikhail. It was in this atmosphere that Dostoevsky wrote *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866). In *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky satirizes contemporary social and political views by presenting a narrator whose "notes" reveal that his purportedly progressive beliefs lead only to sterility and inaction.

The protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, is a young radical by the name of Raskolnikov. The novel depicts the harrowing confrontation between his philosophical beliefs, which prompt him to commit a murder in an attempt to prove his supposed "superiority" and his inherent morality, which condemns his actions. In the novel, Dostoevsky first develops his theme of redemption through suffering.

Although he was unsuccessful with Suslova, she served as the prototype for Polina in *The Gambler* (1866), the novel that Dostoevsky completed in breathtaking speed by dictating it in twenty-six days to the stenographer Anna Grigorevna Snitkina, who became his second wife on February 15, 1867. In 1867, Dostoevsky fled to Europe with Anna to escape creditors. Although they were distressing due to financial and personal difficulties, Dostoevsky's years abroad were fruitful, for he completed one important novel and began another. *The Idiot* (1869), influenced by Hans Holbein's painting *Christ Taken from the Cross* and by Dostoevsky's opposition to the growing atheistic sentiment of the times, depicts the Christ-like protagonist's loss of innocence and his experience of sin.

Dostoevsky's profound conservatism, which marked his political thinking following his Siberian experience,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dostoevsky's famous contemporaries include:

Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852): Ukrainian writer considered one of the fathers of Russian literature.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): British naturalist most famous for formulating the theory of natural selection.

Karl Marx (1818–1883): philosopher, economist, and revolutionary.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): British monarch for sixty-three years.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Russian realist writer considered one of the world's leading authors.

Samuel Clemens (1835–1910): American writer also known as Mark Twain.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): French writer famous for his work of literary naturalism.

and especially his reaction against revolutionary socialism, provided the impetus for his great political novel *The Possessed* (1872). Based on a true event, in which a young revolutionary was murdered by his comrades, this novel provoked a storm of controversy for its harsh depiction of ruthless radicals. In his striking portrayal of Stavrogin, the novel's central character, Dostoevsky describes a man dominated by the life-denying forces of nihilism.

Crowning Achievement Dostoevsky's last work was *The Brothers Karamazov*, a family tragedy of epic proportions, which is viewed as one of the great novels of world literature. The novel recounts the murder of a father by one of his four sons. Dostoevsky envisioned this novel as the first of a series of works depicting "The Life of a Great Sinner," but early in 1881, a few months after completing *The Brothers Karamazov*, the writer died at his home in St. Petersburg.

To his contemporary readers, Dostoevsky appeared as a writer primarily interested in the terrible aspects of human existence. However, later critics have recognized that the novelist sought to plumb the depths of the psyche, in order to reveal the full range of the human experience, from the basest desires to the most elevated spiritual yearnings. Above all, he illustrated the universal human struggle to understand God and self. Dostoevsky was, as American author Katherine Mansfield wrote, a "being who loved, in spite of everything, adored life, even while he knew the dank, dark places."

Works in Literary Context

As a young man, Dostoevsky read widely and was especially fond of the works of Homer, German Romantic

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The question of whether criminals are always punished for their misdeeds has been the subject of much myth and fiction since the time of the ancient Greeks. According to Greek myth, the fearsome Furies, symbols of the conscience, would hound and torment wrongdoers into madness. Modern writers have been less sure of the power of the conscience to punish criminals. Here are a few works that examine “crime and punishment”:

Oedipus Rex (c. 429 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This play tells the story of the ill-fated Oedipus, who kills his father and marries his mother.

“The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. In this famous short story, a murderer is convinced he hears the still-beating heart of his victim.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), a novel by Oscar Wilde. A beautiful, but unscrupulous, young man allows his vices full reign in this novel. His sins catch up with him in an unusual way.

Match Point (2005), a film directed and written by Woody Allen. This film follows the life of a social-climbing tennis coach who turns to murder when his marriage to a socialite is threatened by his mistress’s pregnancy.

Friedrich Schiller, Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol, and Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin.

Existentialism All of Europe was in a state of quasi-revolution in the mid-nineteenth century. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*, which called on the working class to rise up against the bourgeois social order, was published in 1848. Similar radical social and political ideas circulated among young intellectuals in Russia, and Dostoevsky was heavily influenced by them. The radical philosophies he embraced are reflected in his early work, which is seen by some critics as an early instance of existentialism in literature. Existentialism is the term used to describe a philosophy that holds that there is no meaning in life other than what individuals create for themselves. This somewhat bleak perspective is associated with fiction that portrays characters coming to grips with reality and experiencing feelings of malaise, boredom, and alienation. Dostoevsky’s early fiction, particularly his “Petersburg” tales, exhibit strong existentialist traits in keeping with the anti-religious radical philosophy he espoused. His characters feel alienated from both society and themselves.

Dostoevsky moves away from his early existentialism in his later books. The transition can be seen in *Crime and Punishment*, in which the protagonist, Raskolnikov, puts his own radical philosophy into action and then must come to grips with the consequences.

Corruption and Redemption One of Dostoevsky’s dominant themes was the idea that modern urban life is corrupt, but that redemption is possible through suffering and atonement. This idea is central to *Crime and Punishment*. The protagonist, Raskolnikov, is corrupted by the extreme philosophies circulated among St. Petersburg’s intellectuals to the point that he commits a gruesome double murder. It is only in prison, where he must suffer and repent, that he finds a path to redemption through Christianity.

Emphasis on Drama and Dialog One of the aspects of Dostoevsky’s writing style that makes his books so dramatic and engaging is the strength of his dialog. More so than previous writers, Dostoevsky propelled his plots forward with the strength of multiple, fully independent and unique character voices. In this way, he moved away from a reliance on the “authorial voice” that characterized other fiction of the time.

Impact on Later Generations Dostoevsky is credited with the development of both existentialist literature and the creation of the “antihero”—a protagonist who often lacks laudable qualities. *Notes from the Underground* was particularly influential with such writers as Albert Camus, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Hermann Hesse. In Russian literature, the influence of *Notes from the Underground* can be traced in such writers as Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev, Fedor Kuz’mich Sologub, Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin, and Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev in the early part of the twentieth century, and in the period following the revolution, in such writers as Iurii Karlovich Olesha.

Dostoevsky also influenced “father of psychology” Sigmund Freud, who published his essay “Dostoevsky and Parricide” in 1928 as an introduction to a German edition of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky’s examination of the many influences on his characters’ psychology foreshadows the development of Freud’s own psychoanalytical method.

Works in Critical Context

Dostoevsky’s work was generally well received by critics during his lifetime. *Poor Folk* was published in 1846 to great critical acclaim. The writer Dmitri Grigorovich, who shared an apartment with Dostoevsky, presented the manuscript to the writer and critic Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov, who spent all night reading it and the next morning told the critic Vissarion Belinsky that a new Gogol had appeared. Belinsky said that Dostoevsky had produced the first “social novel” in Russia and had made the truth accessible even to the most unthinking reader. Belinsky was not as impressed with Dostoevsky’s next work, *The Double*, but later critics were intrigued by the philosophical and psychological theme of “double-ness” that Dostoevsky skillfully explored in his writing. Dmitrii Chizhevsky, in an article first published in 1928, was among the first critics to expound on the significance of

the double as a philosophical problem in Dostoevsky's works, including such later works as *The Possessed* (1872), *The Adolescent* (1875), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

Crime and Punishment Upon publication in 1866, *Crime and Punishment* was widely praised, primarily for the depth of its psychological analysis. In contrast, the radical critic Dmitrii Ivanovich Pisarev emphasized the depth of Dostoevsky's socioeconomic analysis, arguing that Raskolnikov was driven by the "struggle for existence." Russian author Ivan Turgenev and Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, a leading jurist, both praised the work. Some radical critics charged that Dostoevsky had misrepresented the younger generation and its ideas. The symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov read *Crime and Punishment* in a mythic-religious framework, comparing this and Dostoevsky's other works to ancient tragedy. According to Ivanov, Raskolnikov's guilt is the guilt of all humanity toward Mother Earth. In Ivanov's view, Raskolnikov acts in the role of the scapegoat, the substitute sacrificial victim. Twentieth-century author André Gide, whose own writing was influenced by *Crime and Punishment*, argues that Raskolnikov fails in his attempt to be more than ordinary, while another twentieth-century writer, Thomas Mann, called this work the greatest crime novel of all time.

Crime and Punishment had a profound effect on German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that Dostoevsky was "the only psychologist from whom he had anything to learn." The Russian philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev saw in Raskolnikov's crime the crisis of modern, rational humanism with its glorification of the individual.

One of most productive sources of Dostoevsky criticism in general and *Crime and Punishment* in particular has been psychoanalysis and other forms of scientific psychology. R. D. Laing and Karen Horney are among the many professional psychologists who use Raskolnikov and other Dostoevskian heroes as examples of psychological phenomena. Alfred Bem, a Russian scholar, wrote a series of sophisticated literary studies published in the 1930s that traced the structure of the id and guilt in *Crime and Punishment* and in Dostoevsky's early fiction in general. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, critic Mikhail Bakhtin also emphasizes the importance of Raskolnikov's consciousness, arguing that everything in the novel is "projected against him and dialogically reflected in him."

The Possessed *The Possessed* was received coolly by many contemporary readers, as those in favor of the student movements of the time accused Dostoevsky of slandering an entire generation as insane fanatics. The radical critic Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky gave sarcastic praise to Dostoevsky's "brilliant psychiatric talent" in the novel; in so doing he implied that Dostoev-

sky's own psychological state was somehow peculiar and extreme.

For many twentieth-century critics, *The Possessed* signals the end of the nineteenth-century realist tradition. As critic Edward Said remarks in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), text, time, and understanding fall out of sync in *The Possessed*. Normal genealogy is suspended; the family is shattered; and the events of the novel seem to overtake the control of their creator. In *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (1977), Michael Holquist argues that the division of Stavrogin's persona among all the other characters—for example, Shatov and Kirillov—signals the disruption of the coherent individual self upon which the realist novel usually depends. Instead of the story of the formation of a personality and the development of character, *The Possessed* is a revelation of the disintegration of personality. *The Possessed* thus provides a transition to new literary forms of the twentieth century: for example, the technique of fantastic realism and the supernatural and demonic motifs that dominate that novel are greatly beholden to *The Possessed*. J. M. Coetzee's 1994 novel *The Master of Petersburg* is loosely based on *The Possessed* and on episodes from Dostoevsky's life.

The Brothers Karamazov During its serial publication *The Brothers Karamazov* was reviewed extensively in the Russian press. Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontev protested the overly "rosy" Christianity of the elder Zosima, arguing that it distorted the principles of Russian Orthodoxy. In 1894 Vasily Rozanov published a study of Dostoevsky's works as a whole, focusing in particular on *The Brothers Karamazov*. Although Rozanov reserved special praise for Ivan's "Rebellion" and the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," he also saw great profundity in Zosima's belief that God had taken "seeds from the other world" and placed them on earth.

The perhaps overly simplistic question as to whether Dostoevsky sided with Ivan or Zosima has concerned critics. Albert Camus's *The Rebel* (1951) argued that Ivan's rebellion, based on reason alone, leads to insanity. Other critics see in Ivan's suffering a form of imitation of Christ and thus an unwitting refutation of his rejection of Christ. Robert L. Belknap has also shown how Dostoevsky refutes Ivan's claims by a series of ad hominem arguments. Sven Linner and Jostein Bortnes examine the religious dimensions of the novel, and Valentina Evgeneva Vetlovskaja has shown the significance of the "Life of Aleksei the Man of God" for the character of Alesha.

One of the open critical questions about *The Brothers Karamazov* has to do with the fate of Alesha and the possibility of a second installment of the novel. There is some evidence that Dostoevsky planned to write a second volume in which Alesha would become a revolutionary and commit a political crime. Not all critics accept that Dostoevsky planned to write a second installment.

Modern Critical Reception The study of Dostoevsky, both inside and outside Russia, has been shaped in important ways by his status in that country. In 1972 the massive thirty-volume edition of the complete works of Dostoevsky was undertaken by the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. This edition, with its extensive explanatory notes, bibliographical references, publication histories, draft editions, and variant versions, has been the crucial resource for generations of Dostoevsky scholars all over the world. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, aspects of Dostoevsky's work that were neglected have come to the foreground. These aspects include a closer examination of his politics, both his critique of socialism and his rapprochement with czarist circles, and the study of religious themes and motifs in his works.

In recent years, Dostoevsky scholars have taken advantage of a great variety of critical approaches opened up by feminism, ethnic studies, and the work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Emmanuel Levinas. At the same time, a new tendency has emerged, which emphasizes Dostoevsky's Christianity above all else. The publication of hard-to-find memoirs and new studies based on archival documents continues. An important source book that exemplifies this type of work is the three-volume chronicle of Dostoevsky's life based on his letters and other documents, edited by N. F. Budanova and G. M. Fridlender (1993–1995). In both Russia and the West, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has been established as a cornerstone of Dostoevsky criticism.

Responses to Literature

1. What role do the female characters in Dostoevsky's works play? Do you think they fall into easy categories like good and evil? Or are they fully flesh-out characters in their own rights?
2. Dostoevsky is often praised by critics for keeping his own "voice" out of his novels and giving his characters strong, distinct voices with which to speak for themselves. Do you agree with this assessment? As you read the works of Dostoevsky, do you notice any "intrusions" by the author? If so, in what way do they appear?
3. Czar Peter the Great built St. Petersburg to be a modern, western city. In Dostoevsky work, however, it is portrayed as dehumanizing and cold. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about St. Petersburg and its history. What other writers have used St. Petersburg as a setting? Write a paper tracing the different ways St. Petersburg has been presented in literature.
4. Dostoevsky was said to have had a "conversion experience" while in prison that led him to embrace Christianity. Many other famous figures throughout history have made dramatic personal transformations

while in prison—people as diverse as Oscar Wilde, Malcolm X, and Martha Stewart. Select one such person and research their life using library resources and the Internet. Then write a paper explaining what it was about the prison experience that caused your subject to change.

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Arthur Conan Doyle

BORN: 1859, Edinburgh, Scotland

DIED: 1930, Crowborough, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

A Study in Scarlet (1887)

The Sign of Four (1890)

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (1892)

The Hound of the Baskervilles (1902)

The Lost World (1912)

Overview

Although, as critic Ivor Brown has noted, “there was far more in Doyle’s literary life than the invention of his fascinating and volatile detective,” it is as the creator of Sherlock Holmes that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is remembered. The volumes of historical analysis for which he was knighted have been virtually forgotten; his extensively researched historical novels have not endured. Likewise, his other stories and novels, including some works of early science fiction, are largely overshadowed by the



Arthur Conan Doyle The Library of Congress

exploits of Holmes, the world’s first consulting detective and one of the most famous literary creations of all time.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Aspiring Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on May 22, 1859, into an Irish Roman Catholic family of noted artistic achievement. After attending Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, he entered Edinburgh University as a medical student in 1876. One of his mentors at Edinburgh was Dr. Joseph Bell, who would later serve Doyle as the model for his detective Sherlock Holmes. Doyle received a doctor of medicine degree in 1885. In his spare time, however, he began to write stories.

Doyle grew up in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories (including Scotland). Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also saw advances in the sciences and scientific thinking, reflected in Doyle’s detective fiction.

Early Writing and the Birth of Holmes After two long sea voyages as a ship’s doctor, Doyle practiced medicine at Southsea, England, from 1882 to 1890. In 1885 he married Louise Hawkins and in March 1891 moved his young family to London, where he began to specialize in ophthalmology. His practice remained small, however, and since one of his anonymous stories—a hoax about the real-life “ghost ship” *Marie Celeste* called “Habakuk Jephson’s Statement”—had enjoyed considerable success when it appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1884, he began to devote himself seriously to writing.

The result was his first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, which introduced the detective Sherlock Holmes to the reading public in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* for 1887. This was followed by two historical novels in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, *Micah Clarke* in 1889 and *The White Company* in 1891. The immediate and prolonged success of these works led Doyle to abandon medicine and launch his career as a man of letters.

The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1890), was followed by the first Holmes short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891). The instant popularity of these tales made others like them a regular monthly feature of the *Strand Magazine*, and the famous *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series was begun. In subsequent stories Doyle developed Holmes into a highly individualized and eccentric character, together with his companion, Dr. Watson, the narrator of the stories, and the pair came to be readily accepted as living persons by readers in England and America. In addition to his

popularity among the reading public, Holmes's use of scientific techniques in solving crimes both echoed and helped popularize forensic science, particularly finger printing which was in its infancy in the nineteenth century. Further, Holmes's use of observation and deduction paralleled some of the important discoveries of nineteenth-century science, such as Charles Darwin published in *The Origin of the Species* and William Smith in the *Geological Map of England and Wales and Scotland*.

But Doyle seems to have considered these stories a distraction from his more serious writing, eventually grew tired of them, and in "The Final Problem," published in December 1893, plunged Holmes and his archenemy, Dr. Moriarty, to their apparent deaths in the falls of Reichenbach. Nine years later, however, he published a third Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but dated the action before Holmes's "death." Then, in October 1903, Holmes effected his mysterious resurrection in "The Empty House" and thereafter appeared intermittently until 1927, three years before Doyle's own death. All told, Doyle wrote fifty-six Sherlock Holmes stories and four novels (*The Valley of Fear*, 1914, was the last).

Other Literary Aspirations Among the other works published early in his career, which Doyle felt were more representative of his true artistry, were *Beyond the City* (1892), a short novel of contemporary urban life; *The Great Shadow* (1892), a historical novel of the Napoleonic period; *The Refugees* (1893), a historical novel about French Huguenots; and *The Stark Munro Letters* (1894), an autobiographical novel. In 1896 he issued one of his best-known historical novels, *Rodney Stone*, which was followed by another historical novel, *Uncle Bernac* (1897); a collection of poems, *Songs of Action* (1898); and two less popular novels, *The Tragedy of Korosko* (1898) and *A Duet* (1899).

Nonfiction Work After the outbreak of the Boer War, Doyle's energy and patriotic zeal led him to serve as chief surgeon of a field hospital at Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 1900. His *The Great Boer War* (1900) was widely read and praised for its fairness to both sides. In 1902 he wrote a long pamphlet, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*, to defend the British action in South Africa against widespread criticism by pacifist groups. In August 1902 Doyle was knighted for his service to England.

After being twice defeated, in 1900 and 1906, in a bid for a seat in Parliament, Sir Arthur published *Sir Nigel* (1906), a popular historical novel of the Middle Ages. The following year he married his second wife, Jean Leckie (his first wife having died of tuberculosis in 1906). Doyle now took up a number of political and humanitarian causes. In 1909 he wrote *Divorce Law Reform*, championing equal rights for women in British law, and *The Crime of the Congo*, attacking the exploitation of that colony by Belgium. In 1911 he published a second col-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Doyle's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): The longest-reigning British monarch (sixty-three years), she gave her name to the age. Her "hands off" approach to rule allowed a succession of dynamic prime ministers to chart an imperialist course for Britain.

Brigham Young (1801–1877): First governor of Utah and president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1847 to his death. Called the "American Moses" by his followers for leading them through the desert to the "promised land" near the Great Salt Lake.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): English author and poet, remembered chiefly for his stories set in India as well as his pro-Imperialist poems such as "Gunga Din."

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): English novelist whose work explored the psychological depth of characters whose lives were nonetheless determined by societal forces outside their control.

Oliver Wendell Homes (1808–1894): Popular American poet, novelist, doctor, lecturer, and wit, he dominated the intellectual life of New England for much of the nineteenth century.

lection of poems, *Songs of the Road*, and in 1912 began a series of science fiction stories with the novel *The Lost World*, featuring another of his famous characters, Professor Challenger.

After the outbreak of World War I, Doyle organized the Civilian National Reserve against the threat of German invasion. In 1916 he published *A Visit to Three Fronts* and in 1918 again toured the front lines. These tours, plus extensive correspondence with a number of high-ranking officers, enabled him to write his famous account *The British Campaigns in France and Flanders*, published in six volumes (1916–1919).

Spiritualism Doyle had been interested in spiritualism since he rejected his Roman Catholic faith in 1880. In 1915 he apparently experienced a "conversion" to "psychic religion," so that after the war he devoted the rest of his life and career to propagating his new faith in a series of works: *The New Revelation* (1918), *The Vital Message* (1919), *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), and *History of Spiritualism* (1926). From 1917 to 1925 he lectured on spiritualism throughout Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada. The same cause led him to South Africa in 1928 and brought him home from Sweden exhausted, in 1929. He died on July 6, 1930, of a heart attack, at his home in Crowborough, Sussex.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Conan Doyle's various literary forays, from detective story to historical novel to tales of high adventure, all had established precedents from earlier in the 19th century:

Ivanhoe (1819), a novel by Sir Walter Scott. Considered the first great historical novel, this book, set in twelfth-century England, single-handedly kicked off a medieval revival craze that would influence English art, literature, and architecture for decades to come.

"The Purloined Letter" (1844), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. This short story is often considered the first detective story, or as Poe called them, "tales of ratiocination."

King Solomon's Mines (1885), a novel by H. Rider Haggard. This novel set in Africa features the character of Alan Quatermain leading a rescue party into "Darkest Africa."

Works in Literary Context

Detective Fiction Although the Sherlock Holmes stories quickly became the definitive detective stories of their age, they were not the first. That honor is often accorded to Edgar Allan Poe, who wrote several stories featuring the fictional detective C. Auguste Dupin.

Charles Dickens also dipped his quill into detective mysteries with his novel *Bleak House*, and his protégé Wilkie Collins is often called the "grandfather of detective fiction." Collins's novel *The Moonstone* (1868) is considered by some to be the greatest piece of detective fiction ever written.

Detective fiction has often been categorized as pure entertainment. In recent decades, criticism has begun to shift toward a more serious consideration of these tales. Doyle's detective stories are seen as fascinating clues to the culture in which they were written and as explorations of the attitudes characteristic of late-Victorian life.

Influence In addition to the inestimable influence his Holmes stories have had, Doyle's *Lost World* has spawned several cinematic adaptations, some overt, some, such as *King Kong* and *Jurassic Park*, mere homages. His Professor Challenger stories anticipated later magic realist and neo-realist efforts to blend rigorous scientific observation with fantastic events and landscapes.

Works in Critical Context

Most early book reviewers had favorable opinions of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Typical is the judgment voiced by one anonymous critic in a British periodical, *The Athenaeum*, who said of the collection, "Of its kind it is excellent; there is little literary pretension about it, and

there is hardly any waste of time about subtle character-drawing; but incident succeeds incident with the most businesslike rapidity, and the unexpected always occurs with appropriate regularity." Another reviewer, William Morton Payne, singled out "The Red-Headed League" for particular note in an American journal, *The Dial*, remarking that the story "is a striking illustration of the author's originality." Years later, Doyle cited the same reason for ranking "The Red-Headed League" as his second favorite Holmes story (with "The Speckled Band" first). In 1959, a poll among readers of the *Baker Street Journal*, a magazine for Sherlock Holmes fans, concurred with Doyle.

Sherlockian Opinions The largest body of criticism on the Sherlock Holmes stories comes from groups of enthusiasts who call themselves "Sherlockians" or "Holmesians." In over fifty journals and newsletters published worldwide, the most prominent being the American *Baker Street Journal* and British *Sherlock Holmes Journal*, writers attempt to resolve inconsistencies in the stories or deduce aspects of Holmes's and Watson's lives from clues given in the stories. The central premise shared by these writers, from which much of the fun of their essays arises, is that Holmes was an actual person who solved real mysteries.

Such articles must obviously be read from the same tongue-in-cheek perspective in which they were written. However, they often provide worthwhile information on the historical background of Doyle's stories and testify to the mystique Sherlock Holmes still holds today. One of the best examples of criticism in this "Sherlockian" vein is Gordon L. Iseminger's essay on Holmes as a Victorian archetype, since it demonstrates ways in which Holmes was a product of the culture from which he emerged.

Growing attention to both popular fiction as a category and Doyle as a writer has led critics and readers alike to reexamine Doyle's other writing, such as his science fiction and historical novels. This nearly forgotten body of work is proving to be of interest in its own right, along with its value in illuminating relationships between different types of popular fiction and parallels to the immortal Holmes stories.

Responses to Literature

1. Criminology was a field in its infancy when Doyle wrote his Holmes stories. Using your library and the Internet, research some of the techniques used by police to catch criminals in the nineteenth century, twentieth century, and today. Write a paper covering developments in forensics since the mid-nineteenth century.
2. The characters Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson came to be accepted as real by many readers at the time they were first published, and contemporary enthusiasts continue to treat the characters as if they

were real, using details in the stories to infer further aspects of the personalities of Holmes and Watson. As you read the stories, notice the eccentricities of character and specific details of characterization that have made readers view the detective and his aide as historic figures.

3. Sherlock Holmes was a quintessentially British character, yet he was as popular in America as in England. Research cultural factors in turn-of-the-century America that could account for the popularity. You might also consider other factors that might have made Holmes appeal to Americans that wouldn't necessarily have appealed to British readers.
4. The Sherlock Holmes stories reflected the late Victorian culture in which they were written. The stories present the daily life, social mores, and class concerns of Victorian England. Use your library and the Web to research the social and sexual conventions for which the Victorians were known. How are these conventions different from those of contemporary society?
5. Research the principles of logic known as induction and deduction. Distinguish between them, and identify the elements of each demonstrated by Sherlock Holmes's reasoning in a Holmes story of your choice. You might wish to judge which principle predominates in Holmes's thinking, or which most aids Holmes in solving the mystery. Then write a report calling attention to use of induction and deduction in the Holmes story you have chosen.

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Margaret Drabble

BORN: 1939, Sheffield, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Waterfall (1969)

The Needle's Eye (1972)

The Realms of Gold (1975)

Overview

A respected editor and writer, Margaret Drabble made her reputation in the early 1960s as the preeminent novelist of the modern woman. She is best known for her novels that chronicle the negative effects of dramatic changes in contemporary British society on the lives of well-educated women. Critics generally distinguish two phases in Drabble's career as a novelist: Her first five works focus on young women who struggle with professional, sexual, maternal, and social conflicts as they



Margaret Drabble *Drabble, Margaret, photograph. AP Images.*

attempt to establish careers and discover their identities, while her later novels combine commentary on women's concerns with panoramic views of modern England. Drabble's realistic fiction often shows how fate and coincidence are important to how we understand and accept our individual destinies. She has also written well-regarded works of criticism and biography and has edited several influential volumes, including the fifth edition of the esteemed *Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Days of Illness and Books The second of four children, Margaret Drabble was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, on June 5, 1939, to Kathleen Bloor and John Frederick Drabble. Her parents broke from family roots by attending the university and separating themselves from strong religious practice. Drabble had a diverse religious upbringing: She attended Anglican services with her father because her mother, raised in a repressive fundamentalist tradition, had become a devout atheist. Drabble was also very much affected by the Quakers and attended a Quaker boarding school.

Drabble grew up in a household that embraced books and learning. Her father, also an author, was a lawyer and then a circuit judge; her only brother is also a lawyer. Before and after childrearing, her mother taught English; her younger sister is an art historian, and her older sister, Antonia, is a famous novelist who writes under the name A. S. Byatt.

Despite being part of a large and interesting family, Drabble has described her childhood as lonely. Often ill, she once wrote: "I had a bad chest and was always rather feeble—hated games. I certainly did not feel I was part of the main stream." She spent much of her time alone writing, reading, and "just being secretive." She had an early and constant love of literature, and she was profoundly affected as a child by John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

At the Quaker Mount School where Drabble was educated, she made many friends and became more socially oriented. Like her father and her older sister, she went on to Cambridge University with a major scholarship. She studied English literature at Newnham College and "enjoyed it so much," she claimed, that it "took me a long time to get over it." While at the university, she stopped writing stories in her head and started acting, with some success, because "it was so much more sociable."

Feminism's Second Wave Though the struggle for women's rights goes back centuries, many of the most important advances in the rights of women have taken place in the past one hundred years. This included earning the right to vote in many countries, gaining representative positions in government, and achieving greater

equality in the workplace. After these gains were made, however, women still struggled to reach full equality with men. This led in the 1960s to the "Second Wave" of feminism, in which feminists struggled to attain completely equal rights. This also led to a flowering of feminist art, nonfiction, and fiction, with many female authors gaining popularity for their unique and insightful views on the place of women in modern society.

From Stage to Page In 1960 Drabble graduated with honors, and she might have stayed on as a lecturer if she had not wanted to be an actress. She married Clive Swift the week after she left Cambridge and went with him to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, understudying Vanessa Redgrave and doing occasional walk-ons. Drabble has described her life at this point as without an objective, consisting of "jumping over obstacles: marriage, having babies." Bored with such small roles as a fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and expecting her first child, she began writing her first novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), to fill the time and disprove the myth that "one kind of creativity displaces another."

Other factors contributed to her becoming a novelist. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational work in contemporary feminism—presented her with information and inspiration that was personally relevant to Drabble. She did not feel personally or directly committed to the women's movement or feminism, however. In one interview, she said, "The women's movement is a phenomenon that got started after I got started, so I don't really see where I fit into it." She has in recent years, however, become much more politically engaged and has been a powerful spokesperson against the American and British war in Iraq.

Drabble has expanded the range of her writing, now including screenplays and dramas, and brought her extensive knowledge of British literature to works of criticism, essays, reviews, and journalism. She was made a Citizen of the British Empire in 1980, and Cambridge awarded her an honorary doctorate in 2006.

Works in Literary Context

Margaret Drabble's rise as one of the most important and well-known British novelists writing today has been steady and sure. She has received serious attention in Great Britain since the appearance of her first novel, and ever since the publication of *The Needle's Eye* (1972) she has established an impressive reputation in America as well. She is a traditionalist in form and a pioneer in subject matter. From her first novel, written immediately after graduation from Cambridge, Drabble has recorded the conflicting sensibilities of the new, educated woman seeking her place in the modern world. Her heroines are self-aware, articulate, intelligent, career-concerned; they are also wives and mothers caring for and redeemed by their children. Her key themes tend toward the

contemporary woman's struggle for emotional, moral, and economic independence. She also explores the individual's search for identity; the particular self-awareness of womanhood; the individual's relationship with the personal and national past; the interaction of fate, chance, and character; and the guilt and anxieties of the liberal conscience.

Women and Society In her early novels, including *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), *The Garrick Year* (1964), and *The Millstone* (1965; republished as *Thank You All Very Much*), Drabble drew upon her personal experiences to present psychological portraits of intelligent, sensitive young women in the process of adjusting to social roles and fate. This theme appeared in some of her subsequent novels, as well. In *The Waterfall* (1969), for example, Drabble's characteristic topics of maternity and sexuality are united in the story of an unconventional love affair. The heroine, an unfulfilled housewife who has been abandoned by her husband, is nursed through childbirth by her brother-in-law. Through the brief, passionate romance that develops, the lovers are awakened to a stronger sense of freedom and self-awareness. *The Needle's Eye* (1972) initiated Drabble's use of more varied themes, concerns, and characters, and especially reflected both Drabble's deep interest in ethics and morality and her lack of orthodoxy. Like her, the novel's heroine, Rose Vassiliou, is unsure of her theology but possessed of a conviction that she must do right. An altruistic, upper-middle-class woman, Rose hopes to achieve spiritual grace by renouncing material wealth and embracing a working-class lifestyle in a poor section of London. Although fateful events continually frustrate her plans for salvation, Rose's verve and idealism, coupled with her talent for self-analysis, which is demonstrated through interior monologues, allow her to gain a sense of direction in her life.

Social Issues Drabble's interest in social issues became particularly evident in her succeeding novels, including *The Ice Age* (1977), *The Middle Ground* (1980), *The Radiant Way* (1987), *Natural Curiosity* (1989), and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991). In these novels, the author puts forward an apocalyptic vision of Britain. England is presented as a bleak, alienating environment in social decline where sudden calamities and random violence are commonplace. In *The Radiant Way*, in particular, Drabble made a sweeping indictment of England, writing about grisly crimes committed by a serial murderer, crimes meant to symbolize the country's social chaos.

Influences As she has often reiterated in interviews, Drabble's models have been the great British novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—George Eliot, the Brontës, Arnold Bennett, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf. Like George Eliot and Arnold Bennett, in particular, she writes in the realist tradition.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Drabble's famous contemporaries include:

Betty Friedan (1921–2006): American feminist, activist and writer, best known for starting what is called the "Second Wave" of feminism through the writing of her book *The Feminine Mystique*.

Helen Frankenthaler (1928–): American post-painterly abstraction artist. Originally influenced by the work of Jackson Pollock, Frankenthaler was deeply involved in the 1946–1960 abstract art movement.

Truman Capote (1924–1984): American writer whose stories, novels, plays, and nonfiction are recognized literary classics, including the novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1965), which he labeled a "nonfiction novel."

Gloria Steinem (1934–): A writer and editor who, during the 1960s, appeared as a leader in the women's movement in the United States. In 1970 she cofounded *Ms.*, which grew to be a leading feminist magazine.

A. S. Byatt (1936–): This postmodern poet and author of the award-winning novel *Possession* (1990) is Margaret Drabble's older sister.

Works in Critical Context

Although Drabble is most often praised for her unblinking portrayal of the uncertainties women feel about motherhood and the enforced domesticity that usually accompanies it, critical reviews of her work have been mixed. Feminist reaction to Drabble's work has perhaps been the most negative.

The Ice Age Nancy Hardin, for example, wrote that "Drabble's novels are studies of human nature with the emphasis on feminine nature. That is not to say she is a feminist writer." Similarly, Ellen Cronan Rose acknowledged that "what Drabble seems to find difficult, if not impossible, is giving her whole-hearted support to female characters who are radically feminist in their critique of patriarchy." According to Rose, by not consistently condemning male domination, Drabble seemed to endorse aspects of it. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese severely criticized Drabble's treatment of women, suggesting that Drabble's novel *The Ice Age* "ends chillingly with a simple and total condemnation of female experience." According to Fox-Genovese, "Drabble's women offer a picture of predatory narcissism, their occasional victimhood and suffering being . . . no more than another way of getting what they want."

The Waterfall Drabble's *The Waterfall*, in particular, dealt with an egocentric heroine. As the author's most

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Drabble writes about her women characters' actions in the face of limitations beyond their physical, social, familiar, psychological, and spiritual control. Other works that focus on this idea include:

The Scarlet Letter (1850), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Set in puritanical Boston in the seventeenth century, this is the fictional story of Hester Prynne, a woman who commits adultery and subsequently refuses to name the father of her illegitimate child. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne explores the issues of grace, legalism, sin, and guilt, while describing Hester's struggle to create a new life of repentance and dignity.

Madame Bovary (1856), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. This influential work of realism focuses on a doctor's wife, Emma Bovary, who has adulterous affairs and lives beyond her means in order to escape the banalities and emptiness of domestic life.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. This novel explores themes of women in subjugation and the ways they find identity and self-definition against a backdrop of an oppressive and totalitarian religious political structure.

Pride and Prejudice (1813), a novel by Jane Austen. The smart and spirited heroine of this novel finds romance and self-determination by negotiating the complex codes of social manners required in England at the turn of the nineteenth century.

“experimental” work, the novel's primary stylistic characteristic is a divided narrative point of view. The main character is Jane Grey, the mother of a small child, whose husband has left her. After Jane begins a love affair with her cousin's husband, which Drabble presents as the highest and most consuming of passions, the novel switches to first-person narration. The first- and third-person voices then alternate throughout the remainder of the story, a convention that received divided reviews from critics. Caryn Fuoroli wrote that the split results from Drabble's “inability to control narration” and that the novel fails because the technique keeps her from realizing the “full potential of her material.” Valerie Myer, on the other hand, wrote that *The Waterfall* is Drabble's “best expression of her central concern, that there is no true solution to the conflict between instinct and morality.”

The Needle's Eye One of Drabble's more acclaimed books, *The Needle's Eye*, reflected both Drabble's deep interest in ethics and morality and her lack of orthodoxy. Like Drabble, the novel's heroine, Rose Vassiliou, is unsure of her religious convictions but certain that she

must do right. She gives up her inheritance, marries an unsavory and radical young immigrant, gives away a thirty-thousand-pound legacy to a dubious African charity, and then refuses to move out of the couple's working class house into a more fashionable middle-class neighborhood. Valerie Myer pointed out that Drabble's fatalism in the novel is actually a kind of religion that brings about salvation: “For Margaret Drabble the true end of life is to reconcile flesh and spirit by accepting one's own nature and living with it, in a context of love and responsibility for others. . . . This reconciliation, the author hopes, can come about by involvement in society.”

Responses to Literature

1. How does Drabble introduce and develop her theme of reconciling instinct with morality in *The Waterfall* and *The Needle's Eye*?
2. How are motherhood, and the duties attached to it, defined by contemporary media? How does Drabble seem to define motherhood? What similarities and differences do you see between those definitions?
3. Write a brief essay explaining the corrosive nature of infidelity in *A Summer Bird Cage* and *The Middle Ground*.

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Michael Drayton

BORN: 1563, *Hartshill, Warwickshire, England*

DIED: 1631, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British, English*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Tragicall Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy (1596)

To the Maiestie of King James (1603)

Poly-Olbion (1612)

Poems by Michael Drayton Esquyer (1619)

The Muses Elizium (1630)

Overview

In late-seventeenth-century estimates of literary stature, Michael Drayton ranks only slightly below Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Drayton's position as an important minor poet seemed secure, but his lengthy historical poems did not lend themselves to the techniques of close reading popularized during the vogue of New Criticism in the 1940s and after. By the end of his life, the didactic verse and historical epics upon which Drayton had lavished so much care no longer commanded an audience. Few documentary sources exist for the life of Michael Drayton, and even those that have survived and can be verified are not very revealing. Drayton's remarkable historical self-consciousness, however, enabled him to understand and to record in his works the changes in the role of the poet that occurred during his lifetime.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Elizabethan Beginnings Michael Drayton was born in the vicinity of Hartshill village, Warwickshire, early in 1563. His origins were humble. His social status was inferior to that of William Shakespeare and well below that of Edmund Spenser or Samuel Daniel, both of whom went on to earn university degrees. Early-twentieth-century editors and critics who studied autobiographical anecdotes gleaned from his works, however, constructed a gentrified version of his life. Dedications, which he intended as bids for patronage, were interpreted literally as factual records of his social standing.

Invented Youth One such anecdote was used to construct Drayton's genteel background as a page in the



Michael Drayton *Drayton, Michael, painting. The Library of Congress.*

household of Sir Henry Goodyer the elder (1534–1595): It occurs as an aside in a poem that he published when he was sixty-four. In “Of Poets and Poesie” (1627), the speaker reminisces about his youth as “a proper goodly page,” and reports that he asked his tutor “what strange kinde of men” poets were. His “milde Tutor” directs him in vintage Elizabethan fashion to Latin classics such as Virgil’s *Eclogues*. This poem, primarily about Drayton’s interest in poetry, was for decades misconstrued as biographical.

Drayton’s account of his education offers no particulars. His “milde Tutor” might be anyone from a clergyman who educated promising village children to the schoolmaster of a grammar school. No seventeenth- or eighteenth-century biography mentions connections between Drayton and the Goodyers. However, in the late nineteenth century Drayton’s allusion was interpreted as a real reference to Sir Henry Goodyer and was used to construct—invent, ultimately—an idea of him as having had a privileged childhood at Polesworth, Sir Henry’s country manor.

Experimental Years Whatever his actual childhood might have been, by 1590 Drayton was probably located in London. After publishing *The Harmonie of the Church*, verse translations from Old Testament prayers, in 1591,

he experimented with a series of poetry genres between 1591 and 1595. It is significant that not one of these early works is dedicated to the Goodyers, and a pastoral collection, *Idea. The Shepherds Garland* (1593), is dedicated to Robert Dudley. His experimentation with historical complaint, *Peirs Gaveston* (c. 1594), is dedicated to Henry Cavendish. His practice with quatrains and couplets, *Ideas Mirrour* (1594), is dedicated to Anthony Cooke. And *Matilda* (1594) and *Endimion and Phobe* (1595)—both narratives—are dedicated to Lucy Harington, later Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford.

This profusion of formal experiments and dedications offers contemporary readers a significant view into the sort of poetic apprenticeship a promising young writer of verse could expect in the late sixteenth century, as well as into the dynamics of patronage during this era. The patronage system, which continues to some extent today through various private and public fellowships for artists and scholars, allowed individuals to pursue their artistic talents—even if, like Drayton, they were not independently wealthy—and was a major feature of the fine arts right up into the twentieth century. As Drayton's life shows, however, the patronage system also involved a good deal of currying favor, and favor won could always soon be lost again.

The Peak of Popularity Drayton's poetic promise is realized fully in *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), his most popular work. The poem consists of eighteen letters in rhymed couplets exchanged between couples who played important roles in English history (for example, between Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon, and between Guilford Dudley and Lady Jane Grey). In 1598 and 1599 Drayton added to the collection, bringing the total number of epistles to twenty-four. He also intended *Englands Heroicall Epistles* as both a major bid for patronage and an effort to retain the patronage he then had. His earlier works had each contained one dedication, but this poem contains nine dedications, one for each set of epistles—and each aimed at potential new patrons. Drayton clearly remains most interested here, however, in retaining the patronage of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, and her husband, Edward Russell, Earl of Bedford.

An Effort to Gain the King's Patronage Prior to the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, Drayton revised *Mortimeriados* as *The Barrons Wars* (1603). The Barrons Wars were fought first against the despotic King John (from 1215 to 1217) and then against Royalist forces led by Prince Edward I in 1246 (and lasting three years). Both wars reflected the rise of nonroyal interests in England, and the first resulted in the Magna Carta, considered by many the founding document for modern democracy. In seeking favor, if this is what he was doing, Drayton was certainly also risking royal displeasure with this allusion to the end of absolute monarchy in Britain. All the same, in 1603 Drayton also welcomed King James with a poem entitled *To the Majestie of King James*, and in

1604, probably also in hopes of gaining James's favor, he wrote the first of his divine poems, *Moyses in a Map of his Miracles*. James was known to enjoy theological debate and to favor biblical verse. These bids for the king's patronage were unsuccessful, however. Drayton never received and never again sought favor from the Jacobean monarch. He addressed no verse to James after *A Pean Triumphall* (1604), entered in the Stationers' Register on March 20.

Losing Lucy's Favor By the time James succeeded to the throne, Drayton had lost the favor of Lucy, Countess of Bedford for reasons unknown. On April 23, 1603, when James was welcomed and entertained at the Harington family estate, Samuel Daniel's *A Panegyrike congratulatory to the kings majestie* (1603) was the poetic work presented to the king—under Lucy's auspices. Lucy also arranged for Daniel to present his play *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* at Hampton Court on January 8, 1604, and also promoted Ben Jonson's efforts to gain recognition by the court.

As Daniel and Jonson became increasingly favored literary figures at court, Drayton must have realized that he had little chance of regaining Lucy's favor, but he cannot have foreseen how powerful the countess would in fact become; in the course of events, she came to be the second-most powerful woman at court, just after the queen herself. Once he did understand that he would be ignored by the court, Drayton launched a breathtaking attack on Lucy, reprinting *Idea* replete with calculated insults. He retains a shortened version of his complimentary references to Mary Sidney, but portrays Lucy as Selena, a faithless patroness.

Losing Another Patron In 1612 Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* appeared. The work, an attempt to preserve in verse the history and geography of Great Britain, was dedicated to James's heir, Prince Henry, who seemed to many the royal family member who most symbolized Elizabethan values. Drayton's bid for favor was successful this time, with Henry's household accounts showing grants of pensions of ten pounds to Drayton, but fate intervened: Prince Henry died on November 6, 1612.

A Humble End After a series of moderately, though not wildly, successful years, Drayton's final folio appeared in 1630 under the title of one of his finest poems, *The Muses Elizium*. The collection is dedicated to Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset. In his dedication Drayton says that the constancy of Sackville's favors since they first began "have now made me one of your family, and I am become happy in the title to be called Yours." This heightened rhetoric, however, should not be interpreted literally, since there is no evidence that Drayton received any more patronage from Dorset than did other poets such as John Donne, Jonson, and Robert Herrick.

His exaggerated style aside, Drayton's truthfulness in many matters earned him the respect of his contemporaries

even if it did not win him prosperity. Henry Peacham observed that “Honest Mr. Michael Drayton had about some five pounds lying by him at his death” in 1631, and the final inventory of his estate was reported by his brother Edmund to be a little more than twenty-four pounds. The antiquary William Fulman, however, described his funeral as impressive: “He dyed at his lodging in Fleet Street . . . the Gentlemen of the Four Innes of Court and others of note about the Town, attended his body to Westminster, reaching in order by two and two, from his Lodging almost to Standbridge.”

Works in Literary Context

Varied Styles and Themes on the Value and Death of Poetry Drayton experimented with a series of sub-genres including the pastoral, the sonnet sequence, and the minor epic. He related these efforts as repetitions of “Idea” in the title of each of the Idea works. Drayton also worked with mythological narratives and historical complaints. His writing was done not only with the intention of gaining patronage but to give vent to Drayton’s criticisms of the Jacobean court, the craft of poetry, and the destructive nature of having to secure patrons for his craft’s survival. In his 1593 *Idea. The Shepheards Garland, Fashioned in Nine Eglogs. Rowlands Sacrifice to the Nine Muses*, for example, Drayton devotes nearly a third of one eclogue to a scathing denunciation of how literary clientage can corrupt poetry.

The Disappearance of the Heroic An intellectual heir of the humanists, Drayton believed in the tradition of *bonae litterae* (fine writing) and envisioned the poet as a spokesman for public values. Drayton’s images and diction—in *Rowlands Sacrifice to the Nine Muses*, for instance—emphasize the social function of poetry and its political importance. *The Muses Elizium* (1630), his last pastoral and critical statement on the craft of poetry, however, forecasts that true poetry would die out. He seems to have concluded that epic poetry could no longer be written with conviction since heroic values had disappeared from life and art. Drayton prophesied a bleak future for England and no future at all for the kind of poetry he had spent his life writing. Poets, he implied, would turn to romantic escape and satire. Biting satire filled with topical allusions—like *The Owle* (1604)—was apparently the disillusioned poet’s last resort. His one surviving portrait even depicts him as a satiric laureate: Represented as wearing the traditional laurel wreath of the poet in the frontispiece to the 1619 folio edition of his works, he is portrayed as frowning in disapproval.

Works in Critical Context

The twentieth-century gentrification of Drayton had established the grounds for critical approaches to his work. Poems that did not fit the mild and inoffensive image constructed for Drayton were overlooked or dismissed. His numerous assaults on title and privilege were ignored because they did not ring true as the docile

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Drayton’s famous contemporaries include:

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616): The Spanish novelist and poet considered to have written the first novel, and one of the most important literary works in history: *Don Quixote* (1605).

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): An Italian physicist, mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer who was instrumental in the scientific revolution.

Mary Queen of Scots (1542–1587): Queen of the monarchy of Scotland, she was also queen consort in France and is best known for her imprisonment and execution for treason.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English (Elizabethan) playwright and poet, he is typically described as the greatest writer of all time.

Robert Naunton (1563–1635): An English politician and writer. His valuable account of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, published as *Fragmenta Regalia, or Observations on the late Queen Elizabeth, her Times and Favourites*, (1653) was still in manuscript form when he died.

reflections of a “goodly page.” This has shifted in recent times, however, as scholars have come to see the thunderclouds bristling throughout Drayton’s many meditations on writing and on the patronage system in England.

***Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597)** *Englands Heroicall Epistles* was the most popular of Drayton’s works in its own time. In verse, Drayton successfully interweaved fiction with history while contributing to a genre that had as yet attracted few English practitioners. The work addressed themes of political importance to Drayton’s audience. In the 1597 version each of the paired epistles involves at least one monarch, sometimes two, and each set of epistles after the first two concerns the deposition of a monarch (reigns of Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI) or a struggle over the succession.

Recent critics have suggested that these letters must be seen not only as comments on history, but as comments on themselves as well. Georgia Brown, for example, argues in *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* that they “are not only forms of commemoration, they are also forms of self-dramatization which draw parallels between the content of the poem and the content, or personality, of their author.” In another vein, Stanley MacKenzie observes that *Englands Heroicall Epistles’* Mistress Shore is “a woman who understands the transforming power of literacy and uses it to negotiate freedom,” making her an “unforgiveable threat to patriarchal stability.” Gone now is our vision of the pleasantly dull, middle-class Drayton,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote about the craft and pressures of writing itself:

- Ars Poetica* (c. 18 B.C.E.), a nonfiction piece by Horace. In this treatise, Horace explicates the "art of poetry."
 "Ars Poetica" (1925), a poem by Archibald MacLeish. In this poem about poetry, the speaker suggests that a poem "should not mean / but be."
 "Ars Poetica?" (1961), a poem by Czeslaw Milosz. In yet another version, this poet adds his attempts to define poetry.
 "American Poetry" (1963), a poem by Louis Simpson. In this brief but vividly wrought poem, the speaker defines poetry.
 "The Author to Her Book" (1678), a poem by Anne Bradstreet. In this piece, the poet personifies her book, likening it to a "brat" and the "ill-formed offspring of her feeble brain."
 "Theme for English B" (1951), a poem by Langston Hughes. In this poem, the speaker responds to a vague writing assignment.

replaced with an understanding of the poet as subtly engaged with and challenging to the gender, property, and poetic structures of his time.

Responses to Literature

1. The practice of patronage in the arts has been common for centuries. In Drayton's time, his life depended upon finding patrons to finance his poetry. Explore this practice further, first by finding examples of other writers, poets, and artists who relied on it in Great Britain, then by considering the practice as it existed in other cultures and periods—Japanese, the Church, the National Endowment of the Arts today.
2. You may be an artist or writer who will be considering how to obtain funding soon, or you may imagine you will be. Come up with a "service" or "sales pitch" and then consider a patron capable of supporting your art. (Oprah Winfrey is famous for taking solicitations for her donations.) Write a "dedication" that will win your potential patron's favor.
3. Write a letter or dedication of thanks to someone who has supported you. The support can be financial, emotional, or otherwise; and the person you thank can be a relative or even yourself (if applicable). Try writing in the style of Michael Drayton, using excessive flair.
4. Look at the way that *Englands Heroicall Epistles* combines history with fiction, and compare the techniques used there to those of a modern piece of

art that seeks to achieve the same aims. What general human needs and drives, if any, do both pieces enact through their fictional negotiations of history? Compare concrete techniques or details from the two pieces.

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John Dryden

BORN: 1631, *Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England*

DIED: 1700, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Poetry, drama, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Of Dramatick Poesie (1668)

Absalom and Achitophel (1681)

A Song for St. Cecilia's Day (1687)

The Works of Virgil (1697)



John Dryden *Dryden, John, painting. The Library of Congress.*

Overview

Regarded by many scholars as the father of modern English poetry and criticism, John Dryden dominated literary life in England during the last four decades of the seventeenth century. Although initially famous for his plays, Dryden is today highly regarded for his critical writings as well as his satirical and didactic poems. Throughout his lengthy, varied career, Dryden fashioned a vital, concise, and refined language that served as a foundation for the writers of English prose and verse who followed him.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood during English Civil War Dryden was born August 9, 1631, in Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England, to Erasmus Dryden and Mary Pickering, both moderate Puritans. He grew up during the seven-year-long English Civil War, a conflict between the Puritans, who wanted to abolish the monarchy, and the Royalists, who supported the monarchy. A royal scholarship allowed Dryden to attend Westminster School, where he received a classical education and published his first poem.

The Puritans came to power under Oliver Cromwell in 1649, deposing the monarchy and executing King Charles I not a half mile from where Dryden was study-

ing. It is believed that Dryden's lifelong concern for political stability was a result of growing up during the war. In 1650, Dryden began studying at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree. Next, it appears he worked for Cromwell's government, probably in the Office of Latin Secretary along with poets John Milton and Andrew Marvell.

Published First Poems Following Cromwell's death and during the short-lived government of Cromwell's son Richard, Dryden published *Heroique Stanza* (1658), a group of verses that portray Cromwell as the architect of a great new age. In the following years, Dryden continued to publish politically oriented poems, including the notable *Astraea Redux* (1660). This poem celebrated Charles II's 1660 return from exile and restoration to the English throne. Dryden's change of position instigated attacks in later years by his literary enemies, who charged him with political inconsistency and selfish motivation.

Popular Playwright Dryden next began a career as a playwright. In 1663, the same year that he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, Dryden's first play, *The Wild Gallant*, was produced, followed by *The Rival Ladies* (perhaps acted in 1663), and *The Indian-Queen* (performed in 1664), a collaboration with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. *The Indian Emperour* (1665), Dryden's sequel to *The Indian Queen*, represents his first entirely original play and was written wholly in rhymed couplets. It was extremely popular.

A few weeks after *The Indian Emperor* opened, the Second Anglo-Dutch War began (a conflict between England and Holland over commercial interests in Africa, eventually won by the Dutch but with the English gaining the American territory that would become New York). The bubonic plague (a then common infectious bacterial disease that attacks the lungs and lymph nodes and is spread by overcrowding and poor sanitation), which had begun to spread during the same winter, also ravaged London the following spring. Because of these situations, theaters were closed by royal order in June 1665, and they remained so until December of 1666.

Dryden's first important piece of criticism, *Of Dramatick Poesie*, was published in 1667, but probably written in 1665–1666, when he moved with his family to the country to avoid the plague. Dryden's essay, which examines and challenges theatrical notions, remains the best-known example of his prose, primarily because it is his only freestanding essay not written to commemorate a specific occasion. He soon returned to writing plays and also took on an important post for his country.

Named Poet Laureate In 1668, Dryden became poet laureate of England. Although he had yet to write any of the poems for which he is chiefly remembered today, he had done all the right things, in all the right ways, to make himself the logical choice for the post. By

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dryden's famous contemporaries include:

Nell Gwyn (c. 1650–1687): One of the first English actresses, Gwyn was a famous mistress of King Charles II.

Louis Jolliet (1645–1700): Along with Father Jacques Marquette, this Canadian explorer was the first to explore and map the Mississippi River.

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678): This English poet of the metaphysical school is best known today for his poem "To His Coy Mistress" (1681).

John Milton (1608–1674): Milton, a Protestant English poet, is famous for the blank-verse epic *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669): This Dutch painter and etcher sought to achieve, in his words, "the greatest and most natural movement."

Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679): A Dutch playwright, van den Vondel advocated religious tolerance, as he was a convert from Protestantism to Catholicism himself.

1668, he was England's leading playwright—in 1667 alone, five of his plays were in production on the London stage. He showed himself to be a loyal defender of the court in *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), a poem about the naval campaign during the Second Anglo-Dutch War and the Great Fire of London, which had destroyed much of London in 1666. The poem demonstrates his skills at political argument and effectively defends the court against those who blamed disaster on royal immorality. Dryden even lent the king five hundred pounds—a large sum, considering that the stipend for poet laureate was one hundred pounds per year.

Dryden wrote his longest piece of literary criticism, *Of Dramatick Poesie*, in 1667 as well. Shortly thereafter, he reconsidered his earlier arguments in favor of rhymed play and adopted blank verse, or unrhymed metered poetry. *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost* (1677), adapted from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and written in blank verse, was a great success and solidified Dryden's reputation as the most talented and accomplished writer of the time. In fact, *All for Love*, performed in 1677, was so highly regarded that it displaced the original Shakespearean play from the English stage for a century.

Dryden was part owner of the Bridges Street Theatre, which was destroyed by a fire on January 25, 1672. He had to contribute toward the construction of a new theater and scene house, and his company was at a serious disadvantage while waiting for those facilities to be constructed. During this time, Dryden wrote a rhyming

adaptation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* titled *The State of Innocence* (1673), but it was never performed.

Satire in Later Poems The Popish Plot (1678–81), a thwarted attempt by the Earl of Shaftesbury and others to exclude Charles's Catholic brother, James, from the English throne, provided Dryden with the topic for what critics consider his greatest work, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). This poem is a satirical attack on Shaftesbury and his confederates. This work launched a phase of satirical and didactic verse that directly influenced the development of Augustan poetry in the next century, especially that of Alexander Pope. Dryden's first major satire was followed in 1682 by *Mac Flecknoe*, a mock-heroic poem. Related to *Absalom and Achitophel* in tone, *Mac Flecknoe* displays Dryden's mastery of word order, rhythm, and cunning verbal attack. The same year, he debuted a shorter, more serious satiric poem titled *The Medall*, which again was aimed at Shaftesbury, who escaped sentencing for treason.

As political and religious matters repeatedly overlapped in Dryden's time, an era much concerned with the question of whether Protestant or Roman Catholic monarchs were the legitimate rulers of Britain, it is not surprising that Dryden also began to address religious issues during this period of national turmoil. *Religio Laici; or, A Layman's Faith* (1682) appeared when new plots to assassinate the king were being formed. In this poem, Dryden proclaimed a compromise between Anglicans and the Roman Catholic belief in the absolute authority of the pope, clearly expressing the king's stance in favor of religious toleration.

Catholic Convert In 1685, James II ascended the English throne and soon enacted a declaration of toleration, placing many of his sympathizers in high government positions. Within the first year of James's reign, Dryden converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. Once he converted, the man who had argued for the Anglican cause in *Religio Laici* daringly published a poem arguing for the Catholic cause, *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). Written in beast-fable form, the poem presents a long theological debate between a milk-white hind, representing the Roman Church, and a spotted panther, representing the Anglican Church. As he might have expected, his enemies gleefully noticed the conflicting positions taken in these poems, and, although *Religio Laici* was greeted by public indifference when first published, it was resurrected and used as a weapon against him. When James was deposed in 1688, Dryden refused to swear allegiance to the new government; consequently, he lost his position as poet laureate.

During his last years, Dryden wrote the widely anthologized odes *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast* (1697), in addition to completing five more plays. Primarily, however, he concentrated on translation, completing *The Works of Virgil* (1697) and *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700). In all of his

translations, Dryden's goal was to paraphrase rather than reproduce while still capturing the individuality of the original work. Linguistic purists have harshly criticized Dryden for continually changing word order and narrative sense. Yet his translation of Virgil's works, particularly the *Aeneid*, is regarded as a monumental undertaking that, if not always exact, is nevertheless largely representative of the Latin original. *Fables Ancient and Modern* is similarly regarded as a lasting work of translation.

Dryden died in London on May 1, 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Dryden was an influential poet and playwright in his time, and his works often reflected the tumultuous period in British history in which he lived. His most long-lasting contribution, however, may be in his criticism, as he played a key role in developing the modern English process of examining literature. In all his literary productions, Dryden is both the conservative, ever concerned with the past, and the innovator, looking ahead to the future of English literature.

Criticism John Dryden's plays include prologues, prefaces, and dedications in which he analyzes the works of John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and even himself while discussing the English theater, the difficulties of representing life on the stage, and the merits and drawbacks of rhyme. In so doing, Dryden began the English tradition of practical criticism. While critics of his time were preoccupied with issues of morality, immorality, and uplifting the reader or audience, Dryden wrote objectively and systematically about the literature itself. Through a natural, conversational prose style, he discussed works in the context of literary tradition, generic form, technical innovation, and effectiveness of presentation, all of which became the standard for literary critical investigations.

In Dryden's satirical and didactic poems, he created the extended form of objective analysis that has come to characterize most modern criticism. In his satire, he displayed an irrepressible wit and forceful line of argument that later satirists adopted as their model. Samuel Johnson, who first called Dryden the father of English criticism, considered him the English poet who crystallized the potential for beauty and majesty in the English language: According to Johnson, "[Dryden] found it brick, and he left it marble."

Influence Thus as a critic, he developed a combination of methods that proved useful to critics hundreds of years later. Although his major works are not as widely known today as those of some of his contemporaries, his influence on English literature extends beyond the fame of any particular piece. Dryden dominated the Restoration period, and his language and ideas have served as a foundation for the writers of English prose and verse for

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dryden based his *Fables* on collections by Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer. Fables generally have a moral attached and make their point by featuring animals, plants, and other nonhuman subjects. Here are some collections of fables from around the world:

Ancient Chinese Fables (1996), a compilation of fables by Lie Ze, translated by Yang Xianyi. This collection includes more than one hundred Chinese fables from the fourth century B.C.E. to the seventeenth century C.E..

An Argosy of Fables (2004), a collection of fables by Frederic Taber Cooper. Originally compiled in 1921, this wide-ranging collection includes ancient and contemporary fables from Greece, India, Asia, and the Americas.

Classic Tales and Fables for Children (2001), a compilation of stories by Leo Tolstoy. The nineteenth-century Russian novelist famous for the novel *War and Peace* presents free translations of Aesop's fables and Hindu fables, as well as an original tale.

Moral Fables and Other Poems (1995), by Giovanni Meli, translated into English by Gaetano Cipolla. Fables from Sicily and Italy are translated with the Italian and English versions facing each other.

centuries, making Dryden one of the greatest forces in English literary history.

Works in Critical Context

Dryden reached a level of achievement rarely equaled or surpassed in English literature. Frequent comparisons with his most celebrated literary descendant, Alexander Pope, almost unanimously affirm Dryden's superiority in metrical innovation, imagination, and style, though Pope's works are more widely known.

The Dramas Of all Dryden's works, his dramas have been accorded the least acclaim since his death. With the exception of a few of his more than thirty plays, such as *All for Love* and *Marriage-a-la-Mode*, his productions have vanished from the English stage. This, according to critics, is perhaps largely due to his devotion to the heroic play, a form that attained its greatest expression through him but radically declined in public appeal. In addition, Dryden's comedies, although filled with witty repartee and many memorable characters, have been found lacking in truly comic scenes or effective explorations of human emotion. Not until the early twentieth century, when studies by T. S. Eliot and Mark Van Doren, along with Montague Summers's six-volume collection of Dryden's *Dramatic Works* appeared, did Dryden's plays receive favorable reassessments.

Responses to Literature

1. Do you know anyone who has converted to a different religion? Do you think you would ever do so? Why or why not?
2. Write your own fable for today's world. What point do you want to make? Remember to use nonhumans as your characters.
3. Read a satirical news story on The Onion Web site (www.theonion.com). Research mainstream news coverage of that story or issue. Write an essay analyzing what specifically is satirized, why, and how.
4. Research the Great Fire of London. Create a map showing London before the fire and after it. What neighborhoods were most affected? How long did it take to rebuild?

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Maureen Duffy

BORN: 1933, Worthing, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Microcosm (1966)

The Erotic World of Faery (1972)

All Heaven in a Rage (1973)



Maureen Duffy Duffy, Maureen, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

A poet, playwright, novelist, and historian, writer Maureen Duffy reflects within her work the loneliness experienced by those living on the fringes of a judgmental and sometimes hostile society. Her characters—lesbians, the homeless, political radicals, displaced intellectuals—are frustrated by unfulfilled aspirations and unmet emotional, sexual, or other needs. Novels such as *The Microcosm* (1966), *All Heaven in a Rage* (1973), and *Illuminations* (1991) exhibit deft characterization, while nonfiction works such as the 1972 Freudian literary study *The Erotic World of Faery* also speak to the author's creative talents. Duffy has been praised by critics for her ability to create vivid characters and evoke a sense of place, and her work has been compared favorably to that of Virginia Woolf.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Absent Mother and a Tough Childhood Maureen Patricia Duffy was born on October 21, 1933, in Worthing, Sussex, to Cahia Patrick Duffy and Grace Rose Wright. Her mother suffered from tuberculosis, and Duffy has acknowledged the political and psychological effects of her mother's prolonged absences in sanatoriums. Duffy was educated at Trowbridge High School for Girls in Wiltshire and the Sarah Bonnell High School

for Girls. She studied English at King's College, London, and after earning her bachelor of arts degree with honors in 1956, she taught for two years in Italy. She wrote from an early age and acted in school plays. At the age of seventeen she was offered a place at the Old Vic Drama School, and during her university years she performed in plays by William Shakespeare and Sean O'Casey.

Establishing a Writing Career with the Royal Court Theatre Duffy entered her career during the beginning of the "women's liberation" or "feminist" movement of the 1960s that called for equal legal rights and the right to make choices about family planning. Although she would have encountered sexism in her work, proximity to the women's liberation movement was clearly catalytic to Duffy's career. Unwilling to be confined to female roles as an actor, she concentrated on writing, and in her final year at King's College she wrote "Pearson," a modern adaptation of William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, set in a contemporary factory during a strike. *Pearson* was submitted to Kenneth Tynan, the drama critic for *The Observer*, who was running a competition to find new playwrights. Though *Pearson* did not win the competition, Duffy was invited to join one of the writers' groups at the Royal Court Theatre under the direction of George Devine and William Gaskill. *Pearson* was performed in 1962 as *The Lay-Off* (the title was changed by the producer), but it remains unpublished. She won the City of London Festival Playwright's Award in 1962 for this work. After the publication of her first novel, *That's How It Was* (1962), her writing career was established. This period was an exciting time in her life, during which she was introduced to experimental theater forms, improvisation, mask work, and discussion/evaluation groups. In 1969 her play *Rites* was produced at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre (a branch of the National Theatre) under the direction of Joan Plowright, who recognized the lack of parts for women in the theater. It was then produced at the Old Vic and, subsequently, internationally. It remains Duffy's most performed play to date.

Leadership Roles Duffy's reputation as a writer and critic developed significantly during the 1970s and 1980s as she continued to write poems and novels as well as plays. She was a founder of the Writers Action Group in 1972 and served as joint chairman of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain from 1977 to 1978 and president from 1985 to 1989. She was chairman of the Greater London Arts Literature Panel from 1979 to 1981 and of the British Copyright Council, Authors Lending and Copyright Society in 1982. She received Arts Council bursaries in 1963, 1966, and 1975, as well as a Society of Authors traveling scholarship in 1985. She also became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (1985). Her keen interest in literary figures, especially female ones, influenced much of her writing in the 1970s and beyond.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duffy's famous contemporaries include:

- Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929–1968): American civil rights leader who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and was assassinated in 1968.
- Rita Mae Brown** (1944–): American feminist activist and author of a popular series of mystery novels featuring a cat, Mrs. Murphy, as its star detective.
- Philip Pullman** (1946–): British fantasy writer of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy and, like Duffy, a supporter of the British Humanist Association.
- Elton John** (1947–): British singer, songwriter, and composer who has sold hundreds of millions of albums and won an Academy Award for his work on the music for the Disney animated film *The Lion King*.
- Doris Lessing** (1919–): British author and winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, Lessing is respected for her visionary works and powerful engagement with the female experience.

A Prolific Period: 1973–1995 Between the years of 1973 and 1995, Duffy's artistic efforts were more fully concentrated on the writing of her poems and novels. She was also politically active and involved in environmental and feminist movements. During this time period, she published eighteen books, including novels, essays, and play collections.

Maureen Duffy's writing, in the many genres she has attempted, reflects both her involvement in contemporary society and her uneasy place in the English social system, as a socialist, a lesbian, and an artist aware of her illegitimate and working-class origins. Her work, with its ambitious range, its versatility, and its vitality of language, is impressive. Her best novels are characterized by their brilliancy of style, their elegance of structural form, and their ability to suggest questions that haunt the mind. Several of her novels have received both critical and popular acclaim in Great Britain and the United States.

Works in Literary Context

Duffy's work is marked by an attempt at realism—the accurate portrayal of both the physical and emotional world of her characters. Duffy, however, utilizes this realism in order to explore the questions and lives of those at the fringes of "acceptable society." As such, Duffy employs her considerable descriptive skills to dive deep into the lives of a group of lesbian women in her novel *The Microcosm* (1966), and in other novels, she explores questions about sexual conventions and their relationship to other social restrictions. Duffy's work,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Duffy's works are largely concerned with the place of women in society. Here are some other works that deal with this same theme:

Pride and Prejudice (1813), a novel by Jane Austen. In this novel, Austen paints a sharply humorous portrait of the limited opportunities available to women in early nineteenth century England.

Middlemarch (1874), a novel by George Eliot. In this book, the author—whose real name was Mary Ann Evans—offers a complex portrait of the residents of a fictional English town, notably Dorothea Brooke, an ambitious young woman with grand plans that her husband does not support.

A Room of One's Own (1929), a nonfiction piece by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, Woolf argues that female authors will be able to find success only by becoming financially independent and by creating a private work space in which to practice their art.

then, is a continuation of the work of Virginia Woolf, who is famous for, among other things, analyzing the place creative women have in society and for suggesting alternatives to the conventions that restrict artistic genius in women. Woolf's ideas can be examined in texts like *A Room of One's Own*.

Realism Realism is the touchstone of Duffy's style; like many other observers of working-class life, she is at her best when she relies on accurate, detailed reportage and at her weakest when tempted by sentiment. *The Paradox Players* (1967) is an example of her writing at its most compelling. It describes a man's retreat from society to live for some months in a boat moored on the Thames. The physical realities of cold, snow, rats, and flooding occupy him continually and the hardship brings him peace. He is a novelist, suffering from the hazards peculiar to that profession and has some pertinent comments to make about the vulnerability of the writer. "When I saw the reviews I could have cut my throat. You see they're very kind to first novels for some mistaken reason but when the poor bastard follows it up with a second and they see he really means it they tear its guts out." The experience of winter on the river restores his faith in his own ability to survive.

Lesbianism Duffy's observations are acute, her use of dialogue witty and direct; this authenticity is complemented by an interest in the bizarre, the fantastic. Her best-known book uses these qualities of realism to great effect in a study of lesbian society which is both informa-

tive and original. *The Microcosm* begins and ends in a club where the central characters meet to dance, dress up, and escape from the necessity of "all the week wearing a false face." Their fantasies are played out in front of the jukebox; then the narrative follows each woman back into her disguise, her social role. Steve is Miss Stephens, a schoolmistress; Cathy is a bus conductress; Matt works in a garage. Their predicament as individuals, the author suggests, extends beyond the interest of their own minority group. A plea is made for tolerance, understanding, and that respect without which the human spirit must perish. "Society isn't a simple organism with one nucleus and a fringe of little feet, it's an infinitely complex structure and if you try to suppress any part . . . you diminish, you mutilate the whole." *Wounds* (1969) and *Love Child* (1971) reaffirm this belief.

Freudian Psychology, Greek Mythology, and Philosophy In other novels Duffy explores the relationships between sex, gender, and the larger society. In *Wounds*, for example, recurring scenes featuring a nameless couple making love are punctuated by longer episodes involving a variety of people in modern England who face painful restrictions on their lifestyle. This contrasting of sex with societal limitations sets up a number of questions about the power of love in the modern world and the relationships between personal and public concerns. In *Love Child* Duffy relates the story of Kit, a child of indeterminate sex who takes a deadly revenge on his/her mother's lover. Combining elements of Freudian psychology and Greek mythology, *Love Child* examines a world where gender is subordinate to wealth, power, and the kind of permissiveness that sanctions even the most destructive behavior. A similarly gender-ambiguous narrator is found in *Londoners* (1983), the story of Al, a struggling writer in a London of predatory inhabitants who dreams of writing a film script about the French poet François Villon. Al's essential loneliness and isolation amid the incessant activity of the bustling metropolis, brought on by his/her vocation as a writer as well as by his/her sexual preferences, confronts the issue of private versus public behavior and how sexual identity can serve to marginalize people from the larger society. As she was one of the first homosexual female authors to "come out" to the public, she continues to be hailed as a forerunner in the struggle for homosexual law reform and influence writers who incorporate related themes into their work. Accordingly, Duffy's work is often included in anthologies of feminist influence.

Works in Critical Context

Duffy has been praised by critics for her ability to create vivid characters and evoke a sense of place. Nonetheless, critics often fault her novels for lack of structural cohesiveness. In all, her work has received warm critical reception, including recognition for her talents in the form of a number of literary awards. Indeed, some critics think

highly enough of her work to compare her to the inimitable Virginia Woolf. As one critic for *Time* noted, “both have the knack of tuning the physical world precisely to the pitch of the characters’ emotions. Miss Duffy has a special talent for describing landscape, seascape and weather.”

Praise for Poetry and Clarity of Vision Citing Duffy’s “passionate interest in history and in language,” Shena Mackay commended the versatile author’s oeuvre in the *Times Literary Supplement*. With numerous books to her credit that span the genres of history, literary criticism, poetry, and fiction, Duffy’s later works, according to Mackay, “should consolidate her reputation as a writer, an imaginative poet of the city and someone who is committed to the cause of both human and animal rights.” *Contemporary Women Poets* essayist Geoff Sadler echoed such praise, noting of Duffy’s poetry that “the variety of subjects covered, and the pure, intense clarity of her vision lift her work above the ordinary, giving to it the quality of a personal testament.”

The Paradox Players Duffy’s ability to handle description and develop characters is perhaps most apparent in her fourth novel, *The Paradox Players*. Taking place on a houseboat floating on the Thames during a winter in the 1960s, *The Paradox Players* details the voluntary isolation of the writer Sym. Thinking to abandon his “square” lifestyle, which includes a wife and child, Sym buys an old, forty-foot boat called “Mimosa” and attempts to keep it afloat while also endeavoring to “find a point to work from” in his writing. A critic for the *New Yorker* writes that “no one character in . . . [*The Paradox Players*] is outstanding, although each human being and each animal is impeccably drawn and treated with thorough understanding. As a study in gray, animated and given sad meaning by the slow movement of gray figures, gray weather, and fateful gray light, her book is a work of art.”

All Heaven in a Rage Duffy’s 1973 novel *All Heaven in a Rage*, published in England as *I Want to Go to Moscow*, reflects one of the author’s personal concerns: the proper treatment of animals. The novel’s main character, an incarcerated felon named Jarvis Chuff, is sprung from prison by a group of antivivisectionist vegetarians who promise to give Chuff his freedom if he will help them free a number of animals from captivity. Calling the novel a “romp” on the order of writer P. G. Wodehouse, *New York Times Book Review* critic Paul Theroux added that *All Heaven in a Rage* features a plot that “is at best only amusing and at worst quite preposterous.” Maintaining that the work shows a lack of focus, Anatole Broyard added in the *New York Times* that Duffy’s seventh novel contains “a topical message delivered without urgency, a romance that is well above average in its arbitrariness, a teetering between suspense fiction and morality tale . . . an intermittent flaring up of fine writing.

The book,” Broyard concluded, “consistently refuses to settle on one level and stay there.”

Responses to Literature

1. Duffy’s work has often been praised for its exceptional portrayal of character but has been faulted for its uncertain and, at times, unrealistic plots. Read *All Heaven in a Rage*. Respond to the analysis that Duffy’s characters are better developed than her plots as it relates to *All Heaven in a Rage*. Make sure to cite specific passages to support your response.
2. One of Duffy’s best characteristics as a writer is her ability to capture the details of a character and a place that make that character or place feel real. Realism in writing is based largely on the writer’s ability to capture physical details in the text. In order to improve your ability to capture physical detail, perform a short study of a physical object. Look at it closely, feel it, and hold it in your hand; pay attention to its temperature, the texture on the surface of it, whether it has a distinct smell or not, and other sensory details. Then, in a paragraph or two, describe that object as vividly as you possibly can.
3. Duffy began her writing career in the middle of the Woman’s Rights Movement. Using the Internet and the library, research this important time in history. Then, in a short essay, discuss how the movement and Duffy’s writing complement one another. Make sure to cite specific examples from Duffy’s work to support your response.
4. Duffy is sometimes compared to author Virginia Woolf, particularly in her descriptions that relate her characters’ internal landscapes to the outside world. Find a descriptive passage in one of Duffy’s novels, and compare it to a descriptive passage by Woolf from her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. What similarities do you see between the two writers’ techniques? How do they differ? Based on your limited experience, do you think the comparison between the two writers is valid? Why or why not?

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☒ Maurice Duggan

BORN: 1922, Auckland, New Zealand

DIED: 1974, Auckland, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Immanuel's Land: Stories (1956)

Falter Tom and the Water Boy (1957)

Summer in the Gravel Pit: Stories (1965)

O'Leary's Orchard, and Other Stories (1970)

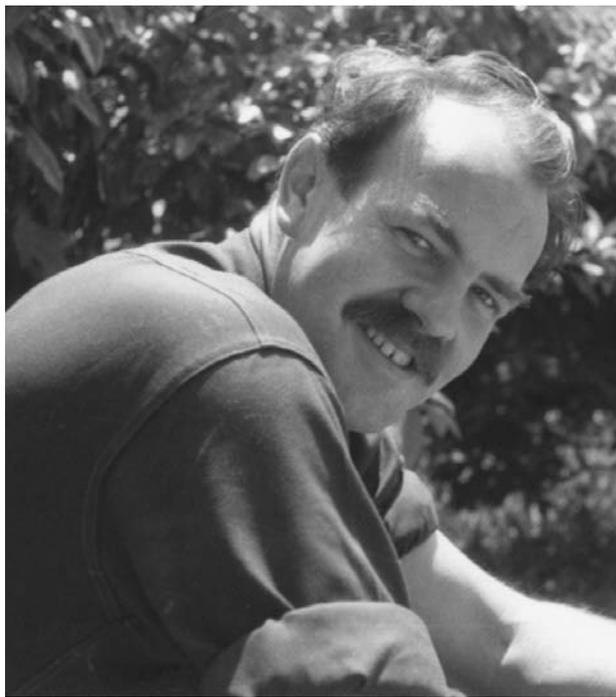
The Fabulous McFanes, and Other Children's Stories (1974)

Overview

New Zealand fiction writer Maurice Duggan is best known for his short fiction, often targeted at children. His stories focus on carefully observed physical detail and realistic environments and feature glum characters. Among his best-known works is the award-winning *Falter Tom and the Water Boy* (1957).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Losses Duggan was born in Auckland, New Zealand, on November 25, 1922, the eldest child of Irish immigrant parents, Robert and Mary Duggan. Seven



Maurice Duggan Eric Lee-Johnson / Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

months after the birth of her fourth child, Duggan's mother died of heart failure. Her sudden death devastated the young Duggan.

As a child, Duggan attended St. Benedict's Convent School and St. Joseph's Convent School. He was an unremarkable student whose main interest was sports, not literature. When he was eighteen years old, Duggan was diagnosed with osteomyelitis—a bacterial inflammation of bone and bone marrow. Duggan's leg had to be amputated just below the knee. The amputation ended his all-absorbing interest in sports and prevented him from following his friends into the army during World War II. While the war had begun in Europe as a conflict between Nazi Germany and the allies fighting that country's aspirations toward dominance, there was also a theater of conflict in the Pacific, as the Allies, including the United States and Great Britain, fought against Japan. New Zealand fought on the side of the Allies, and New Zealanders served in both theaters with distinction. The war, however, did not reach New Zealand itself.

Writing Years The amputation changed Duggan's life and seemed to have spurred his desire to write. By 1944, he had made contact with Frank Sargeson, New Zealand's most famous writer of the time, and the older man soon became his mentor. Duggan evokes this period movingly in "Beginnings," which appeared in the magazine *Landfall* in 1966 as part of a series on how New Zealanders started writing. Duggan's first efforts, though encouraged by Sargeson, were less than remarkable in their overblown use of language and a disregard for convention. Yet as the young writer evolved, his stories became highly stylized and sophisticated. Duggan made his breakthrough with "Six Place Names and a Girl" (1949), published in *Landfall*.

Attempts at Writing a Novel In 1950, Duggan traveled to England, a country still recovering, like much of the world, from the end of World War II a few years earlier. During his two years in Europe, he attempted to write a full-length book. Parts of the uncompleted work were eventually refashioned into short stories, including "Guardian," "In Youth Is Pleasure" (1953), and "Race Day." At the same time that Duggan was writing these stories featuring the Irish Lenihan family, he was also working on a travel diary titled "Voyage." The three-part story features his journey by ship to England, a holiday through Italy, and his adventures in Spain. It was widely admired when published in New Zealand in *Landfall* in the early 1950s.

For the next few years Duggan seems, at least in retrospect, to have been trying to bring the richness of his style into the New Zealand realist tradition, with stories such as "The Wits of Willie Graves" and "Blues for Miss Laverty" (1960). "Blues for Miss Laverty" was written during Duggan's year as Robert Burns Fellow at Otago University, and it is during this fertile period that he produced two long monologues that effectively pushed the New Zealand short story out of its social-realist rut.

Decreased Output After “Along Rideout Road that Summer” (1963), a story which retains many of the themes of conventional New Zealand fiction, in the remaining fourteen years of his life, Duggan completed only a handful of stories. “O’Leary’s Orchard” (1963) and “An Appetite for Flowers” (1967) each attracted great attention when it appeared. Duggan died on November 11, 1974, in Auckland. “The Magsman Miscellany,” which was published in 1975, one year after Duggan’s death, caused a sensation with its skillful use of form and its relevant story of a writer’s relationship with fiction.

Works in Literary Context

Duggan was encouraged by Sargeson though he never really adopted his mentor’s colloquial style. From the beginning, Duggan’s early stories, such as “Sunbrow” and “Notes on an Abstract Arachnid,” displayed wordiness and a lack of interest in conventional forms. His first attempts were weakened by what Duggan himself described as “a habit of rhetoric,” but as he developed, his stories showed a stylishness and sophistication previously unknown in New Zealand fiction. “Six Place Names and a Girl,” to which Sargeson contributed the title, proved a breakthrough because of this style—with its almost minimal plot and its brief, evocative descriptions of areas on the Hauraki Plains. At the time of its publication, its one-word sentences and composite words seemed technically very daring.

Influences With some allowance for artistic license, many of the events in his stories mirror Duggan’s own early life. These works also inspired by his mentors include pieces that further show the influence of James Joyce. In Duggan’s Lenihan stories—“Guardian”, “In Youth Is Pleasure,” and “Race Day” for example—there is the clear influence of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Yet the Lenihan stories are some of the finest series written by a New Zealander.

Dark Themes Duggan employed a stark style in his work through the 1950s. “The Deposition” and “A Small Story” are typical stories of this period—written in a rigorous, spare prose style, with the motif of the gate that the children swing on reflecting the futility of all action.

Such stories also point to Duggan’s bleak outlook, reflected in many of his underlying themes. “Riley’s Handbook,” for example, consists of the ravings of an artist named Fowler who has escaped his wife and family to become a bar-man and caretaker in a sprawling rural hotel. His attempt to revise his identity requires a new name, Riley, and even more. Riley forms a relationship with Myra, another worker in the hotel, and rails bitterly against the absurdity of both his former and adopted lives. The story’s atmosphere of utter despair would be hard to take were it not for Duggan’s unique skills. There is a comic exuberance of language, a sense of reveling in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duggan’s famous contemporaries include:

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) Famed American poet who also wrote children’s tales, including a study of Abraham Lincoln.

César Chávez (1927–1993): A Mexican American farm-worker, he was also a labor leader and civil rights activist who cofounded the National Farm Workers Association.

Philip Larkin (1922–1985): English poet who gained attention when he turned down a poet laureateship. He was deemed by readers as his nation’s best-loved poet.

Martha Gellhorn (1908–1998) American journalist, novelist, impassioned liberal and glamorous friend of the famous, who was also the third wife of Ernest Hemingway.

James W. Tate (1875–1922): English-born American pianist, composer, songwriter, and accompanist, who created popular pantomimes and revues.

melancholy, and the skill with which the story’s characters are drawn.

Works in Critical Context

Despite the scarcity of Duggan’s output he has been ranked with Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson as one of New Zealand’s greatest exponents of short fiction. Several stories by Duggan have been widely admired for their virtuosity of style and their lyric power. His travel diary, “Voyage,” was also well received. The descriptions of the isolated landscape and of the harsh lifestyle of the family blend effectively with the tale of corruption.

The Lenihan Stories The Lenihan stories are built around the lives of the Lenihans, an Irish immigrant family living in Auckland. Its rigorous, spare prose style, and the motif of the gate the children swing on, reflecting the futility of all action, are typical of the stories of this period and are critically admired. These Lenihan stories have been compared favorably with Mansfield’s Karori works on the Burnell family, which were written under similar circumstances. The Lenihan stories were mostly published in Duggan’s first book, *Immanuel’s Land* (1956), and have remained among the most popular of his works.

Responses to Literature

1. Investigate New Zealand—its history, geography, culture, and people. Write a paper that explains how the setting of New Zealand contributes to Duggan’s

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote on family themes in a spare, or minimalist, prose style:

The House on Mango Street (1984), a novel by Sandra Cisneros. In this tightly styled work, the main character, Esperanza, tells her story of growing up a Chicana girl in Chicago.

"Soldier's Home" (1925), by Ernest Hemingway. This concise short story is about Harold Krebs, a soldier returning from war.

Tumble Home (1998), a prose collection by Amy Hempel. In this collection are a novella and several short stories, all centered on characters making their way home.

Where I'm Calling From (1988), by Raymond Carver. This collection of contemporary short stories set in the Pacific Northwest involve the simple but miserable lives of common and working-class Americans.

themes, perhaps choosing a specific story to illustrate your argument.

2. Visit the New Zealand Book Council Web site (cited below), search for Jack Ross, and read one of his poems (such as "Cover"). In a group, identify the images that make Ross's poem one about the "new" North Shore of New Zealand. Then, identify the "old" New Zealand in an early Duggan story. What does your comparison say about changes to the country's culture, technology, politics, or physical geography?
3. Duggan's earliest story, "Six Place Names and a Girl," proved a breakthrough with its minimalist tendencies. Research "minimalism" online with a partner. Make a list of characteristics of the genre and find examples of minimalist writing/writers. As you read a Duggan story, discuss how this technique affects the reader.

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Alexandre Dumas

BORN: 1802, Villers-Cotterêts, France

DIED: 1870, Puys, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, short stories, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Henry III and His Court (1829)

The Three Musketeers (1844)

Twenty Years After (1845)

The Count of Monte Cristo (1846)

The Man in the Iron Mask (1847)

Overview

Enormously popular and prolific, Alexandre Dumas wrote two of the most widely read novels in literary history, *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845). He also helped to inaugurate and popularize Romantic drama on the French stage with his



Alexandre Dumas *Dumas, Alexandre, photograph.*

two plays *Henry III and his Court* (1829) and *Antony* (1831).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Impoverished Youth Alexandre Dumas is generally called Dumas *père* to distinguish him from his illustrious son Alexandre (known as Dumas *fils*), who was also a dramatist and novelist. He was born on July 24, 1802. His father, Thomas-Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie—born in Haiti to a minor French nobleman and a black slavewoman—had risen to the rank of general in the French revolutionary army. Dumas's parents met when Thomas-Alexandre was stationed at her family's inn in August of 1789. The couple was married in Villers-Cotterêts on November 28, 1792, and subsequently had three children, of whom Alexandre was the third, born a few months prior to his father's involuntary retirement from active duty.

Unsuccessful in his attempts to collect back pay, General Dumas and his family lived in poor circumstances. The general's health, which had declined during his detention in Italy, continued to fail, and he died in 1806. In *Mémoires*, published more than forty years later, Dumas would recall his deep affection and admiration for his father, whose image remained vivid in his mind.

An indifferent student, Dumas learned Latin, penmanship (at which he excelled), and reading. Dumas would later come to realize how poorly educated he was and would work to fill in the gaps in his studies. He would also transform his boyhood experience as a student in Villers-Cotterêts into the stuff of fiction, using it as the basis for his description of the main character's education in the novel *Six Years Later; or, The Taking of the Bastille* (1851).

Political Skeptic and Avid Hunter In November of 1814 Dumas's mother, whose repeated and increasingly desperate requests for payment of her husband's military pension had fallen on deaf ears, was granted instead a license to open a tobacconist's shop. It seems reasonable to assume that the ingratitude and indifference with which his father's (and later also his own) services were rewarded by the government colored Dumas's views of most political regimes. What is certain is that the rich and powerful characters who people Dumas's novels and plays only belatedly and begrudgingly reward those who have served them, if at all.

In August of 1816, Dumas began working as an errand boy. Hired to run legal documents out to area farmers unable to come to town to sign them, Dumas often took time out to go hunting rather than attend promptly to his duties. His lifelong passion for hunting and his intimate knowledge of the forest would later provide the raw materials for masterful descriptions of animals, woods, and sporting scenes. Likewise, the game that the adolescent Dumas used to supplement the family's income and diet would become the object of many of the recipes in the posthumously published *Dumas on Food* (1873).

A Love of Theater The year 1819 was marked by several significant events. On June 27, Dumas met Adolphe Ribbing de Leuven, a young Swedish nobleman. Destined to become a lifelong friend and occasional literary collaborator, Leuven stimulated Dumas's love of the theater. Through Leuven, Dumas would meet others who helped shape his career. In September, Dumas began a relationship with the first of his many mistresses. In October, Dumas attended a performance of Jean-François Ducis's 1769 adaptation of *Hamlet* in Soissons and was so overwhelmed by the experience that he purchased a copy of the text and learned the lead role by heart. When Leuven returned from a five-month stay in Paris in March of 1820, he and Dumas collaborated on two vaudeville comedies and a drama. No trace remains of any of these early pieces, which the authors tried, unsuccessfully, to have produced in Paris.

The family's financial circumstances were such that Dumas could not long remain without work. Thus, during the last days of March in 1823, the young man once again left for Paris, where he contacted some of his father's former comrades-in-arms in the hope that they would help him to find a job. It was only thanks to

General Maximilien Foy's last-minute discovery of Dumas's fine penmanship that the youth obtained a position on Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans's secretarial staff.

In March of 1825 Dumas, Leuven, and James Rousseau wrote a one-act vaudeville, which was performed on September 22, 1825, and was published the same year. Dumas was reprimanded for neglecting his office duties, but he paid no attention to this advice, and in February of 1826 he, Leuven, and the printer L. P. Sétier founded and managed a poetry review named the *Psyché*, which appeared from March 1826 until January 1830. Dumas published many of his own poems in this review, the first of several newspaper ventures he would undertake during his lifetime.

Theatrical Triumph In the meantime, in the space of two months, Dumas had written a five-act historical drama in prose, *Henry III and His Court*. Rehearsals for the play began immediately. Because Dumas neglected his work to attend rehearsals, he was forced to choose between his job and his play. He chose the latter. The piece opened on February 10, 1829, with the duc d'Orléans and his dinner guests in attendance. The play was a triumph; it was published two weeks later.

This play includes many elements Dumas would use again in other dramas and novels: a compelling if broadly sketched picture of a society in the midst of a political conflict; real people and places used as a backdrop for an invented tale of passion and ambition; masterful dialogues coupled with powerfully dramatic conclusions; unhappy lovers, at least one of whom dies a spectacular death; a practitioner of some (pseudo-) scientific profession; characters who jump out of windows or use secret passages; women who are portrayed either as angels or devils, and men whose friendships are at least as powerful as love, if not more so.

Though suddenly a successful playwright, Dumas nonetheless resumed working for the Duc d'Orléans, and on June 20, 1829, he was assigned a position as assistant librarian at the Palais-Royal. In July, Dumas participated in the Revolution of 1830. He describes this tumultuous period in his *Mémoires*, highlighting in particular his seizure of an arsenal in Soisson. Life in times of revolution, much like the ones he lived through, also became an important part of his later fiction, such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

The Revolution of 1830 temporarily diverted Dumas from his writing. His liberal activities were viewed unfavorably by the new king, and Dumas traveled for a time outside France. A series of amusing travel books resulted from this period of exile.

His Collaborative Fiction When Dumas returned to Paris, a new series of historical plays flowed from his pen. He also began writing fiction at this time, first composing short stories and then novels. Almost all of the books composed during the next fifteen years first appeared in serial form. Dumas certainly profited from

this arrangement but so too did the newspaper owners, who saw their readership increase whenever they printed a Dumas text. While Dumas and his collaborators continued throughout this time to write what might be called "stand alone" novels, they also developed several series of novels that are now among Dumas's best-known works. In collaboration with Auguste Maquet he wrote the trilogy *The Three Musketeers* (1844), *Twenty Years After* (1845), and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* (1850). *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846) was also a product of this period. Dumas and his associates almost always adapted their novels for the theater, where they were also very well received.

Dumas had many collaborators—Auguste Maquet, Paul Lacroix, Paul Bocage, and P. A. Fiorentino, to name only a few—but it was undoubtedly with Maquet that he produced his best novels. He had assistants who supplied him with the outlines of romances whose original form he had already drawn up; then he would write the work himself.

Not surprisingly, Dumas's success during this period caused resentment among some of his contemporaries. In late February of 1845 Eugène de Mirecourt published a pamphlet entitled *The Novel Factory: Alexandre Dumas & Company*. Notorious for its virulent, racist attack on Dumas, Mirecourt's brochure also denounced Dumas for using collaborators and for unfairly monopolizing publishing opportunities in the newspapers. Dumas sued Mirecourt for slander and won his case on March 15, 1845. On March 26 he signed five-year exclusive contracts with the *Presse* and the *Constitutionnel* to furnish multivolume works for serial publication.

Later Life

Dumas, who had never changed his republican opinions, greeted the Revolution of 1848 with enthusiasm and even ran as a candidate for the Assembly. In 1850 the Théâtre-Historique, which he had founded to present his plays, failed. After the coup d'état in 1851 and the seizure of power by Napoleon III, Dumas went to Brussels, where his secretary managed to restore some semblance of order to his affairs. There he continued to write prodigiously. After spending several years in Russia, Sicily, and Naples, he returned to Paris, where he found himself deep in debt and at the mercy of a host of creditors. His affairs were not helped by a succession of mistresses who expected—and received—lavish gifts from Dumas.

Working compulsively to pay his debts, Dumas produced a number of rather contrived works, among them *Madame de Chamblay* (1863) and *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1864), that were not received with great enthusiasm. His last years were softened by the presence of his son, Alexandre, and his devoted daughter, Madame Petel. He died in comparative poverty and obscurity on December 5, 1870.

Works in Literary Context

Dumas does not penetrate deeply into the psychology of his characters; he is content to identify them by characteristic tags (the lean bitterness of Athos, the spunk of D'Artagnan) and hurl them into a thicket of wild and improbable adventures where, after heroic efforts, they will at last succumb to noble and romantic deaths. His heroes and heroines, strong-willed and courageous beings with sonorous names, are carried along in the rapid movement of the dramas, in the flow of adventure and suspenseful plots. Dumas adhered to no literary theory, except to write as the spirit moved him, which it often did.

Alienation and Infidelity The experiences of Dumas's life formed recurring themes in his work. In his early play *Antony* (1831), for example, he highlighted the conflicts between the individual and society in contemporary Paris. The central figures in the play are a wife and mother who, when forced to choose between her lover and her reputation, bows to social pressures; and Antony, a man of exceptional merit whose illegitimate birth and unjust ostracism have brought him to despair and then to revolt. Dumas would use illegitimacy again in many of his works: *Captain Paul* (1838), *The Vicomte de Bragelonne; or, Ten Years Later* (1848–1850), *The Two Dianas* (1846–1847), and *The Regent's Daughter* (1844). The alienated hero whose superior intelligence, pride, and frustrated passion render him an outsider would also reappear in such works as *George* (1843) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–1845), while the theme of adultery would figure prominently in *Diana of Meridor* (1846) as well as *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Queen's Necklace* (1849–1850), among others.

The Merit of Popular Literature “Popularizer” though he may have been, Dumas was not and should not be regarded as merely the author of entertaining adventure novels for adolescents. He considered himself a historian, and he believed that his works, with their reappearing characters and their broad chronological scope, might accurately be compared to those of Honoré de Balzac. Thus, he wrote that “Balzac wrote a vast and beautiful work with a hundred sides to it entitled *The Human Comedy*. Begun at the same time as his, our work . . . might be called *The Drama of France*.” In the end, though, no collective title ever became attached to Dumas's works, perhaps because his writings could not be categorized under any single heading, however broadly defined. The author of novels and plays, short stories and fantastic tales, travel writings and memoirs, newspaper articles and recipes, Dumas chronicled the political experiences and personal adventures of innumerable real and imagined characters across the ages.

Historical Drama and Beyond The view of Dumas as the “French Walter Scott,” based as it is on a series of novels written from the mid-1840s to the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dumas's famous contemporaries include:

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893): Russian composer perhaps best known today for his *1812 Overture* and his ballet *The Nutcracker*, which was based on Dumas's adaptation of a story originally written by E. T. A. Hoffman.

Louis-Phillipe I (1773–1850): The “Citizen-King” of France from 1830 to 1848, and also the last king of France, placed on the throne during the July Revolution of 1830 that deposed Charles X. His reign was marked by initial support from working-class citizens that gradually turned to resentment, then open rebellion in 1848, when he abdicated the throne and fled to England.

Honoré Daumier (1808–1879): Painter, sculptor, draftsman, and caricaturist whose biting satirical political cartoons had the capacity to seriously sway public opinion. Just as famous for his lithographs and paintings, Daumier was one of France's most respected nineteenth-century artists.

Auguste Maquet (1813–1888): French author and playwright best known for his frequent collaborations with Dumas. Unlike Dumas, he used his book earnings wisely and lived in comfort until his death.

mid-1850s, is an oversimplification. Although Dumas may be particularly remembered as the author of historical romances, when those works began appearing he was already famous for a run of successful plays. It is important to remember, too, that Dumas never abandoned his career as a playwright, although once his success as a novelist was confirmed, he came increasingly to adapt his novels for the stage rather than to write original pieces for the theater.

Works in Critical Context

Despite their unflagging worldwide popularity, their near-universal availability, and their innumerable movie adaptations, the works of Alexandre Dumas have been largely unappreciated by critics. There has been, for some time now, a specialized journal devoted to Dumas studies, and articles on Dumas have regularly appeared in other scholarly publications. Still, Dumas's novels and plays receive little attention in the standard histories of nineteenth-century French literature and are rarely found on lists of required reading at French or American universities.

Too Many Books Throughout his long career, Dumas wrote works in virtually every literary genre, sometimes publishing two or more novels simultaneously in serial

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dumas used his plays and fiction to explore the changing face of France both in his own times and in the past. Other works that cover similar ground include:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831), a novel by Victor Hugo. Set in fifteenth-century Paris, this novel makes a powerful statement about social justice, as well as being an impassioned plea against “modernizing” the great cathedral.

The Phantom of the Opera (1911), a novel by Gaston Leroux. Based partly on Leroux’s research into various legends surrounding the Paris opera house, this Gothic thriller tells the story of a deformed man’s doomed love for a beautiful opera singer.

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. The second historical novel Dickens wrote, this chronicles the turbulent days of the French Revolution during the last decades of the eighteenth century, climaxing with the bloody Reign of Terror.

La Comédie humaine, a collection of fiction by Honoré de Balzac. This sequence of ninety-five finished and forty-eight unfinished works depicts French society in the time between the Restoration of the French Monarchy after Napoleon (1815) and the July Monarchy of Louis-Phillipe that ended in the Revolution of 1848.

form. From the nineteenth century to the present, critics have tended to be suspicious of this level of output, and they will often dismiss as unworthy of respect any author who writes a great deal. This attitude is apparent in the imaginary conversation Delphine de Girardin included in one of her *Parisian Letters* (1845) to explain why Dumas, like Balzac, failed to get elected to the French Academy:

Messrs. Balzac and Alexandre Dumas write fifteen to eighteen volumes a year, one can’t forgive them for that.—But they are excellent novels.—That’s no excuse, there are too many of them.—But they are wildly successful.—That’s one more thing to hold against them: let them write a single, slim, mediocre volume, let no one read it, and then we’ll see. Too much baggage is an impediment to admission to the Academy, where the orders are the same as at the Tuileries Garden; those who carry oversize packages are not allowed inside.”

Too Much Assistance Another factor also appears to have detracted from Dumas’s critical stature: his use of collaborators. “Dumas does not have the kind of imagination that invents things, but one that puts things together,” writes one of his more recent biographers, Claude Schopp. Schopp goes on to suggest that, with

the possible exception of Auguste Maquet, most of the author’s collaborators contributed little more than the initial idea for a work, which Dumas then developed and wrote by himself. Still, at least since the time when the Romantics redefined literary genius in terms of originality and individuality, literary critics have been reluctant to praise authors who, like Dumas, relied on collaborators to help them research and develop their texts.

Too Easy to Read There are also those who, like Michel Picard, would argue that while Dumas’s writings are engaging and even seductive, they do not display the characteristics of serious literature. A Dumas text reads so easily, contends Picard, that one is not even conscious of reading it; it operates “in such a way as to deprive the reader of the capacity to think.” Behind this lies the belief that “real” literature is defined by its complexities.

Contemporary Opinions

Critical appreciation of Dumas’s achievements has increased over time. During his lifetime, he was beset by accusations of plagiarism and outright fraud. He defended his practices, minimizing the contribution of his collaborators and arguing that he had reworked rather than copied the writings of others, but his reputation was severely damaged nonetheless. His tendency late in his career to pad his works for the sake of profit further jeopardized his fame. However, Dumas’s literary stature rebounded shortly after his death, as critics showed a greater tolerance towards his authorial practices. Many of these commentators emphasized that Dumas was indeed responsible for the original quality of his works regardless of his borrowings and collaborations. Still, most critics grant that Dumas neither aspired to nor achieved profundity. Instead, he is usually discussed in terms of his unmatched storytelling ability and depicted as an entertainer par excellence.

Responses to Literature

1. Read about Cardinal Richelieu’s real life and compare it to his life as portrayed by Dumas in *The Three Musketeers*. How accurately did Dumas portray the Cardinal?
2. Dumas presents the siege of La Rochelle as an amusing picnic for the Musketeers. Research conflicts like the Thirty Years War and English civil war. What was war really like in the seventeenth century for the average foot soldier? Were there many opportunities for glory? Why did soldiers fight, if not for glory?
3. Dumas enthusiastically supported the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. What was the cause behind these revolutions? Did they achieve any lasting effects on European politics and society?
4. Critical opinion of Dumas’s work has suffered in comparison to his contemporaries in large part

because of the perception that Dumas only wrote “popular” fiction and did not aspire to create literature. Do you think this is a valid opinion? Is it possible for mass-market fiction to achieve greatness? Can you think of any modern examples of popular fiction that you would classify as great works of literature?

5. Many of Dumas’s best-known works are set in the past. Can you think of other examples of stories set in specific historical time periods that you have read? Do you think these types of books are valuable instruments for learning about the past? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of learning about history through historical fiction?

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❏ Daphne du Maurier

BORN: 1907, London, England
 DIED: 1989, Par, Cornwall, England
 NATIONALITY: English
 GENRE: Fiction
 MAJOR WORKS:
Jamaica Inn (1936)
Rebecca (1938)
Frenchman’s Creek (1941)
My Cousin Rachel (1951)

Overview

Daphne du Maurier was a British author of popular fiction who had the rare quality of being nearly as highly regarded by many critics as she was by her readers. As Margaret Forster wrote for London’s *Sunday Times*, “If all our popular bestsellers were of her excellence then there would be no need to deplore their existence, and the silly snobbery existing between ‘pulp’ fiction and literary fiction would vanish.” Though she wrote dozens of novels, short stories, plays, and nonfiction works, she is perhaps best remembered for the film adaptations of her work, including two films by Alfred Hitchcock: *Rebecca* and *The Birds*.



Daphne du Maurier Hans Wild / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Her Own Way Daughter of renowned actor Gerald du Maurier and granddaughter of artist and author George du Maurier (*Trilby*), young Daphne first turned to writing as a means of escape. Despite a happy and financially secure childhood, she often felt “inadequate” and desperately in need of solitude. She delighted in the imaginary world of books and play-acting and stubbornly resisted “growing up” until her late teens. After shunning the debutante scene and a chance at an acting career, du Maurier was determined to succeed on her own terms—as a writer. During one ten-week stay at her parents’ country home on the Cornish coast, the twenty-four-year-old Englishwoman wrote her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, a romantic family chronicle. A best seller that achieved a fair share of critical acclaim, *The Loving Spirit* so impressed a thirty-five-year-old major in the Grenadier Guards that he piloted his motor launch past the du Maurier home in the hope of meeting the author. Major Frederick “Boy” Browning and du Maurier married a few months later, setting off by boat on a honeymoon “just like the couple in *The Loving Spirit*,” according to Nicholas Wade in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Rebecca Daphne du Maurier lived in Cornwall for forty years, twenty-five of them in Menabilly, a seventeenth-century house that she described as the most beautiful she

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Du Maurier's famous contemporaries include:

Woody Guthrie (1912–1969): American folk singer who wrote "This Land Is Your Land."

Thomas Keneally (1935–): Australian novelist best known for his novel *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which was later adapted into the film *Schindler's List*.

Gabriel García Márquez (1928–): Colombian novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–1963): The thirty-fifth president of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. His term in office began in 1961.

Lawrence Durrell (1912–1990): British novelist who was famous for his tetralogy *The Alexandria Quartet*.

had ever seen. Cornwall, a region of mystery and superstition and the home of legendary figures such as King Arthur and Tristan and Isolde, is a landscape easily made gothic; it is the home, as well, of pirates both fictional and historical, with a coastline that has been responsible for innumerable shipwrecks. While never a fully assimilated Cornishwoman, du Maurier was certainly inspired by her adopted home, the setting of some of her best and best-known novels: *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Frenchman's Creek* (1941), and *The House on the Strand* (1969). It is, therefore, not surprising that du Maurier took time out from her many successful novels to write a history of Cornwall (1967).

It was in Alexandria, Egypt, where her husband was posted in 1936, that du Maurier began her fifth novel, *Rebecca*, published in 1938. Far from home, unhappy in the company of both the British military and the Egyptians, du Maurier often thought about Cornwall—fantasizing about, as much as recalling, its lush forests and pounding seas that stood in stark contrast to the stifling and arid desert. These fantasies and a sense of profound melancholy inform the mood of *Rebecca*, the story of a naive working-class woman whom the recently widowed Maxim de Winter marries and takes back to his palatial family mansion, Manderley, in the south of England. There the second Mrs. de Winter—her first name is never given—discovers that she must compete with the memory of the former mistress of the house, Rebecca, whose qualities, as the creepy housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, constantly points out, were in dramatic contrast to those of the unsophisticated newcomer. But the bride comes to learn that she need not be jealous of her predecessor, for Max hated his first wife. Late in the novel, he is charged with her murder, but during the trial evidence is intro-

duced at the last moment that exonerates him. Returning home, the de Winters discover that the distraught Mrs. Danvers has burned Manderley down; Max and his bride are free to start their lives over again.

The response to *Rebecca* was overwhelmingly positive; critics pointed out that du Maurier could no longer be compared to the Brontës or to any other novelist, but had found her own voice.

Du Maurier basked in the delight of her sudden fame for a time, and then went back to what she knew best—writing. *Frenchman's Creek* was published in 1941, *My Cousin Rachel* in 1951, *The Scapegoat* in 1957, and *Flight of the Falcon* in 1965. According to Jane S. Bakerman, writing in *And Then There Were Nine . . . More Women of Mystery*, these books are, in addition to *Jamaica Inn* and *Rebecca*, the six novels on which du Maurier's "auctorial reputation rests most firmly." There were certainly a bevy of others, including *The King's General*, *Hungry Hill*, and *The House on the Strand*, but the core of her work can be seen in these six.

Works in Literary Context

An avid reader from early childhood, du Maurier was especially fond of the works of Walter Scott, W. M. Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, and Oscar Wilde. Other authors who strongly influenced her include R. L. Stevenson, Katherine Mansfield, Guy de Maupassant, and W. Somerset Maugham. From these writers, du Maurier grew to understand how to write a gothic masterpiece.

The Gothic Thread Gothic literature is marked by the fear of the supernatural's intrusion into one's life. Often, the setting for gothic literature is a large, dark, and foreboding castle or a weatherworn house on a wind-beaten plain, where characters find themselves isolated from the rest of society. The past—often represented by a ghost or the fear of a ghost—presents frightening challenges for the current inhabitants of these scary places. A further complication of traditional gothic literature is the inclusion of a love affair or marriage that is somehow challenged by the specter of the ghosts, both real and psychological, that haunt the settings. The Brontë sisters effectively utilized this formula in novels like *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, and it is in this tradition that one can best place du Maurier's fiction.

Legacy Du Maurier was most proficient in creating psychological or gothic thrillers—usually with some connection to the past—that focus on the struggle of an individual against an oppressive environment. Her best novels—*Rebecca*, *The Scapegoat*, *My Cousin Rachel*, *The House on the Strand*, and *The Flight of the Falcon*—are strong in characterization, setting, and plot. Although she was able to live comfortably as a result of the commercial success of her works and was made a dame of the British Empire in 1969 for her literary contributions to the United Kingdom, du Maurier did not occupy a place in the literary canon during her lifetime—much to her

disappointment. A reassessment of the canon has led in recent years to the “discovery” of several previously neglected figures in British literature, most of them women. This list includes Daphne du Maurier.

Works in Critical Context

While critics have praised a few of du Maurier’s novels—*Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*—with unabashed joy, the novelist has not fared so well with her other work. Indeed, some critics find the plots of her other novels unlikely and the writing sloppy and unbelievable. Despite these problems, however, the overall assessment of du Maurier’s body of work has been largely positive—scholars finding the pleasure of du Maurier’s unlikely stories to outweigh the problems they find in the texts.

Rebecca “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.” With these words, among the most recognizable in twentieth-century gothic fiction, Daphne du Maurier began her classic novel *Rebecca*. Described by the *Spectator*’s Kate O’Brien as “a Charlotte Brontë story minus Charlotte Brontë,” *Rebecca* takes a familiar situation (the arrival of a second wife in her new husband’s home) and turns it into an occasion for mystery, suspense, and violence. Its primary features—an enigmatic heroine in a cold and hostile environment, a brooding hero tormented by a guilty secret, and a rugged seacoast setting—are now virtual staples of modern romantic novels. Though reviewers have long pointed out (and du Maurier agreed) that she could not take credit for inventing this formula, many critics believe that du Maurier’s personal gift for storytelling places her novels a cut above other gothic fiction.

As V. S. Pritchett remarked in a review of *Rebecca*: “Many a better novelist would give his eyes to be able to tell a story as Miss Du Maurier does, to make it move at such a pace and to go with such mastery from surprise to surprise. . . . From the first sinister rumors to the final conflagration the melodrama is excellent.” M. F. Brown also commented in the *New York Times* on du Maurier’s “ability to tell a good story and people it with twinkling reality,” while John Patton of *Books* wrote: “[*Rebecca*] is first and last and always a thrilling story. . . . Du Maurier’s style in telling her story is exactly suited to her plot and her background, and creates the exact spirit and atmosphere of the novel. The rhythm quickens with the story, is always in measure with the story’s beat. And the writing has an intensity, a heady beauty, which is itself the utterance of the story’s mood.”

“Sloppy and Chaotic” Prose Despite the almost overwhelming critical praise for *Rebecca*, some critics believed du Maurier’s other work exhibits too much melodrama, too many plot similarities, and too little character development and analysis. With the exception of *My Cousin Rachel*, a book several critics have hailed as another *Rebecca*, many of du Maurier’s later novels suffer in comparison. The *Spectator*’s Paul Ableman, for instance,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the staples of gothic literature is the importance of the home in which the action of the novel usually occurs. Often set in old castles and homes with rich and long histories, the gothic novel focuses on the life of the domicile itself. Here are a few more works that analyze the life force of a home:

Northanger Abbey (1817), a novel by Jane Austen. Written early in her career but published after her death, this novel is a witty response to the popular gothic fiction of Austen’s day.

“The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. In this masterwork, the “House of Usher” reflects the decline of the family that inhabits it. As the last in the line of Usher becomes frail and his health fails, so, too, does the house of Usher crumble.

House of Leaves (2000), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski. As the marriage between the protagonists in this novel is challenged, the house in which they live expands—new rooms appear out of nowhere—and the characters feel compelled to explore the dark depths of these strange caverns that seem to stretch out for miles.

declared that her “plots creak and depend on either outrageous coincidence or shamelessly contrived mood,” that her prose is “both sloppy and chaotic,” and that her dialogue consists of “rent-a-line, prefabricated units for the nobs or weird demotic for the yokels.” And L. A. G. Strong, another *Spectator* critic, pointed out the “facile, out-of-character lines that disfigure the often excellent dialogue,” as well as a certain “laziness over detail” and a “mixture of careful with perfunctory work.” In addition, insists Beatrice T. Lucey of *Best Sellers*, “nowhere does the reader become engaged and involved in the action.”

Overall Assessment Despite the views of critics who complain about plot similarities and stereotyped characters, Jean Stubbs of *Books and Bookmen* remained convinced of the writer’s success. “Daphne Du Maurier has the deserved reputation of being an outstanding storyteller,” Stubbs wrote. “She has the gift of conveying mystery and holding suspense, above all of suggesting the grip of the unknown on ordinary lives. . . . She is passionately devoted to Cornwall, and insists on our participation. Her sense of theatre creates some characters a little larger than life, and her commonsense surrounds them with people we have met and known, so that the eccentric and dramatic is enhanced.”

Furthermore, as a critic for the *Times Literary Supplement* pointed out in a review of *Rebecca*, it may not be to anyone’s benefit to approach du Maurier’s work as one would approach great literature. “If one chooses to read

the book in a critical fashion—but only a tiresome reviewer is likely to do that—it becomes an obligation to take off one’s hat to Miss du Maurier for the skill and assurance with which she sustains a highly improbable fiction,” the critic stated. “Whatever else she may lack, it is not the story-teller’s flow of fancy. All things considered, [hers] is an ingenious, exciting and engagingly romantic tale.”

Responses to Literature

1. Research the term *melodrama*. After having read *Jamaica Inn*, do you believe that du Maurier’s work can accurately be described as “melodramatic”? Why or why not? Can you think of a film or novel that you have read that seems to be more melodramatic? In a short essay, explore these questions.
2. Using the Internet and the library, research Menabilly, du Maurier’s home. Menabilly has been cited as the inspiration for the places described in *Frenchman’s Creek* and *Jamaica Inn*. In a short essay, discuss the ways in which du Maurier utilizes the real-life place Menabilly in her novels. (Consider the details du Maurier chooses to include and those she chooses to exclude.)
3. Du Maurier said that she was less interested in writing individual characters than she was in writing types of characters. What effect did this decision have on her novels? How does this focus affect your feelings about the characters that populate her novels? In order to answer these questions, consider the novels *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*.
4. People often say, “The book was better than the movie.” Considering how well du Maurier describes her settings, and considering how remarkably films can present these settings, which medium do you feel is more effective in capturing the essence of *Rebecca*? Why do you feel as you do? How important is the visual component in the appreciation of the novel?

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Lord Dunsany

BORN: 1878, London, England

DIED: 1957, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Glittering Gate (1909)

The Chronicles of Rodriguez (1922)

The King of Elfland’s Daughter (1924)

The Charwoman’s Shadow (1926)

“Two Bottles of Relish” (1932)

Overview

Lord Dunsany was the name under which Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett (Baron Dunsany) wrote during an authorial career that spanned nearly five decades. An Irish aristocrat whose peerage stretched back to medieval times, Lord Dunsany is considered one of the earliest and most significant authors of modern fantasy literature. An



Lord Edward Dunsany Alexander Bassano / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

immensely prolific writer, Dunsany's sixty-plus volumes of drama, verse, and short stories were almost always written in longhand with an old-fashioned quill pen. He has been described as a "fantasist's fantasist"—although his work was popular during his lifetime, its continuing reputation has rested largely on the praise of other fantasy writers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Irish Heritage, Military Service, and Writing as a Sideline Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Lord Dunsany, was born in London in July 1878. He was of an ancient Irish family and succeeded to the family title as the eighteenth Baron Dunsany in 1899. He was given a top-flight English education at Eton and the military academy at Sandhurst, and he went into a fashionable and famous regiment, the Coldstream Guards, which had been his grandfather's regiment. He served as a junior officer in Gibraltar and then in the Boer War from 1899 to 1902. Dunsany was married in 1904 to Lady Beatrice Child-Villiers, daughter of the seventh Earl of Jersey. They had one son, Randal Arthur Henry, who was born in 1906. In time, Dunsany gave the famous family castle in County Meath to his son, and Dunsany and his wife lived in England.

Although Dunsany always thought of himself first and foremost as a poet, it was not through his verse that he gained fame. Dunsany published several collections of short stories, but he first became well known through his association with Dublin's Abbey Theatre, beginning with the production of his *The Glittering Gate* in 1909.

In World War I, he was a captain in the Fifth Inniskilling Fusiliers, serving with distinction in France, and he received some minor wounds while battling Irish insurrectionists in 1916. After World War I, Dunsany took up literature as a sideline and was a prolific writer of drama (with encouragement from William Butler Yeats and others), short stories, poetry, and novels. Dunsany's personal opinions, prejudices, and passions—including his love of sports—often crop up in his work. He is chiefly remembered for several of his stories, including "Two Bottles of Relish," (1932) and for several plays that became part of his collected works.

Dunsany claimed that the fantastic novels and short stories he wrote simply came to him without much effort (and, he cautioned, ought not to have too much read into them). Although he had a quick intelligence, a sharp wit, and a sometimes dark humor, his theory was that the artist goes beyond that which his "intellect can discover." At his best Dunsany let himself be led by his lively imagination, and the dreamlike quality of his best work made him famous.

During World War II, Dunsany returned to Dunstall Priory in England as part of the Home Guard, hoping to assist if needed in capturing fallen German pilots or

defending England against a possible invasion—neither of which happened, somewhat to Dunsany's disappointment at his inability to contribute something to the war effort. However, a threatened German invasion in 1941 forced Dunsany to flee Greece, where he and his wife had gone upon his appointment as Byron Chair of English Literature at the national university in Athens.

Modernization of Irish Folklore Dunsany's precise religious beliefs are a matter of some debate, but he most certainly was not a conventional Christian. In novels such as *The Gods of Pegana* he seems to be proposing that the gods described in the stories actually exist, but in other works such as *Time and the Gods* they are more like allegories. The gods and goddesses of Dunsany's works are there merely to express ideas but also to create a convincing, interesting, and unearthly world. As an educated Irishman, Dunsany would have been familiar with the rich history of Irish folklore and mythology, in addition to his scholarly study of the classical mythology of Greece and Rome. Unlike many other Irish writers, however, Dunsany is more famous for his originality than for his reproduction of traditional creation myths and legends. When he does so, as in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, which borrows from the Irish myth of Oisín, he also mixes these elements with more modern ideas, such as evolution and physics.

Since Dunsany's colorful personality was just as much one of his great character creations as anyone who appears in his fiction, many consider it relevant to consider his several autobiographies as part of his literary achievement. He describes his life in *My Ireland* (1937), *Patches of Sunlight* (1938), *While the Sirens Slept* (1944), and *The Sirens Wake* (1945).

Apart from his more mainstream works, Dunsany is typically known as a fantasist, and his antimodern sentiments did not incline him much toward science fiction. One late novel, *The Last Revolution* (1951), however, stands on the border between fantasy and science fiction, even though its ideas continue to parallel the general nostalgia of his work. *The Last Revolution* follows a theme found in many other works of science fiction—namely, machines turning against those who created them.

Dunsany remained active until the end of his life, writing extensively and traveling often. He died at age seventy-nine of appendicitis on October 25, 1957, leaving behind a large body of uncollected work in addition to his dozens of published books.

Works in Literary Context

Tone and Language The tone of Dunsany's fantasies is distinctive. His works are recognized for their dreamlike atmosphere. The surreal effect of his scenes sometimes comes from the juxtaposition of stark, realistic images with the highly idealized landscapes of pastoral

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dunsany's famous contemporaries include:

Winsor McCay (1867–1934): American cartoonist whose best-known work is his comic strip “Little Nemo in Slumberland,” which ran from 1905–1914. The elaborately drawn strip created dreamlike fantasy figures that were an important influence on Walt Disney, Maurice Sendak, and many other cartoon artists.

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898): English author, mathematician, logician, Anglican clergyman, and photographer famous for writing the fantasy story *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871).

Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932): British writer of short stories about children and their imaginative worlds who is chiefly remembered for his novel *The Wind in the Willows* (1908).

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): British author, poet, and friend of Lord Dunsany, famous for both children's and adult works, including *The Jungle Book* (1894) and “Gunga Din” (1892).

mythology. Dunsany has been estimated higher than many other creators of fantastic mythologies and fairy worlds because of his style. His cadences often resound in readers' memories, and his prose has been described as melodic, metaphoric, and poetic. Dunsany acknowledged the Bible's considerable influence on his work, citing it as containing the greatest English in the history of the language. *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories* (1908) provides examples of this elevated prose style, influenced equally by older epics such as *Beowulf* in the language used by heroes to recount their exploits.

Irony and Optimism The humor in Dunsany's work has been described as a sustained gentle irony. Reminiscent in some ways of Ernest Bramah or of Dunsany's own friend Rudyard Kipling, Dunsany related tales of the exotic but left it to readers to believe in them or not. He often lightly ridiculed his readers for their credulity, always including himself in the satire.

Dunsany was a longtime collaborator with the artist Sidney Herbert Sime. The art of both men was about imagining a golden world rather than the horrors that might lie beneath. Unlike much fantasy literature, Dunsany's was not gothic: readers are instead transported to ethereal realms with glittering golden pavements, worlds where even if a mysterious wager turns out to have immediately evil consequences, all will come right in the end. Yet, Dunsany's stories are not mere fairy tales—they remind readers of the common fallibility of human and

god, suggesting that the world is (or should be) governed by an always-present mercy and forgiveness.

Fantastic Influence Dunsany is often cited as a strong influence on later writers of fantasy—a genre that stretches back to the medieval Romances populated by wizards and dragons and reaches forward to the edge of contemporary science fiction. Like J. R. R. Tolkien, the most famous, if not necessarily the first of the great fantasy writers, Dunsany was skilled at creating entire imaginative worlds complete with their own religions, traditions, and cultures. Unlike Tolkien or C. S. Lewis, however, Dunsany did not create one imaginative world and stay in it—he was endlessly inventive and started fresh with each novel or short story. Dunsany shares with Tolkien a nostalgia for a simpler and more idyllic time in the misty past of English and Irish history, but for Dunsany, these values are always threatened by the greed and lack of imagination shown by the encroaching modern world.

Works in Critical Context

Dunsany's contemporaries praised the author primarily as a great dramatist. He first came to prominence through his association with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the home base of other well-known Irish writers, including William Butler Yeats, J. M. Synge, and Lady Gregory. But during his lifetime, Dunsany achieved his greatest renown in the United States, where he was known as “America's favorite peer.” He once had five plays running simultaneously in New York.

Although Dunsany's career spanned nearly five decades, his early works continue to dominate critical discussion of his writings. Modern readers tend to neglect both his dramatic works and his novels in favor of his short fiction. In 1969, critic George Brandon Saul observed that sometimes Dunsany's concern with the dreamworld led him into sentimentality and extreme vagueness of fancy, and his writing suggested more of a generalized talent than it did genius. Nevertheless, critics have generally recognized Dunsany's talent as having had a major influence on fantasy novels and the sometimes symbolic genre of science fiction.

S. T. Joshi has suggested that this view of his output is too narrow, however. “Let us marvel at [Dunsany's] seemingly effortless mastery of so many different forms (short story, novel, play, even essay and lecture), his unfailingly sound narrative sense, and the amazing consistency he maintained over a breathtakingly prolific output,” writes Joshi. Joshi continues: “Dunsany claimed aesthetic independence from his time and culture, [and] became a sharp and unrelenting critic of the industrialism and plebeianism that were shattering the beauty both of literature and of the world”

The King of Elfland's Daughter Few of Dunsany's works have received as much critical attention as *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, since its publication in

1924. Critic Roger C. Schlobin summarizes a widely held belief that Dunsany's "greatest stylistic triumph is the much-heralded *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, and in this novel all the qualities of his fantastic fictions are epitomized." Despite such praise, some critics have claimed that Dunsany's second effort as a novelist fails in fictional terms. The descriptive and imaginative gifts that many have praised in his short fiction, these critics argue, do not serve him well in a longer form, and the book suffers from wordiness and excessive detail.

Responses to Literature

1. What is "dreamlike" about Dunsany's fiction? Even though Dunsany cautions his readers against reading "too much" into his work, does the fact that Dunsany drew upon his own dreams open up his work to psychological interpretations? How do you interpret a polished work of fiction differently than you would interpret a dream?
2. Many modern writers of fantasy still use the formal writing style employed by Dunsany in his most famous work, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Why do you think this style of writing has remained so closely associated with tales of fantasy? How would a fantasy tale written in a modern style—including slang—differ from Dunsany's tales in tone and mood? To test your speculation, copy a paragraph or two from the novel and rewrite it in modern language.
3. Although Dunsany is not very well known among modern readers, another fantasy writer who wrote at about the same time—J. R. R. Tolkien—remains the most popular fantasy author of all time. List some ways in which Tolkien's works differ from those of Dunsany. This can include writing style, subject matter, and themes, among other things. Do these differences help to explain why Tolkien remains so much more popular than Dunsany? Or do you think Dunsany has been unfairly ignored by modern readers?
4. Do some research on the "Celtic Revival" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Irish writers such as William Butler Yeats were encouraging other Irish writers of the time to emphasize Irish mythologies and folktales as an expression of Irish nationalism. Do you think it is fair to include Dunsany in this movement? Does his use of Irish mythology fit the model of what the Celtic Revivalists had in mind?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Dunsany's major themes is that the fantasy world is threatened with extinction by the modern forces of reason, science, or organized religion. Other writers who have also created fantastic worlds that are endangered by modern ways include:

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485), an anthology of legends by Sir Thomas Malory. One of the first books printed in Britain, Malory's collection about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table mark the transition from a pagan to a Christian worldview.

Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up (1904), a play by J. M. Barrie. This work, which formed the basis of Barrie's later novelization and the many adaptations, asks the audience to actively express their belief in fairies in order to help save the life of a character.

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1996), a nonfiction book by Thomas Kuhn. In this highly readable history of scientific thought, Kuhn argues that one major view of the universe (a "paradigm") is considered factually true until another one comes along to replace it.

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☒ Marguerite Duras

BORN: 1914, Saigon, French Indochina

DIED: 1996, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Sea Wall (1950)

The Sailor from Gibraltar (1952)

The Ravishing of Lol Stein (1964)

The Lover (1984)

The North China Lover (1991)

Overview

One of the most important literary figures in France, Marguerite Duras won international acclaim after she was awarded the 1984 Prix Goncourt for her autobiographical novel *The Lover*. Although Duras had been writing fiction and directing films for over forty years,



Marguerite Duras *Duras, Marguerite, 1955, photograph. Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images.*

she was always considered a rather inaccessible author by the general public. The publication of *The Lover* sparked interest in all her work, which was quickly republished to meet the overwhelming demand. Featured in numerous interviews on television and in popular magazines in France, Duras became something of a national literary phenomenon.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood in Indochina Duras was born Marguerite Donnadiou on April 4, 1914, near Saigon (present-day Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam, then known as French Indochina, where her parents had moved to teach school. Following the death of her father when Duras was four years old, her mother spent the family's savings on a rice plantation, hoping the venture would prove viable enough to support her and her three young children. Unfortunately, the colonial officials who sold her the plantation were dishonest, the land was virtually worthless because of recurring flooding from the sea, and Duras's mother found herself broke and trying to raise her family far from home. The family's troubles in Indochina form the backdrop for many of Duras's novels. In particular, her most famous novel, *The Lover*, is based heavily on her own experiences as a young woman coming of age in French Indochina.

A French Resistor Despite the family's poverty, Duras was able to study Vietnamese and French in the prestigious Lycée de Saigon. At the age of seventeen, Duras left for France and eventually earned a *licence* in law and political science at the University of Paris, Sorbonne. She worked as a secretary for the Ministry of Colonial Affairs until 1941, when World War II arrived at France's borders. At that time, France was invaded by German forces, resulting in the German occupation of much of France, with the rest of the country remaining "free" under a provisional government approved by the Germans and based in the city of Vichy. Duras became a member of the French Resistance who opposed the German occupation, working with François Mitterrand. She became a member of the French Communist Party, one of the main supporters of the French Resistance. In 1946 she divorced her first husband, Robert Antelme, whom she had married in 1939. She later married Dionys Mascolo, with whom she had a son, Jean. She published her first novel, *Les Impudents*, in 1943 and went on to publish more than seventy novels, plays, screenplays, and adaptations in her lifetime.

She was later dismissed from the French Communist Party in 1950 along with a number of other French intellectuals for ideological differences. Many who joined the party during World War II did so to show their opposition to Nazi Germany as well as their support of workers' rights. However, after World War II, communism became closely

associated with Joseph Stalin's dictatorial rule of the Soviet Union; Stalin's regime was notable less for the ruler's establishment of workers' rights than for his frequent use of imprisonment and murder against those who disagreed with his policies. This stigmatization of communism, especially in the United States, led to trouble between Duras and American officials over a travel visa in 1969. Duras, wishing to attend a New York Film Festival showing of her *Detruire, dit-elle*, had to prove to officials her adherence to anticommunist principles. Duras was also an apologist for the student uprisings in Paris in 1968 and a supporter of French president François Mitterrand during the 1980s.

In her later life, she lived with a young homosexual writer, Yann Andrea Steiner. In 1984, while recovering from alcoholism in a treatment center, Duras wrote *The Lover*, for which she won the Prix Goncourt in 1984. In poor health as a result of her lifelong alcoholism, she died on March 3, 1996, in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

Duras's work has spanned many genres and styles, but the emotional intensity and themes of love, solitude, desire, and despair remain constant throughout. Commentators on Duras's work often divide her literary career into four periods. The novels from her first period have been described as her most realistic and conventional. Her most significant novel from this period, *The Sea Wall* (1950), is set in Indochina and reflects the author's interest in both East Asian culture and issues of social injustice and oppression. Like many of her acclaimed novels, the book is loosely based on an incident that occurred in Duras's childhood.

Focus on the Individual The works from Duras's second period are marked by a shift from linear plots and abrupt, obscure dialogue to a more personal and ironic idiom. The primary works from this period—*The Sailor from Gibraltar* (1952) and *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* (1953)—are considered more concentrated than Duras's previous novels because they focus on fewer characters, events, and relationships. *The Sailor from Gibraltar* concerns a woman who travels on her yacht throughout the Mediterranean in search of her former lover. Duras suggests that the protagonist's persistence gives meaning to her otherwise empty life. *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* similarly reflects Duras's increasing interest in individual characters and their varying moods and emotions.

The Antinovel Duras's third literary cycle includes works often described as antinovels, in which she employs minimalist techniques to accent particular experiences or emotions. *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), for instance, describes a woman's descent into madness after being rejected by her fiancé. Considered an antinovel because of its stark narrative, unreliable narrator, and fragmentary contrast and insights, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* has also been described as an investigation into human conscious-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duras's famous contemporaries include:

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): English dramatist and poet, Beckett's work straddles the line between modernist and postmodernist. His minimalist plays formed the keystone of what came to be called the "Theater of the Absurd."

Robert Musil (1880–1942): Austrian author of the same generation as Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka, Musil never received the same recognition as his peers despite being greatly admired by them. His unfinished masterpiece, *The Man Without Qualities*, would be recognized after his death as one of the most important modernist novels.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): Major figure in the Indian independence movement, close associate of Mohandas Gandhi, Nehru was named the first prime minister of India after the country won its independence in 1947.

Hélène Cixous (1937–): French feminist writer, poet, critic, and philosopher, Cixous also wrote extensively on the relationship between sexuality and language, most famously in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa."

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): French general, leader of the Free French during World War II, and founder of the French Fifth Republic in 1958, for which he served as its first president until 1969.

ness. *The Vice-Consul*, considered the last of Duras's antinovels, simultaneously focuses on a young Asian girl who is abandoned by her mother after becoming pregnant and a government official who becomes involved in the glamorous diplomatic life of Calcutta, India.

Inability to Love Duras's fourth and most eclectic literary period is evidenced in such novels as *The Malady of Death* (1982), *The Lover*, and *The North China Lover*. *The Malady of Death* is a minimalist account of an asexual man who pays a prostitute to live with him for a week and addresses his overwhelming sense of isolation and inability to love. *Emily L.* (1987), another novel from this period, also addresses how one's inability to love can lead to self-destruction.

Autobiography Often considered a revised version of *The Sea Wall*, *The Lover* explores more completely Duras's childhood experiences in French Indochina and her debilitating relationships with her overbearing mother and indolent brothers. While *The Lover* is recognizably autobiographical, Duras focuses on the recollection of events and their emotional significance rather than on the events themselves, thus creating a complex

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Duras's life as well as her fiction have been marked by the author's alcoholism. The following works also deal with alcoholism:

John Barleycorn: Alcoholic Memoirs (1913), a novel by Jack London. This novel is widely recognized as being the first intelligent literary treatise on alcohol in American literature.

The Lost Weekend (1944), a novel by Charles Jackson. In this novel, the author tackles the demons and obsessions that challenge the alcoholic.

Days of Wine and Roses (1962), a film by Blake Edwards. This story of an alcoholic man who draws his wife into his hard-drinking lifestyle received five Academy Award nominations.

structure that conveys the illusion of simplicity. In 1985, Duras published *The War: A Memoir* (1985), a collection of six narratives believed to have been written during World War II and forgotten for forty years. In the title story, Duras recounts her experiences with the French Liberation Movement during the war. She also describes the mental agony she endured while waiting for her husband, Robert Antelme, to return from a German concentration camp. *The North China Lover*, which began as a screenplay for Jean-Jacques Annaud's adaptation of her novel *The Lover*, tells the same story as the novel but in a very different style and tone. In addition, Duras provides cinematic directions—how a scene could be shot, what kind of actress should play a role—creating a work that is part novel, part screenplay. The publication of *The North China Lover* is in large part due to the disagreements between Duras and Annaud over the script for *The Lover*.

Regarding the relationship between her fiction and her life, Duras is quoted by writer Alan Riding as explaining: "Even when my books are completely invented, even when I think they have come from elsewhere, they are always personal." Speaking of how a writer should approach his work, Duras states: "You shouldn't have a subject. You have to go into the forest; you shouldn't be afraid, and it comes, all alone; stories of love, of foolishness, they come on their own, as if you were walking like a blind man before they arrived."

Works in Critical Context

Critical commentary on Duras's work has focused on several major themes. These include the relationship between love and self-destruction, the metaphysics of boredom and inactivity, and the pain of solitude and despair. As Germaine Brée has observed: "The very title

of [*The Sea Wall*] suggests a dogged, unequal battle against a superhuman force. This was to remain one of Duras's basic themes: barrage against the immense solitude of human beings, barrage against the pain of all involvements, barrage against despair."

The North China Lover Scholars have also noted Duras's movement away from the realism of her early novels to the minimalist techniques and focus on emotional experience of her later works. Considered one of her most abstract and impressionistic works, *The Vice-Consul*, notes Alfred Cismaru, contains "standard [anti-novel] devices: unfinished sentences, subconversations, hidden allusions . . . [and] mysterious and unexplained situations." At the time of its publication, many critics argued that *The Lover* was Duras's most effective synthesis of her themes and minimalist style. With the publication of *The North China Lover*, however, many critics argued that the latter was the better of the two closely related novels. In *The North China Lover*, Duras writes in the third person, a technique she uses to distance her characters from the reader, instead of switching between first and third person as she did in *The Lover*. While the second novel is more explicit and shocking, critics believe it is more humane, lyrical, and compelling.

Responses to Literature

1. Duras was one of several French feminist playwrights active during the latter part of the twentieth century. Research another of these writers (Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, or Nathalie Sarraute) and analyze their style in comparison to Duras. What qualities make them feminist writers? How did their feminist views differ from each other?
2. In addition to her plays, Duras worked in cinema as both a screenwriter and director. Watch one of the films she worked on (*Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour* or *India Song*) and compare it to its literary source. How did Duras adapt the film? What changes did she make to the material? Do you feel the essential story remained the same?
3. What role does Duras's experience in the French colonies play in her writing? How does she represent colonial subjects in works such as *India Song* and *The Lover*?
4. One of Duras's recurring themes is the body. How does she portray the body in her writing? Is it a positive or negative object? What larger themes does the body represent?

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☒ Lawrence Durrell

BORN: 1912, Jullundur, India

DIED: 1990, Sommieres, France

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Black Book (1938)

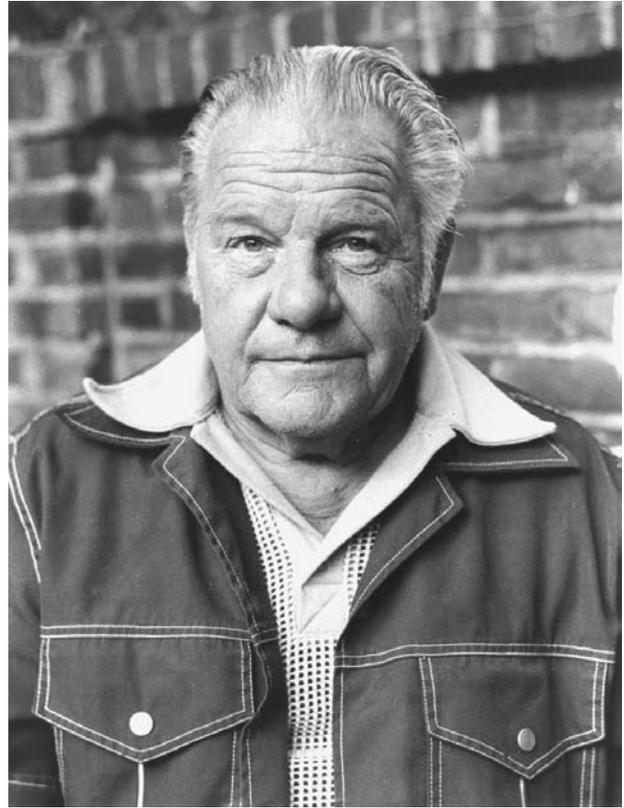
A Key to Modern British Poetry (1952)

Bitter Lemons (1957)

The Alexandria Quartet (1962)

Overview

Lawrence Durrell is known primarily as the author of *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962), a set of four novels widely considered to be among the finest achievements in twentieth-century fiction. Continuing in the tradition of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, Durrell experiments with the structure of the novel while also probing the human psyche. His work is infused with observations on the nature



Lawrence Durrell Durrell, Lawrence George, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

of reality and sexuality, based in part on the theories of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life, Early Success Lawrence Durrell was born in India in 1912 to Anglo-Irish parents who had never seen England because his family had lived in India for three generations. England had officially made India a part of the British Empire in 1858, after many Indians had attempted to drive out the British East India Company, which had effectively ruled much of India for a century. Among the many industries that flourished in India—primarily for trade and shipment back to England—were cotton and silk production.

Despite his family history, Durrell considered himself an Irishman. His father was an engineer who worked on the construction of the Darjeeling railroad line which skirts the Himalayas. Durrell attended the College of St. Joseph in Darjeeling, and at the age of eleven, he was sent to England to continue his education at St. Edmund's School in Canterbury. This move was the first great change in his life, but his father's attempt to groom him as a member of the British ruling class did not succeed. After secondary school, according to Durrell's own

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Durrell's famous contemporaries include:

Anaïs Nin (1903–1977): Nin is best known for her erotica and for her seven-volume journal, which Henry Miller predicted would someday “take its place beside the revelations of St. Augustine, Petronius, [Pierre] Abelard, [Jean Jacques] Rousseau, [Marcel] Proust, and others.”

Robertson Davies (1913–1995): This Canadian novelist's work often deals with religion and metaphysics while interweaving theatrical elements with traditional novel forms.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): This American novelist often experimented not only with the limitations of the novel form but also with the use of dialect.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): This U.S. president's time in office was marred by the Watergate scandal, which eventually forced Nixon to resign for fear of being impeached.

account, he deliberately failed the entrance examinations for Oxford four times, a conscious rebellion against his father. He became a jazz pianist at a London nightclub called The Blue Peter while aspiring to be a writer. After marrying artist Nancy Myers, Durrell completely devoted his energies to becoming a novelist.

Oppressed by the hardship of life in a grimy quarter of London, Durrell was also stung by the stifling pressure of British society on his artistic ambitions. In a letter he wrote, “England wrung my guts out of me and tried to destroy everything singular and unique in me.” In 1935, to escape “that mean, shabby little island,” Durrell went with his family to the island of Corfu, off the Adriatic coast of Greece. He wanted to live the life of an expatriate writer and to recreate the life of London in his novels, much as the expatriate James Joyce had done for Dublin. It was in Corfu that Durrell began reading the work of Henry Miller, whose work would have a major influence on the artist.

Durrell's Muse Durrell's discovery of the works of Henry Miller had a tremendous effect on his writing, and Durrell initiated a correspondence which was to continue until Miller's death. In 1938, after censorship problems had complicated its publication in the British Isles, Durrell's *The Black Book* appeared from Obelisk Press in Paris, and he became what he calls a “serious” writer. The novel established Durrell's reputation and drew lavish praise from Miller: “You've crossed the equator. Your commercial career is finished. From now on you're an outlaw, and I congratulate you with all the breath in my body. I seriously think that you truly are

‘the first Englishman!’” The success of the novel instilled in Durrell the confidence that he was on the right track artistically.

The Alexandria Quartet After a nineteen-year break in his novel-writing career, Durrell produced what would become the centerpiece of his career as a novelist: *The Alexandria Quartet*, comprised of *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, and *Clea*. In this ambitious and intricate series of novels, Durrell attempted to create a fictional parallel of twentieth-century physics, based on the theories he had developed in his one book of literary criticism, *A Key to Modern British Poetry*. The books of *The Alexandria Quartet*, which Durrell called “an investigation of modern love,” are not sequential; rather, the first three books tell about the same events and characters in pre-World War II Alexandria, but from different viewpoints. The “facts” of the story of sexual liaisons and political intrigue are glimpsed only obliquely from the accounts of different narrators. There is, in a sense, no objective truth to be discovered. The fourth novel, *Clea*, is a more traditional chronological narrative which takes the characters through the war years.

Other Genres In addition to his novels, Durrell is noted for a series of works generally referred to as the “island books,” a hybrid genre incorporating autobiography and satiric social commentary. *Prospero's: A Guide to the Landscape and Manners of the Island of Corcyra* (1945) is an “island portrait” of Corfu, its geography, lore, customs, and eccentric inhabitants. Durrell's literary output also includes twelve volumes of poetry, three plays, several books of satiric sketches of diplomatic life, short stories, and collections of his correspondence with Henry Miller, Alfred Perles, and Richard Aldington. Durrell died of emphysema at his home in the village of Sommieres on November 7, 1990.

Works in Literary Context

Durrell's writing career began during a period of formal experimentation in literature. Sensing the limitations of conventional novels and poetry, authors were trying to figure out how the human experience could be fully expressed in literature. Consequently, a narrator might attempt to recount the haphazard development of a human being's thoughts. Writers also began to push the limits of “decency,” describing with unflinching openness sexuality and sexual deviancy. Durrell primarily subscribed to these kinds of experimentation, though he also delved into some narrative design experimentation in his acclaimed *The Alexandria Quartet*.

Rebel Writers and Formal Experimentation One of the most significant influences on Durrell during his search for his own voice as a writer was Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller's 1934 novel, which introduced a frankness in subject matter and expression never seen before, was published in France, banned in England, and

immediately joined James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) as major books that were widely read "underground." Durrell was influenced by the innovations of all three writers: He admired Miller's openness, Joyce's formal experiments, and Lawrence's erotic honesty and spirit of revolt. In *The Black Book*, Durrell deliberately tried to create a plot that would move in memory but remain static in linear time, radiating instead out into space. He referred to this principle that he would go on to refine in *The Alexandria Quartet* as "heraldic."

Indeed, *The Alexandria Quartet* was an experiment in form. The outer plot, a story of love, mystery, and spies, is narrated by a young writer who takes an archetypal journey to find love, self-knowledge, and his artistic voice. He writes a first novel *Justine* about a love affair in Alexandria, and then follows with *Balthazar*, which contradicts the first by quoting other people. Finally, after interjecting a third omniscient volume, *Mountolive*, revealing the "facts," the narrator adds a last novel—*Clea*—that moves forward in time toward his attainment of maturity and wisdom.

The form of the *Quartet* is intrinsic to the work; Durrell had been concerned for many years with how the new physics of space-time might apply to fiction, and insofar as *The Alexandria Quartet* experiments with the novel's limitations with regard to chronology and memory, it is easy to link it to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). In this novel, the plot is developed in backward chronological order and is completely immersed in the dialect of the Deep South, thereby requiring readers to discover a new way to think in order to follow the details of the novel.

In fact, Durrell's experimentation with the interplay of memory and narrative has been effectively used to describe the way post-traumatic stress disorder affects Vietnam War veterans by contemporary writers. Novelists such as Tim O'Brien have helped modern readers understand that for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, there are essentially two existences: the one in the here and the now and the one that is stuck in the traumatic events of the Vietnam War. Successful experimentation with memory and its effect on novel chronology does not merely describe this sensation; the reader actually has a sense of what it feels like to be living within two realities.

Works in Critical Context

Although critics have differed widely in their assessments of Durrell's canon, they have never questioned the quality of the island books, but from the *Quartet* onward, contention swirled around his experiments with form, with characterization, with layering of ideas, and with language itself. Yet viewed as a whole, his work finally takes on, as John Unterecker said in *On Contemporary Literature*, a "marble constancy" all its own. It "fuses together into something that begins to feel like an organic whole."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Alexandria Quartet retells its key events multiple times from different points of view. The idea here seems to be that, so long as stories are told by human beings, they are defined by their subjectivity; therefore, the stories will not be reliable sources of truth. Here are some other examples of artistic works that wrestle with the idea of subjectivity as it relates to truth:

The Things They Carried (1990), by Tim O'Brien. In this collection of short stories, Tim O'Brien describes the experiences of a soldier in the Vietnam War; however, it becomes clear that the events recounted are not "factually true" but only "emotionally true."

Rashômon (1950), a film by Akira Kurosawa. A tragic encounter between a bandit and a samurai and his wife is recounted several different ways by the participants and witnesses—including the dead samurai, who offers his testimony through a medium.

The Indian Killer (1996), by Sherman Alexie. In a traditional murder mystery novel form, Alexie introduces a new twist: Because the serial killer in this novel is never discovered, murder and fear continue to reign at the end of the novel, and the truth is never found.

The Island Novels Durrell's island novels, or landscape books, are drawn from the Greek world, but they are far more than travelogues or catalogues of places to visit. Much like the travel literature of Norman Douglas and D. H. Lawrence, they recreate the ambience of places loved, the characters of people known, and the history and mythology of each unique island world. The first three landscape books, *Prospero's Cell*, *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, and *Bitter Lemons* form a kind of trilogy mounting in intensity and power. *Prospero's Cell* is considered by critics to be the most beautiful of the three, evoking the Corfu of the young Durrell, his Greek friends, and the history of the island and resonates with myths from Homer to William Shakespeare and beyond.

In comparison, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is a harsher, less romantic look at the life of the people of Rhodes immediately after the war. In *Reflections*, Durrell classified his love of islands as "Islomania": "This book is by intention a sort of anatomy of islomania, with all its formal defects of inconsequence and shapelessness." *Bitter Lemons* is critically seen to be the finest of Durrell's island studies and among the most outstanding of his works. Published in 1957, the book was written immediately after he returned to England from Cyprus, where his romance with Greece had been tragically strained by the island's nationalistic uprisings. The author's mixed emotions are expressed vividly in *Bitter Lemons*. In the *New*

York Times Book Review, Freya Stark praised its “integrity of purpose, . . . careful brilliant depth of language and . . . the feeling of destiny which pervades it,” declaring that the book elevated Durrell to the highest rank of writers.

The Alexandria Quartet Well-read in Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and in Sir James Frazer’s mythic theory, Durrell saw modern thought returning full circle to Far Eastern and Indian philosophy, and he wanted to weave all these concepts into the tapestry of *The Alexandria Quartet*. He explained in *Paris Review* that “Eastern and Western metaphysics are coming to a point of confluence in the most interesting way. It seems unlikely in a way, but nevertheless the two main architects of this breakthrough have been Einstein and Freud. . . . Well, this novel is a four-dimensional dance, a relativity poem.” Durrell’s concept of space-time has been greatly debated by critics of his work. Anthony Burgess contended in *The Novel Now*, that “To learn more and more as we go on is what we expect from any good novel, and we need no benefit of ‘relativity.’” In *Lawrence Durrell*, John Unterecker voiced the opposite: “The relativity theory involves a reorientation for the modern writer not only toward the materials of his art but also toward himself, his audience, his world.” In no sense a pretentious or superfluous theory imposed on the *Quartet*, space-time is, in many ways, the central structure of the work.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Alexandria Quartet*. To what extent do you feel Durrell’s experimentation with form is successful? Consider specifically the use of repeated stories from different viewpoints.
2. Read at least two of Durrell’s island novels. In these novels, Durrell attempts to bring to life the myths, the geography, and the people of the islands he describes. Draft a short essay in which you describe the people, places, and myths of your hometown, considering Durrell’s work while you write.

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❑ Friedrich Dürrenmatt

BORN: 1921, *Konolfingen, Switzerland*

DIED: 1990, *Neuchâtel, Switzerland*

NATIONALITY: *Swiss*

GENRE: *Drama, fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Romulus the Great (1949)

The Physicists (1962)

The Meteor (1966)

Play Strindberg (1969)

Achterloo (1983)



Friedrich Dürrenmatt *Keystone / Getty Images*

Overview

Friedrich Dürrenmatt was the leading German-language dramatist of his generation, after Bertolt Brecht. He dominated German, Austrian, and Swiss repertoires and was familiar to audiences throughout Europe, North America, and South America. When not directing the plays himself, he regularly participated in their production, revising and rewriting in consultation with actors up to the last minute; if the performance failed to affect the audience as he thought it should, he cast the text in a new version.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Artistic Talent Friedrich Dürrenmatt was born on January 5, 1921, in the Emmental region of Switzerland to Reinhold Dürrenmatt, a pastor of the Konolfingen church, and Hulda Zimmermann Dürrenmatt. In 1933 Dürrenmatt entered the secondary school in the neighboring village of Grosshochstetten; he spent his spare time in the studio of a local painter, who encouraged him to indulge his passion for painting and drawing. He pursued this activity all his life and was twenty-three before he decided to concentrate on writing stories and plays and to make visual art an avocation.

A Series of Interruptions in Studies The family moved in 1935 to the city of Bern, where Dürrenmatt's father was appointed pastor of the Salem Hospital. Dürrenmatt was enrolled at the Freies Gymnasium, a Christian secondary school, where he lasted two and a half years before he was invited to leave. He transferred to a less rigorous private school, the Humboldtianum, from which he regularly skipped class. He frequently attended the City Theater of Bern, where his uncle, a government official, held a reserved seat.

Upon graduating from high school, after being rejected by the Institute of Art, he enrolled at the University of Zurich, where for one semester he studied philosophy, literature, and natural science. He then became a student of philosophy at the University of Bern for a semester, tutoring in Greek and Latin to earn pocket money. His studies were interrupted—this time, not his fault—when he was called to military duty. Although Switzerland, with its linguistic and cultural melange of German, French, Italian, and Romansh, was neutral in World War II (1939–1945), it maintained a strong military, actively conscripting citizens as part of a plan to deter a potential (and, indeed, fully planned, though never materialized) German invasion. In 1942, Dürrenmatt returned to the University of Zurich for two semesters, spending most of his time in the company of painters and writing plays and stories. In 1943, though, he fell sick with hepatitis and returned home to Bern. He spent his final four semesters of university study there, concentrat-

ing on philosophy and contemplating the possibility of a doctoral dissertation on Søren Kierkegaard and tragedy.

Marriage and Writing for the Basel Stage In 1946, Dürrenmatt married actress Lotti Geissler. They settled in Basel in 1947, at about the time he was completing his first radio play, *The Double* (1960), which was turned down by Swiss Radio, and his first drama, *It Is Written* (1947). Opening night spectators in Zurich booed the latter; but reviewers recognized Dürrenmatt's powerful talent and potential, and he received a cash prize from the Welti Foundation to encourage him to continue writing. His second play, *The Blind Man* (1947), aroused neither outrage nor much interest in its initial production and was removed from the Basel repertoire after nine performances. Productions at two other theaters fared no better.

The Humor of Classical History On August 6, 1947, the Dürrenmatts' first child, Peter, was born. After the failure of *The Blind Man* the family could no longer afford to live in Basel, and they moved to Schernelz, where Lotti's mother, Frau Falb, had a home. Dürrenmatt was also helped financially by friends and anonymous patrons who wanted to foster his talent.

Before the move, though, he had agreed to provide the Basel theater with a play titled "The Building of the Tower of Babel"; the cast had been selected, and the manuscript had grown to four acts. But mature consideration forced him to destroy it. The play he quickly wrote instead, *Romulus the Great* (1949), became the first of his enduring theatrical successes. The work reflected Dürrenmatt's knowledge of Roman history and classical works and concerns the rule of Emperor Romulus Augustulus during the tail end of the Roman Empire. Although the work is not meant to be historically accurate, many of the details—such as the main character's obsession with rearing chickens—were taken from actual historical figures and events. The play was also produced in Zurich in 1948, and in 1949 it became the first major Dürrenmatt production in Germany when the Göttingen theater performed it. Critics were stingy with praise, objecting to the anachronisms and some of the comic effects, but the play became a standard in the German-speaking theater and beyond, perhaps not least because—after the tragedies of the Holocaust (in which Nazis deliberately murdered 6 million Jews and many others) and such Allied atrocities as the firebombing of Dresden—the German-speaking world was desperate for history with a hint of humor in it.

Writing Detective Plays to Pay Avant-Garde Bills Royalties did not yet amount to much, however, and the Falb household started to become cramped as the family grew by two daughters: Barbara and Ruth. Adding to expenses was Dürrenmatt's hospitalization for diabetes. He turned, then, in part to pay the rent on a house in the region of Ligerz in west-central Switzerland, to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dürrenmatt's famous contemporaries include:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): The German playwright and theater director credited with developing the concept of "epic theater."

Václav Havel (1936–): A Czech playwright imprisoned for his opposition to the Czech government in the 1970s, Havel later served as president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic from 1989 to 2003.

Arthur Miller (1915–2005): A Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright, most famous for his plays *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): A French philosopher and author known for his ideas of existentialism, or the belief that life has no objective meaning beyond an individual's own life-project.

Toni Morrison (1931–): A celebrated American author and professor, she is both a Pulitzer Prize- and Nobel Prize-winning author, the first black woman to win the latter.

writing detective novels—with great success. His income, augmented by royalties from radio plays, was great enough to make possible the purchase in 1952 of a house above the city of Neuchâtel in which he lived until his death. Dürrenmatt had completed the manuscript for *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* in 1950, only to have it rejected by Swiss theaters. Also in 1952, however, Hans Schweikart, manager of the Munich Intimate Theater, directed the premiere, establishing Dürrenmatt in Germany as an avant-garde dramatist. The play was praised by critics, although its follow-up, *An Angel Comes to Babylon* (1953), did not measure up to the first.

The Physicists (1963) proved to be another resounding success for Dürrenmatt. The play tells the story of a brilliant scientist who hides in an asylum and pretends to be insane in order to keep his potentially dangerous discoveries away from those in power, and in order to continue his research unmolested. The work reflects the unease that many people felt in the aftermath of World War II and during the height of the Cold War, when the efforts of scientists were increasingly applied to the development of instruments of destruction. Writing from historically neutral Switzerland, one can imagine how Dürrenmatt must have seen the United States and the Soviet Union—rivals in the Cold War and in the concomitant arms race—as paranoid, globe-spanning madmen. From the play's perspective, it is the cold war policy of MAD (mutually assured destruction: the idea that no one would want to launch the first nuclear missile

because both sides had the capacity to completely destroy one another) that ensures the evil results attendant on the physicists' mental exertions, though Dürrenmatt was also highly critical of scientists' irresponsibility for the application of their work.

Strindberg, but Not Shakespeare *King John* (1968), based on William Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* (c. 1595), was greeted enthusiastically, but Dürrenmatt's other Shakespeare adaptation, *Titus Andronicus* (1970), was a failure. The audience booed during the performance, and critical rejection was unanimous. Dürrenmatt's most successful adaptation was *Play Strindberg* (1969)—based on part 1 and the end of part 2 of August Strindberg's *Dance of Death* (1901). The piece has been played on major stages in Europe and America.

Retiring from the Stage in Style Dürrenmatt's final drama, *Achterloo* (1983)—the title is a place name from a children's rhyme—underwent four revisions, the definitive one prepared especially for the 1988 Schwetzingen Festival. In 1988, though, Dürrenmatt announced his decision to abandon the theater, and two years later he died at his home, on December 14, 1990. Despite an up-and-down career as a playwright, he did not leave the stage without recognition. In his lifetime he won seventeen prestigious awards, was made honorary member at Ben-Gurion University in Israel in 1974, and earned an honorary doctorate from the University of Zurich in 1983. And his plays such as *The Visit* and *The Physicists* are still among the most frequently performed plays in the German-speaking world.

Works in Literary Context

Wide-Ranging Influences Dürrenmatt's complex works take inspiration from a multitude of sources: father and grandfather left their imprint on "the pastor's boy Fritzli," as he was called by the townspeople, in his intense preoccupation with religion, his conservative cast of mind, and the hard-hitting satire of his plays. The tales his father recounted from classical mythology and the Bible stories his mother told him provided material for many of his major works. And although his early plays such as *The Blind Man* suffered from philosophical and theological pretension, Dürrenmatt took influence from his intensive studies of the works of Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

A Library of Styles For as many influences as there were on his playwriting, so were there that many styles and genres in which Dürrenmatt wrote—including individual and mixes of comedy, murder mystery, spy drama, love story, and intellectual pieces. *The Physicists* (1963), for instance, incorporates all of these—yet Dürrenmatt delivers the work in straightforward language that fits a tight Aristotelian structure still considered the basic plot structure today. As another clever device, he artfully lures

his audience into the trap of enjoying what seems to be a heartwarming happy ending, only to show it to be mere wishful thinking and a misperception of the hard truth that events will always take the worst imaginable turn.

Disillusionment and the Decline of Humanity

Like many of the thinkers he studied, and like many authors writing after World War II and the Holocaust, Dürrenmatt was concerned with the decline of humanity. Consistently there appear the tones of nihilism—or a belief in nothing—and the accompanying attitudes that suggest despair, anxiety, and hopelessness. In many of Dürrenmatt's plays, the heroic characters actively fight against the worst impulses of the human condition and fail. This is shown in *The Visit*, where the teacher—the last holdout arguing against the murder of the man who drove off Claire—finally succumbs to the overwhelming greed of the majority. This play has also been read as a response to the pervasive poverty in Europe after the Second World War, and to the U.S. Marshall Plan for reconstruction of Europe—though Dürrenmatt himself often warned against reading his characters as symbols, noting, “Misunderstandings creep in, because people desperately search the hen yard of my drama for the egg of explanation which I steadfastly refuse to lay.”

Works in Critical Context

Dürrenmatt's most popular plays, especially *The Visit* (1956) and *The Physicists* (1962), made him the darling of theater people and critics. But as directing styles changed and texts came to be seen as mere raw material, Dürrenmatt began to complain of inadequate performances of his works. He also found reviewers rejecting his work because it seemed uncommitted when compared to the activist message plays and documentaries that began to appear in the late 1960s. Germany in particular experienced a strong surge in literary activism as the “68ers,” the student activists who protested frequently in 1968 for a more just and equitable society, came to dominate the arts world. Several of Dürrenmatt's works held up under the criticism, however. One such play is *The Meteor*.

The Meteor (1966) A mix of farce and the macabre, the play offers one magnificent role in its central character and several challenging secondary ones: On a seemingly endless hot, sunny midsummer day, visitors climb the stairs to the stuffy garret where Nobel Prize-winning playwright Wolfgang Schwitter starved as a young artist and where he has chosen to try to die after failing to do so in the hospital. He is irritable and says unexpected and hurtful things to those who confront him; it seems that the “resurrected” behave in an unfettered, demonic way, bringing out the worst in others.

Most critics have admired Dürrenmatt's imaginative power, even those who do not know what to make of the final scene: One thought it a failed effort at profundity, others found it anticlimactic, and a few objected to the irreverence toward the Salvation Army. Such criticism was

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote about the futility of solving humanity's problems:

The Bald Soprano (1950), a play by Eugène Ionesco. In this work, wives do not know their husbands, local visitors are misunderstood, and everyone is unnerved.

Long Day's Journey into Night (1956), a play by Eugene O'Neill. In this modern drama, excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

Marat/Sade (1963), a play by Peter Weiss. In the tradition of Antonin Artaud, the playwright offers a bloody, provocative examination of human suffering.

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. This play is a stark and daunting exploration of human cruelty, human tolerance, and human perception.

particularly galling to Dürrenmatt, who never tired of demonstrating in his plays the severe damage done by ideologies and their true believers. More recently, critic Roger Crockett has suggested in *Understanding Friedrich Dürrenmatt* that “Dürrenmatt's characters are most often involved in some form of game, and understanding how and why they play is a big part of understanding the author.” That Dürrenmatt “has largely been neglected in the English-speaking world in recent years,” argues literary scholar Kenneth Northcott, “reflects a regrettable insularity on the part of the theatrical world of the United States in particular.”

Responses to Literature

1. Although Dürrenmatt's plays often focus on the darkest parts of human nature, he has pointed out that they are meant to be comedies. Read *The Visit*. Do you think comedy is an effective way of addressing humanity's faults? Why or why not? In your opinion, does *The Visit* succeed as comedy? Support your opinion with examples from the work.
2. In several of his plays, Dürrenmatt performs a study of opposites. Consider one or more of his works and identify the opposing forces or characters. How are they different? Where is the tension most obvious? Is one “side” more likeable, or more sympathetic?
3. How does Dürrenmatt's play *The Physicists* reflect European anxieties during the cold war? Provide a brief description of the cold war in order to better focus your analysis of the play.
4. In an interview conducted by Violet Ketels at Temple University, Dürrenmatt recounts how he studied philosophy and theology for ten semesters. In *It Is*

Written, he describes a spiritual crisis. Where in a Dürrenmatt work is there evidence of his sense of a god? How does that play reveal his attitudes about that god, and what do these attitudes seem to be?

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Umberto Eco

BORN: 1932, *Alessandria, Italy*

NATIONALITY: *Italian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Name of the Rose (1980)

Foucault's Pendulum (1989)

The Island of the Day Before (1995)

Baudolino (2000)

The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana (2004)

Overview

The long list of Umberto Eco's books and publications contains only a handful of novels, with the first two, *The Name of the Rose* (1980) and *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989), being his best known. Despite Eco's relatively



Umberto Eco. Eco, Umberto, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

scarce output, these novels' remarkable international success has made him the most famous Italian novelist writing today. Before the appearance of his first novel, Eco, a man of encyclopedic learning, was already well known for his contributions to the discipline of semiotics, or the study of how meaning is communicated, as a prolific author of books and essays on a wide range of scholarly subjects, and as a gifted writer on politics and popular culture. His novels and other writings have been translated into many languages, and he has lectured and taught at universities all over the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Background in Aesthetics, Semiotics, and Architecture Umberto Eco was born at Alessandria, in Piemonte, Italy, on January 5, 1932. During World War II, he and his mother retreated to the mountainside area of Piedmontese. Originally an accountant at a firm that manufactured bathtubs, Eco's father served in three wars for the Italian army. Eco's early education was Salesian, a school of thought based on a Roman Catholic religious order established in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Eco renounced Catholicism later in life after experiencing ambivalence about his faith. The first in his family to attend a university, Eco studied at the University of

Turin, graduating in 1954 with a degree in philosophy. At Turin he came under the lasting influence of the philosopher Luigi Pareyson, under whose guidance he wrote his thesis, which became his first published book, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (1956).

In 1961, Eco received his *Libera Docenza* (a degree that is roughly equivalent to a doctor of philosophy) in aesthetics, and from that year until 1964 he held the position of lecturer in aesthetics at both the University of Turin and the Politecnico in Milan. He was appointed professor of visual communication at the University of Florence in 1966, and in 1969 he returned to the Politecnico as a professor of semiotics. Although one might be tempted to associate Eco with the conventional notion of “arts and letters,” during his years at Florence and the Politecnico he was in fact a member of the faculty of architecture. *The Absent Structure: Introduction to the Study of Semiotics* (1968) contains an extended treatment of architecture as a medium of communication, a subject to which he has returned throughout his career.

Success as a Novelist: Fame and Fortune While pursuing his highly successful university career, Eco was not confined by his academic roles. By the end of the 1970s Eco was well known as a critic, a journalist, and a politically involved intellectual. No one, however, could have predicted the great leap in his fame—and fortune—that would follow the appearance of *The Name of the Rose* in 1980. Set in a northern Italian monastery of the fourteenth century, the novel is replete with literary, philosophical, theological, and historical arcana, and is punctuated by many passages in Latin and other languages. The book sold more than 1 million copies in Italy, where it won several prizes, among them the highly regarded Premio Strega. Translated into French in 1982, it became a best seller in France, winning the Prix Médicis. *The Name of the Rose* was translated into English in 1983, and in the United States, the hardcover edition remained on the best-seller list for forty weeks, ultimately selling more than one million copies. The paperback rights brought \$550,000, reputed to be the largest sum of money ever paid for a paperback translation, and sales of the paperback edition exceeded eight hundred thousand copies within the first three months after its appearance. *The Name of the Rose* has been translated into more than thirty-six languages, including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Turkish, and Arabic. A motion picture version directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud was released in 1986. Within a few years after the publication of his first novel, Umberto Eco had become one of the most well-known writers in the world.

Success as a Catalyst to Creative Output Maintaining the momentum he gathered during his success in the 1980s, Eco has continued to publish novels, philosophical texts, and children’s books, in addition to his scholarly publications. His recent literary works include *The Island of the Day Before* (1995), *Baudolino*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eco’s famous contemporaries include:

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): Nobel Prize–winning Italian writer and folklorist, Calvino is the most translated Italian writer of the twentieth century. His early work has been classified as magic realism; his later work is perhaps better described as postmodern.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–): French anthropologist, his theory of structuralism is an attempt to describe and understand human society. Lévi-Strauss’s thoughts have been widely adopted by both philosophers and postmodern authors.

Ian Fleming (1908–1964): Author of the James Bond canon of spy novels, as well as the children’s book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Fleming was himself an intelligence operative during the Second World War.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Perhaps the best known of the Latin American “boom” authors of the mid-twentieth century, Borges was a fiction writer, thinker, historian, anthropologist, and critic.

Alcide De Gasperi (1881–1954): Italian politician recognized today as one of the founding fathers of the European Union.

(2001), and *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2005), and *On Ugliness* (2007).

Success as a Catalyst to Scholarship The success of his novels and the steady progress of his scholarly work brought Eco the highest academic and public distinctions. All the while, Eco remained fully involved in the academic pursuits to which he was devoted before he became famous. His scholarly and theoretical writing continues unabated, as does his commitment to the progress of semiotics. He remains the editor of *Versus* and continues to serve on the editorial boards of other journals. At the same time, the enormous success of his novels has greatly intensified academic interest in his work. His fame as a novelist has led to an exponential increase in invitations to lecture and teach at institutions all over the world. He currently holds over thirty honorary doctorate degrees from prestigious universities around the world.

Works in Literary Context

As a semiotician, novelist, medieval scholar, journalist, and parodist, Eco has produced an amazingly diverse and influential body of work since the 1950s, and he is certainly one of the most prominent public intellectuals in the world. Authors of notable influence on Eco include James Joyce, Jorge Luis Borges, Charles Pierce, Immanuel Kant, and Aristotle.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Eco is hardly the only author to center his tales on deep, arcane conspiracies. Other notable works to touch upon such a theme include:

The Book of the SubGenius (1983), a book by J. R. "Bob" Dobbs. This work is a compilation of bizarre, humorous, and sometimes disturbing ramblings of the Church of the SubGenius, a surrealist collective, which takes on conspiracy theories, New Age gurus, American arcana, and other sacred cows.

The Illuminatus! Trilogy (1975), novels by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. This postmodern trilogy of novels simultaneously satirizes and celebrates the topsy-turvy world of modern conspiracy theories. Many of the trilogy's ideas have since become canonical among conspiracy theorists, an idea Eco would revisit in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

The Da Vinci Code (2003), a novel by Dan Brown. One of the best-selling books of all time, Brown's conspiracy-detective novel covers similar ground to *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Factual Fiction One trait found throughout Eco's fictional works is an abundance of factual information related to the many fields that interest the author, from history to architecture to language. In his 1990 article "Pendulum Diary," William Weaver, who had translated all three of Eco's novels into English, remarks on the tremendous amount of "sheer information" that Eco puts into his fiction, noting that *Foucault's Pendulum*, like its predecessor, is marked by elaborate and abstruse references, extravagant linguistic play, and a formidable number of quotations.

The Battle Between Tradition and Modernism Set in a Benedictine abbey in northern Italy in the year 1327, Eco's first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, is both an elaborately detailed medieval detective drama and a semiotic novel of ideas. When several monks are murdered in a sequence echoing the biblical prophecies of the Apocalypse, Brother William of Baskerville is summoned to apply his enlightened deductive powers to solve the mystery. From this central scenario, Eco creates a conflict between the modern values of rationality and humor, represented by William, and the superstition and severity of the Middle Ages, as embodied by Jorge de Burgos, the blind and aged guardian of the abbey's labyrinthine library. A maze of literal and metaphoric possibilities and obstacles, the library conceals the key to the mystery—a collection of heretical texts considered so incendiary that their discovery prompts several murders.

William's search for truth is confounded by stubborn authorities, including officials of the Inquisition, and this conflict reflects differences between modern humanism and absolute submission to the Church.

Imagined Conspiracies While *The Name of the Rose* moves forward from the Middle Ages to the intellectual issues of the twentieth century, *Foucault's Pendulum* moves backward, confronting the reader with an avalanche of arcane learning about such subjects as the Knights Templar, the Cabala, and the Rosicrucians. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, Eco extends the scope of his metaphysical study to include many of the historical and religious mysteries of the last two millennia. Although the novel revolves around a seedy publishing house in contemporary Milan, it examines mystical phenomena from Stonehenge to the Crusaders' Jerusalem to exotic rituals in modern Brazil. Three editors involved in publishing texts dealing with occultism and esoteric practices are supplied a manuscript by a man they believe is a charlatan. With the aid of a computer and some quixotic analogies, they create a six-hundred-year web of arcane correlations linking the Templars' secret to the motives of such historical figures as the Benedictines, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Adolf Hitler. As they reinterpret most of human history to fit their theoretical matrix, the three editors begin to believe their own fabrication and, as ardent occultists learn of the secret, this eventually results in murder and human sacrifice. While the novel follows the myriad twists of the editors' inner trains of thought, it finally condemns their illogical folly.

In the years since his success in the 1980s there has been an explosion in the number of doctoral dissertations written on Eco's work, with the novels being their principal concern. While his influence on the most recent generation of intellectuals, philosophers, and artists remains to be seen in full, there can be little doubt that he occupies a central place in the geography of contemporary Italian letters.

Works in Critical Context

The success of his novels and the steady progress of his scholarly work throughout the 1980s brought Eco the highest academic and public distinctions. In 1983 the Rotary Club of Florence honored him with its Columbus Award, and in 1985 he was made a commander of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In the same year he also received the Marshall McLuhan Award from UNESCO Canada and Teleglobe. Since 1985 universities throughout the world have awarded him twenty-four honorary degrees. Critics, however, have offered varying responses to two of his major works.

The Name of the Rose Critics lauded Eco's ingenious plot and challenging intellectual discourse. Franco Ferrucci observed: "The narrative impulse that commands the story is irresistible. That is no mean feat for a book in which many pages describe ecclesiastical councils or

theological debates. . . . Yet Mr. Eco's delight in his narrative does not fail to touch the reader." Despite its occasionally cerebral tone and frequent Latin quotations, *The Name of the Rose* achieved widespread international popularity and was adapted for film in 1983.

Foucault's Pendulum Reviewers offered widely divergent interpretations of the novel. Some critics denounced Eco's allusive style as laborious, encyclopedic, and inappropriate for the novelistic form. Author Salman Rushdie remarked: "[*Foucault's Pendulum*] is humourless, devoid of character, entirely free of anything resembling a credible spoken word, and mind-numbingly full of gobbledygook of all sorts." Other reviewers, however, extolled Eco's metaphysical inquiry. Joseph Coates commented: "[Eco's] plot can be read as a metaphor for modern science or for the whole manipulative arrogance of Western thought (as opposed to the message of Eastern religions) according to which man must master and exploit nature—and ultimately destroy it. With this book, Eco puts himself in the grand and acerbic tradition of Petronius, François Rabelais, Jonathan Swift and Voltaire."

Responses to Literature

1. Identify the most striking conventions of the detective story. What do readers expect to find when they read a mystery? How does Eco meet or subvert these expectations in *The Name of the Rose*?
2. Construct a time line of the major historical events in Western Europe in the fourteenth century. How do these events play a role in *The Name of the Rose*? How does having knowledge of medieval history affect your reading of *The Name of the Rose*?
3. *Foucault's Pendulum* features an invented conspiracy that turns out to be real. As an exercise, invent a conspiracy of your own; choose a selection of individuals and organizations that do not seem to be connected to each other to act as puppets of your conspiracy. What goal does your conspiracy work toward? How does it use its puppets to further its aims?
4. Compare the film version of *The Name of the Rose* to the book. Do Eco's themes come across in the movie? What elements of the book are minimized or left out of the film?

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Gunnar Ekelöf

BORN: 1907, Stockholm, Sweden

DIED: 1968, Sigtuna, Sweden

NATIONALITY: Swedish

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Late Arrival on Earth (1932)

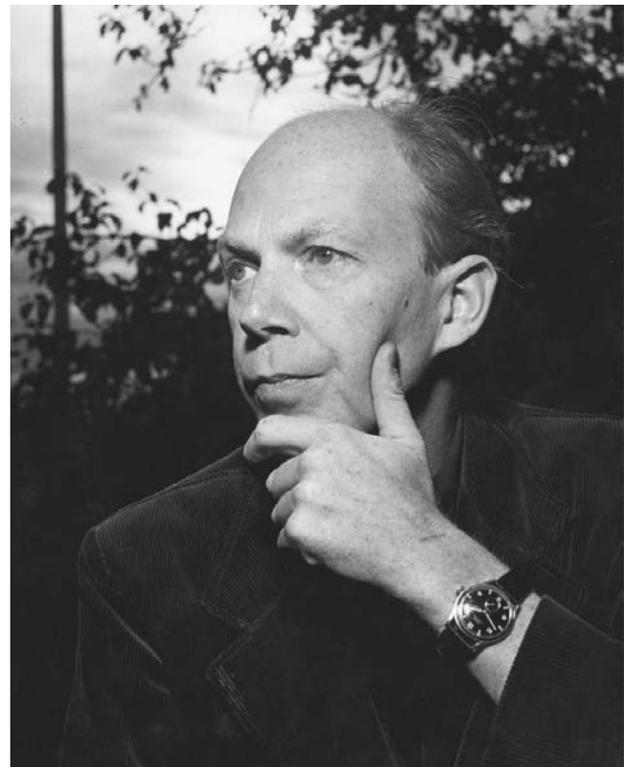
Sorrow and the Star (1936)

Buy the Blind Man's Song (1938)

Ferry Song (1941)

In the Autumn (1951)

A Mølva Elegy (1960)



Gunnar Ekelöf Das Fotoarchiv

Overview

Gunnar Ekelöf is often described as the most important poet of modern Swedish literature. His poetry is regarded as innovative in form and technique, especially in its adaptation of musical forms to verse. Some believe Ekelöf's poetry will have a lasting place in the history of literature because of its originality and its relevancy to the problems of the modern age.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged but Difficult Beginnings On the surface at least, Bengt Gunnar Ekelöf's childhood was privileged. He was born in Stockholm on September 15, 1907. Ekelöf's mother, Valborg, née von Hardenberg, belonged to a solid, upper-class family dating back five generations. His father, Gerhard Ekelöf, was from an extremely poor background with roots in the southern Swedish province of Småland. Gerhard Ekelöf had come to Stockholm as a trained typographer but made a brilliant career for himself as a stockbroker. By the first few years of the twentieth century, he had become a multimillionaire.

Below the surface of upper-class wealth and privilege, however, Ekelöf's family home was marked by conflicts. Ekelöf's father was the indulgent parent, generous with his son, while his mother felt called upon to play the authoritarian role and to be the disciplinarian. Young Ekelöf seems to have been strongly attached to his father while his relationship with his mother was ambivalent from the outset.

Family Illness and Schooling Abroad Valborg Ekelöf was more interested in traveling, staying in fashionable places, and pursuing her affairs with men than in ensuring a suitable environment for her sensitive and emotionally demanding only child. As a result, young Ekelöf spent a good deal of his childhood in private schools or under the tutelage of adult relatives. This lack of mothering and his accompanying sense of homelessness can explain why the motif of the Virgin Mary (the mother of Jesus Christ) came to play such an important part in Ekelöf's work.

In 1910, Gerhard Ekelöf revealed that he had contracted syphilis through contact with a prostitute in the 1890s. This revelation led to open conflict with his wife, from whom he had withheld the information. The sexually transmitted disease had no cure until 1911 when Salvarsan came on the market, so it progressed in him and by 1913 had reached its advanced stages of total paralysis. Ekelöf describes the progressive debilitation of his father and the eerie atmosphere of his childhood home in the moving autobiographical essay "A Photograph," first published in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* in 1956.

At school in Stockholm, Ekelöf received the traditional European classical education, with studies in

Greek, Latin, and modern languages, but there were few signs of his future brilliance as an artist. He was, however, able to read Greek and Latin writers in their original languages and was a competent translator of writers as difficult as Sappho and Petronius. He used these skills to write book-length satires of the literary establishment and Western Christian culture as a student.

Worldly Studies After completing his school-leaving certificate by the narrowest of margins, Ekelöf went to London in 1926 to study Persian and Hindustani, but he returned shortly thereafter to Uppsala, Sweden, where he unsuccessfully continued formal Oriental studies. The years following Ekelöf's graduation from the gymnasium were marked by uncertainty, emotional crises, and general aimlessness. He spent the next few years wandering around Europe, playing the dandy, dreaming of owning a coffee plantation in Kenya, and speculating on the unstable stock market with his inheritance. His important but troubled sojourn in Paris in 1929 and 1930, supposedly to study music and become a classical pianist, was a time of inner chaos, alcohol abuse, and suicidal urges. There, however, he came in contact with French modernism and began composing drafts of *Late Arrival on Earth*.

Ekelöf lost his inheritance in the so-called Kreuger crash of the early 1930s. By this time period, the world economy was suffering as the Great Depression took hold in the United States and spread to the rest of the world. The Kreuger crash was the Swedish equivalent of the Wall Street crash in the United States, as wealthy industrialist Ivar Kreuger committed fraud to secure massive bank loans later discovered by the Swedish government around the time Kreuger committed suicide. This financial situation forced Ekelöf to come to grips with the problem of economic survival in a Europe that was slowly moving toward the brink of economic and social collapse in the post-World War I period.

Return to Sweden Ekelöf's return to Sweden in 1930 marked the last time he seriously thought of escape from there forever, although all his life he harbored a love-hate relationship for his homeland. A disastrous impulsive marriage to Gunnel Bergström in 1932 ended quickly and unhappily when his wife left him for the writer Karin Boye. Ekelöf's pioneering early poetry collection *Late Arrival on Earth* was published that same year and was the fruit of the author's Paris stay. It brought him in contact with the currents of European modernism (an early to mid-twentieth-century literary movement that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter and a search for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression). However, in the retrospective assessment of his writing, Ekelöf refers to *Late Arrival* as a one expressive of his youthful, morose state of mind at the time. *Late Arrival* was, however, something so new and revolutionary, at least in the Swedish context, that it continues to fascinate readers. Throughout his literary life Ekelöf constantly returned to the

original manuscripts to gain new ideas and impulses for later works.

Personal Poetic Breakthrough Ekelöf's next two collections, *Sorrow and the Star* (1936) and *Buy the Blind Man's Song* (1938), were favorably reviewed despite the conservatism of critics of the time. But his next work, *Ferry Song* (1941), was regarded by critics and Ekelöf himself as his personal breakthrough. Ekelöf created these works as World War II raged in much of Europe as many countries, including Great Britain, fought to contain the territorial aspirations of Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler. Sweden was officially neutral, but because of its proximity to other Scandinavian countries such as Norway, which became controlled by Germany, it played a role in the conflict. Sweden both served as a haven for refugees from the Nazis and allowed Germany to transport troops through its territory to Nazi-controlled Norway.

Continuing to write in the post-war period, Ekelöf looked to the avant-garde. Following the success of *Ferry Song*, the long poem "Voices from Underground" from the 1951 collection *In the Autumn* became Ekelöf's most successful and best-known attempt to describe poetically a passage into the world of dreams—and, incidentally, into the world of surrealism. Surrealism was an early twentieth-century movement of art and literature that explored the subconscious and often featured dreamlike, if not illogical, juxtapositions of imagery.

New Travels, New Genres Ekelöf's "anti-poet" phase is represented by his next three collections. In these works, Ekelöf expanded his genres to fables, word-juggling nonsense verse, parodies, grotesques, dream accounts, and travel poems based on his frequent visits to Italy. During this period, Ekelöf also developed his notion of "poetry in things," a term that he borrowed from his compatriot Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, who emphasized the increasing value of concrete things and the decreasing value of words.

The Twenty-Three-Year Opus In 1960, Ekelöf published *A Mölna Elegy*—a work that has since been called the most advanced experiment in the use of the "quotation-allusion" technique in Swedish literature. Given the fact that *A Mölna Elegy* was a work in progress over some twenty-three years, it is hardly surprising that the published version came as an anticlimax to many critics, some of whom had developed excessive expectations about the poem.

Inspiration in Istanbul Ekelöf regarded himself as a poet in the style of Paul Valéry, a diligent worker in the habit of producing sometimes fifty to one hundred drafts of a poem. Furthermore, in his essay "From a Poet's Workshop" (1951), he expresses great skepticism about the reality of so-called poetic inspiration, even in the case of such improvisational geniuses as his fellow countryman, eighteenth-century poet and songwriter Carl

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ekelöf's famous contemporaries include:

Josephine Baker (1906–1975): African American expatriate dancer and singer who became an international celebrity and is regarded as the first African American woman to star in a major motion picture.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): French author and metaphysical philosopher, she laid the foundations for early feminism with her writing.

Rachel Carson (1907–1964): American marine biologist, environmentalist, naturalist, and science writer whose work *Silent Spring* (1962) was instrumental in the advent of global environmentalism.

Zora Neale Hurston (1903–1960): African American writer and folklorist who paved the way during the Harlem Renaissance for future African American women writers.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French philosopher, writer, and critic who is often attributed with pioneering modern existentialism.

Michael Bellman. The wave of poetic inspiration that came over Ekelöf in a hotel room in Istanbul in 1965 and out of which grew the trilogy *Diwan over the Prince of Emgion* (1965), *The Tale of Fatumeh* (1966), and *Guide to the Underworld* (1967) must therefore have been all the more surprising to the author himself.

Final Serious Illness In 1967, after a series of illnesses but no successful diagnosis, Ekelöf was finally discovered to be suffering from cancer of the esophagus. He died at his home in Sigtuna on March 16, 1968. In *A Mölna Elegy*, Ekelöf had written: "No, let me be cast into the sea / without cannonball, without banner / slowly disintegrate integrate / No, just be burnt to ashes / and cast into the sea." In 1965 Gunnar and Ingrid Ekelöf had visited the ancient city of Sardis in Turkey and walked along the river Paktolos. Ekelöf's ashes were strewn over the waters of the Paktolos.

Works in Literary Context

Influence on Style Ekelöf's work, both difficult and demanding, reflects the influences of the mystical poetry of Persia and the Orient, Taoist and Indian mysticism, and movements of French Symbolism (where individual elements take on primary significance) and surrealism (where strange, dreamlike qualities characterize the images). *Dedication*, for example, reflects the influence of French Symbolism in that the author portrays himself as an interpreter, or "seer," one whose vision and insight

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ekelöf's involvement with surrealist, dreamlike poetry had a profound impact on Swedish literature. Here are a few works by writers who have also influenced literature with similar efforts:

The Automatic Message (1933) by André Breton. In this important nonfiction treatise, the author discusses automatism (automatic writing) in the context of surrealism.

Blood and Guts in High School (1984) by Kathy Acker. This popular novel—one of the author's best-selling works—is representative of the modern experimental novel.

Last Nights of Paris (1929) by Philippe Soupault. This short surrealist novel features a protagonist obsessed with a woman who takes him deep into the underworld of Paris in the 1920s.

Djinn (1981) by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Using the form of the detective novel, as well as many liberties in regard to point of view, Robbe-Grillet creates a surrealist adventure featuring the character Simon Lecoeur and his vivacious love interest, Djinn.

extends beyond the perimeters of surface reality. This poetry collection shows the author groping in symbols toward the truth he believes lies beyond reality. *Ferry Song* shows the influence of Symbolism and romanticism in its style. Ekelöf attempts to reconcile the ideal and the real. He examines the natures of both self and reality and questions whether traditional ideas about self and reality are valid.

Struggles between Ideal and Real, Good and Evil

In his examination of the ideal and real, Ekelöf comes to a certain conclusion. He finds that we live in a world where the forms of reality come solely from the compulsions of persons caught in the suffocating battle between good and evil. For him, there are the moralists, who help to perpetuate the good/evil system, who take sides and create forms and structures to aid their cause. There are also the uncommitted, who recognize but refuse to participate in the war between good and evil. By withdrawing from the struggle that structures all cultures and societies, however, the uncommitted must pay the price of complete isolation.

This kind of modern argument challenges readers to abandon their conventional perceptions of both poetry and reality. As is true of the work of the surrealists, Ekelöf's poetry also urges readers to explore the role of their subconscious (that part of the mind that dreams, for example) in their thinking. In keeping with this aim, his work is often filled with fantastic, dreamlike images and

symbols that mock rational (or conscious) thought. It is against this background of thought that reality and self emerge as Ekelöf's major concerns, and freedom from the "idea" (from the mental struggle) of good versus evil becomes his primary goal.

Works in Critical Context

Critics today describe Ekelöf as a profound thinker and praise his ability to incorporate diverse influences into a coherent pattern of thought. Some also marvel that he remained, in spite of these influences, a distinctly Swedish poet in that the landscapes and aura of his native country haunt most of his work. Early critics, however, had more diverse responses to his work, indicating the uncertainty during this period about the role surrealism would play in modern culture.

Late Arrival on Earth The original reception of this work by professional critics was overwhelmingly negative and dismissive. The style of the work and its abstractness alienated and confounded the readers of the time, and Ekelöf was branded as a surrealist, something that he later denied. In *Late Arrival*, Ekelöf abandons sonnet structure and the conventional verse line for free, associative prose poems somewhat reminiscent of Arthur Rimbaud. No capital letters appear in the poems, punctuation is used sparingly, and inanimate objects are personified: "the flowers doze in the window and the lamp gazes light / the window gazes with thoughtless eyes out into the dark / paintings exhibit without the soul the thought confided to them / and houseflies stand still on the walls and think."

Late Arrival, despite appearances, is a work of great artistic deliberateness, one that performs a balancing act between the two poles of feeling and calculation, free association and a strict application of musical principles to poetry. In short, what Ekelöf succeeded in doing in his first poetry collection was to free words of their job of referring and to create freestanding verbal constructs of great density and musicality, which transformed the language of twentieth-century Swedish poetry.

While many contemporary critics praise Ekelöf's complex poetic innovations, they also note problems of translation. Thus, remarks Leif Sjoeborg in his *Reader's Guide*, "Some sensitive English speaking readers of Ekelöf's poetry are put off, because he is allegedly 'strange' or 'weird'" As Joseph Garrison concludes in his *Library Journal* review of Bly's *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness*, Ekelöf's "radical" works in translation "should be read carefully, very carefully."

Responses to Literature

1. Ekelöf had great interest in history and the influence of the past. Discuss where this interest is reflected in his poetry, using examples from the text (poem or collection) you choose.

2. Ekelöf's *Ferry Song* came about during one of the bleakest periods in European history, when communist and fascist forces were taking hold of large parts of Europe. With a partner, do a Web search for information on either communism or fascism, and find evidence (if possible) of these forces' impact on the poet's work.
3. Go to the Louvre or another major metropolitan museum online. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dali, Giorgi De Chirico, Edgar Jené, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about their work (or a particular work). Then, using the same list of surrealist characteristics, find as many incidences of surrealism as you can in Ekelöf's work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, so that you might each point out something the others in the group did not see and so you can collectively come up with your own understanding of surrealism.

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Cyprian Ekwensi

BORN: 1921, Minna, Nigeria

DIED: 2007, Enugu, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

People of the City (1954)

Jagua Nana (1961)

Burning Grass (1961)

Divided We Stand (1981)

Overview

Cyprian Ekwensi is regarded as the father of the modern Nigerian novel. Although he wrote for both children and adults, he is especially well known for his stories for young people.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Nigeria of Ekwensi's Youth Born in Northern Nigeria in 1921, Ekwensi grew up in various cities and had numerous opportunities to observe the "urban politics" of Nigeria. The region had been designated as a British protectorate in 1901, and the culture quickly became a mix of traditional African and modern European influences; this mix was not always harmonious, and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many Nigerians called for independence from England.



Cyprian Ekwensi Ekwensi, Cyprian, photograph. The Library of Congress.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ekwensi's famous contemporaries include:

Isaac Asimov (1920–1992): This Russian-born author wrote a great number of science fiction novels.

Arthur C. Clarke (1917–): This British science fiction author collaborated with Stanley Kubrick on the immensely popular film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist whose English-language novel *Things Fall Apart* is the most widely read work of African literature ever written.

Thea Astley (1925–2004): This Australian novelist won one of her nation's major literary awards, the Miles Franklin Award, repeatedly.

Ekwensi received his secondary education at the Higher College in Yaba and in Ibadan at Government College, his postsecondary education at Achimota College in Ghana, the School of Forestry in Ibadan, and the Chelsea School of Pharmacy at London University. In the early 1940s, Ekwensi taught English, biology, and chemistry at Igbobi College near Lagos. Ekwensi began writing at the end of World War II. His first stories were about his father, eulogizing his unequalled bravery as an adventurous elephant hunter and his skill as a carpenter. Ekwensi's first collection of short stories, *Ikolo the Wrestler, and Other Ibo Tales*, was published in 1947. In 1949 he accepted a teaching position at the Lagos School of Pharmacy.

Government Positions and Civil Strife Despite his professional qualifications in pharmacy, Ekwensi joined the news media in 1951, working for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. That same year Ekwensi won a government scholarship for further studies in pharmacy at London University. It was on the ship that took him from Nigeria to England that Ekwensi wrote *People of the City*, uniting those stories he had broadcast on Radio Nigeria into one long story. At the end of the fourteen days during which Ekwensi had secluded himself inside his cabin on the ship, he had completed his first major literary creation. Originally entitled *Lajide of Lagos*, Andrew Dakers published it as *People of the City* in 1954. In addition to being Ekwensi's first major novel, *People of the City* has the distinction of being the first West African English novel written in a modern style.

Nigerian Independence Nigeria finally gained its independence in 1960, and in 1961 Ekwensi was named federal director of information—a position in which he controlled all Nigerian media, including film, radio, television, printing, newspapers, and public relations. In that

same year, he published *Jagua Nana*, his most popular novel. In 1967 he joined the Biafran secession as the chairman of the Bureau for External Publicity and director of Biafra Radio. The Biafran secession occurred when an eastern region of the country dominated by the Igbo people, who experienced much persecution at the hands of other ethnic groups in the country, declared the area of Biafra as an independent state. This led to a civil war that lasted until 1970 and resulted in the defeat of the Igbo secessionists.

Throughout his career, Ekwensi pursued his diverse vocational interests: teacher, journalist, pharmacist, diplomat, businessman, company director, public relations consultant, photographer, artist, information consultant, writer, and general shaper of public opinion. In 1991 he was appointed chairman of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. Ekwensi published many more books, including a sequel to *Jagua Nana* called *Jagua Nana's Daughter* in 1993. He became a member of the Nigerian Academy of Letters in 2006 and died of undisclosed illness in 2007.

Works in Literary Context

Ekwensi's novels are marked by their faithfulness to realism. Influenced by his time as a radio broadcaster, his works often portray the grit and grime of city life—full as it is of excitement as well as frustration—right along with political and social commentary. As such, Ekwensi's novels do for Africa—Lagos, in particular—what Dostoevsky did for St. Petersburg with his unflinching representation of that town's underbelly. Ultimately, though, Ekwensi will be remembered for popularizing the novel form in Africa and helping shape the art form to make it fit Africa's cultures and languages.

City Life Captured With the exception of *Burning Grass* and *Survive the Peace* (1976), all of Ekwensi's novels are set in the city of Lagos. He revels in the excitement of city life and loves to expose its many faces of modernity. Ekwensi writes about cultural centers, department stores, beaches, lagoons, political organizations and campaigns. He also writes about people in the city: criminals, prostitutes, band leaders, ministers of state, businessmen, civil servants, policemen, thugs, thieves, and many others. Authors such as J. M. Coetzee and Chinua Achebe have also written about the racial and political turmoil of the continent; Ekwensi, however, focuses his attention on the contemporary scene instead of Africa's pre-colonial past. Using a naturalistic narrative technique reminiscent of Émile Zola, Ekwensi captures both the restless excitement and the dissatisfaction of life in the city. Many of the incidents in his novels are taken from the everyday life around him because he believes that the function of a novelist is to reflect the social scene as faithfully as possible.

Ekwensi's novels trace the history of Nigeria in chronological sequence. *People of the City* is set in the last days

of the colonial era. Next is *Jagua Nana*, which covers the period of the election campaigns that ushered in the first independent government. *Beautiful Feathers* (1963) reflects the first optimistic years of independence with its concern for Pan-Africanism, the unity and cooperation of all African citizens. *Iska* (1966) exposes the tribal and factional divisions and animosities that finally erupted in the Nigerian civil war. Last is *Survive the Peace*, which begins at the end of the war and deals with the immediate problems of security and rehabilitation.

Contribution to African Literature Ekwensi's greatest contribution to Nigerian literature is undoubtedly his success as a social realist and a commentator on current events. *Jagua Nana* was one of the first novels to expose the corruption within the Nigerian political system, while *Iska* forecasted a civil war in Nigeria. *Survive the Peace*, a postwar novel, drew timely attention to refugee problems, the tragic fate of scattered families, and the fragility of peace. *Divided We Stand* was one of the first fictional documentaries on the war and its aftermath, and *For a Roll of Parchment* was one of the earliest exposés of the indignities suffered by African students in England. Ekwensi's choice of topical subjects only added to his unrivaled popularity.

Works in Critical Context

Ekwensi's value in paving the way for other African novelists is undisputable. The quality of his writing, however, has been the source of much debate from the beginning of his career. *People of the City*, which established Ekwensi's basic format for his novels, has been criticized for its careless plotting and its disregard for the humanity of some of its characters, who are often unceremoniously and unnecessarily killed. Because Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* frankly depicts the sexual appetite of its leading character, it has drawn the anger of many critics and moralists since its publication.

People of the City Ekwensi knows Lagos, the setting of *People of the City*, very well. He also is aware of the idiosyncrasies of his characters, who are symptomatic of the city's moral depravity. The novel's strength is in its lifelike description of urban realities in Africa. Ekwensi ponders why things happen the way they do and why no one seems to care—or care enough. He attempts to confront society with its evils. The picture is one of squalor, bribery, corruption, and mercenary values presented by a person who has inside knowledge of the situation. In the end, it is the city that emerges as the villain: "The city eats many an innocent life every year."

Ekwensi's didacticism and sense of retribution are evident throughout *People of the City*. Often he oversteps his role of mirroring society to that of judging it. Ekwensi is both the plaintiff and jury, and he sometimes resolves conflicts in the novel by simply killing off characters for whom he has no more use. These methods lead to melodramatic, unconvincing contrivances. Unresolved issues

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Because race and politics in Africa are oftentimes difficult to separate from one another, the political and social situation in Africa has been scrutinized not only by political analysts and ethnographers around the world, but also by writers and artists. Here are a few works that explore such conflict:

Heart of Darkness (1902), a novel by Joseph Conrad.

Describing the colonization of the Congo in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Conrad's work focuses on the oppression of the natives by a Belgian trading company intent on extracting and selling the resources of the Congo.

Disgrace (1999), a novel by J. M. Coetzee. This novel takes place just after an effort at racial subjugation in South Africa had ended; in order to survive in a country where black and white people are now considered equal, the white protagonist must unlearn the sexual and racial superiority he has formerly known.

Catch a Fire (2006), a film directed by Philip Noyce. Based on a true story, Patrick Chamusso, a black South African living under a racist government, turns to terrorism when he is falsely convicted of a crime.

at the conclusion of each subplot make the novel read like day-to-day records of events that are sometimes interconnected but, more often than not, these loose ends seem haphazardly thrown together. Nonetheless, *People of the City*, as the first modern West African novel in English, remains of major importance. It is the picture of Lagos in all its squalor—the infectious corruption, the grab-and-keep mania—that confirms its lasting value as a work of fiction.

Jagua Nana Ekwensi's second major urban novel, *Jagua Nana*, is remarkable in many ways and has drawn conflicting responses from critics. To many, it is a masterpiece and may well be his most lasting contribution to the art of the African novel. Certainly it is his most popular novel. To some, however, all the praise the novel has attracted is misplaced and misdirected because its value as a work of art is questionable. Published a year after Nigerian independence, some church organizations and women's unions attacked the novel and demanded that it be banned from circulation among the young. Even the Nigerian parliament was involved in the controversy. Before finally rejecting the idea, parliament debated several times a proposed filming of the novel in Nigeria by an Italian company. At the center of the whole controversy was *Jagua*, the heroine of the novel, whose uninhibited sexual life was said to have turned the novel into a mere exercise in pornography. Admirers of the novel, however,

have described Jagua as Ekwensi's most fully realized character and one of the most memorable heroines in fiction anywhere.

Responses to Literature

1. *Jagua Nana* was quite the scandal when it was published in 1961 because of its provocative sexual material. Locate summaries of the novel that give you an idea of Jagua's lifestyle. Do you think the novel would be considered so scandalous if it had been released in the twenty-first century instead? Why or why not?
2. Read *People of the City* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Ekwensi's novel focuses on the city, while Achebe's text is decidedly rural. In a short essay, compare the impressions you get about Africa based on these different representations.
3. Some critics have suggested that Ekwensi's sense of humor is "Rabelaisian." Research this word. To what extent and in what ways do you think the term applies to Ekwensi's sense of humor, if at all?
4. J. M. Coetzee is a white South African, while Ekwensi is a Nigerian. Both are African novelists, though. Compare their representations of Africa. Based on your readings of these novelists, how do you think race—and racism, for that matter—plays into their portrayals of Africa?

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☒ Mircea Eliade

BORN: 1907, Bucharest, Romania

DIED: 1986, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Soliloquies (1932)

The Hooligans (1955)

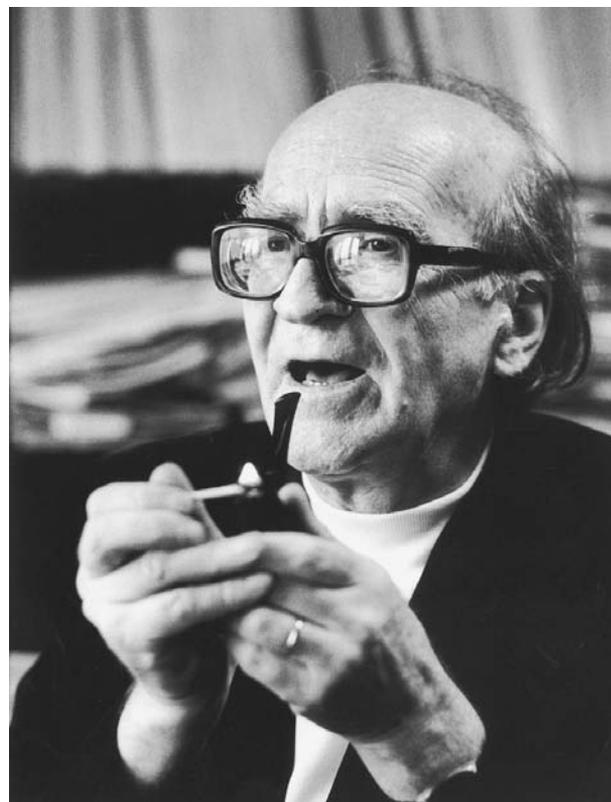
The Sacred and the Profane (1959)

Shamanism (1964)

A History of Religious Ideas (1976–1983)

Overview

Mircea Eliade is best known in the West for his scholarly works and studies in comparative religion, written in French and English. Unfortunately, his literary works, written in Romanian, equally masterful but less frequently translated, are less known. Thus, as a writer of fiction, his work continues to belong only to Romanian literature: In his native land, Romania, where he is better known for his fantastic and realistic fiction, he ranks among the nation's most significant writers.



Mircea Eliade Michael Mauney / Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Budding Intellect Mircea Eliade was born in Bucharest, Romania, to Gheorghe, an army officer and a native of Moldavia, and Ioana, a native of the western region of Oltenia. Because of his father's military postings, the Eliades moved twice between Tecuci and Bucharest, finally settling in the capital city soon after the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. They moved into a house whose attic was to play an almost mythical role in the writer's life. Around the time Eliade was admitted to the prestigious Spiru-Haret high school in 1917, he began reading novels and detective stories while simultaneously developing a passionate interest in the natural sciences, chemistry, zoology, and entomology.

First Publications In the spring of 1921 his first article, "The Enemy of the Silkworm," was published in *Journal of Popular Sciences*. It was followed by a scientific story called "How I Discovered the Philosopher's Stone," which was awarded the first prize in a competition sponsored by the same journal. Encouraged, Eliade wanted to work in the field of science while also feeling a strong vocation for imaginative literature.

Autobiographical Works In 1923 Eliade began writing an important autobiographical piece, "The Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent," partly published in various periodicals between December 1926 and December 1927. The book aimed at being more than an autobiographical novel; it was also intended as a symbolic narrative about a teenager's life. Eliade also began keeping a journal, a habit he preserved until his death. Several years later, Eliade used the same technique of the autobiographical journal-novel inspired by the ideal of authenticity in his unpublished novel "Gaudemus," which was conceived as a sequel to "The Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent."

Spokesman for a Generation By 1928 Eliade had earned the reputation of an astute essayist. He wrote regularly for the influential Bucharest-based *Cuvântul*, edited by his professor Nae Ionescu, one of the most important intellectuals in Romania during the interwar period. Eliade became interested in articulating problems related to his own generation. He addressed significant issues in an essay series, "Spiritual Itinerary, I-XII," published in *Cuvântul* in the fall of 1927.

Studies Abroad: Italy and India In the spring of 1928 Eliade traveled to Italy, where he did research for his thesis, "Contributions to Renaissance Philosophy". As a result of his work, he successfully defended his thesis and graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Bucharest in the fall of the same year. In August 1928 Eliade received a letter from Maharaja Nandy informing him that he was awarded a five-year grant to study Indian

philosophy with Dasgupta in Calcutta. There he spent three years studying Sanskrit, familiarizing himself with Indian philosophy, falling in love, and writing articles and novels for his Romanian readers.

Prolific Years In the fall of 1932 Eliade and his friends founded in Bucharest the Criterion Association for Arts, Literature, and Philosophy, a cultural organization that held a series of public lectures and sponsored various other cultural events. In 1935, the year in which he became a member of the Society of Romanian writers, Eliade offered his readers three new books: *Asiatic Alchemy*, his first published scientific book; *Work in Progress*, a companion to *India*; and *The Hooligans*, a sequel to *The Return from Paradise*. Eliade never matched this astonishing pace of publication in subsequent years, while he devoted most of his time to consolidating his reputation as an academic. The book that contains the seeds of all Eliade's later interpretations of the symbolism at the center of the world, *Babylonian Cosmology and Alchemy*, appeared in the fall of 1937.

Threatened Freedom A royal dictatorship was imposed on Romania in the spring of 1938. Corneliu Codreanu, the head of the right-wing Iron Guard movement, was arrested. People suspected of sympathizing with the Iron Guard were put under close supervision. Eliade, who had written a few right-wing articles, was also suspect. After escaping a night-time search of his home, he was arrested a few weeks later and charged with having suspect foreign contacts. Refusing to sign a declaration of dissociation from the Iron Guard (which he never belonged to), he was sent to a detention camp at Miercurea-Ciuc, where he joined Nae Ionescu. Eliade remained there only a few weeks. Suspected of having tuberculosis, he was transferred to a sanatorium further south and released three weeks later.

Success in the 1950s For Eliade the 1950s were a successful decade in which he achieved long-deserved international recognition as a leading historian of religions. He was invited by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn to lecture at the multidisciplinary Eranos Conferences in Ascona, Italy. He also became a prominent member of a circle dominated by the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. In 1951 a research grant from the Bollingen Foundation relieved him of the poverty he had been living since his 1945 arrival in Paris. Two of his most important scientific books, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951) and *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1954) were published.

Renewed Popularity, Retirement, and Declining Health In October of 1956, Eliade emigrated to the Chicago where he began a highly influential professorship. During the 1970s Eliade pursued his scholarship with renewed stamina and enthusiasm. Most of the books he published during this decade were academic, culminating with the first two volumes of his monumental

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliade's famous contemporaries include:

Corneliu Codreanu (1899–1938): Romanian leader of the Iron Guard, a violent anti-Semitic organization that was active during the interwar period.

Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong (1901–1971): The American jazz trumpeter who was an innovative and therefore primary influence in the advancement of jazz music.

Walt Disney (1901–1966): The American producer, screenwriter, animator, and entrepreneur who was one of the world's foremost entertainment artists, producing movies, amusement parks, and subsequent iconography.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): The famous expatriate writer whose name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): The Mexican painter who became an influential figure with her representation of indigenous culture rendered in her distinctive style.

three-volume *A History of Religious Ideas* (1976–1983). Despite his declining health, Eliade's last years were dedicated as usual to travel, scholarship, and literature. He also continued to receive visits from admirers, friends, and Romanian exiles. In Romania the interest in Eliade was revived by the publication of *At the Court of Dionysus* (1977), which offered a good selection of Eliade's best fiction. In 1982 he started working on the second volume of his *Autobiography*, and in 1983 he retired from the University of Chicago.

Hailed as one of the founders of the history of religions in the United States, he completed the third volume of his *A History of Religious Ideas*, supervised the editing of the monumental sixteen-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) and worked as a guide to world religions published in collaboration with his protégé Ioan P. Culianu at Chicago. In 1985 the trustees of the University of Chicago established a new chair in Eliade's honor. He died only a few months later, on April 22, 1986.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Eliade's lifelong personal habits as a scholar and writer were influenced early and with great force: Jules Payot's *The Education of the Will* (1894), which Eliade read as a teen, started him on a rigorous process of self-discipline. To learn English he read James George Frazer. He discovered alchemy and the history of religions. He read Edouard Schuré, Lautréamont, Léon Bloy, Voltaire, and B. P. Hasdeu, and was fascinated by

the breadth of their knowledge. He also developed a special inclination for Honoré de Balzac. The teenage Eliade's greatest discovery, however, was Giovanni Papini's autobiography, *The Failure* (1912)—this book reinforced Eliade's drive toward encyclopedism as well as his will to self-perfection.

Profound Themes at Interplay in Dual Genres

Eliade's five-year study of Indian philosophy with guru Dasgupta in Calcutta from 1928 to 1933 taught him great lessons and further reinforced his life-long themes of study. Most significantly, he discovered the sacred in objects or cosmic rhythms that are common to all traditional rural societies. This last lesson became a recurrent theme in Eliade's approach to the history of religions. As he did elsewhere in his fiction and nonfiction, Eliade further developed this theme in works such as *The Snake* (1937), a fantastic novel with common characters who become involved in a series of strange happenings. By using symbols such as the snake, the moon, the forest, and the water, Eliade described the way in which the fantastic permeates everyday life without disrupting it. He reiterated the main idea of the unrecognizability of miracles. This idea, along with the theme of the sacred camouflaged in the profane, is the key to all Eliade's major writings.

In 2006 the University of Chicago held a conference to evaluate the academic, political, and social contributions made by Eliade and another prominent religious scholar, Joachim Wach. In addition to recognition in the United States, sections of Europe's far right and German representatives of *Neue Rechte* credited Eliade with inspiring them in their respective endeavors.

Works in Critical Context

As an encyclopedist writing in both fiction and nonfiction genres, Eliade developed a full-fledged methodology of the sacred that revealed his originality as an historian of religions and established him as a revered scholar. As renowned Canadian critic Northrop Frye once noted, the most impressive thing about Eliade's works was not the breadth of his erudition, but the unity and the consistency with which he brought together yoga, literature, primitive religions, and alchemy to form a pattern.

A Mixed Affair Reviewers were mixed in their opinions of the exoticism and the mythology of voluptuousness of *Maitreyi* (1935). The love story became a widely acclaimed novel and was hailed as a "revolution" in Romanian literary history. It was awarded the national prize for 1933 and was one of Eliade's most successful works, gaining him recognition as a major literary writer in Romania. A contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement* saw the tale as a "metaphor for the narrator's awakening consciousness of a new and radically different culture" and compared Eliade's "intensely poetic prose style, by turns declamatory and confessional" to Marguerite Duras and Elizabeth Smart. Isabel Colegate,

writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewed both accounts and cited Eliade's version as "intensely felt and economically written." Fleming declared *Bengal Nights* to be "a romance not just with an Indian but with India herself." Indeed, several critics noted Eliade's feminization of India in this novel. Tilottama Minu Tharoor, writing for *Washington Post Book World*, noted Eliade's depiction of Alain as an engineer who "unabashedly revels in his assumptions of racial superiority and the power he exercises over the Indian landscape." Tharoor continued, "Whenever there is something about [Maitreyi] that eludes his immediate understanding, Alain refers to her as 'primitive.'" Fleming commented on the discrepancies and similarities between Eliade and Devi's versions: "Eliade's offense was not novelistic embellishment but rather its reverse: Had *Bengal Nights* not retained so many truths, it would have been far less damaging."

Responses to Literature

1. The Spiritual Itinerary essays Eliade wrote empowered his generation. Write your own Spiritual Itinerary—for your generation. What will you include to empower, encourage, or inspire your peers? What is important to your generation?
2. There are several Web sites with trivia quizzes for celebrities and famous people. At Celebrina.com, however, there is only a blank form for Eliade (to date). Visit www.celebrina.com/mircea-eliade.html and fill in the blanks, based on what you know about Eliade.
3. If the page is finally complete, go to the next prompt here: Work alone to come up with your own trivia quiz on the author. When you finish, trade quizzes with a partner. What do your two trivia quizzes have in common? What did you leave out? What had you included that your partner left out? What does this tell you about what is important to your partner and to you?
4. Eliade was greatly affected by the political extremism in Romania. To put his life and work into further context, do a Web search on the political movements in the country during the 1930s and following decades. If you work in a group, each person could consider one element—censorship, the problems with King Carol II, the Iron Guard movement—and meet again to inform each other, giving you a more complete picture.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also explored religion, alchemy, and mysticism:

The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949), a nonfiction book by Joseph Campbell. In this influential work, the author investigates heroes and heroism, myths and mythology.

A History of God (2004), a nonfiction book by Karen Armstrong. In this comprehensive study, the author thoroughly explores three monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Man and His Symbols (1961), a nonfiction book by Carl Jung and colleagues. In this collection, Jung and four esteemed scholars discuss mythology, ritual, and symbol in art and culture.

The Tempest (1610–1611), a play by William Shakespeare. In one of his last plays, Shakespeare features the magician Prospero and explores alchemy on many levels.

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George Eliot

BORN: 1819, Warwickshire, England

DIED: 1880, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Adam Bede (1859)

The Mill on the Floss (1860)

Silas Marner (1861)

Middlemarch (1871–1872)

Overview

George Eliot's work has been praised for its realistic approach to character and skillful plot development. Staged against the backdrop of rural England, Eliot's novels explore moral and philosophical issues associated with the growing agnosticism and spiritual despair of nineteenth-century English society. *Middlemarch* is considered unsurpassed among novels of the period in intellectual depth, and it remains the work on which Eliot's reputation most firmly rests.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Deep Relationships with Father and Brother Eliot, born Mary Ann Evans, was the youngest child of



George Eliot Eliot, George, drawing. The Library of Congress

Robert Evans, agent for the estate of Sir Francis Newdigate, and Christiana Pearson Evans, his second wife. She grew up in the red-brick-and-ivy Griff House, overlooking the fields and canals of Warwickshire. She began school at five years old, and, like her brothers and sisters (two of the four half-siblings from her father's first marriage), she was a boarding student at an Evangelical school. Her fiction suggests that the most important relationships of her childhood were with her full brother Isaac, prototype of the difficult-to-please Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and her father, often described as a model for *Adam Bede* and Caleb Garth as well as for Mr. Tulliver, who is always willing to take his daughter's part in her emotional struggles.

By the time she was twenty-one, Evans's mother had died and her brothers and sisters were married and scattered. She left Griff and moved with her father into a house on the Foleshill Road in Coventry. Partly because of her friendship with Charles Bray, who had bought the paper in June 1846, Evans wrote some short reviews and essays for the *Herald* the following winter, pieces that would become her first publications.

A Nurse First and a Journalist Second Evans wrote little prose during the next few years, which she spent keeping house and nursing her father as he endured his last illness. Until she began writing for the *Westminster Review* in 1851, apparently her only publication was a rave review of James Anthony Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849). The review was so enthusiastic that it prompted mutual friends to set up a romantic—albeit fruitless—matchmaking scheme. The plan backfired when Froude failed to show up at the rendezvous point, and announced his engagement to another in his note of regret.

Having spent the winter after her father's death in 1850 alone in Geneva, Evans returned to England alone. She soon after made the move to leave behind the provinces permanently, except as settings for her fiction. Recruited by John Chapman to edit his newly acquired pet project, the *Westminster Review*, she moved into his publishing, bookselling, and lodging establishment at 142 Strand and became a member of London's lively literary and intellectual set. Among her new acquaintances was George Henry Lewes, who contributed articles on philosophical, scientific, and literary topics to the *Westminster Review* and other London periodicals. Despite Lewes's thoroughly failed—but still legal—marriage to Agnes Jervis, Lewes and Evans began in 1853 a mutually supportive intellectual, romantic, and emotional partnership that endured until his death in 1878.

A Life in Motion In eloping first to Germany in 1854, Evans and Lewes set a lifelong pattern by which they interspersed periods of hard work in London with travel that was part vacation, part field trip. On the initial trip to Weimar and Berlin, Lewes was completing a biography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe while Evans

gathered material and background for articles. Her need to supplement the small income from her father's legacy resulted in the following two years of intense journalistic productivity. During this time, she wrote dozens of reviews, most of them for the *Westminster Review* and the *Leader*. In Germany, this was a period of intense upheaval. The Prussia-led unification of Germany into a modern nation state would not occur until France's final defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871. And the French revolution of 1848 had sparked a series of revolutions in the German states, whose aftermath was far from resolved when Evans and Lewes first traveled there. Evans's German travel, together with the extensive religious reading of the Evangelical days of her youth, equipped her to write especially rapidly and well on books pertaining both to German history and culture and to religion.

Forsaking the Lying Truth for the True Lie Evans gave up journalism almost completely when she began writing fiction in the fall of 1856, and soon, for fear of finding negative comments on her own work, she stopped even reading book reviews. The excellent income from the novels freed her from financial need, and, unlike her journalism, her fiction could conveniently be written away from London. During the next twenty years, despite their permanent residence at The Priory near Regent's Park beginning in 1863, she and Lewes often fled the fog, the noise, and the sooty air of London. Eliot (who had assumed her pseudonym in 1857) wrote much of her fiction while traveling on the Continent or on holiday at the seaside. She chose a male pen name, although female authors published freely during that time, to distinguish herself from what American author Nathaniel Hawthorne referred to as that "damned mob of scribbling women," the female authors of popular romances. At home she and Lewes were occupied with settling his three growing sons in suitable professions, taking care of each other's feeble health, and maintaining the literary social life that they developed as the fame of the novels increased. By the late 1870s Eliot's success as a novelist had brought her not only wealth and fame but also the simple social acceptance denied her since she and Lewes had begun living together openly. At the Priory they entertained friends and fans on Sunday afternoons, and they began a series of regular visits to the universities at Oxford and Cambridge.

After Lewes died in 1878, Eliot struggled with her grief for more than a year, then astonished her friends and her public by marrying John Walter Cross, a banker twenty years younger than she. They honeymooned on the continent and leased a new house in London, but only seven months after her wedding Eliot died suddenly—in December of 1880. The beloved novelist was buried in Highgate Cemetery on the north edge of London, a city she seldom represented in her novels but evoked consistently in her nonfiction prose.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliot's famous contemporaries include:

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American abolitionist most famous for her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a writer whom Eliot admired.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): Famous British writer whose novels are often compared to Eliot's, perhaps due to their scope and intricate plots.

George Henry Lewes (1817–1878): English philosopher, critic, and Eliot's longtime partner.

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903): English philosopher who coined the term "survival of the fittest" after reading Charles Darwin's work on the evolution of species.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, was perhaps the most powerful antislavery advocate of all time, pushing for and signing into law the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery.

Works in Literary Context

Science as Metaphor for Life The use of scientific metaphor is characteristic of George Eliot's work, and bespeaks a dominant tendency of her period. Eliot was associated with Herbert Spencer, George Henry Lewes, and other "scientific philosophers," and their influence upon her was great. Counterbalancing this, however, was a conservative tendency arising from her early acquaintance with rural life in the Midlands and Evangelical background. In her short story "Amos Barton," that conflict is apparent in the alternating condescension and tenderness of her attitude toward her subject. But in the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, for example, her originality and insight are still obscured by conventional forms of expression, corresponding to conventional modes of feeling and thought. In general, Eliot's work may be described as psychological realism, a genre dependent on the application of scientific ways of seeing to the understanding of human relations, and one that included such greats as Jane Austen and, later, Henry James. Eliot's progress as an artist mirrored, then, the intellectual and social movement of her period toward scientific rationality—with all of its advantages and flaws.

Selflessness, Morality, and the Novel One common theme found in many of Eliot's works is selflessness. Silas Marner, the main character in her novel of the same name, experiences only misfortune when he works for his own wealth and happiness. However, when he takes in a young child whose opium-addicted mother has died, his life—and his place as a member of the community—is

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Eliot's *Middlemarch* is concerned not only with characters but with politics, as the events primarily center around the Reform Act of 1832. Her other novels also comment on political events and debates that were significant to Victorian England. Here are some other works that deal with political issues during tense times.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This antislavery, pre-Civil War novel led Abraham Lincoln to refer to Stowe as "the little lady who made this big war."

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. Set around the time of the French Revolution, this novel reaches its climax during the storming of the Bastille prison.

Lumumba (2000), a film directed by Raoul Peck. This movie depicts the movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo for independence from Belgium in 1960.

Hotel Rwanda (2004), a film directed by Terry George. The true tale of a hotel manager who helped save the lives of over one thousand Tutsi refugees during the genocidal rampage of Hutu extremists in 1994 is captured in this film, which earned Don Cheadle an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of the main character.

transformed. In *Daniel Deronda*, the title character lives his life as selflessly as possible, which serves as an example to the self-involved Gwendolen Harleth, who shows signs of maturity by the end of the novel. In these and other works, Eliot is still negotiating the historical legacy of the novel as an art form. Particularly in England, the development of the novel was regarded with skepticism by many, and was often called on to justify its existence by providing solid moral instruction for readers. Insofar as her work does offer some moral instruction—though not without a degree of skepticism—Eliot follows in the footsteps of such British authors as Samuel Richardson, whose eighteenth-century bestseller *Pamela* (1740) has delighted and infuriated critics and moralists alike for centuries.

Works in Critical Context

While Eliot was regarded as the leading English novelist during the last years of her life, it was common at that time to differentiate between her early and late work and to prefer the former. Reviewers almost unanimously agreed that Eliot's later novels were overly philosophic and didactic, lacking the spontaneity and charm of her early autobiographical works. Consequently, the esteem

in which she was held was already in decline at the time of her death in 1885, and was further diminished by the late-Victorian revolt against "the-novel-with-a-purpose" or "novel of conduct." It was not until the 1940s that her novels, particularly the later ones, returned to favor, generating a resurgence of interest in her work and a body of criticism that rivals dedicated to her fellow Victorian, Charles Dickens. The variety and quantity of current critical response is perhaps the best measure of Eliot's complex genius. She continues to inspire analysis for her psychological insight, broad vision, and mastery of a realistic style.

Adam Bede "There can be no mistake about *Adam Bede*," wrote one reviewer for the *London Times*. "It is a first-rate novel, and its author takes rank at once among the masters of the art." The novel was first published in three volumes in February of 1859. A year later it had gone through four editions with four printings of the last edition; had been translated into French, German, Dutch, and Hungarian; had spawned a sequel; and had brought forward a Warwickshire eccentric named Joseph Liggins who claimed to be the real George Eliot (since the true author had concealed herself behind a pseudonym). *Adam Bede* sold sixteen thousand copies in a year and earned Eliot a great deal of money. "In its influence," the probably partial Lewes wrote to his son Charles, "and in obtaining the suffrages of the highest and wisest as well as of the ordinary novel reader, nothing equals *Adam Bede*."

The Mill on the Floss Eliot's next novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, was published in 1860, and was subjected to scathing criticism: The main character Maggie is not of "the smallest importance to anybody in the world" but herself, said philosopher and critic John Ruskin. Ruskin's reaction was symptomatic of that of most critics of the novel: *The Mill on the Floss* affected them where they were weakest. They felt that Maggie's free will was unfairly overcome in a moment of crisis. Their simple categories of right and wrong were undermined by what later critics have described as a "complex web of heredity, physiology, and environment." Consequently, as David Carroll remarks, "The Victorian reader's sympathies have been turned against his moral judgment and he feels aggrieved."

Middlemarch *Middlemarch*, says A. S. Byatt, "is a novel, above all, about intelligence and its triumphs, failures, distractions, fallings-short, compromises and doggedness." The greatness of *Middlemarch* was immediately acknowledged; the novel was a classic in its own time. In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot had written a tragedy; in *Middlemarch* she wrote an epic. And *Middlemarch* could be accorded too much praise, claims Geoffrey Tollotson, only "by saying that it was easily the best of the half-dozen best novels in the world."

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the symbolism of the coming of the new year in *Silas Marner*.
2. Describe some common characteristics of Eliot's female characters. What are their primary concerns and goals? How do they reflect the society of nineteenth-century England?
3. Research the Reform Act of 1832 and explain why Eliot thought it important enough to set her novel *Middlemarch* during the time prior to the passing of the act.
4. *Middlemarch* is widely considered Eliot's best work. In your opinion, is this because of the power of her story and characters, or because she was the first to use certain techniques that have become commonplace in modern novels? Do you think certain works should be read and remembered because they represent landmarks in the development of literature, regardless of whether the writings themselves are viewed as timeless works of art? Why or why not?
5. Why did the Victorians revolt against the "novel-with-a-purpose"? Do you think Eliot is partly to blame for this new trend? Why or why not?

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T. S. Eliot

BORN: 1888, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

DIED: 1965, London, England

NATIONALITY: American, British

GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Prufrock, and Other Observations (1917)

The Waste Land (1922)

Journey of the Magi (1927)

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats (1939)

Four Quartets (1943)

Overview

T. S. Eliot, the 1948 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is one of the giants of modern literature, highly distinguished as a poet, literary critic, dramatist, and editor/publisher. Eliot articulated distinctly modern themes in forms that were a marked departure from those of nineteenth-century poetry. Among his best-known works were "Gerontion" (1920), and within a couple of years, one of the most famous and influential poems of the century, *The Waste Land* (1922).



T. S. Eliot *Eliot, T. S., London, England, 1956, photograph. AP Images.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Midwestern Born, but New England Bred Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the second son and seventh child of Charlotte Champe Stearns and Henry Ware Eliot, members of a distinguished Massachusetts family recently transplanted to Missouri and fiercely loyal to their New England roots. Eliot's family tree includes settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, prominent clergymen and educators, a president of Harvard University (Charles William Eliot), and three presidents of the United States (John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Rutherford B. Hayes). His father was the president of a local company in St. Louis, and his mother was educated at the city's Smith Academy. He completed his preparations for college by attending the Massachusetts-based Milton Academy.

Early Poems Published While at Harvard Entering Harvard in 1906, Eliot studied with some of the most distinguished philosophers of the century, including George Santayana, Josiah Royce, and Bertrand Russell. He focused on the religion of India and idealist philosophy (especially Immanuel Kant), with further work in ethics and psychology. His studies, which included two years of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy, influenced his perspective and provided a more comprehensive context for his understanding of culture. Later, these Eastern materials entered his poetry. Eliot also joined the staff of the *Harvard Advocate*, the university's literary magazine, where several of his earliest poems were first published.

A Move to England Between the poems of 1910–1911 and *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot lived through several experiences that are crucial in understanding his development as a poet—he moved to England and eventually became naturalized as a British subject, married Vivienne Haighwood, and became a member of the Anglican Church. While in London, Eliot called on the poet Ezra Pound, and Pound immediately adopted him as a cause, promoting his poetry and introducing him to William Butler Yeats and other artists. In 1915, at a time when Eliot was close to giving up on poetry, Pound arranged for the publication of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in *Poetry* magazine. Pound continued to play a central role in Eliot's life and work through the early 1920s. He influenced the form and content of Eliot's next group of poems, the quatrains in *Poems* (1919), and more famously, he changed the shape of *The Waste Land* by urging Eliot to cut several long passages.

In addition to Pound's influence, Eliot's poetry was also affected by his marriage to Vivienne Haighwood. Their relationship was troubled by her neurotic disorders, and the element of despair is evident in his poetry from

1915 through the 1920s. To support himself and his chronically ill wife, Eliot took several jobs to help cover medical expenses. Working from 1916 to 1920 under great pressure (a fifteen-hour workday was common for him), he wrote essays, published in 1920 as *The Sacred Wood*, that reshaped literary history.

Illness Sparks Creativity The years of anxiety in Eliot's personal life took its toll, and in 1921, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, he sought treatment in a sanatorium in Switzerland. (A sanatorium is a medical facility for long-term care or for those recovering from illness.) In this protected environment, he completed “The Waste Land.” The poem was extensively edited by Pound, at Eliot's request, and in 1922, *The Waste Land* was published in the first issue of the *Criterion*, a literary review edited by Eliot.

The Waste Land, considered a masterwork of high modernism, was a direct response to the despair and destruction wreaked in all areas of European society by World War I. The Great War, as it is also called, started as a skirmish between Austria-Hungary and Serbia after Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Serbia by a member of a Bosnian nationalist group. Because of long-standing tensions and entangling alliances, nearly the whole of Europe became involved in the war, including Great Britain, and later the United States. Of the estimated 30 million military casualties, nearly 2.5 million were British soldiers. Almost a million were killed.

Success and Later Years In 1927, Eliot was baptized in the Anglican Church and became naturalized as a British subject. As Europe again inched toward war amidst a worldwide economic downturn known as the Great Depression in the 1930s, Eliot's major poetic achievement was “Burnt Norton,” composed in 1935. It was the first of four comparable works that together are known as *Four Quartets*. They are usually considered his masterpiece, and Eliot himself thought *Four Quartets* his greatest achievement and “Little Gidding” his best poem.

Eliot lived through World War II, a conflict in which Great Britain came close to being overrun by Adolf Hitler-led Nazi Germany as the rest of Europe had been. While Britain remained free and survived to triumph over the Nazis by the war's end, Eliot experienced marked changes in his personal life in the post-war period beginning in 1947. His wife, Vivienne, died, after having spent several years in an institution. In 1948, Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature, augmenting his stature as a celebrated literary figure. Then in 1957, he married Valerie Fletcher. T. S. Eliot's last years, though happy, were darkened by illness. He died of emphysema in London on January 4, 1965.

Works in Literary Context

Eliot's first volume of poetry, *Prufrock, and Other Observations*, established him as an important new voice in American and English poetry. Its poems encapsulate the

distinctive techniques Eliot uses throughout his career. Many critics noticed the influence of French symbolists in the poems, notably Jules Laforgue and Charles Baudelaire. These poets had impressed Eliot with their realistic portrayals of urban landscapes and their bold use of irony and symbolism. Eliot's earlier poems feature similar qualities. They are characterized by their sardonic tone, strong rhythms achieved by blending formal and informal language, and vivid, startling metaphors.

Isolation Eliot's early poems present a metaphorical view of the modern world as dry, desolate, barren, and spiritually empty. The isolation is social, religious, and (because Eliot is a poet) vocational. In "Portrait of a Lady," other people and perhaps God exist, but they are unreachable; in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," they exist only as aspects of the thinker's mind. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot reveals his position that modern society had lost its spirituality to secularism.

Failure of Communication Another theme commonly found in Eliot's poems is the failure of communication, of a positive relationship, between a man and a woman. It is found in the other early poems "Hysteria" and "La Figlia che Piange," and appears early in *The Waste Land* with the image of the "hyacinth girl." Over time, the failure of communication becomes related to other emerging themes, especially to religious meanings, for example, in the symbolic imagery of the "rose-garden," which appears in *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Confidential Clerk*.

Influence As an eminent poet, critic, and playwright, Eliot has maintained an influence upon literature that some critics claim is unequalled by any other twentieth-century writer. His poetry and prose are frequently cited as having helped inaugurate the modern period in English and American letters. His influence could be felt on poetry until the end of the century and beyond.

Works in Critical Context

Largely considered one of the greatest modern poets, Eliot has maintained an influence on literature that some critics claim is unequalled by any other twentieth-century writer. In the 1920s, Eliot's densely allusive style gained him an international reputation on the order of Albert Einstein's, but his fondness for European models and subjects prompted some of his compatriots to regard him as a turncoat to his country and to the artistic tradition of the new it had come to represent. Beginning in the 1950s, new experimental techniques in poetry, the revival of the Romantic belief in the primacy of the individual, and the emergence of personal or "confessional" poetry led to a decline in Eliot's authority and popularity. Most recent critics, however, while expressing occasional reservations about Eliot's personal ideology, agree that his profoundly innovative, erudite approach to poetry and criticism has had a permanent impact on literature.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliot's famous contemporaries include:

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): American modern poet who suggested that poets "make it new." Pound helped Eliot edit and publish his works.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Irish writer best known for the modernist novel *Ulysses*.

Conrad Aiken (1889–1973): American poet and close friend of Eliot at Harvard. Aiken edited Emily Dickinson's *Selected Poems* (1924), which helped establish her literary reputation posthumously.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): British philosopher and Nobel Prize winner who was known for being politically outspoken and anti-imperialistic. He was the coauthor of *Principia Mathematica*.

The Waste Land Among the most innovative, influential, and controversial poems of the twentieth century, *The Waste Land* challenged conventional definitions of poetry upon its publication in 1922. The five sections of this book-length poem are composed of apparently random, disconnected images and scenes and are spoken by several different voices that blend together. The meaning of *The Waste Land* is a subject of much debate, but scholars generally agree that it presents a metaphorical portrait of the modern world as dry and desolate and of humanity as emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually empty. Acknowledging its complexity, Hugh Kenner contended that the poem's imposing structure invites imaginative readings: "*The Waste Land* is suffused with a functional obscurity . . . embracing the fragmented present and reaching back to that 'vanished mind of which our mind is a continuum.'"

Four Quartets Eliot told Donald Hall in 1959 that he considered *Four Quartets* to be his best work, "and," he added, "I'd like to feel that they get better as they go on. The second is better than the first, the third is better than the second, and the fourth is the best of all. At any rate, that's the way I flatter myself." Neville Braybrooke writes: "It is . . . generally agreed . . . that in his *Four Quartets* [Eliot] attempted . . . to achieve a poetry so transparent that in concentrating on it attention would not fall so much on the words, but on what the words pointed to. And in his rigorous stripping away of the poetic, such a pure poetry is sustained."

Responses to Literature

1. Read the poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In groups, prepare answers to the following questions:

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In his later years, Eliot wrote more about spiritual issues than personal ones. He knew about many religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism, and referred to them symbolically and literally in his texts, particularly in *Four Quartets*. Here are some other works that emphasize spiritual and religious concerns:

"The Second Coming" (1920), a poem by William Butler Yeats. In this famous poem, the speaker worries that the end of the world may be coming, and that instead of Jesus Christ, someone or something else might be in control.

Siddhartha (1922), a novel by Hermann Hesse. This book is a fictionalized version of the story of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama.

The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), a film directed by Martin Scorsese. Based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, this film is an epic but controversial look at the last days of Jesus Christ on earth.

The Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. The book is the story of a shipwrecked Indian boy who contemplates the nature of God while stranded on a raft with a live tiger.

Why will the mermaids not sing to Prufrock at the end of the poem? Do you think Prufrock is actually talking to a real woman? Is this indeed a love song? Explain.

2. Write a short review describing which of the *Four Quartets* you think is best and why.
3. With a partner, find references to *Alice in Wonderland* and the Bible in *Four Quartets*. Discuss why Eliot would use these allusions.
4. With a partner, choose one of the sections from *The Waste Land* and prepare an oral reading for the class that emphasizes an aspect of the poem such as theme or subject matter.

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Odysseus Elytis

BORN: 1911, Heraklion, Crete, Greece

DIED: 1996, Athens, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Orientalisms (1939)

The Axion Esti (1959)

Maria Nefeli (1978)

The Little Mariner (1988)

West of Sadness (1995)

Overview

An internationally acclaimed poet who is considered among the foremost Greek literary figures of the twentieth century, Odysseus Elytis celebrated the splendors of nature while affirming humanity's ability to embrace hope over despair. Combining his interest in surrealism with lyrical evocations of Greek landscape, history, and culture, Elytis created poems that exalt the virtues of sensuality, innocence, and imagination while striving to reconcile these attributes with life's tragic aspects. A recipient of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature, Elytis was cited by the Swedish Academy for writing "poetry which, against the background of Greek tradition, depicts with sensuous strength and intellectual clear-sightedness modern man's struggle for freedom and creativity."



Odysseas Elytis *Elytis, Odysseus, photograph. AP Images.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Summers by the Sea The youngest of six children, Elytis was born in Heraklion, Crete, to a wealthy industrialist and his wife. He attended primary and secondary schools in Athens before enrolling at the University of Athens School of Law. As a youth, Elytis spent his summer vacations on the Aegean Islands, absorbing the seaside atmosphere that deeply informs the imagery of his verse. Also essential to Elytis's poetic development was his attraction to surrealism, which he developed during the late 1920s through the works of French poet Paul Éluard.

Artistic Awakening In 1935, after leaving law school, Elytis displayed several visual collages at the First International Surrealist Exhibition in Athens and began publishing poems in various Greek periodicals. His first collection of verse, *Orientalisms*, focuses on the beauty of the Aegean landscape. These poems also display Elytis's affinity for such surrealistic devices as the portrayal of supernatural occurrences, exploration of the unconscious, and personification of abstract ideas and natural phenomena. In his next volume, *Sun the First*, Elytis confirmed his predilection for examining nature's intrinsic relationship with human spirituality.

Reflections of War in Poetry During World War II, Italy and Germany were allied. Italy's dictator, Benito Mussolini, grew anxious to emulate the territorial expan-

sion of Germany's leader Adolf Hitler, and resolved to seize Greece. During the Italian invasion of Greece in 1940 and 1941, Elytis served on the Albanian front as a second lieutenant in Greece's First Army Corps. The heroism he witnessed amid the tragedy and suffering of combat is reflected in his long poem *Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign*. Centering on the death of a young Greek soldier whose transfiguration and resurrection serves as an affirmation of justice and liberty, this work advances Elytis's concerns with the merging of physical and spiritual existence and pays tribute to those individuals who resist oppression and defend freedom.

Immersion in Civic and Cultural Affairs Following the publication of *Heroic and Elegiac Song*, Elytis ceased producing poetry for more than a decade, immersing himself in civic and cultural affairs. From 1948 to 1953, during a period of civil war and subsequent civil unrest in Greece, Elytis lived in Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne and wrote articles in French for *Verve* magazine. Several years after returning to Greece, Elytis published *The Axion Esti*, an intricately structured cycle alternating prose and verse. Indebted for much of its tone, language, symbolism, and structure to the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, *The Axion Esti* incorporates elements of Christianity and images of Grecian landscapes and culture while augmenting Elytis's concern for the spirituality of the material world.

In the 1960s, translators abroad began to take notice of Elytis's poetry, and translations of his poems appeared in German, English, Italian, and French. During this period, Elytis traveled extensively. In 1961 he journeyed to the United States as a guest of the State Department; in 1962 he visited the Soviet Union; in 1965 he toured Bulgaria; in 1967, just before the military coup, he visited Egypt; and in 1969 he moved to Paris.

1979 Nobel Prize in Literature In 1975 Elytis was offered an honorary doctorate from the Philosophical School of the University of Thessaloniki, and he was proclaimed an honorary citizen of Lesbos. In 1979 he was proclaimed an honorary citizen of Heracleion, Crete. In 1975 *Books Abroad* dedicated an entire issue to his poetry. The greatest surprise for the poet, however, came in October 1979, when the secretary of the Swedish Academy announced the awarding of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature to Elytis "for his poetry, which, against the background of Greek tradition, depicts with sensuous strength and intellectual clear-sightedness modern man's struggle for freedom and creativeness." Other candidates for the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature included Graham Greene, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Simone de Beauvoir. The announcement was received with tremendous enthusiasm in Greece.

Post-Nobel Popularity Elytis lived and continued to create for seventeen years after receiving the Nobel Prize

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Elytis's famous contemporaries include:

George Seferis (1900–1971): Greek poet who became the first Greek to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963.

Mikis Theodorakis (1925–): One of Greece's best-known composers, Theodorakis scored films such as *Zorba the Greek* (1969) and *Serpico* (1973), and also put Elytis's *The Axion Esti* to music.

Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (1902–1986): Greek author and politician who briefly served as prime minister of Greece twice, in 1945 and in 1967.

André Breton (1896–1966): French writer often credited as the main founder of the surrealist movement.

Paul Éluard (1895–1952): This French poet, partially influenced by the American author Walt Whitman, was associated with the founding of the surrealist movement.

in Literature. His post-Nobel popularity kept him busy. The few years that immediately followed the Nobel presentation were spent almost entirely on award receptions, presentations, and speeches around the globe. In 1980 he was presented with an honorary doctorate from the Sorbonne in France, and in 1981 he received an honorary doctorate from the University of London. He was also declared an honorary citizen of Larnaca and Paphos (Cyprus), and he was invited by the Spanish prime minister Adolfo Suárez González to visit Spain, where he was declared an honorary citizen of Toledo (in the fall of 1980). The Royal Society of Literature (United Kingdom) presented him with the Benson Medal in 1981, an award given as lifetime recognition in poetry, fiction, history, and belles lettres. Also in 1981, Rutgers University, in the United States, established the Elytis Chair of Modern Greek Studies in honor of the poet, and in March 1982 he was presented, by Mayor D. Beis of Athens, with the Gold Medal of Honor of the City of Athens. During the 1980s Elytis published three collections of poetry: *Tria Poiimata me simaia Eykairias* (1982, *Three Poems Under a Flag of Convenience*), *Ímerologio enos Atheatou Apriliou* (1984; translated as *Journal of an Unseen April*, 1998), and *O Mikros Nautilos* (1986; translated as *The Little Mariner*, 1999).

West of Sadness Elytis's final collection, *Dytika tis Lypis* (1995, translated *West of Sadness*) was written in the summer of 1995 in Porto Rafti, Greece, where the poet was vacationing with fellow poet Ioulita Iliopoulou, who had been his partner for about a decade (he had never married nor had children). The seven poems of the

collection are “more dense,” as Elytis wrote, “and for this reason more difficult, but closer to my ideal.” The title of the collection signals its mood: on one hand, the life of the eighty-three-year-old poet is moving westward toward its setting; but on the other hand, it also moves “west of sorrow,” that is, beyond where sorrow itself sets. The biographical events in the poet's life are insignificant: “what remains,” the collection concludes, “is poetry alone.”

Elytis died of a stroke in his apartment in Athens on March 18, 1996. A posthumous collection titled *Ek tou Plision* (From Nearby) was put together by his heir, Iliopoulou, and was published in 1998.

Works in Literary Context

Elytis's poetry is often read in the context of surrealism, the artistic movement known for its rejection of objective reality. Indeed, he is the translator of numerous surrealist texts into Greek and has written extensively on the subject, many of these essays collected in the volume *The Open Book*. Significantly, in 1991 an exhibition of Greek poetry and painting, including work by Elytis, was staged at the Georges Pompidou Centre Paris, titled “Surrealist Greeks.” This title is especially accurate in describing Elytis, because although Elytis's work does incorporate many of the elements of surrealism, it is equally important to remember where Elytis comes from, as he infuses his writing with the rich culture, heritage, landscapes, and literary traditions of his native Greece.

“Greek Reality” Although Elytis engages with contemporary surrealism in his poems, it would be misleading to exaggerate the extent of the poet's commitment to any movement. Even in the early verse, surrealism is adapted (to borrow Elytis's own term) as the poet confronts “Greek reality,” drawing upon the resources of a native poetic tradition. In fact Elytis has been outspoken in stressing his intimate poetic relationship to Greek literary figures as diverse as Andreas Kalvos (1946) and Alexandros Papadiamantis (1976). Moreover, echoes from Greek folk poetry, Byzantine hymns, and liturgical texts reverberate through his poetry. As Elytis remarked in his Nobel acceptance speech in 1979, the poet must simultaneously “recast the elements of the social and psychological requirements of [his] age.” Echoes from the German poets Friedrich Holderlin and Novalis interact with allusions to the national Greek poet Dionysios Solomos.

Surrealism and the Free Association of Ideas Elytis adapted only selected principles of surrealism to his Greek reality. Some other characteristics of surrealism, such as automatic writing, were considered unacceptable to Elytis. Free association of ideas, a concept he often made use of, allowed him to portray objects in their “reality” but also in their “surreality.” This is shown in various poems, as when a young girl is transformed into a fruit, a landscape becomes a human body, and the mood

of a morning takes on the form of a tree. “I have always been preoccupied with finding the analogies between nature and language in the realm of imagination, a realm to which the surrealists also gave much importance, and rightly so,” claimed Elytis. “Everything depends on imagination, that is, on the way a poet sees the same phenomenon as you do, yet *differently* from you.”

Orientalism, published in 1936, was Elytis’s first volume of poetry. Filled with images of light and purity, the work earned for its author the title of the “sun-drinking poet.” Edmund Keeley, a frequent translator of Elytis’s work, observed that these “first poems offered a surrealism that had a distinctly personal tone and a specific local habitation. The tone was lyrical, humorous, fanciful, everything that is young.”

Popularity Today Resists Classification Odysseus Elytis’s popularity in Greece remains astounding. He became a national commodity after the Nobel Prize, as evident in a continuous inclusion of his name in cultural and national symbolism: More than a dozen streets in Greece and Cyprus are named after him; a life-size statue sculpted by Yiannis Papas was placed in one of Kolonaki’s most central squares (Plateia Dexamenis); and a cruise ship, a theater on the island of Ios, and a hotel in Thessaly have all been given his name. Biographical information and scattered lines from his poetry adorn tourist pamphlets enticing visitors to travel to the Greek islands. Such cultural incorporation comes as a stark contrast not only in relation to the deeper essence of his poetry but also to the ascetic life he had led in his small apartment. Elytis’s poetry clearly resists superficial classifications. His multifaceted style of writing, along with his lucid theoretical formulations, earned him an enduring place in modern Greek literature.

Works in Critical Context

When *Maria Nefeli* was first published in 1978, it met with a curious yet hesitant public. M. Byron Raizis related in *World Literature Today* that “some academicians and critics of the older generations still [wanted] to cling to the concept of the ‘sun-drinking’ Elytis of the Aegean spume and breeze and of the monumental *Axion Esti*,” and for that reason viewed this new work as “an experimental and not-so-attractive creation of rather ephemeral value.”

The Eternal Female The reason behind the uncertainty many Elytis devotees felt toward this new work stemmed from its radically different presentation. Whereas his earlier poems dealt with the almost timeless expression of the Greek reality, “rooted in my own experience, yet . . . not directly [transcribing] actual events,” as he once stated, *Maria Nefeli* is based on a young woman he actually met. Different from the women who graced his early work, the woman in Elytis’s poem has changed to reflect the troubled times in which she lives. “This Maria then is the newest manifestation of the eternal female,” noted Raizis, “the most recent mutation

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Surrealism is often remembered as a movement in the visual arts—painting, in particular. But as its striking images and the way the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images impressed viewers of the visual arts in the early years of the movement, it is easy to forget that surrealists developed out of a literary school—the Dadaist school—that emphasized sound over reason in their poems. Here are a few more works of surrealism that were produced at the time Elytis worked in the form:

The Magnetic Fields (1920), a novel by André Breton and Philippe Soupault. This work is considered the first surrealist novel because its authors utilized the “automatic writing” technique characteristic of surrealism. In “automatic writing,” a writer attempts to write continuously while purposely trying not to think about the words he or she is writing.

Night of Loveless Nights (1926), a poem by Robert Desnos. Desnos is considered one of the founding fathers of literary surrealism, and this extended poem about unrequited love is one of his finest.

Le Paysan de Paris (1926), a surrealist text by Louis Aragon. This work represents a loving portrayal of the places and people that make up the surrealist movement—a kind of literary portrait—written at the peak of surrealism’s influence.

The Persistence of Memory (1931), a painting by Salvador Dalí. In this surrealist work, clocks are depicted as melting and hanging over a tree, a horse, and a desk, thereby exemplifying surrealism’s interest in juxtapositions of unlikely images

of the female principle which, in the form of Maria, Helen and other more traditional figures, had haunted the quasi-idyllic and erotic poems of [Elytis’s youth].” Raizis explained further that Maria is the “attractive, liberated, restless or even blasé representative of today’s young woman. . . . Her setting is the polluted city, not the open country and its islands of purity and fresh air.”

Lyrical Humanism Despite the initial reservations voiced by some critics, *Maria Nefeli* has come to be regarded as the best of Elytis’s later writings. Gini Politi, for example, announced: “I believe that *Maria Nefeli* is one of the most significant poems of our times, and the response to the agony it includes *is written*; this way it saves for the time being the language of poetry and of humaneness.” Kostas Stamatiou, moreover, expressed a common reaction to the work: “After the surprise of a first reading, gradually the careful student discovers beneath the surface the *constants* of the great poet: faith in surrealism, fundamental humanism, passages of pure lyricism.”

Responses to Literature

1. Surrealism is a fairly unique artistic movement insofar as it has influenced artists of various media, including both visual and literary arts. Read Elytis's *Orientalisms* and look at Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*. In what ways do both works use surrealist elements similarly? In what ways do the two works display different surrealist traits?
2. Read *The Axion Esti*. This text has been said to be indebted to the Greek Orthodox Church. How does Elytis use the themes and language of the church in these poems, either to evoke a tradition or to critique that tradition? In your response, make sure to cite specific passages from Elytis's work to support your claim.
3. Many authors who otherwise were in tune with the artistic ideals of surrealism eventually moved away from the movement because of its communist ethics. Using the Internet and the library, research the surrealist movement's relationship to communism. Then, in a short essay, analyze how surrealist authors—including but not limited to Elytis—and artists use their work to support or refute communist ideals.
4. Elytis loved his home country of Greece and wanted to express its beauty through his poems. Because of the effectiveness of these poems in expressing the beauty of Greece and the Aegean Sea, Elytis has been called a "sun-drinking" poet. Think about your own hometown. If you were a poet who was interested in describing the physical terrain and culture of your hometown, what would critics call you? Why? In order to answer these questions, you might try writing a few lines of verse in honor of your hometown to get you going.

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Buchi Emecheta

BORN: 1944, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

In the Ditch (1972)

Second Class Citizen (1975)

The Slave Girl (1977)

The Joys of Motherhood (1979)

Destination Biafra (1982)

The Rape of Shavi (1983)

Overview

Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta is considered one of the most important female African writers, best known for novels that address the difficulties of modern African women who are forced into traditional subservient roles. Her heroines often challenge their restrictive lives and aspire to economic and social independence. Emecheta, regarded by critics and politicians alike as a role model, represents a new and vigorous departure in fiction about women in and from Africa.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Tumultuous Early Life Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was born on July 21, 1944, in Yaba, near Lagos, Nigeria, to Jeremy Nwabudike Emecheta and his wife, Alice Okwuekwu Emecheta. Both of her parents were traditional Igbos (an ethnic group in West Africa), and her father was employed as a railway molder. In



Buchi Emecheta Emecheta, Buchi, photograph © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Emecheta's childhood, Nigeria was undergoing significant change as many African countries sought their independence in the post-World War II period. The conflict stirred pressures for self-government in many colonial countries, and Nigeria began lobbying Great Britain for greater autonomy. After a series of short-lived constitutions, Nigeria achieved full independence in 1960.

By this time, Emecheta had undergone significant changes of her own. Her mother died when she was young, and she was orphaned as a young girl when her father was killed serving with British troops in Burma, another British colony that had gained its independence in the late 1940s but was marred by internal strife and violence between nationalists and Communists vying for power. After being raised by her extended family for several years, Emecheta was educated at a Methodist missionary school until 1960, when she was sixteen. That same year she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been betrothed for five years.

The couple moved to London so her husband could study accounting, a common occurrence for Africans from former British colonies. As many African countries moved toward and achieved independence, scholarships were created so their citizens could become educated in Europe and the United States, then return and take on positions of responsibility at universities as well as in business and government. The couple eventually had five children—Florence, Sylvester, Jake, Christy, and Alice, but six years after their arrival, the couple separated after Emecheta suffered increasingly harsh abuse at her husband's hands. She was left to raise the children on her own.

Autobiographical First Books After leaving her husband in 1966, Emecheta entered the University of London, graduating with a BS with honors in 1972. She also held a post as a library officer with the British Museum in London from 1965 to 1969. Between 1969 and 1976, she was a youth worker and sociologist with the Inner London Education Authority and wrote her first fiction works. Emecheta's first two books, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974), are heavily autobiographical.

The books describe her childhood in Lagos, her 1960 marriage to Onwordi, and their move to England. But the novels—following the early years of her fictionalized self, the protagonist, Adah—also concentrate on her struggle to support and bring up five children alone. *In the Ditch* begins at the point when she has left her husband and is living on her own with her children in a slum, supporting them by working in the library at the British Museum. The book is a collection of “observations” that Emecheta had originally sent to the *New Statesman*, which published them and thereby launched her writing career.

Continued Struggles The autobiography of the first two novels continues in *Head Above Water* (1986)—describing Emecheta's continued struggle to bring up

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Emecheta's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Bukovsky (1942–): Russian author and activist, best known for being a former Soviet political dissident who ran for the president of Russia in 2007.

Jean-Luc Godard (1930–): French filmmaker and a pioneer of French New Wave best known for directing such films as *Breathless*.

Dustin Hoffman (1937–): American film actor, best known for his roles in *The Graduate* (1967) and *Tootsie* (1982).

Mick Jagger (1943–): British rock musician, songwriter, and performer best known as the front man for the Rolling Stones.

John Updike (1932–): American fiction writer, best known for his “Rabbit” series of novels (1960–2001) and the novel *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984). He has won two Pulitzer Prizes.

her family as a single parent, to earn a degree in sociology, to find jobs, and to continue to write. The novel ends with the achievement of two major goals: the purchase of a house of her own and her settling down to become a full-time writer. In between, *Head Above Water* explores social conditions in black London and sheds interesting light on Emecheta's development as a writer, as it describes her involvement with each of her emerging novels.

Emphasis on Social Slavery The manuscript that the oppressive husband Francis burns in *Second Class Citizen* surfaces as Emecheta's 1976 book, *The Bride Price*. With this book, set in the early 1950s in Lagos and Ibadan, she departs from her own life story. Despite this radical shift in subject matter, *The Bride Price* is a logical development of her writing as she continues to explore the injustices of caste and gender issues.

Emecheta's fifth book, *The Slave Girl* (1977), was published while Emecheta was employed as a social worker. Much of the book is devoted to a description of domestic slavery, the kind that persisted in Africa long after slavery was outlawed. Some Africans, as well as other ethnic groups, continued to sell people into slavery. Because women were not as highly regarded as men in society, young girls were sold for profit by their male relatives. Such girls were forced to become domestics or join the sex trade. The conditions for a domestic servant are paralleled with those of woman's conditions in marriage in her next novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). After an interlude of four pleasant children's books, Emecheta's authorship took a new turn with *Destination Biafra* (1982), which focuses the larger subject of war.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also emphasized feminist themes:

As You Like it (1599–1600), a play by William Shakespeare. In this pastoral comedy, double (or even triple) disguises make way for gender reversals and several humorous misconceptions and mishaps.

The Birthday of the World (2003), a collection of short stories by Ursula K. LeGuin. This book explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are "God."

A Room of One's Own (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, the author explores the early politics of women writers and writing.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, the author speculates on a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and religious totalitarian takeover by the small elite class.

Women Without Men (1989), a novel by Shahrnush Parsipur. This explosive novel was banned by the Iranian government for its "defiant portrayal of women's sexuality," and its author was arrested and jailed.

Career Change By this time Emecheta had left social work behind and was a visiting professor at the University of Calabar from 1980 to 1981. In 1982, she took a faculty position at the University of London. Emecheta also ran the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company, which has branches in London and Ibadan, Nigeria, from 1982 to 1983, and published her next two novels through the publisher. With her 1983 work, *Double Yoke*, she returned to more manageable settings and subject matter, and picked up with her discussions of prejudices. This time the emphasis was on those prejudices of Nigerian men against educated women in Nigeria. Independence for women in Nigeria, according to this novel, was still a leap, and the relationship between the sexes still resembles a war.

Double Yoke and her next book carry that imprint. As an allegory about the relationship between Europe and Africa, *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) represented yet another new departure in Emechet's writing. Emecheta seemed to be searching for the best values in the worldviews of these two civilizations, but as they appear stubbornly incompatible, the author took a middle course. *Gwendolen* (1989) returned to the London black-immigrant theme that Emecheta knew so well. For the first time, though, the main character was not a Nigerian but a West Indian.

Published Fewer Novels While Emecheta only published two novels after *Gwendolen*—*Kehinde* (1994) and

The New Tribe (2000)—both continued to touch on the author's long-running themes and are set in both London and Africa. *Kehinde* traces the events in the life of a middle-aged, professional woman of Nigerian descent who, after living in London for several years, returns to Nigeria and gains a new appreciation of her accomplishments. In contrast, *The New Tribe* focused on the difficult journey of self-discovery of a young man of Nigerian descent who leaves his adopted family in England to find his roots in Africa, encounters corruption, theft, and illness, and returns to England.

Still based in London, Emecheta continues to hold visiting lectureship posts and returns to Nigeria regularly to visit her family.

Works in Literary Context

Emecheta has always proclaimed that much of her fiction is based on her own life. She could well echo the words of Johann von Goethe, who said not only that nothing would be found in his writings that he had not experienced himself, but also that nothing in them was in exactly the form in which he had experienced it. Emecheta's early years spent in Nigeria and England have given her material for her most successful novels. The realism of much of her writings has led critics to categorize her as a documentarist.

Social Influences and Feminist Themes It is evident that Emecheta was sorely impacted in childhood by gender bias—when, for example, she almost missed getting an education because girls were kept at home while boys were sent to school. Because she negotiated rights for herself, Emecheta was able to receive a decent education. The influence of social values with regard to women is also apparent, as it became an early theme that prevailed throughout her work.

Central to many of her novels is the role of women in present-day Africa. In her fiction, she shows courage by challenging traditional male attitudes about gender roles. She expresses anger and iconoclastic contempt for unjust institutions, no matter how time-honored or revered they are. She also displays a willingness to seek new ways to break what she sees as the unjust subjugation of women in the name of tradition.

Second Class Citizen, for instance, portrays a young Adah as an unusually determined little girl whose mind is firmly set on getting a Western education, from which she has been effectively barred because she is "only a girl." This sets a basic theme that runs through Emecheta's entire body of work: an intense anger at the sexual discrimination that is at the core of the culture of her people and a concomitant contempt for the men who perpetuate it. The theme of the slavlike conditions of marriage for a woman is developed in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Even *Gwendolen* (1989), whose main theme is incest, lends itself to the well-known scenario of girls and women oppressed by men and fighting for self-respect.

Works in Critical Context

Emecheta is praised for her convincing characterizations, thorough presentation of social themes, and vivid sense of place. Because she exposes such African customs as polygamy, servitude, and arranged marriages—as practices that curtail the power and individuality of women—some critics categorize her works as feminist literature. Her feminism, though mild in Western eyes (and though she refuses to be called a feminist), and her criticism of aspects of African cultural tradition have enraged some male African critics, who claim that Emecheta misrepresents Igbo society.

In the Ditch and Second Class Citizen Critics praised Emecheta for her straightforward prose and amusing yet poignant evocation of her heroine's tribulations in the books. Rosemary Bray in the *Voice Literary Supplement* commented, "Both books are simply told, bearing the mark of painful authenticity even before you know they are autobiographical. [Emecheta] wrote them to rid herself of rage at a society and a man who could not accept her independent spirit."

Responses to Literature

1. Though Emecheta resists the feminist label, the bulk of critical discussion of her work concerns the feminist attitude. In a group effort, take sides to debate whether her works can or should be categorized as feminist. To support arguments for and against, consider scenarios in which women lose their humanity in brutal marital battles, how female characters define their femininity (through sexuality? motherhood?), and where descriptions are or are not attacks against men.
2. Make an effort to list several definitions and types of family. What constitutes a family as you understand it? Then, consider Emecheta's comments on family in *The Joys of Motherhood*. How do your two definitions compare? Where do they differ? What does this tell you about yourself and/or your own family? What does this tell you about the author?
3. Go on a Web adventure to find background research on the Igbo culture in general and Yoruba women in particular (the following Web site at Emory University might be helpful: <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Yoruba.html>). What are the expectations of men and of women in Igbo culture? What are the values? What in Emecheta's novels demonstrates an opposition to these values and gender role expectations?

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Shusaku Endo

BORN: 1923, Tokyo, Japan

DIED: 1996, Tokyo, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

White Man (1955)

Yellow Man (1955)

The Sea and Poison (1958)

Wonderful Fool (1959)

Silence (1966)

The Samurai (1980)

Overview

Shusaku Endo was one of the most prolific novelists of postwar Japan. Since he began writing in 1955, he published more than 175 books, including forty-five novels and seventeen short-story collections, in addition to scores of volumes of essays, criticism, travel reminiscences, plays, and screenplays. An internationally recognized novelist, Endo is considered one of the most influential and popular writers in postwar Japan.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Manchuria Endo was born on March 27, 1923, in Tokyo, Japan. When he was quite young, his father, Tsunehisa Endo, a bank employee, was transferred to a branch office in Dalian, a city in Japanese-occupied Chinese Manchuria, and the boy moved there with his parents and older brother. (While Manchuria was a region in northeast China, international agreements sanctioned a Japanese presence there, which was resented by



Shusaku Endo Endo, Shusaku, photograph. AP Images.

the Chinese. One point of contention was Japanese control of the key South Manchurian Railroad.)

Religious Conversion and Schooling When Endo was ten, his parents divorced, and his mother, Iku, returned to Japan with him and his brother, moving in with her sister's family in Kobe. Endo's aunt was a devout Catholic, and at her encouragement his mother converted to Catholicism. At her urging, her sons attended catechism class, which Endo agreed to do only after he learned that the foreign priest would provide candy. Endo was baptized a Catholic in 1934.

During this time, social and economic policies in Japan were swiftly turning against the importation of foreign goods and foreign beliefs, and an impetus toward purging such alien artifacts and ritually cleansing the land through warfare was beginning. At the age of eleven Endo could certainly not have been aware that his conversion to Christianity was an action directly opposing the growing nationalistic, jingoistic, and antiforeign trends that were reshaping Japan and moving the country toward war.

Rebelling against the influence of his deeply religious mother, Endo moved in with his father. When the time arrived for college entrance exams, though he was a poor student, Endo did well enough to be admitted into the prestigious, private Keio University in 1943. His father was angry when he learned his son had applied not to medical school but to the Department of Literature. Thrown out of his father's house, Endo settled in a dormitory for Christian students.

Interrupted Schooling Endo began studies just as war began between Japanese and Western powers. Because Japan wanted to become a major industrial, military, and imperial power, it moved to control other territories, including China, and signed a pact in 1940 with Nazi Germany and Italy to form an alliance against Great Britain and France. When the United States tried and failed to deter Japan and its territorial ambitions with economic sanctions, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in 1941 hoping to force the United States to accept Japan's recent conquest of the Philippines, Malaya, and Burma. Instead, the United States declared war on Japan and joined World War II in Europe as a member of the Allies.

Because of the war, classes were often canceled and students sent out to perform labor service. Endo worked in an airplane parts factory. Though he never saw armed combat, he was nevertheless impacted by the pressures by classmates or teachers who often demanded to know whether he would choose between the divine emperor of his native land or the God of the foreigners. Endo resented such coercion to choose between one morality and another, and his responses were to later provide the material for his novels.

Saved by Illness and Christ To deal with the moral dilemma, Endo began creating a "Maternal Christ," an

image of a personal, pocket-sized Christ that would not compel him to make hard decisions, accuse him of moral cowardice, or send him off to die for a political ideology. This Christ was to appear in his best novels from the 1960s through the rest of his career. Ironically, a serious case of pleurisy—a respiratory disorder in which the membrane that surrounds the lungs becomes inflamed and makes breathing painful—kept him from being drafted.

Brief Studies in France Using superior economic and military resources, the United States isolated Japan then launched bombing attacks on its industrial centers. After the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, killing tens of thousands of people instantly in both cities Japan surrendered. In the postwar period, the United States assisted Japan as reforms were implemented and an open society based on capitalism was put in place. One way this was accomplished was through educational opportunities provided to Japanese students.

After the war, on recommendations of a French priest, Endo became part of one of the first Japanese groups chosen for overseas study, and in June of 1950, he sailed for France, where he spent two and a half years studying French Catholic literature at the University of Lyon. He had to conclude his studies prematurely when he succumbed to a serious lung ailment in Lyon and was forced to return to Japan. Shortly thereafter, he began to write. His first novella, *White Man* (1955), was awarded the Akutagawa Prize.

The Japanese Graham Greene Endo met and proposed to Junko Okada, a young woman studying French literature at Keio University. She accepted, and they married two months after the ceremony for the Akutagawa Prize had been held. They had one child, Ryunosuke. Endo pursued his lifelong preoccupations with problems of choices and morality in his writing in these years—publishing *Yellow Man*, his second novella and the companion piece to *White Man* (1955); *The Sea and Poison* (1957); and *Volcano* (1959).

In 1959, Endo also published the first of many popular “entertainment” novels that helped earn him the title of “the Japanese Graham Greene.” Novels such as *Wonderful Fool* (1959) and *Song of Sorrow* (1977) continued to grapple with the same moral issues addressed in his serious novels, but they presented these issues in a semicomical, nonreligious way that made them more accessible to Japanese readers.

Relapse In 1960, Endo took another trip to Europe to gather materials for a study of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), a French writer of psychological and philosophical works best known for his belief in absolute freedom and sexual immorality. There, Endo suffered a major relapse of pleurisy. He was hospitalized for two and a half years and underwent three operations. His novels

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Endo's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Bly (1926–): American poet and activist who founded the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998): Japanese director who created classic Japanese-language films such as *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954), and received an Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1990.

Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989): Japanese artist credited as the father of the Japanese style of comics known as manga.

Daniel Inouye (1924–): United States senator from Hawaii for more than four decades and the first American of Japanese descent to be elected to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

then changed somewhat. From *Silence* (1966) through *Deep River* (1993), Endo featured the suffering of those individuals physically and spiritually weak and those social institutions that caused the suffering. *Silence* was awarded the Tanizaki Prize for literature in 1967.

From Lecture Circuit to Theater Between 1967 and 1969, Endo lectured on the theory of the novel at Seijo University. But his larger interests lay in Kiza, the amateur theater company that he organized in 1968 and that has run, with a few lapses, annually since its founding. Kiza performances—versions of Western classics and an occasional adaptation of a Japanese work—invariably sold out.

Jerusalem and Jesus In 1968, Endo became for a time the chief editor of *Mita Bungaku*, Keio University's literary journal. On his way to Jerusalem in March of 1972 to research his next novel, Endo stopped in Rome for an audience with Pope Paul VI. While still pondering the shape his novel would take, Endo wrote a highly idiosyncratic work, *A Life of Jesus* (1973). In this novel and two that followed, Endo focused on his view of accounts and struggles of Jesus in scenes past and present. The results were sometimes shaky, and both critics and readers were disappointed.

Endo's continuing interest in the “Christian century” (1549–1639) also informed his next writings, a series of works that are perhaps most accurately described as contemplative histories in which Endo embraces Christianity, starting with *The Iron Pillory: Konishi Yukinaga* (1977). After several more works with similar themes, Endo published *The Samurai* (1980)—perhaps his most acclaimed novel except for *Silence*. The novel won the Noma Prize. In 1986, Endo published his quasi-autobiographical

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also investigated themes of spiritual identity:

Catfish and Mandala (2000), a novel by Andrew Pham.

The author visits his native Vietnam to find his true self and his place in two cultures.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this volume, the poet depicts childhood, reflects on identity, and focuses on the settings of rural Ireland.

Jacob Have I Loved (1980), a novel by Katherine Paterson.

A young girl feels abandoned by a God who puts her sister first.

The Last Spin, and Other Stories (1960), by Evan Hunter.

Several stories in the collection highlight identity—including the title story, which looks at the impact of gang life on the individual.

The World of Malgudi (2000), four novellas by R. K.

Narayan. In this collection, the author expresses the values and mores of domestic life and explores what it means to be Indian in modern times.

Scandal. In 1993 *Deep River*—his last major novel and a portrait of Christian behavior that transcends all human-made prejudices—quickly became one of his most popular works among Japanese readers.

In October 1995, Endo was in the hospital recovering from a stroke when, on the day before the Tokyo premiere of Steven Dietz's new bilingual stage adaptation of *Silence*, the Japanese government named Endo the newest recipient of the Order of Culture. After frequent hospital stays following his stroke, Endo died on September 29, 1996.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Several influences are apparent in Endo's work. He was most impressed by the writings of Christian novelists such as François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos, but his experiences, which proved generally frustrating, are more apparent as influences. He vividly presented in his fiction images of faith that he shaped through his own experience, his feelings toward his mother (some responses to the wrath of his father), and his literary sensitivity.

Moral Motifs and Christian Concerns Endo's writings collectively present examinations of the search for spiritual roots. Although his readers are often uncertain about whether to embrace him as a serious or as a comic writer, Endo was a dedicated, serious thinker

about the cultural gaps separating Japan from the West, the problems of contrasting moralities, and the conflicts between individuals and the institutions that tortured them.

Endo expressed this thought in major works with spiritual and Christian themes. With *Scandal* venturing into psychological drama, for example, Endo explores the question of multiple (and morally contradictory) personalities. With the greater portion of his works from *Silence* through *Deep River*, Endo focuses his sympathy on those weak in both body and spirit and presents features of his forgiving, accepting Christ.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have praised Endo for the power of his words as well his accessibility to both Japanese and Western audiences. Many critics theorize that it is his Christianity that makes his work more accessible to the Western reader. Many reviewers assert that the issues of cultural conflict prevalent in his fiction are universal themes that make his work powerful and substantive. Endo has been praised as courageous in addressing questions of faith and sin in his work, in which his understated style and his infusion of humor prevent his moralizing from becoming off-putting to the reader.

Silence One of Endo's most critically praised works and the first of his books to be translated into English is *Silence*. The novel is a fictional account of the first seventeenth-century Christian expeditions to Japan, during which Italian and Portuguese missionaries and their followers were persecuted. Of the book, Jean Higgins observed, "*Silence* concerns itself with the theological question of the image of God, Eastern and Western. Yet it does so without dogmatizing or indoctrinating." John Updike wrote in the *New Yorker* that "one can only marvel at the unobtrusive, persuasive effort of imagination that enables a modern Japanese to take up a viewpoint from which Japan is at the outer limit of the world."

Responses to Literature

1. As a boy, Endo witnessed the conflict between the Manchurian Chinese and the Japanese who had occupied the area. Of his countrymen in Manchuria, Endo later wrote: "The Japanese, brimming with the vulgarity and the high-handedness of the parvenu, strolled these streets disdainful of the Chinese who had lived here for countless years." In a group effort, research the conflict between the Japanese and Chinese in Manchuria. What did the Japanese culture want from the Chinese? How did the Chinese respond to the invasion of the Japanese? Who resisted? Who protested? Reconsider Endo's comment. What tone (or attitude) does he express?

2. Endo's early studies and experiences convinced him that an insurmountable wall separates Western Christian culture from the polytheistic culture of Japan, which celebrates many gods and goddesses. Beginning with his first essay, "The Gods and God," his writings reflect an effort to come to terms with dueling identities—those that positioned him between two worlds. Search an Endo work for either (a) aspects of Western Christianity or (b) aspects of Japanese religion of many gods. In a paper, introduce your choice by pointing out examples from Endo's writing that will help your audience understand the general nature of that world and Endo's frustration at being between those worlds.
3. Endo chose a particularly violent period in Japanese history (a time of intense persecutions of Christians in the early seventeenth century) to show the brutal ways in which society oppresses the individual and makes the practice of a personal faith all but impossible. Why do you think he chose this time period to write about? Create a presentation in which you share your views.
4. Endo's novel *Silence* is primarily an epistolary novel, or a novel in the form of a letter or letters written by the narrator. Try writing a short story in the form of a letter to someone. It can be a real or fictional person, and the events of the story are entirely yours to choose. After you finish, make a list of the ways in which a story in the form of a letter is different from any other kind of story you might write.

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■ Hans Enzensberger

BORN: 1929, Kaufbeuren, Bavaria, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Verteidigung der Wölfe (1957)

Der Untergang der Titanic (*The Sinking of the Titanic*, 1978)

Die Furie des Verschwindens (1980)

Kiosk (1997)

Wu Warst Du, Robert? (*Where Were You, Robert?*, 2000)



Hans Magnus Enzensberger Ulf Andersen / Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Enzensberger's famous contemporaries include:

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): García Márquez, a Colombian writer, is best known for his use of magic realism in novels; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro was the leader of the successful Cuban Revolution in 1959 and served as the country's leader from 1959 until his retirement in February of 2008.

Imre Kertész (1929–): Kertész is a Hungarian Jewish author who survived the Holocaust; he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002.

Jürgen Habermas (1929–): This German philosopher and social scientist is best known for his theory of communicative action.

André Previn (1929–): Previn is a German-born composer and conductor who has won Academy and Grammy awards for his theatrical compositions.

Anne Frank (1929–1945): Frank was a German-born Jew who was killed during World War II; she is most famous for the publication of her diary, *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

John Barth (1930–): Barth is an American writer who is one of the pioneers of postmodernism in American literature.

Overview

Hans Enzensberger, considered by many to be Germany's most important living poet, is equally well known as an editor, translator, and social critic who has stirred a variety of controversies during his fifty-year career.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Nazi Germany Enzensberger was born on November 11, 1929, in Bavaria, Germany. He grew up in Nazi-era Germany and at the end of World War II, he was conscripted into a German militia. He survived the war and went on to study literature, languages, and philosophy in various European universities. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the lyric poetry of Clemens Brentano, a German poet from the mid-1800s who was a leading member of the younger Romantic generation.

Poetry and Politics Enzensberger began his literary career in post-World War II Germany. In 1955 he joined Group 47, an association of authors that encouraged criticism of political and social conditions and was generally opposed to the values and standards of West Ger-

many. For the next decade, he devoted himself to political poetry. The appearance of his first two collections of poetry earned him great notoriety as Germany's "angry young man." From the late 1950s he spent prolonged periods abroad, visiting the United States, Mexico, Italy, Russia, the Far East, Cuba, and Norway before eventually settling back in Germany, in Munich.

By the mid-1960s, he had lost his faith in the political efficacy of poetry; thereafter, he became more actively involved in politics. He founded the political periodical *Kursbuch*. Remaining its editor until 1975, Enzensberger and his magazine became active in the sixties' debates about the writer's role and function.

In 1968 Enzensberger resigned a fellowship at Wesleyan University in protest against U.S. foreign policy and moved to Cuba, his model for revolutionary change. Until the mid-1970s, he focused his writings on revolutionary subjects.

Social Criticism By the 1980s, Enzensberger had finished with his period of revolutionary fervor and returned to the lyricism characteristic of his earlier works. He remained an active social critic throughout the next two decades, however. He produced poetry, essays, and even children's fiction, tackling a wide range of social issues. He stirred up controversy in 1995 with his provocative book *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*, which presents a broad definition of civil war that includes inner-city rioting as well as full-blown national conflicts. His works continue to offer readers difficult challenges and to demonstrate the inseparable nature of politics and culture.

Works in Literary Context

Enzensberger is perhaps the most wide-ranging and protean figure in contemporary letters. During his fifty-year career, he has moved fluidly through the important issues of the day, often influencing the public debate with his poetry and social commentary.

Germany's "Angry Young Man" At the beginning of his career in postwar Germany, Enzensberger was concerned with the state of the language, which he felt was corrupted by war and tyranny, and with the material and spiritual state of his country. For Enzensberger, that conflict takes the form of anger in his early verse. As Helmut Gutmann explained in a *German Quarterly* review, the "irate aggressiveness" of Enzensberger's poems "gave his first two volumes . . . their own unmistakable tone. They are protest and polemics, they denounce and unmask. . . . Enzensberger's anger is directed against a world that he sees dominated by a dehumanizing technological civilization and by the machineries of power that enslave man, be they government or industry, politics or the military, the synod of bishops or the mass media of the 'Bewusstseinsindustrie' (consciousness industry)."

Concurrent with his poetry, Enzensberger began writing essays expressing both his literary and social concerns. He published two volumes of essays during the early sixties. Then, in 1965, he founded a new periodical, *Kursbuch*, to provide a forum for literary and political discussion. The demand that literature be politicized, and subsequent calls for the “end of literature,” were issues hotly discussed in *Kursbuch*. As one commentator noted, “Enzensberger’s contribution gave courage to this belief, and to the idea that literature, as ordinarily and traditionally understood, was on the way out.”

Combining Lyricism and Social Criticism
Enzensberger’s “declaration of disbelief in literature,” however, did not prevent him from quietly continuing to write poetry. The 1970s saw the publication of various poetic works reflecting the author’s disillusionment with all social systems, as well as an apparent loss of faith in literature’s power to effect revolutionary change. The 1980 publication of *Die Furie des Verschwindens*, a collection of short poems, marked the end of Enzensberger’s sixteen years of revolutionary fervor and a renewal of the lyricism characteristic of his earlier works.

Works in Critical Context

Called “Germany’s most important literary catalyst” in a 1968 issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, Enzensberger catapulted to fame with the publication of his first two volumes of poetry. Since those early works, the German poet has become equally well known as a social critic. One critic noted that Enzensberger “is more learned, cosmopolitan, and restless” than any of his contemporaries; and that he is “intent on radical doubt [and] does not participate in collective stances for very long.”

The variety and range of Enzensberger’s works make it difficult to summarize critical response to his writing. A brief look at the critical response to a couple of his more provocative offerings can provide a sort of overview to his reception by critics and audiences.

Civil Wars Enzensberger stirred up controversy in 1995 with his provocative book *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*. Enzensberger suggests that using high-tech weaponry to kill people we have never seen is far more terrible than a war that pits neighbor against neighbor. The book examines the types of violence that have proliferated since the end of the Cold War. His book is a “cluster of lively arguments,” according to Mark Thompson in *New Statesman & Society*, and *Publishers Weekly* claims the book convincingly demonstrates the inseparable nature of politics and culture.

Where Were You, Robert? Enzensberger’s *Wu Warst Du, Robert?*, which was translated as *Lost in Time* and published in England as *Where Were You, Robert?*, represents a different kind of offering from his usual poetry and politics. The book is a fanciful tale about a fourteen-year-old boy, Robert, who is capable of time

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Enzensberger’s poetry combines dramatic satire with meditative verse to explore themes of oppression, coercion, and civil unrest. Here are some similar works:

Odas Elementales (1954–1959), a poetry collection by Pablo Neruda. This collection of poems demonstrates Neruda’s Communist political views through an extensive description of the everyday world.

Festivals and Funerals (1971), a poetry collection by Jayne Cortez. This collection of poems uses excessive language and imagery to expose the oppression of women, particularly African American women.

Anarchy (1998), a poetry collection by John Cage. This collection of poems draws on and reworks the writings of famous anarchists to create a series of poetic lectures on important questions of human freedom.

travel simply by blinking his eyes. Robert is not aware of this power until his first accidental journey takes him to the Soviet Union in the year 1956. Robert moves through various historical vignettes, surviving his adventures through his own wit and skill. The history presented in the book is quite accurate, leading D. J. Enright in the *Times Literary Supplement* to call it “a fantasy for people who don’t read fantasy, and perhaps disapprove of it.” A *Publishers Weekly* writer noted the lack of a unifying theme in this episodic book but concluded that the author’s “humorously deadpan narrative voice, his taste for witty ironies and Robert’s sheer moxie offer a surfeit of pleasures in and of themselves.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read several of Enzensberger’s poems from the 1960s and 1970s. Do his ideas, which were considered radical and controversial at the time, still seem cogent today? Discuss some of the similarities and differences between then and now, analyzing developments in history, culture, politics, and technology.
2. Critics have noted that Enzensberger does not “participate in collective stances for very long.” Does a poet and social critic have a responsibility to remain fairly steady in his or her opinions? In what ways does changeability strengthen or weaken Enzensberger’s status as a social critic?
3. In 1965 Enzensberger founded a political periodical, *Kursbuch*, to explore the important literary and political questions of the day. Write a list of the important literary and political questions of today

and compose an editorial addressing one of these questions.

4. Use *Where Were You, Robert?* as a model to write a short children's story that depicts a time-traveler's adventures in a notable period in the past.

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▣ Laura Esquivel

BORN: 1951, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Like Water for Chocolate (1991)

The Law of Love (1996)

Malinche (2006)

Overview

A best-selling, highly respected author in her native Mexico, Laura Esquivel's first book *Like Water for Chocolate* (*Como Agua Para Chocolate*, 1991) was a crossover success, earning her an international reputation. Esquivel merges folk stories, magic realism, and a feminist perspective in her writing, garnering both popular and critical acclaim. *Like Water for Chocolate* was a best seller in the United States. Employing the brand of magic realism that Colombian Gabriel García Márquez popularized, Esquivel blends culinary knowledge, sensuality, and alchemy with fables and cultural lore.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Child of the "Boom" Esquivel was born on September 30, 1950, in Mexico City, the daughter of Julio Caesar, a telegraph operator, and Josephine Esquivel. Growing up in Mexico, she was educated at Escuela Normal de Maestros. Esquivel grew up during a time when Latin American fiction was enjoying substantial worldwide popularity, known as the "boom." This was due to authors such as García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa, who hailed from different Latin American countries but together developed and refined the qualities associated with modern Latin fiction. This includes magic realism, or the use of fantastic or super-



Laura Esquivel *Esquivel, Laura*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

natural elements within an otherwise realistic story. This magic realist tradition was carried on by Esquivel when she became a novelist.

While teaching kindergarten for eight years, Esquivel became increasingly involved in children's theater workshops. Unable to find adequate plays, she began to write her own and from this she progressed to writing for children's public television in Mexico. Famed Mexican director Alfonso Arau, who was then her husband, encouraged Esquivel to continue writing, training her to write screenplays. She was nominated for the Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences Ariel Award for best screenplay for *Chido Guan, el Tacos de Oro* (1985). She conceived of her first novel *Like Water for Chocolate* originally as a screenplay. However, producers told her the script would be too costly to produce so she transformed it into a novel. The novel achieved overwhelming popularity in her native Mexico where it was a best seller, in Latin America, and in the United States where it spent several weeks on the *New York Times Book Review* best-seller list.

Like Water for Chocolate is the story of Tita, the youngest of three daughters born to Mama Elena, the

tyrannical owner of the De La Garza ranch. Tita is a victim of tradition: As the youngest daughter in a Mexican family she is obliged to remain unmarried and to care for her mother. Experiencing pain and frustration as she watches Pedro, the man she loves, marry her older sister Rosaura, Tita faces the added burden of having to bake the wedding cake. But because she was born in the kitchen and knows a great deal about food and its powers, Tita is able to bake her profound sense of sorrow into the cake and make the wedding guests ill. For the remainder of the novel, Tita uses her special culinary talents to provoke strange reactions. The character of Tita was partly inspired by Esquivel's own great-aunt, also named Tita.

Success Begets Success Encouraged by the novel's success, Esquivel and Arau decided to produce the film version themselves, with Arau directing and Esquivel penning the screenplay for which she won an Ariel award. Building upon her success, Esquivel published a second novel, *The Law of Love* (*Ley del Amor*, 1996). The book reflects her break with her family's traditional Catholic roots and her interest in Eastern philosophy and New Age ideas. The story opens with the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán, the future site of Mexico City, and the rape of an Aztec princess atop a temple. Many centuries later, the principal actors of this earlier drama reappear as Azucena, her missing soul mate Rodrigo, and planetary presidential candidate Isabel in a confrontation that finally breaks the cycle of vengeance and hatred with love and forgiveness. Packaged as a multimedia experience, the novel includes a compact disc of Italian arias and Mexican love songs as well as illustrations by famed Spanish graphic artist Miguelanxo Prado. The reader is instructed to play the music and look at the pictures between chapters.

Esquivel continues to work and live in Mexico City with her second husband Javier Valdez, a dentist.

Works in Literary Context

From Inner Reality to Outer Reality As Esquivel related to Joan Smith in an interview about her novels, "I am always interested in that relationship between outer reality and inner desire, and I think it is important to pay attention to the inner voice, because it is the only way . . . to develop the strength to break with whatever familial or cultural norms are preventing you from fulfilling your destiny." Despite this resistance to attachment to one's past, food has played a significant role in Esquivel's life since she was a child. Remembering her early cooking experiences and the aromas of foods prepared in her grandmother's house, she told Molly O'Neill of the *New York Times* that "I watch cooking change the cook, just as it transforms the food. . . . Food can change anything." In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Esquivel uses food as a way of making Tita's emotions concrete and tangible. This is a common trait in magic realism and its predecessor, surrealism.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Esquivel's famous contemporaries include:

Martin Amis (1949–): English novelist, essayist, and short-story writer. Amis is best known for his novels *London Fields* (1989) and *The Information* (1995).

Alfonso Arau (1932–): Esquivel's ex-husband and acclaimed director and actor; he also directed the film adaptation of *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Martin Scorsese (1942–): American Academy Award-winning film director, writer, and producer. Scorsese's body of work addresses such themes as Italian American identity, Roman Catholic concepts of redemption and guilt, the violence endemic to American society, and machismo.

Isabel Allende (1942–): Chilean novelist who, like Esquivel, uses magic realism in her writing. She focuses on the experiences of women, weaving together autobiography, myth, and realism. She is best known for her contributions to Latin American literature.

Martha Stewart (1941–): American business magnate, cookbook author, editor, and homemaking advocate. Stewart has held a prominent position in the American publishing industry for over twenty years, is the editor of a national homekeeping magazine, host of two popular American daytime television shows, and writer of hundreds of articles on the domestic arts.

Feminine Power In her essay on the representation of women in Mexican culture, Maria Elena de Valdes credits Esquivel with revealing the power Mexican women exercised in the domestic sphere within a larger culture where they were virtually powerless. Through her focus on domesticity and cooking in her first novel, Esquivel explores the choices that women use to change their lives, to develop their creativity, and to express their individuality. De Valdes argues that *Like Water for Chocolate* has particular resonance with Latin American women. In addition, De Valdes suggests that this novel may serve to illuminate this feminist aspect of society to Latino men.

Works in Critical Context

Some critics have praised Esquivel for her playful and unique style. Critics such as James Polk and Karen Stabiner credit Esquivel for creating an enticing and entertaining mix of recipes, romance, and magic. Marisa Januzzi points out that in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the author transforms seemingly futile emotions into powerful magical forces, which can alter the character's fate. However, while Januzzi praises Esquivel's imagination,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Culinary expertise is crucial to human civilization and culture, yet it is often taken for granted in works of literature. Food plays a big role in Esquivel's first novel; the book includes recipes, and the main character, Tita, gets her revenge through her fantastic cooking skills. Here are a few other works that explore the power of food:

The Flounder (1978), a novel by Günter Grass. Nobel laureate Grass explores many themes, including world politics and feminism, using the language of cooking.

Babette's Feast (1987), a film directed by Gabriel Axel. This Academy Award-winning film records the careful preparations for an extravagant meal cooked by Babette, a Parisian political refugee living in an austere Danish village in the nineteenth century.

Big Night (1996), a film directed by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci. Two Italian brothers run a restaurant and make a lavish feast to impress a restaurant critic in this comedy of errors.

Chocolat (1999), a novel by Joanne Harris. Set in France, this is the story of a young mother and her daughter who open a chocolate shop, bringing unexpected changes to the small town in which they live.

the critic admits that the author shows signs of immaturity in her plot development, a criticism echoed by other reviewers. Many critics cite Esquivel's book as arresting but light.

Critics are even less positive in their reviews of *The Law of Love*. Robert Houston writes: "no amount of razzle-dazzle can hide the fact that *The Law of Love* is seriously, perhaps even fatally, flawed." Many critics agree that the plot is inadequately developed and that multimedia elements, while interesting, neither contribute to nor advance the story.

Responses to Literature

1. What do you think Esquivel is trying to say about the role of women in her books? What is she trying to say about the roles of men? Does she see both as equals?
2. Using the Internet and library sources, research magic realism and its history. Read at least one title that you find in your research and write an essay describing how magic realism is used in it.

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▣ Sir George Etherege

BORN: 1636, Maidenhead, England

DIED: 1692, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub (1664)

She Would if She Could (1668)

The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter (1676)

Overview

George Etherege had a gift for sharp and satiric social observation, but he also had an indulgent streak and an indifferent work ethic. He was one of the great British Restoration period dramatists. He had an expert touch with portraits of vain social show-offs, witty urban gentlemen on the make, and duplicitous young women plotting to get their man. In some ways, however, his greatest character was the persona he created for himself—a diplomat and gentleman of the court with a taste for the fast life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Murky Background Etherege remains a shadowy figure for biographers. He left only three plays and a handful of poetry, and most of the information about him comes from letters written long after he ceased writing for the stage. Etherege's father was a landowner and a court loyalist, and after he died, George was raised by his grandfather. To provide for him, his grandfather apprenticed him in 1654 to an attorney. Etherege later studied law in London, but he left the profession in 1663 and began working on his first play. He may have traveled in France during this time.

Charles II had only recently been restored to power in England, following the rule of the strict Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell following the English Civil War, which had culminated in the overthrow and execution of Charles I in 1649. Cromwell had restricted theatrical

productions as morally unhealthy, among other efforts at regulating what he and his followers saw as the sinfulness of life in England. When Charles II returned to England after his exile in France, however, he brought with him the French court tastes for extravagance, clever conversation, flirtation, and comic theater. England celebrated his return, and the period dominated by the distinctly un-Puritan character of his reign is known as the Restoration (1660–1700).

Etherege quickly became a player in Charles II's court. William Oldys wrote that Etherege was one of "those leading Wits among the Quality and Gentry of chief rank and distinction, who made their pleasure the chief business of their lives." *The Comical Revenge*, Etherege's first play, probably premiered in March of 1664. One of the crew recalled it as being more successful than any preceding comedy. Its success opened doors for Etherege, and he was soon established as one of the witty group of courtiers including Sir Charles Sedley and John Wilmot, earl of Rochester. King Charles himself attended the opening of Etherege's next play, *She Would If She Could*, on February 6, 1668. This play, which critics have generally considered superior to *The Comical Revenge*, generated less interest at the time. Samuel Pepys's diary contains the following description of the premiere: "Lord, how full was the house and how silly the play, there being nothing in the world good in it and few people pleased in it." The poorly prepared production may well account for the indifferent reception of *She Would If She Could*, which was later quite popular with audiences and critics alike.

Etherege's standing at court, established by two plays and a group of aristocratic friends, was further confirmed by his appointment in 1668 as secretary to Sir Daniel Harvey, England's ambassador to Turkey. He accompanied Harvey to Constantinople (now called Istanbul) from 1668 to 1671, and, upon his return to London, Etherege seems to have taken up the easy, directionless life he had left. Etherege wrote to his friend Henry Jermyn in 1688, "I need not tell you I have prefer'd my pleasure to my profit and have followed what was likelier to ruin a fortune already made than make one: play and women. Of the two the Sex is my strongest passion."

Warned by the careless productions of *She Would If She Could*, Etherege seems to have taken pains to ensure that his third and last play, *The Man of Mode*, fared better. The first recorded performance took place on March 11, 1676. The main character, Dorimant, is probably modeled on the fashionable and notorious Earl of Rochester, a new friend of Etherege's. Rather than being inspired by the play's success to further write for the stage, however, Etherege continued to pursue the pleasures of the court in the company of Rochester and others. There are reports of pranks and tavern brawls. In 1679, Etherege was nonetheless thought respectable enough for knighthood, which

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Etherege's famous contemporaries include:

Rory O'More (1620–1655): Irish nobleman and the main organizer of the 1641 Irish Rebellion, the event that sparked the Eleven Years War.

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658): Puritan leader of the of the Parliamentary forces which rebelled against King Charles I in the English Civil War. After having the king executed in 1649, he claimed absolute power and appointed himself Lord Protector for Life.

Margaret Cavendish (1624–1674): Cavendish was one of the most prolific, ambitious, and thoughtful writers of the period. Her *Sociable Letters* (1664) gives a vivid, first-person account of her remarkable times.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): English philosopher and father of Materialism, or the reduction of all events and thoughts to the effects of physical motion. He argued for a clean break between philosophy and theology.

Samuel Butler (1612–1680): English poet best known for his mock-epic poem *Hudibras*, which satirizes the hypocrisy of the Puritans.

he may have purchased rather than earned in order to marry a rich widow, Mary Arnold.

Etherege was appointed as a diplomat to Germany soon after his marriage, and he lived there much as he did in London, continuing to indulge his passions for gambling and women. He had dancing and fencing instructors and enjoyed what opera and other music was available. He gave some time to tennis and more to hunting, but how much he gave to business is debatable. Etherege's final years are even more obscure than his first. He left Germany for France early in 1689, but little else is known after that. The place and date of his death are unknown, although research points to Paris in 1692.

Works in Literary Context

Restoration Comedy Until recently, Etherege has been considered one of the inventors of a genre known variously as the comedy of manners. This type of play is reflective of the lightheartedness of the era that produced it. After years of imposed seriousness during the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell, high society was eager for some naughty fun. Etherege's work, like other Restoration-era comedies, suited the tastes of theater-goers. His plays feature explicit sexual situations, drunkenness, rowdy violence, feasting, and revelry—with little worry about morals.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Etherege's heroes are far from being paragons of moral virtue, but it is hard not to admire them for their wit, charisma, and sheer audacity. Following are some examples of works containing either audacious or notably foppish characters.

"Satire Against Mankind" (1675), a poem by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Wilmot, who was good friends with Etherege, wrote biting satires of human hypocrisy while developing a reputation in the court of Charles II as a libertine.

The Scarlet Pimpernel (1905), a novel by Baroness d'Orczy. This adventure tale set during the French Revolution features a character with a secret identity: to the public he is an insufferable fop of an English baronet, but in private he is the audacious hero known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, famous for his daring rescues of condemned French aristocrats.

Elmer Gantry (1927), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. A smug, womanizing college football player notices the power and money that evangelical preachers are making, so he decides to become one himself, destroying anyone who gets in his way. He is exposed as a fraud, but the publicity only gives him greater status.

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003), a film directed by Gore Verbinski. This adventure film features the memorable antihero pirate Captain Jack Sparrow, a man without a social compass, who swaggers and bluffs his way in and out of several tight spots on the high seas.

Works in Critical Context

The Man of Mode Moral issues tended to dominate critical discussion of Restoration comedy up through the middle of the twentieth century. Characters like Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* are seen on the one hand as accurate representations of a court wit of the period, and on the other hand as dangerous role models who can have a bad influence on the behavior of audiences and readers.

In the 1700s, critics such as Samuel Johnson and Thomas Macaulay took the high moral road in condemning Etherege's work, fearing the dangers of "mixed characters" on impressionable young minds. Indeed, this was a view that was common up to the early twentieth century. In 1924, Bonamy Dobrée remarked that Etherege took no positions, and that his plays were "pure works of art" rarely appealing to the intellect and not to be taken seriously.

There have been attempts, especially during the 1950s, to claim great philosophical significance for Etherege's

plays, especially *The Man of Mode*. John Palmer summarizes a century of defense when he calls Etherege an artist who "accurately reflected this period in his personal character, and received a sincere impulse to reflect it artistically in his comedies. . . . His plays are morally as well as artistically sound. He felt and saw the comedy of contemporary life; and he honestly sought and found the means to express it."

Responses to Literature

1. Do some research into what the words "rake" and "libertine" meant in the period of 1660–1700. What does a "rake" believe, what are the social origins of this type of person, and how is this character type represented in Etherege's plays? How does a "rake" compare to a "fop"?
2. What is a "double entendre," and what is its comic effect? How and why does Etherege use it in his comedies?
3. How relevant is Etherege's life as a context for his writing? Do you feel that Etherege wrote with insight about the people and society he knew best, or did he write an idealized version of people and relationships that were always outside of his own circle and situation? Is it relevant that Etherege did not write about many things he knew from his own life, such as his diplomatic work?
4. William Shakespeare was known for writing plays that appealed to all the social levels of English society. How do Etherege's plays compare in this way? Were they meant to be successful with all types of audiences? If so, how? If not, how do you think this has affected his popularity among modern audiences?

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✠ Euripides

BORN: c. 484 BCE, *Salamis, Cyprus*

DIED: 406 BCE, *Macedonia*

NATIONALITY: *Greek*

GENRE: *Drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

Medea (431 BCE)

Andromache (c. 424 BCE)

Electra (c. 420–416 BCE)

Iphigenia among the Taurians (c. 414 BCE)

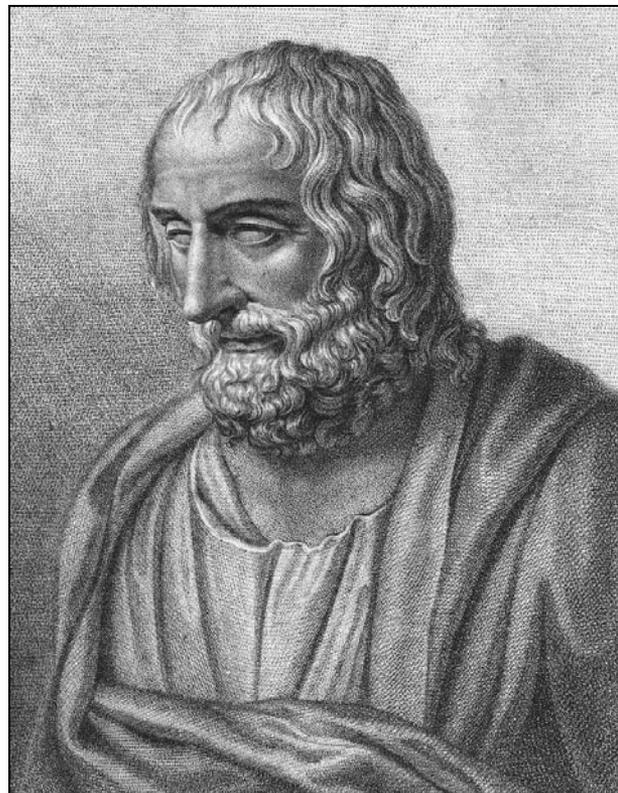
Bacchae (c. 406 BCE)

Overview

Of the three poets of Greek tragedy whose work endures, Euripides is the one whose plays survive in the largest number (eighteen, in contrast to seven each for Aeschylus and Sophocles). His plays are notable for containing both tragic pathos and the nimble play of ideas. In antiquity, at least from the time shortly after his death about 407 or 406 BCE, Euripides was immensely popular and his dramas were performed wherever theaters existed. His influence continued through later antiquity and into the Renaissance and beyond, shaping French, German, Italian, and English literature until well into the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Child of Privilege Euripides was born in 484 BCE to parents who appear to have been affluent (a number of sources report that he was born on his father's estate on the island of Salamis). Several facts corroborate the assumption that he was of at least middle-class origin



Euripides Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

and means: A pupil of Aristotle's recalled that, as a boy, Euripides was allowed to participate in two religious ceremonies, and he is known to have received a good education. At a time when most literature was transmitted orally, Euripides allegedly possessed an extensive library comprising many philosophical works. His interest in philosophy also manifested itself in his friendships with many of the era's leading thinkers, including Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Protagoras, who was said to have first recited his inflammatory treatise *Concerning the Gods* at Euripides' home. Many readers have inferred that the vicious women depicted in Euripides' plays represent his experiences with and reprisals against several unfaithful wives, but scholars have found evidence of only one marriage that produced three sons.

Athenian Heyday Euripides spent most of his life in Athens, which enjoyed one of its most fruitful and influential periods during his youth and early adulthood. Funded by silver from rich regional mines and the tribute of subordinate allies, Athenian culture flourished in the form of democratic statecraft, architecture, painting, sculpture, oratory, poetry, history, and tragedy, the city's particular pride. Every year the Athenian archon, or chief magistrate, selected three playwrights to compete in the dramatic festival, at that time changing from a religious ceremony honoring the god Dionysus into a more secular

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Euripides's famous contemporaries include:

Pericles (495–429 BCE): Athenian statesman and military leader who presided over the city's Golden Age and led it into the disastrous Peloponnesian War.

Socrates (469–399 BCE): A classical philosopher regarded as one of the founders of Western philosophy, his thoughts (which were never written down in his lifetime) directly influenced the work of such later philosophers as Plato and Aristotle.

Sophocles (496–406 BCE): One of the three great Greek tragedians, along with Euripides and Aeschylus, Sophocles wrote at least 120 plays, only 7 of which have survived to this day. He is best known for his Oedipus plays.

Aristophanes (456–386 BCE): Another of the great classical dramatists, Aristophanes specialized in comedy and is known to this day as "The Father of Comedy."

Xerxes I (reigned 485–465 BCE): The son of Darius the Great, Xerxes led his mighty Persian Empire in a massive invasion of the Greek city-states. After a bloody and costly victory at Thermopylae, Xerxes was defeated at sea at the Battle of Salamis. His army was defeated a year later at Plataea, inaugurating the Classical Age of ancient Greece and the ascendancy (and rivalry) of Sparta and Athens.

artistic competition. Each playwright produced a tetralogy consisting of three tragedies and a lighter "satyr" (or satirical) play; a first prize represented one of Athens's highest honors.

The peace that prevailed during Euripides' youth, however, ended when Athenian territorial ambitions inflamed the city's long-standing rivalry with Sparta over who should be the dominant power in Greece; these tensions, culminating in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), drained the coffers and the spirit of Athens. Although Euripides is known to have produced his first tetralogy in 455 BCE, only nineteen of the ninety-two Euripidean plays referred to in ancient commentaries exist today, and all but the first date from after the start of the war.

Invited to produce tetralogies for at least twenty-two Dionysian festivals, Euripides was not notably popular. Whereas his elder competitor Sophocles won about twenty-four first prizes, Euripides garnered only four or five, the last posthumously. Aristotle and several biographers report that, outraged by Euripides' disrespectful treatment of the immortals, the archon Kleon prosecuted him for blasphemy, but no record indicates the trial's

outcome. Late in his career, Euripides sought to leave Athens, frustrated, scholars have speculated, by his relative lack of success at the dramatic festivals, the ongoing devastation of the war, and the city's war-related decline. He eventually left in 408 BCE at the invitation of the Macedonian king Archelaus, who hoped to establish a cultural center rivaling Athens. Continuing to compose at Archelaus's court, Euripides was working on *Iphigenia in Aulis* when he died there in 406 BCE.

Works in Literary Context

Euripides was one of three playwrights whose works represent the dynamics of Athenian thought at the height of classical drama in the city-state during the fifth century BCE. Euripides, younger than Aeschylus and Sophocles, was more notably affected by the Peloponnesian War. This bitter and protracted conflict ended Athens's Golden Age and contributed to the sense of uncertainty, injustice, and suffering that permeates Euripidean tragedy. Euripides was also more influenced by a contemporary philosophical trend toward skeptical inquiry that accelerated the erosion of belief in traditional religion. The role of the gods in his plays remains controversial. While some critics concede only that Euripides questioned divine benevolence, others argue that he was an aggressive atheist who depicted the immortals' cruelty in order to stir up religious discontent.

Euripides' stylistic and technical modifications further place him as a significant influence on the developing art of theater. Still operating within the structural conventions that governed classical Greek drama, he: adapted the traditional chorus, prologue, and epilogue; simplified word use; increased the representation of female characters; blurred the traditional distinction between comedy and tragedy; and refined psychological realism. Renowned for these innovations, Euripides is perhaps best known for the tragic sensibility—responsive to the decline of Athens and the nature of the human condition—that has rendered him relevant to readers of the modern age.

Female Protagonists Of Euripides' nineteen known works, eighteen are tragedies, and all take as their subject matter the divine myths, martial narratives, and noble family histories that literary and religious tradition had established as the requisite subject matter for fifth-century dramatists (Aeschylus and Sophocles often treated the same materials).

Among the most noted of his concerns is the thematic depiction of the conflict between reason and passion; the latter force invariably prevails. This insistence upon the power of irrational emotion, many critics contend, constituted Euripides' rebuttal of the contemporary philosopher Socrates' contention that knowing good is sufficient to doing it. The Euripidean view is particularly evident in *Medea* (431 BCE), whose eponymous heroine anguishes before punishing her unfaithful husband by killing their children and her rival: "I feel the enormity

of the act I am about to commit; but passion overcomes my better resolve.” It is also shown in *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), in which Phaedra struggles against a divinely induced lust for her stepson: “We know what goodness is, and we recognize it, but we do not practice it.” These two dramas also suggest Euripides’ interest in female protagonists, a then unconventional affinity that Aristophanes mocked in his comedy *The Frogs*. In plays such as *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, many of his other known plays, Euripides focused upon the conflicts and the suffering of women.

Innovations Known as a stylistic innovator, Euripides is often praised for his psychologically realistic characterizations. Sophocles commented that, while he himself made men as they ought to be, Euripides made men as they are. Although his characters are immortals and leaders, Euripides offered sustained and detailed depictions of their struggles with the emotions of ordinary people. His portrayals of Medea deciding between preserving her children and murdering them to smite her husband and Phaedra struggling between honor and lust for Hippolytus are often cited as the most sophisticated and evocative representations of emotional dynamics in classical drama. Euripides is also noted for rejecting the lofty language previously considered appropriate for characters of high birth, and his use of simple, working-class language further enhanced his characters’ accessibility.

E. M. Blaiklock has described Euripides as “the most historically significant of Greek dramatists,” and, in numerous respects, he left the genre far different from the way it was when he found it. Euripides introduced the innovations that led, in the fourth century BCE, to the so-called New Comedy, a dramatic form resembling the modern play far more than do the works of Athens’s Golden Age. Furthering the secularization of drama by humanizing gods, focusing on human beings, and enhancing realism, Euripides adapted the standard mythic subjects so freely that wholly invented plots and characters became possible in the century following his death. His demotion of the chorus from a continually active and dramatically integrated presence to a group that offered less necessary observations only between dramatic episodes catalyzed the chorus’s eventual disappearance in the breaks between acts. Euripides also established a precedent for Shakespearean tragicomedy when he provided happy resolutions for his otherwise tragic recognition plays.

Legacy In the century after Euripides’ death, the Dionysian festival began to favor reviving fifth-century BCE plays over soliciting new works from contemporary dramatists. Lysurgus, an influential Athenian orator and financier, ordered the establishment of authoritative texts for the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. However, scholars believe that the resulting Euripidean collections became more corrupt than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles because Euripides’ plays were performed more

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Euripides’ *Medea* deals with the horrible revenge extracted by a woman whose husband forsakes her. Here are other works that tell tales of women scorned:

Cousin Bette (1846), a novel by Honoré de Balzac. Bette, a “poor relation,” enlists the help of a prostitute to ruin the fortunes of her well-off relatives.

Vanity Fair (1847–1848), a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray. The novel’s formidable heroine Becky Sharp uses her beauty, brains, and wit to claw her way into high European society.

The First Wives Club (1996), a film directed by Hugh Wilson. Three middle-aged divorcées seek revenge on the first husbands who left them in this comedy.

often and more widely during the following centuries, increasing the likelihood of actors’ interpretations.

After the decline of Greece in the fourth century BCE, Euripides’ works became popular in Alexandria, the North African city that succeeded Athens as the center of Hellenistic culture during the pre-Christian era. Alexandrian book collectors also established a standard text; this version was used in schools and by grammarians. From Alexandria the Euripidean manuscripts were transmitted to Rome and from Rome to the Byzantine Empire, where the plays were frequently revived. Classical scholar A. Kirchoff believes that the nineteen plays known in the twentieth century derive from a collection created during the Byzantine period, in the ninth or tenth century. Our oldest reliable manuscripts of Euripides’ works were all, Kirchoff maintains, copied from this document.

Works in Critical Context

Ancient Critical Responses Euripides’ reception in ancient Greece is indicated by both the number and the nature of the classical references to him. Aristophanes, scholars assume, embedded so many quips about Euripides in his comedies only because audiences were sufficiently familiar with Euripides’ themes to appreciate them. Aristophanes most commonly charged Euripides with misogyny because his heroines were often vengeful, though he also mocked Euripides’ themes as morbid and his speeches as melodramatic.

Sophocles, who praised Euripides’ realistic characterization and ordered that all participants in the Dionysian festival following his death don mourning garb, respected his younger rival, and the inscription on an Athenian monument suggests that its author, allegedly acclaimed historian Thucydides, did as well: “His bones are laid in

Macedon, where he / Ended his life. His tomb? The whole of Hellas. / Athens his motherland. His muse gave joy / To many: many give to him their praise.” Aristotle criticized Euripides’ slack and nonlinear plots but still deemed him “the most tragic of poets.”

Fourteenth- to Nineteenth-Century Critical Responses The fourteenth-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri mentions Euripides—but not Aeschylus or Sophocles—in the *Divine Comedy*. In general, the greater number of references to Euripides in scholarly and popular writings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance indicates that his works were better known than those of his contemporaries. The seventeenth-century French neoclassical playwright Jean Racine, terming himself Euripides’ “disciple,” based his *Andromaque*, *Iphigenie*, and *Phedre* upon Euripidean works, and his English contemporary John Milton admired “sad Electra’s poet” as well, incorporating lamentations modeled after Euripides’ into his *Samson Agonistes*.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, classicists began to recognize the roots of long-familiar Latin literature in Greek works not previously studied or translated. Coming to understand the characteristics of classical Greek tragedy as exhibited by Aeschylean and Sophoclean works, scholars criticized Euripides’ body of work as impure and inferior because it modified the established tragic conventions. He was more admired during the Romantic period. German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe defended him as “sublime” and attempted to reconstruct the lost play *Phaethon*; the scholar Ludwig Tieck described his work as inaugurating romantic poetry.

Modern Critical Responses Modern critics, more inclined to perceive Euripides’ experimentation as innovative, have commented on the comic aspects of his late plays and the mysticism inherent in his tragic sense. Kitto, among the most influential twentieth-century classicists, asserts that all the fragmentary and illogical components of Euripidean drama contribute to his depiction of an impersonally cruel cosmic force, which can wreak its destruction through the agency of unreasoning human passion.

Critic F. L. Lucas credits him with inventing the “discussion play,” a species of drama later popularized by Voltaire, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw, and traces several stock characters, including the nurse-confidante, the ghost, and the martyred virgin, to him. As author Richmond Lattimore remarks, “Euripides worked in a medium which was not of his own invention or altogether of his own choice, but he made it his own.” That comprehensive adaptation, coupled with a tragic sensibility that suffered the decline of Athens and the

truths of the human condition, has kept Euripides relevant to dramatists and their audiences for over two thousand years.

Responses to Literature

1. Both *Medea* and *Electra* feature strongly written female characters. Compare the two women and their behaviors. How does each character express her strength? How are they similar? How are they different?
2. Euripides seemed mostly interested in his characters and their developments, often to the detriment of his plots. Select one of his plays. How would you change the plot to make it stronger or to make the ending more satisfying?
3. Are there any contemporary situations you can think of that mirror the circumstances of *Medea*? Write about a recent case of a jealous spouse enacting revenge upon an unfaithful partner. Compare the modern spouse’s actions, and the consequences he or she suffered, to those of Medea.
4. Select a Euripides play and analyze the “falling action”—the arc through which a doomed tragic figure falls. Who were they at the start of the play and when did their fall begin? How quickly did things fall apart for the character?
5. Classical Greek theaters were shaped according to very specific rules and traditions. Research the construction of ancient theaters and how their layouts would affect the staging of plays such as those of Euripides.

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■ Mary Ann Evans

SEE *George Eliot*

F-G

▣ Frantz Fanon

BORN: 1925, *Fort-de-France, Martinique*

DIED: 1961, *Bethesda, Maryland*

NATIONALITY: *Algerian, Martinican*

GENRE: *Nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Black Skins, White Masks (1952)

The Wretched of the Earth (1961)

Overview

A political essayist from the Caribbean, Frantz Fanon is chiefly remembered for *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961), a collection of prose denouncing colonialism and racism in the third world. Although his proposal of using violence to obtain political liberation met with heavy criticism, Fanon has been praised as a direct and learned critic of racial, economic, and political injustice in the former colonies of Europe.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Proud Martinican Frantz Fanon was born in 1925 to a middle-class family in Fort-de-France, Martinique, a French colony in the West Indies. One of eight children, Fanon was a sensitive but difficult child who often got into fights with his peers. At school he learned to speak French, sing patriotic French songs, and read French literature and history. Like other Martinicans, he regarded himself as a Frenchman and grew up hearing that the “negroes” in Africa were “savages.” Starting in 1940, France was occupied by the German Nazis during World War II, and the French Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis. Martinique thus came under Vichy command, and the sudden presence of Vichy French sailors blockaded in Fort-de-France, Martinique by Allied forces caused racial tensions to flare. These

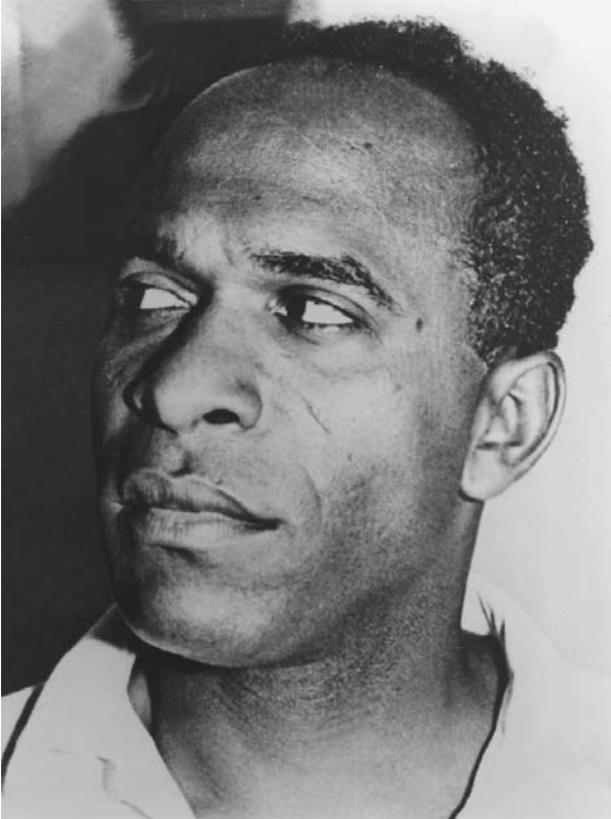
experiences began to change Fanon’s vision of Europeans and of race relations.

He attended the Lycée Schoelcher in 1941, studying under Aimé Césaire, the great poet of *Négritude*, the Francophone celebration of the power and dignity of black African culture, and he quickly embraced Césaire’s philosophy. Over the next year, Fanon spent much of his time campaigning to get Césaire elected as a member of the French National Assembly.

French general Charles de Gaulle led the Free France movement, urging his countrymen to resist the Nazi occupation. In 1943, inspired by de Gaulle, Fanon joined the French army, where he encountered blatant racism. Disillusioned by his growing awareness of what it means to be black in a white world, Fanon returned to Martinique in 1946.

Black Skins, White Masks In May 1951, Fanon debuted as a published writer when “L’expérience vécue du noir” (“The Lived Experience of the Black”), a chapter from Fanon’s book *Peau noire, masque blancs* (*Black Skins, White Masks*, 1952), appeared in the journal *Esprit*. The book is an essay collection, heavily influenced by the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Jean-Paul Sartre, that examines black life in a white-dominated world. It is one of the founding texts in postcolonial studies and arguably Fanon’s most influential work. Criticizing attempts by blacks to hide their blackness under a “white mask,” Fanon seeks to expose what he views as the delusionary influence of white culture—its inability to define black identity as anything other than the negative image of European values and ideals.

The Algerian War Having successfully completed his medical examinations, Fanon moved to French-controlled Algeria in 1953 to serve as the psychiatric director of Blida-Joinville Hospital. A year after his arrival, the Algerian War erupted, and Fanon quickly aligned himself with the pro-independence political group Algerian Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN). Fanon attended the first Congrès des Ecrivains et



Frantz Fanon The Everett Collection

Artistes Noirs (World Congress of Black Writers and Artists) in Paris in September 1956. Here he delivered his paper “Racisme et culture” (Racism and Culture), later published in *Pour la révolution africaine*.

By late 1956, Fanon was no longer able to accept his impartial role as a psychiatrist working for the French colonialists. He was also at some risk because of his clandestine support for the Algerians. His “Lettre à un Français” (Letter to a Frenchman), first published in *Pour la révolution africaine*, poetically and disturbingly evokes his criticism of those who fled the violence in Algeria rather than become involved. In 1956 Fanon also resigned his position at the hospital, stating that it was useless to cure individuals only to send them back into a “sick” society. Psychiatric disorders were the direct result of societal oppression, Fanon believed, and therefore society must change before one can help individuals. After participating in a work stoppage with other doctors sympathetic to FLN, Fanon was expelled from Algeria in 1957.

In exile in Tunis, where he arrived in January 1957, Fanon resumed his psychiatric practice under the name Fares, and soon started work at the Hôpital Charles-Nicolle, where he established the first psychiatric day clinic in Africa.

Fanon first became an international spokesperson for the FLN in 1958. Using the pseudonym Omar Ibrahim Fanon and claiming to be a native of Tunisia, he visited Rome in September 1958 and returned there in December, this time in transit to Accra, Ghana, as part of the FLN delegation to the All-African People’s Congress. In 1959, Fanon attended the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, delivering a speech, “Fondements réciproques de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération” (The Reciprocal Foundation of National Culture and Liberation Struggles), which was later published, with minor revisions, in *Les Damnés de la terre*. A little more than a month later, he traveled to Morocco to work on reorganizing medical services for revolutionary forces in Algeria.

Fanon’s service in Morocco suddenly ended when he was injured in an incident variously described as an assassination attempt, a land-mine explosion, or an automobile accident. The back injury he sustained required treatment in Europe. After several weeks of treatment, Fanon returned to Tunis in August 1959 to attend a policy meeting of the FLN. That fall *L’An V de la Révolution Algérienne* appeared. Though it was not successful, it had a significant impact on French “third worldism,” in which disaffected youth rejected the policies of the old Left, instead viewing countries such as Algeria and Cuba as emerging humanitarian or socialist states that offered the true next step in revolution.

In February 1960, Fanon became the permanent representative of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic) in Accra, recognized as the Algerian ambassador by the Ghana government although he did not have diplomatic status and was identified as Libyan on his passport. He met several leading figures in African independence movements and promoted the cause of Algerian independence among sub-Saharan African nations.

The Wretched of the Earth In 1960, Fanon was diagnosed with leukemia. Throughout spring and summer 1961, Fanon dictated to his wife *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), which has been hailed as the manifesto of Third World revolution and the bible of black radical groups in the United States. The full text was complete in July 1961 when Fanon met French intellectuals Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Rome. A short time later, Sartre agreed to write the book’s preface. Fanon’s reputation as a literary and political figure rests on this third book. In this work he argued that political independence is the essential forerunner to genuine economic and social change. Convinced that Western countries had subjugated the third world to exploit its resources and its people, Fanon considered revolution the only feasible path to liberation. He therefore proposed that the “wretched of the earth,” the

poorest of the poor, lead others in political liberation, and he advocated using violence to achieve this end.

A few weeks before *Les damnés de la terre* was published, Fanon suffered a serious relapse of leukemia. Arrangements were made to take him to the United States for treatment, although he initially opposed the idea. He underwent treatment but died of complications arising from pneumonia on December 6, 1961. His body was returned to Tunisia and buried across the battle lines on the Algerian frontier. His anonymous articles from *El Moudjahid* and other works were assembled with the help of his wife and published as *Pour la révolution Africaine* in 1964, while some of his psychiatric publications were gathered in a 1975 issue of the journal *Information psychiatrique*.

Works in Literary Context

The political climate of the early and mid-twentieth century ensured that a predominantly white culture would try to maintain its position in the world following the era of colonization. Blatant racism revealed itself in Europe through the dictatorships of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Combined with the socialist fervor that emerged in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, a virulent political ferment came into being that strongly influenced Fanon's worldview.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, according to *New York Times Book Review* writer Robert Coles, Fanon draws on his experiences with racism and on his background in philosophy and literature, particularly the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sartre, to examine black life in a white-dominated world and the black man's futile attempt to hide his blackness under a "white mask." Works cited throughout this book point to Fanon's familiarity with African American novels, particularly works by Richard Wright and Chester Himes.

Works in Critical Context

Critics are divided over the significance and ethical value of Fanon's writings. Albert Memmi, for example, argued that Fanon overestimated the leadership role of the Third World poor. Furthermore, he found Fanon's theory of violence "disturbing and surprising for a psychiatrist." Similarly, Lewis Coser regarded Fanon as an "apostle of violence" with an "evil and destructive" vision. In contrast, Dennis Forsythe proclaimed Fanon a "great symbolic hero" whose vision energized civil rights movements across the world. Emile Capouya also reminded Fanon's critics that "violence is the essential feature of colonialism at all times; Fanon did not invent it." According to Aimé Césaire, Fanon advocated violence in order to create a nonviolent world: "[Fanon's] violence, and this is not paradoxical, was that of the nonviolent." Conor Cruise O'Brien argues: "Violence is not, as Fanon often seems to suggest, a creation of colonialism. On the contrary, colonialism is a form of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fanon's famous contemporaries include:

Ahmed Ben Bella (1918–): One of the leaders in the Algerian War and the first president of Algeria after its independence from France; considered by many to be the father of the Algerian nation.

Aimé Césaire (1913–): Martinican poet and author, mayor of Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital, and member of the French National Assembly; promoted a specific Martinican identity, separate from that of the French.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Prime minister of Cuba from 1959 to 2008; leader of the Cuban Revolution (1956–1959), which overthrew the government of dictator and general Fulgencio Batista in favor of a Marxist government.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): French author and philosopher known for *The Second Sex*, one of the formative books of the feminist movement.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French existentialist who advocated the view that without God, people must develop their own sense of personal responsibility and meaning in life.

violence: a form developed by the most tightly organized and most effectively violent human societies. . . . In this respect, it seems to me that Fanon overrates the originality of colonialism."

According to Barbara Abrash, "*The Wretched of the Earth* is an analysis of racism and colonialism, and a prescription for revolutionary action by which colonized men may redeem their humanity." Fanon firmly believed that violence was the only way to bring down an intolerable, oppressive society. Robert Coles, however, reflected that Fanon's impact lies not only in his message but also in his sheer determination to deliver it, observing that since he is writing to awaken people, to inform them so that they will act, he makes no effort to be systematic, comprehensive, or even orderly. Quite the contrary, one feels a brilliant, vivid and hurt mind, walking the thin line that separates effective outrage from despair.

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about Malcolm X, a well-known leader in the civil rights movement in the United States who was criticized for urging black Americans to seize their rights "by any means necessary." Malcolm X was influenced by Fanon's work. What do you think Fanon would have thought of Malcolm? Would

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among the themes in Fanon's works is the passionate exploration of the interplay between racism and social justice. Here are some other titles that explore various aspects of social justice:

I, Rigoberta Menchú (1983), a work of fiction by Rigoberta Menchú. This fictionalized memoir describes the situation of the indigenous Guatemalans during the Guatemalan Civil War and the brutal treatment they faced; the author won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 "in recognition of her work for social justice and ethnocultural reconciliation based on respect for the rights of indigenous peoples."

Invisible Man (1952), a novel by Ralph Ellison. This classic American novel tells the tale of a young African American man and his search for identity in a world that bases everything on the color of one's skin.

Native Son (1940), a novel by Richard Wright. Another American classic, this tells the tragic story of a poor African American male who eventually fulfills the miserable expectations that society has imposed on him.

Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction (2003), a non-fiction work by Robert J. C. Young. This book shows concrete examples of what it means to live in a post-colonial country, and how that is a stimulus to further political activity.

Untouchable (1935), a novel by Mulk Raj Anand. This novel tells the story of one day in the life of a man in the "untouchable" Indian caste, considered the lowest of the low in traditional Indian culture.

Fanon have been proud? What do they share in their social outlooks?

2. We often use stereotypical images as shorthand: "typical woman driver," "acting white," "talking black," "that's so gay." Choose any stereotype-reinforcing phrase that you or your friends or family commonly use. Research the actual facts behind it—for example, for "typical woman driver," look up driving statistics; for "talking black," research language use among different social classes and ethnic groups—and write an essay about your findings and your reactions to the phrase now that you have some more knowledge about its origins.
3. Revolutions usually, but not always, involve violence. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the Algerian War and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia (now the nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Write an essay analyzing why one revolution involved violence and the other did

not. What conditions led to the difference? Can you draw any overall conclusions?

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Nuruddin Farah

BORN: 1945, Baidoa, Somalia

NATIONALITY: Somali

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

From a Crooked Rib (1970)

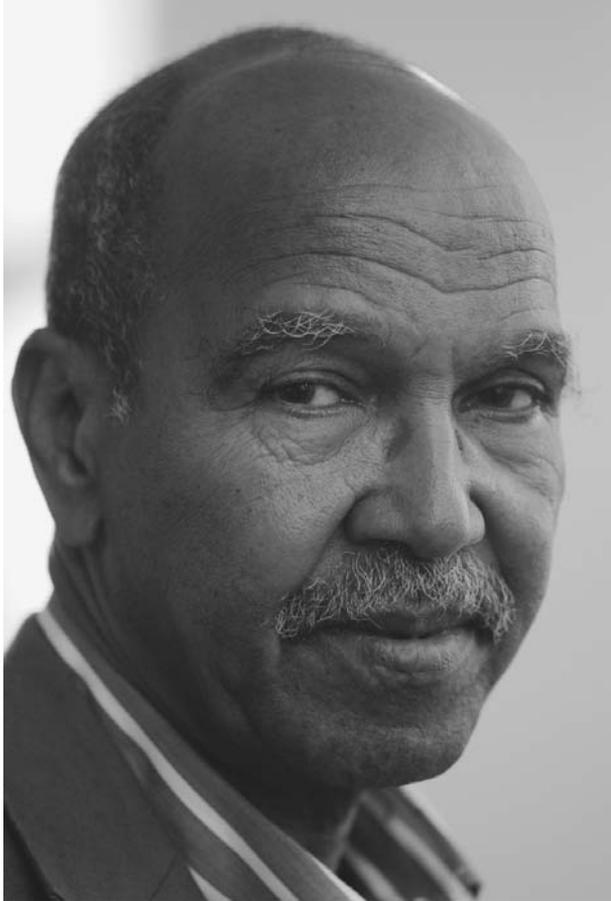
Sweet and Sour Milk (1979)

Sardines (1981)

Maps (1986)

Overview

An important figure in contemporary African literature whose fiction is informed by his country's turbulent history, Farah combines native legends, myths, and Islamic doctrines with a journalistic objectivity to comment on his country's present autocratic government. His criticism of traditional Somali society—in particular, the plight of women and the patriarchal family structure—has made him an "enemy of the state," and he has lived in voluntary exile in England and Nigeria. Kirsten Holst Petersen



Nuruiddin Farah Ulf Andersen / Getty Images

described Farah's "thankless task" of writing about the oppressed: "Pushed by his own sympathy and sensitivity, but not pushed too far, anchored to a modified Western bourgeois ideology, he battles valiantly, not for causes, but for individual freedom, for a slightly larger space round each person, to be filled as he or she chooses."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in a Tradition of Rich Oral Culture

Born in 1945 in Baidoa to Hassan Farah (a merchant) and Aleeli Faduma Farah (a poet), Nuruiddin Farah was educated at first in the Ogaden, a Somali-populated area now in Ethiopia. His first languages as a child were Somali, Amharic, and Arabic, followed by Italian and English. From these early years one can see two important features that were to dominate his writing life. First, he was brought up in a tradition with a rich oral culture, in which poetry is a craft that takes years to master. Poetry enters political debates in a sophisticated manner, epic or satirical but also oblique and allusive, and plays an important social function. Some of Farah's relatives,

including his mother, are known masters of the genre. Second, the history of colonization and borders gave him early access to a wide range of cultures: his travels and readings made him a cosmopolitan writer, a world nomad who was to write from a distance about Somalia, "my country in my mind," as he once called it.

In 1965 his novella *Why Die So Soon?* brought him to public attention in his country and into contact with the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence, then in Somalia. While a student at the University of Chandigarh in India (1966–1970) he wrote—in two months—*From a Crooked Rib* (1970), a novel that has maintained its popularity for the past thirty-eight years.

Uncertain Future and Coup in Somalia In 1969 a coup gave power to the military regime of Siad Barre, replacing the democratic government that came to power in 1960 when Somalia gained its independence from Italy. In 1970 Farah went back to Somalia with his Indian wife, Chitra Muliyl Farah, and their son, Koschin (born in 1969). Farah then taught at a secondary school and finished his second novel, *A Naked Needle*. The publisher accepted it but agreed to hold it, until 1976, due to political uncertainty in Somalia. It describes the debates among the elite in the capital, the "privilegentzia"—the privileged—and the tentative hopes in the new "revolution." Later Farah rejected this early book as irrelevant and refused to have it reprinted: "It was not the answer to the tremendous challenge the tyrannical regime posed," he says in "Why I Write" (1988).

Censorship and Exile In 1972 the Somali language was given an official transcription and dictionary; what was spoken by the whole nation could become a national literary language. It was for Farah the long-awaited opportunity to write fiction in his mother tongue and thereby speak directly to his people. In 1973 he started the serialization of a novel titled "Tolow Waa Talee Ma ...!" in *Somali News*, but the series was interrupted by censorship. Farah, then on a trip to the Soviet Union, was advised not to run any more risks. Thus he began a long exile from his country.

Extending Political Themes in Fiction His visit to the Soviet Union extended to a trip through Hungary, Egypt, and Greece in the days of the Siad Barre military regime. From this contact with various types of political power came his first major novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979). It had to be written in English, since Farah could no longer be published at home. But this imposed language, implicitly creating an international readership, extended the scope of his fictional exploration of political themes. With this novel Farah started a trilogy he calls "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship," which has much relevance inside and outside Africa.

His next novel, *Maps* (1986), began another trilogy known as the "Blood in the Sun" trilogy. These works were set amid the real-life Ogaden War, a territorial

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Farah's famous contemporaries include:

- Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian author of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the most widely successful African novel ever published.
- V. S. Naipaul** (1934–): Trinidad-born author and Nobel Prize winner whose 1979 novel, *A Bend in the River*, concerned a Muslim living in an African country recently granted its independence.
- Gloria Steinem** (1934–): Outspoken American feminist, writer, and cofounder of *Ms.* magazine.
- Benazir Bhutto** (1953–2007): Extremely popular Pakistani politician who went into a self-imposed exile in 1998. In 2007, she returned to Pakistan to run for office but was assassinated on December 27, 2007, within weeks of the upcoming election.
- Siad Barre** (1919–1995): This army commander came to power after the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke and the military coup of 1969; after replacing the democratic government with his military regime, Barre held power as the Head of State of Somalia until 1991.

dispute fought between Somalia and Ethiopia in the 1970s. In 1996, Farah once again returned to his home country, which was then under the weak control of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). This mirrors the events in his 2007 novel *Knots*, in which a Somali woman who has lived most of her life in Canada returns to her native country to discover the devastation caused by the local warlords. Farah also wrote *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2000), a nonfiction book that chronicles the lives of Somalis forced to flee from the country after the collapse of the government in 1991. In 1998 Farah was awarded the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature and is regarded by many as one of Africa's most significant literary figures of the twentieth century.

Works in Literary Context

Nuruddin Farah's novels are an important contribution to African literature. He writes about his country, Somalia, but the interest is more than regional: The books present the theme of individual freedom in the face of arbitrary power in a way that is relevant outside Africa as well, and they do so with an intellectual and poetic control that makes him one of the most stimulating prose writers in Africa today. Influenced by the work of authors in his extended family, the guiding topic for the majority of Farah's work is the plight of women in Somalia. Nur-

uddin's novels were not well-received by the military regime in Somalia, however, he did receive mild praise from critics abroad.

Linking Freedom with Feminism In the slim novel *From a Crooked Rib*, a young Somali woman, Ebla, leaves her nomad community to avoid an arranged marriage, and in her quest for independence she finally finds a kind of stability in the capital, Mogadishu, living with two men of her choice. The journey to freedom can be read as an allegory of the birth of Somalia as a new nation. But the attraction of the book lies in the sensitive portrayal of a young peasant woman, illiterate but not naive, aware of her low status in society but always clear-eyed and resourceful. It came as a surprise to readers to realize how well the young writer, male and Muslim, could represent a woman's perception of herself, her body, and the world.

Sardines (1981) is another of Farah's strikingly feminist novels. The story focuses on the world of women hemmed in together in their houses, women who are like children hiding in closets when they play the game "sardines." Medina, a journalist, has decided that her daughter, Ubax, aged eight, is not going to go through the ritual clitoral excision and infibulation performed on all Somali women according to custom. Medina is pitted against her ineffectual husband and the power of her mother and mother-in-law. Although ideological debates play an important part in the story, the main weight of the meaning is again carried by a dense metaphorical network: natural images—fire, water, and birds—show how the balance in the fertility cycles is broken by the socially enforced clitoral circumcision, seen by Farah as a deliberate maiming of women. Again the issue is not merely feminism; it is connected with overall political oppression: "Like all good Somali poets," Farah told Julie Kitchener, "I used women as a symbol for Somalia. Because when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia." In *Sardines* Farah touches a taboo subject as a warning to his compatriots, but also to all nations where, according to him, the subjection of women paves the way for the establishment of tyranny.

Advocating Human Rights Farah is generally acknowledged, along with Sembene Ousmane and Ayi Kwei Armah, whose female characters also possess the same vision as Farah's women, as one of the African writers who has done the greatest justice in championing human rights through his work. His influence extends beyond the world of literature to include political and cultural realms, particularly with regard to gender inequality.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have praised the uniqueness of Farah's writing. "The novels are, in the widest sense, political but are never simplistic or predictable," declares Angela Smith

in *Contemporary Novelists*. The author's first two novels, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *A Naked Needle* (1976), were both written before his self-imposed exile from his home country. He is better known, however, for his trilogy of novels about the collapse of democracy in Somalia known as "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship."

From a Crooked Rib and A Naked Needle He depicted the inferior status of women in Somali society in his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), the first work of fiction to be published in English by a Somali author. According to Kirsten Holst Petersen, who has called Farah "the first feminist writer to come out of Africa," *From a Crooked Rib* will likely "go down in the history of African literature as a pioneering work, valued for its courage and sensitivity." Other critics believe the work is substandard, however. Florence Stratton wrote: "Stylistically and technically, *From a Crooked Rib* is a most unsatisfactory piece of work. It does not prepare the reader for the elegant prose, intricate structures, or displays of technical virtuosity of the later novels." Farah's next novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), revolves around a British-educated young man, Koschin, whose search for a comfortable existence in post-revolutionary Somalia is complicated by the arrival of a former lover from England who intends to marry him. Reinhard W. Sander observed: "Next to Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, [*A Naked Needle*] is perhaps the most self-searching [novel] to have come out of post-independence Africa."

The "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship" Trilogy These works document the demise of democracy in Somalia and the emerging autocratic regime of Major General Muhammad Siyad Barre, referred to as the "General" in this series. The first volume of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), focuses upon a political activist whose attempts to uncover the circumstances of his twin brother's mysterious death are thwarted by his father, a former government interrogator and torturer. *Sardines* (1981), the next installment, depicts life under the General's repressive administration and examines social barriers that limit the quest for individuality among modern Somali women. Critics admired Farah's realistic evocation of his heroine's tribulations. Charles R. Larson stated: "No novelist has written as profoundly about the African woman's struggle for equality as has Nuruddin Farah." *Close Sesame* (1982), the final volume of the trilogy, concerns an elderly man who spent many years in prison for opposing both colonial and post-revolutionary governments. When his son conspires to overthrow the General's regime, the man's attempts to stop the coup cost him his life. According to Peter Lewis, "*Close Sesame* analyzes the betrayal of African aspirations in the postcolonial period: the appalling abuse of power, the breakdown of national unity in the face of tribal rivalry, and the systematic violation of language itself."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Farah's novels are notable for their concern with the problems experienced by women in his native Somalia. Indeed, Farah has been credited with writing the first feminist novel to come out of Africa. However, feminism in literature dates back at least to the late eighteenth century, and has been produced in many cultures around the world. Here are a few more prominent feminist texts that argue that women deserve more freedom than society then allowed them:

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), a treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft. This work, written by the mother of Mary Shelley—the author of *Frankenstein*—is one of the first to present an argument for women's rights in general, and the right to an education in particular.

The Feminine Mystique (1963), a nonfiction work by Betty Friedan. In this work, Friedan discusses the stifling nature of the role to which women were relegated at that time in America: the role of housewife, a position that she finds "terrifying" because of the loneliness the housewife must feel to be all day cut off from interactions with other adults.

The Subjection of Women (1869), an essay by John Stuart Mill. Arguing against the patriarchal system in which he lived and in favor of equality between the sexes, John Stuart Mill became one of the first major authors to support the burgeoning feminist movement.

A Room of One's Own (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. One of the arguments made against the equality of men and women in the artistic sphere during Woolf's lifetime was that women had not proven themselves capable of producing high art. Woolf argued that women would produce high art if aspiring female artists had their own money and "a room of one's own," just as men have, to explore their innate talents.

Responses to Literature

1. Both Farah's *Sardines* and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* deal with, in one way or another, the sexuality of women and the role that societal conventions play in a woman's perception of her body. Read these texts, and then, in a short essay, compare how each of these authors approaches these delicate subjects. Who seems to be the intended audience for each text? Based on the text, what changes do you think each author would like to see made in society? Make sure to cite specific passages from each text in support of your argument.
2. Farah has been praised for his ability to write from a female's point of view, considered by some a difficult task for a man. Read *From a Crooked Rib*. In a short

essay, describe the narrative techniques, turns of phrases, and other details of the novel that make Farah's portrayal of his female protagonist so effective.

3. In his book *Sardines*, the balance in the fertility cycles is broken by the socially enforced clitoral circumcision. Forced female circumcision has persisted in many African countries, despite attempts by outside agencies, and authors like Farah, to put an end to the practice. Using the Internet and the library, research the history of forced female circumcision in Africa—its origins, its purpose, and its significance—and then write a short essay in which you explore the question: Why does forced circumcision persist in these countries? Describe your emotional reaction to the inclusion of this issue in Farah's novel.
4. Read *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*. This trilogy is meant to depict the political changes in Somalia and includes references to real-life figures. After having read the text, use the Internet and the library to research events described in Farah's text. Which events does Farah choose to fictionalize or exaggerate in his trilogy? In your opinion, why does he choose these events to fictionalize and not others?

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George Farquhar

BORN: 1677, Londonderry, Ireland

DIED: 1707, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Love and a Bottle (1698)

The Constant Couple (1700)

The Recruiting Officer (1706)

The Beaux Stratagem (1707)

Overview

A notable dramatist of the Restoration period, George Farquhar was instrumental in reforming the theatrical practices of his age. For the most part, his most famous plays, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem*, maintain the witty, vulgar, cynical, and amoral tone characteristic of Restoration drama, also known as comedy of manners. However, Farquhar's work demonstrates a



George Farquhar © Topham / The Image Works

natural humor, warmth, and joy for life that the writing of his contemporaries lacked. Because of the lighthearted and somewhat idealistic remarks in his plays, Farquhar is considered by some to have signaled the end of Restoration comedy by moving toward sentimental drama.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The English Restoration Farquhar was born at a time when England had only recently recovered from a violent civil war, during which the ruling English monarchy was removed from power. In its place, a commonwealth led by Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell was created. Under Cromwell's strict rule, theaters throughout England were closed down due to their alleged debasement of moral values. When the monarchy was finally restored to power in 1660 under the rule of Charles II—hence the term “Restoration”—theaters were once again opened, and the exuberant feelings of the day made their way into the comedies that became popular during that time.

Born in Londonderry, Ireland, Farquhar's education began with his attending the Londonderry Free Grammar School under the instruction of Ellis Walker, an educator who acquired local fame for having his students perform the comedies of Terence, an ancient Roman writer, and William Shakespeare. In 1694 Farquhar entered Trinity College in Dublin as a sizar, or a student who performs menial duties for a small allowance, but his studies ended abruptly in 1696 when he left Trinity without a degree. Some biographers speculate that he may have been expelled from the college.

Accidental Stabbing Farquhar joined Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre, where he became acquainted with stage life and began a lifelong friendship with the Irish actor Robert Wilks. Farquhar was a poor actor who had a thin voice and occasionally suffered from stage fright. His acting career ended in 1697 after he accidentally stabbed and seriously injured a fellow player during a dueling scene. Nonetheless, his theater experience proved invaluable in helping him gain an understanding of both the potential and the limitations of the stage.

Encouraged by Wilks to try writing comedies, Farquhar traveled to London and contacted Christopher Rich, manager of the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, where Farquhar's first play, *Love and a Bottle*, was successfully produced in 1698. Early audiences treated the play with good-natured praise. Compared to Farquhar's later comedies, *Love and a Bottle* seems old-fashioned in its determination to be bawdy, its reliance on stock characters and plot devices, its harsh treatment of the cast mistress, and its focus on sexual pursuit. With this first drama, Farquhar tested his theatrical skills, but he created little that was new or influential.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Farquhar's famous contemporaries include:

Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680–1747): This German poet translated Alexander Pope's *Essays on Man* into German.

Isaac Watts (1674–1784): Watts was an English songwriter who penned over seven hundred hymns.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741): An Italian priest, Vivaldi was also a preeminent and prolific Baroque composer known for his work *The Four Seasons*.

Anne Marie of Orléans (1669–1728): Queen of Savoy and Sardinia, Anne Marie of Orléans was also the grandmother of King Louis XV of France.

Jiang Tingxi (1669–1732): This Chinese painter edited the encyclopedia *Complete Collection of Ancient and Modern Writings and Charts*.

Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754): Holberg was a Norwegian historian and playwright who is considered the founder of Danish literature.

Attempt at Fiction Writing The year his first play appeared on stage, Farquhar was not yet completely committed to drama as a vocation, for he anonymously published a novella, *The Adventures of Covent-Garden*, a few weeks after *Love and a Bottle* opened. *The Adventures of Covent-Garden* was supposedly based on Antoine Furetiere's *Scarron's City Romance, Made English* (1671). None of Farquhar's early biographers attributed the novella to him. In 1795, Isaac Reed reproachfully noted in his copy that Farquhar plagiarized a bit from it for *The Constant Couple*. Indeed, Farquhar's novella introduced plots and dramatic theory that he expanded in later works. Leigh Hunt, who had acquired Reed's copy, was the first to recognize that Farquhar himself was the author of the novella. Hunt said Farquhar was the author described in the novella as “a young gentleman somewhat addicted to poetry and the diversions of the stage.”

Fame The success of Farquhar's second play, *The Constant Couple; or, a Trip to the Jubilee*, affirmed Farquhar's ability as a playwright. It features the character of Sir Harry Wildair, played by Wilks, whose tremendous popularity inspired Farquhar to write *Sir Harry Wildair: Being the Sequel of the Trip to the Jubilee*. An unexpected failure, it received little critical attention and was the first in a series of unsuccessful productions. In 1703, likely supposing she was wealthy, Farquhar married a widow who, he soon discovered, was penniless. Farquhar left London the following year to accept a commission as a lieutenant of Grenadiers in the army. Farquhar's service on a recruiting campaign in England's west country

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The life of a soldier has long been the subject of literature, art, and, more recently, film. Here are some other works about the lives of soldiers:

The *Iliad* (twelfth century BCE), an epic poem by Homer.

This classic tale of the Trojan War focuses on the dispute between Greece's greatest warrior, Achilles, and his commander, Agamemnon.

The Barracks Thief (1984), a novella by Tobias Wolff.

Wolff describes the lives of paratroopers in training to join the Vietnam War.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. This famous novel about a German soldier serving during World War I is one of the most widely read war novels of all time.

Black Hawk Down (2001), a film directed by Ridley Scott.

Based on a true story, this movie tells the story of an elite group of soldiers who have been sent to Somalia to capture a corrupt warlord.

Jarhead (2003), a memoir by Anthony Swofford. Swofford describes his role as a sniper in the First Gulf War.

inspired one of his most famous pieces, *The Recruiting Officer*—an immediate success upon its production in 1706. Despite his revived fame, the final years of Farquhar's life were marred by poverty and failing health. Living in London, Farquhar received enough financial support from Wilks to work on his last play, *The Beaux Stratagem*. Completed in only six weeks, it is regarded by many to be Farquhar's finest work. In 1707, shortly after *The Beaux Stratagem* was staged, Farquhar died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine.

Works in Literary Context

Critics stress Farquhar's importance as a transitional figure in English literary history. He began his career during a time when Restoration drama was extremely popular, but critics of the morality embodied by these plays were also gaining prominence. Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698), for instance, attacked the lax morality and sexual attitudes in Restoration drama. Scholars have noted that although Farquhar is usually identified with writers of the comedy of manners, he stands apart from them in several significant ways.

Moving Beyond Restoration Drama Farquhar's early comedies, *Love and a Bottle*, *The Constant Couple*, and *Sir Harry Wildair* are similar to other Restoration dramas in that they are bawdy in tone and tend to focus on sexual intrigue. They also contain intricate plots that

involve mistaken identities, multiple disguises, and trick marriages, all of which provide a sharp contrast to the simple story lines of fellow Restoration dramatists such as John Vanbrugh. In addition, the dialogue in Farquhar's plays, though lively, lacks the witty, cynical hardness of comedies of his contemporaries William Wycherley and William Congreve. While still an important trait, wit in Farquhar's plays is less apparent and is often secondary to plot and character, with comedy achieved through situation and natural plot progress rather than through daring wordplay.

Farquhar's later plays, *The Inconstant* and *The Twin Rivals*, diverge even more from the comedy of manners form, for they follow Aristotle's belief that comedies should instruct their audience by rewarding virtue, chastising vice, and laughing at weakness. *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem*, Farquhar's most celebrated plays, also reflect this new moral dimension, only their morality is less forced and more natural as a result of Farquhar's portrayal of provincial life and country manners.

Furthermore, Farquhar's characters in his later plays differ from the heartless rogues of Restoration drama in that his country maids, innkeepers, and highwaymen are genteel instead of crude and are presented in a sympathetic light. Contributing to an atmosphere of unaffected cheerfulness and freshness, their vivacity, openness, and unpredictable behavior render them more realistic than traditional character types of Restoration drama. Even Farquhar's treatment of the common Restoration theme of marital incompatibility sets him apart from his predecessors. In *The Beaux Stratagem*, for example, Farquhar resolves the couple's conflict by introducing a separation by mutual consent or divorce, a serious note that also suggests equality of the sexes.

Legacy Farquhar's drama is marked by its movement away from the over-the-top, overtly sexual humor of Restoration drama. He is credited with extending the range of Restoration drama by introducing country settings, manners, and characters, aspects that were later adopted and perfected by Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan. Because of his changes, one senses that Farquhar has a greater interest in the humanity of his characters and avoids simply using them as props for his humor. He analyzes characters as much as situations, just as the twentieth-century dramatist George Bernard Shaw does. In fact, pointing out that the naturalism and simplicity of Farquhar's plays are distinctly modern, Bonamy Dobree proposed that Farquhar was "the Shaw of his time."

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Farquhar's work has never been unanimous. In his short career, he produced several plays that received high praise, but many others went virtually unnoticed by his contemporaries. As time passed and aesthetic sensibilities changed, critics began to appreciate

the humanity of Farquhar's characters. Nonetheless, most of these early critics still felt that Farquhar's drama was best seen as a part of—not separate from—Restoration drama and judged him accordingly. It is only within the last one hundred years that Farquhar has been evaluated as a transitional figure who contributed to the evolution of drama at the end of the Restoration period.

Pretended Impostors Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem* were tremendously popular with contemporary audiences and have been long acknowledged as Farquhar's greatest works. Eighteenth-century critics and dramatists extolled these plays for their sentiment and humanity, proposing that Farquhar was the founder of a new and possibly superior form of comedy. Romantic critics Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt held Farquhar in high esteem and were the first to classify him with Restoration writers, defining him in relationship to that group's achievements. Even so, Hazlitt praised Farquhar's heroes for their honesty, asserting that unlike the common Restoration rakes, "they are real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors."

Wholesome, if Not Decent Hunt, along with Alexander Pope, found the natural language in Farquhar's plays "wanting in an air of good breeding" and suggested that it lacked the polish and glitter of Restoration comedy. Nonetheless, Farquhar's depth of feeling, theatrical skill, and diverse characters prompted Hunt to pronounce him, in comparison with other Restoration dramatists, "upon the whole, the truest dramatic genius, and the most likely to be of lasting popularity." Critics of the Victorian era were generally hostile to the writers of Restoration drama because of its bitter satire, lascivious wit, and hedonistic values; however, these critics tended to view Farquhar favorably because he engendered greater morality in his plays. Edmund Gosse commented that "Farquhar succeeds in being always wholesome, even when he cannot persuade himself to be decent."

Diabolical Fire Exalting the humor of situation above that of wit and emphasizing plot above dialogue, Farquhar's comedies contributed an unsurpassed freshness, deep perception of human nature, and imaginative liveliness to the English stage of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Comparing Farquhar to other playwrights of his time, William M. Thackeray concluded in the nineteenth century that Farquhar was "something more than a mere comic tradesman: [he] has a grand drunken diabolical fire in him."

In the twentieth century, scholars discussed Farquhar's comedies independently from Restoration drama. William Archer even asserted that Farquhar rebelled against Restoration comedy. Several modern critics concur with Archer, but also blame Farquhar for adulterating the comedy of manners and ushering in sentimental comedy. They assert that his works stand between these two dramatic periods without committing to either one and

therefore come across as confused and inconsistent. John Palmer has argued that, because he "never really discovered in his art a neutral territory where the values he borrowed were reconciled with the values he contributed," Farquhar helped bring about the demise of the English comic spirit. Recent criticism is more positive, noting that Restoration drama was already in decline by the time Farquhar began writing and that he was correct to seek out a new form.

Responses to Literature

1. One critic said that Farquhar's characters were "real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors." What do you think this critic meant when he said this? How can one be a "pretended impostor"? Support your response with examples from one or two of Farquhar's plays.
2. Describe a comedic plot in one of Farquhar's plays. Rewrite this plot for a modern audience. To understand how to do this, you might consider reading Jane Austen's *Emma* or watching the film *Clueless*, which is an adaptation of Austen's classic novel for a modern audience.
3. Read William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, a quintessential Restoration-period drama. In what ways do you think the work of Farquhar upholds the characteristics of the Restoration-period drama that is represented in Wycherley's play? Cite specific examples from both Wycherley's play and Farquhar's work.

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Georges Feydeau

BORN: 1862, Paris, France

DIED: 1921, Rueil-Malmaison, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Fitting for Ladies (1886)

A Close Shave (1892)

The Lady from Maxim's (1899)

A Flea in Her Ear (1907)

Overview

Skillfully manipulating the conventions of vaudeville and farce, Georges Feydeau delighted Parisian audiences in the decades preceding World War I. Precisely staged, his plays are known for their wildly unlikely coincidences, mistaken identities, and misunderstandings. In addition, scholars find in his dramas an intellectual dimension generally absent in the works of other vaudevillian authors, and, although the farce has been replaced by other come-



Georges Feydeau Feydeau, Georges, photograph. Source unknown.

dic forms in modern theater, Feydeau's plays are still regularly performed today.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Literary Childhood in Paris Born December 8, 1862, in Paris, France, Feydeau was the son of writer and scholar Ernest Feydeau and a celebrated Polish beauty named Lodzia Selewska. The Feydeau family's wealth and position in Parisian society allowed the young Feydeau to associate with such literary figures as Theophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, and Jules and Edmund de Goncourt, who recorded in their diaries that he was an enchanting but lazy child. Growing up in a city that was one of the intellectual and artistic capitals of the Western world, Feydeau was exposed to the theater at a young age, and, encouraged by his father, he began to write plays before he was even ten years old.

The Belle Époque The period during which Feydeau grew up and attained success was known in France as the "Belle Époque," or "Beautiful Era." This was a time notable throughout Europe for its political stability and economic prosperity. The Franco-Prussian War, the culmination of many years of hostilities between Germany and France, came to an end in 1871; the devastation of World War I would not arrive until more than forty years later. Because of this relative peace and prosperity, the Belle Époque led to a flowering of the arts, with performance arts such as plays and music enjoying a boost as audiences sought light entertainment. Feydeau's work, which was always humorous—and sometimes later dismissed as inconsequential—was perfectly suited for the French audiences of this time period.

Comedic Monologues After his father died in 1873, Feydeau's mother married an eminent journalist, and the couple attempted to dissuade Feydeau from a career in the undignified world of the theater by securing for him a position in a law office. Nevertheless, Feydeau spent his evenings at the theater, and he often presented his original comic monologues at social gatherings. After the success of his first monologue, he composed five more, which were performed by many of the most well-known comedians of Parisian salon society.

King of Vaudeville In 1881, Feydeau wrote his first play, *Wood and Viewed*, thus beginning a period of creativity that culminated in 1886 with the enormously popular *Fitting for Ladies*. Feydeau's acclaim was short-lived, however, as this drama was followed by seven years of critical failures with only a few mediocre successes interspersed. In the meantime, Feydeau married Marianne Carolus-Duran, the daughter of a wealthy, well-known portrait painter who helped Feydeau with the financial problems that had arisen as a result of the

playwright's succession of poorly received plays, as well as his heavy losses in the stock market.

Feydeau took a break from writing in 1890 in order to study the work of France's greatest vaudevillians, including Henri Meilhac and Alfred Hennequin. This method proved worthwhile, as Feydeau made a triumphant return to the stage in 1892 with *A Close Shave*, a production that ran for over one thousand performances and resulted in Feydeau's being proclaimed the King of Vaudeville. As his reputation spread, his plays were sometimes performed abroad in translation before premiering in France, with *A Flea in Her Ear* becoming his most popular play in English-speaking countries.

The Road to Insanity Throughout his life, Feydeau was prone to depression, a condition that grew worse with age. After an unhappy, bitter marriage, Feydeau left his wife in 1909 and moved to a hotel, living there alone for ten years, surrounded by his books and paintings. In 1916, at the height of World War I (1914–1918), he divorced his wife. As the outside world was falling to pieces, his work during these years often emphasized domestic themes, especially his last five short dramas—in which wives are depicted as irrational, unyielding shrews who persecute their husbands.

As Feydeau descended from depression into syphilis-induced insanity in 1918, he grew dependent on the assistance of other writers: The first act of one play was written by Sacha Guitry; another play had to be finished by Yves Miranda; and *I Don't Cheat on My Husband*, Feydeau's last full-length play, was a collaboration with René Peter. By 1919, Feydeau was having delusions of being an emperor or an animal, and his children had him institutionalized. In an asylum in Rueil-Malmaison, France, Feydeau's state of mind deteriorated even more, and he died two years later.

Works in Literary Context

Feydeau's influence as a playwright has been great, as his dramas have been adapted into novels and songs and continue to be staged almost one hundred years after his death. Some scholars view Feydeau as a predecessor of surrealism and the theater of the absurd; certainly, his impact is apparent in the plays of absurdist dramatists Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. Feydeau himself looked to the great dramatists Sophocles and William Shakespeare for guidance in matters of theatrical conventions, learning, among other things, the important rule of never letting the audience feel tricked. However, the playwright was probably most inspired by Molière, France's foremost writer of farce.

Vaudeville Variance Although vaudeville was one of the most popular forms of theater in Paris during the nineteenth century, Feydeau considered it predictable and stagnant, which inspired him to introduce new elements into the genre. Influenced by recent ideas of the naturalists, he gave greater dimension and believability to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Feydeau's famous contemporaries include:

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Regarded as Ireland's greatest poet, Yeats won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923 for poetry that ranged from nationalistic to spiritual to mythological.

Émile Loubet (1838–1929): President of France from 1899 to 1906, Loubet was a factor in the break between the French government and the Vatican.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963): Du Bois was an African American social activist and writer whose *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) criticizes Booker T. Washington for being insufficiently militant concerning the rights of African Americans.

John Millington Synge (1871–1909): Both the comedies and tragedies by this Irish playwright offended many of his countrymen with their ironic wit, and realism, and lewdness.

Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935): American poet Robinson introduced readers to his fictitious Tilbury Town through dramatic monologues such as "Richard Cory."

Edmond Rostand (1868–1918): Rostand, a French poet and dramatist, is best known for writing *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play featuring a hero with an oversized nose.

what had previously been stylized, stock characters and convoluted, contrived plots. Additionally, he drew upon the customs and morality of his own time to update the traditional conflicts of vaudeville. In doing so, Feydeau derived humor not only from the action of his comedies, but also from both his characters' realistic faults and the social satire born from them. With comic caricatures and coordinated action, Feydeau fully developed the satiric features that distinguish his work from that of other vaudevillian writers. In *The Lady from Maxim's*, for example, much of the comedy is derived from the desire of respectable citizens to practice what they suppose to be proper social behavior, no matter how ridiculous that behavior might be.

The Controlled Complexity of the Puzzle Using what is generally recognized as his greatest talent, Feydeau constructed his comedies like complex puzzles. Many critics remark that it is difficult to summarize a play by Feydeau because he interweaves several plot lines intricately so that they cannot be separated. The result is that each piece of action and every bit of dialogue are necessary for a play's final effect, which has been carefully crafted to evoke laughter. Because even the slightest change can disrupt the delicate balance of his plays,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Feydeau's later plays present a dismal portrait of marriage based on his own marital experience. In these works, women are depicted as relentless, heartless vixens who have either resisted or totally undermined the presumed authority of their husbands. While such a view of marriage is certainly gloomy, it has been a recurring theme in literature and art. Listed below are other works that portray marriage as a source of misery:

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), a drama by Edward Albee. After their marriage becomes a nasty battle, the cynical husband and wife in Albee's play try to humiliate each other in new ways.

The Taming of the Shrew (1594), a drama by William Shakespeare. Because it portrays a husband forcing and tricking his outspoken, intelligent wife into obedience to his will, feminists and other engaged readers have long challenged this well-known tale about the battle of the sexes.

"Toward Evening" (c. 100 BCE), a poem by Chinese poet Ch'u Yuan. In only four lines, the poem captures the essence of an unhappy marriage among the nobility, comparing it to a storm.

Feydeau's detailed stage directions, while reflecting his extensive knowledge of the theater, allow little flexibility for directors or actors.

Works in Critical Context

According to a review by critic Francisque Sarcey, performances of Feydeau's *A Close Shave* had to be finished in pantomime because the actors' voices were drowned out by the thunderous laughter of the audience. Despite this kind of reception, fellow playwright Catulle Mendès predicted at the height of Feydeau's career that nobody would ever read his colleague's plays, a proclamation most likely based on Feydeau's seven-year string of failures. Although his celebrity declined in the years immediately following his death, Feydeau did not fade into obscurity as did many of his contemporaries. Instead, recent critics consider Feydeau France's greatest comic dramatist after Molière, and his work continues to be widely performed in French theaters, as well as on stages throughout the Western world. Feydeau's dramas are not only produced today, but they also are read and studied, prompting Norman R. Shapiro to call Feydeau "the [Johann Sebastian] Bach of his genre."

A Basic Negativity Many critics believe that close examination of Feydeau's comedies reveals a basically negative approach to life. Consistently immoral and deceitful in their actions, his characters present a cynical view of human nature, and their behavior frequently

causes pain and suffering. Feydeau's darker side is especially apparent in the one-act plays he wrote later in his career. Shorter, simpler, and less farcical than his earlier works, these plays deal with marriage, an institution portrayed as an ongoing struggle between two hopelessly incompatible people. Shapiro comments, "The playwright, like a master puppeteer, assumes a god-like role, creating around his helpless characters a universe of seeming absurdity in which their efforts to resist their destiny are frantic but fruitless," and even goes so far as to call Feydeau's theater "eminently cruel." Although some scholars claim that Feydeau was simply attempting to create a new form of comedy, most hold that the pessimistic changes in his later plays were a consequence of his personal problems.

A Flea in Her Ear One of Feydeau's later works, *A Flea in Her Ear*, was a success when it premiered in Paris in 1907 and has been his most popular play in both England and the United States. Peter Glenville has observed that Feydeau's dramas are "immaculately constructed" and "are largely concerned with the appetites and follies of the average human being caught in a net devised by his own foolishness." *A Flea in Her Ear* is no exception. As is the case with most farces, the play is fast-paced, and its scenes are filled with slapstick comedy. Events in *A Flea in Her Ear* take place within the context of mistaken identities and deceptions; the characters' confusion and surprise delight the members of the audience, who know all sorts of secrets that the characters do not. One particularly innovative prop that provides for great situational humor is a revolving bed that makes people instantaneously appear and disappear, an arrangement that impressed critics and audiences alike when the play opened. Because of such dramatic techniques, Shapiro notes that *A Flea in Her Ear* functions as a "rigorously, logically constructed machine" by fully developing its farcical possibilities.

Responses to Literature

1. How did French vaudeville differ from American vaudeville? How have both vaudevilles influenced comedy in America to the present day? Name a few contemporary American comedians who draw upon vaudeville for their performances and explain what vaudevillian conventions these modern-day entertainers use.
2. Explore the political history of France from 1900 to 1945. Given France's situation during World War II, explain the rebirth of Feydeau's popularity in the early 1940s.
3. Farce is typically defined as a boisterous comedy involving ludicrous action and dialogue intended to induce laughter through exaggeration and extravagance—rather than a realistic imitation of life. Research the history of farce in the theater.

Create a time line that shows at least seven major farcical works throughout the history of theater. Make sure you include the authors' names with the name of the plays and their year of publication or performance.

4. Feydeau was prone to depression—referred to as “melancholy” in his day—most all of his life. Trace the history of the word “melancholy.” What role do you believe depression has had in the life of artists? Compare Feydeau with at least one other author, examining how their respective work was affected by the disease.

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Henry Fielding

BORN: 1707, Sharpham, Somerset, England

DIED: 1754, Lisbon, Portugal

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Tom Thumb (1730)

An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews (1741)

The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams (1742)

The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling (1749)

Amelia (1762)



Henry Fielding *Fielding, Henry, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Overview

The English novel as we recognize it today was shaped in large part by Henry Fielding's three major novels. But if he had never written a novel, Fielding would have a place in literary history as being for a time one of England's most popular comic playwrights. And if he had never written a play, Fielding would have a place in political history as an influential journalist and essayist. And if he had never written anything at all, Fielding would still have a place in British history as a reforming judge and the originator of London's first effective police force. It has often been said that if one could choose only one book from which to learn about England during the eighteenth century, that book should be Fielding's novel—often regarded as the first novel in English letters—*Tom Jones*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Spirited Youth, Sans Parents Henry Fielding was born on April 22, 1707, at Sharpham Park, Somerset, the estate of his maternal grandfather. In 1710 the Fieldings moved to East Stour in Dorset. Henry's mother died when he was eleven, and he was raised by his grandmother with occasional visits to his charming but irresponsible father, Edmund Fielding. Lady Mary Wortley

Montagu, a distinguished writer and Fielding's cousin, described him about this time as a handsome and high-spirited youth, full of the joy of life, witty and humorous; very much like his most famous literary creation, Tom Jones.

A Controversial Playwright Turns to Contestatory Law Fielding's achievement as a novelist often overshadows his short but dynamic career as a playwright—between 1728 and 1737. Fielding ranks as one of the most popular dramatists of the eighteenth century, and if the political fallout from his satire had not brought his theatrical activities to an abrupt end, Fielding might never have made the transition from playwright to novelist.

Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques*, premiered in 1728, and for the next seven years Fielding was active as a playwright and theater manager. He specialized in comedies, farces, and satires, the best of which is probably *Tom Thumb* (1730). Two political satires, *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737), so infuriated the government of the powerful Prime Minister Robert Walpole that all London theaters, except two protected by royal patent, were ordered closed by the Licensing Act of 1737. Fielding's career as a playwright was over, along with the theatrical careers of many others.

Fielding then turned to the study of the law. He continued to oppose the Walpole government by editing a political journal, *The Champion* (1739–1740), the first of four journals for which he wrote over his lifetime.

The Dialectical Development of the Novel: Against Richardson In 1740, the morally earnest novelist Samuel Richardson published *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, the story of a servant girl who preserves her virtue against the sexual advances of her aristocratic employer, who later proposes a proper marriage to her. The book was an immediate success. Fielding thought the work was the very essence of moral hypocrisy, and he could not resist spoofing this in an unsigned novella, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741). Recent critics have noted with chagrin that the success of fiction like Fielding's and Richardson's was achieved at precisely the moment of the Great Irish Famine of 1740–41. A critical consensus is emerging that the success of this new art form was related to English readers' need to distance themselves from the suffering of their neighbors in Ireland, which was at the time an English colony. While 10 percent of the Irish population was starving to death, the new novels were offering moral instruction and convulsive laughter to an ever more appreciative London readership.

Continuing the attack on Richardson, Fielding wrote a bogus sequel to *Pamela*, giving the heroine a younger brother who likewise resists the sexual advances of his aristocratic lady employer. *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742) begins with the extended joke

of the sexual double standard—female virginity being valued so much more than male chastity—but it soon outgrows its satiric origins and becomes a fully developed novel in its own right. Fielding's preface is a manifesto for the developing genre of the novel.

Fielding's law practice was not prospering, and the moderate income from *Joseph Andrews* was not sufficient to provide for his wife and children. Consequently he gathered for publication as *Miscellanies* (three volumes, 1743) some earlier works, including *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild, the Great*, a savagely ironic account of a notorious London thief whom he equated with all “great men,” Robert Walpole in particular.

Fielding's eldest daughter died in 1742, his wife in 1744, and he himself was painfully crippled with gout (an extremely painful form of arthritis). The death of his beloved wife, Charlotte, was such a shock to Fielding that his friends feared for his sanity. Yet, during these years, Fielding was creating one of the world's enduring masterpieces of good humor and convivial optimism, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749).

Political Journalism and Personal Scandal

While he was writing *Tom Jones*, Fielding also edited two political journals, *The True Patriot* (1745–1746) and *The Jacobite's Journal* (1747–1748). In 1747 he married Mary Daniel, his first wife's servant, who was pregnant with his child. Fielding ignored the jeers of his enemies—their grief over Charlotte's death had drawn him and Mary together, and they had five children and a loving family for many years.

A Magistrate Sets Sail for Lisbon In 1748 Fielding was commissioned Justice of the Peace. Most of his work was concerned with London's criminal population of thieves, informers, and prostitutes. Fielding was assisted in his work by his blind half-brother, Sir John Fielding (1722–1780), a justice of the peace who was said to be able to recognize over three thousand criminals by their voices. The brothers organized the Bow Street Runners, the first modern police force.

Fielding's experiences as judge gave a more serious tone to his last novel, *Amelia* (1752). The sufferings of the heroine and her irresponsible husband are used to expose flaws in the civil and military institutions of the period.

Sick with jaundice, dropsy, and gout, and worn out by overwork, Fielding resigned his post as magistrate and sailed to Lisbon, Portugal, to recuperate. He made his journey the subject of his last work, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, which was published posthumously (1755). Fielding died in Lisbon on October 8, 1754.

Works in Literary Context

Journals The early eighteenth century was a great age for journalism and essay writing. Increasing literacy rates,

an unquenchable thirst for novelty, and a constantly contentious political climate resulted in dozens of journals and newspapers appearing seemingly overnight. Fielding produced three journals in his lifetime in the model of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, the influential journals of cultural commentary published by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Fielding's journals featured more politics, however, like the journals of Daniel Defoe.

The Rise of the Novel Many critics consider *Tom Jones* to be the first novel in English. Novels are long fictional stories that feature ordinary people—sometimes in everyday situations and sometimes in extraordinary circumstances. The novel emerged as a popular literary genre in the eighteenth century as literacy rates rose, printing costs dropped, and the middle class swelled. A new population of readers emerged, and these people appreciated fiction with which they could identify.

Restoration Comedy Conventions Fielding's comic dramas were indebted to Restoration comedy, a style popular during the period 1660–1700. Restoration comedies are marked by their urbane and witty dialogue, complex plots, satirical touches, and sexual humor. Fielding used all of these, greatly increasing the satire, often politicizing the content, and using a more coarse style of burlesque comedy.

Reimagining the Picaresque For his novels, Fielding drew heavily upon the inspiration and structure of Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605). In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding recasts the brave, idealistic, but absentminded hero of *Don Quixote* into the figure of Parson Adams. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding borrows the now-familiar formula of the hero-with-bumbling-sidekick from *Don Quixote* and his squire Sancho Panza, recasting them as the heroic Tom and the naive country bumpkin Benjamin Partridge. Fielding also borrows the on-the-road structure of episodic adventures from *Don Quixote* known in the Spanish literary tradition as the “picaresque.” In many of these episodes, Fielding draws upon his experience as a successful comic dramatist to create scenes remarkable for their comic timing, sharply drawn characterizations, and complex interweaving of plot and subplots.

Flawed Heroes Of the themes in Fielding's novels that have received most attention, the most enduring is whether *Tom Jones* is, or should be, an admirable hero despite his faults. Tom is truly in love with Sophia, but he is young and handsome, and he has a difficult time saying no to the several women who make themselves available. In one notorious case, Tom has an extended affair with Lady Bellaston, an aristocrat in London who has information about the whereabouts of Sophia. Tom accepts her money and gifts in exchange for his sexual favors. For many readers this crosses a line. Various aspects of sexuality appear in Fielding's works, including incest, sexual harassment, adultery, and the simple sexual explorations

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fielding's famous contemporaries include:

- Ignacy Krasicki** (1735–1801): Polish poet and novelist. Krasicki was a clergyman who wrote a hilarious mock-epic called *Monachomachia*, (1778) which ridiculed the passive lifestyle of monks. There was a huge controversy, but Krasicki responded with an equally satirical sequel.
- Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov** (1711–1765): One of the most learned scholars of his time, Lomonosov was a chemist, mathematician, grammarian, and rhetorician. He made lasting contributions to the regularization of the accents and syllables in the Russian language for poetic verse.
- Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804): German philosopher who challenged the Enlightenment faith in the unlimited potential of human reason. His *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) argued that what we can know about the world comes only from the evidence of our senses.
- Voltaire** (1694–1778): French satirist, dramatist, and poet. Voltaire was a fearless satirist who kept up a relentless attack on human bigotry, ignorance, greed, and fanaticism, seen best in his most famous work, *Candide* (1759).
- James Thomson** (1700–1748): This Scottish-born poet's evocative poems about the landscape collected in *The Seasons* (1726–1730) are often seen as forerunners of the emotional nature poems of the Romantic poets, fifty years ahead of their time.

of young people who act on their emotions instead of their good judgment.

Often connected with sexuality, but not limited to it, is the theme of hypocrisy. Fielding is a powerful satirist of the hypocrisy that he sees as a growing infection in society, law, and the church. For example, in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding creates the memorable character of Parson Adams, an elderly, absentminded, and naive Anglican minister who serves as a kind of lightning rod for hypocrisy in the many different people he encounters on the road. Despite his backwardness and childlike innocence, indeed because of it, he demonstrates by contrast the vanity and pettiness of others. Fielding's cure for hypocrisy, which Adams embodies, is in preferring good works (the Anglican value) over strong faith (the Methodist or Calvinist value). It is what you do that matters in the end, not what abstract doctrine you believe in or what kind of person others think you are; it is worth noting that the protagonists in Fielding's three major novels are a servant, an illegitimate orphan, and an ex-convict.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones* are influenced by the "picaresque"—a Spanish genre about the adventures of a trickster or rogue hero, traveling from place to place, getting into trouble with authority figures, and escaping by use of his cleverness and charm. Below are some works about tricksters, as well as about clashes between urban or industrial and rural or agricultural lifestyles.

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. Gulliver is more gullible than roguish, but he travels to several remote islands discovering little people, huge people, and talking horses. Gulliver gets himself into trouble by maintaining his English "common sense" values in places with very different assumptions and traditions—the vehicle for Swift's often bitter satire.

Firefly (2002), a television series created by Joss Whedon. In the twenty-sixth century, a group of smugglers—led by a former sergeant from the losing side of a galactic war—journey across the galaxy and find trouble wherever they go, but always manage to stay one step ahead of the peacekeepers, bounty hunters, and criminals trying to track them down.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. In this picaresque novel about a trip on a raft down the Mississippi River, Twain shows what is great and enduring about life in the South, but Huck also encounters all the forces of racism, corruption, and greed that mark a turn of the corner in Southern life on the eve of the Civil War.

Works in Critical Context

Fielding's reception history is bound up in a tight knot with Samuel Richardson's reception history. The two dominant novelists of the mid-eighteenth century did not know one another personally but took several swipes at one another's work. Most significant among these swipes is probably Fielding's *Shamela* (1741), a satire on Richardson's classic novel of conduct, *Pamela* (1740). It has become a commonplace in literary criticism that the two novelists are diametrically opposed to one another, and between them one can find all the seeds of subsequent English novels: Fielding represents the external, comic, optimistic, tolerant, easygoing, panoramic, masculine, and urban aspects through his omniscient narration; whereas Richardson represents the internal, tragic, fatalistic, morally strict, anxious, focused, feminine, and domestic aspects through his first-person novels written in the form of letters. There are many themes that both novelists have in common, such as the corruption of vain aristocrats and the tyranny of self-interested parents, but it is usually the differences

between the two novelists that are emphasized to make a point. Fielding's rises in critical fashion over 250 years of criticism are usually linked to Richardson's declines, and vice versa.

Tom Jones *Tom Jones* was the talk of the town when it first appeared. It had the best advertisement possible: the whiff of scandal. Preachers denounced its supposed sexual immorality in their sermons, and some even blamed it for the two earthquakes that hit London in 1750. *Amelia* was also a popular success, even though it is less often read today; still, critics were so hard on Fielding for a handful of oversights in the novel that he stated in his *Covent-Garden Journal* that he would never again write fiction.

In the nineteenth century, Fielding's reputation was split: among fellow novelists his influence and popularity was high, but among the moralistic Victorian critics he found little support. William Hazlitt, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot all paid their tributes to Fielding, but the most memorable statement came from Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the Oedipus Tyrannus, the Alchemist, and Tom Jones the three most perfect plots ever planned." (*Oedipus* is a Greek tragedy by Sophocles, and *The Alchemist* is a Renaissance comedy by Ben Jonson.)

Coleridge's comment was frequently cited by critics in the twentieth century, especially the "New Critics" of the 1940s and 1950s who gave detailed appreciations of Fielding's plotting and sense of structure. R. S. Crane's "The Plot of Tom Jones" became a classic of the movement, and Martin Battestin argued that Fielding's plots reflect the symmetrical elegance of the neoclassical architecture popular in the eighteenth century. Feminist critics starting in the 1960s found less to admire in Fielding's masculine approach and sexist characterizations. Most recently, Fielding has been blessed with a generation of responsible (and sometimes competing) biographers who have done much to erase the rumors and innuendos that had damaged his reputation over the years. In his Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, Claude Rawson describes Fielding as "the most important English playwright of his time" and "one of the great inaugural figures of the history of the novel." Further, Rawson observes, "Fielding's almost obsessive concern with Richardson was to develop and sharpen a mode of fiction-writing whose life and after-life continue strong."

From Print to Film Fielding's popularity received a major boost in 1963 when Tony Richardson's movie version of *Tom Jones* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. *Tom Jones* was later produced as a BBC miniseries in 1997, and the character of Fielding himself has appeared, along with his brother John Fielding, as a crusading judge in the British television series *City of Vice* (2008).

Responses to Literature

1. Evaluate Fielding as a moralist in *Tom Jones*. Does the author's seeming tolerance of Tom's sexual escapades undermine or outweigh the theology and morality argued for elsewhere in the novel? Do you think Tom is a positive or negative role model, both in Fielding's time and in ours?
2. Read the preface to *Joseph Andrews* and measure Fielding's new theory of comedy with his practice in his novels. How well do they live up to Fielding's high aims?
3. Consider Fielding's powerful use of irony in *Jonathan Wild*. How many different kinds and shades of irony can you find? Does the culture of celebrity today, where even criminals are considered "great" if they are famous enough, provide a fresh perspective on Fielding's ironies?
4. In Fielding's short lifetime, he had three distinct careers: as a playwright, a novelist, and a judge. From your reading, how did his experience in each of these areas have an influence on what he achieved in the other two? Provide and analyze examples.

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Gustave Flaubert

BORN: 1821, Rouen, France

DIED: 1880, Croisset, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

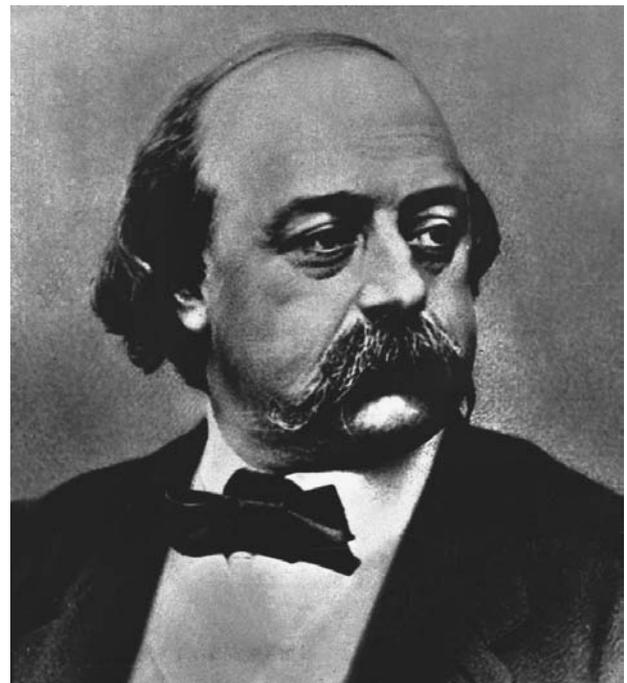
Madame Bovary (1857)

Salammbô (1863)

Sentimental Education (1870)

Overview

The most influential French novelist of the nineteenth century, Flaubert is remembered primarily for the stylistic precision and dispassionate rendering of psychological detail found in his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary* (1857). Although his strict objectivity is often associated with the realist and naturalist movements, he objected to this classification, and his artistry indeed defies such easy categorization. Flaubert struggled throughout his career to overcome a romantic tendency toward fantastic imaginings and love of the exotic past. A meticulous craftsman, he aimed to achieve a prose style "as rhythmical as verse and as precise as the language of science."



Gustave Flaubert Popperfoto / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Tumultuous Century in French History France during the nineteenth century was a place of frequent political turmoil and intrigue. The monarchy had only recently been removed from power during the French Revolution, in the final years of the eighteenth century. A republic was established in its place, though the country eventually came under the control of military leader Napoléon Bonaparte, who declared himself emperor and whose tyrannical and imperialist rule was in many ways not unlike the monarchy that had recently been deposed. After Napoléon was removed from power in 1815, an official monarchy was established once again, though the royal family's power was no longer absolute. This resulted in a period of relative peace during the 1830s and 1840s; however, the dissatisfaction of the working class—who for the most part were not able to vote, since they did not own property—erupted in 1848 with another revolution. Once again the vacuum of power left in the newly established republic led to a single leader with extensive powers, and once again his name was Napoléon: Louis Napoléon, nephew of the former emperor. He ruled from 1852 until 1870, when he was removed from power and yet another republic—known as the Third Republic—was established. These tumultuous times inevitably informed Flaubert's writing, most notably in his last novel, *Sentimental Education* (1870).

Gustave Flaubert was born on December 12, 1821, in Rouen, France, where his father was chief surgeon and clinical professor at the city hospital, the Hôtel Dieu, and his mother was a well-known woman from a provincial bourgeois (middle-class) family. Flaubert lived with his parents, brother Achille, and sister Caroline in an apartment at the hospital. As a youth he attended the Collège Royal de Rouen, traveled with his family throughout France, and spent summer vacations at Trouville. It was in Trouville that he first met Maria-Elisa Schlesinger, a married woman for whom he harbored a lifelong infatuation and who deeply influenced the character and direction of *Sentimental Education*. Although Flaubert was interested in literature and began to write at an early age, upon receiving his baccalaureate he honored his parents' wishes and reluctantly began law school in Paris. In 1844 his studies were disrupted when he experienced the first attack of what is now believed to have been epilepsy. As a result, he abandoned his plans for a law career and devoted himself to writing. Both his father and sister died in 1846, and the author, his mother, and his infant niece moved to the family home at Croisset, near Rouen. Except for several trips abroad and to Paris, including one to that city in 1848 to observe the February Revolution “from the point of view of art,” Flaubert remained at Croisset until his death.

Madame Bovary Often described as a satire on romantic beliefs and the provincial bourgeoisie, *Madame Bovary* relates the story of Emma Bovary, a bored housewife whose dreams of romantic love, primarily gathered from popular novels, are unfulfilled by her marriage to a simple country doctor. She attempts to realize her fantasies through love affairs with a local landowner and a law clerk, and later through extravagant purchases. Unable to pay her debts and unwilling to bear her disgrace or conform to bourgeois values, she commits suicide. This novel, Flaubert's first to be published despite years of writing and several completed manuscripts, initially appeared in installments in *La Revue de Paris*. Although serious critics immediately recognized in *Madame Bovary* a work of immense significance, the French government censored publication of the *Revue*. Flaubert, his printer, and his publisher were tried together for blasphemy and offending public morals. All were eventually acquitted, and both Flaubert and *Madame Bovary* acquired a certain notoriety. Flaubert came to resent the fame of *Madame Bovary*, which completely overshadowed his later works, saying he wished to buy all the copies, “throw them into the fire and never hear of the book again.”

Later Work After *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert sought a new subject that would be far from the bourgeois provincial setting over which he had labored so long. Once again turning to the past, he traveled to Carthage to gather material for *Salammbô* (1863), a historical novel whose exotic subject matter and opulent setting are reminiscent of the romantic tradition but whose descriptive technique is rigorously objective. In 1859, well into the writing of *Salammbô*, he wrote to Ernest Feydeau: “The deeper I plunge into antiquity, the more I feel the need to do something modern, and inside my head I'm cooking up a whole crew of characters.” Commentators agree that this “crew of characters” ultimately became the cast of *Sentimental Education*. Although not as well known or as widely read as *Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education* is currently regarded as one of his greatest achievements, both for its commentary on French life in the nineteenth century and for what it reveals, through its autobiographical content, about one of the greatest writers of France.

Flaubert was burdened in his last years by financial difficulties and personal sorrow resulting from the deaths of his mother and several close friends. He was also saddened by the feeling that his works were generally misunderstood. He enjoyed close friendships with many prominent contemporaries, however, including George Sand, Ivan Turgenev, Henry James, and Guy de Maupassant, the latter serving as his literary apprentice. A complex personality, obsessed with his art, Flaubert is perhaps best understood through his voluminous *Correspondence* (published 1894–1899). In these candid and spontaneous letters, Flaubert chronicles his developing literary philosophy and the meticulous research and writing of his works.

Works in Literary Context

Flaubert's name has long been linked to realism, and *Madame Bovary* has long figured as a sacred text of literary "mimesis" (the representation of reality). Flaubert's lesser-known *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1895) uses autobiography as both theme and inspiration to tell the story of a fourth-century Christian hermit. The novel revisits other common Flaubertian themes, including destruction and creation.

Realism The earliest recorded use of the term *realism* came in a Parisian periodical of 1826. Having defined it as a "literary doctrine . . . that would lead to the imitation not of artistic masterpieces but of the originals that nature offers us," the journalist added that realism "might well emerge . . . as the literature of the nineteenth century, the literature of truth." Realism was not to achieve wide currency until the 1850s, however, and then it would be used in conjunction with a certain style in painting, in particular the paintings of Gustave Courbet. Realism was rarely used without the epithet *sordid* or *vulgar*. Despite the fact that Flaubert refused to think of himself as a realist, his name has been long associated with realism. In fact, *Madame Bovary* figures often as its canonical text. In fact, Flaubert's descriptions in this novel were considered so grotesquely realistic that the government charged both the author and the publisher with immorality (though both parties were acquitted).

Flaubert believed writers must write about observed, actual facts, which relates to the devotion to science indicative of this period. In this sense, he was very much a realist. He wished the writer to be, like the scientist, objective, impartial, and impersonal. Flaubert was also a Platonist who believed in the Socratic dictum that the True, the Beautiful, and the Good are one. He was convinced that if the writer presented the true through the beautiful, his work would also be morally good.

Social Criticism Although Flaubert sought to depict objective reality in his works, themes of social criticism are apparent as well, with a clear reflection of specific attitudes regarding social class. In *Madame Bovary*, the ambition and vanity of Emma Bovary leads her to live beyond her means; many see this as a condemnation of the bourgeois middle class of the period, many of whom envied the life of aristocrats but still had to work for a living. Likewise, ambition becomes the downfall of Emma's husband, Charles, who is a doctor. He is convinced by a colleague to attempt a risky and unnecessary surgery that could possibly expand his reputation; the surgery is disastrous, however, and the patient loses a leg. Flaubert also depicts the complicity of merchants and moneylenders in creating an atmosphere of unhappiness through the character of Monsieur Lheureux. He convinces Emma to buy unnecessary goods on credit, which leads to a destructive cycle of debt from which she never escapes.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Flaubert's famous contemporaries include:

Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893): Flaubert's protégé, Maupassant is considered one of the first, and greatest, modern short-story writers. His stories often feature intricate and clever plot twists and sudden, unexpected endings.

Harriet Tubman (1821–1913): African American abolitionist and Union spy during the United States Civil War; Tubman rescued more than seventy slaves using a network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. In the postwar era, Tubman struggled for women's suffrage.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): Zola is remembered as both an important naturalist writer and a leader in radical French politics. In 1898 Zola came to the defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French army officer who had been railroaded partly on anti-Semitic grounds; Zola's essay "j'accuse" ("I accuse")—for which he was brought up on libel charges—remains one of the best examples of political agitation against institutionalized oppression.

William Henry Vanderbilt (1821–1885): American businessman, philanthropist, and wealthy son of Cornelius Vanderbilt. During his life, Vanderbilt was the richest man in the world as no living person, even the world's richest royalty, approached him in wealth at the time of his death.

Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883): In contrast to his contemporaries and fellow novelists Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Turgenev lobbied for increased westernization of Russia. His views put him at odds with many of his countrymen, and he spent much time abroad, forging a close friendship with Flaubert during his time in Paris.

Victor Hugo (1802–1885): A leader of the French Romantic movement, Hugo was also a poet, playwright, politician, and essayist. He is best remembered today for his novels *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.

Autobiography *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* is a difficult work to describe. It could be called a philosophical prose poem or a dramatic narration and dialogue. Flaubert's identification with Anthony is at the heart of this strange work. There can be little doubt that this is a portrait of the artist himself, of an obstinate artist who resisted all self-doubt and every temptation in order to remain faithful to his self-imposed mission to his text. It also reflects the fear of decadence that haunted the nineteenth century. This was the legacy of the historical relativism of the Enlightenment related to the comparative study of religions in Flaubert's day.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Flaubert is perhaps the most well-known realist author, but he was hardly the only writer to produce classic works in that genre. Some others are:

Germinal (1885), a novel by Émile Zola. A writer of the naturalist school, which followed directly and built upon the tropes of realism, Zola's meticulous approach to his research and writing put even Flaubert to shame. In this, his thirteenth novel and widely acknowledged masterpiece, Zola tells the story of a French miners' strike in unrelentingly harsh and realistic terms.

Adam Bede (1859), a novel by George Eliot. The pen name of Mary Ann Evans, who used a male name to make sure her books would not be dismissed out of hand, Eliot was one of the most successful realist writers of the nineteenth century. This, her first published novel, tells a story of accusations of child murder set in a small rural village.

War and Peace (1869), a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Perhaps the best-known novel of all time, Tolstoy's first great masterpiece, which traces the fortunes of five Russian families during the Napoleonic wars, is also considered by some to be the pinnacle of realist literature.

"The Necklace" (1884), a short story by Guy de Maupassant. Maupassant was a protégé of Flaubert and took the latter's novelistic techniques and refined them to masterly usage in the short-story format. In this, the most well-known of his short stories, the author weaves a tale of middle-class aspirations and lost dreams and ends with one of his trademark twist endings.

Works in Critical Context

Although some critics fault his pessimism, cold impersonality, and ruthless objectivity, it is universally acknowledged that Flaubert developed, through painstaking attention to detail and constant revision, an exquisite prose style that has served as a model for innumerable writers. Today, commentators consistently acknowledge Flaubert's contribution to the development of the novel, lauding *Madame Bovary* as one of the most important forces in creating the modern novel as a conscious art form. Recognized for its objective characterization, irony, narrative technique, and use of imagery and symbolism, *Madame Bovary* is almost universally hailed as Flaubert's masterpiece.

Madame Bovary Perhaps because of the notoriety that *Madame Bovary* earned upon its serial publication in 1856, the book enjoyed popular success. Its charms were not entirely lost on reviewers, either, with many

popular figures—including Charles Baudelaire—commenting positively about the work. Critic Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve, writing in *Causeries du Lundi*, stated, "*Madame Bovary* is first and foremost a book, a carefully composed book, amply premeditated and totally coherent, in which nothing is left to chance and in which the author or, better, the painter does exactly what he intends to do from beginning to end." An unsigned essayist from the *Atlantic Monthly*, writing in 1891—several years after the first English translations of the novel had appeared—contended, "The truth of *Madame Bovary* has stamped its impress deeply into literature, and the word 'realism' would have to be widely diverted from its simple and spontaneous meaning to exclude such a work from its category." Harry Thurston Peck, in an 1895 essay for *Bookman*, offered this evaluation: "The vividness and truth of its every character, the compact and muscular form in which it is cast, the absolute perfection of its style, all raised it to the rank of a classic from the moment of its completion." Critical opinion of the novel has only improved in the decades that followed, and it is widely recognized as one of the greatest novels ever written. Michael Dirda, in a 2004 review for the *Washington Post*, called the book "the most controlled and beautifully articulated formal masterpiece in the history of fiction," and further stated that "if you've never read it, or if you've only worked through it in first-year college French, you need to sit down with this book as soon as possible. This is one of the summits of prose art, and not to know such a masterpiece is to live a diminished life."

Nearly fifty American editions have been issued, while there have been more than a dozen different translations into English. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound all found in Flaubert a master from whom a lesson in writing could be learned. Pound unabashedly proposed Flaubert to his compatriots as an example to be appreciated and followed: "America needs a Flaubert to generalize and register the national folly without a tender hand." Joyce is said to have read everything by Flaubert that was in print and to have learned whole pages by heart.

Sentimental Education Flaubert encountered more critical woes with the publication of his novel *Sentimental Education*. During the writing process, he was tormented by doubts about the book. While he intended to sketch bourgeois characters, he scorned the bourgeoisie and feared his readers would too. He also doubted his ability to depict the characters effectively. Flaubert's many misgivings about *Sentimental Education* were realized immediately after the work's publication. Critics derided the book: They accused him, as they had with *Madame Bovary*, of baseness and vulgarity; questioned his morality; attacked the novel's descriptive passages as tedious and redundant; deplored the absence of a strong hero; labeled the narrative awkward and disjointed; resented Flaubert's exposure of illusions held dear about the political events of 1848; and even claimed that

Flaubert had lost forever what literary skills he may have once possessed. The reviews were so negative, in fact, that Flaubert suspected he was the victim of a plot to defame him. Yet modern scholars generally agree that the explanation is much simpler: Most readers were not ready for what appeared to them to be a novel in which subject, plot, and character were merely background features, and few could easily bear its despairing tone and bleak atmosphere.

Responses to Literature

1. Gustave Flaubert has been called the master of “Art for Art’s Sake.” Research the literary school of realism and the idea of “art for art’s sake” and discuss Flaubert’s work in those terms.
2. Flaubert, it is said, was attempting to write realistically, to report what he saw, and to write with the beautiful precision of the language of science. Discuss how a work of literature can be said to resemble, in style, tone, rhythm, or diction, a piece of music or a work of science.
3. Read *Madame Bovary* and discuss the various parallels between that novel and the short story “A Simple Heart.” In particular, examine the similarities and differences in the worldviews expressed in the two works.
4. Discuss the reaction to *Madame Bovary* at the time of its publication and how critical opinion has changed over time. What does this tell you about the changes in society from the time of its publication onward?
5. Investigate the lives of the French middle class during the nineteenth century. How strict was their class system? What moral standards did they follow?

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■ Ian Fleming

BORN: 1908, London, England

DIED: 1964, Canterbury, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Casino Royale (1953)

From Russia with Love (1957)

Doctor No (1958)

Goldfinger (1959)

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car (1964)

Overview

Ian Fleming is best known as the creator of James Bond (Agent 007), a character that spurred the development of the spy-thriller genre in fiction. He was also, however, a journalist, financier, and collector of rare books, who during World War II served as the aide to the British director of naval intelligence.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Father Killed in Action Ian Lancaster Fleming was born on May 28, 1908, in the Mayfair district of London.



Ian Fleming Fleming, Ian, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

He was the second son of Valentine Fleming and Evelyn Beatrice Ste. Croix Rose. Fleming's father was a wealthy investment banker in the firm of Robert Fleming and Company, which had been founded by Fleming's grandfather. When Fleming was nine years old, his father was killed in action in World War I.

By Valentine Fleming's will, Evelyn Fleming was given control of the income from her husband's fortune as long as she lived and did not remarry. For Fleming, this stipulation meant that he would receive no money from his father's estate unless his mother agreed, and this arrangement would continue even after Fleming reached adulthood. He was, therefore, obliged to conform to her wishes until he was able to achieve financial independence.

Tumultuous School Days Fleming began his education in 1916 at Durnford School on the Isle of Purbeck. The cult of physical toughness received greater emphasis at Durnford than did academic studies, reinforcing Fleming's lack of interest in scholarly pursuits. Fleming's lackluster academic career continued after he went on to Eton in 1921. There, despite a stellar performance in individual sporting events, he had difficulty in yielding to authority and refused to follow the rules set by his housemaster. In 1926, disappointed with his poor academic performance, his mother removed him from Eton so that he could prepare at a special tutorial college for the entrance examination at the Royal Military College

(now the Royal Military Academy) at Sandhurst in preparation for a career as an officer in the army.

Fleming never adjusted to the requirements of military discipline, and his habit of leaving the grounds without permission to meet women in town did not bode well for a career in the military. He contracted gonorrhea before completing his training course and left school to recuperate. Pressured by his mother, who feared that the truth of his illness would come out and bring shame to the family, he submitted his resignation to become effective September 1, 1927. After leaving Sandhurst he attended Tennerhof, an experimental private school in the Austrian Alps. There he read widely, traveled around Europe, studied languages, took up skiing and mountain-climbing, and continued his active pursuit of amorous adventures.

A Foray into Journalism Fleming also spent some of his time preparing for the Foreign Office examination, which he took in 1931. He ranked twenty-fifth of the sixty-two who sat for the rigorous examination, not nearly high enough for any of the three positions available. Through his mother's influence he obtained an interview with Sir Roderick Jones of the Reuters news agency. Fleming impressed Jones with his language abilities, wide-ranging knowledge, and manner, and Jones hired him on a trial basis at a salary of 300 pounds per year. Fleming reluctantly moved in with his mother at her Chelsea home until he could make enough money to live on his own.

Fleming did well at Reuters, and after more than a year of routine editing and reporting, he was sent to Moscow in April 1933 to cover the trial of six British engineers working in the Soviet Union who were being tried for sabotage, espionage, and bribery. Fleming knew enough Russian to communicate effectively with Moscow residents, and he was excited by the trial. He set up elaborate preparations to scoop the opposition when the verdict came in but was beaten out by twenty minutes.

A Career in Finance When Fleming returned to England, Reuters offered him a position as assistant to the bureau chief in Shanghai at an annual salary of eight hundred pounds. Although it was a significant increase and he liked the excitement of the life of a foreign correspondent, he needed still more money to live in the style he enjoyed. When his grandfather Robert Fleming had died earlier that year, Fleming had not been provided for in the will. Fleming decided to follow his mother's advice to seek a more lucrative career in the London financial world. Through the combined influence of his mother and his mistress, Maud Russell, he found a position with Cull and Company, a merchant banking firm. Fleming hoped to be made partner of the firm when Maud's husband, Gilbert, retired, but two years later, Gilbert Russell postponed retirement indefinitely. In June 1935, Fleming moved to the brokerage firm Rowe and Pitman

as a junior partner with an income that promised to be more than two thousand pounds a year.

In early 1937, Fleming moved out of his mother's Chelsea home and into an unusual flat in a converted Baptist chapel constructed in 1830. He began to entertain frequently, particularly a group of friends to which he gave the title *Le Cercle gastronomique et des jeux de hasard*. He also began to collect books, encasing them in expensive black boxes with which he lined the windowless walls of the converted nave that served as his living room.

Goldeneye With the outbreak of World War II, Fleming obtained a position in the naval intelligence division, rising to the rank of commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, the rank that he eventually assigned to James Bond. The life that he lived and some of the people he met during the war would find their way into his novels. For example, Fleming once attempted to take the money of some German agents in a card game just as Bond did with Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*; where Fleming failed, however, Bond succeeded. When in 1941 Fleming accompanied Admiral John Godfrey, the director of naval intelligence, to the United States to establish relations with American intelligence services, he was allowed to take part in a clandestine operation against a Japanese cipher expert. Fleming later embellished this story as well and used it in *Casino Royale*. Critics have been tempted to see Bond as the personification of his creator. They do have certain interests in common, such as gambling, sports, and cars, but Fleming maintained that Bond is simply the incarnation of his own adolescent fantasies.

Among the places Fleming visited during the war was Jamaica, and at the end of the war he purchased shoreline property there, built a house, and named the estate "Goldeneye." Although Fleming returned to journalism after the war, serving as foreign manager of the Kelmsley group of newspapers, it was at Goldeneye that he began to work on the James Bond novels. It was these works that finally gave him the financial independence he had so long desired.

James Bond and Other Successes Using his experience with British intelligence as a basis, Fleming began turning out spy novels featuring secret agent 007, James Bond. Although not an immediate hit in America, sales of the books took off after President John F. Kennedy put *From Russia with Love* on a list of his favorite books.

Between 1953 and 1966, Fleming wrote a total of fourteen Bond books, all of which would eventually be made into film adaptations. Film rights to all published and future Bond books were sold in 1961; *Dr. No*, the first Bond film, premiered in 1962. Not expected to do particularly well, the first Bond film was an instant smash hit and kicked off a "spy craze" that would permeate popular culture for the remainder of the decade.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fleming's famous contemporaries include:

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963): Charismatic American president whose brief term coincided with such important events as the Cuban missile crisis, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the beginnings of the space race and the civil rights movement. His assassination in 1963 has been observed to mark the end of an era in American politics and society.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): One of the greatest poets of the twentieth century and an influence on its poetry as a critic and publisher, his long modernist poem "The Waste Land" became a rallying cry for the disillusionment felt by many young people after the First World War.

Sean Connery (1930–): The first actor to portray James Bond on the movie screen, the respected Scottish actor was knighted in July 2000 in recognition of his long and successful movie career.

Kingsley Amis (1922–1995): A prominent British novelist in the years after World War II, he was one of a group of writers known as Britain's "angry young men." After Fleming's death, he published a James Bond novel *Colonel Sun* (1968) as well as a study *The James Bond Dossier* (1965).

Fleming also wrote the popular children's book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, which was made into a live-action Disney movie, and a nonfiction book on diamond smugglers. Fleming died on August 12, 1964. Although the official cause was a heart attack, he had been a heavy smoker and drinker throughout his life and had long been in poor health.

Works in Literary Context

The Spy Thriller The genre that would come to be known as the spy thriller began with the twentieth century. Books like *Kim* (1901) by Rudyard Kipling and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) by Baroness Orczy delved into the exploits of undercover agents. Several Sherlock Holmes stories follow the pattern of spy stories more closely than detective stories as well.

With the coming of World War II, the first "authentic" spy novels, often written by retired intelligence officers such as W. Somerset Maugham, began to appear. But it would take the cold war between Soviet Russia and the United States to truly ignite public interest in the genre.

The 1960s were the high point for the spy genre, as it spread beyond books into movies and television. For

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ian Fleming's Bond books virtually defined the modern spy novel; here are some other worthy representatives of the genre:

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (1963), a novel by John Le Carré. Voted the best spy novel of all time by *Publisher's Weekly*, this tightly plotted novel depicts "the good guys" in a distinctly cynical light.

Kim (1901), a novel by Rudyard Kipling. Set among the intricate moves and countermoves of the Great Game, the political conflict between Britain and Russia in central Asia during the nineteenth century.

Ashenden (1928), a novel by W. Somerset Maugham. Based on the author's experiences serving with British intelligence during World War I, this is often credited as being the first true espionage novel.

many, the Bond books and movies remain the definitive benchmarks of the genre.

Influence The formula of the Bond novels gave birth to a whole genre, the spy thriller, which has been imitated ad nauseum ever since. Many spy novels are actually "anti-Bonds," in which the heroes display a rather loose view of morality and a cynical worldview; the novels of John Le Carré were an early example of this. Later writers such as Robert Ludlum and Tom Clancy honed and perfected the spy thriller.

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Fleming's books has varied. Some reviewers have commended Fleming's ability to build suspense and his sense of place and atmosphere; others have castigated him as a purveyor of bad fiction and an offensive code of moral principles. In a 1958 attack on Fleming's work, Bernard Bergonzi criticized the Bond adventures as morally destructive. Paul Johnson focused this attack when he called *Doctor No* the "nastiest book" he had ever read, and then went on to denounce Bond and his creator for excessive displays of "sex, sadism, and snobbery." Christine Bold has written that "it is no secret that Fleming's fiction ritually works to objectify and infantilise its 'girls,' as these sexually mature women are routinely named." Kingsley Amis's book *The James Bond Dossier* is an extended defense of Fleming and a laudatory examination of his works. The Bond books have also been analyzed as modern treatments of ancient myths and legends. Despite this attention from critics, Fleming insisted that his intent was not to write literature, but to keep the reader turning the page.

Casino Royale The first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, was published in 1953 to largely agreeable

reviews and sales. Anthony Boucher, in a review for the *New York Times*, saw promise in certain passages but not in the clichéd plot, concluding, "You should certainly begin this book; but you might as well stop when the baccarat game is over." In 2006, with a new film adaptation of the book just released in theaters, Nicholas Lezard of the *Guardian* recommended the book to modern readers, both for its glimpse at English society just after World War II and because the book, like all of Bond's adventures, is "enormous fun."

Responses to Literature

1. Select a James Bond novel and movie. How do the two compare? How different is the literary James Bond from his cinematic alter ego? Does the difference seem more pronounced if the movie was made many years after the book's publishing date?
2. What conventions of the spy thriller did the Bond books create?
3. The success of the James Bond novels is owed in large part to being written at a time when American readers were particularly receptive to spy stories. What was going on in America and abroad at the beginning of the 1960s that would have made tales of espionage so popular? Why do you think there was a "spy craze"?

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Dario Fo

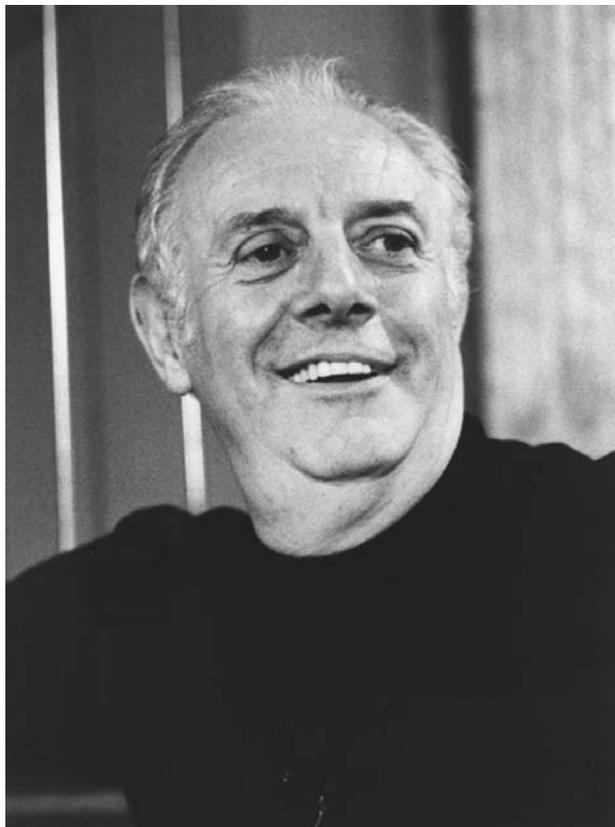
BORN: 1926, San Giano, Lombardy, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

- Archangels Don't Play Pinball* (1959)
- He Who Steals Foot Is Lucky in Love* (1961)
- It's Always the Devil's Fault* (1965)
- Comic Mystery* (1969)
- Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970)



Dario Fo Fo, Dario, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

For more than fifty years, Italian playwright Dario Fo has been a central figure in theater. His preoccupation has always been to question and denounce the injustices imposed on human beings around the world, and although his theater has used comedy to expose the corruption, dishonesty, and arrogance of the powerful, he has always provoked serious reactions throughout the world. Fo's ideological stance has always been accompanied by a personal commitment, beyond the theater, to help and support those who suffer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Creativity in Family Tree Fo was born in San Giano, Italy, on March 24, 1926. His father, Felice, was a railway stationmaster and a socialist, while his mother, Pina Rota, was an educated woman of peasant origin and tradition. Fo's parents were not insensitive to the appeal of art and culture. His father was an amateur actor, and his mother had written a critically acclaimed autobiographical book, *The Nation of Frogs* (1970). Fo's grandfather, Giuseppe Rota, was a natural-born storyteller

and was also important to the boy's development as a performer and playwright. In an early interview, Fo traced his own talent for theater and literature to this grandparent.

Interrupted Schooling In 1940, Fo enrolled at the Accademia d'Arte di Brera to study architecture, but was unable to attend his courses because of the outbreak of World War II. The war in Europe began because of the territorial ambitions of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Germany, which had been heavily penalized after losing World War I, sought to regain its stature and invested heavily in its military in the early 1930s. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. France, and later the United States, allied with Britain, to form the Allied Powers while Italy, among others, including Japan and various central and eastern European powers, allied with Germany to form the Axis Powers.

Italy was ruled by its own fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, for much of the war. However, defeats in Greece and North Africa and the invasion of Sicily by the United States and its allies, led to the end of Mussolini's regime in July 1943. Italy was soon divided into two warring zones. One was in the south and controlled by the Allies, while the north, including Rome, was controlled by the Germans, who formed the Italian Social Republic with Mussolini as its head. German power eventually collapsed, and the Axis Powers lost the war. Mussolini was later executed for his role in the conflict.

This period is nonetheless important, because Fo befriended intellectuals who later dominated the landscape of Italian culture in the 1960s and 1970s. These friends included Carlo Lizzani, Elio Vittorini, Carlo Bo, and Gillo Pontecorvo. His family took an active part in the antifascist resistance, and Fo helped his father to smuggle refugees and Allied soldiers to Switzerland, while his mother cared for wounded partisans. After Italy was divided in 1943, Fo was conscripted into the army of the Italian Social Republic. He managed to escape, however, and hid until the end of the war.

Theatrical Beginnings After the war, Fo continued his studies in Milan at the faculty of architecture of the Politecnico. He never completed his curriculum for graduation, but he got a part-time job as an assistant architect and began to draw theater scenes and to exhibit his paintings and drawings. He also began to frequent the Milan theatrical scene, where his encounter with the actor and theater manager Franco Parenti turned out to be decisive for his future career. Fo became involved in the "small theatre" (community theater) movement, where he performed improvised monologues. In 1950, he started to work for a theater company led by Parenti. In 1951, Fo performed "Poor Little Thing," a series of satirical monologues, as part of the revue *Seven Days in Milan* at the Teatro Odeon in Milan. It was his first

experience in an “official” theater. Parenti also introduced Fo into the Italian State Broadcasting Company, RAI, where Fo performed his monologues on the radio program *Chicchirichi* that year.

In 1953 and 1954, working in collaboration with Parenti and Giustino Durano, Fo was the author and actor of the shows *A Finger in the Eye* (1953) and *Fit to Be Tied Up* (1954), which were staged at the Piccolo Teatro of Milan. Both shows experienced censorship interference due to their anti-government content.

Brief Foray into Film In 1955, Fo and his wife, Franca Rame, worked in movie production in Rome. Fo became a screenwriter and worked on many productions, having signed a contract with the Dino de Laurentiis Film Company. In 1956, he was the coauthor and lead actor of *The Duffer*. The film was a commercial failure.

In 1959, the Company Fo-Rame was established, and for the next nine years opened each theater season at the Odeon in Milan with a new play or show. In addition to taking part in her husband’s comedies, Rame took charge of the administrative responsibilities of the company, while Fo focused more on playwriting and acting.

Finding a Dramatic Voice Fo’s activity as a dramatist had begun in the 1950s, when he wrote seven farces that were collected and performed later under the titles *Thieves, Dummies and Naked Women* (1958) and *Final Gag* (1958). He wrote his first three “regular” plays between 1959 and 1961: *Archangels Don’t Play Pinball* (1959), *He Had Two Pistols with White and Black Eyes* (1960), and *He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love* (1961). These early plays represent Fo’s willingness to find a personal and original voice in the theatrical panorama of Italian playwriting of the 1960s.

As Fo began finding his dramatic voice, Italy was recovering from the effects of World War II. When the war ended, Italy was poverty-stricken and politically fragmented. Reconstituted as a republic in 1946, the country soon adopted a new constitution, though it nearly collapsed because of the physical and economic devastation of the war. After receiving foreign assistance in the early 1950s, Italy rebounded economically and experienced unprecedented development through the 1950s and 1960s.

Political Revolution and ARCI In Europe throughout the early twentieth century, many intellectuals and artists embraced communism and a viable, desirable alternative to the nationalistic totalitarian regimes of the past. The growing political dominance of the Soviet Union in eastern Europe after World War II caused many to reconsider their connection to the communist party. In Italy, many members and supporters of the Italian Communist Party abandoned the organization. Fo had never become a member of the Italian Communist Party, while Rame did, but regarded the

group with the utmost interest and believed that the needs of the working class were best met through communism. For this reason, he decided to cooperate with ARCI (the Communist Party association for recreation and culture, with a membership of about one million). After dissolving the Company Fo-Rame, he founded the Company New Scene. The new company toured Italy and other countries to stage their works in places that reflected their social engagement, such as circuses, squares, culture clubs, university assembly halls, and factories occupied by striking workers.

Attacking America During this period, Fo staged two new plays, *Throw the Lady Out* (1967) and *Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small, Middle-Sized and Large Puppets* (1968). Both plays are satires set in circuses, and both attack the United States for its capitalist, consumerist culture and its involvement in the Vietnam War. Comments made in the play about President John F. Kennedy’s assassination were considered so outrageous, especially in the United States, that President Lyndon Johnson and American authorities denied Fo a visa to enter the country. This prohibition remained in effect until 1986.

Fo’s Masterpiece The year 1969 was a crucial year for Fo’s art and career. He completed the first version of *Comic Mystery*, widely considered his masterpiece. The play drew criticism, however, on grounds of supposed irreverence and blasphemy.

A dramatic incident at the end of 1969 marked Fo both personally and artistically. A bomb killed nineteen people in a bank in Piazza Fontana, Milan. This brutal, anonymous attack started what became known as “the season of bombs,” a period of increased violence, killings, and bomb attacks in Italy. Fo believed high-ranking members of the government were behind the attacks. In 1970, he staged *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, inspired by the Piazza Fontana incident and centering on the death of the anarchist Pino Pinelli at the police headquarters of Milan in 1969.

A New Play in a New Theater In 1973, Fo, Rame, and the members of their theater company occupied an old abandoned building in Milan called Palazzina Liberty. After completely restoring it, including its theater, they opened the new structure in 1974 with *We Can’t Pay? We Won’t Pay!* This play, about a tax protest by housewives, features one of Fo’s most famous gags: two women steal regularly from a supermarket, concealing items under their overcoats as if they were pregnant.

Woman’s Work The works that followed had contemporary value: *Fanfani Kidnapped* (1975) was written against the background of the political election that year, and *Mother’s Marijuana Is the Best* (1976) deals with the increasing problem of drug use among young working-class Italians. Toward the end of the 1970s, Fo wrote for and with Rame a series of one-act plays and monologues

about the female condition, including *All House, Bed and Church* (1977). This series of one-act plays was highly successful, even though Rame stated on opening night that perhaps the only flaw of the work was that Fo wrote most of it, and, his being “unequivocally a man” he was “unable to penetrate the contradictions, humiliations and harassments to which we [women] are subject.” Notwithstanding this flaw, the play series was staged all over Europe, Canada, and the United States.

As the cooperation in playwriting with Rame had been so fruitful, Fo continued the experience, producing more monologues for actors. In 1978, Fo completed the third version of *Comic Mystery*. He also rewrote and directed *Story of a Soldier*, based on Igor Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (1918).

The Moro Affair Letters Fo could not avoid being interested in the Moro Affair, probably the most shocking political crime in the history of the Italian Republic. In March 1978, a commando of the Red Brigades (a clandestine revolutionary Communist organization) kidnapped Aldo Moro, premier and leader of the Christian Democratic Party. *The Tragedy of Aldo Moro*, published in the periodical *Quotidiano dei lavoratori* in June 1979, is an intensely dramatic work, based on the letters Moro wrote from the place where he was kept. In spite of the interest of the theme and the considerable artistic value of the text, the play has never been performed publicly.

American Ban Lifted American authorities suspended their ban on Fo's entry into the country in 1984. Two years later he toured the United States, presenting his works and lecturing in many theaters and universities.

After *The Pope and the Witch* (1989)—a harsh criticism of the authorities managing the centers for drug addiction, prevention, and care—Fo turned to the issue of AIDS with *Quiet! We Are All Falling!* in 1990. He wrote *Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas* (1990), then turned to the sixteenth century to write an adaptation on the works of an anticlassist in *Dario Fo Recites Ruzzante* (1993). In 1993, Fo also wrote *Mama! The Sans-Culottes!*, a metaphorical play that is based on an actual event, an attempted coup d'état in Italy by the military supported by sections of the Secret Service. Beginning with this play, Fo became more interested in problems regarding the Italian justice system, focusing particularly on the pressures exerted against judges who only wish to do their duty.

Illness and Recovery On July 17, 1995, Fo was disabled and almost lost his sight because of an attack of cerebral ischemia (decreased supply of blood to the brain, often caused by blockage or obstruction of supplying blood vessels). He recovered within a year and returned to the stage in 1996 with *The Emperor's Bible, the Peasants' Bible*, derived, as the author has stated, from an “illuminated codex of the ninth century.” He also revis-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fo's famous contemporaries include:

Don Arden (1926–2007): The English music manager who represented such artists and groups as Black Sabbath, Electric Light Orchestra (ELO), and Small Faces.

César Chávez (1927–1993): The Mexican American farmworker who was also an activist and civil rights leader. He cofounded the National Farm Workers Association.

Robert Bly (1926–): An American poet and activist. He founded the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. Bly's books include *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990).

Hugh Hefner (1926–): An American entrepreneur who is the famous founder of Playboy Enterprises.

Todd Matshikiza (1921–1968): A South African jazz pianist, composer, and activist who was instrumental in apartheid resistance efforts and who was subsequently exiled by the South African government. His works include the choral piece *Makhaphile* (1953).

ited corruption with his play *The Devil with Tits* (1997). Also in 1997, Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, causing an uproar in some intellectual circles in Italy. Aside from the controversial nature of many of his plays, opponents felt that his work was mere clowning and did not have the literary merit to deserve the prize. Fo, delighted by the uproar, turned his Nobel lecture into another performance. With the money from the prize, Fo and Rame founded The Nobel for the Disabled, an organization dedicated to assisting the handicapped.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fo presented several more themes of personal and public interest—including works on justice and *The Holy Jester Francis* (1999), which suggested St. Francis of Assisi was the first jester ever known. In 2007, Fo published his memoirs, *My First Seven Years (Plus a Few More)*. The book shares his childhood in Italy and reiterates the greatest influences on his art. He continues to live in Italy and produce original works.

Works in Literary Context

Influenced by his paternal grandfather's story-telling ability as well as his own passion for current events, Fo's themes are typically those that interest him personally and the contemporary society as a whole. The themes preferred by Fo, especially in later years, have been those that, above all, address the issues of injustice and discrimination in the world.

Comic Style for Serious Themes Fo has always perceived himself as a modern jester, one who has assigned

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also written on themes of social injustice:

Freedom Songs (1991), a novel by Yvette Moore. In this novel for young adults, the author explores the life of one family living in the early 1960s and the impact of the civil rights movement on their lives.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), a novel by Harper Lee. In this novel, human dignity is nearly destroyed but restored when the humanitarian lawyer Atticus Finch goes to court.

Maus (1977), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. In this unusual but provocative format for the story of the Holocaust, the Jewish people are portrayed as mice and the Nazis are depicted as cats.

The U.S.A. Trilogy (1938), three novels by John Dos Passos. In this collection of three novels, the author uses innovative literary techniques to explore the development of America in the early twentieth century. The books examine such issues as the treatment of immigrants, urban blight, and the rise of unions.

himself the task of denouncing—by means of jokes and mockery—what he finds wrong with society. Some of his most serious themes are treated in comic fashion by his using grotesque comedy or presenting in farce.

Quiet! We Are All Falling! can be defined as a grotesque situation comedy—in which a concoction of themes is dealt with in a way that enhances the monstrous features of power—even if people have become accustomed to them to a point that they have become unaware of their true nature. *Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small, Middle-Sized and Large Puppets* (1968) is a popular farce that starts to explore fascism and evolves into political slurs against the bourgeoisie (middle class), the military, and the Catholic hierarchy. *He Had Two Pistols* is farce, and at the same time it tends to evoke more the tones and atmospheres of dark or black comedy.

Works in Critical Context

Fo's comedies have met with government censorship. Yet, many have also been received by the general public and by entertainment and literary critics with much respect and praise. His farce *A Finger in the Eye* was a critical and commercial success. *Fit to Be Tied Up* was frequently sold out. Other plays have not fared as well, such as *He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love* and *It's Always the Devil's Fault*.

He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love In *He Who Steals a Foot* the myth of Apollo and Daphne is revisited,

yet deprived of any classical dignity. It is cast in a farcical light that stresses the popular and possibly vulgar developments of the theme. This event triggers a freewheeling succession of misunderstandings, gags, and misrepresentations. Paolo Puppa, in his *Dario Fo's Theater: From the Stage to the Piazza* (1978), regarded this comedy as the “most bookish” of Fo's plays.

It's Always the Devil's Fault In the 1965 *It's Always the Devil's Fault*, Fo relies largely on quick-changing disguises and fast rhythm. The action develops without any delays until the farcical ending, when the play's heretics rebel, claiming their long-denied rights. This play did not receive positive reviews from the critics. As Piero Novelli wrote in *Gazzetta del Popolo*, it was so overloaded with gags and scene changes that it created genuine confusion on stage.

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, research the elements of farce, grotesque comedy, and black comedy. How do Fo's plays fit these categories?
2. While reading Fo's plays, mark or highlight sections you think might be offensive to certain groups of people. Do you think Fo intended to be offensive? What purposes might giving offense serve?
3. Those interested in the social and political history of Europe following World War II should read *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (2006), by Tony Judt. Judt, an academic historian, provides a highly readable and carefully researched portrait of the birth of modern Europe.

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Ken Follett

BORN: 1949, Cardiff, Wales

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Eye of the Needle (1978)

The Man from St. Petersburg (1982)

Lie Down with Lions (1985)

The Pillars of the Earth (1989)

World Without End (2007)

Overview

Ken Follett began his career as a fiction writer while working for the *London Evening News*. He produced a series of mysteries and thrillers (two for children) under various pseudonyms until he felt he had learned enough and had written well enough to author under his own name. Since that time, Follett has become one of the world's youngest millionaire authors, making his fortune writing international thrillers that blend historical events and action-adventure fiction. After the success of his first best seller, *Eye of the Needle*, each of Follett's subsequent novels has debuted with massive first printings and vast publicity. His works strike a balance between the serious and the popular and have been praised for their psychological complexity as well as the sensitive treatment Follett gives his female characters.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Work: Journalism and Rock and Roll
Born in Cardiff, Wales, on June 5, 1949, the son of Martin and Lavinia Follett (the former an internal revenue clerk), Kenneth Martin Follett attended University College in London, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy in 1970. While still at university, on January 5, 1968, he married Mary Emma Ruth Elson, who worked as a bookkeeper to help put Follett through school. The Folletts have a son, Emanuele, and a daughter, Marie-Claire.



Ken Follett TORSTEN SILZ / AFP / Getty Images

Follett began his career in journalism as rock music columnist for the *South Wales Echo* from 1970 to 1973. Then he became a crime reporter for the *London Evening News* from 1973 to 1974, an editorial director for Everest Books Ltd., London, from 1974 to 1976, and deputy managing director for the same company from 1976 to 1977. In the late 1970s, he became involved politically in the activities of Britain's Labour Party, and in the process met the former Barbara Broer, a Labour official, who became his second wife in 1985. More than a decade later, she became an elected Member of Parliament.

Early Success: Writing for the Masses
Follett's ideal, set forth in his 1979 essay "Books that Enchant and Delight," is a compromise between the serious and the popular, the "plot, story, excitement sensation, and the world outside the mind" that he believes serious writers too often ignore, merged with the "graceful, powerful prose" and more complex character development that mass-market writers fail to take time for.

His first novel, *The Big Needle*, published in 1974, was quickly turned out under the pseudonym Simon Myles to pay car repair bills after the birth of his daughter

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Follett's famous contemporaries include:

Neil Armstrong (1930–): American astronaut, professor, test pilot, and naval aviator. The first person to set foot on the moon.

Simon Cowell (1959–): Emmy-nominated artist and repertoire ("A & R") mogul who has produced top-selling artists around the world. Talent judge on blockbuster television series *American Idol* since 2002.

Wilma Rudolph (1940–1994): 1960 Summer Olympian who became the first American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympic season.

John Updike (1932–): Award-winning American writer of small town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize.

Oprah Winfrey (1954–): Award-winning actress, talk-show host, and philanthropist who ranks highest in such categories as the only African American billionaire (2001–2003) and most philanthropic African American of all time (2004).

Marie-Claire in 1973. It reflects its origins: sensationalist, racy, and short, with an exciting chase scene that has since become the hallmark of a Follett novel.

Breakthrough Novels Follett's big break came in 1978. The highly acclaimed *Eye of the Needle*, a Literary Guild selection and winner of the 1978 Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America, was in fact—thanks to a carefully conducted marketing campaign—on the best-seller list weeks before its actual publication. Follett's motivation remained monetary: having attended a sales conference held by Futura Publications, distributors of Everest Books, Follett was asked by Anthony Cheetham, Futura's managing director, to write an adventure story related to World War II. After a night on the town he wrote a three-paragraph summary, which the managing director lost; Follett recalled it when sober, received a commission, and wrote the book in three months. *Eye of the Needle* sold 5 million copies worldwide and was adapted for the screen by Stanley Mann and released by United Artists in 1981. The book also launched Follett's interest in World War II, a backdrop that would factor greatly in the works to follow.

Triple, published in 1979, was Follett's second best seller. It brought in \$2.5 million and a three-book, \$3-million deal with New American Library and took nine months to write. Criticized for being technically inept, *Triple* was praised for showing both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Conversely, *The Key to Rebecca*, published in 1980, had a first printing of one hundred thousand

copies, was subsidized by the leading book clubs, and serialized in several magazines. Follett took a year to write the novel and his care is reflected in the quality of its prose and characterization. It is based roughly on accounts of Erwin Rommel's 1942 North African campaign, and includes a plausible portrait of Anwar-el-Sadat as a young Egyptian army officer who is one of the leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement.

Even More Fame *On the Wings of Eagles*, published in 1983, capitalized on American bitterness over the Iran hostage crisis. In 1979, fifty-two American diplomats were taken hostage by Iranian revolutionaries opposed to U.S. intervention in their country. Though the hostages were ultimately released, the event soured relations between Iran and the United States. The book is a non-fiction account of Texas industrialist H. Ross Perot's successful rescue of two senior corporate executives from Tehran. Imprisoned during the 1979 anti-American and revolutionary movement, the executives escaped during a mob attack on the prison (assisted by the rescue team) and trekked across hostile territory to meet Perot in rural Turkey. According to Sanford Silverburg in the August 1983 *Library Journal*, this book "captures the anarchy of the Iranian revolution, the ineffectiveness of the American embassy there, and the boldness of one prominent American entrepreneur."

His 1989 novel *The Pillars of the Earth*, which Follett himself is said to regard as his finest work, has taken on a cult status since its publication. Set in the mid-twelfth century, the historical novel is concerned with the building of a Kingsbridge, England castle. For medievalists, the work's Gothic backdrop and tone combined with thriller characteristics made *Pillars* a must-read. The novel became Follett's best-selling work, listed at number thirty-three on the BBC's *Big Read*, a 2003 survey with the goal of finding the "Nation's Best-loved Book" and was a selection for Oprah's Book Club in November of 2007.

Continued High Times Along with *The Pillars of the Earth*, *A Dangerous Fortune* (1993), and *A Place Called Freedom* (1995) have also been blockbuster successes, due to his early diligence. His latest work, *World Without End* (2007), took three years to write. In the duration, he has continued to be a prominent Labour supporter, fundraiser, and occasional contributor to *Writer* magazine.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Although he is quiet about specific details of his past, in an interview with Simon Townley of *News for Medievalists*, Follett asserted, "I get inspiration from history, I read about something like, for example, the bankruptcy of the Berring Bank back in 1990. I read an article about it and I thought it would be worth looking at."

Popular Fiction Follett is a popular writer. He relies but little on metaphor and allusion and broadens the scope of his works beyond the specific facts and the series of coincidences only to play around with popular psychology, at times with feminist or romantic trappings. A. J. Mayer, in the September 29, 1980, issue of *Newsweek*, argues that, "Follett is no literary stylist," though "his clean, purposeful prose is more than adequate to the demands of his tightly plotted fast-moving story." Follett focuses on simple writing that provides a clear image in the mind of the reader, which emphasizes his carefully plotted action. Follett himself describes this style as "transparent," designed to allow the reader to enjoy the story without calling attention to the prose itself.

Works in Critical Context

While several of Follett's works have gained an international following in one respect and mixed reviews in another, several stand out as most often read, shared, and discussed—among them *Eye of the Needle*.

Eye of the Needle (1978) In the August 7, 1978, *Newsweek*, Peter Prescott called *Eye of the Needle* "rubbish of the very best sort," "a triumph of invention over convention" characterized by a "remarkable pace," an "astute use of violence," a "sense of particular environments," and of "occasionally felicitous prose." Likewise, Richard Freedman of the *New York Times Book Review* said it is "a thriller that really thrills, on both the visceral and intellectual levels," while Roderick MacLeish of *Book World-Washington Post* labeled it "a great flight-and-pursuit novel" and found its plot equal to a Frederick Forsyth novel and its writing of a quality with John Le Carré; he praises the book as "the best spy novel to come out of England in years."

Responses to Literature

1. While Reading *The Pillars of the Earth*, consider the character of Alfred. Why do you think he is so repugnant? In Part V, how do you feel when Alfred goes to Jack and grovels for a job?
2. For many years, Follett has been inspired by not only World War II themes but themes of good and evil. Who or what do you think is good in *The Pillars of the Earth*? Who or what do you see as evil? What similarities and differences would you say exist between the two? Would you say good or evil ruled?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Follett once said, "I have to be fascinated by what I am doing. World War II is the era I have been most comfortable with. I have written four novels set in that time and I am sure I'll write more. It's an exciting period to write about, the whole world felt involved in a battle of good and evil." Equally fascinated with their subjects are some of Follett's fellow writers and their hallmark works:

- The Eagle Has Landed* (1975), a novel by Jack Higgins. In this novel of political intrigue set against a World War II backdrop, the writing is so enduring readers have been known to credit the characters for its longevity.
- The Shawl* (1990), a novella by Cynthia Ozick. In this poetic novella of the Holocaust, a woman named Rosa protects her baby under a shawl, even though the baby is dead.
- Winds of War* (1971), a novel by Herman Wouk. In this immense work, readers get epic, adventure, love, and romance at once.

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C. S. Forester

BORN: 1899, Cairo, Egypt

DIED: 1966, Fullerton, California, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

- The African Queen* (1935)
- The General* (1936)



C. S. Forester *Evening Standard* / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Captain Horatio Hornblower (1939)
The Good Shepherd (1955)

Overview

A prolific author whose career spanned over forty years, C. S. Forester wrote action and adventure novels characterized by historical detail and unpretentious language. The British author was an outstanding storyteller who wrote highly cinematic fiction, and many of his books were adapted for film, including *The African Queen* (1935). His careful research and absorbing plots made him one of the top producers of popular fiction in English in the mid-twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Birth in Egypt C. S. Forester was born Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith in Cairo on August 27, 1899, the son of George Smith, an official in the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and his wife, Sarah (née Troughton). His mother returned home to England with Forester and his four older siblings so they could be educated there. From early on, he read voraciously, a book a day or more. He also developed a precocious interest in naval battles and military strategy.

Effects of War In secondary school during World War I, Forester attended Officers' Training Corps but was disqualified for military service due to a heart condition. World War I was caused by territorial tensions and entangling alliances that were spun into action by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The war soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe, resulting in massive loss of life for soldiers and civilians alike. Nearly a million British soldiers alone were killed, wiping out much of a generation of young men.

In August 1918, bereft of friends lost in the war, which was nearing its end, Forester went on a solitary four-week camping trip. During the trip he came to terms with his rejection for military service and decided to enter medical school; however, he turned out to have a profound ineptitude for anatomy. In 1921, he adopted the pen name Cecil Scott Forester and embarked on a career as an author.

Two Books a Year Forester wrote his first novel in two weeks at the astonishing rate of six thousand words a day, had it typed, and sent it off to a publishing house. After four rejections, Forester gave up on the manuscript and started another. This time he injected an element of discipline into his efforts, slashing his daily production by two-thirds. By his own admission, he had not yet mastered the art of fully developing his ideas prior to commencing work. Forester would later disparage the second novel as "very bad." Nevertheless, *The Paid Piper* (1924) would later become his third published book.

Forester's third literary effort, *A Pawn among Kings* (1924), about Napoléon Bonaparte's Russian campaign, was his first published book. Before it appeared, its publisher commissioned Forester to write a biography of Napoléon for an advance of twenty-five pounds, the first money he had earned as a writer. He subsequently wrote the biography *Josephine, Napoleon's Empress* (1925). He would later consider this phase of his career as hackwork, and his earnings were less than he had anticipated. To ensure a subsistence income, he estimated, he needed to produce at least two books a year. He supplemented his income with more biographies and articles for trade periodicals for goldsmiths, pawnbrokers, and bus drivers.

Improved Literary Status The thriller *Payment Deferred* (1926) began to establish Forester's reputation. The novel, about a bank clerk who sees an opportunity to advance by poisoning his nephew, was later adapted for the stage and screen. Keeping up his prolific pace, he published ten works in five years, including three in 1929: a biography of Horatio Nelson, a travel book, and his first work of naval fiction, *Brown on Resolution*, about a captured seaman in World War I.

Off to Hollywood In 1932, Forester moved his family to California to write for the burgeoning motion picture industry in Hollywood while continuing to crank out

historical and military fiction. At this time, motion pictures were becoming a big business in the United States in part because of the transition from silent to sound films. The demands of sound movies led to increased opportunities for writers who produced scripts for the assembly-like production of films in this period.

Forester wrote two of his finest novels in the mid-1930s. In *The African Queen* (1935), set during World War I, a missionary's daughter and a rough-mannered boat captain plan an attack on a German gunboat. *The General* (1936), sometimes considered Forester's masterpiece, is a satire of the military mentality and the shortcomings of military organization in World War I. It recounts the rise of an incompetent English officer to the rank of lieutenant general. Hitler apparently saw the character of General Curzon as the epitome of British military ineptitude and ordered his generals supplied with translations.

Hornblower at Sea Forester's deep appreciation for naval life in the Napoleonic era likely has its roots in Egypt, where he was born and spent his early years: British naval hero Horatio Nelson scored a massive victory over Napoleon's forces in the Battle of the Nile in 1798. The story of Nelson's cunning and bravery was no doubt recounted for the young Brit living, as he did, in the shadow of this major military triumph. In 1937, during a six-week voyage on a merchant ship, Forester began to develop the heroic character Captain Horatio Hornblower (clearly named after the hero of the Nile, Nelson), with whom he would forever be linked. Forester did not intend a whole series of Hornblower novels when he wrote *The Happy Return* (1937). He turned from the Hornblower character and covered the Spanish Civil War (a struggle for control of Spain between Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, and Republicans, who wanted to continue the Spanish Republic founded in 1931) for the *New York Times*. Afterward, he conceived the idea of depicting Hornblower's entire naval career.

A reluctant hero, introspective and tenacious, Hornblower represented heroism and martial fortitude for millions of readers. The eleven novels in the *Hornblower* cycle leap back and forth in chronology, chronicling his role in the Napoleonic Wars and his advancement through the ranks of the British navy from midshipman in 1794 to admiral of the fleet in 1848. The remarkably popular Hornblower novels were often serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other periodicals. The first three in the series were published together as *Captain Horatio Hornblower* in 1939.

Wartime Activities In 1938, Forester returned to Europe as a correspondent for the *New York Times* and witnessed the German annexation of Czechoslovakia. By this time, Nazi Germany, led by dictator Adolf Hitler, was acting on its territorial ambitions by taking over country after country in Europe. While the British and French implemented a policy of appeasement (which allowed

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forester's famous contemporaries include:

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): British politician and Nobel Prize-winning historian; prime minister during World War II.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): British author of literary thrillers, including *Stamboul Train* (1932).

Agatha Christie (1890–1976): Immensely popular British novelist and playwright known for detective stories and murder mysteries such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934).

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist known for works depicting male heroism, such as *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

James Michener (1907–1997): American novelist; author of meticulously researched historical sagas like *Texas* (1985).

Germany to annex territories for several years) in hopes of avoiding war, they finally saw that this policy would not work and declared war on Germany when it invaded Poland in September 1939. The war soon engulfed most of Europe, later included a Pacific theater of action, and many countries became involved worldwide.

During World War II, Forester produced propaganda material for the British Ministry of Information. His duties gave him the opportunity to travel on British warships. In the summer of 1943, on board the USS *Tennessee*, he experienced severe pains in his legs. He was diagnosed with arteriosclerosis (the hardening of arteries resulting in reduced blood flow) in the legs, a condition which sometimes led to amputation. Although friends thought he should retire, Forester's habit of writing a thousand words a day helped him reconcile himself to his situation. He suffered a severe heart attack in 1948, but as an aid to recuperation, he wrote the next Hornblower book, *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* (1950), which begins to fill in details of his hero's origins.

Tales of Fighting Sail Aside from the Hornblower novels, Forester continued to produce well-regarded works of swashbuckling fiction with a great variety of historical and military settings. *The Earthly Paradise* (1940), for example, is set against the background of Christopher Columbus's third voyage to the New World in 1498. *The Captain from Connecticut* (1941) progresses down the American coast to the Caribbean during the War of 1812. Forester also wrote a nonfiction account of that war, *The Age of Fighting Sail* (1956), which is also an exciting narrative. One of his best works, *The Ship* (1943), follows the British warship *Artemis* as it

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Forester's literary bailiwick was the open sea, where much of the world's great adventure literature is set, including the following:

Odyssey (eighth century B.C.E.), an epic poem by Homer.

The epic poem of the ancient Greeks recounts the adventures of Odysseus as he returns home to Ithaca after the Trojan War.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1797), a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This legendary poem, one of the early works of Romantic literature, is the source of the phrase "an albatross around one's neck."

Moby Dick (1851), a novel by Herman Melville. This great American novel pits man against whale in a fateful struggle to the death.

Captain Blood (1922), a novel by Rafael Sabatini. An Irish doctor, deported to the Caribbean, becomes a buccaneer in this popular adventure novel.

The Far Side of the World (1984), a novel by Patrick O'Brian. The tenth novel in a well-regarded nautical series follows Jack Aubrey aboard the HMS *Surprise* during the War of 1812.

escorts a convoy to the besieged island of Malta during World War II. Forester intersperses descriptions of action with the personal histories of various crew members.

Following World War II, Forester wrote two dark, reflective novels: *The Sky and the Forest* (1948) and *Randall and the River of Time* (1950). *The Sky and the Forest*, a somber work about the African slave trade in the nineteenth century, is also an allegorical criticism of imperialist ideology. One of his most appreciated stories is *The Good Shepherd* (1955), in which an American commander tries to protect a convoy from German submarines in 1943. It is perhaps Forester's most intense study of one of his predominant themes: the individual charged with solitary responsibility and the stresses that independent command places on character.

Forester's health declined following another heart attack in 1962. He died on April 2, 1966. The eleventh Horatio Hornblower novel, *Hornblower and the Crisis* (1967), was published posthumously, as was Forester's autobiography.

Works in Literary Context

Forester's literary sensibilities, and his interest in naval battles and military strategy, were formed at an early age. Some of the material that he devoured in his youth, such as Robert Leighton's *The Thirsty Sword* (1892) and H. Rider Haggard's novels, certainly influenced his later work, as can be seen in his depictions of physical combat.

The sea writings of Frederick Marryat prefigured the nautical genre Forester helped to define. Forester enjoyed reading nautical and military studies, particularly of the Napoleonic period. No less than fifteen of Forester's novels relate to the era of the great French emperor, who fascinated Forester and whom he considered the Hitler of the nineteenth century. Many scholars see in the character of Horatio Hornblower traces of a real British naval officer from the Napoleonic Wars, Thomas Cochrane.

"The Man Alone" A principal theme in the Hornblower novels and several of Forester's other works is that of "the man alone," the solitary hero or commander who must make weighty decisions and overcome mighty obstacles to achieve a worthy objective. This is, of course, a conventional and time-tested definition of heroism, especially of the martial variety. The nautical setting of so many of Forester's stories—in which the protagonist is literally at sea, adrift from civilization, and left to his own devices—enhances the sense of isolation with which Forester imbues his heroes.

Sensitivity to Class One notable subtheme in Forester's work is a sharply observed portrayal of class tensions, especially in British society. For example, *Brown on Resolution* savagely satirizes middle-class snobbery, and *The African Queen* reveals the hypocrisy saturating the class system in Britain. But Forester never could remove himself from the conventions of that system. Invariably in his novels, characters from the lower social orders—such as Charlie Allnutt, the protagonist of *The African Queen*—are inarticulate and often display a cringing subservience to their "betters." In the Hornblower series, the author often refers to his hero's poverty and non-aristocratic background. At the same time, the class division between officer and common seaman is never forgotten.

Cinematic Works Forester's historical fiction, especially his naval fiction, spawned many imitators due to its immense popularity. The Jack Aubrey novels by Patrick O'Brian, beginning with *Master and Commander* (1970), are among the better contemporary efforts in this mode. Indeed, Thomas Cochrane served as a model for the character of Jack Aubrey. More broadly, Forester's skills at plot and action, and his penchant for historical verisimilitude, set a standard for popular literature as well as film.

Works in Critical Context

The Hornblower Saga Forester will be remembered as a crackerjack writer of popular fiction largely due to the success of his Hornblower saga. The character Horatio Hornblower became a symbol of pride for British citizens during World War II. Eight million copies of the works that recounted his adventures were sold in Forester's

lifetime. The author grasped the imagination of his public, providing it with a hero whose qualities, while stereotypically British, could flourish in the American literary market. A lively Horatio Hornblower fan culture thrives today, with conventions and Internet blogs, but it is surprising that so little critical or scholarly interest has been shown in the work of so prolific and socially conscious a writer. Besides a telling biography about Forester written by his son, John Forester, that reveals a strained relationship between them and a more scholarly biography penned by literary critic Sanford Sternlicht, little else has been written about Forester. A great deal of research remains to be done.

The African Queen It is likely that Forester's best-known work is *The African Queen*, whose film adaptation is now considered a classic American film. Unlike the Hornblower novels, *The African Queen* was a critical success upon its publication in 1935. Critics agreed that certain elements of the story were somewhat implausible, but conceded that Forester makes it worth the reader's while to set this fact aside. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Percy Hutchison concluded, "The credulity of the reader may be stretched here and there, but, having given himself to the tale, as one must always give one's self up wholeheartedly to romance or eschew it altogether, he will go on. Suspended again and again in midair, he will find pleasure in the suspense, a device of which Mr. Forester again and again proves himself a master." In her *Saturday Review of Literature* review, Amy Loveman wrote that Forester "has sufficient skill in characterization, sufficient psychological subtlety, to lift his story above the general run of adventure yarns, and enlist interest in his hero and heroine as personalities and not mere lay figures on which to hang excitement."

Responses to Literature

1. Compare Horatio Hornblower to one or two contemporary action heroes in a visual presentation. Does the comparison tell you anything about how times have changed? Explain.
2. Why did the Hornblower novels, set during the Napoleonic Wars, resonate with the British public during the Second World War? Write a paper with your findings.
3. Write about the characteristics of narrative and plot in Forester's action novels, citing several of his works.
4. *The General* is often considered an antiwar novel, but Forester wrote many war stories and detailed battle scenes. What were Forester's attitudes on the subject of war?
5. The character of Napoléon figures in several of Forester's books. Evaluate how Forester portrays the

Corsican general. Create a presentation in which you share your findings.

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E. M. Forster

BORN: 1879, London, England

DIED: 1970, Coventry, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Room with a View (1908)

Howards End (1910)

A Passage to India (1924)

Overview

One of the most influential and highly regarded authors in the British canon, E. M. Forster published only five novels during his lifetime—the first four of those between 1905 and 1910. He built a reputation as a novelist of distinction and as a persuasive man of letters. He attained the greatest recognition and authority, however, after World War II, long after publishing *A Passage to India*—his most significant novel by far—in 1924. In fact, by the time he had reached the height of his public renown as a novelist, he had nearly stopped writing fiction altogether. Though his reputation and influence have suffered since his death in 1970, he still commands the respect and enthusiasm of critics and general readers alike for his many virtues as a fiction writer and essayist.



E. M. Forster Forster, E.M., photograph. Edward Gooch / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Love of the Countryside and Unhappy School Years Edward Morgan Forster was born in London on January 1, 1879. His father died a year and a half later. His great-aunt left him a legacy of eight thousand pounds when she died in 1887, making it possible for him to receive without strain a university education and to devote himself to a career as a writer without worrying about other employment.

Possibly the most important aspect of Forster's early life was his residence with his mother at Rooksnest, a house in Hertfordshire near Stevenage. Here Forster developed his love for the English countryside, and Rooksnest became the model for Howards End house and farm in *Howards End* (1910). He attended a preparatory school at Eastbourne and then became a day student at Tonbridge School. The family, meanwhile, had to leave Rooksnest to reside in Tonbridge. These years at school were unhappy for Forster, and he later reflected on this disaffection in his depiction of Sawston School in *The Longest Journey* (1907).

Inspiration at Cambridge The Tonbridge years gave way to the excitement of university life and an

accompanying broadening of horizons. Forster's closest friend in his undergraduate years was H. O. Meredith, who helped make him conscious of his homosexual inclinations and who became the prototype for Clive Durham in Forster's novel *Maurice* (published posthumously in 1971, but written largely in 1914).

The Apostles and the Bloomsbury Group What Cambridge meant for Forster, he revealed directly and by implication in the early chapters of *The Longest Journey* and in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934), a biography of his Cambridge friend and mentor. In *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*, Forster asserted that it was possible in the relaxed but stimulating ambiance at Cambridge for a young man to unite into a meaningful whole the various and different powers of his nature. Through H. O. Meredith's influence Forster became a member of the Cambridge Conversazione Society, otherwise known as the Apostles, a group of young men who passionately discussed moral, intellectual, and aesthetic issues and who were to form the nucleus of the later cluster of intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group (named after the neighborhood in London where many of its members lived). The Apostles during Forster's time at the university and immediately thereafter included Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and Saxon Sydney-Turner; Roger Fry was a member from an earlier time.

Forster felt a strong affinity to many of the "Bloomsbury" values, which included friendship, speculative discussion, a persistent questioning of tradition and convention, agnosticism, advocacy of social change, an appreciation of innovation in the arts, and a testing of moral values. He dramatized vividly the quintessential Bloomsbury values in the Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*, in Fielding and Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* (1924), and in his own eloquent credo, written later in his career, *What I Believe* (1939; reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951).

A Teacher and a Writer In 1902, Forster became an instructor at the Working Men's College in London, an affiliation that lasted for twenty years. At the suggestion of Nathaniel Wedd, Forster's tutor and friend at Cambridge, he also decided to become a writer. The years from 1903 to 1910 were years of extraordinary creative release for Forster. He wrote four novels of surpassing force and insight, all of them now recognized as Edwardian classics: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910).

A Conscientious Objector to World War I After his time at Cambridge, Forster traveled extensively with his mother, writing travel essays and histories that set the stage for the novel most frequently recognized as his greatest, *A Passage to India* (1924). Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the

Austro-Hungarian throne, World War I broke out in 1914. Forster did not serve in a military capacity because he objected to the war, however, he did work at a hospital for the Red Cross in Egypt from 1916 until 1917.

Achieving Literary Fame and Deteriorating Health When Forster published *A Passage to India* in 1924, he was in his mid-forties and was already a respected and relatively successful novelist. This novel, however, catapulted him to literary fame and popular acclaim. He had struggled in writing it, though, and thereafter he turned away from fiction, concentrating his creative energies on essay writing and political engagement. In the 1930s and 1940s, Forster gained public prominence in part because his essays kept bringing him before the public. In his public utterances he revealed a deep commitment to values that first the Depression and then the Nazi rise to power and World War II placed under threat; and, in the years after 1945, he enjoyed international prestige. He also suffered his first stroke in 1964, though, and a more serious one the next year; his health deteriorated gradually thereafter. He had to give up what had been an active life of traveling and speaking engagements, though he remained intellectually acute until his death. He suffered a massive stroke on May 22, 1970, and died on June 7, 1970.

Works in Literary Context

E. M. Forster's novels are often witty, filled with sharp observations, and deeply realist in their descriptions of the world. When he stopped writing novels and turned his attention primarily to essays, these same qualities contributed to his great popularity as an essayist and public speaker. Similar in style to the novels of Jane Austen, Forster's fiction works focus on three major themes: salvation through love, the deficiency of traditional Christianity, and the repressive nature of English culture. These themes are underscored by numerous allusions to paganism and mythology and are infused with Forster's liberal humanism and subtle wit. Most readers and critics would align him in the quality of his work—though not in breadth and comprehensiveness—with such modern writers as Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence. As noted, his work was influenced by members of the Bloomsbury Group, including Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Roger Fry.

The Edwardian Novels Forster's first four novels (as well as a fifth, written at the same time, but not published until after his death) are generally considered Edwardian in style and theme. These novels—*Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910)—are rooted in his depiction of the life and manners of the upper-middle class that he knew from the inside. He had the insider's love of this society despite its shortcomings, but he also

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forster's famous contemporaries include:

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930): English writer best known for his novels *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and described by Forster in an obituary notice as "the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation."

Virginia Woolf (1882–1945): A prominent author and feminist philosopher, Woolf was another member of the Bloomsbury Group. Her best-known novels include *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, while *A Room of One's Own*, in which she argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," is probably her most highly regarded nonfiction piece.

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): French general Charles de Gaulle was a leader of the resistance to the Nazi regime in France during World War II; he later founded France's Fifth Republic in 1958 and was the most influential political leader in modern French history.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Spanish visual artist Pablo Picasso was a cofounder of the Cubist movement, and one of the most influential painters of the modern era.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): German-born theoretical physicist Albert Einstein is perhaps the most famous scientist of all time, and the mind behind the theory of relativity.

knew its shortcomings as only an insider could. Accordingly, he appreciated its amenities and its graciousness, but also critiqued strongly its frivolousness and materialistic obsessions. He had the insight, however, to see that people could themselves change, even when living in a society that was essentially static. And the finer spirits in this milieu, he saw, were enabled by their wealth to appreciate, without undue stress, the resources of culture, the renovating influence of nature, and the potential fullness of the inner life of the spirit and mind.

The Supernatural In Forster's early short stories he is most clearly a fantasy writer by any definition, wide or narrow. These stories have generally been admired for their originality and lucid style, but they have seldom been granted the same attention as his novels. "The Story of a Panic" (1904), the first story he wrote, and "Albergo Empedocle," the first of his stories that achieved publication (in the magazine *Temple Bar*, December 1903), were both products of the revelatory experience his travels in Italy had been to him. They both deal with British middle-class tourists in Italy faced with phenomena that defy their understanding. In both, an apparently dimwitted youth undergoes a transformation that is alarming and incomprehensible to his travel companions. The

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The tendency for writers of fiction, poetry, and drama to dabble in essay writing is well known, but few have been as committed to the latter genre as Forster. As a political essayist, Forster is, among modern writers, second in importance perhaps only to George Orwell. Below are some other examples of modern political essays by writers of fiction and drama:

“Shooting an Elephant” (1936), an essay by George Orwell. A classic anti-imperialist piece in which Orwell examines the way the enforcers of imperial authority become trapped in positions of stupid cruelty.

Brave New World Revisited (1958), a nonfiction book by Aldous Huxley. Here, Huxley considers whether the world has become more or less politically destitute in the nearly thirty years that have passed since he wrote the dystopic novel *Brave New World* (1932), about an increasingly totalitarian society.

“Socialism and Liberty” (1928), an essay by George Bernard Shaw. In this work Shaw offers an explanation of the ways in which personal liberty need not be constrained by a socialist system, as it had been in the Soviet Union. The essay appeared in a larger volume entitled *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*.

theme uniting these and most stories by Forster is that of another life not ruled by conventions that cripple natural impulses and the potential for self-realization.

In his two major novels, *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, the supernatural is ostensibly absent, but the author obviously endeavors to invest his plot and characters with a degree of universal significance. In *Howards End* a visualization of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony as a battle between good and evil forces develops into a symbolic pattern underlying the novel, and in *A Passage to India* the echo in the Marabar Caves, where a young Englishwoman imagines she has been sexually assaulted by an Indian, becomes a recurrent theme integrated into the novel as a whole, suggestive of both the immensity and the emptiness of the universe.

An Essayist and Humanist Perhaps Forster’s most notable development as a writer in the late 1920s and afterwards was as an essayist. As such, Forster wrote commentaries on outstanding individuals of the past and present, on social problems, on political questions, on aesthetics and the arts, on the spell of the past, on the fascination of distant places (including the Orient), on the threat of war, and on the actual cataclysm of the war itself. Forster’s point of view was that of the engaged humanist; his stance varied from an objective

analysis of a situation, personality, or book to familiar utterances in which his own temperament and preferences predominated.

Influence Forster continues to be one of the most widely studied novelists in world literature, but though his novels were established early as classics, Forster never enjoyed tremendous popular success. Morton Dauwen Zabel writes that Forster had “no stylistic followers and perhaps few disciples in thought, yet if one were fixing the provenance of [W. H.] Auden’s generation, Forster’s name—whatever the claim of [Henry] James, Lawrence, or Eliot—would suggest the most accurate combination of critical and temperamental forces, the only one stamped by the peculiarly English skeptical sensibility that survived the war with sanity.”

Works in Critical Context

Forster’s works are admired for their believable characterizations that simultaneously serve as representations of abstract ideas. Frederick P. W. McDowell observes,

A fascination exerted by characters who grip our minds; a wit and beauty present in an always limpid style; a passionate involvement with life in all its variety; a view of existence alive to its comic incongruities and to its tragic implications; and a steady adherence to humanistic values which compel admiration . . . such are the leading aspects of Forster’s work that continually lure us to it.

A Passage to India *A Passage to India*, which is widely regarded as Forster’s masterpiece, draws on his own experiences in India during visits there in 1912 and 1921. This novel’s acclaim derives from its portrayal of diverse cultures—Muslim, Hindu, and Christian—and the difficulties inherent in their coexistence. Forster explores in *A Passage to India* the Hindu principle of total acceptance, employing this philosophy to suggest an integrating force for which, as events in the novel suggest, the world is unprepared. The unpreparedness of the world outside India for this principle is exemplified by an episode in the Marabar Caves, where Mrs. Moore, an elderly British matron, presumably experiences nihilistic despair upon hearing an echo suggesting to her that “nothing has value.” Mrs. Moore, unlike the Hindus, is unable to assimilate this despair into the totality of her religious sensibility, and she succumbs to spiritual passivity. This crucial scene represents, according to Philip Gardner, “The enigmatic and frightening side of spiritual experience, the sense of chaos and nothingness whose effects spill over and make the conclusion of the novel equivocal.”

Responses to Literature

1. In *Howards End*, Margaret’s philosophy of “Only connect” and Henry’s adage, “Concentrate,” seem contradictory in important ways. What contradictions and conflicts between the two ideas do you see?

Which idea would you say wins out in the novel, and why?

2. Compare and contrast two of Forster's novels in terms of their dependence on fate or coincidence. What does Forster seem to be communicating about our role in the universe, and about a human capacity for change—or lack thereof?
3. What role does negation play in *A Passage to India*? Look for places where the word “nothing” appears, descriptions of things in terms of what they are not, and moments in the plot where it appears that “nothing” is happening, or where characters think something is happening but it is not. What is the importance of negation with regard to the larger themes of the novel? With regard to Forster's critique of British colonialism in India?
4. When you think about Forster's interest in the supernatural and in experiences beyond what is commonly considered rationality, what feelings or responses does that provoke in you? In what ways does your response reflect the prejudices of your own culture? In what ways is it a rejection of those prejudices? Research other writers in the tradition of literary realism, and consider their attachments to the paranormal or supernatural. Why might a genre dedicated to a realistic portrayal of the world as it is produce so many texts that include irrational, mystical, or metaphysical elements?

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Frederick Forsyth

BORN: 1938, Ashford, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Day of the Jackal (1971)

The Odessa File (1972)

The Dogs of War (1974)

Overview

Frederick Forsyth is one of the world's leading writers of suspenseful thrillers. Since the 1971 publication of *The Day of the Jackal*, he has written a string of best-selling novels featuring realistic international crises. Forsyth's ability to depict the operations of large organizations and his insider's descriptions of military and governmental operations have been especially noted by critics.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Youngest Fighter Pilot Turns to Journalism

Forsyth was born in Ashford, Kent, England, in 1938 and educated at Tonbridge School, where he studied French and German. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1956 and



Frederick Forsyth Forsyth, Frederick, photograph. AP Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forsyth's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Ludlum (1927–2001): American author of more than two dozen bestselling thrillers, include the popular *Bourne* series.

Helmut Kohl (1930–): German politician and chancellor of Germany from 1990 to 1998 (and of West Germany from 1982 to 1990).

Tom Clancy (1947–): American author of best-selling political thrillers such as *The Hunt for Red October*.

Rajiv Gandhi (1944–1991): Seventh prime minister of India, assassinated by a suicide bomber during his 1991 campaign.

served as its youngest fighter pilot (at age nineteen) before entering a career in journalism. From 1958 to 1961, he was a reporter for the *Eastern Daily Press*, first in Norwich and later in King's Lynn, Norfolk; in 1961 he was a Reuters correspondent and traveled between London, Paris, and East Berlin, serving as bureau chief in the East German capital because of his knowledge of languages. Next he served as a BBC radio reporter in London between 1965 and 1967, an assistant diplomatic correspondent for BBC Television in 1967, and a freelance journalist in Nigeria in 1967 and 1968 after his pro-Biafran coverage offended Sir David Hunt, British high commissioner in Lagos.

From Journalist to Award-Winning Novelist

Forsyth's coverage of the Biafran war led to his one major work of nonfiction, *The Biafra Story* (1969; revised as *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story*, 1977). The Biafran war was a civil war in Nigeria (1967–1970), fought as the oil-rich region of Biafra sought to secede from a Nigeria dominated by an oppressive government that in some ways resembled the British colonial administration from which Nigeria had gained its independence. Shortly thereafter, drawing heavily on his experience in journalism, Forsyth published *The Day of the Jackal*, his first novel. For this work he received the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award (1971) for Best Novel. Forsyth told J. Bonfante in 1971 that he had no literary ambitions but to be merely a commercial writer whose intent was to sell copies and make money. He claims that *The Day of the Jackal* was born of his need "to ease a financially embarrassed position."

Forsyth's novels are usually set in the cities and countries where he worked as a news correspondent. *The Day of the Jackal*, for example, takes place in several western European countries and comes to a climax in

Paris. *The Odessa File* is based on Forsyth's time in East Berlin, where he first became aware of the existence of an underground Nazi organization that protected war criminals from prosecution. *The Dogs of War* concerns a fictional African country in the throes of revolution and is based on his experiences in Biafra. From Nazi war criminals to Biafran "freedom fighters" to international terrorist organizations, Forsyth has consistently covered key world events in his fiction, offering readers their own fear back to them, packaged as fiction and neatly resolved in the end.

Works in Literary Context

The Documentary Thriller Realism is the key word behind the novels of Frederick Forsyth. Often credited as the originator of a new genre, the "documentary thriller," Forsyth found sudden fame with the publication of his smash-hit best seller, *The Day of the Jackal*, a book that combines the suspense of an espionage novel with the detailed realism of the documentary novel, a genre first made popular by Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. The detail in Forsyth's novels depends not only on the months of research he spends on each book but also on his own varied personal experiences, which lend even greater authenticity to his writing. As *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Andrew F. Macdonald explains, "the sense of immediacy, on an insider's view of world affairs, of all-too-human world figures," as well as quick-paced plots, are the keys to the author's popularity.

Political Thrills on the Grandest Scale Building on the tradition of crime fiction, Forsyth's first novels were published in the 1970s, alongside the last novels by Agatha Christie, a forerunner in what is often referred to as the *Golden Age of Detective Fiction*. However, unlike Christie's comparatively lighthearted tales of detective fiction, many of which were written before World War II, the events of popular political thrillers like Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), Fletcher Knebel's *Seven Days in May* (1962), and Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* take place on a much larger scale. Reflecting the continued decline in trust in authority, particularly that of one's government, the plots of these novels are structured by conflicts that accompanied the rapid social change following World War II.

How Machines and Organizations Operate Forsyth is among the best of contemporary writers at capturing the heart and soul of organizations at work. While most crime novels pay necessary attention to police procedure and the motivation of chief and underling, few writers risk the minute concern with organizational dynamics and the massive amount of detail that truly represent the way organizations do, in fact, operate. It is surely no exaggeration to say that organizations largely create the texture of modern life; yet few novels, crime-oriented or otherwise,

shed much realistic light on their operation. This is Forsyth's forte, with the added bonus of precise technical description worthy of a science writer, of how things work, ranging from the construction of a special rifle (*The Day of the Jackal*, 1971) and improvised car bombs (*The Odessa File*, 1972), to gunrunning (*The Dogs of War*, 1974) and the innards of oil tankers (*The Devil's Alternative*, 1979), to the assembly of miniature nuclear bombs (*The Fourth Protocol*, 1984).

Journalistic Style Forsyth's direct, precise writing style is attributable to his early career as a newspaper journalist. The effect of detail invites the reader into the world of the expert, establishing credibility and making the layperson a partner and an insider. Forsyth's disciplined style is more than simple restraint, the resisting of the tempting melodramatic adjective or adverb. Rather, it constitutes a point of view, a "transparency" of style that allows the reader a view of plot and character seemingly untrammelled by authorial guidance.

Works in Critical Context

Winner of an Edgar Allan Poe Award for *The Day of the Jackal*, Forsyth has been praised for his highly detailed depictions of the inner workings of governmental and military organizations. His ability to present a behind-the-scenes perspective while spinning a complicated plot of international dimensions allows his readers to believe in the story and become willing accomplices in its development.

The Day of the Jackal *The Day of the Jackal*, based on actual attempts to assassinate French president Charles de Gaulle, was written in thirty-five days. It won immediate acclaim and sold 6 million copies in three years. Stanley Elkin, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, found Forsyth's "implausible villain, a professional assassin whose business card might well read 'Presidents and Premiers My Specialty,'" not only plausible but so professional "that even saintly readers will be hard put not to cheer this particular villain along his devious way." Deservedly Forsyth's best-known book, *The Day of the Jackal* is both a treatise on police procedure and a testimony to the power of a determined individual. *The Day of the Jackal* has been translated into eleven languages. A successful film was made by Universal Pictures in 1973, with Fred Zinnemann directing and Edward Fox playing the Jackal.

The Day of the Jackal established a highly successful formula, one repeated by Forsyth and a host of other writers. Critics have praised its powerful effect (adjectives like "riveting" and "gripping" are common), albeit with some qualms about his language. Elkin, for example, talks about his "graceless prose style which shapes up as a lot of recitatif [a recitation blending song and speech] and very little aria [melody]." Forsyth's novels ever since have been criticized for what they do not accomplish more than for what they actually attempt, though he himself

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among Forsyth's themes is an individual's relationship to the organization. Forsyth suggests that it is the lone professional, whether opposed to the organization or part of it, who truly creates history, but it is a history represented only palely on the front pages of newspapers. Other suspense thrillers that explore this theme include:

The Hunt for Red October (1984), a novel by Tom Clancy.

This techno-thriller follows the adventures of Jack Ryan, an ex-marine working part-time for the CIA.

Seven Days in May (1962), a novel by Fletcher Knebel. In this political thriller, U.S. president Jordan Lyman learns of a military plot to overthrow him because of dissatisfaction with a treaty he signed with the Soviet Union.

The Manchurian Candidate (1959), a novel by Richard Condon. This novel, banned in some communist states, follows a brainwashed son of a political family who has become an assassin for the Communist Party against his will.

The Bourne Identity (1980), a spy thriller by Robert Ludlum. In this gripping tale, a man with retrograde amnesia attempts to discover who he is and why several organizations, including the CIA, want to kill him.

refuses to rank his work as *belles-lettres*. Perhaps unfortunately, with each subsequent book, commentators have complained about elements of the formula as faults rather than as essential parts of Forsyth's approach. Michael Crichton, writing for *Saturday Review*, found that the subject matter of *The Odessa File* had "too many reverberations, too many profound moral questions, to fit comfortably in a suspense-novel format." He added that the "use of real background in this instance often seems exploitative in a disagreeable way."

Sentiment for Fair Play and the Little Guy in the Short Stories According to some critics, Forsyth's short stories reveal a gentler and more "literary" sensibility than the hard-driving, masculine persona of the longer novels. However allegedly financial were Forsyth's motives for writing his more successful works, his short stories show a determined sympathy for the vulnerable little man and an almost nostalgic championing of traditional fair play. In spite of their abbreviated length, the stories for the most part showcase fully rounded characters in relatively realistic situations, facing problems that are often quite modest and ordinary. The stories thus offer a more domestic and limited perspective on the themes that inform the longer novels. One story, "There Are No Snakes in Ireland," won Forsyth a second Edgar Allan Poe Award.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the use of realism in *The Day of the Jackal*. Which elements would you consider the most realistic? Which seem like the most far-fetched?
2. Explain how his experience as a war reporter influenced Forsyth's choice of subject matter in his book-length works. Provide examples to support your views.
3. How do you account for the divided critical response to Forsyth's fiction?
4. Keep a reading journal while you read *The Day of the Jackal*. At the end of each chapter, write a short paragraph predicting future events in the plot. After you finish the book, go back and analyze your predictions. If they were correct, what clues did Forsyth provide to help you anticipate the coming events? If not, how did he lead you astray?

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John Fowles

BORN: 1926, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, England

DIED: 2005, Lyme Regis, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Collector (1963)

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969)

Poems (1973)

The Ebony Tower: Collected Novellas (1974)

A Maggot (1985)

Overview

While John Fowles's reputation was based mainly on his novels and their film versions, he demonstrated expertise in the fields of nature, art, science, and natural history as reflected in a body of non-fictional writings. Throughout his career, Fowles committed himself to a scholarly exploration of the place of the artist in contemporary society and sought the personal isolation and exile that he felt essential to such a search.



John Fowles Fowles, John, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Intellectual “Heaven” at Oxford John Fowles was born on March 31, 1926, to middle-class parents Robert John and Gladys Richards Fowles. He attended a London preparatory school, the Bedford School, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. He then served as a lieutenant in the Royal Marines for two years, but World War II ended before he saw actual combat.

Following the war, Fowles studied French and German at New College, Oxford. He later referred to this period as “three years of heaven in an intellectual sense.” After graduating from Oxford, Fowles began a teaching career that took him first to France, where he taught English at the University of Poitiers, and then to Spetsai, a Greek island, where he taught at Anorgyrios College. It was on Spetsai that Fowles met Elizabeth Whitton. Three years later, on April 2, 1954, they were married in England.

Fowles continued to earn a living through a variety of teaching assignments until the success of his first published work, *The Collector* (1963), allowed him to move with his wife and her daughter to Lyme Regis in Dorset. He continued to live in this quiet seacoast town—intentionally isolated from English literary circles—where he wrote, gardened, and pursued his interests in natural and local history.

Writing Career Begins It was not until Fowles was in his early twenties that he began his writing career. After translating a poem by Pierre de Ronsard he was able to overcome a fear of self-expression that he once suggested is common to all Englishmen. Fowles’s first serious attempts at writing took place on Spetsai, amid the natural splendors of the Greek landscape. His experience of the mystery and majesty of this island was a powerful influence. Not only did he write poetry, which appeared later in his collection *Poems*, but this setting also provided the inspiration for *The Magus* (1965), a work that would obsess the writer for many years. Leaving Greece was a painful experience for Fowles, but he felt the move was necessary to his artistic growth. “I had not then realized that loss is essential for the novelist, immensely fertile for his books, however painful to his private being.”

Submission Delayed While back in England and teaching in a variety of positions in the London area, Fowles worked on several manuscripts but was dissatisfied with his efforts and submitted none for publication until 1963, when *The Collector* appeared.

The commercial success of *The Collector* enabled Fowles to publish *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas* the following year. As the title suggests, this volume consists of a collection of philosophical statements covering diverse areas but aimed at proposing a new, ideal man for our times—the Aristos. The publication of this book at that time probably owed something to the fact that *The*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fowles’s famous contemporaries include:

Richard Burton (1925–1984): Welsh actor known for, among other things, being outspoken, being the highest paid actor in Hollywood (at one time), and for marrying actress Elizabeth Taylor twice.

Peter Matthiessen (1927–): American naturalist, Zen Buddhist, and historical fiction and nonfiction author.

Peter Sellers (1925–1980): British comic actor best known for the movies *Pink Panther* and *Being There*.

John Updike (1932–): Award-winning American writer of small town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize.

Collector, in spite of its popular reception, was denied critical consideration by many who failed to look past its thriller format.

Fowles’s next published work, *The Magus*, published in 1965, was, according to its author, “in every way except that of mere publishing date . . . a first novel.” Using Spetsai as his model, Fowles created the island of Phraxos where Nicholas Urfe, a young English schoolmaster, meets Maurice Conchis, the enigmatic master of an island estate. Through a series of bizarre “godgames,” Conchis engineers the destruction of Nicholas’ perception of reality, a necessary step in the achievement of a true understanding of his being in the world. While *The Magus* was first published in 1965, Fowles issued a revised edition in 1977 in which he had rewritten numerous scenes in an attempt to purify the work he called an “endlessly tortured and recast cripple” which had, nonetheless, “aroused more interest than anything else I have written.”

Fowles was at work on a new manuscript when in 1966 he envisioned a woman in black Victorian garb standing on a wharf and staring out at the sea. She “was Victorian; and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian Age. An outcast. I didn’t know her crime, but I wished to protect her.” The vision recurred, became an obsession, and led eventually to *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, a Victorian novel in manner, but contemporary and existential in viewpoint. The novel was made into a popular film of the same name in 1981.

In 1974 *Ebony Tower*, a collection of stories, appeared. The work was televised ten years later. The title story focuses on a confrontation between a pseudo-sophisticated man of the world with a reclusive shaman who shatters his poorly conceived notions of reality, a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *The Collector*, Fowles contemplates the theme of confrontation between the few versus the many, the artistic versus the conventional. This theme, as well as a concern with freedom, authenticity, and parallel realities, appears in several of his novels. By giving characters their freedom, Fowles liberates himself from the tyranny of rigid planning.

Here are a few works by writers who also produced similar themes or offered similar innovative styles:

City of Glass (1986), a novel by Paul Auster. In this, one of the earliest postmodern novels, Auster plays with language, scene, and structure in a combination of detective fiction, existentialism, and intellectual literature.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler (1981), a novel by Italo Calvino. A comedy, a tragedy, a thoughtful and thought-provoking experience.

In the Labyrinth (1959), a novel by Alain Robbe-Grillet. An existential detective novel for the postmodern culture.

theme explored more broadly in *The Magus*. This volume contains a translation of a twelfth-century romance written by Marie de France. Fowles's original title for this collection was *Variations*. While these stories are original and unique, they are connected to each other and to the earlier works by an underlying sense of loss, mystery, and desire for growth.

Daniel Martin (1977), perhaps the most autobiographical of Fowles's novels, draws upon his early memories of the Devonshire countryside as well as his later involvement in the Hollywood film industry. *Mantisa* (1982), though more cerebral, demonstrates a continuing concern with the artist's intrapersonal conflicts.

In 1996, a new edition of Fowles's essay "The Tree" was published, and along with it the essay "The Nature of Nature," written some fifteen years later when the author was approaching seventy years of age, suffering from a crippling illness, and taking what one reviewer described as "a more immediate look at last things." In *The Nature of Nature*, Fowles wrote, "Illness has kept me even more alone than usual these last two years and brought me closer to being, though that hasn't always been very pleasant for my body. What has struck me about the acutely rich sensation of beingness is how fleeting its apprehension . . . the more you would capture it, the less likely that you will."

Freedom Fowles's roots in Western culture were broad and deep, and he earned a reputation as an innovator in the evolution of the contemporary novel. He was a spokesperson for modern humanity, steeped in science,

yet ever aware that what it more deeply needs is "the existence of mysteries. Not their solutions." In contrast to his public success as a popular and serious "literary" writer, Fowles consistently distanced himself from the middle-class English society that was his familial lot and a source of much resentment toward his father. By the time he died in his home in Lyme Regis, Dorset, Fowles was living a sort of self-imposed exile. His focus in naturalistic writing was combined with his interest in exploring and challenging the traditional devices of storytelling to explore themes related to his alienation. Such themes and concepts as freedom reflect his personal attitude and play a significant role in his public writing. Not only did he refuse to be put into a "cage labeled 'novelist'" as he stated in *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas*, but he also rejected any label limiting him to a particular kind of writing. Fowles wrote fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and drama, and also edited, translated, and explored many other forms of writing. This intellectual innovator of style continues to sell millions of copies of his novels, making a number of them bestsellers.

Works in Literary Context

Influences In his years of study at New College, Fowles was exposed to the Celtic romances and the existential works of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka, and several others. In a personal note in *The Magus*, Fowles paid tribute to the Celtic romance, and in *The Godgame*, he pointed out the influence on his novel by psychologist Carl Jung, author Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and writer Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. He was also inspired by French literature, the discipline of psychology, and several other areas of study that lent themselves to his intellectualism and writing.

At the same time, Fowles had a profound effect on serious readers, mainstream readers, and his many students who would consult him for reading lists. He never had one, but his followers would read whatever he would mention or recommend.

The Artistic Versus the Conventional One of Fowles's signature themes is represented in his novel *The Collector*. In the book, Frederick Clegg, a poorly educated clerk of the lower class and an amateur lepidopterist—a scientist who studies butterflies and moths—becomes obsessed with a beautiful young art student, Miranda Grey. Clegg wins a large sum of money in a football pool, enabling him to carry out a plan of kidnap and imprisonment. The first part of the book is told from Clegg's point of view and the second is told from the imprisoned Miranda's perspective. The characters of Miranda and Clegg embody the conflict that Fowles, reaching back to Greek philosopher Heraclitus, finds central to mankind—the few versus the many, the artistic versus the conventional. As Fowles noted, "My purpose in *The*

Collector was to analyze, through a parable, some of the results of this confrontation.” This theme, as well as a concern with freedom and authenticity and parallel realities, recurred in later novels. Miranda, according to Fowles, “is an existential heroine although she doesn’t know it. She’s groping for her own authenticity.”

Works in Critical Context

At times Fowles gained mixed attention for his work. For instance, *Daniel Martin* appeared in 1977 to uneven reviews. While some critics faulted its rambling structure and lack of narrative suspense, others regarded it as a more honest, straightforward recounting of personal confrontation with one’s own history. In the same respect, several of his works have earned much positive acclaim, including *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.

The French Lieutenant’s Woman When *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* was published in 1969, it met with critical and popular success. James Aronson, in the *Antioch Review*, stated that with this novel, Fowles showed himself to be “a novelist as great as [Joyce] Carey and [E. M.] Forster.” Paul Edward Gray of the *Yale Review* called it “a modishly-framed imitation of Victorian fiction” that was nonetheless “remarkably satisfying.”

Not all reviewers were as pleased. Jonathan Keates of *The New Review*, after reading the work, felt “irritated at having to endure a drenching from a mixture of archly self-conscious detachment, toe-curling patronage, and a set of opinions, stated or implied, on the Victorians which I didn’t share.” Some critics saw the virtues of the book in comparison to his later works. Denis Donoghue, in a negative review of *Daniel Martin* for the *New York Review of Books*, notes that “*The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is Fowles’s best work because he found for that occasion a major theme of great historical and personal importance, and he commanded a language at least adequate.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. What are the gender role expectations for Victorian women? What are the gender role expectations for Victorian men?
2. Besides using narrative shifts in many of his novels, such as in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Fowles offers multiple endings. Based on what you discovered about the roles of Victorian men and women, which ending would be most accepted by readers during Victorian times? Which ending do you think would be best received by audiences today? Can you think of an even more updated ending? If the book were updated, what would Sarah’s role be as a woman? Would she still be a nanny? Would she take on a secretarial (or administrative assistant) role? Would she be more like a tutor? Why? What would Charles’s role be? Why?

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Janet Frame

BORN: 1924, Dunedin, New Zealand

DIED: 2004, Dunedin, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Owls Do Cry (1957)

Scented Gardens for the Blind (1963)

A State of Siege (1966)

Intensive Care (1970)

The Envoy from the Mirror City: An Autobiography (1985)

The Carpathians (1988)

Overview

Janet Frame was one of New Zealand’s most well known contemporary fiction writers. She published eleven novels and several stories and poems, many of which are set in her native country. Frame is not only often acknowledged



Janet Frame Frame, Janet, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

as New Zealand's greatest novelist but is internationally famous—noted not only for her use of material from her years spent in a mental institution, but also for her complex writing style.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Difficult Childhood Janet Paterson Frame was born on August 28, 1924, in Dunedin, New Zealand, the fourth child of railway engineer George Samuel and Lottie Clarice (née Godfrey) Frame, a former housemaid in the home of writer Katherine Mansfield. Frame began writing as a child in an effort to liberate herself from what she termed “a background of poverty, drunkenness, attempted murder, and near-madness.” During the Depression (a worldwide economic downturn in the 1930s caused by economic crises in Europe and the United States, among other factors), her large family scraped out a living in a rural area of New Zealand and suffered several tragedies. Two of her sisters, Myrtle and Isabel, drowned in separate incidents, and her younger brother George suffered many seizures from epilepsy.

Writing as Genuine Life Saver Though she wanted to be a writer, Frame began training to become a teacher at the Dunedin College of Education and aud-

ited courses at the University of Otago in 1943. Soon after entering college, Frame suffered from emotional issues. She began weekly therapy sessions, but while practice-teaching in Dunedin in 1947, a breakdown ensued. As a school inspector arrived to visit her classroom, Frame exploded and bolted from the room.

Her breakdown required psychiatric treatment at Seacliff Mental Hospital, north of Dunedin. Frame was diagnosed with schizophrenia (a psychotic disorder marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions, and behaviors), and her teaching career ended. Although she endured several years of institutionalization and electroconvulsive therapy (applying electrical charges directly to the brain)—both common treatments of psychotic and psychiatric conditions at this time—she continued to write and published her first book of short stories, *The Lagoon* (1951). At the same time that Frame was scheduled to undergo a frontal lobotomy (the removal of part or the whole of the brain's frontal lobe as a means of curing certain mental illnesses, a somewhat commonly used treatment at the time), the book was awarded the Hubert Church Memorial Award. This prize was at that time one of the nation's most prestigious literary honors, and it is said to have resulted in the cancellation of her lobotomy. As Frame would later claim, writing saved her life.

Autobiographical Successes Upon being discharged from the hospital, Frame went to live with her sister and family in Northcote in Auckland. There, she met New Zealand author Frank Sargeson. That same year, Frame moved into an old army shack on Sargeson's Takapuna property, where she wrote her first novel, *Owls Do Cry* (1957), which won the New Zealand Literary Fund Award in 1960. Frame then left New Zealand and moved to Europe to develop her talents as a writer. While abroad, she published several stories about her experiences in a psychiatric hospital, including *Faces in the Water* (1961).

Frame returned to New Zealand in 1963. In 1964, she was granted a New Zealand Scholarship in Letters and in 1965, a Robert Burns fellowship from Otago University. As her success flourished over the next several years, Frame continued to earn awards and traveled to the United States and England.

Much of Frame's fiction contains autobiographical elements, but it was not until the publication of her three-volume autobiography in the 1980s that Frame revealed the details of her family life and the eight years she spent in and out of mental hospitals. *To the Is-Land* (1982) traces Frame's poverty-stricken childhood in New Zealand and investigates some of the incidents that later led to a series of nervous breakdowns. In the second installment, *An Angel at My Table* (1984), Frame recounted her experiences as a student at a teacher's training college and the events that caused her to flee

from the assignment when the inspector entered her class to observe her lesson.

Frame continued to garner critical acclaim with her subsequent novels, most notably her last book, *The Carpathians* (1988), which won a Commonwealth Literary Prize in 1989. She died of myeloid leukemia on January 29, 2004, in Dunedin. Another novel of Frame's was published posthumously, *Towards Another Summer* (2007). This short autobiographical novel was so personal that she would not publish it while she was alive, a metaphysical meditation on the nature of "home."

Works in Literary Context

Influences of Society, Failed Communication, and Madness Frame's work is complex and not easily accessible. It is also as rewarding as it is challenging, as it imaginatively attacks larger issues of memory as fiction, language as deceptive, and women as vehicles for silence in a largely patriarchal world. Regarding Frame's work and its treatment of memory, there has been much debate over whether her autobiographical work is mostly fiction and whether her fiction is mostly autobiographical. Along with her reluctance to allow her life to be categorically described and dissected by critics, Frame readily acknowledged that autobiography itself is a fiction. Her own memory was affected by the many electroshock therapy treatments she received during her eight years in mental institutions, affecting her ability to truly write autobiographically. Even the clearest memory cannot be rendered precisely within the limits of language, as her characters often illustrate.

Difficulty of Communication Through her characters, Frame addresses the problem of language as an inept mode of communication. Many of her characters have difficulty relating to others through words. For example, in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1963), narrator Vera Glace is tortured by the speechlessness of her daughter, Erlene. In *The Carpathians*, New Yorker Mattina Brecon attempts to get to know her neighbors on Kowhai Street, where she has taken up temporary residence in order to research the Memory Flower, for which the town is famous. One night she awakens to find her neighbors screaming without human language, covered by a midnight rain of glittering specks that are the ashes of language: letters and punctuation marks. The townspeople mysteriously disappear, Mattina and Kowhai Street are left deserted, and no words can explain exactly why. In such novels, Frame frequently uses figurative language in an effort to depict the ways in which people communicate—or fail to.

Themes of Dysfunction, Difference, and Madness Much of Frame's fiction is marked by concerns with death, poverty, and madness—conditions with which she became familiar while growing up during the Depression, and later when she spent so many years institution-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frame's famous contemporaries include:

Heinrich Böll (1917–1985): Böll was a German author respected for his post–World War II writings, including *Billiards at Half-Past Nine* (1959), and for his successful resistance to joining Hitler's Youth.

Ella Fitzgerald (1917–1996): Fitzgerald was an African American vocalist dubbed the First Lady of Song. She is considered one of the most influential jazz singers of the twentieth century.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963): Plath was an American poet and novelist. She explored her obsessions with death, self, and nature in works that expressed her ambivalent attitudes toward the universe, as seen in *The Collected Poems* (1981).

Doris Lessing (1919–): Lessing is an English author. She is perhaps best known for her novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

John Updike (1932–): Updike is an American novelist, essayist, and literary critic. He is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures in his novels of the "Rabbit" series (1960–2001).

alized. *Owls Do Cry* concerns a woman struggling to survive in a psychiatric hospital. *Intensive Care* (1970) is a story about the creation of legislation that would rid the world of misfits. *Scented Gardens for the Blind* is an allegorical tale about the possible atomic destruction of Britain. In such works, Frame explores misconceptions about insanity by juxtaposing madness and fantasy with reality.

Social Inequities Frame's writing also addresses the social inequities of people who are perceived as being psychologically, physically, or intellectually inferior by those possessing political power. Her writing is, for instance, often woman-centered. Reflecting the woman-negating influences of a patriarchal world, her main characters are usually females who have been silenced or who have protected themselves through silence. Their language moves within this silence and either serves as companion or executioner.

Empowerment The bridging of worlds for the sake of empowerment is central to Frame's work. Though her novels usually stop short of actually empowering her characters, there is the persistent yearning for communication and the idea of acceptance as potential cure. Society, with its limited language, views anyone outside the tight circle of prescribed roles as deviant. Frame's

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Frame's writing reflects her concerns for destructive familial relationships as well as the consequences of miscommunication between individuals and societies. Here are a few works by writers who also considered themes of family or social disturbance, inequality, and power struggle:

Long Day's Journey into Night (1956), a play by Eugene O'Neill. In this modern drama, an excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

Once Were Warriors (1990), a novel by Alan Duff. In this novel, Maori cultural struggles are closely examined in the setting of urban New Zealand by way of the impoverished, undereducated Heke family.

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), a novel by Ken Kesey. In this cult classic, the mental institution is changed forever when rebellious parolee Randle McMurphy is admitted.

Song of Solomon (1977), a novel by Toni Morrison. This contemporary novel features Milkman, Macon, and Pilate Dead, and focuses on the dynamics of the southern African American family.

True West (1980), a play by Sam Shepard. The theme of dysfunctional family dynamics is played out to the hilt in this drama with a Western backdrop.

characters, chained to society by both language and thought, can only attempt to define their own boundaries in society. Despite their frustration and failure at communication, these characters can be thought of as heroic. They strive to find a balance between their individualism and societal norms and eventually come into their own.

Works in Critical Context

Many of Frame's novels are generally regarded as disturbing and powerful. Equally significant is how critics have ranged in their responses from struggling to comprehend Frame's work to praising it with much applause. Several, for instance, have commented on how difficult Frame's novels can be to interpret. Narrators cannot be assumed to be truthful, and events cannot necessarily be taken as fact. Others have praised the lyrical, complex language and word games Frame employs in her fiction. The names of her characters, for example, are frequently symbolic, like Thera Pattern in *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), Vera Glace in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, and Malfred Signal in *A State of Siege* (1966). Still other critics have dismissed these tactics as a distraction from her thematic intentions.

The Carpathians *The Carpathians* was Frame's last book and is the subject of much critical review. The story

takes place in the fictional town of Puamahara, New Zealand, where a local legend purports that a young Maori woman gained unusual knowledge of human history after tasting the fruit of an unknown tree. Mattina Breton, a wealthy New Yorker, travels to New Zealand to learn the source of the folktale from Puamahara's eccentric residents and becomes fascinated by reports of the Gravity Star, an astral phenomenon that—if real—would challenge common perceptions of time and space and destroy the world.

Some critics have faulted *The Carpathians* for complex and interrelated elements of reality and fantasy and several conscious shifts in point of view. They have found the novel to be overburdened with difficult ideas. However, others have lauded Frame for her exploration of the relationships between language, conformity, and the mysteries of time and space. Jayne Pilling commented in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "As so often in Frame's novels, there's a curious, combustible mix of modes at work here. . . . Yet its possibilities are so rich that Frame needs several different narratives, Chinese-box style, to contain them."

Responses to Literature

1. Frame's novels explore how New Zealanders struggle with their identity, trying to fit into a country with Maori traditions. After reading one of Frame's works, write a brief essay that explains how Frame views cultural identity.
2. Read *Faces on the Water* and hold a class discussion about Frame's experiences with a mental disorder. Discuss how her personal experience had such a strong impact on her writing.
3. Frame claimed writing saved her life when her book of short stories, *The Lagoon*, won the Hubert Church Memorial Award and averted her scheduled lobotomy. After reading the stories, work in a small group and prepare a statement that explains why these stories are worthy of such accolades.
4. Frame did not agree to many interviews. Imagine that Ms. Frame is still alive and that you have been granted a rare opportunity to interview her. What questions would you ask? Why?

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☒ Anatole France

BORN: 1844, Paris, France

DIED: 1924, Tours, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard (1881)

"Crainquebille" (1901)

Penguin Island (1908)

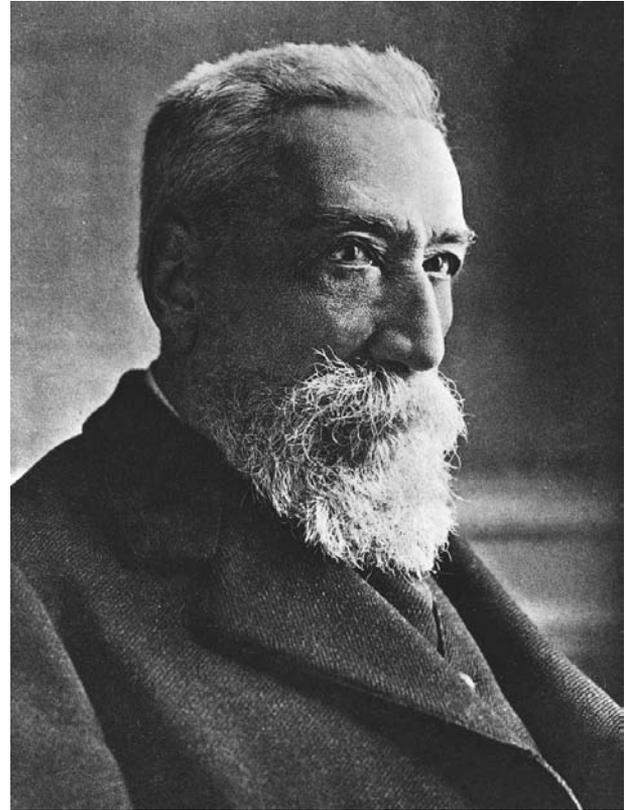
The Red Lily (1910)

Overview

During his lifetime, French author Anatole France, was widely recognized as his country's greatest author. He distinguished himself in two widely diverse areas of literature—wistful storytelling and biting satire—and gained immense popularity with such works as *My Friend's Book* (1885). After his death, France's reputation suffered a marked decline and is at present undergoing reevaluation.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth in the Second Empire Anatole France was born Jacques Anatole François Thibault in Paris on April 16, 1844, the son of a self-educated bookseller. When France was only four, his country underwent yet another in a series of political transformation. The monarchy of Louis Philippe began seeing events of violent opposition



Anatole France France, Anatole, photograph. The Library of Congress.

in Paris in 1848 that eventually resulted in his removal in favor of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, who served as president of the Second Republic until 1852. This Bonaparte then declared himself Napoléon III and ruled France as emperor until 1871. The period of his rule is known as the Second Empire.

France enjoyed average success during two years at preparatory school in St. Mary's Institute, but his next seven years at the senior school, the famous College Stanislas secondary school, were painful. His diary and the comments of his Jesuit masters reveal the youth's sense of inferiority, which led to indifference, carelessness, and outright neglect of schoolwork. Greater intellectual profit came to him from browsing among his father's books and from friendships with influential customers. The most crucial influence on the impressionable youth was one of his father's regular clients, Count Dubois-Dubais, an ardent classicist and admirer of the past whose wealth allowed him to develop and indulge his taste for finer things. The older man's easy, carefree lifestyle appealed to young France.

Took up Literary Life During his late teens and early twenties, France was confronted with the necessity and the uncertainties of choosing a career, though he had the luxury of living at a time when his country was

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

France's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Peary (1856–1920): Peary was an American explorer. In a series of expeditions around the turn of the twentieth century, Peary claimed to be the first person to have reached the geographic North Pole.

Henry Ford (1863–1947): Ford was an American industrialist and founder of the Ford Motor Company. He pioneered practices, from the assembly line to the institution of the eight-hour workday, that revolutionized industry.

Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929): Clemenceau was a French statesman. He served twice as prime minister, including during the latter half of World War I.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): Zola was a journalist, critic, social activist, playwright, and novelist. He was highly influential among his fellow Naturalist writers and in liberalizing French politics. His article "J'accuse!" ("I accuse!") condemning the anti-Semitic "Dreyfuss affair" was a landmark event in European politics.

Paul Verlaine (1844–1896): Verlaine was a French poet noted for his contribution to the French Symbolists. He believed the function of poetry was to evoke and not describe.

experiencing great material prosperity as well as colonial expansion. For a time, he had to be content with odd jobs. France assisted his father, worked as a teacher, and worked for a publisher at Bachelin-Deflorenne. Encouraged by his success, he applied unsuccessfully for the post of assistant librarian at the Senate Library. A few months later, in 1866, the sale of the family business made France's search for security more urgent, and he found the courage to approach the young publisher, Alphonse Lemerre, who promptly hired him as an editor and manuscript reader. In his new position, France came in contact with the Parnasse poets, who comprised an anti-Romantic, art-for-art's-sake literary movement during the mid-nineteenth century.

By the mid-1870s France had not yet published any fiction, but he was well known in several Parisian literary circles. To augment his small writing income (mostly from prefaces, encyclopedia articles, and ghost work for Lemerre), which often left him dependent upon his parents for lodging, he finally obtained employment in 1876 at the library of the Senate. It had been only a year since the French Third Republic had been declared, which saw the separation of church and state as well as complete freedoms of the press, speech, and association implemented. In 1877, France married Valérie Guérin de

Sauville, with whom he had one daughter before an 1893 divorce.

Published First Novels France began his fiction career with novels and stories of a highly conservative, conventional nature. His first critical and popular success came with *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881). The protagonist, a reclusive scholar unsuited to worldly dealings, was the first of many similar characters, who were to some extent based on France himself. Similar characters included Jean Servien from *The Aspirations of Jean Servien* (1882) and Jerome Coignard from *The Queen Pedagogue*. As his fame grew, he began to treat more controversial themes with an increased tendency toward passion and love, as evidenced in *The Red Lily* (1894), and the stories in *Balthazar* (1889), works which illustrate France's view of the church and social reform.

The writing of the four-novel series "L'histoire contemporaine" spanned a period of great change for France. Until this time, France had never aligned himself with any political cause. However, during the composition of the third novel in the series, *The Amethyst Ring*, France became for the first time in his life actively involved with a social cause—the Dreyfus Affair.

Politically Active In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was convicted of treason and subsequently condemned to deportation to Devil's Island, a small island located off the coast of French Guiana that was used as a brutal penal colony. The public had no reason to doubt the justice of the sentence, but in the following years, evidence emerged that cast doubt on the captain's guilt as well as on the propriety of the government's conduct in the matter. In a November 1897 interview, France said he could not approve of the verdict, since he had not been able to examine the evidence. After writer Émile Zola published his famous open letter, "J'accuse," in the January 13, 1898, *Aurore* to condemn the sentence, he was charged with defamation. France signed the "Pétition des intellectuels" in Zola's support the next day and then testified at his trial.

France's new involvement was reflected in the covert political and legal systems that became a recurring theme in his writing. The short story "Crainquebille" is probably France's most well-known indictment of judicial injustice. As he grew in social awareness, satire became one of France's chief literary tools, of which he made increasing use in such later novels as *Penguin Island* (1909), *The Gods Are Athirst* (1913), and *The Revolt of the Angels* (1914). In France's later years, he was increasingly involved politically with the extreme left and for a time became a supporter of the French Communist Party, as did many intellectuals and artists of this period who generally stood in opposition to World War I. In 1921, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He published his last book the following year, the novel *The Bloom of Life* (1922). France died six months after his eightieth birthday, in 1924.

Works in Literary Context

The work of Anatole France is characterized by urbanity, wit, taste, craftsmanship, astuteness, and rationalism. Not without reason was he called “The Master,” both in his own time and often in the large body of criticism that appeared after his death. However, France’s elegant style and subtle humor have not secured for him the same kind of enduring reputation enjoyed by his more revolutionary or politically involved contemporaries. To some, his work appears dated and sentimental. He wrote during a major change in the arts and literature, when old Europe was giving way to a vastly new and different modern Europe. To his contemporaries, however, France was a modern writer with the bravery to write biting, even shocking, satires of major cultural institutions.

Rationalism and Skepticism France adopted reason, in the French tradition, with a goodly dose of skepticism as a guide to living and thinking. He considered himself a rationalist. Rationalism is a school of thought in which human reason is considered the arbiter of truth. France was careful, though, to avoid giving human reason more credit that it deserved. Though France was scornful of religious dogma, he was nearly as suspicious of the dogmatic claims of science. Thus, France was also a skeptic, meaning he had a disposition to doubt that truth could ever be ascertained about certain things.

Works in Critical Context

While France received lavish praise from critics during his lifetime, he was ignored or disparaged after his death. The nostalgic sentiment of his early work appealed to fewer critical readers than it once had, and the social and political issues that inspired his satires are now primarily of historical interest. In the 1980s, a significant number of critics have offered favorable rereadings of his works. Critics who have reevaluated France have found a new and more complex appreciation for the artistic qualities of his fiction and his sophisticated handling of literary forms.

In 1897, the year before the first collection of France’s *Selected Texts* appeared, Charles-Louis Philippe had written: “Anatole France is delightful, he knows everything, he’s even erudite; that’s why he belongs to a species of writers that is ending.” In 1916, André Gide had remarked that France’s work, while elegant and subtle, was “without anxiety”—too clear, too easily understood, never disturbing his readers. Yet in 1921, when France was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, praised both the substance and style of France’s writings as worthy of his great predecessors, including François Rabelais and Voltaire, and called the new laureate the last of the great classicists and the most authoritative contemporary representative of French civilization.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whether it was religion or science, France always demonstrated a certain amount of skepticism. Other works in a similar skeptical vein include:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. Consistently named as one of the Great American Novels, Twain’s most popular work takes satirical aim at institutionalized racism, religion, and society in general.

Babbitt (1922), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. A scathing look at conformity in the American middle class and, as Lewis calls it, “boosterism,” the act of promoting your town’s outward appearance.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964), a film directed by Stanley Kubrick. Loosely based on the Cold War thriller *Red Alert* (1958), by Peter George, this black comedy skewers the contemporary military mindset and the doctrine of “mutual assured destruction.”

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard One work for which France received praise during his lifetime was *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*. Reviewing the book in 1890 in his introduction to an English translation, Lafcadio Hearn wrote, “The author of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* is not classifiable,—though it would be difficult to name any other modern French writer by whom the finer emotions have been touched with equal delicacy and sympathetic exquisiteness.” Similarly, the *Nation* stated in 1885 that the book “revealed to the world five or six years ago that M. Anatole France, besides being a savant, was a poet with a fine and rare fancy, and above all a tender and sympathetic heart.”

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss France’s contributions to French literature.
2. Write a short essay in which you describe France’s use of satire in his apparently straightforward stories.
3. As a class, justify why France won the Nobel Prize in 1921 despite the fact that his literary reputation was already in decline.
4. What themes in France’s work make his writing uniquely “French”? Do you think these themes helped fuel his popularity during his life? How might they have affected his marginalization after he died? Create a presentation of your findings.

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❏ Dick Francis

BORN: 1920, Coedcanlas, Tenby, Wales

NATIONALITY: *British, Welsh*

GENRE: *Fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Sport of Queens (1957)

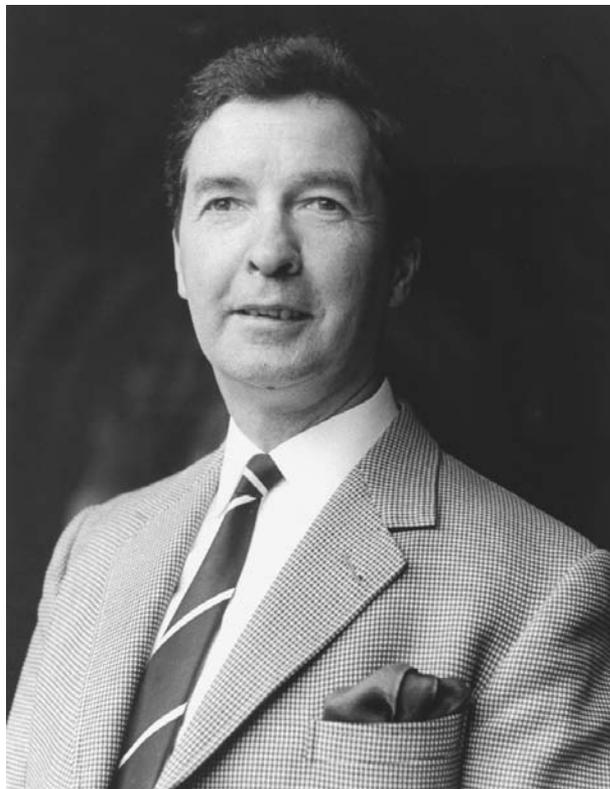
For Kicks (1965)

Rat Race (1970)

Come to Grief (1995)

Overview

The name Dick Francis is synonymous with thrillers and horse racing. A former steeplechase champion, Francis



Dick Francis *Francis, Dick*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

has used his thorough knowledge of the “sport of kings” as the basis for almost all of the thirty-odd novels he has produced since 1962. His novels have been translated into nearly two dozen languages and have sold more than 20 million copies. Although his stories generally follow a formula, the character development, sharply observed details and lean, fluid prose raise his best work to the status of literature. His dialogue captures the nuances of social class as he throws together the echelons of equine sports: owners, trainers, jockeys, stable lads, bookmakers, and touts (people who gather information about racehorses and sell it to bettors). Both entertaining and masterful, Francis’s novels fuse the best in the American detective genre and the European murder mystery.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Dreams of Being a Jockey Richard Stanley Francis was born on October 31, 1920, at Coedcanlas, his maternal grandfather’s farm near Tenby, Pembrokeshire, Wales. His father, George Vincent Francis, a professional steeplechase jockey before World War I, became the manager of W. J. Smith’s stables at Holyport, near Maidenhead.

Francis learned to ride at age five and showed horses at age twelve. He vowed at age fifteen to become a professional jockey and helped race, train, transport, and show horses for his father, first at Holyport, then at the family stables near Wokingham. During World War II, he flew fighter planes, troop-carrying gliders, and Wellington bombers for the Royal Air Force. After the war, Francis returned to racing, first as an amateur (tacitly taking under-the-table “gifts” from grateful owners), then as a professional. The conflict he experienced firsthand between amateurs and professionals in the world of horseracing is the source for much of the tension found in many of his novels.

Mystery Leads to Mystery Francis first came to the public eye as a victim in one of the most unusual sports mishaps of the century. In the British Grand National steeplechase, considered by many to be the world’s most prestigious horse racing event, Francis was riding Devon Loch, the Queen Mother’s horse. Having just cleared the last jump, Francis was headed toward victory at the finish post when the horse suddenly and inexplicably collapsed. Francis never discovered what had startled his horse, but that single event turned into a triumph grander than the seasoned jockey could ever have imagined: The accident actually marked the beginning of his writing career.

A literary agent’s continued interest in Francis’s perspective of the race led him to write his autobiography. “The one good thing about an autobiography as a first introduction to writing is that at least you don’t have to research the subject: the story is all there in your own head,” Francis stated in *The Sport of Queens*. In 1957, the same year the work was published, Francis retired as a jockey and began covering horseracing for London’s *Sunday Express*.

Economic necessity, more than anything else, led Francis to try his hand at fiction writing. The mystery surrounding his loss at the Grand National seemed a natural inspiration for a mystery—but this time, it was one he could solve. His debut novel, *Dead Cert*, sold well enough for him to consider writing another one. Since 1964, with the appearance of his second novel, Francis’s fans have been able to read a new novel by their favorite author each year. Rather than looking for Francis in the winner’s circle at the racetrack, his fans on both sides of the Atlantic know to find him on the bestseller lists.

Works in Literary Context

Francis had long been a devotee of detective fiction. As a child, he read Arthur Conan Doyle, Nat Gould (a pre-World War I English racing writer), and Edgar Wallace. As he grew older, he read authors such as Alistair MacLean, Desmond Bagley, Gavin Lyall, and Michael Underwood. A meticulous researcher, Francis has taken the best of his predecessors and improved upon them to create his nearly forty books.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Francis’s famous contemporaries include:

Edogawa Rampo (1894–1965): Rampo, an admirer of western mystery writers, was Japan’s first modern mystery writer and the founder of the Detective Story Club in Japan.

Frederick Busch (1941–2006): A prolific American writer, Busch’s work delved into nontraditional detective stories.

Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961): With his lean prose style and cynical detective character, Hammett effectively invented hard-boiled detective fiction.

Cary Grant (1904–1986): This English actor performed in a multitude of films over his long career, including movies as diverse as lighthearted comedies, musicals, and Alfred Hitchcock thrillers.

Ellis Parker (1871–1940): Parker was the “American Sherlock Holmes” who solved 98 percent of the murders he pursued; however, Parker himself violated the law in pursuit of the truth about the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh’s baby and died in prison.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): A master of cinematic suspense, Hitchcock gained international recognition for his intricate plots, insight into human psychology, and unique camera techniques.

Classic and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction Paving the way for what is known as the Golden Age of classic detective fiction, *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins, is usually regarded as the prototype for the full-length detective novel in England. Characteristics of the classic form include:

- an unquestionably upright, genteel hero of sound principles;
- offstage deaths that distance the reader from violence;
- an objective search for a pattern of clues amid red herrings;
- a carefully reasoned elimination of suspects with a personal motivation for seeking justice.

Partly in response to the rising crime and gangster activity caused by Prohibition and the Great Depression, the American school of hard-boiled detective fiction began to replace the classic British form. The hard-boiled detective novel differs from the classic in several ways:

- The main character is a tough, cynical, down-to-earth detective who is capable of violence and mistrusted by the police.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Human beings want to view society as being controlled by justice. Literary and artistic traditions exemplify the struggle humans have experienced in trying to determine whether society and, indeed, the world itself, is so ordered. Francis's work generally suggests that justice will triumph in the end, but others have questioned whether that is so. Here are some pieces that analyze the role justice plays in the world:

The Count of Monte Cristo (1844), a novel by Alexander Dumas. In this novel, protagonist Edmond Dantès is falsely accused and convicted of treason; after spending years in prison for the crime, he eventually escapes and exacts his own vigilante justice upon those who conspired against him.

A Stout Cord and a Good Drop (2006), a novel by James Gaitis. Gaitis's historical fiction is based on the facts associated with the Montana Vigilantes group, the infamous Montana hanging spree of 1863–64, and the establishment of the Montana Territory during the Civil War.

The Virginian (1902), a novel by Owen Wister. Wister first introduces the idea of frontier justice in this American Western novel.

Without Remorse (1993), a novel by Tom Clancy. A former Navy SEAL (sea, air, land team) systematically eliminates a gang of drug dealers.

The ability to reasonably solve a murder is secondary to the capability to fight one's way out of dangerous situations.

Murder takes place around the protagonist on an ongoing basis.

The search for a criminal involves questions of loyalty and personal betrayal and ends with personal solutions.

The story culminates with a physical confrontation between investigator and criminal.

Francis's skill in merging the best of the classical and the hard-boiled detective fiction traditions is a large part of what gives the Francis adventure novel its power and appeal. Francis surpasses his predecessors by building on both English and American detective traditions in his focus on vigilante justice. His approach to justice differs from the more conventional form seen in detective traditions in which the "bad guy gets what's coming to him" by means of the justice system.

Legacy It is difficult to assess the legacy of a writer who is still working, but in terms of Francis's tweaking of the traditional detective form, it is clear that the same vigilante approach to justice appears in graphic novels such as

Sin City, novels in which lone figures mete out justice according to the misdeeds of criminals. In fact, graphic novels often show an affinity for different forms of literature, from detective fiction to more traditional classical literature, including Shakespeare's. Both Francis and graphic novelists attempt to be equally thrilling and thought-provoking, often proposing answers to the question, How should we live?

Works in Critical Context

How could a steeplechase jockey become such a popular writer? By way of explanation, John Mortimer noted in the *New York Times Book Review*, "What he brought with him from the race track were the crowd-pulling powers of suspense, surprise and the shared enthusiasm to discover who's going to win." Perhaps his best trait is the diversity in character and plot he purposefully brings to his writings. "Despite his standard approach," writes Gina Macdonald in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, "Francis's works are never the same. His plots remain fresh, unexpected, solid. They move forward briskly, with an admirable sense of timing, and are lent variety by his interweaving of racing and other concerns." Remarkably, he has managed to continue a five-decade-long writing career with no noticeable slumps. "The author's notes for Mr. Francis's books often observe that as a jockey he rode for the Queen Mother," Elizabeth Tallent observed in the *New York Times Book Review*. "At this point in his illustrious writing career," the critic continued, "the Queen Mother might wish to note in her *vita* that the writer Dick Francis once rode for her."

Francis's Horse Racing Subculture Francis has used his horse racing background to give him the framework for his fictional material. Sometimes his novels focus on the racing world, and sometimes the horses are kept in the background, as a side note to add color to the story. Reviewers have noted, however, that even those readers not interested in horseracing can find something to love in a Francis mystery. In the *New York Times*, John Leonard noted, "Not to read Dick Francis because you don't like horses is like not reading [Fyodor] Dostoyevsky because you don't like God. Baseball, boarding houses, racetracks and God are subcultures. A writer has to have a subculture to stand on." Critics agree that Francis adeptly describes his own subculture with a realism that does not detract from the storyline.

In a *New York Times Book Review* critique of Francis's third novel, *For Kicks*, published in 1965, Anthony Boucher wrote, "The background of life among horses and trainers and stable lads (and criminals) is so real you can smell and taste it." In a *London Magazine* review of Francis's 1979 thriller, *Whip Hand*, John Welcome observed, "Francis can make a race come alive off his pages in thrilling fashion. One can hear the smash of birch, the creak of leather and the rattle of whips." These two volumes won their author recognition from his

fellow mystery writers: a Silver Dagger award from the British Crime Writers Association for *For Kicks* and a Gold Dagger award from the same organization, as well as an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America, for *Whip Hand*.

Improving with Age Writing in the *British Book News*, James Melville called Francis “the author who can truthfully say that his best book is the one most recently published.” Based on critical response, Francis’s most recent books stand up well to Melville’s analysis. In *School Library Journal*, for example, Pam Spencer deemed Francis’s 1991 novel, *Comeback*, full of “the same storytelling magic as always,” and a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor noted that the book showed Francis’s “touch with a story as sure as ever.” “All the action, suspicions, and deaths,” Jim and Janet Mura observed in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, “make for a fast and exciting read.”

Responses to Literature

1. It is often said that Dick Francis novels are basically detective novels, but that they are not confined by the conventions of detective novels. Read one of Francis’s detective novels and research the conventions of detective novels. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation illustrating elements of detective fiction, both classic and hard-boiled. In what ways does Francis’s work stretch the boundaries of traditional detective novels?
2. Read one of Francis’s earlier novels and one of his most recent. Do you agree with James Melville’s assessment that Francis’s work has only gotten better with age? Why or why not?
3. Both Dick Francis and Norman MacLane began their literary careers later in life. Using the Internet and the library, research the life of Norman MacLane and write a short paper in which you discuss MacLane’s early life and how it affected his writing in comparison to that of Francis’s.

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■ Anne Frank

BORN: 1929, Frankfurt, Germany

DIED: 1945, Bergen-Belsen, Germany

NATIONALITY: German, Dutch

GENRE: *Diary, short stories*

MAJOR WORKS:

Diary of a Young Girl (1947)

The Works of Anne Frank (1959)

Overview

Anne Frank is known worldwide for the diary she kept while hidden in German-occupied Amsterdam during World War II. For two years, Frank and her family remained stowed away with four other Jews in a few attic rooms above the office where her father worked. Nazi officers discovered their hiding place on August 4, 1944, captured the eight hidden Jews and sent them to concentration camps. Anne Frank died in March 1945, shortly



Anne Frank *Frank, Anne, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frank's famous contemporaries include:

Norman Mailer (1923–2007): American writer whose first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, concerns his army service during World War II.

Günter Grass (1927–): German novelist who explored the phenomenon of Nazism.

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): German chancellor and ruler of Nazi Germany from 1933–1945.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): British prime minister during World War II.

Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007): American satirical novelist imprisoned in Germany during World War II.

before her sixteenth birthday. Her journal, published in 1947 as *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, candidly describes the experiences and emotions of an ordinary adolescent in extraordinary circumstances. Many people have found her life story inspiring and symbolic of the overwhelming tragedy known as the Holocaust.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Amid Persecution and War Annelies Marie “Anne” Frank was born to an upper-class Jewish family in the city of Frankfurt. The early childhood of Frank and her elder sister, Margot, was secure and loving, but the year of Anne’s birth also marked the onset of a worldwide economic depression that affected a great number of Europeans. In Germany, economic disaster, combined with the lingering effects of Germany’s defeat in World War I, led to the installation of Adolf Hitler as leader of the government in 1933. Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) party made anti-Semitism official state policy. Following Hitler’s decree that Jewish and non-Jewish children could not attend the same schools, the Franks left their homeland and by 1934 were settled in Amsterdam.

Despite the growing threat of war, Frank lived a normal life, much like any Dutch girl, for the next few years. In many respects, Frank remained absorbed in everyday life even after the Germans invaded Holland in 1940 and imposed harsh anti-Jewish measures. Frank was forced to leave her Montessori school and attend the Jewish Lyceum. As Nazi horrors increased, including the roundup of Amsterdam’s Jews in 1941 for incarceration in concentration camps, Otto Frank and his business partners secretly prepared a hiding place in the top,

back portion of their company’s combined warehouse and office building on Prinsengracht Canal.

In June 1942, Anne celebrated her thirteenth birthday, receiving among her presents a small cloth-bound diary. Several weeks later, Margot Frank was notified to report to the reception center at the Westerbork concentration camp, and the family fled into the secret annex. They were joined by a Mr. and Mrs. Van Pelz (rendered as “Van Daan” in Anne’s diary) and their fifteen-year-old son Peter, and several months later by Albert Dussel, a middle-aged dentist. Together they remained virtually imprisoned for over two years.

“Life in the Secret Annex” Anne wrote in the diary until the discovery of the hiding place in August 1944. The diary meant a great deal to her; she viewed it as a personal friend and confidant. In the diary Anne relates the aggravations of life in hiding as well as the experiences of adolescence that are recognized by people everywhere. Lively and vivacious, she was chastised at school for chattering, but in the annex she was forced to whisper throughout the day. It was a great trial for her. After a year of this silence, combined with her confinement, she expressed feelings of depression, writing on October 29, 1943, “The atmosphere is so oppressive and sleepy and as heavy as lead. . . . I wander from one room to another, downstairs and up again, feeling like a songbird whose wings have been clipped and who is hurling himself in utter darkness against the bars of his cage.”

Anne could be headstrong, opinionated, and critical, especially of her mother. Generally cheerful and optimistic, she adored her father and attempted to get along with the others, but she was sensitive to criticism, explaining in her diary that no one criticized her more than she herself. Her special attention was given to a budding puppy love with Peter van Daan. The relationship ended soon because it was difficult to maintain in the confined space of the hiding place and because she had a talk with her father who suggested ending it.

The diary traces her development from an outgoing, popular child to an introspective, idealistic young woman. Frank questioned her own idealism in an often-quoted passage written July 15, 1944: “It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.”

Discovery by the Nazis and Death The diary ends on August 1, 1944, three days before the group was arrested and sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. Margot and Anne were later transferred to Bergen-Belsen. According to a survivor who knew her at the concentration camp, Anne never lost her courage and deep sensitivity. Both Anne and Margot died of typhoid fever at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945. Their mother had died earlier at Auschwitz. Otto Frank, liberated from

Auschwitz by Russian troops in 1945, returned to Amsterdam and soon received a letter informing him of his daughters' deaths. Miep Gies, who had helped hide the family, gave Anne's writings to him. Urged by friends, Otto Frank published an edited version of the diary, deleting some passages he thought too personal. After Otto Frank passed away in 1980, more of the Anne Frank archive was opened, and in 1989 *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition* brought readers the diary without her father's cuts.

Works in Literary Context

Initially, Frank considered her diary a private work. Conceiving of the diary as a friend, she named it "Kitty," after a character in a popular series of children's books by the Dutch author Cissy van Marxveldt. She wrote her entries in the form of letters to Kitty. The vivid, poignant entries range in tone from humorous to serious, casual to intense, and reveal Frank's ability to write narrative and descriptive accounts as well as to write about abstract ideas. The diary, often commended for its engaging style, is full of vitality. Meyer Levin has praised the work for sustaining "the tension of a well-constructed novel."

Personal Narratives Frank's attitude toward her diary changed in the spring of 1944, when she heard the voice of a minister from the exiled Dutch government on the radio. He was proposing that letters and diaries written during the German occupation be collected, to help future generations understand what the Dutch people had endured. Frank began to copy her entire diary onto loose-leaf paper, editing and revising along the way, with awareness that it could one day be published.

Anne Frank's diary occupies a prominent place in the litany of first-person accounts of danger and hardship, including diaries from soldiers and civilians during other wars, slave narratives and captivity narratives. Indeed, for many young readers, her diary has become the defining document of this genre.

Coming of Age *The Diary of Anne Frank* also belongs squarely in the tradition of coming-of-age literature, fictional or factual. Frank can thus lay claim to literary precursors such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. In turn, the earnestness of her self-reflection opened the way for the flourishing of coming-of-age novels in the late twentieth century, represented by authors such as J.D. Salinger for adult readers, and Judy Blume and S.E. Hinton for young readers.

During the course of writing the diary, Anne became certain she wanted to be a writer. She envisioned a novel based on her diary. Additionally she wrote stories, later collected in *The Works of Anne Frank and Tales from the House Behind*. According to *New York Times Book Review* critic Frederick Morton, the stories "show that Anne followed instinctively the best of all platitudes: Write whereof

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Holocaust is one of the most cataclysmic events of modern times, raising urgent questions about the nature of evil and its lasting effects on everyone it touches. The following works relate to these events:

Night (1958), by Elie Wiesel. An autobiographical account of life in the Nazi death camps.

Survival in Auschwitz (1947), by Primo Levi. The author's first-person account of daily experience in the death camp is told with restraint and dry wit, enabling the reader to grasp the horror of genocide in its full depth.

Sophie's Choice (1979), by William Styron. An American writer makes friends with a Jewish man and his lover, Sophie, who gradually reveals her haunting secret.

Schindler's Ark (1982), by Thomas Keneally. A novel based on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved more than a thousand Jews from the camps; basis for Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*.

Shoah (1985), a film directed by Claude Lanzmann. This nine-hour documentary film is an oral history of survivors, witnesses, and participants in the everyday activities of the Holocaust.

you know. Not even her little fairy tales are easy escapes into make-believe, but rather pointed allegories of reality. . . . Still none of these . . . has the power of any single entry in the diary."

A Lasting Impact Anne Frank's diary proved remarkably popular, selling millions of copies and being translated into many languages. A stage adaptation opened in New York in 1955. Four years later, a major Hollywood motion picture was produced based on the diary. To this day, the diary is routinely assigned to schoolchildren around the world.

Works in Critical Context

As a historical document the diary is an indictment of the Nazis' destruction of human life and culture. As Ilya Ehrenburg has stated, "One voice speaks for six million—the voice not of a sage or a poet but of an ordinary little girl." Critics have argued that while newsreels and books that explicitly portray Nazi atrocities have had a stupefying effect on people, Frank's story acquaints people with everyday recognizable individuals and has thus been phenomenally effective in communicating this enormous tragedy. In postwar Germany, there was an intense interest in Frank among German youth after years of repressive silence regarding Nazi crimes. Anne Birstein and Alfred Kazin have asserted that "the reality of what certain people have had to endure in our time can be

grasped humanly and politically only because of the modulation of a document like *The Diary of a Young Girl*, which permits us to see certain experiences in a frame, in a thoroughly human setting, so that we can bear them at all.”

Apart from interest in the diary for its historical value, some have admired its accurate, revealing portrait of adolescence. “She described life in the annex, with all its inevitable tensions and quarrels,” wrote L. De Jong in *A Tribute to Anne Frank*. “But she created first and foremost a wonderfully delicate record of adolescence, sketching with complete honesty a young girl’s feelings, her longings and loneliness.” Annie Romein-Vershoor has expressed the view that Frank “possessed the one important characteristic of a great writer: an open mind, untouched by complacency and prejudice.”

Responses to Literature

1. For what purposes did Anne Frank use her diary? How did the diary’s place in her life evolve over time?
2. After March of 1944, Anne Frank began writing her diary with greater consciousness that it may someday be read. How does this awareness influence her style and the direction her writing takes? Provide several specific examples supporting your main points.
3. Using your library and the Internet, research the European Jewish reaction to the rising power of Adolf Hitler. How many Jews left their homes to find safety? How many hid, as did Anne Frank and her family? Of those, how many were discovered and sent to their deaths? On the other hand, how many stayed, hoping the situation would not get worse? What do you think your family would have done?
4. The 1998 documentary film “Paper Clips,” depicts the story of a high school teacher in a small town in Tennessee. She wanted to open the eyes of her students to a world event that most had never heard of, and, in some way, have those students actually touch that event. The students filled a railcar with 11 million paper clips: one paper clip for each person who died. This railcar now stands as a memorial in this Tennessee schoolyard as a lesson the students will not forget. Now, imagine you are the teacher. Can you create a project that will have your students, or even your friends, connect to Anne Frank’s teen years? What could make it real to you and how would you transmit that reality to your peers?

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George MacDonald Fraser

BORN: 1925, Carlisle, England

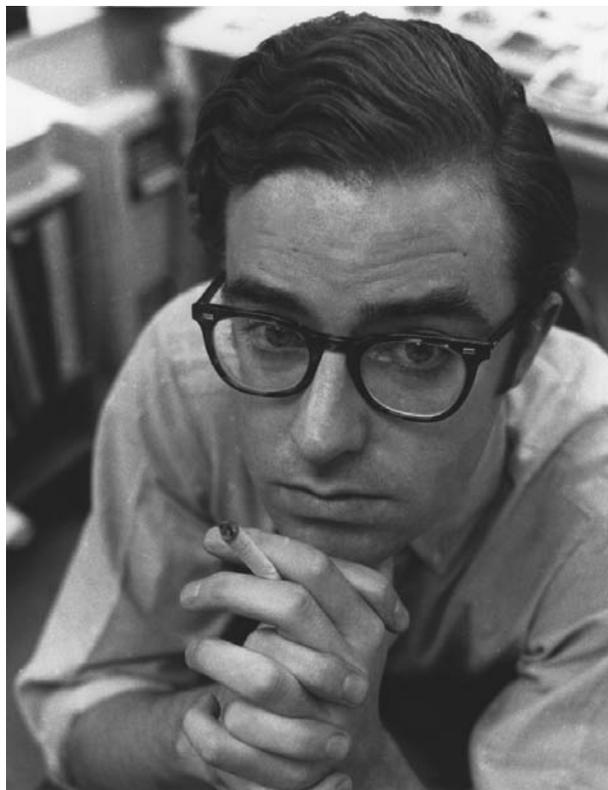
DIED: 2008, Isle of Man (British Crown dependency)

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Flashman: From the Flashman Papers, 1839–1842 (1969)



George Fraser *Fraser, George IV*, 1968, photograph. AP Images.

Royal Flash: From the Flashman Papers, 1842–43 and 1847– (1970)
Flashman and the Dragon (1986)
The General Danced at Dawn (1970)
Quartered Safe Out Here: A Harrowing Tale of World War II (2001)

Overview

George MacDonald Fraser was more than a novelist—he was also a journalist, soldier, scholar, historian, and writer of screenplays. He is best remembered for his series of satirical *Flashman* novels, centered on a cowardly and mischievous British soldier in the nineteenth century who stumbles his way through history. Fraser also made a successful career in Hollywood, both as a historian of the movies and as a screenwriter for several popular films. Throughout his life and his writing, Fraser has explored exactly what it means to be “heroic” in the modern age.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From the Son of a Doctor to an Ordinary Soldier
 George MacDonald Fraser was the son of a doctor, born and raised in Carlisle, England, near the border with Scotland. He attended school in both Carlisle and Glasgow, Scotland. In 1943, several years after Germany’s invasion of Poland, which marked the beginning of World War II, Fraser joined the army. During his service, he repeatedly engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Japanese in the jungles of Burma (now Myanmar). He recounts some of these experiences in his memoir, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, a book widely praised for its view of war from the ordinary soldier’s perspective.

Fraser used his military experiences after the war, including his postings in the Middle East and North Africa, to create three volumes of short stories about the waning days of British colonialism, which began at the end of World War II as most of Europe lay in ruins and even Britain found itself nearing bankruptcy. The stories alternate between comedy and tragedy, and all of them feature Fraser’s character Private McAuslan, “the dirtiest soldier in the world.”

Life After the Military After his discharge from the military, Fraser became a journalist in England and Canada, eventually returning to Glasgow to become an editor at the *Glasgow Herald* in 1953. He left this position when his first novel, *Flashman*, became a hit in 1969. He moved to the Isle of Man, Crown dependency of the United Kingdom, to avoid paying high British taxes, and he remained there for the rest of his life.

Success in Hollywood Fraser’s interest in history led him to write a book about how Hollywood treats histor-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fraser’s famous contemporaries include:

- Roald Dahl** (1916–1990): British author known for his children’s books, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964).
- Margaret Thatcher** (1925–): Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.
- Claude Lévi-Strauss** (1908–): The French anthropologist who was an important figure in the development of structuralism, a branch of analysis that focuses on the relationship between interrelated parts of a system as a source of meaning, as it relates to anthropology.
- John Kenneth Galbraith** (1908–2006): An economist who argued that wealthy nations should use their resources to help developing countries deal with poverty for their mutual benefit. He won two Presidential Medals of Freedom, from presidents Harry Truman and Bill Clinton.

ical figures and events, *The Hollywood History of the World: From One Million Years B.C. to Apocalypse Now* (1988). He concludes that the movies do a more responsible job than most people might assume. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Fraser contributed to the movies himself, adapting his novel *Royal Flash* for the screen in 1975. He also wrote the screenplays for several other historical farces, including *The Three Musketeers* (1973) and its sequel *The Four Musketeers* (1974). He also co-wrote one screenplay in the James Bond series: *Octopussy* (1983).

Fraser was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1999. He continued writing and publishing work into old age. On January 2, 2008, at the age of eighty-two, George Fraser died of cancer. His daughter, Caro Fraser, is a successful writer with a series of novels of her own—legal thrillers set in London’s Caper Court. He is also survived by his wife and two sons.

Works in Literary Context

Fraser’s most popular creation, *Flashman*, was inspired by Thomas Hughes’s novel *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857), which Fraser read as a boy. In Hughes’s novel, a character named Flashman appears as a sadistic bully that torments the novel’s protagonist, Tom. Building on a tradition of authors who publicly conflated fact with fiction, Fraser joined authors like Daniel Defoe who gained popularity after their tales, which were assumed by readers to be true, were revealed to be fiction.

False Document When *Flashman: From the Flashman Papers, 1839–1842* first appeared in 1969, many people

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

An “antihero” should not be confused with a “villain”: The antihero is the protagonist (the center of the reader’s interest and affection, trying to bring about good or order) and the villain is the antagonist (the character trying to stop the protagonist, trying to create crime or chaos). An antihero exhibits qualities such as cowardice or dullness, but still remains the protagonist, sometimes in spite of himself. Here are some other works containing antiheroes.

Hamlet (1599–1601), a play by William Shakespeare. The titular character of this tragedy is often considered one of the earliest examples of an antihero in English literature. Though his aims are just, Hamlet is hesitant, skeptical, and self-absorbed. These traits all contribute to his ultimate downfall.

Don Quixote, Man of La Mancha (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. This central book in the canon of Western literature tells of an eccentric Spaniard who cobbles together a suit of armor made of scrap metal and sets out to slay giants and rescue damsels in distress.

The Maltese Falcon (1930), a novel by Dashiell Hammett. This classic detective story introduced the character of Sam Spade, a private investigator who does whatever it takes—including working with criminals—to solve his case.

Blackadder (1983–1989), a television series written by Rowan Atkinson, Richard Curtis, and Ben Elton. This classic British series is about a vain, cowardly, self-interested, but very smart and witty antihero who appears in various places throughout key moments in British history, from the medieval period through World War I.

assumed it was a true story. It deals with the misadventures of a young British captain in India who always manages to end up the hero while running from danger. Fraser claimed that he had found the manuscript wrapped in oilskins and packed in a tea-chest in the Leicestershire town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. So many readers believed the account was true that the publisher had to break the story that it was a fake to the *New York Times*. With this publicity, the book became a bestseller.

Joining the Tradition of Conflating Fiction with Fact Fraser was certainly not the first author to conflate fiction with fact. When the novel emerged as a popular literary genre in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it was a child that bore a family resemblance to its various ancestors: travel narratives, sermons, saint’s lives, criminal confessions, spiritual autobiographies, histories, political tracts, professional guides. The first bestselling novel in the history of the genre was

Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. That story was told in Crusoe’s voice, the real author’s name appears nowhere in the book, and there is enough realistic detail for it to be taken as fact.

Satire of Victorian Figures and Society The eleven sequels to the original *Flashman* novel abandon the factual premise in favor of satire and comedy, as the protagonist travels to virtually every notable location and meets nearly every important person in the second half of the nineteenth century: Benjamin Disraeli, Arthur Wellesley Wellington, Otto von Bismarck, Queen Victoria, Abraham Lincoln, and others. The main character’s selfishness and eye for the ladies get him into tricky situations, but he always weasels out of them through his charm, wit, and knack for making a quick getaway. Fraser was writing these *Flashman* novels in the mid-1960s when straightforward and heroic historical fiction was no longer in style. One of Fraser’s literary contributions was to fuse the old Victorian novel with the new cynical, sardonic, and witty satires of the 1960s.

Works in Critical Context

Fraser’s novels, notes W. Keith Kraus of *Best Sellers*, are “the continuing story of Harry Flashman, a nineteenth-century rogue who zoomed to stardom in a first volume over the bodies of a few thousand Afghans . . . and a handful of reviewers.” Other *Flashman* books feature the hero in various historical settings. In *Flashman and the Redskins*, for instance, Flashman travels to the United States and tries to persuade President Ulysses S. Grant to give General George Armstrong Custer his job back. Jonathan Yardley, in *Washington Post Book World*, finds this adventure, though not “quite as hilarious as promised in the promotional material,” still “consistently entertaining” and “eminently satisfying.” Jack Kapica, of the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, considering the hero’s exploits in *Flashman and the Dragon* less predictable than the previous *Flashman* books, declares that “there is a more mature hand at work here, and one that is oddly even more satisfying.”

Of the *Flashman* books in general, a writer for the *London Times* writes, “It was all rollicking nonsense; but it had a sterling quality that went to the heart of many sophisticated readers who like to relax with a rubbishy book provided it is well written rubbish. Fraser was a thoroughly professional literary craftsman.”

Objections to Fraser’s writing are often politically based. It is not always clear when racist and sexist attitudes regularly appear in the *Flashman* novels because of their nineteenth-century setting, or because they are shared by Fraser. As Fraser himself once said of Flashman, “If he wasn’t an elitist, racist swine, I’d be selling bootlaces at street corners instead of being a successful popular writer.” The *London Times* obituary for Fraser reads,

“Through it all, sabres glint in the sunlight and the white man comes out top in the end; bosoms heave, bodices are ripped; foreigners strut and sneer and simper and generally prove their inferiority. Part of the delight of the stories, when they appeared in an age of women’s liberation and campaigns against racial discrimination, was the shameless way Fraser ignored political correctness.” Others have been less delighted. A reviewer of *Flashman and the Angel of the Lord* says that the novel’s “ignorant, extremist, symbolic political violence . . . is ultimately uninteresting.” In Fraser’s memoirs, he is particularly harsh on the changes in Britain under the “New Labour” government of Tony Blair; the appeal of *The Light’s on at Signpost* (2002) is likely to be limited to those who already agree with his conservative point of view.

Responses to Literature

1. Have you ever been tricked into thinking that all or part of a fictional work was true? What was your reaction? What are the benefits and dangers of this as a literary technique?
2. Where do you draw a line between an antihero and a villain? How much can a character “get away with” before you lose sympathy or interest? Do some research on what reviewers have said about Flashman as an antihero, and see if he crosses that line for some of those critics. What do you find most and least appealing about Flashman?
3. Fraser was commissioned to write a screenplay for the James Bond series. Why do you think the producers selected Fraser? What do Bond and Flashman have in common as characters?

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Michael Frayn

BORN: 1933, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Tin Men (1965)

Noises Off (1982)

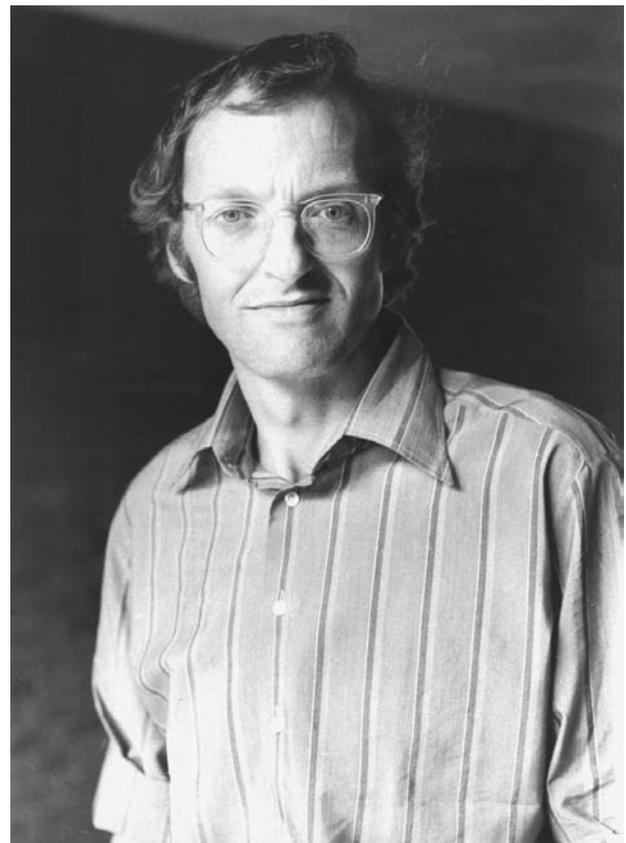
Copenhagen (1998)

Spies (1984)

Democracy (2002)

Overview

In his newspaper columns, novels, and plays, Michael Frayn employs satire and farce to explore the complexities and shortcomings of contemporary society. Among his



Michael Frayn Frayn, Michael, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

targets are human foibles, middle-class values, the pitfalls of technology, and those aspects of popular culture that Frayn believes distort reality—including mass media, public relations, and advertising. Although he first established himself as a columnist and novelist, Frayn is probably best known for several acclaimed theatrical works he wrote during the 1970s and 1980s. In these plays, he undertakes a more thorough examination of the relationship between language and reality. He is widely praised for his wit, insight, and ability to unite comedy with serious, philosophical observation.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Difficult Child becomes a Reluctant Cold Warrior Michael Frayn was born on September 8, 1933, in London, England, to Thomas Allen Frayn, a sales representative for an asbestos company, and Violet Alice Lawson Frayn, a shop assistant. Soon after his birth, which came during the worldwide economic depression that preceded World War II's 1939 start in Europe, Frayn's parents moved to Ewell on the southern fringe of London. Frayn believes his sense of humor began to develop during his years at Kingston Grammar School where, to the delight of classmates, he practiced "techniques of mockery" on his teachers. Referring to this early habit of making jokes at the expense of others, Frayn says, "I sometimes wonder if this isn't an embarrassingly exact paradigm of much that I've done since."

After leaving school in 1952, Frayn was conscripted into the Royal Army and sent to a Russian-interpreter course at Cambridge. He also studied in Moscow for several weeks, returning with the opinion that the so-called Cold War was ridiculous. The Cold War was a decades-long period of tension between purportedly Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Asia and the determinedly capitalist governments of Western Europe and the United States. Such East-West relations would later become a subject of satire in many of Frayn's works. Eventually Frayn was commissioned as an officer in the Intelligence Corps, which certainly influenced his second novel, *The Russian Interpreter*, (1966). Discharged from the army in 1954, he returned to Cambridge to study philosophy at Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge.

From behind the Stage in Cambridge to behind High Society in Manchester At Cambridge, Frayn wrote humorous articles for the undergraduate newspaper. He also collaborated with John Edwards on a musical comedy, *Zounds!*, which was performed in 1957 by the Cambridge theatrical club, the Footlights. After graduation in 1957, Frayn worked for the *Manchester Guardian*, where he was a reporter from 1957 to 1959 and a columnist from 1959 to 1962. His columns of social satire for the *Guardian* soon became very popular and

were collected into two books, *The Day of the Dog* (1962) and *The Book of Fub* (1963). In 1962 he moved to the *Observer* in London, where he continued writing humorous columns until 1968. His work for the *Observer* has also been collected as *On the Outskirts* (1964) and *At Bay in Gear Street* (1967).

A Novelist Turns to Television Frayn's first novel, *The Tin Men* (1965), is a satire on the failure of mere human beings to rise above the level of computers. Naturally, it is in the satirical mold of his newspaper columns. *The Tin Men* won the Somerset Maugham Award, and his second novel, *The Russian Interpreter*, about espionage, won the Hawthornden Prize. Two more satirical novels followed: *Towards the End of the Morning* (1967) and *A Very Private Life* (1968).

Television then offered Frayn a new opportunity to try out his dramatic skills. In 1968 "Jamie on a Flying Visit," a farcical comedy about the collision between the tired inhabitants of a postwar housing estate and a rich visitor from the protagonist's wife's undergraduate past, was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It and "Birthday" (1969), a story about the overriding imperatives of human reproduction, were produced as part of the *Wednesday Play* series.

Failed Drama Offers the Blueprint for Success The encouragement of the producer Michael Codron, who later staged many of Frayn's plays and produced his motion picture *Clockwise* (1986), prompted Frayn to try writing for the theater. His first professional theatrical production, four one-act two-actor plays collectively titled *The Two of Us*, opened on July 30, 1970, at the Garrick Theatre in London. *The Two of Us* was not a success, and Frayn fared little better with his next play, *The Sandboy* (1971).

Frayn, however, did not give up on his drama and went on to write the well-received *Noises Off*, which established his reputation not only as a playwright but also as a supreme writer of farce. A comedy that depends on its parodic borrowings from the worst traditions of the British farce, *Noises Off* traces progress from the last-minute rehearsal and the subsequent run of an awful piece of repertory theater, and the connection between the stage business and the actors' interwoven lives. The idea for the play came initially from Frayn's viewing of his own work, *The Two of Us*, from backstage. He found that viewing the play from that vantage point provided a greater comic experience than observing it from the usual audience perspective.

Sparkling Career as a Dramatist and Prose-writer Frayn's success in theater, however, did not mean a renunciation of his earlier engagement with the novel. He continued writing novels sporadically throughout the 1980s and '90s and into the new century, most recently offering the very successful *Spies* (2002). At the same time, his stage efforts found still greater success,

with the 1998 *Copenhagen* winning a variety of awards, including a prestigious Tony Award for Best Play for its Broadway performances in 2000. *Copenhagen* deals with a mysterious meeting between physicists Neils Bohr (Danish) and Werner Heisenberg (German) in Nazi-occupied Denmark, with Frayn reaching back from the end of the twentieth century to one of the century's most significant and devastating moments: World War II and the development of the atomic bomb. Frayn returned again to Germany for his successful 2002 play *Democracy*, before turning to Austrian theater impresario Max Reinhardt—and his encounter with Nazism—for the 2008 *Afterlife*. He has also published a number of volumes of non-fiction and philosophy, with his latest effort *The Human Touch: Our Part in the Creation of a Universe* (2006) focusing (rather lightly, complain the critics) on what quantum theory and certain trends in cognitive science suggest about the world outside our minds. Frayn lives in London with his wife, well-known biographer and literary critic Claire Tomalin.

Works in Literary Context

Frayn's work is nearly always satirical in nature. But that satire runs above a deep philosophical undercurrent. Indeed, much of Frayn's work delves into issues of language and meaning, and his philosophical thinking is influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosopher whose primary focus was on the nature and limitations of language.

In the Satirical Tradition Satire seeks to critique a person or practice, usually by exaggerating and laying bare the foibles of the person or the practice. As an example, Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* satirizes many aspects of the culture in which he lived, but Swift focused extra energy on scientists. He considered scientists to be overly abstract people whose ideas were far removed from practical implementation. In *Gulliver's Travels*, he portrays scientists as being so absent-minded that they actually have to hire assistants to help them remember to do things like breathe, eat, and go to the bathroom.

Frayn's work, like Swift's, often focuses its satirical gaze on people who are less than fully present in the lives they lead. For instance, *Tin Men* is a satire on the stupidity of people whose procedures are so dull that they can be taken over by computers. Again, in *Mr. Foot*, Frayn satirizes lifeless and loveless marriages. The husband is enshrined as the upholder of a set of suburban values spoofed in the English absurdist tradition, and the wife, who is the mouthpiece of the satire, is thus separated from those values. In *Mr. Foot*, the audience ultimately comes to understand that the life of the wife has been a tragic loss, thereby underscoring the fact that there is something missing in the suburban values Frayn critiques. This suggests, in the process, that there must be a better way to live life.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frayn's famous contemporaries include:

Cormac McCarthy (1933–): An American novelist, many of whose novels, including *No Country for Old Men* and *All the Pretty Horses*, have been adapted into popular films.

Michael Ondaatje (1943–): The Sri-Lankan and Canadian novelist who won the Booker Prize for his novel *The English Patient*.

Bob Marley (1945–1981): A Jamaican songwriter who promoted peace through his songs. His efforts were recognized when he was awarded the Peace Medal of the Third World from the United Nations.

Cyprian Ekwensi (1921–2007): An author who helped to popularize the novel as an art form in his native Nigeria.

José Saramago (1922–): The Portuguese novelist honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998.

Benazir Bhutto (1953–2007): The first woman to serve as prime minister of Pakistan. Bhutto was assassinated on December 27, 2007, in her home country.

Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Language

Frayn's work is thoroughly infused with philosophical meditations—on everything from the nature of reality to the effects of language. With respect to these philosophical ruminations, Frayn recalls, “The philosopher who entirely dominated the way that philosophy was done and taught at Cambridge, and who had the greatest possible influence on me and everything I've written was Wittgenstein.” An Austrian expatriate who spent most of his life in England, Wittgenstein was a leading figure in twentieth-century philosophy. He studied logic under Bertrand Russell at Cambridge and later taught philosophy there until 1947. Wittgenstein's work deals primarily with the nature and limits of language. He discussed the limits of language as a means of interpersonal communication and as a means of representing reality. Words, he said, present a picture of reality but are not reality itself.

To see the influence of Wittgenstein on Frayn's drama, one need only look at Frayn's second play, *The Sandboy*. Its central character is a city planner who is so successful that a documentary film is being made about him. In the play the actors speak to the audience as if it is an imaginary film crew, which is present to record a day in the life of Phil Schaffer, city planner. This unusual dramatic framework places Phil and his wife in the position of having to present a social facade and yet appear natural at the same time, while asking the audience—in a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Noises Off, Frayn's most popular play, utilizes a technique best described as "play-within-a-play." The play itself is a play, but it is also about a play. The characters in *Noises Off* attempt to perform in another play called *Nothing On*. Here are a few more examples of films and plays that use the "play-within-a-play" strategy:

For Your Consideration (2006), a film directed by Christopher Guest. This sharp piece of social satire sends up actors and the awards they receive, pointing out the self-congratulatory nature of institutions like the Academy Awards.

Adaptation (2002), a film directed by Charlie Kaufman. This film is about Kaufman, who wrote *Being John Malkovich*. In this movie, Kaufman participates in the production of *Being John Malkovich* while trying to adapt a novel into another screenplay. Along the way, Kaufman exposes the fears and fantasies that haunt him during the creative process of writing a screenplay.

Kiss Me, Kate (1948), a musical play by Cole Porter. In this musical, the actors attempt to perform a version of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Kiss Me, Kate* was honored with a Tony Award in 1949, demonstrating the popularity of the "play-within-a-play"—or in this case the "play-within-a-musical"—format.

Hamlet (c. 1601), a tragedy by William Shakespeare. In this play, as Hamlet tries to determine whether or not his uncle has killed his father, he produces a play that he thinks will force his uncle into confessing to the crime. He thereby raises questions about the nature and purpose of theatrical productions.

move that breaks the dramatic unity separating audience from players—to assume roles as partners in this charade. It is a play of ironic contrasts between what the liberal, intellectual Phil announces to the camera and what he actually does: a play about one man's self-delusions. The play also goes beyond simple satire of hypocrisy, examining fundamental questions about the very nature of reality. The questions it raises are reminiscent of Wittgenstein's: What is the reality signified by what people say? Do the words people use signify what they really mean—do they themselves know what they mean and what reality is? What is real and what is merely a representation of what is real?

Given the recent popularity of "reality" television, *The Sandboy*—with its questions regarding the nature of reality and the way it is portrayed through language and, indeed, visuals—is clearly before its time in representing the problems of capturing "reality." Furthermore, if the "reality" we

can understand is never simply what it is, but always our own representation or web of symbols, the idea of being delusional is itself somewhat called into question.

Works in Critical Context

Michael Frayn is a satirist who has moved from newspaper columns to novels to television productions to stage plays. Judging from the critical responses, he seems to have conquered each medium. His plays have been popular with audiences who are attracted to their humor and with critics who have noted and reveled in their underlying social and philosophical commentary.

Noises Off Although many renowned comedies and dramas have used the play-within-a-play format in the past—it is a device that predates Shakespeare—perhaps no self-referential play has been so widely received in this generation as *Noises Off*, a no-holds-barred slapstick farce. *Noises Off* invites the audience to witness the turmoil behind a touring company of has-beens and never-weres as they attempt to perform a typically English sex farce called 'Nothing On.' Referring to the production as "a show that gave ineptitude a good name," *Insight* writer Sheryl Flatow observes that *Noises Off* was criticized by some as nothing more than a relentless, if effective, laugh-getting machine. The charge of being too funny, however, is not the sort of criticism that repels audiences, and *Noises Off* enjoyed a long run on both London's West End and New York's Broadway. Describing his own play, Frayn states: "The fear that haunts [the cast] is that the unlearned and unrehearsed—the great dark chaos behind the set, inside the heart and brain—will seep back on to the stage. . . . Their performance will break down, and they will be left in front of us naked and ashamed."

Critic Benedict Nightingale describes it in the *New Statesman* as "by far the funniest play in London," a view shared by many others. And in *TLS: The Times Literary Supplement*, Peter Kemp writes, "Having first parodied a farce, then brilliantly engineered his own, Frayn finally sabotages one. . . . Juggling expertly with its own stock in trade, *Noises Off* is a farce that makes you think as well as laugh."

Copenhagen Where Frayn succeeded in out-farc-ing the farce with *Noises Off*, he may just have out-dramaed the drama in *Copenhagen*. *The New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley notes, "*Copenhagen*, a critical and (more surprisingly) popular hit when it opened in London at the Royal National Theater in 1998, is nominally about a subject with all the sex appeal of a frozen flounder: a meeting in 1941 between the venerable Danish physicist Niels Bohr (Mr. Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Mr. Cumpsty), his former pupil and a German, during which no one to this day knows exactly what happened." Despite such a seemingly "unsexy" premise, Brantley concludes that the play is "endlessly fascinating" and that its protagonists take "possession of your own imagination as well, probably raising your blood pressure in the

process. And who would ever have thought it: that three dead, long-winded people talking about atomic physics would be such electrifying companions?" Likewise, in a review for the *Guardian*, David Hare writes, "Audiences flock to *Copenhagen* because they judge, rightly, that Michael Frayn has something interesting to tell them about nuclear physics." But *Copenhagen* is hardly just a play about ideas; it is a play about how ideas themselves are also about people, and it is perhaps in this that its enduring appeal may be found.

Responses to Literature

1. If the "play-within-a-play" setup is designed to make a comment upon the process of writing and producing plays, then what is Frayn communicating about the creative process in *Noises Off*? Support your response with analysis of passages from the play.
2. Frayn has been described as a writer of farce. Using the Internet and the library, research the word *farce*. How would you define this word as it relates to Frayn's work? Support your response with analyses of passages from his work.
3. Frayn's *The Sandboy* raises a number of the same questions asked by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein regarding reality and language. Based on your reading of the play, what kinds of answers—if any—does Frayn offer to these questions?
4. Frayn's *The Tin Men* is widely considered a fine example of satire. Read the novel and, in order to understand the complexities of writing effective satire, try to use Frayn's style to satirize an aspect from today's popular culture.

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❖ Sigmund Freud

BORN: 1856, Freiberg, Moravia (now Czech Republic)

DIED: 1939, London, England

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Interpretation of Dreams
(1899)

On Narcissism (1914)

Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)

The Ego and the Id (1923)

Civilization and Its Discontents
(1930)

Overview

The work of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, marked the beginning of a modern, dynamic psychology by providing the first systematic explanation of the inner mental forces determining human behavior.



Sigmund Freud Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Early in his career Sigmund Freud distinguished himself as a histologist, neuropathologist, and clinical neurologist, and in his later life he was acclaimed as a talented writer and essayist. Freud is considered one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of the twentieth century for his development of the theories and methodologies of psychoanalysis. Central to his theory is the concept of the unconscious, which he described as a primitive region of the psyche containing emotions, memories, and drives that are hidden from and repressed by the conscious mind. Under his guidance, psychoanalysis became the dominant modern theory of human psychology and a major tool of research, as well as an important method of psychiatric treatment that currently has thousands of practitioners all over the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

His Mother's Favorite Sigismund Schlomo Freud was born on May 6, 1856, in Freiberg, Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic. Sigmund was the first child of his twice-widowed father's third marriage. His mother, Amalia Nathanson, was nineteen years old when she married Jacob Freud, aged thirty-nine. Sigmund's two stepbrothers from his father's first marriage were approximately the same age as his mother, and his older stepbrother's son, Sigmund's nephew, was his earliest playmate. Thus, the boy grew up in an unusual family structure, his mother halfway in age between himself and his father. Though seven younger children were born, Sigmund always remained his mother's favorite. When he was four, the family moved to Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and one of the great cultural, scientific, and medical centers of Europe. Freud remained in Vienna until a year before his death.

Youth in Vienna Freud went to the local elementary school and attended the humanistic high school (or gymnasium) from 1866 to 1873. He studied Greek and Latin, mathematics, history, and the natural sciences, and was a superior student. He passed his final examination with flying colors, qualifying to enter the University of Vienna at the age of seventeen. His family had recognized his special scholarly gifts from the beginning, and although they had only four bedrooms for eight people, Sigmund had his own room throughout his school days. As was the custom at the time, he lived with his parents well into adulthood, moving out when he was twenty-seven.

Pre-Psychoanalytic Work Freud first considered studying law but then enrolled in medical school. He spent seven instead of the usual five years acquiring his doctorate, taking time to work in the zoological and anatomical laboratories of the famous Ernst Brucke. At nineteen he conducted his first independent research

project while on a field trip, and at twenty he published his first scientific paper.

Freud received his doctor of medicine degree at the age of twenty-four and went on to spend three years as a resident physician in the famous Allgemeine Krankenhaus, a general hospital that was the medical center of Vienna. Psychiatry at that time was static and descriptive. A patient's signs and symptoms were carefully observed and recorded in the hope that doing so would lead to a correct diagnosis of an organic disease of the brain, which was assumed to be the basis of all psychopathology (mental disorder). The psychological meaning of behavior was not itself considered important; behavior was only a set of symptoms to be studied in order to understand the structures of the brain. Freud's later work revolutionized this attitude; yet, like all scientific revolutions, this one grew from a thorough understanding of and expertise in the traditional methods.

During the last part of his residency Freud received a grant to pursue his neurological studies abroad. He spent four months at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris, studying under the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot. Here, Freud first became interested in hysteria and Charcot's demonstration of its psychological origins. Thus, Freud's development of a psychoanalytic approach to mental disorders was rooted in nineteenth-century neurology rather than in the psychiatry of the era.

Beginning of Psychoanalysis Freud returned to Vienna, established himself in the private practice of neurology, and married. He soon devoted his efforts to the treatment of hysterical patients with the help of hypnosis, a technique he had studied under Charcot. Joseph Breuer, an older colleague who had become Freud's friend and mentor, told Freud about a hysterical patient whom he had treated successfully by hypnotizing her and then tracing her symptoms back to traumatic events she had experienced at her father's deathbed. Breuer called his treatment "catharsis" and attributed its effectiveness to the release of "pent-up emotions." Freud's experiments with Breuer's technique were successful, demonstrating that hysterical symptoms could consistently be traced to highly emotional experiences that had been "repressed," or excluded from conscious memory. Together with Breuer he published *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), which included several theoretical chapters, a series of Freud's case studies, and Breuer's initial case study. At the age of thirty-nine Freud first used the term *psychoanalysis*, and his major lifework was well under way.

At about this time Freud began a unique undertaking, his own self-analysis, which he pursued primarily by analyzing his dreams. As he proceeded, his personality changed. He developed a greater inner security, and his at times impulsive emotional responses became less marked. A major scientific result was *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901). In this book he argues that the dreams of every person, just like the symptoms of a hysterical or

an otherwise neurotic person, serve as a “royal road” to the understanding of unconscious mental processes, which have great importance in determining behavior. By the turn of the century Freud had increased his knowledge of the formation of neurotic symptoms to include conditions and reactions other than hysteria. He had also developed his therapeutic technique, dropping the use of hypnosis and shifting to the more effective and more widely applicable method of “free association.”

Development of Psychoanalysis Following his work on dreams, Freud wrote a series of papers in which he explored the influence of unconscious mental processes on virtually every aspect of human behavior—slips of the tongue and simple errors of memory (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901), humor (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 1905) and artistic creativity (*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 1910)—as well as cultural institutions (*Totem and Taboo*, 1912). He recognized that predominant among the unconscious forces that lead to neuroses are the sexual desires of early childhood that have been excluded from conscious awareness, yet have preserved their dynamic force within the personality. He described his highly controversial views concerning infantile sexuality in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), a work that initially met vehement protest but was gradually accepted by practically all schools of psychology. During this period he also published a number of case histories and a series of articles dealing with psychoanalysis as therapy.

After 1902 Freud gathered a small group of interested people on Wednesday evenings for presentations of psychoanalytic papers and discussion. This was the beginning of the psychoanalytic movement. Swiss psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler and Carl Jung formed a study group in Zurich in 1907, and the first International Psychoanalytic Congress was held in Salzburg in 1908. In 1909 Freud was invited to give five lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. He considered this invitation the first official recognition to be extended to his new science.

At the same time Freud made a major revision in his theory of childhood sexuality. He first thought that his neurotic patients had actually experienced sexual seductions in childhood, but he then realized that his patients were usually describing childhood fantasies, or wishes, rather than actual events. He retracted his earlier statement on infantile sexuality, but he rejected neither the data nor the theory—he simply reformulated both. Later, as psychoanalysis became better established, several of Freud’s closest colleagues broke with him and established groups of their own, some of which continue to this day. Among them, Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, and Wilhelm Reich are the best known.

Later Years In 1923 Freud developed a cancerous growth in his mouth that led to his death sixteen years and thirty-three operations later. Despite his ill health, these were years of great scientific productivity. He pub-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Freud’s famous contemporaries include:

Arthur Clive Heward Bell (1881–1964): English art critic and prominent proponent of formalism in aesthetics. Bell was a member of the Bloomsbury Group, an English collective responsible for influencing literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics.

Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940): British conservative best known for appeasing Adolf Hitler and the Nazis with his signing of the 1938 Munich Agreement.

E. M. Forster (1879–1970): English novelist, short-story writer, and essayist best known for his novels examining class difference and hypocrisy in early twentieth-century British society.

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychoanalysis who is typically considered first a follower of Freud who then developed theoretical differences, split from Freud, and formed a new school of thought.

lished findings on the importance of aggressive as well as sexual drives (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920); developed a new theoretical framework to organize his new data concerning the structure of the mind (*The Ego and the Id*, 1923); revised his theory of anxiety, which he now interpreted as a signal of danger emanating from unconscious fantasies rather than the result of repressed sexual feelings (*Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, 1926); and discussed religion, civilization, and further questions of theory and technique.

In March 1938 Austria was occupied by German troops, and Freud and his family were put under house arrest. Through the combined efforts of Marie Bonaparte, Princess of Greece; British psychoanalyst Ernest Jones; and W. C. Bullitt, the American ambassador to France, the Freuds were permitted to leave Austria in June. Freud’s keen mind and ironic sense of humor were evident when, forced to flee his home at the age of eighty-two, suffering from cancer, and in mortal danger, he was asked to sign a document attesting that he had been treated well by the Nazi authorities; as biographer Ernest Jones quoted, he added in his own handwriting, “I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone.” Freud spent his last year in London, undergoing surgery. He died on September 23, 1939. The influence of his discoveries on the science and culture of the twentieth century is incalculable.

Works in Literary Context

Personal Life Influence Freud’s personal life has long been a subject of interest to admirers and critics.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud introduced a conceptual framework for the basic structure of the psyche, a framework he extended in theory throughout his career. Here are a few works by writers who covered similar subjects:

13 Dreams Freud Never Had (2005), a nonfiction book by J. Allan Hobson, M.D. Neuroscientific study of the dreaming brain-mind, as reported by a Harvard psychiatrist and neuroscientist who uses his own dreams for the study.

Man and His Symbols (1964), a work of nonfiction by Carl G. Jung. Jung's most significant theories as collected and explained by contemporaries, experts, and scholars.

The Writings of Anna Freud (1974), a nonfiction collection by Anna Freud. Collected papers and lectures on child development and psychology by the daughter of Sigmund Freud.

An intensely private man, Freud made several attempts to thwart future biographers by destroying personal papers. However, his scientific work, his friends, and his extensive correspondence allow historians to paint a vivid picture.

Freud was an imposing man, although physically small. He read extensively, loved to travel, and was an avid collector of archeological curiosities. As an adult, Freud did not practice Judaism as a religion. Despite this fact, his Jewish cultural background and tradition were important influences on his thinking. He considered himself Jewish and maintained contact with Jewish organizations; one of his last works was a study of Moses and the Jewish people. Devoted to his family, he always practiced in a consultation room attached to his home. He was intensely loyal to his friends and inspired loyalty in a circle of disciples that persists to this day.

Professional Influence His bold and original sexual theories influenced colleagues and have provoked ongoing controversy. Freud's insistence on the libido as the dominant human drive led to breaks with some of his illustrious followers, notably Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, who respectively emphasized a "will to power" and a mythic/spiritual questing as important sources of unconscious energy. But the Freud-led international psychoanalytic movement gained considerable influence in professional circles in the period before World War I, and Freudian theory had been popularized in Europe and the United States by the 1920s. *Freud's Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (General Introduction to Psychoanalysis), published in 1916 and translated into English four years later, introduced his basic ideas

about dreams, errors, sexual development, and neurosis to a general readership.

Works in Critical Context

While Freudian concepts and language now suffuse Western culture, psychoanalytic theory remains highly controversial more than half a century after Freud's death. He continues to be criticized for exaggerating unconscious sexual motivations, and many of his theories about female sexuality are now widely dismissed. More fundamentally, the very concept of an unconscious yet communicative mind has been challenged and psychoanalysis itself belittled as pseudoscience.

But Freud himself made only limited claims for the therapeutic value of psychoanalysis. Whether or not his theories hold up—and there is still much argument on both sides—his genius in introducing an entirely new way of thinking about human behavior is universally acknowledged.

While most of his works have earned recognition for making profound contributions to Western culture, one theory as well as one other work stand out: psychosexual theory and *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory* (1905) secured Freud's international reputation and notoriety. In it, the Viennese psychiatrist outlines the childhood stages of sexual development, whose successful passage he thought vital to adult happiness and psychic equilibrium.

The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) In this book, which remains one of his most widely read works, the psychiatrist states that dreams often express unconscious desires (or deep-seated wishes) in symbolic form. While many readers found these ideas interesting, some critics were less impressed. An unnamed reviewer for *The Nation* states of the book, "The layman must certainly see in this conception much that will appear to him fantastic, if not absurd. The psychologist must see in it the building of a huge structure upon a very slim and unstable foundation." Carl Jung, in a 1933 essay on the differences between him and Freud, describes the book as an instance of Freud putting "his peculiar mental disposition naïvely on view," and faults the author for not supporting his basic premise.

Responses to Literature

1. Consider Freud's biography in relation to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. What similarities exist between his life and his work?
2. What questions would you ask Freud about dreams if he were alive today? What, if any, challenges to his ideas might you pose?

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Brian Friel

BORN: 1929, Omagh, Tyrone, Northern Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Philadelphia, Here I Come! (1964)

Faith Healer (1979)

Translations (1980)

Dancing at Lughnasa (1990)

Overview

One of the leading Irish dramatists of his era, Brian Friel is noted for his deft use of language, his sensitive charac-



Brian Friel Thos Robinson / Getty Images

terizations, and his interest in Irish life and history. In his plays, Ireland not only provides the canvas upon which his largely rural characters are portrayed, but it also acts as a character itself. Friel is a central figure in the resurgence of interest in Irish drama that took place on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1980s and 1990s. He follows in the tradition of W. B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey, and other Irish artists of the early twentieth century. He has achieved commercial and critical success with works that address pressing social concerns.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Strong Influence of School Friel was born Bernard Patrick Friel on January 9, 1929, outside of Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland. His father was a primary-school principal, and his mother was a postmistress from Glenties in County Donegal. When Friel was ten, his family moved to Londonderry. After completing his secondary education, Friel went to the seminary at

St. Patrick's College. He graduated in 1948, but instead of entering the priesthood, he attended St. Joseph's Teacher Training College in Belfast. He then returned to the Derry area and spent the next ten years teaching in various schools. The figure of the schoolmaster is present in many of his stories and plays.

The Irish Civil War and Continuing Troubles

In the years before and after Friel's birth, the people of Ireland were embroiled in a divisive conflict over the country's fate as either a dominion of Great Britain or as an independent nation. According to a treaty signed in 1921, Ireland was established as a free state that would remain a part of the United Kingdom. Opponents of the treaty included many members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who had long fought to establish Ireland's complete independence from England. These republicans argued that remaining a part of the United Kingdom would deny them the complete freedom and independence they sought for their country—especially since the treaty specifically required Irish citizens to pledge an oath of allegiance to the reigning British monarch. The bloody conflict between republicans and free-state supporters lasted less than a year, but resulted in the death of thousands, including both soldiers and civilians caught in the action. The republicans lost the battle, though the cause of complete independence remained the focus of the IRA in the decades following the war. The cities of Belfast and Londonderry—referred to simply as “Derry” by republicans—which feature prominently in Friel's life, were among the areas most affected by the ongoing strife.

Teacher and Storywriter During his years as a schoolteacher, Friel wrote short stories. Because Friel was born into the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, the violence and alienation of the Northern Irish is never far beneath the surface of his stories. His first published story, “The Child” (1952), described the disappointment of a child who hopes and prays, in vain, that his parents will stop fighting. Already present in this story is a central Friel theme: the division between hope and reality. In 1954 he married Ann Morrison, with whom he fathered five children. He was active in the Irish civil rights movement of the time as a member of the Nationalist Party, which supported Irish independence from England; however, the “troubles” and sectarian politics that are so dominant in Irish history are largely absent from his writing.

Friel found early success with his short fiction, broadcasting numerous stories on BBC Radio starting in 1956. He began publishing stories steadily in the *New Yorker* magazine. In addition to his stories, he worked as a freelance journalist, submitting articles to *Commonweal* and the *Irish Press*. In 1960 Friel ended his teaching career and began writing full-time.

Shift to Drama Friel's first story collection, *The Sauer of Larks*, was published in 1962. By this time, he was

also writing stage plays, some of which were produced at Dublin's famous Abbey Theatre, seat of the Irish dramaturgical tradition of Yeats, O'Casey and others. In 1963, to increase his knowledge of the working theater, Friel accepted an invitation from the noted Anglo-Irish director Tyrone Guthrie to visit him in Minneapolis, at the theater that bears Guthrie's name. The four months Friel spent observing Guthrie direct *Hamlet* and Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* initiated his shift from short fiction to drama.

Transatlantic Productions In 1964 Friel completed the play that was to be his first commercial success and that would secure his international reputation: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* The play is about Gareth O'Donnell, who departs from Ireland to the promise of a new life in Philadelphia. The story delves into the inner state of the immigrant through an unconventional device: Gareth is split into his public and private selves, played by two actors. The drama enjoyed a successful run in its author's native Northern Ireland and in London, then played at New York's Helen Hayes Theatre for 326 performances, the longest run for an Irish play on Broadway. The American theater community gave Friel such a warm reception that his next play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966), was staged in New York before its production in Dublin. In that play, an eighty-nine-year-old Irish woman returns home after thirty-four years in America, only to be relegated to a rest home by her brother and his wife. A steady stream of dramatic works followed over the next fifteen years, each produced on one or both sides of the Atlantic.

The 1970s was a time of increased political violence in Northern Ireland. In January 1972, civil rights organizers in Londonderry marched to protest imprisonment without trial. British soldiers started arresting people and began shooting at the unarmed crowd. Thirteen people died. Shortly afterward, Friel wrote *The Freedom of the City* (1973), an overtly political play that relates the events of three Irish civil-rights demonstrators in Londonderry, moving freely through time, and counterpointing the action with snippets from an academic lecture.

Friel increased his standing with two stage successes in 1979. *Faith Healer* consists of four monologues, by characters living and dead, attempting to sort out the life of Frank Hardy, who is either a miracle worker or a charlatan. The play opened on Broadway while Friel's *Aristocrats* (1979) was running at the Abbey in Dublin. The latter play concerns a family of Irish Catholic gentry in decline whose inner workings are exposed as friends, family, and outsiders gather to witness the wedding of the family's youngest daughter. Critics drew numerous comparisons to the stage works of Anton Chekhov, and indeed, Friel wrote *Aristocrats* while working on a translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*.

Critical Successes In 1980 Friel and actor Stephen Rea formed the Field Day, a theater company dedicated

to bringing professional theater to communities throughout Ireland. Friel's play *Translations* (1980), the Field Day's first production, obliquely addresses the struggle in Northern Ireland by depicting the collision between the English and the Irish in 1833, when the English succeeded in closing Gaelic schools despite native resistance. *Translations* explores the nature of language and reveals its political exploitation as a colonizing tool; many consider it Friel's best play.

Friel's greatest commercial success as a playwright came with *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), another metaphorically suggestive play with complex characterizations and relationships. It is a portrait of a woman-run household where five spinster sisters dance and sing when a radio arrives. The title of the play refers to a harvest festival honoring the ancient pagan god Lugh, a tribute to celebrating the past with the present. *Dancing at Lughnasa* won the British Olivier Award and American Tony Award for best play of the year and was adapted into a motion picture in 1998 starring Meryl Streep.

More recent Friel plays include *Molly Sweeney* (1994), about a blind woman who regains her sight, and *Afterplay* (2002), which imagines the meeting of several characters from Chekhov. Friel has translated or adapted for the stage several works by Chekhov and Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev. Friel was elected to the prestigious Irish arts association Aosdana in 1982, and in 1987 he was appointed to the Irish Senate, the first writer to be honored in this way since William Butler Yeats. Famously shy of publicity, he lives with his wife in County Donegal.

Works in Literary Context

Friel's plays are frequently compared with those of Chekhov, and, indeed, their underlying sense of pathos and futility, and their reliance on subtle, subtextual clues to convey character and message, draw upon the influence of the Russian master. Friel's short stories, however, are more distinctly Irish in derivation. Friel has expressed his indebtedness to Sean O'Faolain on many occasions; critics also see Friel's style as influenced by, or even derivative of, Frank O'Connor and Liam O'Flaherty. The short fiction of John Updike and V. S. Pritchett has also won Friel's admiration.

Ballybeg In both his stories and his plays, Friel has created his own fictional landscape, which he called Ballybeg, or, literally, "small town" (from the Irish *Baile Beag*). All of the area is part of the historical province of Ulster, in what today is County Donegal. The locale functions as a microcosm of Ireland, a canvas on which to paint Irish concerns, social norms, and characters seemingly indifferent to the island's political divisions.

Irish Characters None of Friel's stories has an urban setting, and they are peopled entirely by characters who maintain a slightly naive understanding of the world. No one is particularly evil, and deceptions and lies are perpe-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Friel's famous contemporaries include:

Derek Walcott (1930–): West Indian playwright and poet; winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and poet; author of *Things Fall Apart*.

Frank McCourt (1930–): Irish American author of *Angela's Ashes*.

Athol Fugard (1932–): South African playwright and stage director.

Seamus Heaney (1939–): Irish poet; winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Mary Robinson (1944–): President of Ireland, 1990–1997; United Nations high commissioner for human rights, 1997–2002.

trated against the self, toward sustaining illusion, rather than against others. Throughout his work, Friel handles his characters with affection and compassion, reflecting an extraordinary sensitivity to human nature. Outwardly simple, the characters are inwardly complex, and the emotional battle of each is kept free of sentimentality by Friel's skillful use of language. The combination of intelligence and emotion in Friel's characters succeeds in conveying a strong sense of the inadequacies of human nature while affirming the continuum of life.

Works in Critical Context

Friel's writing has been acclaimed for more than four decades. He had already earned a place among Ireland's top writers of short fiction, and a prestigious American outlet for his stories, when he turned to playwriting in the early 1960s. His plays have been warmly received and consistently produced. He is undoubtedly a leading figure in the revival of Irish drama in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Mixed Evaluations Critical appraisal of his work has not been uniformly appreciative. Friel is not considered a master of the short-story form; the consensus among critics is that all of his stories tend toward sameness in idea and execution. Friel has also defended himself against the charge that his stories are compromised by adherence to a formula suited to the *New Yorker* and to a foreign audience seeking a sentimental, idealized sense of Irishness. As a dramatist, critics perceive that Friel's mastery of character and fondness for storytelling outstrip his dramatic flair, depriving his plays of a sense of dynamism. Some critics find the overall scope of his work limited by its Irish milieu. Others, conversely, applaud

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brian Friel's plays capture the modern Irish experience and are partially responsible for a revival of the Irish dramatic tradition. The following are among the most well-known works premiered in Ireland by Irish playwrights:

Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902), a play by W. B. Yeats. A nationalistic play staged on opening night at the Irish National Theatre, the Abbey, in 1904.

The Playboy of the Western World (1907), a play by John Millington Synge. This drama, about a young man who may or may not have killed his father, provoked riots at its Dublin opening in January 1907.

The Plough and the Stars (1926), a play by Sean O'Casey. Set in Dublin, this work relates events leading to and including the famous Easter uprising of 1916.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Toward the Somme (1985), a play by Frank McGuinness. This work depicts the story of volunteers for the Ulster division in World War I.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane (1996), a play by Martin McDonagh. A black comedy about a middle-aged spinster who takes care of her elderly mother, the New York production won four Tony Awards in 1998.

his commitment to dramatizing the Irish national character and dilemma.

Critical studies of Friel's work appear in ever increasing numbers. Most focus almost exclusively on his dramatic works, viewing his short fiction only as a prelude to themes and ideas in the later dramas. A few critics, such as John Cronin in his contribution to the 1993 volume *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, analyze his stories for their own sake. Some recent studies, such as Scott Boltwood's *Brian Friel, Ireland, and the North*, delve into the relationship between the personal and the political in Friel's plays. Other commentators view language and its uses as a central Friel theme, an element that critics identify as common to the Irish dramatic tradition, from Oscar Wilde through W. B. Yeats to Samuel Beckett.

Responses to Literature

1. Explore the theme of language in one or more of Friel's plays; for example *Translations*.
2. Does it make sense to think of Friel as simply an Irish writer? How does he relate the specifics of the Irish experience to universal human concerns?
3. Would you call Friel a political writer? How do his stories and plays address controversial issues in subtle or indirect ways?

4. Most of Friel's stories take place in the fictional village of Ballybeg. What function does this community play in his work?

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Carlos Fuentes

BORN: 1928, Panama City, Panama

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Death of Artemio Cruz (1962)

Terra Nostra (1975)

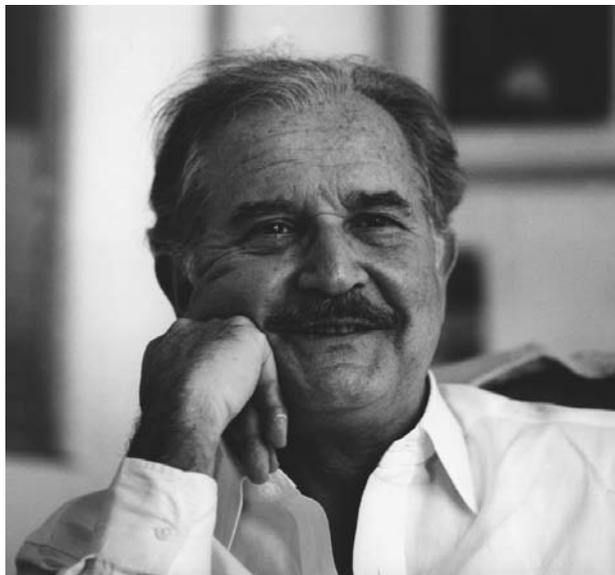
Burnt Water (1980)

Orchids in the Moonlight (1982)

The Old Gringo (1985)

Overview

Carlos Fuentes is widely regarded as Mexico's foremost contemporary novelist. His overriding literary concern is to establish a viable Mexican identity, both as an autonomous entity and in relation to the outside world. In his work, Fuentes often intertwines myth, legend, and history to examine his country's roots and discover the essence of modern Mexican society. Fuentes writes: "Our political life is fragmented, our history shot through with failure, but our cultural tradition is rich, and I think the time is coming when we will have to look at our faces, our own past." This tradition incorporates elements of Aztec culture, the Christian faith imparted by the Spanish



Carlos Fuentes *Fuentes, Carlos, photograph. AP Images.*

conquistadors, and the failed hopes of the Mexican Revolution. Fuentes uses the past, thematically and symbolically, to comment on contemporary concerns and to project his own vision of Mexico's future.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Diplomatic Roots, Law School, and International Service Carlos Fuentes, the son of a Mexican career diplomat, was born on November 11, 1928, in Panama City, Panama. As a child, he lived at several diplomatic posts in Latin America and spent much of the 1930s in Washington, D.C. He attended high school in Mexico City and later entered the National University of Mexico. While studying law there, he published several short stories and critical essays in journals. After graduating from law school, Fuentes traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to study international law and in 1950 began a long career in foreign affairs that culminated in his serving as Mexico's ambassador to France from 1975 to 1977.

The Latin American Literature "Boom" Fuentes wrote throughout his diplomatic career, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s he gained international attention as an important contributor to the "boom" in Latin American literature. Along with such authors as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, Fuentes published works that received international acclaim and spurred the reassessment of the position that Latin American authors held in contemporary literature. Fuentes's work, like that of several writers associated with the "boom," is technically experimental, featuring disjointed chronology, varying narrative perspectives, and rapid cuts between scenes, through which he creates a surreal atmosphere. For exam-

ple, in his first novel, *Where the Air Is Clear* (1958), Fuentes uses a series of montage-like sequences to investigate the vast range of personal histories and lifestyles in Mexico City. This work, which provoked controversy due to its candid portrayal of social inequity and its socialist overtones, expresses Fuentes's perception of how the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century failed to realize its ideals. This revolution, which began with an uprising led by Francisco I, was a reaction against the politics of dictator Porfirio Díaz and, ultimately, led to a complicated civil war. The frustration of the revolution, a recurring theme in his writing, forms the basis for one of Fuentes's most respected novels, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962).

Use of the Fantastic In the novella *Aura* (1962), Fuentes displays less concern with social criticism and makes greater use of bizarre images and the fantastic. Fuentes employs a disordered narrative in *A Change of Skin* (1967) to present a group of people who relive significant moments from their past as they travel together through Mexico. Fuentes's concern with the role of the past in determining the present is further demonstrated in *Terra Nostra* (1975), one of his most ambitious and successful works.

Negotiating the Contextual Mexican Identity with Magic Realism Fuentes's later fiction investigates Mexico's relationship with the rest of the world. *Distant Relations* (1980), for example, involves a Mexican archaeologist and his son who meet relatives in France; on another level, however, this work is about the interaction between Mexican and European cultures. In this novel, an old man relates a tale to a man named Carlos Fuentes, who in turn relates the tale to the reader. Through the inclusion of ghosts and mysterious characters, Fuentes also introduces fantastic events into otherwise realistic settings, a technique prevalent in Latin American literature that is often termed magic realism. In the novel *The Old Gringo* (1985), which examines Mexican-American relations, Fuentes creates an imaginative scenario of the fate that befell American journalist Ambrose Bierce after he disappeared in Mexico in 1913.

Plays, Short Stories, and Critical Essays In addition to his novels, Fuentes has written several plays, including *Orchids in the Moonlight* (1982), and has published the short-story collections *Los días enmascarados* (1954), *Cantar de ciegos* (1964), and *Chac Mool y otros cuentos* (1973). Many of his short stories appear in English translation in *Burnt Water* (1980). Fuentes is also respected for his essays, the topics of which range from social and political criticism to discussions of Mexican art.

In 1989 *The Old Gringo* was adapted as a film starring Jane Fonda and Gregory Peck. In 1994, said to be based on an alleged affair he had with the American actress Jean Seberg, Fuentes published *Diana, the Goddess Who Hunts Alone*, sparking controversy about the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fuentes's famous contemporaries include:

Julio Cortázar (1914–1984): Born in Belgium, Julio Cortázar was an Argentine writer who spent the last thirty years of his life in exile after he vocally opposed the dictatorship of Argentina's Juan Perón.

Edward Albee (1928–): American playwright famous for integrating absurdist elements into American theater. A three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Albee is most widely known for having written the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): Cuban novelist who exerted a tremendous influence on contemporary Latin American writers; his writings are considered some of the earliest examples of magic realism.

Gregory Peck (1916–2003): American actor Peck was a major box office draw from the 1940s to the 1960s. One of Peck's last roles was in the film version of *Old Gringo* (1989).

Jean Seberg (1938–1979): An American actress best remembered for her roles in the "New Wave" of French cinema in the 1960s. Fuentes's fictionalized relationship with Seberg was the subject of his work *Diana, the Goddess Who Hunts Alone* (1994).

historical accuracy of the book's contents. Throughout the 1990s and up to present day, Fuentes has steadily published novels, short stories, critical essays on politics and culture, in addition to his academic duties as professor at Brown University; he has taught courses at universities throughout the United States.

Works in Literary Context

Among Fuentes's major themes are the quest for Mexican national identity—influenced by the writings of the Mexican philosophers José Vasconcelos and Samuel Ramos, and by the seminal work on the Mexican national character by Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950)—and a continued and profound exploration of the components of that identity: political, historic, social, psychological, and mythic. One of Fuentes's most compelling themes is the world of the gods and goddesses of the Aztec pantheon—especially the god of life and love, Quetzalcoatl—his downfall and self-banishment from the New World, and his supposed return in the form of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, examined in *Terra Nostra* and in his drama *Todos los gatos son pardos*.

American Influence on Mexico Another theme that appears throughout Fuentes's work is that of the United States and the tremendous social, cultural, and

political impact it has exerted on his homeland, Mexico. Fuentes is decidedly ambivalent toward the country viewed in Latin America as the Colossus of the North. He spent much of his life traveling and lecturing in the United States, teaching at major North American universities, and collaborating on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) projects, such as the one commemorating the voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492. In his fictional works Fuentes emphasizes the fact that the greatest revolutionary force in Mexico is not the rebellious, ultimately defeated, *los de abajo* (lower class) but the North American presence. And in *Old Gringo*, in an attempt to come to grips with the North American–Mexican cultural clash, Fuentes evokes a revolutionary Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century through North American eyes and from a feminist perspective. Thus the narrator and the most important character is neither the acerbic and misanthropic Ambrose Bierce, to whom the title refers, nor the revolutionary general in the army of Pancho Villa, Tomás Arroyo—who in a fit of rage kills Bierce, ironically granting Bierce the death he has sought in Mexico—but the recluse, Harriet Winslow.

The History and Future of Mexico Fuentes's concern with the role of the past in determining the present is further demonstrated in *Terra Nostra*. Many critics believe that this novel exceeds the scope of his earlier fiction, extending the idea of history as a circular force by incorporating scenes from the future into the text. *Terra Nostra* is divided into three sections: "The Old World," which concerns Spain during the reign of Philip II; "The New World," about the Spanish conquest of Mexico; and "The Next World," which ends as the twenty-first century begins. By tracing the evolution of Mexico beginning with the Spanish conquest, Fuentes depicts the violence and cruelty that originated in the Mediterranean area and was perpetuated in Mexico through Spanish colonialism.

Christopher Unborn (1987), a verbally extravagant novel, continues Fuentes's interest in Mexican history. This work is narrated by Christopher Palomar, an omniscient fetus conceived by his parents in hopes of winning a contest to commemorate the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. According to contest rules, the male baby born closest to midnight on October 12, 1992, whose family name most closely resembles Columbus will assume leadership of Mexico at the age of twenty-one. The novel's nine chapters symbolize Christopher's gestation and allude to Columbus's voyage, which Fuentes views as a symbol of hope for Mexico's rediscovery and rebirth. Narrating from his mother's womb, Christopher uses wordplay, literary allusions, and grotesque humor, combining family history with caustic observations on the economic and environmental crises afflicting contemporary Mexico. *Christopher Unborn* satirizes Mexico's government as inept and its

citizenry as complacent, warning that the country's collapse is imminent without change.

As a key figure in the Latin American “boom” of the mid-twentieth century, Fuentes has exerted a considerable influence on later generations of Latin American writers. Vaulted to international fame and respect, Fuentes and his fellow boom writers loom so large that later writers who followed in their footsteps are called “post-boom.” Writers like Isabel Allende, whom Frederick Nunn has called “a product of the Boom,” are indirectly influenced by Fuentes and his ilk; as a reaction against the thematic and stylistic experiments of the boom, they have returned to a more realistic, naturalistic writing style. Style differences aside, their success and international acclaim are a direct result of the trails blazed by the likes of Fuentes.

Works in Critical Context

In discussing the critical response to the work of Fuentes, accomplished author Octavio Paz illuminates a stark divide in opinions about his work. Paz praises Fuentes's tendency toward extremes and defends him against his harsher critics, of which there are many. He writes, “Novels, stories, plays, chronicles, literary and political essays: Fuentes's body of work is already one of the richest and most varied of contemporary literature in our language. . . . Fuentes has been and is the main course of many cannibal banquets, for in literary matters—and not only in this, but in almost all social relations—Mexico is a country for which human flesh is a delicacy.” Similarly, critic Earl Shorris echoes Paz's assessment of the place held by Fuentes in Mexican letters. In assessing Fuentes's career, Shorris concludes that he “has been the palimpsest of Mexican history and culture separated into its discrete layers: Indian, Spanish, French, revolutionary, aristocratic, leftist, centrist, expatriate. In this analyzed presentation of the person, this soul shown after the centrifuge, Mr. Fuentes demonstrates the complexity of the Mexican character and the artistic difficulties peculiar to the novelist born in the Navel of the Universe, which is where the Aztecs placed Mexico.”

Fuentes's achievements in the novel genre have been recognized through his being awarded several distinguished prizes including the Premio Alfonso Reyes in 1980. *Cambio de piel*, one of his most intricate and problematic novels, was awarded the Premio Biblioteca Breve by the Barcelona publishing house Seix Barral. In 1975 Fuentes received the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia in Mexico City and in 1977 was awarded the Rómulo Gallegos prize in Venezuela, both honors for his novel *Terra Nostra*, which he wrote while a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. In 1984 he was awarded the Mexican Premio Nacional de la Literatura by President Miguel de la Madrid, and in 1987 he received the Spanish Premio Cervantes in Madrid, awarded by King Juan Carlos.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The works of other authors who, like Fuentes, have explored Mexican national identity include:

The Labyrinth of Solitude (1950), a collection of essays by Octavio Paz. The unifying theme of these works, written by one of Mexico's most respected authors, is an analysis of the character of the Mexican people, particularly the cultural emphasis on solitude and death.

Like Water for Chocolate (1989), a novel by Laura Esquivel. A masterwork of magic realism, this story follows a woman who expresses her feelings, literally, through her cooking; each chapter begins with a Mexican-food recipe.

The Plumed Serpent (1926), a novel by D. H. Lawrence. The title references the serpent-god Quetzalcoatl. This work, written from the perspective of non-Mexican outsiders, explores both contemporary Mexico and its pre-Columbian past.

Responses to Literature

1. Read Ambrose Bierce's famous short story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” which is mentioned in *Old Gringo*. What does that story tell you about the character of Bierce as Carlos Fuentes portrays him in the novel?
2. Fuentes outlines a projection of the future of the Hispanic people in *Terra Nostra*. Read and analyze this projection. Do you agree with Fuentes's ideas? Why or why not?
3. The stories of Carlos Fuentes can range over a wide variety of themes. Contrast two stories that deal with dissimilar themes and analyze their differences.
4. Identify and characterize conflicting layers of society in Fuentes's short stories. How do the different elements interact with each other?

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☒ **Athol Fugard**

BORN: 1932, Middleburg, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Blood Knot (1961)

Boesman and Lena (1969)

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead (1972)

"Master Harold" . . . and the Boys (1982)

Overview

Athol Fugard is South Africa's foremost playwright and one of the leading dramatists of the latter twentieth century. A writer, director, and performer, he has worked collaboratively with performers across the racial divide and transformed South African theater. In his work, Fugard focused relentlessly on the injustices perpetuated by South Africa's apartheid system of government. As his plays make viscerally clear, all South Africans have been the victims of the tragic legacy of apartheid.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Racial Divide in Youth Harold Athol Lannigan Fugard was born on June 11, 1932, on a farm in Cape Province, in the semidesert Karoo region of South Africa. In 1935, the family moved to Port Elizabeth, which became his lifelong home. His father, a crippled former jazz pianist of English stock, amused the boy with fantastic stories and confused him with his unabashed bigotry. His mother—an Afrikaner descended from Dutch settlers who had been coming to South Africa for trade purposes since the late seventeenth century—supported the family by managing their boardinghouse and tearoom.



Athol Fugard *Fugard, Athol*, photograph. AP Images.

Fugard credits his mother with teaching him to view South African society with a critical eye.

By the 1930s, legal and social discrimination was firmly in place against South Africans of non-European ancestry. After slavery ended there in 1833, blacks were required to carry identification cards, and in the early twentieth century, the Native Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 prohibited blacks from owning land in areas of white residence. Only 13 percent of the land in South Africa was put aside for blacks, though they formed 70 percent of the population. By the 1930s, Afrikaners—the more uncompromising supporters of segregation than English-speaking whites—began using the term *apartheid* to refer to their ideas of racial separation.

As a white child growing up in a segregated society, Fugard resisted the racist upbringing offered him, but could not escape apartheid's influence. He insisted that the family's black servants call him Master Harold, and one day, he spat in the face of Sam Semela, a waiter in the Fugard boardinghouse, who was the best friend he had as a child.

Transformation of Racial Beliefs Fugard attended Catholic schools as a youth. He had his first experience of amateur dramatics in secondary school, as an actor and as director of the school play. A scholarship took him to the University of Cape Town, where he studied ethics. However, he dropped out just before graduation and toured the Far East while working aboard a merchant ship. Fugard has remarked that living and working with men of all races aboard the *Graigaur* liberated him from the prejudice endemic among those with his background. Within a year he was back home, working as a freelance journalist for the *Port Elizabeth Evening Post*. By then, he knew he wanted to write.

As Fugard prepared for such a career, apartheid policies had become more strict in South Africa. When the Afrikaner-backed Nationalist Party was elected into office in 1948, more apartheid laws began to be put into place. Such laws made it illegal for blacks to use first-class coaches of railroad cars and for marriage between people of different races and divided the country into regions for blacks, whites, and coloreds (those of mixed race). Black South Africans had fought such discriminatory practices since the early twentieth century, but by the late 1940s, one major group, the African National Congress (ANC), increased its tactics to include strikes and acts of civil disobedience.

After Fugard met Sheila Meiring, an actress from Cape Town, and married her in 1956, he developed an interest in drama and started off as an actor. The couple moved to Johannesburg and began collaborating with a group of black writers and actors in the ghetto township of Sophiatown. Fugard worked briefly as a clerk in the Native Commissioner's Court, which tried cases against

nonwhites arrested for failing to carry identification. Observing the machinery of apartheid up close opened his eyes to its evil effects. Out of these experiences came *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nongogo* (1959), his first two full-length plays, which Fugard and his black actor friends performed for small private audiences.

The Blood Knot Fugard moved to England in 1959 to write, but his work received little attention there, and he realized he needed to work in the context of his home country. South African apartheid policies were firmly in place, and blacks, coloreds, and Asians (a racial category added to apartheid laws in the 1950s) were fully, legally segregated from whites. When he returned home, he completed his first and only novel. *Tsotsi* (1980) concerns a young black hoodlum who accidentally kidnaps a baby and is compelled to face the consequences of his actions. Fugard tried to destroy the manuscript, but a copy survived and was published in 1980.

While finishing *Tsotsi*, Fugard wrote his breakthrough play, *The Blood Knot* (1961). The idea came to him in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre, when police killed blacks protesting the apartheid pass laws—a turning point for all South Africans. *The Blood Knot* portrays the oscillating sense of conflict and harmony between two brothers born to the same mother. Morris has light skin and can pass for white. He confronts the truth about his identity when he returns home to live with his dark-skinned brother, Zach.

Fugard played the role of Morris himself. The play was first presented in 1961 to an invited audience. At that time, blacks and whites were banned from appearing on the same stage or sitting in the same audience. From the opening image of a shabby, pale-skinned man preparing a footbath for a black man, *The Blood Knot* struck South Africa's segregated culture like a bombshell. In 1962, Fugard supported a boycott against legally segregated theater audiences.

Collaborative Theater Returning to Port Elizabeth, Fugard helped found an all-black theater group called the Serpent Players. Despite police harassment, the group gave workshops and performed a variety of works for local audiences. Fugard also began to take his work overseas. His passport was revoked in 1967 after *The Blood Knot* aired on British television. Even after the government banned his plays, he refused to renounce his country. Fugard maintained that love, not hate, for South Africa would help that country break the chains of apartheid. In 1971, his travel restrictions were lifted, and Fugard traveled to England to direct his acclaimed play *Boesman and Lena* (1969), an unflinching portrayal of mutual hostility and dependence between a homeless mixed-race couple who wander without respite.

As Fugard gained increasing critical acclaim, he further refined his model of experimental, collaborative drama. He created his pieces with the actors, and staged

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fugard's famous contemporaries include:

Nadine Gordimer (1923–): A South African fiction writer and antiapartheid activist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961. She wrote *Burger's Daughter* (1969).

Wole Soyinka (1934–): The Nigerian playwright, poet, and essayist, who wrote the play *Kongi's Harvest* (1970).

Desmond Tutu (1931–): The Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, head of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Harold Pinter (1930–): An English playwright, screenwriter, and poet famous for such plays as *The Homecoming* (1964).

August Wilson (1945–2005): The American dramatist whose Pittsburgh Cycle chronicles the African-American experience in the twentieth century.

them in small, unofficial venues, with minimal sets and props. With two talented black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, Fugard produced three improvisational works with political themes: *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972), in which a man assumes a dead man's identity in order to obtain an apartheid pass; *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* (1972), about an "illegal" biracial love affair; and *The Island* (1973), in which two political prisoners stage Sophocles' play *Antigone* to express solidarity and resistance. The "Statements Trilogy" was staged in London and New York to great acclaim. Another experiment was the nearly wordless drama *Orestes* (1971), which juxtaposes the Greek tragedy with a contemporary protest in South Africa, to explore the impact of violence on both its victims and its perpetrators.

Protests and repression grew more intense in the late 1970s in South Africa. Beginning in 1976, blacks in Soweto violently protested the use of Afrikaans in schools, and the suppression by South African police of the riots left 174 blacks dead and 1,139 injured. New protest groups and leaders emerged among young blacks. More protests followed the death of one such leader, Steven Biko, while in police custody. In this environment, the playwright turned to more personal concerns. In *A Lesson from Aloes* (1978), a Dutch Afrikaner declines to defend himself when accused of betraying his only friend to the police, and for most of the play the audience is unsure of his innocence.

No Easy Answers Fugard's plays of the 1980s continued to probe the social and psychological dimensions of his nation's crisis, which deepened with the declaration of a state of emergency in 1985. A new constitution came

into force that reinforced the political control of whites, leading to increased strikes and conflicts by nonwhites as well as international pressure for change. The emergency regulations gave police the power to arrest without warrants and detain people indefinitely without charging them or notifying their families.

Some of his works opened in the United States and were not staged in South Africa. *The Road to Mecca* (1984), explored the solitary white consciousness through an elderly artist who isolates herself at home, producing sculptures from cement and wire. Fugard departed from realism with *A Place with the Pigs* (1987), a parable concerning a Soviet soldier who hides in a pigsty for forty years. Both plays premiered in the United States.

My Children! My Africa! (1989) was the first Fugard play to premiere in South Africa in years. The work was inspired by the story of a black teacher who refused to participate in a school boycott and was later murdered in Port Elizabeth by a group that believed he was a police informer. The play provoked controversy with its implicit critique of the school boycotts organized by the African National Congress.

Postapartheid Fugard's plays consistently place multiple viewpoints into dialogue, and exempt no position from scrutiny. This stance coincides with the principles of "truth and reconciliation" with which South Africa attempted to heal its wounds in the 1990s. When F. W. de Klerk became the head of the National Party in the late 1980s, he began instituting a series of reforms, including the legalization of such groups as the ANC. Apartheid laws began to be repealed in the early 1990s, the ANC was elected into power in the mid-1990s, and black former political prisoner Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. The first of Fugard's postapartheid plays, *Playland* (1993), is a case in point. As two strangers—one black, one white—reveal their darkest secrets to each other in an amusement park, the inherited nightmares of apartheid surface, offering no easy answers and forcefully posing the question: Can the sins of the past be forgiven, if not forgotten?

Valley Song (1996), reflects the playwright's optimistic view of his nation's future after the inauguration of Mandela. It also reveals its author's inward focus: Fugard placed himself onstage as the self-styled author. Two of his more recent works were also tinged with nostalgia. *The Captain's Tiger* (1997) is a reflection on his months in the merchant marines, while *Exits and Entrances* (2004) explores his early theatrical career. Fugard continues to make his home in South Africa.

Works in Literary Context

Fugard has created some classic works for the stage, but he acknowledges little influence from prior dramatists. The small casts, sparse sets, and flat dialogue in his plays reveal an aesthetic debt to Samuel Beckett. Reading

William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams early in his career confirmed his sense that he wanted to create drama that was, above all, local. Echoing one of his favorite authors, Albert Camus, Fugard says in *Notebooks, 1960–1977* that the “true meaning” of his life’s work is “just to witness” as truthfully as he can “the nameless and destitute” of his “one little corner of the world.” The greatest influence on his work comes from his collaborators, especially black performers, such as Zakes Mokae and John Kani, who carry on a rich, indigenous storytelling tradition.

Psychology in Intimate Relationships According to Dennis Walder in *Athol Fugard*, Fugard’s plays “approximate . . . the same basic model established by *The Blood Knot*: a small cast of ‘marginal’ characters is presented in a passionately close relationship embodying the tensions current in their society.” For example, Boesman expresses his hatred of the South African political system in the form of violence toward Lena, who suffers Boesman’s misplaced rage with dignity. Similarly, in *My Children! My Africa!* the confrontation between the elderly black schoolteacher and the militant student reflects a gap between generations and ideologies. A Fugard play invariably reveals the damage that unjust social institutions inflict on the psychic and ethical integrity of individuals. Fugard forces audiences to consider his characters in their complexity, not to characterize them as good or bad.

The Dramatic Image Fugard’s model is also consistent in the way his plays are produced. The actors are directly involved in the play’s creation. Unnecessary scenery, costumes, and props are stripped away, creating what the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski called “poor theater,” although Fugard was practicing it before he encountered Grotowski’s work. For Fugard, a play exists only when it is performed for an audience. The function of drama is to evoke the truth of what he calls “the living moment.” The intense, revelatory moments in his plays are usually expressed in images, such as the moment when Hally spits in Sam’s face in *Master Harold*, or when Zach looms above his brother Morris, provoked by racist insults into attack, in *The Blood Knot*.

Works in Critical Context

Fugard is highly regarded by literary and theater critics. Some have called him the greatest playwright of his era. He commands respect for his unflinching opposition to apartheid and for his sophisticated explorations of its subtly destructive effects. Critics have also appreciated his ability to elicit emotion without declining into melodrama. Most South African drama, especially the nation’s lively alternative theater, bears the stamp of Fugard’s work. His acclaim is greater outside his home country. In the United States, he is one of the most frequently performed living playwrights.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The theater of Athol Fugard lays bare the consequences of racial prejudice, as do the following works for the stage:

Othello (ca. 1603), a play by William Shakespeare. In this brilliant tragedy, Iago plays on sexual as well as racial anxieties to undo the Moor of Venice.

A Raisin in the Sun (1959), a play by Lorraine Hansberry. In this landmark play, Walter Lee and Lena Younger face discrimination when they buy a house in a white neighborhood.

Blues for Mister Charlie (1964), a play by James Baldwin. This meditation on racism was written in the wake of the assassination of civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

Dream on Monkey Mountain (1967), a play by Derek Walcott. A metaphorical play in which the downtrodden consciousness of a colonized society is symbolized through the hallucinations of an aging charcoal vender named Makak.

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf (1975), a play by Ntozake Shange. A hard-hitting poem/play about the experience of African American womanhood.

Racial Critique Not all critics of apartheid, however, have appreciated Fugard’s works. Over the years, some have faulted him for his failure to denounce the system’s injustices in a more confrontational manner. His plays are open to multiple interpretations, and thus to controversy. For example, some Afrikaners believed the message of *The Blood Knot* was that blacks and whites could not live together peaceably, while some black critics called the work racist. Most now embrace the play as a sad commentary on the way racism has twisted and tangled our understanding of brotherhood and humanity.

Amid the racial polarization of apartheid, Fugard walked a fine line. Critic Jeanne Colleran wrote in *Modern Drama* that “Fugard cannot write of Johannesburg or of township suffering without incurring the wrath of black South Africans who regard him as a self-appointed and presumptuous spokesman; nor can he claim value for the position previously held by white liberals without being assailed by the more powerful and vociferous radical left.”

“Master Harold” . . . and the Boys One of many of Fugard’s plays to receive acclaim was “*Master Harold*” . . . *and the Boys*. Reviewing the New York production, Robert Brustein of the *New Republic* noted that “*Master Harold* seems to be a much more personal statement than his other works; it also suggests that his obsession

with the theme of racial injustice may be an expression of his own guilt, an act of expiation. Whatever the case, his writing continues to exude a sweetness and sanctity that more than compensates for what might be prosaic, rhetorical, or contrived about it.”

Responses to Literature

1. Do you support Athol Fugard’s claim that he is not a political writer? Why or why not? What constitutes political writing? Who, in your opinion, is a successful political writer today? How so? Write a paper in which you explain your arguments.
2. How does the experimental nature of Fugard’s theater affect the content and tone of his plays? Create a presentation using classmates as actors to illustrate your findings.
3. Citing three or more of Fugard’s plays, write about the role that violence plays in his work. For what type of audience would this violence have an appeal?
4. In what ways does Fugard believe that white South Africans have been affected by the nation’s racial legacy? How does he demonstrate these effects? Write a paper in which you explain your arguments.
5. What can you learn about love and intimate friendship by studying *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, and “*Master Harold*” . . . and the Boys? Create a presentation that demonstrates your findings.

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John Galsworthy

BORN: 1867, Kingston Hill, Surrey, England

DIED: 1933, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Country House (1907)

Strife (1909)

The Dark Flower (1913)

The Skin Game (1920)

The Forsyte Saga (1906–1921)

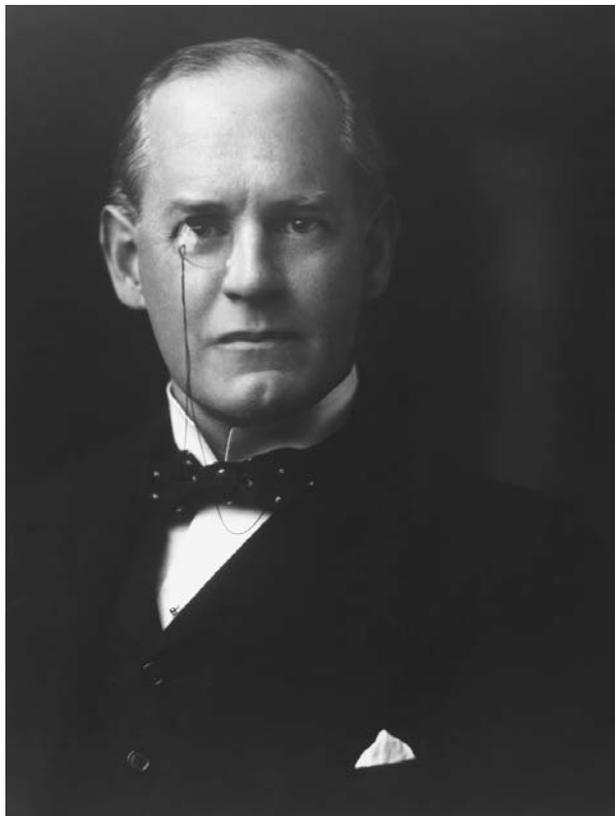
Overview

English novelist and Nobel Prize winner John Galsworthy is best known for his literary series *The Forsyte Saga*, his portrayal of the British upper classes, and his treatments of social values. Also a dramatist, his reputation in his lifetime was second only to that of George Bernard Shaw. Through his plays, Galsworthy was a compassionate reformer who campaigned against long prison terms, harsh treatment of prisoners, class discrimination at the bar of justice, anti-Semitism, the intransigence of capitalists and labor union leaders, and other evils of society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life at Coombe Galsworthy was born on August 14, 1867, at Parkfield, Kingston Hill, Surrey, England, the second child and first son of John Galsworthy and Blanche Bartleet Galsworthy. His father was a successful solicitor (attorney), company director, and property owner. When Galsworthy was still a child, his father moved the family to a huge home he had built on a large acreage called Coombe, near the village of Maldon. He called his house Coombe Warren, an estate that was to become a model for Galsworthy’s novels’ settings.

From Preparatory School to Oxford Law At the age of nine, Galsworthy was sent to the Saugeen Preparatory School, a boarding school in Bournemouth. Five



John Galsworthy Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

years later, he entered the prestigious Harrow School in London, where he excelled in athletics. In 1886, he went to Oxford University to study law, graduating with second-degree honors in 1889. The following year, he was called to the bar and began writing legal briefs for his father's firm. Galsworthy, however, had little interest in a legal career.

Meeting Ada Galsworthy and Joseph Conrad In 1891, at a family celebration of the marriage of Galsworthy's cousin Arthur Galsworthy, the author met the woman who came to dominate his entire life. That woman was his cousin's bride, Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper Galsworthy. The marriage was a disaster for Ada, who later claimed that she endured marital rape and beatings. Although Ada became the model for Irene, Galsworthy's greatest heroine in *The Forsyte Saga*, her relationship with the author did not materialize until much later.

In 1891, Galsworthy's father sent him on an extended inspection tour of his mining interests in Canada, and during the next few years, he traveled widely. During a two-month voyage aboard the *Torrens* in 1893, he formed a close friendship with the first mate of the ship, Joseph Conrad, who was then at work on his first novel. Conrad later encouraged and guided Galsworthy

in his literary efforts. Between 1897 and 1901, Galsworthy published two novels and two volumes of short stories under the pseudonym John Sinjohn. The last of these works, *A Man of Devon* (1901), contains his first short story dealing with the Forsytes.

Ada next met Galsworthy in 1893, at the annual Eton-Harrow cricket match. Galsworthy was smitten. She told him about her miserable marriage, and, full of sympathy for her, he began to share her torment. They started to meet often, usually in the company of a female relative. Without her, Galsworthy might never have become a great writer. After she finally got a divorce and she and Galsworthy were married, in 1905, she aided him by typing manuscripts, listening to his work, shielding him from unwanted visitors, and lavishing affection on him. She managed their household and handled correspondence and appointments, thus helping Galsworthy to be a prolific writer. Most important of all, Ada was Galsworthy's muse.

Critical Acclaim After his father's death in 1904, Galsworthy began publishing under his own name and regularly produced novels for the next three decades. In 1906, the first Forsyte novel, *The Man of Property*, appeared, followed by what many critics consider his best non-Forsyte story, *The Country House* (1907). Also in 1906, his play *The Silver Box* was produced, and it met with favorable criticism.

Beginning in 1901, he wrote thesis plays (dramas that address and debate a social problem) for the next twenty-three years. Such plays as *Justice* (1910) effected real change. By revealing how harsh prison punishment destroys individuals, Sir Winston Churchill, then the home secretary in the cabinet, introduced sweeping prison reforms. Other important thesis plays included *The Fugitive* (1913), which focused on married women in extramarital affairs, and *The Mob* (1914), about morality and war. Such works were representative of the Edwardian age, named for the ruler of Great Britain, King Edward VII. Unlike the Victorian era that preceded it, the Edwardians critically questioned established mores.

During the First World War, Galsworthy donated the income from his writings to the war effort—including the profits from his last social satire, *The Freelanders* (1915), and the dramatic *Beyond* (1917)—and volunteered as a masseur in a Red Cross hospital in France. World War I began when Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Bosnian terrorist in Serbia in June 1914. Because of diplomatic breakdowns and entangling alliances, what could have been a local skirmish in the Balkans between Austria-Hungary and Serbia soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe and many other countries. Great Britain was a major player in the conflict, allying with France and Russia to form the Triple Entente against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Much of the fighting on the Western Front took place in France, where trench warfare

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Galsworthy's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): Conrad was a Polish novelist. He is best known for his novels *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900).

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944): Kandinsky was a Russian printmaker, painter, and art theorist. He is considered the founder of the abstract painting movement.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): Wells was an English novelist and nonfiction writer. He was one of the foremost science fiction writers in history and one of the first to write about time travel. One of his most famous novels is *The War of the Worlds* (1899).

Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957): Ingalls Wilder was an American author. She was a popular writer of children's books with her early pioneer series, including the best-known *Little House on the Prairie* (1935).

Florenz "Flo" Ziegfeld (1867–1932): Ziegfeld was an American Broadway impresario. He is best known for his elaborate and expensive productions, such as the *Ziegfeld Follies* series of shows that ran from 1907 to 1931.

was common. After the United States joined the war on the side of the Triple Entente in 1917, the fighting ended in 1918, and the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919.

Postwar Literary Success As the war ended, Galsworthy's output of novels and short stories continued unabated. Outside of the World War I–influenced *Saint's Progress* (1919), *The Forsyte Saga* became his fictional focus. In July 1918, he conceived of, and began to implement, the idea of making *The Man of Property* the first volume of a trilogy that became *The Forsyte Saga*. The books that followed included the novels *In Chancery* (1920) and *To Let* (1921). When the whole of the saga was published in one volume, *The Forsyte Saga* in 1922, public reaction was immense: it sold more than a million copies in one year in both Great Britain and the United States. Following the success of the volume, Galsworthy wrote another Forsyte trilogy—*The White Monkey* (1924), *The Silver Spoon* (1926), and *Swan Song* (1928)—which did not prove as popular, though this did not deter him from starting a third trilogy that he did not complete.

The 1932 Nobel Prize In 1932, shortly before his death, Galsworthy was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. When he died on January 31, 1933, of what was believed to be a brain tumor, he was at the height of his popularity. Few other British writers—certainly not any of the modernists—had the power, prestige, or the vast reading public he had.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Galsworthy's writing was summarily influenced by his surroundings and the people who inhabited them. His childhood memories of Coombe Warren and the beautiful surrounding countryside influenced his portrayal of Robin Hill in the Forsyte books. There were a great many relatives in his life, and it is apparent that the extended Galsworthy clan influenced the author's character constructs in *The Forsyte Saga* and several other novels.

His meeting Joseph Conrad gave Galsworthy the idea of becoming a writer, but the motivating force behind his writing was his wife, Ada. Her beauty and allure, Galsworthy's smitten state, and her suggestion that he write propelled Galsworthy from bored lawyer to energized writer. Moreover, her marital status in the Victorian era when marriage was truly for life, her undeniable love for Galsworthy, her beauty, and her courage in entering into an illicit relationship condemned by the society of which they were so much a part proved subject and theme for much of Galsworthy's literary output over his lifetime.

Social Criticism Galsworthy first achieved prominence as a dramatist. His most esteemed plays are noted for their realistic technique and insightful social criticism. While working for his father, Galsworthy collected rents from the tenants of London slum properties, and several of his plays examine the contrast between the rights of the privileged upper classes and the poor. In *The Silver Box*, for example, the son of a wealthy member of Parliament steals a purse from a prostitute. Later, the husband of one of the family's servants steals a cigarette box from the purse. While the wealthy young man is released, the servant's husband is convicted and sent to prison.

English Values In the early decades of the twentieth century, Galsworthy portrayed traditional English values, such as love of the countryside, fair play, integrity in business and other worldly affairs, devotion to justice, respect for women, harmony between the sexes, honorable behavior, support for the underdog, and the Victorian/Edwardian code of the gentleman and lady. Many of the books and stories included in the *Forsyte Saga* reflect these values as do such books as *The Country House*.

Works in Critical Context

Though the reading public disagreed, modernist writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce scoffed at the traditional English values depicted in Galsworthy's works. The modernists considered Galsworthy and other Victorian/Edwardian novelists, such as H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, mere sociologists whose literary depictions were unrealistic.

There was more respect among modernists for Galsworthy when it came to his vigorous satirizing of the upper middle class, with its snobbery, overpossessiveness,

and indifference to the working class and the poor of the land. Demonstration of this effective mocking can be found in the Forsyte Saga.

Although Galsworthy's dramas and novels were highly regarded during his lifetime, critical and popular interest in his works declined shortly after his death. In 1967 the British Broadcasting Corporation aired a twenty-six-hour serial adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga* for television. Repeated the following year and syndicated in more than forty countries around the world, this adaptation is credited with renewing interest in Galsworthy's novels. Today, Galsworthy is recognized as an important chronicler of English life, with Sanford Sternlicht praising his works as "the finest written portrait of the passing from power of England's upper middle class."

The Forsyte Saga The major literary achievement of John Galsworthy's life was *The Forsyte Saga*, a family epic that includes two trilogies of novels as well as several short stories. The saga satirizes upper-middle-class and upper-class British society in the Edwardian age and the immediate post-World War I period. With the saga, it was thought that something essentially English had been created. Critics bestowed great praise upon the author. According to one *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography* writer, critics lauded the trilogy for its "sweep and control" and proclaimed Galsworthy "a modern Thackeray." Still praising the series as well as Galsworthy's continued popularity in 2007, Allan Massie of the *Spectator* believed that the Forsytes remained popular "because one can argue about his characters as we do about our friends and acquaintances in 'real life.'"

Responses to Literature

1. Galsworthy was immersed in themes of Victorian values. Go online to literary sites and databases and find one aspect of Victorian literature to investigate, such as Victorian literary style, Victorian writers, or the events and concerns that influenced Victorian themes. When you have printed out examples, return to share your new area of expertise with a group, so you can discuss how Galsworthy's works fit the genre.
2. Social class distinctions are an important part of Galsworthy's history and a major feature in his works. Research a particular incident where two classes are in opposition. What are the characteristics of each class? What is the core argument? Which "side" do you see more clearly represented in Galsworthy's writing? What characteristics of the class are evident in his satire?
3. Can you think of other family sagas that have been represented in popular literature or film? Come up

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also written on family and social class values:

An American Tragedy (1925), a novel by Theodore Dreiser. This book explores the troubles of young Clyde Griffiths, who is challenged by his rich-girl/poor-girl relationships.

Leave it to Psmith (1923), a comic novel by P. G. Wodehouse. In this work, the author makes fun of the British upper class.

SubUrbia (1994), a play by Eric Bogosian. In this play, slackers meander about as one of their friends flees suburban life and makes it big in Hollywood.

The Virgin Suicides (1993), a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. In this quirky story, the narrator is a neighborhood boy who relates the sequential suicides of five sisters, the daughters of overprotective parents.

Ordinary People (1976), a novel by Judith Guest. In this book the affluent Jarrett family struggles to cope after a fatal sailing accident takes the life of the eldest son.

with a list and compare your findings with *The Forsyte Saga*. What do your examples have in common with the saga? How are they different? Write a paper with your findings.

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☒ Mohandas Gandhi

BORN: 1869, *Probandar, Kathiawar, India*

DIED: 1948, *New Delhi, India*

NATIONALITY: *Indian*

GENRE: *Nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Hind Swaraj (1909)

India on Trial (1922)

Satyagraha in South Africa (1928)

Women and Social Injustice (1942)

Overview

The Indian independence leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, called the Mahatma (“Great Soul”) by many of his countrymen, changed the world far beyond his successful struggle to end British imperial rule in India. Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance to illegitimate authority and his mass civil disobedience campaigns introduced a new form of popular political struggle that has since been adopted around the globe, notably by the civil rights movement in the United States. Elaborated in his voluminous writings, the Indian leader’s religious and social convictions—centered on the ideals of tolerance, community, equality, simplicity, and self-sacrifice—are also prevalent in modern thought. Above all, Gandhi’s personal example of self-abnegation, his courage and perseverance, and his tolerance and humanity remain a source of inspiration to millions worldwide.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Racial Discrimination in South Africa The son of a provincial official from the *Vaisya* Hindu caste, Gandhi studied law in England and struggled to overcome a painful shyness that threatened to end his career. His political initiation occurred in Natal, South Africa, where he went to work for an Indian company and found himself victimized by the country’s policies of racial discrimination. Gandhi refused to endure this treatment



Mohandas K. Gandhi *Gandhi, Mohandas K.*, photograph. AP Images.

passively and formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 both to champion the Indian minority’s political and civil rights and to press reform on the British colonial government. Supported by a thriving legal practice in Johannesburg, Gandhi founded the journal *Indian Opinion* in 1904 to rouse support for Indian rights. At the same time, he began exploring spiritually based paths to social change.

Gandhi’s innovative melding of political, social, and religious thinking led him to the key concept of *satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance to illegitimate authority. He launched a mass civil disobedience campaign in Johannesburg in 1906 to protest the Transvaal government’s plan to register and better police the Indian population, and he continued to promote *satyagraha* until he returned to India eight years later. While Gandhi’s efforts to improve the plight of South African Indians produced few concrete gains, they did help bolster Indian confidence and self-esteem. Gandhi’s endeavors also encouraged South Africa’s oppressed black majority in its struggle for political and civil rights. The Indian leader described his South African campaign in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, published in 1928.

Rise of Indian Nationalism The economic and political upheavals of World War I released a wave of

Indian nationalism. Following the 1918 armistice, the Rowlatt Acts of 1919 essentially continued the restrictions on civil liberties that had been imposed during wartime. In response, Gandhi launched the first nationwide civil disobedience campaign. Scattered violence, however, marred the strike and prompted a swift and brutal response from local British officials, culminating in the Amritsar massacre, which left four hundred Indians dead and twelve hundred wounded. Shocked and appalled by both sides, Gandhi called off the movement, but the massacre turned Gandhi, and millions of others, from ardent supporters of the empire into “pronounced opponents.” Nonetheless, he hesitated to fully exercise his influence lest violence break out again.

Sentenced to Prison Gandhi’s fears were confirmed by the events of 1920–22. Both politicizing his movement after the Amritsar massacre and using his overwhelming support from the lower classes—Hindu and Muslim alike by this point—Gandhi assumed the leadership of the moderate middle class–based Congress Party. He drafted a “Congress Constitution” defining the party’s agenda as the attainment of self-rule “by all legitimate and peaceful means.” He also reorganized the Party to maintain broad-based national support, breaking all ties with the British. In 1920, Gandhi rallied the nation in another campaign of limited noncooperation, but the campaign only provoked mass arrests and unrest. Encouraged by other Congress leaders, Gandhi was prepared to call a total strike in one province to paralyze the government. Just days before it was to begin, however, chilling news spread across India that a mob had burned a police headquarters, killing twenty constables. The news convinced Gandhi that his people were not yet ready for peaceful passive resistance, and he turned from political demonstration to social welfare programs in the villages, hoping to teach the self-control he believed was necessary for his campaigns to be successful. Nevertheless, Gandhi was arrested by the British in mid-1922 for “promoting disaffection,” and served two years of a six-year sentence before being released due to appendicitis. Ill and disheartened, Gandhi continued to promote self-control and peaceful solutions. It was during this period that Gandhi wrote *Story of My Experiments with Truth* in support of the Indian nationalist movement and nonviolent noncooperation.

The British continued to exclude the Indians from the process of political reform and administration of India. Frustrated with the slow pace of reforms, Gandhi reentered the political arena in 1928, urging Congress to launch another nationwide strike unless India’s demands for constitutional independence were met within a year. The British did not meet these demands. In consequence, Gandhi organized a symbolic demonstration of the Indians’ refusal to recognize the British government’s authority. The “Salt March” of 1930 was designed to disobey

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gandhi’s famous contemporaries include:

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): This English novelist is one of the first writers to experiment with “free indirect discourse,” in which authors attempt to accurately represent the course of a character’s thoughts, through all its twists and turns.

Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919): A leading figure in the Mexican Revolution, Zapata led the Liberation Army of the South in a quest for social reform.

Nayantara Sahgal (1927–): An Indian author who writes in English, Sahgal is known for fiction that deals with India’s elite responding to the crises engendered by political change.

Virginia Foster Durr (1903–1999): Durr’s letters provide a firsthand account of southern life in the chaotic period of the American civil rights movement.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Some people have called Picasso’s *Guernica* modern art’s most powerful antiwar statement.

the government’s heavily taxed monopoly on the manufacture of salt by marching to the coast and taking salt directly from the sea. Gandhi reached the sea in April, scooping up the first piece of natural salt himself, and calling on all Indians to emulate his actions in defiance of the government. Gandhi’s actions unleashed long pent-up emotions. Waves of protest and unrest swept across India and thousands were imprisoned. Gandhi himself was arrested again in May of 1930 and released again in 1931.

Seeking Indian Unity Although Gandhi was able to bring attention to some of India’s lowest castes, religious and ideological divisions continued to weaken the Congress party’s attempt to unite against the British. This lack of unity only confirmed the British belief that India was not ready for self-government. On the eve of World War II, the Congress party itself was divided between moderates and extremists, and the rival Muslim League, revived under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, advocated a separate Islamic state of Pakistan. The Congress declared its intention to boycott the war effort until independence was granted—a political miscalculation that gave the Muslim League a stronger voice in the self-rule movement, as it supported the British position. Gandhi, however, supported the Congress and in October 1940 called for a renewed *satyagraha* campaign, recruiting individual followers to “proclaim his resolve to protest the war nonviolently.” The usual pattern of arrests and releases followed.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The maxim “the pen is mightier than the sword” emphasizes the power that writing has to bring about change. In much of Gandhi’s writing, he attempted to achieve social change by describing his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Gandhi’s use of literature to galvanize a revolutionary movement is part of a long tradition in which authors have counted on their words to aid a revolutionary cause. Here are some important works from other independence movements:

Common Sense (1776), a pamphlet by Thomas Paine. In 1776, Paine anonymously published this pamphlet calling for the American colonies to overthrow British rule.

The Spirit of the Laws (1748), a nonfiction account by Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu. Although Montesquieu died before the French Revolution, this philosophical treatise outlined the separation of powers within government, ideas important for revolutionary thinkers.

Mein Kampf (1925), a nonfiction piece by Adolf Hitler. At once both autobiography and political ideology, this text outlines some fundamental beliefs of the dictator.

Popular with the mass of the Indian population, Gandhi remained the spiritual leader of the independence movement. Yet, his political influence waned as the Hindu-Muslim split widened. His dream of a united India was quickly becoming politically impractical, and, while he continued to be consulted on national issues, his advice went largely unheeded by both the Congress party and the Muslim League. In 1947, the British resolved to transfer power to Indian hands. Gandhi hailed this decision as “the noblest act of the British nation” but elsewhere it unleashed an orgy of violence and bloodshed. A wave of religious violence leaving some 1 million dead followed the announcement that the land of India would be divided into a Hindu India and an Islamic Pakistan. Gandhi’s last days were spent fasting as he tried to quell the growing communal strife. The revered Mahatma became a victim himself in January 1948 when he was shot by a Hindu extremist. Millions worldwide mourned the violent end of a man who had always attempted to find peaceful solutions.

Works in Literary Context

Some facts should be remembered when considering the writings of Gandhi. The first is their abundance. The standard set is the hundred-volume *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by the Indian government, with a great deal of this collection being composed of Gandhi’s daily correspondence. According to Raghavan

Iyer in his introduction to volume one of *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, “Despite the vast amount of proliferating literature on Mahatma Gandhi, there has yet been no accessible and coherent record of his essential writings. . . . [Gandhi’s] actual books were few, short and somewhat inconclusive. . . . His unfinished autobiography and several popular biographies remain the chief—and rather misleading—sources of public knowledge about the personality and impact of Gandhi.”

Gandhi’s Translations Used to Support His Own Causes Gandhi concerned himself with making texts originally in English available to his countrymen. For example, he translated John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* into Gujarati. In supporting equal opportunity, Ruskin offered an alternative to utilitarianism, which merely sought the good of the greatest number. Gandhi’s preface to his translation reflects his respect for Ruskin’s text and philosophy of adaptation: “since the object which the book works towards is the welfare of all—that is, the advancement of all and not merely of the greatest number—we have entitled these articles ‘Sarvodaya.’” Gandhi’s Gujarati adaptation was translated into English by Valji Govindji Desai and published posthumously as *Unto This Last: A Paraphrase by M. K. Gandhi*.

Gandhi attempted to create a society based on values unlimited by a religious past or a political present. This aim can be seen in his correspondence with Leo Tolstoy, which he translated into Gujarati. He reminded his readers of the values Tolstoy upheld, such as love, nonviolence, and independence of spirit. Gandhi hammered home the doctrine of passive resistance advocated by Tolstoy, who urged Indians to refuse to cooperate with the British government. It is hard to believe that the following words from the preface to Tolstoy’s “Letter to a Hindoo” are Gandhi’s selections from Tolstoy rather than Gandhi’s own voice: “Do not resist evil, but also yourselves participate not in evil. . . . A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising 200 millions. . . . Do not the figures make it clear that not the English but the Indians have enslaved themselves?”

The Reluctant Autobiographer Gandhi began writing his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Gujarati in 1925, the same year he completed *Satyagraha in South Africa*. The first volume was published in 1927, the second in 1929. A single-volume edition was published in 1940 as *An Autobiography; or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi had reservations about autobiography as a form because of its Western heritage and thought the sense of permanence in such a work obstructed the development of both the subject and his readers. He negotiated these difficulties by pointing out that while his public life was known throughout the world, he alone knew the spiritual life that complemented it. This spiritual life comprised a series of experiments. Although conducted in the public domain, they were continuing applications of a personal

understanding of what constituted truth (*svaraj*). According to Gandhi, since the personal and the political are attempts to realize truth, they must be considered together as part of a single record.

Gandhi's purpose for writing was to support efforts to liberate India from British rule and to promote his belief in nonviolent resistance. Gandhi's body of work, both as a translator and as an author, was important while his career was active, but his impact on the American civil rights movement is virtually immeasurable. The literature of the 1950s and 1960s, combined with the practice of nonviolent protests—like sit-ins—were the hallmark of the civil rights movement, and all find their origins in Gandhi's teachings.

Works in Critical Context

Uncommon Commonsense Gandhi suspended much of his activist work in the mid-1920s, although he remained very much in the public eye through his widely circulated writings. Two collections of articles on non-cooperation and the nationalist movement that originally appeared in the journal *Young India* were published during this period, and his *Story of My Experiments with Truth*, written during his years in prison, appeared in 1927. This last work “is extraordinary for candor and quality of self-criticism,” remarked *Los Angeles Times Book Review* critic Malcolm Boyd. Writing in the *Yale Review*, Merle Curti commented, “The book is without literary distinction, but it is, nevertheless, great . . . because of the supreme sincerity and humility with which Gandhi reveals his limitations and strength in his never-ending struggle to approach Absolute Truth or God.” *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, as Told in His Own Words* was published with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). “To read this book is an education in itself,” *Saturday Review* critic Ranjee Shahani observed of the work. “Gandhi stands out in our murky era as a lighthouse of uncommon commonsense.”

Responses to Literature

1. Both Emiliano Zapata and Gandhi were revolutionary figures, but each had a different view of how revolution was to be achieved. In fact, there have been a number of revolutions and attempted revolutions during the last three hundred years—the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Mexican Revolution, to name but a few. Research a leading figure in one of these other revolutions and compare his or her basic approach to revolution to that of Gandhi's.
2. Look up the definition of the word “ironic.” Based on this definition, do you believe that it is “ironic”

for a person dedicated to nonviolent opposition to be assassinated? Why or why not? In the style of a newspaper editorial, explain your thinking.

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Théophile Gautier

BORN: 1811, Tarbes, France

DIED: 1872, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835)

Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems (1852)

History of Romanticism (1874)

Overview

Gautier's extraordinary worship of beauty—physical, tangible, intellectual, and even moral—colors his work across a multitude of genres. Gautier's importance as a writer comes from his strong belief that an artist should concern himself or herself only with portraying, to the best of his or her ability, the beauties of the art form itself. That belief became known in English as “art for art's sake” and influenced an entire movement of writers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.



Théophile Gautier *Imagno / Hulton Archive / Getty Images*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Boarding School, Artistic Studies, and Meeting Victor Hugo Gautier was born in Tarbes, in southwestern France, on August 30, 1811. When he was three years old, the family relocated to Paris, where his father, Pierre, took a post as a government official. At the age of eleven, the boy enrolled in the Collège Louis-le-Grand; then, after an unhappy experience as a boarding student there, he moved as a day student to the Collège Charlemagne. There, he met Gérard Labrunie, later known by his pen name, Gérard de Nerval, who became his lifelong friend. During this period, Gautier began to study painting and to write poetry. In 1829, Gérard introduced Gautier to the already-famous Victor Hugo. Dazzled by Hugo's presence and position as leader of the new Romantic school, Gautier enthusiastically supported Hugo's theatrical endeavors with his flamboyant behavior at the premiere of Hugo's play *Hernani* (1830), a performance that marked victory in the campaign to gain critical respect for Romantic drama.

Shocking the Bourgeoisie Gautier was now part of the Parisian literary and artistic bohemia. With Nerval,

Pétrus Borel, and other would-be artists and writers, Gautier formed the Petit Cénacle, delighting in a boisterously defiant campaign to “shock the bourgeoisie.” This group gradually merged into the so-called Groupe du Doyenné. New members joined in their free-living ways, their eager quest for critical recognition—on their own terms—and their continuing efforts to unsettle the middle class. Gautier was not above exploiting his bohemian associations. In *The Young-France, Stories in Jestful Manner* (1933), he evoked their escapades and their assaults on middle-class values, all the while poking fun at their more absurd eccentricities.

Career as a Critic In 1836, having already displayed a solid knowledge of art and artistic technique in occasional critical articles, Gautier found a post as an art critic for Emile de Girardin's new daily newspaper, the *Presse*. In 1837, with Nerval, he also began to share the duties of theater reviewer for the *Presse*. Gautier soon took over full responsibility for the theater column; every week for nineteen years, except for periods of absence now and then from Paris, he turned in to Girardin a review of current theatrical offerings.

Every spring, he produced a series of articles in which he critiqued the paintings and sculptures being exhibited in the annual Salon. Gautier held the two positions on the *Presse* until 1855, when he left his sometimes bumpy association with Girardin to take over the art and drama columns of the *Moniteur Universel*, the official newspaper of the French government. Here he remained until 1869, when he joined the new government-sanctioned daily, the *Journal Officiel*. His tenure there was short. With the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the French empire fell and the *Journal Officiel* ceased publication. Two independent dailies, however, the *Gazette de Paris* and the *Commonweal*, were happy to employ Gautier; he was able to pursue his journalistic work until a few months before his death in 1872.

Strained Familial Relations, Civil Strife, and Nostalgia During Gautier's last years, journalism became ever more tiresome. His refusal to approve his daughter Judith's marriage in 1866 resulted in severely strained relations in his family. The Prussian siege of Paris in 1870 and the subsequent civil strife in 1871 brought physical trials, domestic displacements, fears for the safety of family members, and uncertainties in his professional life. His health was deteriorating. He sought escape not in exoticism, but in a nostalgic return to his festive days as a young partisan of the Romantic cause. He was writing his recollections of this happy time when he died on October 23, 1872. The unfinished *History of Romanticism* (1874) remains one of Gautier's most precious legacies.

Works in Literary Context

Gautier holds an important place in French letters as a transitional figure between Romanticism and realism.

Beginning his career as an impassioned partisan of Victor Hugo, he ended his career as a close friend of Gustave Flaubert. Gautier's proximity to other artists within the Groupe du Doyenné and other literary circles significantly influenced the trajectory of his work.

“Art for Art’s Sake” Gautier’s rejection of an ideological mission in art and his call for a nonutilitarian outlook in the artist made him recognized as a leader in the “art for art’s sake” movement. His preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* stands as the principal manifesto of *l’art pour l’art*, with its uncompromising claim that art in whatever form has no other aim and no other morality than the creation of beauty.

Exoticism in Attention to Detail Indeed, one of the most evident features in Gautier’s writings is exoticism defined by an incredible attention to detail. It may be contemporary, as in his evocations of the countries that he visited, or may involve an imaginative reconstruction of earlier times, like the world of ancient Greece or the age of Louis XIII. Whatever the time or place, Gautier situates his reader in a palpable world. He uses his background as an artist to describe cities, with their buildings, their monuments, and their street scenes, in minute detail. He celebrates ceremonies, processions, and crowd scenes, not forgetting to pay close attention to the smallest seam on his characters’ clothing. In his language, he is careful to correctly employ the technical vocabulary particular to the specific time, milieu, or activity he is trying to effectively represent.

Influence of Art for Art’s Sake Gautier’s collection *Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems* went through an exceptional six editions in twenty years. Because of its visual inclination—its dedication to art for art’s sake—the collection inspired Charles Baudelaire to write his famous *Flowers of Evil*, released in 1909. Baudelaire dedicated his collection of poems to Gautier: “To the impeccable poet, to the perfect magician in letters, to my dear and revered master and friend Théophile Gautier, with the deepest humility I dedicate these sickly flowers.” When, at Gautier’s death, the editor Alphonse Lemerre invited contributions to a memorial volume honoring the author of *Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems*, no fewer than eighty contemporaries sent poems, among them the acknowledged greats of the day—Hugo, Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, Stéphane Mallarmé, and the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne. Further, his doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*—art for art’s sake—is probably better known than Gautier himself.

Works in Critical Context

Because of his exceptional flair for language, Gautier became one of the best-known authors of his day; his work, on the whole, was well-received and appreciated by

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gautier’s famous contemporaries include:

Mark Twain (1835–1910): American author, best known for his novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

Victor Hugo (1802–1885): French novelist and dramatist known for works like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1832) and *Les Misérables* (1862).

Emily Brontë (1818–1848): English novelist whose *Wuthering Heights* (1847) remains a popular choice for film adaptation.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859): French historian who documented and commented upon the rise in equality among the classes and focused specifically on democracy in America.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873): British philosopher who championed the rights of women, in addition to writing extensively in defense of his philosophical system, utilitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of providing the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.

Gregor Mendel (1822–1884): Austrian chemist whose study of pea plants ultimately led to our understanding of genetics.

his contemporaries for its artistic merit. French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire praised Gautier for his imagination, style, and passion for beauty, calling him finally “a perfect man of letters.” Gautier put his heart into his creative works. Though sometimes criticized for ignoring plot and character, he was acknowledged as a stylist for whom the evocation of natural beauty was paramount. “I am one for whom the visible world exists,” he said, and for many modern critics this statement defines the limits of his artistic vision: His narrative coherence often suffers in order that he may give an exact description of a setting.

Modern Criticism: Gautier’s Dehumanization of Art Critic Raymond Giraud finds that Gautier’s dedication to art for art’s sake, distances the writer from some of the mundane and even painful realities of life. In his article “Gautier’s Dehumanization of Art” (1963), published in *L’Esprit Createur* he writes, “The [art for art’s sake] doctrine of impassiveness has its positive side, its strong conviction of the intrinsic value of art; but it also could be a doctrine of retreat from the painfulness of life.” Similarly, critic Hilda Nelson argues that Gautier’s handling of past and present in his fantastical novels serve to neutralize time, decay, and death, thus preserving in art the “dreams that men create for

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The art for art's sake movement in literature was a reaction against the then-popular belief that art, both visual and literary, must contain some kind of moral or religious message to be meaningful. The adherents of the doctrine believe that art should be produced simply for the sake of art itself and emphasize the beauty of the art form over its social usefulness. Gautier's extensive critical and creative output helped popularize this view, but he was neither the first nor the greatest producer of art created for art's sake. Here are a few examples of work produced by like-minded artists:

"The Poetic Principle" (1850, posthumous), an essay by Edgar Allan Poe. In this work, Poe argues that what people respond to most in poetry is not its message but the beauty of the poem itself, and that the best poem is written only for the poem's sake—a kind of precursor for the broader assertion that art should be produced for art's sake only.

Flowers of Evil (1857), a poetry collection by Charles Baudelaire. In this collection of poetry, as with many Baudelaire pieces, he conveys not the beauty of the world around him but rather vividly describes some of the vilest aspects of his subjects. As such, the text represents a different understanding of art for art's sake, one which strays into an overlapping literary movement called Decadence.

Whistler's Mother (1871), a painting by James Whistler. Whereas Gautier was often criticized for the excessive nature of his descriptions, this painting by Whistler, a strong proponent of art for art's sake, shows that beauty can consist of a simple portrait of one's mother.

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891), an essay by Oscar Wilde. In this work, Wilde argues that when an artist attempts to conform to what is expected from his or her art form—in this context, the moral or religious—rather than following his or her own muse, he or she thereby loses the title "artist."

Eraserhead (1977), a film directed by David Lynch. This cult film utilizes the peculiar ability of film to seamlessly move between the dream world and the "real" world of its main character and, like Gautier's work, focuses on the images it presents over its narrative. The film represents a distinctively modern interpretation of the art movement that Gautier and Poe started over a century before its creation.

their salvation and happiness." In her article "Theophile Gautier: The Invisible and Impalpable World: A Demi-Conviction" (1972), published in *The French Review*, Nelson writes, "Gautier, too, became aware that desires and fears, the limitations of time and space, death and disintegration, could be resolved in the creative act, art, and that art alone was capable of reproducing,

in permanent form, the dreams men create for their salvation and happiness."

Responses to Literature

1. Gautier's work is often criticized for losing track of plot and action and, instead, favoring beautiful descriptions. Read *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. To what extent does this criticism apply to this novel? Explain your response in a short essay.
2. In a discussion with a group of peers, compare Gautier's expression of art for art's sake with David Lynch's in his film *Eraserhead*. How do the different media used to fulfill the doctrine of art for art's sake affect the artists' interpretation of the doctrine? In other words, what can Lynch do with film that Gautier cannot do with either his poetry or fiction, and vice versa?
3. Proponents of the art for art's sake movement felt that there was something disingenuous about expecting a piece of art to convey social, moral, or religious messages. Yet, many of our oldest and most revered stories contain just such morals—consider Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare." Using the Internet and the library, research the art for art's sake movement and some of the criticisms leveled against it. Then, in a short essay, briefly describe the opposing positions and offer your opinion about the disagreement.
4. Contrast the success of Gautier's poetic works with that of his theater criticism. Describe your emotional reactions to both.

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John Gay

BORN: 1685, Devon, England

DIED: 1732, London

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

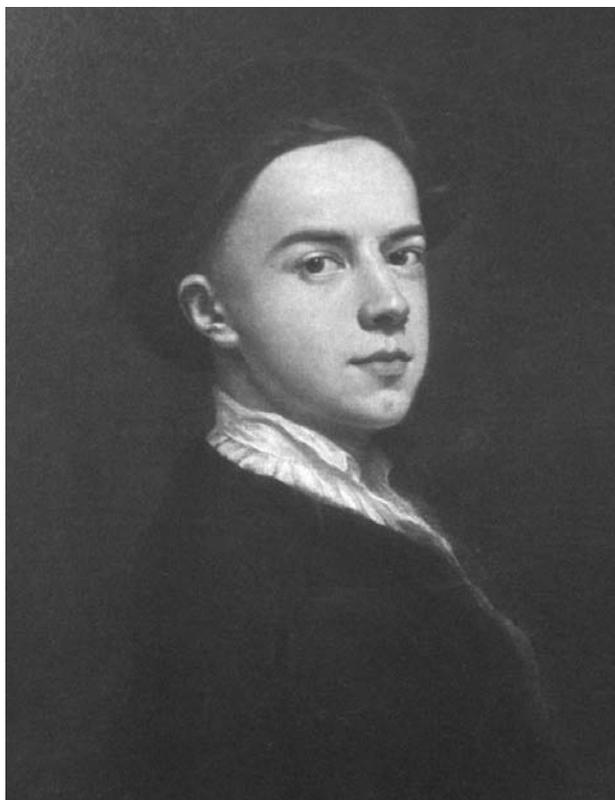
The Shepherd's Week (1714)

Trivia: or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London (1716)

The Beggar's Opera (1728)

Overview

John Gay is best known as the author of the satire *The Beggar's Opera*. It was his greatest popular and critical success, and because of it, many people do not realize that he also excelled at poetry and musical lyrics. Gay's poetry questions the same things it asserts, telling the truth from behind a whole series of shifting, elusive masks. Both during his life and after his death, Gay was overshadowed by his friends Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and his authorship has sometimes been questioned because of the influence these two men had on his work. Unlike Swift and Pope, however, Gay was a man of



John Gay. Gay, John, photograph. The Library of Congress.

the theater whose main talent was his ability to unite words and music.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From the Country to the City John Gay was born in rural Barnstaple on the North Devon coast of England about June 30, 1685. Barnstaple was an important port, and Gay's family included tradesmen, clergymen, and soldiers. Because Gay was exposed to a broad range of people while growing up, he was well prepared to write about people of different occupations and social classes. After the death of his parents, William and Katherine Hanmer Gay, when he was ten, Gay lived with his uncle, Thomas Gay. He attended the local grammar school and was apprenticed to a silk merchant in London around 1702. His rural origins combined with this urban experience would prove significant, since he used both his knowledge of the English countryside and his understanding of the criminal side of London in his writings. Possibly because of poor health, Gay negotiated an end to his apprenticeship in 1706.

After a brief return to Barnstaple, Gay moved back to London and gained a position as secretary to Aaron Hill, a friend from school. Since Hill was involved in various literary projects, Gay began to make acquaintances in Hill's literary circles. He anonymously published his first poem during this time, a blank-verse parody of John Milton entitled *Wine* (1708), complete with drunken shifts in tone. Entertaining and lively, the poem alternates between ridicule and praise, foreshadowing some of his later poetry. Also during these years, Gay became lifelong friends with satirists Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift and met the composer George Frideric Handel.

In December 1712, Gay was appointed domestic steward and secretary to the duchess of Monmouth, widow of the duke executed in 1685 for an unsuccessful attempt at seizing the throne. Partly because of this position, Gay became known as an amiable hanger-on to the aristocracy. Published in January 1713, the first edition of *Rural Sports*, "Inscrib'd to Mr. POPE" mentions Gay's efforts to promote himself at court and to recommend himself to wealthy patrons. Gay called *Rural Sports* a georgic, suggesting a connection between this poem about country sports and Virgil's *Georgics*, a four-volume work about cultivating the land, growing vines and fruit trees, breeding animals, and keeping bees.

First Successes Gay's comedy *The Wife of Bath* was performed in May 1713. It was not a success, but one of its songs became popular. In fact, several lyrics and ballads from Gay's plays were successful, even if the plays themselves were less so. Gay's long poem, *The Shepherd's Week*, appeared in April 1714 and brought him the literary praise he had not yet received with his plays. Critic Peter Lawis calls this work "probably the most important

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gay's famous contemporaries include:

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): A German composer, Bach was better known as an organist during his lifetime; his masterpieces include the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the *Goldberg Variations*.

Anne Bonney (1698–1782): Bonney was an Irish pirate who left her husband and disguised herself as a man to join "Calico Jack" Rackham's crew in the Caribbean.

George Handel (1685–1759): This German composer is best known for *Water Music* and the choral work *Messiah*.

Robert Harley, First Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer (1661–1724): English statesman and patron of the arts, Harley befriended Gay, Pope, Swift, and others.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): Pope was an English poet and satirist whose literary satire earned him both fame and enemies.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): An Anglo-Irish satirist and poet, Swift horrified the public with "A Modest Proposal," which suggested that the Irish poor should solve their financial problems by selling their children as food for the rich.

James Stuart (1688–1766): The son of the deposed King James II of England, Prince James tried unsuccessfully to claim the throne for himself. He was known as "the Old Pretender."

Augustan contribution to the genre of pastoral." Augustan writers of the eighteenth century admired Roman literature from the time of the emperor Augustus (reigned 27 BCE–14 CE) and imitated the works of such writers as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, often drawing parallels between the two ages. Shortly after *The Shepherd's Week* was published, Gay left the household of the duchess of Monmouth to become secretary to Lord Clarendon.

Success—But Whose? Gay described his *The What D'Ye Call It* (1714) as a "tragi-comi-pastoral farce." With this work, Gay established himself as a satirical comedian and lyricist of formidable ability. Unfortunately, rumors began circulating that the work was written in part—or even principally—by Pope and John Arbuthnot, fellow satirist and physician to the royal court.

In an advertisement to the printed version of his next play, *Three Hours after Marriage* (1716), Gay acknowledged "the Assistance I have receiv'd in this Piece from two of my Friends," and the assumption has always been that he is referring to Arbuthnot and Pope. This associ-

ation was no doubt good for the play's quality, but it provoked a severe reaction from Pope's enemies and in the long run damaged the play and Gay's reputation for originality.

Music and Lyrics Around 1718, Gay and Handel collaborated to create the work *Acis and Galatea*, Gay writing the libretto, Handel the music. The concept of integrating words and music, of allowing the words to play against the music and the music against the words, is a difficult one for most writers to accept, much less master. It was performed privately at the palace of Handel's patron, the Duke of Chandos, in 1718, but did not receive a public performance until 1731.

Although Gay held various court appointments through the years as his literary reputation grew, he never achieved success at court. He finally gained financial independence with the success of *The Beggar's Opera*. It was performed sixty-two times, probably a record run in London at that time. Gay drew on English and French theatrical traditions, on the Italian comedy, on the folklore and slang of the London underworld for his drama, and on popular and formal music wherever he found it for his songs. Musical comedy in the form of ballad opera had arrived, allowing Gay to offer a mocking alternative to Italian opera.

He was prolific in his final years, writing a sequel to *The Beggar's Opera* entitled *Polly* (1729), which was suppressed for political reasons, and leaving three unfinished plays upon his death from fever on December 4, 1732, at the age of forty-seven. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, next to Geoffrey Chaucer's tomb. Observing the world around him with a most discerning eye, Gay had composed his own epitaph: "Life's a jest; and all things show it. / I thought this once; but now I know it."

Works in Literary Context

Rather than laughing at trivialities by describing them in epic language as Pope does, Gay shows that high seriousness is not something completely different from the familiar and commonplace. Rather than using the language of mock epic to show how inappropriate some subjects are for epic treatment, Gay suggests that trivial things can be centrally important and that prestige alone is not a sufficient indicator of virtue or enduring value.

Country and City Life Gay's experience with both country and city life is apparent in much of his work. His rural background is especially evident in *The Shepherd's Week*, a pastoral farce that mocks the native pastoral as practiced by Ambrose Philips and criticized by Pope. Gay's major poem *Trivia: or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* is a mock-georgic. Although some scholars assert that *Trivia* may owe something to Jonathan Swift's "Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower," Gay's work is far more than mere imitation or derivative: it demonstrates wit, vivid description, and

complex play with the conventions of pastoral, georgic, and epic poetry.

Modeled after Virgil's *Georgics*, *Trivia* is a georgic in the sense that it is a poem about how to do something. In addition to demonstrating the elements of the classical georgic form, which in this case is used to tell the reader how to survive in the city, *Trivia* is also an urban pastoral, the town poet's answer to the country poet of *The Shepherd's Week*. While *The Shepherd's Week* introduced the urban reader to country lore, *Trivia* turns the urban walker's experience into similar lore, applying pastoral elements of georgic work to an urban context. Undoubtedly, Gay applied the knowledge of urban life he gained while working as an apprentice in London.

Ballad Opera The idea for *The Beggar's Opera* seems to have been suggested by Swift, but Gay definitely proved his originality within the play. His lyrical talents, which he had been developing throughout his career, came to fruition, and an entirely new form of musical theater grew out of this work, the ballad opera. Ballad opera combines social satire, political satire, and literary burlesque just as Pope was combining the same ingredients in the first version of *The Dunciad* and Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. Though the three works are seemingly completely different, they also are recognizably related.

Sven Armen states: "*The Beggar's Opera* is one of the masterpieces of rogue literature, and it shares with [Robert] Greene's pamphlets, [Ben] Jonson's London plays, and the novels of [Henry] Fielding, [Tobias] Smollett, and [Charles] Dickens an intimate knowledge of the methods and practices of the London underworld."

Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's great variation on Gay's theme, *The Threepenny Opera*, is certainly one of the most important pieces in twentieth-century musical theater—arguably the most important, but it has not displaced *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's opera, furthermore, has an important relationship to Handel's "Italian" operas. Yvonne Noble has argued that it represents the rebirth of a specifically English opera tradition.

Works in Critical Context

The traditional view of John Gay is that he was a poet whose personal virtues worked against his public success. Because he lacked the savage indignation of Swift or the sustained energy of Pope, he has often been regarded as the friend of great poets, but hardly as more than a secondary figure. Recently, scholars and critics have recognized Gay's expertise at lyric poetry at a time when epic and satire were most prominent and have begun to value his inventiveness. The habit of ascribing his work to others goes back to Gay's own time and is especially hard to combat because some of his works were, in fact, collaborative.

The Beggar's Opera Bertrand Bronson calls *The Beggar's Opera* "a social commentary which, for all its surface playfulness, fulfills some of the profoundest ends of com-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although he had a gentler tone than some of his contemporaries, Gay satirized the government and society of his day. Here are more satirical works by other authors:

The Great Dictator (1940), a film directed by Charlie Chaplin. Released well before the United States entered World War II, this movie, starring Charlie Chaplin as "Adenoid Hinkel," satirizes Nazism and Adolf Hitler.

The Satires (first and second centuries CE), a collection of poems by Juvenal. The poems in these five books critique perceived threats to the Roman upper classes.

Utopia (1516), a novel by Thomas More. This novel, originally written in Latin, describes an "ideal" society that is rigid and totalitarian, where all challenges to uniformity are seen as threat.

edy. . . . He is simultaneously ridiculing a low society by decking them in all this borrowed finery. For burlesque has a two-edged blade, though both edges need not be equally sharp." According to Sven Armens, "*The Beggar's Opera*, in addition to being aesthetic criticism in its burlesque of the fashionable Italian opera, is also the social criticism of the poor man as artist. . . . Money thus forms the basis of social liberty and moral independence; its constant misuse in the town results in the distressing separation of human beings into economic abstracts of 'Haves' and 'Have-Nots.'" He continues, "Gay's satire on the professions is more concerned with the problems of honor and self-interest than the companion problems of justice and money. The point which Gay wishes to make is that just as the go-betweens, the bawd and the fence, should be the most reliable and dependable persons for their sort of business, so should professional men, such as lawyers responsible for justice, priests responsible for general morality, and statesmen responsible for the welfare of the whole society, be the most conscientious guardians of both the individual and the state entrusted to their care. But are they?"

Responses to Literature

1. John Gay was a gifted collaborator. Have you ever collaborated with someone on a project or assignment? How did you make sure that your own voice was heard, and that the work and the credit were equally assigned? Would you do things differently another time?
2. John Gay gained a reputation as a "hanger-on" because he relied on other people's help to support himself financially. Do you think an artist should take

a “day job” to be financially secure, even if that leaves less time to create art? Or do you think it is better for them to rely on other people for financial assistance if that means they have more time to create?

3. Gay collaborated with Handel, widely seen as one of the great Baroque composers. If you could collaborate with any musician today, who would it be? Write an essay explaining whom you would choose and why.

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❏ Maurice Gee

BORN: 1931, Whakatane, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Special Flower (1965)

In My Father's Den (1972)

A Glorious Morning, Comrade (1975)

Plumb (1978)

The Scornful Moon (2004)

Overview

Maurice Gee is an award-winning author of fiction for both children and adults. His writings reflect a strong sense of New Zealand life, providing insight into his country's politics and ideals. He was little recognized outside of his native country until the publication of his novel *Plumb*, which won the 1978 James Tait Black Memorial Award. Gee's short stories are primarily by-products of his novels, and today they rank among the finest stories in New Zealand literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in New Zealand Gee was born in 1931 in Whakatane, New Zealand. He grew up in the small town of Henderson, outside of Auckland. Gee was to use the simple town's environment for the setting of most of his future stories and novels.



Maurice Gee Gee, Maurice, photograph. Reproduced by permission.

Gee was educated at Henderson School, a public institution that also finds its way into many of his stories. From there, he entered Avondale College, where he took an MA in English in 1955. It was at college where he began writing and publishing short stories—the first of which, “The Widow,” was published in 1955 in the magazine *Landfall*.

In this time period, New Zealand was undergoing political change. In 1947, the country became completely autonomous from Great Britain. (New Zealand had been a colony of Great Britain, formally founded in the mid-nineteenth century.) As an autonomous nation, New Zealand became more intertwined with American foreign policy after the end of World War II and signed the three-way defense ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States) Pact with Australia and the United States in 1951. Later, New Zealander troops fought in both Cold War, anti-Communism conflicts in Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s through early 1970s.

A Writing Apprentice Although Gee had always desired to be a writer, he took a job teaching in Paeroa after graduating, thinking this was the only way to make a living. But he did not care for teaching and spent every free hour he could writing. In 1961, he won a grant from the New Zealand Literary Fund and continued teaching and writing in England. The country Gee went to was being transformed as Great Britain was dealing with the impact of the loss of its empire as many of its colonies gained independence in the post-World War II period. As a result, the British economy was in decline at this time. For the next ten years, Gee learned to write—to find his writing voice, develop his style, and establish an

audience. He published eleven stories between 1955 and 1961, the years leading up to his first published novel in 1962.

First Novels Published Even though the mid- to late 1950s marked his apprenticeship, Gee's early stories still were considered significant. After "The Losers" and "Eleventh Holiday" established him as a serious writer and created an audience for him, he began writing novels. His first novel, *The Big Season*, came out in 1962. This was followed by two works that won New Zealand Literary Fund Awards of Achievement: *A Special Flower* (1965) and *In My Father's Den* (1972).

From Librarian to Full-Time Writer For several years, Gee held several jobs, among them a position as a librarian. Although the job added stability to his life, he found himself once again frustrated as all the books distracted him from his own writing. In 1976, he quit the library to write full time. That same year *Games of Choice* was published, followed by a series of novels for adults that marked for the writer a new level of literary accomplishment—an ambitious trilogy of novels about the Plumb family.

Plumb (1978) and its sequels, *Meg* (1981) and *Sole Survivor* (1983), have many ingredients of his earlier novels: With some religious and domestic flavor, the three books produce a saga on New Zealand life, focusing on its history and society succumbing to decay. The characters are outsiders and outcasts. They are defined by and ruined by idealism, materialism, and corrupt politics. These same kinds of characters reappeared in a number of other Gee novels, both for adults and younger readers, including *The Burning Boy* (1990), the Deutz Medal for Fiction-winning *Live Bodies* (1998), and the award-winning thriller *The Fat Man* (1994). By this time, New Zealand had developed a reputation for intense environmental concerns, including a 1984 ban on nuclear-armed vessels in its harbors, which damaged its relationship with the United States.

Continued Success as a Novelist In the early 2000s, Gee continued to publish novels for both younger readers and adults. In 2001, he published *Ellie and the Shadow Man*, for young adult readers, followed by two novels for adults, *The Scornful Moon: A Moralists Tale* (2003) and *Blindsight* (2005). He continues to live and work in New Zealand

Works in Literary Context

Gee's stories are often set in fictionalized versions of his childhood hometown and the surrounding area, giving his stories a distinctive sense of place. The influence of Henderson and Henderson Creek have especially influenced Gee's novels, which are set in New Zealand's past

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gee's famous contemporaries include:

Neil Armstrong (1930–): American astronaut, professor, test pilot, and naval aviator, who, in 1969 was the first person to set foot on the moon.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007) One of America's most respected, influential novelists, he is perhaps best known for his novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969).

Elgar Howarth (1935–): English conductor and composer, this former trumpet player has made significant contributions to brass band music.

Toni Morrison (1931–): Widely respected, she was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Among her best-known novels are *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987).

Joe Orton (1933–1967): English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies such as *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) that shocked and amused his audiences.

John Updike (1932–): American writer of small-town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects, he has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990).

and through close observation chronicle how his country's politics and ideals have evolved over time.

Fantasy Science Fiction

Science fiction also held appeal for Gee. His interest in writing fantasy science fiction began when he borrowed a book, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), from a friend. His first effort in the genre is *Under the Mountain* (1979), the creepy tale of giant alien worms that live under an Auckland volcano and plan to turn Earth into a giant mud ball so it is more to their liking.

Realist Style Outside of fantasy science fiction writing, Gee's art and his vision have both developed out of the tradition of critical realism of Frank Sargeson and the other writers of that generation. As in Sargeson's stories, Gee's offer a clear-cut division between the more individualistic and imaginative outsider and the repressive puritan majority. For example, in "Eleventh Holiday," Gee pits the persecuted young Frank Milich against the middle-aged, middle-class "regulars" at Mayall's Cottage Resort. In Gee's stories, the characters are important as individuals responding to larger moral issues. They are important as vehicles of the themes; more important this way than they are as social "types." It is in the creation of character in its moral dimensions that Gee excels and earns his place as a significant contemporary writer of New Zealand critical realism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whether Gee's stories are set in his native New Zealand or in fantasy worlds, they carry universal themes concerning social and familial conflicts and the struggle of right against wrong. Here are a few works by writers who also wrote on themes of morality for characters who are outsiders:

- The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel by J. D. Salinger. This novel is a cult classic for its protagonist, the angst-ridden teenager, Holden Caulfield.
- Hadrian the Seventh* (1904), a novel by Frederick William Rolfe. This novel features the eccentric, chain-smoking George Arthur Rose—in line for the priesthood but who becomes a candidate for the papacy.
- Of Mice and Men* (1937), a novel by John Steinbeck. Although often placed at the top of censors' lists, this novel is profound in its exploration of mental and social disability.
- The Stranger* (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. In this existential novel, the protagonist, Meursault, is less than sympathetic from the start.
- To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), a novel by Harper Lee. In this novel, human dignity is nearly destroyed but is restored when the humanitarian lawyer Atticus Finch goes to court.

Works in Critical Context

Gee has been widely praised for his keen depictions of past and present New Zealand landscapes and societies as well as for his compelling, well-rounded protagonists and supporting characters. Fellow realist Maurice Shadbolt has praised Gee's work for the way in which it captures the "sight and sensation" of life in contemporary New Zealand. "Each of Gee's novels bountifully gives us a rich vision of some region and aspect of New Zealand life, and of human life in general," added a contributor to *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*. Gee has met with equally warm reception for his young adult literature, such as the "O" trilogy.

The "O" Trilogy Gee's "most ambitious fantasy work for young adults" is the "O" trilogy—composed of *The Halfmen of O* (1982), *The Priests of Ferris* (1984), and *Motherstone* (1985). The trilogy involves young protagonists who travel to a fantasy world to help restore the balance between good and evil. The character development and the treatment of the morality theme have prompted some reviewers to compare the trilogy to C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

While other reviewers have found flaws in the "O" trilogy, critics have not been quick to dismiss it as merely light reading. Karen Stang Hanley complained in *Booklist* that while Susan is a well-developed protagonist, the

other characters in the first book seem "vague" by comparison. However, many reviewers have found much to praise. Tony Ficociello from *School Library Journal* states, "Gee has created a unique environment and his story soars with excitement." David Bennett adds that "all fantasy readers will relish" *The Priests of Ferris*. "It is always tempting to approach this kind of book in a frivolous mood," concludes Marcus Crouch in a *Junior Bookshelf* review, "but this would be to misjudge a formidable talent. Maurice Gee . . . is a remarkable writer, who uses the conventions of the out-world romance both to tell a most compelling story and to make some valid social comments."

Responses to Literature

1. Read Gee's book *Salt*. Write a review on the book, explaining the symbolism of the fantasy world and its inhabitants.
2. Research realism and critical realism as literary genres in order to come up with a working definition. In your definition, consider the following points: What are the characteristics of realism? What are the additional characteristics of critical realism? How do the two overlap? How does your favorite Maurice Gee story fit the definition?
3. Use the Internet or library and investigate New Zealand—its history, geography, culture, and people. In a small group, discuss how knowing more about New Zealand helps readers understand a Gee work.

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☒ Jean Genet

BORN: 1910, Paris, France

DIED: 1986, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Condemned Man (1942)

Our Lady of the Flowers (1944)

The Maids (1947)

Prisoner of Love (1986)

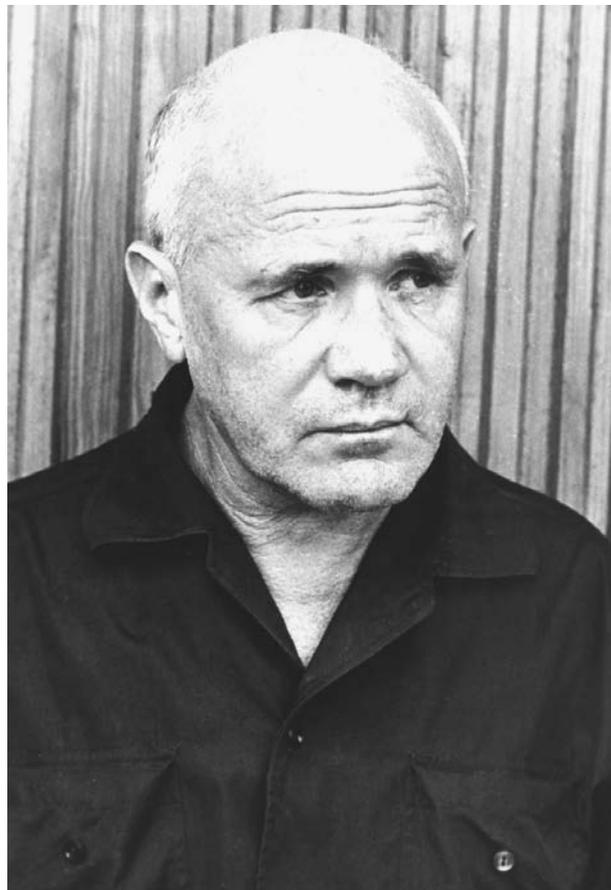
Overview

Jean Genet is best known for surreal poetic dramas in which he utilizes the stage as a communal arena for bizarre fantasies involving dominance and submission, sex, and death. Genet, whom Jean Cocteau dubbed France's "Black Prince of letters," is linked to such amoral, antitraditional writers as the Marquis de Sade and Charles Baudelaire by his use of rich, baroque imagery, his deliberate inversion of traditional Western moral values, and his belief that spiritual glory may be attained through the pursuit of evil. Although Genet first won international recognition for his lyrical novels about prison life, most critics contend that his dramas represent the most refined synthesis of his characteristic style and themes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Life in Prisons Although the facts of Genet's life are so mixed with fiction as to be nearly indistinguishable, it is certain that he was born in 1910 in Paris. His father was unknown, and his mother, Gabrielle Genet, abandoned him at birth. As a ward of the *Assistance publique*, he spent his early childhood in an orphanage. As a young boy, he was assigned to a peasant family in the Morvan region of France. The foster parents, who were paid by the state to raise him, accused him of theft, and some time between the age of ten and fifteen he was sent to the Mettray Reformatory, a penal colony for adolescents. After escaping from Mettray and joining and being dishonorably discharged from the Foreign Legion (for his homosexuality), Genet spent the next twenty years wandering throughout Europe, where he made his living as a thief and male prostitute.

According to the legend, he began writing his first novels in jail and quickly rose to literary prominence. Having been sentenced to life in prison for a crime he did not commit, he received a presidential pardon from Vincent Auriol in 1948, primarily because of a petition circulated by an elite group of Parisian writers and intellectuals. After 1948 Genet devoted himself to literature, the theater, the arts, and various social causes—



Jean Genet Genet, Jean, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

particularly those of political underdogs, such as the Black Panther movement for equal rights for African Americans in the United States, or the Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule in the Middle East. He would later memorialize these experiences in his memoir, *Prisoner of Love*, published posthumously in 1986. Genet's early days of literary prominence, after the successful but humiliating conclusion of World War II (in which France was liberated—from both German forces and its own Vichy government, a puppet regime controlled by the Nazis—by Allied forces in 1944), were a time of both reconstruction and political instability in France, with the so-called Fourth Republic having more than twenty-one prime ministers over the course of the twelve years of its existence.

Poetry, Novels, Plays... and One Fictional Autobiography It is frequently noted of Genet that his development as a writer was from poetry to novels to plays. According to the legend, his initial creative effort was a poem written in prison, and, in fact, his first published work was his poem *The Condemned Man*. Between 1942 and 1948, Genet proceeded to write four major novels and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Genet's famous contemporaries include:

- Fritz Hochwaelder** (1911–1986): An Austrian dramatist whose work was affected by his brush with the Nazis prior to World War II.
- L. Ron Hubbard** (1911–1986): An American science fiction author who also founded the controversial Church of Scientology.
- Chinua Achebe** (1930–): A Nigerian novelist, poet, and literary critic, Achebe is perhaps the most significant African writer in English of the twentieth century.
- Frida Kahlo** (1907–1954): A Mexican painter whose work includes elements of several schools of art, including Surrealism and Symbolism.
- Dominique Pire** (1910–1969): The Belgian monk whose efforts in helping World War II refugees earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1958.
- Yitzhak Rabin** (1922–1995): The Israeli prime minister who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 and was assassinated in 1995.

one fictionalized autobiography. He also wrote two plays, of which one, *The Maids*, was produced by Louis Jouvet in 1947. And while Genet went on to make two films between 1949 and 1956 (*Imaginations* and *Song of Love*), his most successful theatrical period was from 1956 to 1962. During that time, he wrote and presented three plays—all successful productions. Various ballets, mimes, films, aesthetic criticism and sociopolitical statements were interspersed throughout his years of productivity, from about 1937 to 1979. Weakened by ill health, Genet published little after 1979. He was found dead on the floor of his Paris hotel room on April 15, 1986, and buried in the Spanish cemetery in Larache, Morocco.

Works in Literary Context

Genet's work is most fruitfully viewed in terms of its subversion of both traditional structure and heteronormative themes. Indeed, his novels—which lack traditional chronology and smooth transitions—have been linked with a movement in literature called the “new novels.” “New novelists” attempted to rethink the traditional structure of the novel in order to reflect the increasingly complicated human psyche in the post–World War II era. In addition to experimenting with the form of the novel, Genet also opened that form up to what has been called “homosexual eros.” That is to say, not only does Genet invert traditional conceptions about the structure of the novel, he also challenges the perspective that heterosexuality is or should be “normative” or dominant.

The “New Novelists” Of Genet's five novels, counting the fictionalized autobiography, *The Thief's Journal*, critics consider *Our Lady of the Flowers* and *The Miracle of the Rose* to be his best. His first novel was brought to Jean Cocteau's attention by three young men who had become acquainted with Genet, who was then selling books (some stolen) from a bookstall along the Seine. Cocteau recognized the literary merit of *Our Lady*, which is a tour de force. This novel is unique for several reasons: its basic philosophy, its sophisticated literary technique, and its composite central character Genet-Divine-Culafroy. Genet's works, like those of the well-known “new novelists” Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor, may be considered nontraditional in their disregard of conventional psychology, their lack of careful transitions, their confused chronologies, and their disdain for coherent plot structures.

Homosexual Eros and an Ethic of Evil Genet's novels, which are fraught with exotic imagery and metaphors, French slang, and scatological language, all take the form of non-chronological, semiautobiographical narratives that alternate between the first and third person. According to Richard Howard, Genet's novels “are the great affair in his career primarily because they are the first and perhaps the only texts to set forth for the Western imagination an explicit realization of homosexual eros.” By rejecting the morality of what he perceives to be a repressive, hypocritical society that punishes its least powerful social castes for crimes universal to all classes of humanity, Genet seeks to create in his literature what Sartre termed in his influential study, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, “a black ethic, with precepts and rules, pitiless constraints, a Jansenism of evil.” In his first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Genet inverts traditional Western values to replace ideals of goodness with ideals of evil, courage with cowardice, love with betrayal. Thus, evil is transformed into good, suffering into joy, and shame into glory. The book, described by Sartre as “the epic of masturbation,” was written beneath a blanket in Genet's cell at the prison of La Fresne. Through his fantasies, Genet describes the loving revenge of a submissive homosexual prisoner, Divine, on his dominant pimps and cellmates, Darling and Our Lady, whom he resents supporting through male prostitution. Genet ultimately deems Divine's betrayal of Our Lady, a murderer whom Divine delivers to prison officials for execution, to be a tribute to supreme evil. By betraying his lover, Divine is able to identify with both victim and executioner and to assume the universal burden of criminal responsibility.

Granddaddy to the Beats Given Genet's open discussion of homosexuality and his refusal to conform to the conventions of the novel, it is fair to say that his work opened the door for the success of a number of Beat writers, antiestablishment American writers who rose to prominence in the 1950s. If American poet Allen

Ginsberg has been described as the Father of Beat literature, Genet must surely have been its Granddaddy. Beat writer Jack Kerouac's famous autobiographical novel, *On the Road*, certainly benefited from Genet's groundbreaking work, and William S. Burroughs, for example, wrote openly both about bisexuality and drug use in his novel *Naked Lunch*, a work held together only thematically—there is no clear chronology and the characters that inhabit the pages are connected to one another in only the smallest of ways.

Works in Critical Context

Genet's early success as a novelist may certainly be attributed to various factors—to the support of Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre, to the scandal arising from his subject matter, and to his notoriety as a thief and novelist. The critics long continued to accept the simplistic legend of the unlettered convict genius despite the classical references and other literary allusions, the sophisticated structures, and the sheer volume of work purportedly created between 1942 and 1948. The legend persisted until 1970 when Richard N. Coe published, in *The Theatre of Jean Genet: A Casebook*, an essay by Lily Pringsheim in which she reported that the Genet she had known in Germany in 1937 was of “a truly astonishing intelligence. . . . I could scarcely believe the extent of his knowledge of literature.” She also revealed that Genet begged her “to store away a number of manuscripts . . . and that he shared [with her friend Leuschner] an uncontrollable thirst for knowledge, for Leuschner, like Genet, carried books about with him everywhere he went: Shakespeare, language textbooks, scientific treatises.”

Early critical response, then, was focused on Genet as a person, but in recent years, critics have shifted their focus from the man to the work and have affirmed the complexity and beauty of Genet's themes and the intricate structure of his novels. The diversity of the critical response to Genet is best illustrated by an examination of the body of work that seeks to explain and judge his novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

Our Lady of the Flowers Francis L. Kunkle in his *Passion and the Passion: Sex and Religion in Modern Literature* is representative of those critics who reject Genet's work; Kunkle finds *Our Lady* to be “a kind of endless linguistic onanism which often collapses into obscene blasphemy.” Most critics, however, consider *Our Lady* innovative in its treatment of time and its concept of gesture-as-act, and sophisticated in its self-conscious aesthetic. In *Jean Genet: A Critical Appraisal*, Philip Thody defends the worth of the book: “There are a number of reasons for considering *Our Lady of the Flowers* as Genet's best novel, and the work in which his vision of reality is given its most effective expression. It has a unity which stems from its concentration upon a single character, and Genet's projection of his own prob-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Genet's work was notable for its open treatment of homosexuality. Here are some more books and films dealing with homosexual themes:

The Charioteer (1959), a novel by Mary Renault. This historical novel offers a bold, unapologetic portrayal of male homosexuality during World War II and stands as a classic work of gay literature.

The Dying Gaul (2005), a film directed by Craig Lucas. In this film—based on a play by the same name—a young homosexual screenwriter enters a sexual relationship with a movie producer in part, at least, to gain favor with him in order to get his film made.

Long Life (2004), a series of essays by Mary Oliver. In this collection of essays, Mary Oliver explores the meaning of her long life in terms of her homosexuality, her ecological concerns, and her career as an author.

Howl (1956), a poetry collection by Allen Ginsberg. This collection of poems describes frankly, among other things, the pleasures of homosexual love; for that frankness, its author was charged with obscenity and threatened with prison time.

lems on to Divine creates a detachment and irony that are not repeated in any other of his works.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Genet's work has been described as nontraditional in its presentation of chronology and its transitions from scene to scene. How would you describe your reaction to these facets of this novel? In what ways does Genet's structure, meant to represent the fracturing of the human psyche in the wake of two World Wars, continue to speak to the modern experience of self-hood? In what ways might it be obsolete?
2. Little is known for sure about Genet's life. What exists is a set of legends designed to support an image of the author as a lonesome, self-taught, underprivileged genius. Since so much was made of this legend during his lifetime, his work was often interpreted in terms of it. After having read *Our Lady of the Flowers* or one of Genet's other novels, do you think you would respond differently to the text if you knew that Genet had lived a privileged, bourgeois life? Is it fair to judge the effectiveness of a work based on the biography of its author? Write an essay supporting your position on this issue.
3. Research the “new novelists” on the Internet and in the library. In your opinion, in what ways does

Genet exemplify the beliefs of those who follow this tradition, and in what ways does Genet's work represent some other literary trend or movement? Analyze examples from Genet's work to support your response.

4. At the time of publication, Genet's work was seen by many as immoral and, for that reason, flawed. Is "morality" an appropriate category for judging the quality of a literary work?

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▣ Hsadullah Khan Ghalib

BORN: 1797, Agra, India

DIED: 1869, Delhi, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Divan-i-Ghalib (1841)

Panj ahang (1849)

Dastanbu (1858)

Overview

Hsadullah Khan Ghalib is regarded as the most important Urdu-language poet of the nineteenth century. He is praised in particular for his artful use of the short lyric



Hsadullah Khan Ghalib *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

form known as the *ghazal*, although he also wrote numerous volumes of letters and an account of the Sepoy Rebellion, in which Indian natives attempted to overthrow British colonial rule.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Orphan at Age Five Ghalib was born into an aristocratic Muslim family in Agra. Orphaned at age five, he was reared with his brother and sister by maternal relatives. Ghalib started writing poetry in both Urdu and Persian as a child. At age thirteen, he married and moved to his wife's home in Delhi, where, except for occasional travel, he resided the rest of his life. There he made the acquaintance of several prominent and influential poets and wrote both occasional and lyric poetry for patrons at the Mughal court. In 1827 Ghalib went to Calcutta on legal business and met a number of writers and scholars in that city and in Lucknow, gaining him admittance to the literary world outside of Delhi.

Breaking with Tradition While in Calcutta, Ghalib observed the material prosperity of British civilization and attributed this wealth to English academic and legal innovations. Thereafter, he began to challenge Indian institutions, especially the practice of educating Muslims in a dialect of Persian that varied from the traditional language in both vocabulary and grammar. Ghalib argued that Indians should write Persian as native speakers wrote it, and he presented his ideas at a symposium held

by the university at Calcutta. Ghalib's audience strongly criticized the unfamiliar style of Persian he was espousing, prompting him to condemn his opponents in Calcutta newspapers. His challenge to Indian tradition and his outspoken nature provoked animosity among many of Ghalib's colleagues and involved him in a lifelong controversy. However, the quarrel also brought him greater attention, and the resulting correspondence with other scholars established his reputation as both an innovative writer and an uncompromising scholar.

Rethinking Rebellion In 1841 Ghalib published his collected Urdu poems, *Divan-i-Ghalib*. His next book did not appear until 1849, when he produced *Panjahang*, a handbook on the writing of letters and poetry illustrated with samples of his own work; throughout the next decade, he published only sporadically. Since the sixteenth century, India had been occupied by traders from various nations in Europe, many of whom hoped to colonize the land. By 1856, the majority of India was under the control of the British East India Company. In 1857 Ghalib was forced to reassess his great admiration for Western culture when the British rulers of India responded to the Sepoy Rebellion with bloody violence. Known as the "First War for Independence" in India, this rebellion marked a transfer of governing power from the British East India Company to the British Crown. Eighteen months after the start of the fighting, Ghalib published *Dastanbu*, his memoirs of the suffering brought on by the conflict, sending copies to various British officials, including Queen Victoria, both to plead for moderation in the treatment of Indians and to establish his own innocence in the rebellion. Motivated by the realization that most of his unpublished manuscripts had been destroyed when the rebels and British alike had looted the libraries of Delhi, Ghalib attempted to gather his remaining *ghazals* into expanded editions of his *Divan*. In the loneliness caused by the deaths and exile of many of his friends, Ghalib began to write several letters a day for solace; many of these were collected for publication. Despite rapidly failing health in his later years, Ghalib helped edit some of these collections, as well as critiquing poems sent to him by poets all over India. He died in Delhi in 1869.

Works in Literary Context

The Ghazal Ghalib's experience of cultural differences between the East and West heavily influenced his work and linguistic preferences. In addition, his competition with and respect for Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq, a prominent contemporary of Ghalib's, played a significant role in the development of his work. Although Ghalib wrote in several genres, his *ghazals* have generally been the best received of his works. *Ghazals* usually consist of five to twelve couplets that are linked by common meters and rhyme schemes, but not necessarily by subject matter or

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ghalib's famous contemporaries include:

Washington Irving (1773–1859): Best known for his stories "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving offered a turn to tradition and folklore reflective of an uneasy acceptance of the great changes of the early nineteenth century.

Benoit Fourneyron (1802–1867): Fourneyron was a French engineer who designed the first usable water turbine. In making it possible to capture energy from moving water, he played a particularly key role in the development of industry and industrial machinery around the world.

Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq (1789–1854): Zauq was a contemporary and rival of Ghalib's and served as tutor to the emperor of India. The two poets, while exchanging periodic jibes, apparently had a mutual respect for one another's abilities.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, was perhaps the most powerful antislavery advocate of all time. He pushed for and signed into law the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery. He was assassinated shortly thereafter.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): Darwin was an English naturalist whose theory of natural selection as a mechanism for evolution revolutionized the natural sciences. Spin-offs on his work, most notably by Herbert Spencer, who proposed a theory of social Darwinism, helped the British to justify their racist colonial enterprises to themselves.

tone. They were written in both Urdu and Persian, although Persian poetry generally brought greater prestige. As a young man, Ghalib preferred to compose in Persian—which had a similar status to that of Latin in Western Europe of the Middle Ages—until he noticed a growing taste for Urdu verse among Delhi poets. From the 1820s onward, he composed increasingly in Urdu, and now is remembered chiefly for his Urdu writings. Critics remark that Ghalib expanded the range of themes of the *ghazal* genre and utilized conventional Persian and Urdu poetic devices in new ways.

Expanding the Boundaries of Language A nightingale singing in a garden for love of a rose was a common metaphor for a poet composing his works in response to a beloved, but unattainable, woman. Ghalib used the same allusion to suggest his interest in progress and modernity: "My songs are prompted by delight / In the heat of my ideas; / I am the nightingale / Of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Loss and grief are, in many ways, classical literary themes. The world changes, and with that change, much that has been solid and known melts away. The ability to capture lyrically personal and shared responses to shifts in the surrounding world has long been a hallmark of great poetry and fiction alike. Here are some other authors writing in response to historical change and loss:

In Search of Lost Time (1913–1927, translated 2002), a novel by Marcel Proust. French author Proust's epic seven-volume novel meditates on the nature of time and memory and is shot through with grief and loss. The personal difficulties of physical infirmity and the cruelty of others are interwoven with the social catastrophes of World War I and the aerial bombardment of Paris.

Austerlitz (2001), a novel by W. G. Sebald. Contemporary German author Sebald ties together a man's sorrowful search for memories of his father with the brutal and sickening history of the Holocaust throughout Western Europe.

The Bell Jar (1963), a semiautobiographical novel by Sylvia Plath. In this work, American poet Plath chronicles her own experience of bottomless grief and depression, in part a response to her encounter with the teeming busyness, but also hopelessness, of New York City.

flower garden of the future.” By identifying his symbolic beloved with a future age, Ghalib stressed his interest in change. He broke more strongly with established literary practice in his letters. Educated Indian Muslims usually wrote letters, as they did poetry, in Persian rather than in Urdu, while Ghalib wrote increasingly in Urdu. Moreover, in either language, letter writers customarily employed rhyming sentences and addressed their correspondents with flattering epithets. In place of such formality, Ghalib substituted colloquial language and nicknames or terms of endearment like “brother.” His letters proved so popular they were adopted as models by subsequent writers of Urdu. Today, scholars and artists look to Ghalib's work for indications of the cultural and political climate in India during the nineteenth century. Ghalib's on-going influence can be seen in the presence of films, plays, and a television series based on his life and work.

Works in Critical Context

Highly regarded for his contributions to the development of Urdu poetry, Ghalib was virtually unknown outside Urdu-speaking communities for decades following his death. His work, however, gradually came to the attention of Western readers, and the centenary of his death in

1969 was marked by several volumes of English translations of his poems, with critical notes and biographical essays. Recent scholars have focused in particular on his handling of *ghazal* stylistic conventions and his contribution to the development of Urdu literature, and they agree that his extraordinary skill as a lyric poet makes him one of the most prominent figures in nineteenth-century Indian literature.

Writing in an era of colonial crisis and traumatic change in India, “Ghalib was not,” as Aijaz Ahmad writes, “in the modern sense, a political poet—not political, in other words, in the sense of a commitment to strategies of resistance. Yet, surrounded by constant carnage, Ghalib wrote a poetry primarily of losses and consequent grief; a poetry also of what was, what could have been possible, but was no longer.” It is important to note that his thematic focus on loss and sorrow coincides with a commitment to progress. That latter was perhaps most strikingly evidenced in his renewal of older themes and his investment in the Urdu language, then seen as the lesser cousin to Persian.

Responses to Literature

1. Read several of the *ghazals* in *Divan-i-Ghalib*. In your opinion, what are the crucial elements in Ghalib's portrayal of loss and sorrow? Think about the symbolism and word choice in the poems. Be sure to cite and explain specific examples from the text.
2. Research the use of the Persian and Urdu languages in India. Does the use of one language over the other suggest a certain social standing? Why do you think Ghalib chose to work in Urdu in his later life?
3. As you read through Ghalib's work, recall that you are reading Urdu texts in English translation—and that translation is always a process of interpretation. Pick three to five terms that seem crucial to you in one or two of the *ghazals*, and look back to the original Urdu texts. Now, find other possible translations of those terms. How might the meaning of the poem be different for you if the terms were translated in different ways? What does this suggest about the ways in which we experience and share meaning? What does it tell you about translation?
4. Research the Sepoy Rebellion. What caused this violent uprising, and how did it end? How did Ghalib use this real-life event as inspiration for his book *Dastanbu*?

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Michel de Ghelderode

BORN: 1898, Ixelles, Belgium

DIED: 1962, Brussels, Belgium

NATIONALITY: Belgian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Farce of Death Who Almost Died (1925)

Chronicles of Hell (1929)

The Public Life of Pantagleize (1930)

Red Magic (1931)

The Actor Makes His Exit (1935)

Overview

Michel de Ghelderode was among the most influential twentieth-century dramatists working in French, earning an international reputation as an avant-garde playwright. Although he lived his entire life in his native Belgium, Ghelderode achieved his critical and commercial success in Paris. His plays are often set in surreal, dystopic fantasies, peopled by grotesques, dwarves, and marionettes; nevertheless, they exhibit psychological realism. Although he sometimes achieved notoriety through scandal, Ghelderode felt he never received the recognition nor achieved the financial success he deserved.



Michel de Ghelderode Association internationale Michel de Ghelderode

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

French Beginnings Ghelderode was born Adolphe Adhémar Martens in Ixelles, Belgium, on April 3, 1898. He was the fourth child of middle-class parents Henri-Adolphe Martens, a clerk at the general archives at Brussels, and Jeanne-Marie. Although they were Dutch speakers, the Martens chose to educate their children in French, the only official language of Belgium at the time. In fact, Ghelderode published all of his works in French, apparently never mastering written Dutch.

Early Illnesses Martens attended school at the Institut St-Louis in Belgium until 1914, when he was forced to leave after a bout with typhus (an infectious bacterial disease that was regularly epidemic until a vaccine was created in the 1930s). His adolescence was deeply affected by his illness and the death of his brother in World War I. Though the war had its immediate causes in eastern and central European politics and entangling alliances, Germany's invasion of Belgium in August 1914 brought Great Britain into the conflict. Though the Belgian army tried to resist, Germany occupied much of Belgium during World War I. Belgium proved to be a major battleground on the Western Front as the Allies—Great Britain, France, and Belgium, among others—sought to liberate the country.

Martens attempted suicide at least once and was never entirely stable. He became something of a hypochondriac, always suffering from one ailment or another. Because of chronic asthma, he left school early and for the rest of his life lived as an invalid.

The Devil, Damnation, and Death Raised by a mother who fervently believed in both God and the devil (whom she claimed to have personally seen), Ghelderode was told supernatural tales from an early age. When he began to read, stories of the macabre and fantastic were his favorites. When he began to write—short stories and poems, then plays—he continued his preoccupation with those subjects.

In 1916, Ghelderode developed an interest in the marionette (stringed puppets) theaters of old Brussels, searching their records for lost or forgotten plays. Some of his own plays are reportedly based on or inspired by old marionette dramas of the sixteenth century. In 1918, a representative from a local group of avant-garde writers and artists approached Ghelderode and invited him to give a lecture. Ghelderode accepted but stated that his lecture would have to deal with American Edgar Allan Poe's work. To accompany the lecture, the arts group asked Ghelderode if he had an appropriate short play they could perform. Although he had never written a play before, Ghelderode said that he had a suitable play, then quickly wrote one. The resulting work was *Death Looks Through the Window* (1918)—a horrifying play with physically or morally defective characters and an ending in “hell and damnation,” as Ghelderode later described it.

New Politics, New Work By 1923, Ghelderode was working as the archives editor in Schaerbeek, a suburb of Brussels. His lifelong interest in old manuscripts was fostered by this position. During the 1920s, Ghelderode also continued his theatrical efforts, writing puppet plays usually based on biblical stories. These plays also included *The Death of Doctor Faust* (1926) and *Don Juan* (1928). When audience reaction to these French language works was not enthusiastic, he turned to the Flemish People's Theatre. The theater was strongly nationalist, which suited Ghelderode, who also expressed support for Flemish nationalism. (Belgium is a country made up of two distinct peoples. The Flemish are generally found in the north, while the Walloons, a French-speaking people, are found in the south. There has long been tension between the groups, though the French language has long predominated.)

In 1925, Ghelderode became the principal playwright for the Flemish People's Theatre, which produced a number of his early plays. During the 1920s, he was also a member of the Renaissance de l'Occident, a literary group that published his plays either in their magazine or in separate booklets. Some plays written or published at this time were not produced until many years later. By the late 1920s, Ghelderode's plays were also being produced in Paris and Rome.

The year 1930 saw the production of Ghelderode's *The Public Life of Pantagleize*—a play centered around the violent attack on capitalist society. *Pantagleize* presents Ghelderode's essentially religious vision, which

sees the world, by its very nature, as hopelessly corrupt. During the initial production, the actor playing the lead character grew ill and died, suffering a delirium in his final days in which he argued with characters he had played in several of Ghelderode's productions. The bizarre hallucinations of the dying man inspired Ghelderode to write *The Actor Makes His Exit* (1935), in which an actor grows ill and dies because of the morbid plays he has been performing.

Alleged Nazi Sympathy Because he was committed to nothing and acted as a free writer, anarchist-aristocrat Ghelderode welcomed the Nazi invasion of Belgium in 1940 and hoped the Nazis would appreciate his work. Nazi Germany had been growing as a power under Adolf Hitler since the mid-1930s and had strong territorial ambitions. European leaders tried a policy of appeasement to avoid war, but allowing Germany to take over parts of Czechoslovakia did not curb Hitler's desire for territory. World War II began when Great Britain and France declared war on Germany for invading Poland in 1939. By 1940, Germany had invaded and taken over Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. While a democratic Belgian government was formed in exile, Belgium remained occupied until 1944.

Anti-Semitic and hostile to democratic government, Ghelderode took the Nazis to be German comrades of the Flemish nationalists. During the occupation, he went on German radio to broadcast a series of talks on folklore subjects under the title *Our Own Things and People*. Charged with collaborating with the enemy at war's end, Ghelderode lost his job and citizenship. A series of judicial appeals finally won him a pardon and a revocation of the charges against him. In 1949, he was awarded a government pension and essentially retired from playwrighting.

International Acclaim Ironically, Ghelderode first won international acclaim the year he retired. A Paris production of his play *Chronicles of Hell*, first written in 1929, caused such a scandal that the curtain was brought down on the show after four performances. The resulting publicity launched a series of other productions of his plays both previously produced and unproduced in Paris, Rome, Madrid, Copenhagen, Oslo, Krakow, Cairo, and various locations throughout Eastern Europe. By the late 1950s, Ghelderode's plays were also being produced in the United States. His plays were produced in his native Belgium throughout the decade as well. His last play was written in 1952, *Mary the Poor*, on commission from the Brabant church of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. It is considered by most critics to be inferior to his earlier works. Despite this relative failure, he was probably the most influential playwright in French and among the most influential worldwide when he died on April 1, 1962.

Works in Literary Context

Unlike many of his contemporaries in the theater, Ghelderode, who penned more than fifty plays, focused

almost exclusively on writing drama. His oeuvres include only a handful of published works that are not plays. He wrote plays that shocked audiences, challenged convention, and employed popular theatrical traditions that had been neglected by artists of the elite. Sex, death, religion, and the theater itself were Ghelderode's most cherished themes, and he addressed them while testing the limits of social mores and contemporary drama.

Unique and Varied Influences The carnival atmosphere of Ghelderode's plays is derived from traditional Flemish street carnivals, masquerades, and the peasant revelries found in the paintings of Pieter Brueghel. Ghelderode set several plays in what he termed "Brueghellande." Critics and commentators often compared his works to the art of Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch as well as to the plays of Maurice Maeterlinck. Ghelderode also credited the Elizabethans and such Spanish playwrights as Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón as sources of inspiration. Another powerful influence was the medieval world and its exuberant festivals, omnipresent church, brutality, and sensuality.

Grotesque Style, Fantastic and Macabre Themes

An openness to the fantastic is often present in Ghelderode's plays. In *Caroline's Household*, for example, a group of mannequins used for target practice in a shooting gallery escape to seek revenge on those who have harmed them. In *The Blind Men*, inspired by a Brueghel painting, three blind pilgrims refuse to believe a one-eyed man who tells them they are headed in the wrong direction. They end up falling into quicksand. Other plays feature the devil, living corpses, masked revelers at carnival time, misers, lechers, angels, historical figures, and midgets. Ghelderode's plays present a grotesque, absurd world where humans live in torment and confusion. This "carnival of vices" is the result of a world that has lost its faith. Dark and foreboding, Ghelderode's plays blend elements from marionette plays, medieval festival, and religious mystery drama into a personal statement unlike any other in modern drama.

Influence on Postwar Playwrights Ghelderode redefined the possibilities of the theater and prepared the way for postwar playwrights such as Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett.

Works in Critical Context

Critical study of Ghelderode's work has followed a pattern of neglect and rediscovery throughout the playwright's career, especially since his death in 1962. In Belgium, and somewhat later in France, early audiences and critics of Ghelderode's plays were often shocked by their uncompromising portrait of human depravity and sin, their treatment of religious hypocrisy, and their scatological wit. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the Parisian theater establishment came to embrace him

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ghelderode's famous contemporaries include:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): German playwright, director, and poet, he was influential as creator of "epic theater," operator of the acclaimed Berliner Ensemble theater company, and practitioner of experimental drama. His works include *The Threepenny Opera* (1928).

M. C. Escher (1898–1972): Dutch graphic artist, he is world-renowned for his woodcuts, lithographs, and mezzotints that trick the eye, seem to defy logic or physics, and feature explorations that include infinity and the impossible.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): British film and television director and producer, he is considered an icon for his pioneering suspense and thriller entertainment, his droll wit, and his unique style—including making cameo appearances in every one of his films and presenting his own series with props and mental gags. His films include *The 39 Steps* (1935).

C. S. Lewis (1898–1968): Irish writer and scholar, he is best known for his series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949–1954), but is also popular for his studies of Christian apologetics.

Golda Meir (1898–1978): The fourth prime minister of Israel, she was known as "The Iron Lady" of politics.

as an innovative and important writer. Though his stature briefly waned in France around his death, his stature as a playwright of international importance grew and spread to North and South America, Eastern Europe, and Great Britain. Since the 1960s, Ghelderode's reputation has continued to increase.

Critics over the decades have suggested that Ghelderode's plays do not fit into any established tradition. While Ghelderode's theater defies categorization, his most avid scholars have been able to articulate his artistic approach as it presents itself in his work.

Importance of the Plays "Among modern dramatists," George E. Wellwarth explained in *Tulane Drama Review*, "Michel de Ghelderode stands by himself. If we must have a classification for him, then he can most nearly be compared to that group of novelists who have concentrated on the creation of a fictional world of their own, a microcosm in which to reflect their view of human behavior in the world as a whole. . . . Ghelderode has created an enclosed world that reflects and comments upon the larger world outside. Ghelderode's world is medieval Flanders, and his view of the world can best be described as savagely grotesque."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also favored macabre themes:

American Psycho (1991), a novel by Bret Easton Ellis. The central character in this work of fiction has a disturbing way of dealing with irritating guests.

Buried Alive (2002), a nonfiction book by Jan Bondeson. In this thoroughly researched work, the author recounts the history of the fear of being the victim of premature burial.

"The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), a short story by H. P. Lovecraft. When his loved one dies, the narrator discovers a disturbing truth.

The Shining (1977), a novel by Stephen King. A winter caretaker and his family have otherworldly experiences in the Overlook Hotel.

"The surface characteristics of Ghelderode's universe are dazzling," Jacques and June Guicharnaud concluded in *Modern French Theatre*. "In many of his plays masqueraders, grotesque figures, living corpses, gluttonous and lustful men and women frantically move about in a decor of purple shadows, full of strong smells, and throw violent, foul, or mysterious phrases at each other in highly colored language filled with Belgian idioms, archaisms, and shrieks. Even in the plays where the language is closest to modern French, the dialogue and long speeches are profuse and frenetic. There is no rest in Ghelderode's theatre; the shock is permanent."

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library or the Internet, find out more about one of the artistic movements listed below. Write a short paper summarizing your findings.

Angry Penguins
Cubism
Dogme 95
Electronic Art Music
Expressionism
Noise Music
No Wave
Pop Art
Progressive Rock
Social Realism

2. Ghelderode was known for using imagery from Renaissance art in his plays. Some critics have even

compared his plays to Flemish paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel. Using your library or the Internet, find several copies of paintings by Bosch or Brueghel. Then, working with a single Ghelderode play, see if you can detect the influences of either Bosch or Brueghel. This can be in the imagery of the play—the use of color, shape, sensory experience, object, or scene—or it might be in the repeated appearance of one item as a symbol. How would you argue, then, that a Ghelderode play is like a Brueghel or Bosch painting? What imagery or symbolism do the two works share? Create a presentation for the class with your findings.

3. Some critics note that Ghelderode was influenced by the medieval Italian theatrical tradition known as *commedia dell'arte*. To find out more about this type of theater, read *Commedia dell'arte: An Actor's Handbook* (1994), by John Rudlin.

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☒ Kahlil Gibran

BORN: 1883, *Bechari, Lebanon*

DIED: 1931, *New York*

NATIONALITY: *Lebanese*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

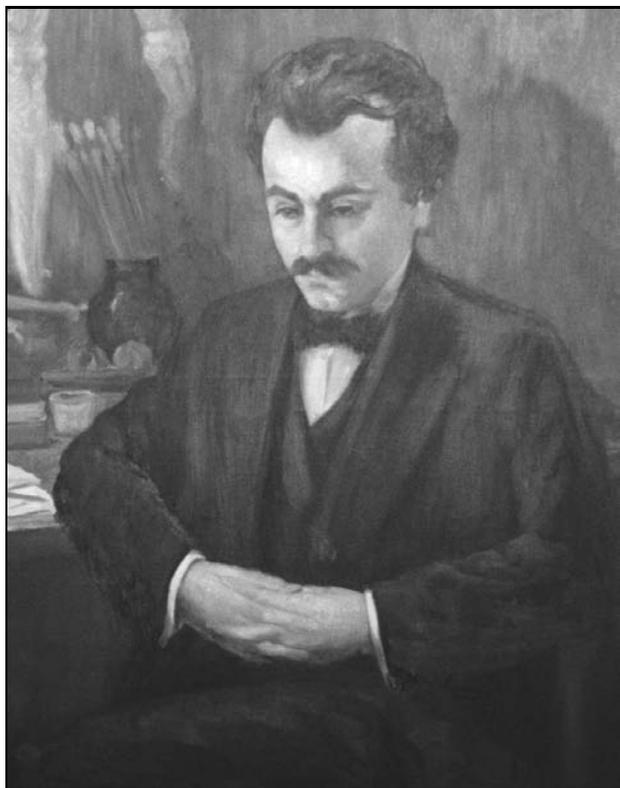
A Tear and a Smile (1914)

The Madman (1918)

The Prophet (1923)

Overview

Lebanese author of the immensely popular *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran is one of the most commercially successful poets of the twentieth century. His small books, biblical in style and often illustrated with his own allegorical drawings, have been translated into twenty languages, making him the most widely known writer to emerge from the Arab-speaking world. Gibran's poetry and prose are recognized for their metrical beauty and emotionally evocative language. They also demonstrate an ecstatic spiritualism and a serene love of humanity.



Kahlil Gibran © Helene Rogers / Alamy

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Lebanon to the United States and Back

Kahlil Gibran, baptized Gibran Khalil Gibran, was born on January 6, 1883, in Bechari, Lebanon, to Khalil Gibran and Kamila Rahme. His childhood in the isolated village beneath Mt. Lebanon included few material comforts, and he had no formal early education. However, he received a strong spiritual heritage. From an early age he displayed a range of artistic skills, especially in the visual arts. He continued to draw and paint throughout his life, even illustrating many of his books. Gibran's family immigrated to the United States when he was twelve and settled in the Boston area, but he returned to the Middle East for schooling two years later. Pursuing his artistic talents further, he entered the famed École des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he studied under the French sculptor Auguste Rodin. Gibran's first efforts at writing were poems and short plays originally penned in Arabic that attracted modest success. In 1904, Gibran returned to the United States where he befriended Mary Haskell, headmistress of a Boston school. She became his adviser, and the two wrote lengthy romantic missives to each other for a number of years. These letters were later reproduced in the 1972 book *Beloved Prophet: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell, and Her Private Journal*.

Exile and World War I During these early adult years, Gibran lived in Boston's Chinatown. Scholars note that the works from this period show a preoccupation with his homeland and a sadness stemming from his status as an exile. One of his first published books, *'Ar' is al-muru'j* (later published in English as *Nymphs of the Valley*, 1910), was a collection of three stories set in Lebanon. Two subsequent works written during this era, later published as *Spirits Rebellious* and *The Broken Wings*, are, respectively, a collection of four stories and one novella. In each, a young man is the hero figure, rebelling against those inside Lebanon who are corrupting it; common literary targets include the Lebanese aristocracy and the Christian church.

During World War I, his growing success as an émigré writer was tempered by Lebanon's abysmal wartime situation. Lebanon was at the time a region of the Ottoman Empire, which had chosen to side with Germany and Austro-Hungary, the Central powers, in their war against England, France, Russia, and their allies. Ultimately, after the Central powers were defeated by Allied troops, the Ottoman Empire was occupied and broken up into smaller regions to be controlled by Allied countries; as part of the peace accord, France assumed control of Lebanon. Prior to that, however, during the harshest periods of the war, many Lebanese citizens starved to death. Scholars of the poet's body of work hypothesize that Gibran's sorrow manifested itself in a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gibran's famous contemporaries include:

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): This Indian social leader advocated nonviolent resistance as a means to effect social change.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States served four terms in office. His New Deal policies are widely credited with helping the United States survive the Great Depression.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): American-born expatriate poet and playwright. His best-known poem, *The Waste Land*, was published the year before Gibran's *The Prophet*.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919): Nicknamed Teddy, he was the twenty-sixth president of the United States, serving in office from 1901 to 1909.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): This Irish poet was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923, the year of the publication of Gibran's *The Prophet*.

more pronounced quest for self-fulfillment in his works, and a spirituality that sought wisdom and truth without the aid of an organized religion. At one point in his career, the writer was excommunicated from the Christian Maronite church. His first work written and published in English was 1918's *The Madman: His Parables and Poems*. Its title comes from a previously published prose work in which the hero sees existence as "a tower whose bottom is the earth and whose top is the world of the infinite . . . to clamour for the infinite in one's life is to be considered an outcast and a fool by the rest of men clinging to the bottom of the tower," explained Mikhail Naimy in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*.

Out of the sadness and despair of the years leading up to, including, and following World War I came Gibran's best-known work, *The Prophet*, which was published in 1923. The author planned it to be first in a trilogy, followed by *The Garden of the Prophet* and *The Death of the Prophet*. The initial book *The Prophet* chronicles, through the title character Almustafa's own sermons, his life and teachings. Much of it is given in orations to the Orphalese, the people among whom Almustafa has been placed.

Death Gibran was forty-eight when he died of liver cancer in New York City on April 10, 1931. The Arabic world eulogized him as a genius and patriot. A grand procession greeted his body upon its return to Bechari for burial in September 1931.

Works in Literary Context

Diverse influences, including Boston's literary world, the English Romantic poets, mystic William Blake, and phi-

losopher Friedrich Nietzsche, combined with his Bechari experience, shaped Gibran's artistic and literary career. The influence of English poet William Blake, who illustrated his own collections of poetry, can be seen in Gibran's own illustrations. However, the most fruitful analysis of Gibran's predecessors must include a look at the parallels between Gibran's magnum opus and nineteenth-century authors Nietzsche and Walt Whitman.

Literary Comparisons Gibran's biographer, Mikhail Naimy, found similarities between *The Prophet* and Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In each, the author speaks through a created diviner and both prophets walk among humankind as outsiders. Some elements are autobiographical. The critic saw a parallel in Gibran's dozen-year stay in New York City with the twelve-year wait Almustafa endured before returning home from the land of the Orphalese.

Another critic compared *The Prophet* to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*. Mysticism, asserted Suhail ibn-Salim Hanna in *Literature East and West*, is a theme common to both, with Gibran having rejected the attitudes termed Nietzschean in favor of the more benign European ideology that unfolded during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. "Like Whitman, Gibran came to see, even accept, the reality of a benevolent and harmonious universe," wrote Hanna.

Gibran's Legacy Authors since Gibran have utilized the spiritual/mystical autobiographical form to great effect. Respected psychiatrist Carl Jung took the form, tweaked it, and produced his memoir *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Nonetheless, Gibran's legacy extends beyond his direct influence on his literary successors and is best seen in the way he is viewed as an inspirational figure, whose mere mention evokes mysticism and thoughtfulness.

Works in Critical Context

Overall, Gibran's work has received little academic examination. As an introductory essay in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* points out, "Generally, most critics agree that Gibran had the refined sensibility of a true poet and a gift for language, but that he often marred his work by relying on shallow epigrams and trite parables."

A Tear and a Smile Gibran's first collection of poetry appeared in Arabic in 1914 and was translated into English several years later and published as *A Tear and a Smile*. "The tears, which are much more abundant here than the smiles," observed N. Naimy in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, "are those of Gibran the misfit rather than of the rebel in Boston, singing in an exceedingly touching way of his frustrated love and estrangement, his loneliness, homesickness and melancholy." Naimy called this book a bridge between a first and second stage of Gibran's career: the writer's longing for Lebanon gradually evolved into a dissatisfaction with the destructive

attitude of humankind in general. By now Gibran's body of work was received enthusiastically in the extensive Arabic-speaking world, winning a readership that stretched from Asia to the Middle East to Europe, as well as across the Atlantic. Soon his writings were being referred to as "Gibranism," a concept that "Gibran's English readers will have no difficulty in divining," wrote Claude Bragdon in his book *Merely Players*; aspects of "Gibranism" include "Mystical vision, metrical beauty, a simple and fresh approach to the so-called problems of life." Today, Arabic scholars praise Gibran for introducing Western romanticism and a freer style to highly formalized Arabic poetry.

The Prophet In October 1923 *The Prophet* was published; it sold over one thousand copies in three months. *The Prophet* was a popular success, but its critical reception has always been mixed. "In this book, more than in any other of his books, Gibran's style reaches its very zenith," declared Gibran's biographer, Mikhail Naimy. "Many metaphors are so deftly formed that they stand out like statues chiseled in the rock." Nonetheless, not all critics were as kind to Gibran's magnum opus as Naimy. Critiquing *The Prophet* from a more practical standpoint, Gibran's biographer, Khalil S. Hawi, faulted its structure. Writing in *Kahlil Gibran: His Background, Character and Works*, Hawi noted that "behind the attempts to perfect the sermons and each epigrammatical sentence in them lies an artistic carelessness which allowed him to leave the Prophet standing on his feet from morning to evening delivering sermon after sermon, without pausing to consider that the old man might get tired, or that his audience might not be able to concentrate on his sermons for so long." Still, *The Prophet* went on to become the best-selling title in the history of its publisher, Alfred A. Knopf.

Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet and the library, research the word *mystic*. Based on your research, would you consider Kahlil Gibran a mystic? Why or why not? Explain your thinking in a short essay.
2. For a long time, mystics were popular religious leaders. In some ways, some very important historical figures could be considered mystics: Jesus Christ, Confucius, Buddha, and even Socrates. How do you think mystics would be received today?
3. Read *The Prophet*, keeping in mind Khalil Hawi's criticism of the practicality of the Prophet's delivering sermon after sermon without pausing. Do you think that Hawi's criticism is justified? If so, do you think the criticism lessens the overall effect of the text? Explain your thought processes in a short essay.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gibran's early work demonstrates his feeling of exile from his native Lebanon, suffusing it with great sadness and inspiring brilliance. Here are a few of the works of exiled writers:

Tristia (c. 10 CE), a work of poetry by Ovid. Ovid was exiled by the Roman emperor Augustus for reasons that remain mysterious. In this work, he laments his exiled state.

Dubliners (1914), a book of short stories by James Joyce. This collection of short stories depicts the people and places of Dublin. The book was well received by the Irish, many of whom felt that Joyce had captured the essence of the Irish character, both good and bad. The collection was published ten years after Joyce subjected himself to a self-imposed exile from his native Ireland.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1982), a novel by Milan Kundera. Czech author Kundera lived in exile in Paris while his homeland was dominated by the Soviet Union, and wrote this novel about the Prague Spring, a period of political liberalization that led to a Soviet military crackdown in 1968.

4. In what ways, if at all, is the teaching of the Prophet in *The Prophet* relevant to your life? Cite specific examples from the text as you fashion your response.
5. To find out more about the history of Lebanon, read *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1993), by Kamal Salibi. Salibi has been praised for his even-handed approach to Lebanon's recent history, which is marked by sectarian violence.

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☒ André Gide

BORN: 1869, Paris, France

DIED: 1951, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Marshlands (1895)

The Immoralist (1902)

The Counterfeiters (1927)

Theseus (1946)

Overview

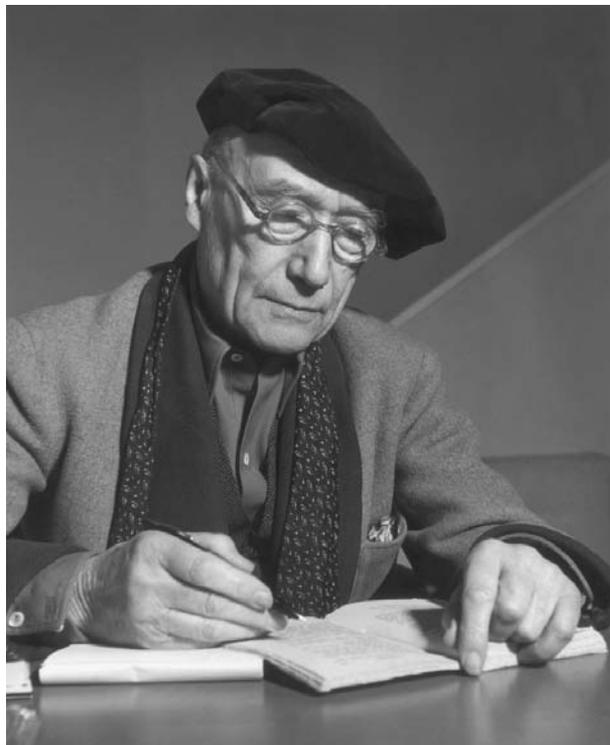
André Gide, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947, saw a writing career that spanned over six decades and ranged in style from symbolist to classical to biography to political tract. His work often focused on a central character, usually a thinly veiled version of Gide himself, who struggled with reconciling two vastly different sets of morals. Today he is chiefly remembered for his extensive journals and his frank discussion of his own bisexuality at a time when such subject matter was strictly taboo.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Divided Nature André Gide was born in Paris on November 22, 1869, to Paul Gide, a professor of law at the Sorbonne, and his wife, Juliette. They were both of the Protestant upper middle class. After the death of his father when André was eleven, the boy grew up in a largely feminine environment. In later years Gide often attributed his divided nature to this mixed southern Protestant and northern Norman Catholic heritage. His fragile health and nervous temperament affected his education, which included both formal schooling and a combination of travel and private tutoring. At the age of fifteen he vowed a lifelong spiritual love to his cousin, Madeleine Rondeaux.

Symbolist Period In 1891 Gide published his first book, *The Notebooks of André Walter*. In it, dream is preferred to reality, spiritual love to physical. It did not succeed in winning Madeleine over, as Gide had intended. During this period he was introduced into the symbolist salons—intellectual gatherings of followers of the symbolist movement—of Stéphane Mallarmé and José de Heredia by his friend Pierre Louÿs. The influence of the salons and symbolist thought can be seen in Gide's next works, *Treatise of the Narcissus* (1891) and *Le Voyage d'Urien* (1893).

In 1893 Gide set out for North Africa with his friend Paul Laurens hoping to harmonize his sensual desires with his inherited puritanical inhibitions. Gide fell ill with tuberculosis there and was forced to return to France, where he was shocked to find the symbolist salons



André Gide Hulton Archive / Getty Images

unchanged. He retired to Neuchâtel for the winter and wrote *Marshlands*, a satire on stagnation that broke with symbolism.

Unconventional Lifestyle After returning to France, Gide married his cousin Madeleine. Gide described their attachment as “the devotion of my whole life,” but the marriage was traumatic for them both. Gide expressed an overwhelming spiritual need to share his life with his cousin, and she provided him with a source of stability, but her strict Christian values often conflicted with his unconventional lifestyle. He specifically separated love and sexual pleasure.

In 1895 Gide returned to North Africa, where he met Oscar Wilde and Lord Douglas. Wilde encouraged Gide to acknowledge his love of young men, and Gide passionately gave in. This was a pivotal year for Gide as it also brought the death of his mother and his marriage to Madeleine, who continued to symbolize for him the pull of virtue, restraint, and spirituality against his cult of freedom and physical pleasure. Gide's life was a constant battle to strike a balance between these opposing imperatives.

Middle Years Gide wrote his doctrine of freedom in 1897. *Fruits of the Earth* is a lyrical work advocating liberation through sensuous hedonism. Five years later, Gide published *The Immoralist* (1902), a novel consisting of many autobiographical elements. In it, the author

dramatizes the dangers of his male protagonist's selfish quest for freedom and pleasure at the cost of death to his pious wife. In this, perhaps Gide's greatest novel, as in many of his other works, the portrait of the virtuous, devoted heroine was inspired by Madeleine.

Conceived at the same time as *The Immoralist*, *Strait Is the Gate* (1909) is a critique of the opposite tendency toward excessive restraint and useless mysticism. Also patterned after Madeleine, the heroine renounces her earthly love to devote herself entirely to God and the spiritual life. The final pages of her diary suggest the futility of her self-denial as she is left in solitude without God. The book was Gide's first success.

In the years between these two novels, Gide cofounded *La Nouvelle revue française*. After publishing another highly polished though less autobiographical work in 1911, Gide was ready to challenge the principle of order in art. He accomplished this with *The Vatican Swindle* (1914), a humorous satire on middle-class complacency, relativism, and chance. The work evolved the notion of the "gratuitous act," an expression of absolute freedom, unpremeditated, seemingly unmotivated. It is clear he was influenced by his reading of Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Religious Crisis and Homosexuality In *The Pastoral Symphony* (1919), a pastor's interpretation of Christ's words to legitimize his love for the heroine is pitted against his son's orthodox adherence to the restrictions of St. Paul. This work is a reflection of Gide's religious crises of 1905–1906, which had been precipitated by his disturbing meetings with the fervent Catholic poet, playwright, and diplomat Paul Claudel. This religious crisis also inspired *Numquid et tu...?*, which retraces Gide's effort to seek and find his own truth in the Gospels.

In 1924 Gide risked his reputation by publishing *Corydon*, a defense of homosexuality, and, two years later, *If It Die...*, his well-known autobiography that focuses on the years 1869–1895, the period of his homosexual liberation.

The Counterfeiters Gide's *The Counterfeiters* appeared in 1926. The culmination of thirty years of meditating on two aspects of literary freedom—freedom from subjective, autobiographical fiction and freedom from the limitations of the traditional novel—the novel conveys a true impression of life perceived subjectively and individually. In it, Gide devised a technique of disorder. *The Counterfeiters* marked a general revolt against realism by defying the reader's conventional expectations. Instead, the reader is forced to reflect on the technical problems facing the modern novelist.

Later Years In 1925–1926 Gide traveled in the Congo with Marc Allégret. Gide was deeply distressed by the colonial exploitation of the natives that he witnessed there. When he returned to France he published

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gide's famous contemporaries include:

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): German philosopher who critiqued contemporary views of religion, morality, science, and culture. He achieved his greatest notoriety after he had already begun a descent into syphilis-induced madness.

Henri Bergson (1859–1941): French philosopher of metaphysics, his works touched on freewill, memory, and evolution. His thinking had a profound influence on modernist writers.

Philippe Pétain (1856–1951): Pétain made a name for himself as a victorious general in World War I only to earn the undying resentment of his countrymen after he assumed leadership of Vichy France, the puppet state set up by the victorious Germans in 1940.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): A major figure in English literature and the post–World War I London literary scene, Woolf, whose bisexuality influenced her writing, is considered one of the foremost modernist authors.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900): Novelist, playwright, poet, irrepressible wit, and professional celebrity, Oscar Wilde was one of the most celebrated figures of his time. His homosexuality led to a conviction for "gross indecency" and led to his early death.

accounts of his trip and issued a call for action. This experience facilitated his conversion to communism in the 1930s. However, disillusioned by a visit to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1936, he admitted his mistake in *Return from the U.S.S.R.* (1936) and *Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R.* (1937). Former associates bitterly criticized Gide for these books.

Gide no longer felt at ease with intellectual conformity. In 1931 he insisted in the play *Oedipus* on the individual's obligation to draw his own ethical conclusions rather than follow the path of blind discipleship.

In 1935 *Later Fruits of the Earth* reiterated the ideal of liberation tempered by consideration of others, a sense of social duty, and self-discipline. During the German occupation of France during World War II, Gide was forced to flee to Tunisia. In *Theseus* (1946) the adventures and accomplishments of the original *Theseus* parallel Gide's own. The following year Gide was awarded an honorary degree from Oxford and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Widely considered the most important publication of Gide's later years was his *Journal, 1889–1939*, released in 1939. The final volume (1950) carries the journal through 1949. Considered by some his best work, the *Journal* is the moving self-portrait of a man whose mind

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gide stirred considerable controversy for featuring gay or bisexual characters in his fiction. Other works that broke ground in their portrayals of gay characters include:

The Miracle of the Rose, an autobiographical work by Jean Genet. Published in 1946, Genet's autobiographical, nonlinear work describes the homosexual erotic desire he feels for his fellow adolescent detainees in the Mettray Penal Colony and Fontevrault prison.

The Diary of Anaïs Nin: Vol. 1 (1931–1934), a memoir by Anaïs Nin. Published in 1966, Nin's diary explores, among other topics, the author's experiments with bisexuality. The published version made Nin a feminist icon of the 1960s.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, a memoir by Gertrude Stein. Written in 1933, this is actually Stein's autobiography, written from the perspective of her partner Toklas. This work, despite its homosexual subject matter, brought Stein worldwide fame and recognition.

Prick Up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton, a biography by John Lahr. Published in 1978, the biography reconstructs the life and death of British comic playwright Joe Orton, who was widely considered a successor to Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward. Orton was murdered by his homosexual lover at the age of thirty-four.

mirrors the crisis of the modern intellectual. It contains precious information on his platonic marriage to Madeleine, who quietly endured her husband's homosexual adventures by taking refuge in a world of piety and domesticity. Her mute suffering was a tremendous source of guilt and pain to Gide, who loved her deeply. *Et nunc manet in te*, published posthumously in 1951, is Gide's testimony to that love and an honest account of their unspoken tragedy. Gide died in Paris on February 19, 1951, and was buried at Cuverville in Normandy.

Works in Literary Context

Symbolist and Classical Influences Throughout his literary career Gide adapted his style to suit his subject matter, resulting in an unusually wide variety of works. Such early efforts as *The Notebooks of André Walter* and *The Fruits of the Earth* are rich in metaphor and lyric beauty, as befits works featuring an impressionable young man's first encounters with life. The poetic prose contained in these books reveals Stéphane Mallarmé and the symbolists's influence on the author. Gide abandoned symbolism, however, in favor of a simpler, more classical

style when he began experimenting with themes and forms drawn from the Bible and Greek mythology. Gide also discovered the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and was influenced by his classicism. All of these factors played an important part in the development of Gide's mature style. For example, he made use of ancient myth in such works as *Prometheus Misbound* (1899), and *Theseus*, his celebrated study of the problems of the mature artist. His drama, meanwhile, especially *Saul* (1903) and *Numquid et tu ...?* (1926), is based on biblical materials. Critics have also noted logical and formal similarities between Gide's recits, or psychological narratives, such as *Strait Is the Gate* and *The Pastoral Symphony*, and biblical parables. Some believe that his farces, including *Marshlands* and *Lafcadio's Adventures* (1914), are derived from the same source.

The Counterfeiters Gide's most ambitious and stylistically elaborate achievement was the novel *The Counterfeiters* (1917), a work that owes a great deal to Fyodor Dostoyevsky. An experimental novel, *The Counterfeiters* takes its form from patterns in music. In it, Gide attempts to reproduce the unstructured chaos of everyday life through the use of meaningless episodes, conversations, and Dostoyevskian interruptions of action at moments of great intensity. Linear narrative is abandoned as several unrelated stories occur simultaneously. Although Gide's innovations in *The Counterfeiters* were important to the development of the French novel, he did not continue to pursue the experiment. Later works, such as *Oedipus* and *Theseus*, are written in a severely classical style that abandons the inventive audacity of Gide's earlier works.

Autobiography The characters in Gide's fiction, even though they are based in part on himself, often distort the image of the artist as they disclose it. This is because Gide's fictional technique was to create a character abstracted from a single aspect of his personality. Thus the nature of his characters often varies widely from work to work. Gide was also constantly reexamining his assumptions, so it is not uncommon for successive novels to portray contradictory beliefs and situations. Still, Gide's shifting concerns do not reflect indecisiveness, as early critics charged. Rather, they exhibit external evidence of his continual dialogue with himself.

Influence Although he was well known and respected among his fellow writers, Gide remained unrecognized by the general public until the 1920s, when his involvement as founder and editor of the prestigious *La nouvelle revue française* led to his discovery. His influence on the Albert Camus, Jean Genet, and their generation was significant. Although he rejected existentialism, he is widely recognized as a forerunner of the existentialist movement.

Works in Critical Context

Credited with introducing modern experimental techniques to the French novel, Gide is highly esteemed for the

autobiographical honesty of his work, which depicts the moral development of a modern intellectual. His work is recognized for its diversity in both form and content, yet critics have also noted that his characters consistently reflect his own moral and philosophical conflicts. For this reason, commentators on Gide's works often attach as much significance to biographical detail as they do to artistic method.

One of Gide's primary artistic and philosophical concerns was authenticity. He discussed his life in a way that has been called exhibitionistic by some critics, while others discern religious overtones in his "unremitting search for self-correction and self-purification." Alfred Kazin, in discussing the psychology of Gide's highly confessional works, observed that "he would like to be both free and good, and failing both, had compromised by being honest." The much-discussed Gidean notions of "sincerity"—which Germaine Bree has summarized as signifying the "struggle of human beings with truths compulsively followed"—and "*disponibilité*," which Gide interpreted as "following one's inclinations, so long as they lead upward," were products of this lifelong passion for self-awareness. However, Gide's critics are quick to point out that although he used forms conducive to autobiographical honesty, such as first person novels, journals, and personal essays, Gide did not reveal himself completely in his works.

Critics today are divided in their assessment of Gide's novels. While some perceive them as dated and of only minor interest to contemporary readers, others maintain that the perfection of Gide's style and the sincerity with which he set out to expose social, religious, artistic, and sexual hypocrisy guarantee the novels a permanent place in twentieth-century literature. There is wider consensus among critics about the value of Gide's voluminous *Journals*, though. Despite the charges of narcissism that are often raised in discussions of the *Journals*, most critics agree with Philip Toynbee that Gide's "greatest talent was for portraying himself against the carefully delineated background of his time," and that the *Journals* today retain "all the interest for us which can be earned by a patient sincerity, an eager curiosity, and a brilliant pen."

Responses to Literature

1. Societal attitudes toward and treatment of homosexuals has changed in the century since Gide began writing on the subject. Write an essay describing the societal attitudes and legal status of homosexuals in your own society. What is your own opinion of the status of homosexuals in today's society?
2. Gide's frank treatment of his homosexuality in his work made him a literary outcast for much of his life. How did other contemporary homosexual authors such as Thomas Mann, Oscar Wilde, and Christopher Isherwood express their sexuality in their work, and what consequences did they suffer?
3. André Gide and Marcel Proust were both French authors whose works touched on the nature of reality and illusion. Compare and contrast Gide's *The Counterfeiters* and Proust's *Swann's Love*. How does Proust's treatment of women and love compare to Gide's?
4. Several of Gide's works have heavy classical overtones, recalling ancient Greek dramas. What are the characteristics of a classical story? How closely did such works as *Oedipus* and *Theseus* subscribe to the classical Greek template? Were there any modern stylistic elements present in these stories?

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☒ Jean Giono

BORN: 1895, Manosque, Basses-Alpes (now Alpes-de-Haute Provence), France

DIED: 1970, Manosque, Alpes-de-Haute Provence, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Hill of Destiny (1929)

Blue Boy (1946)

“The Man Who Planted Trees” (1953)

The Horseman on the Roof (1954)

The Straw Man (1957)

Overview

French author Jean Giono is best known as a novelist and playwright who rejected the modern, industrialized world and advocated a return to a simple existence in harmony with nature. His characters are often peasants who love the earth and artisans who find their satisfaction in work well done. He is remembered today as one of the most original and visionary writers of postwar France.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Provençal Childhood Antoine Jean Giono was born on March 30, 1895, to an anarchist shoemaker and his wife in the small town of Manosque in Provence, France. While at school in Manosque, Giono read the Greek and Latin classics—they were cheaper to buy than books by modern authors—and began writing at an early age. The harsh, sunlit landscapes of his native Provence fed his fantasy that ancient Greece had magically been overlaid on southern France.

Served in World War I At the end of 1914, Giono was drafted into service in the French army in World War I. After the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist, what could have been a local skirmish turned into an all-encompassing conflict because of entangling diplomatic alliances. France was allied with Great Britain, Russia, and later the United States against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey.

From 1916 to 1918, Giono participated in the war as an infantry soldier in trench warfare. The Western Front of the war was primarily fought in this grueling type of warfare, with trench lines zigzagging across France. During the battle in Flanders in 1918, he was gassed. World War I was the first conflict to use poison gas as a weapon. Gases used in combat included chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas. The war ended in 1918 with a victory by the



Jean Giono Giono, Jean, Paris, photograph. AP Images.

French, British, and Americans, and the Treaty of Versailles was ratified in 1919.

Published First Poems After demobilization in 1919, he began working in various banks until 1929, when he decided to try to make his living by writing. Giono pursued his writing throughout the early 1920s and published his first work, a series of prose poems, in 1924 under the title *Accompanied by the Flute*. Giono's literary career began to blossom as he won a long series of literary prizes. He practiced many genres with steady success, including novels, poetry, drama, literary criticism, historical narrative, and some unclassifiable hybrids of his own creation. He expanded his interests to include painting, music, and filmmaking, making many friends with influential artists and critics in all genres across France.

War-Influenced Novels By the 1930s, Giono was publishing important novels such as *To the Slaughterhouse* (1931). It is the first of Giono's works in which the modern age, in the form of World War I, bursts into his private world of the peaceful countryside. There is one section of horrible beauty, describing how rats and crows feast on dead soldiers. In Giono's hands, the forces of life and bitterness take contrary and alternating forms. This bitter evocation of war is replaced by affectionate memories of childhood and family in the semiautobiographical *Blue Boy* (1932).

Although still considered works anchored in a specific region, the novels *Song of the World* (1934), *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1935), and *Battles on the Mountain* (1937) represent a move away from the realistic presentation of the countryside toward a symbolic expression of the issues that were currently preoccupying the author. It was only a small step from these three novels to the more political writings of the late 1930s and early 1940s. With war imminent, Giono argues in *Refusal to Obey* (1937) and *Letter to the Peasants on Poverty and Peace* (1938) that if the peasants were to stop providing the towns and battle zones with food, then war would grind to a halt. In *True Riches*, *The Weight of the Sky*, and *Triumph of Life*, he sees contemporary society threatened by increasing mechanization and urban life, and urges a return to the natural order of the world together with a renunciation of materialistic values.

Move to the Left Giono's writings have been profoundly influenced by his political beliefs. His controversial position throughout the period of just prior to and including World War II was resolutely in favor of peace. Giono founded a movement in 1935 to promote pacifism, collective living, and ecological concerns. He also made speeches, circulated petitions, and contributed to leftist journals.

During the highly politicized period of the 1930s, Giono moved away from the left when the official Communist line began emphasizing national defense rather than pacifism. Not that Giono's antiwar feelings were always pacifist. Giono's politics were not so much driven by partisan beliefs as a dream of a peasant's paradise that would combine destruction of the machine-mad modern world with the rejuvenation of older societies.

Imprisoned during World War II Giono did consent to military service briefly when war broke out in September 1939, primarily because he did not want to bring trouble to his friends running the local authorities. World War II began in earnest at that time when Nazi Germany acted on its intense territorial ambitions by invading Poland. Abandoning their hitherto policy of appeasement, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Germany soon invaded and conquered many continental European countries in 1940. France became occupied by Germany that June, and remained under Nazi control until 1944. There was a French government in exile, however, as well as an active organized French resistance to the Germans.

After Giono refused to cooperate further with local authorities, he was imprisoned for two months, then freed partly on the intervention of his many admirers. Near the end of the war, he was again imprisoned, this time for five months. He was accused of being a collaborator with the Germans, although he had not actively cooperated. Although some people turned away from him because of his refusal to participate in the French war effort, he was immensely popular as a writer after the war.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Giono's famous contemporaries include:

Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951): This novelist and satirist was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. His novels include *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), and *Arrowsmith* (1925).

Pierre Jean Jouve (1887–1976): French poet, novelist, and critic. Religion and sexuality merge powerfully in his works. His books include *Dance of the Dead* (1917).

Paul Valéry (1871–1945): This French poet and critic believed that the creative mind always worked in similar ways, no matter if the subject was science or poetry. His poetry collections include *Charmed* (1922).

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): This Irish dramatist, novelist, and poet was remarkably consistent in his darkly comic portrayals of human futility. He helped to define two different literary movements—modernism and postmodernism—through such plays as *Waiting for Godot* (1952).

Paul Hindemith (1895–1963): German composer and violinist. In an era of experimental classical music that emphasized atonality, Hindemith's music was harmonically advanced but always melodic.

Grigory Yevseyevich Zinovyev (1883–1936): This Russian Communist leader shared power with Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev after the death of Vladimir Lenin. During Stalin's move for absolute power, Zinovyev and Kamenev were removed from power, and Stalin had Zinovyev executed.

Historical Themes

Giono continued to write prolifically after the war, despite being ostracized by some of his former followers. His post-World War II works are marked by a shift away from the poetic celebration of peasant life, however, to a series of novels with a historical background. The best known of these later novels is *The Horseman on the Roof* (1951), which received much public acclaim. His plays also often took on historical subject matter, including the radio play *Domitien* (1964) about the last days of the Roman emperor. His later output also included travel books and screenplays for such films as *Crésus*. Giono died of a heart attack on October 9, 1970, in Manosque.

Works in Literary Context

Giono's influences are extensive and come from many different directions. First and foremost, his works are grounded in his experience with the people and textures of rural communities and the rugged French countryside. Giono was also very well read, and he drew heavily from

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Giono's "The Man Who Planted Trees," presents an idealized version of a simple man finding happiness by living a simple life in harmony with nature. Despite their poverty, peasants and rural folks are often idealized by writers. Their closeness to nature and their detachments from the corruptions of consumerist urban life often make them heroic, not pitiable, characters. Here are some other works that feature peasants as idealized characters or that exhort readers to adopt a peasantlike lifestyle:

Émile; or, On Education (1762), a philosophical treatise by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau details here what he considers the perfect education and upbringing for a "natural man" who can live untainted by the corruption of modern society.

Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems (1798), a poetry collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This collection marked the beginning of the Romantic period in English literature. The poems in the collection frequently focus on rustic settings and plain folk.

Walden (1854), a nonfiction work by Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps the most famous nonfiction work in American literature, this book details Thoreau's experiment in self-reliance living near a pond in Walden, Massachusetts.

Quotations from Chairman Mao (1964), nonfiction by Mao Tse-tung. This collection of excerpts from the famous Chinese leader, praising the virtues of peasant life as the guiding principles of the Communist Party, has had almost one billion copies in print.

classical literature, often superimposing Greek and Roman themes and literary structures on the contemporary French setting. He believed that nature is in a constant state of change—as is history, so in this way, nature and man are always bound together. A related theme is the danger of the increasing materialism and impersonality of modern life.

Man's Unity with Nature Giono was writing during a period of modernism (a literary movement that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter while searching for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression) when writers usually found bleakness and despair in their reaction to the increasing alienation and violence of life marked by two world wars. Whereas writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound found modern consciousness to be fragmented in an uncaring urban environment, Giono looked in a different direction and tended to find certainty and resolution in man's unity with nature. He rejected entirely the two things that modernists used to border their worldview: urban life and warfare.

Pacifism Giono's pacifism during World War II got him arrested twice, but this was to become one of his lasting influences on later writers who would write similarly about World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq war. In novels such as *To the Slaughterhouse*, Giono shifted between scenes of village life and warfare, mixing the modes of narrative the way Kurt Vonnegut Jr. would later do in his antiwar novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Giono finds a kind of natural beauty in human and animal carnage, describing it in sensual detail—the effect is disturbing, as seen in the work of other lyrically graphic war writers such as the poet Wilfred Owen and the novelist Dalton Trumbo (*Johnny Got His Gun*, 1939).

Works in Critical Context

Giono's reputation has, if anything, increased in the years since his death. He was recognized initially as a great poet in prose and a regional novelist, but his main appeal today lies in his handling of such themes as the struggle for survival against elemental forces, the strength of love and hatred, the destructive power of jealousy, and the creative power of friendship.

The Novels Literary scholars often praise Giono's sense of wonder and delight in the unity of man and nature. According to Henri Peyre, Giono "rejected much of our urban and analytical civilization; but he held out hope for despairing moderns. He aimed at rebuilding a new unity in man and endeavored to instill in him the sweet, or bitter, 'love that nature brings.'" Norma L. Goodrich expresses a similar view in *Giono: Master of Fictional Modes*. She found that Giono's novels "afford shelter and comfort by reminding the modern reader, with whom the world is much too much, that beyond his routine and narrow horizons lies a vast, adventure-some universe of freedom and pure delight."

Giono is considered one of the most important French novelists of the century. "Giono [was] first of all a great poet in prose," according to critic Maxwell Smith. "It is now generally recognized that he . . . brought . . . a new freshness, warmth, and color to the French language." In writing of Giono's earlier novels, Peyre asserts: "They [ignore] academic subtleties and the fashion of the day. Their heroes [are] not poisoned by complexities. . . . In them the tone of a psychological dissector [has] given way to that of a poetical master of suggestive language and an epic storyteller." And, finally, in discussing the profusion of Giono's work, Smith comments: "What will remain will in all likelihood be only a handful of his novels—but enough to assure him a permanent and distinguished rank among the great novelists of France."

Responses to Literature

1. Research Giono's career as a writer and film director. Are his films much like his novels in their structure and content, or does Giono make alterations to his art when he uses this different form? What has the critical response been to his films, compared to his

novels? (Note: You can also answer these questions using Giono's art and music as topics.) Write a paper outlining your findings.

2. Giono liked to combine genres and invent new hybrid forms. He sometimes mixes prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction. What are the pros and cons of this technique? Does Giono's way of writing fit in with the content of what he's saying? Create a presentation in which you outline your theories.
3. Giono was a pacifist, but good storytelling depends upon a vivid sense of conflict. In a paper, explain the ways Giono portrays conflict in his films and novels.
4. Perhaps the best-loved work by Giono is "The Man Who Planted Trees," a short story about the noble deeds of a simple peasant in harmony with the land. Giono gave up his rights to the story so it could be reprinted widely. In 1987, an animated version won the Academy Award, and it is often cited as one of the best animated shorts ever made. Do some research into the history of this remarkable story and its many adaptations, accounting for its extraordinary popularity and mythic appeal. Create a presentation of your findings.

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📖 Jean Giraudoux

BORN: 1882, Bellac, France

DIED: 1944, Paris

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

My Friend from Limousin (1922)

Amphitryon 38 (1929)

Racine (1930)

Judith (1931)

Tiger at the Gates (1935)



Jean Giraudoux Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

Overview

Although he first distinguished himself in fiction, Jean Giraudoux gained fame primarily because of the stylized dramas he wrote, focusing on the universal themes of love, death, and war. Engaged in elegant, intellectual dialogue, his characters frequently represent abstract ideas. Because of his seemingly effortless, witty manipulation of language, Giraudoux gained a reputation early in his career as an overly refined pseudo-intellectual. But behind that lyrical, playful use of words, Giraudoux's plays and novels—especially those of his later years—reveal a deep-seated idealism, a desire for an incorruptible world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Brilliant Youth, and the Urge to Travel Hippolyte Jean Giraudoux was born in 1882 in Bellac, France, a province of Limousin, to Léger and Anne Giraudoux. Because his father, a minor civil servant, was a quiet man often absent from home, Giraudoux felt closer to his mother and his only sibling, an older brother. A gifted and brilliant child, he attended a boarding school in Chateauroux on scholarship, studying French literature, Greek, Latin, and philosophy, which emphasized the idealism of many nineteenth-century thinkers. After completing his studies in 1900, winning the school's award for excellence, Giraudoux moved to the Lakanal

school near Paris for two years of further preuniversity instruction. When he left the school, he received the Lakanal Prize for excellence, in addition to first prize for history and French composition, and, in a national competition, first prize for Greek.

In 1903, after completing a period of required military service, Giraudoux entered the renowned École Normale Supérieure in Paris, first studying French literature before changing to German studies. He visited Germany on a fellowship in 1905 and spent a year in Munich working as a tutor for Paul Morand, who became a writer and diplomat as well as Giraudoux's friend. Traveling throughout central Europe during this time, Giraudoux observed the radical division of Germanic and Gallic influences in Europe, an issue that would figure prominently in much of his work.

From a Reluctant Journalist to a Diplomat

Between 1904 and 1906, Giraudoux published his first sketches and stories, some of which were included in *Provincials*, his first book. After he returned to Paris in 1906, he discovered that he had little interest in a career in education after a short stint of student teaching. Nonetheless, friends arranged for him a position as a visiting French-language assistant at Harvard University. When he returned to Paris in 1908, Giraudoux worked for a daily paper to which he contributed some of his own stories under a pseudonym. At the same time, he had other stories published in prestigious magazines.

In 1910 Giraudoux began an active foreign-service career, which included a position as the chief of information and press services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Traveling extensively for his job, he was one of the well-known diplomatic travelers among twentieth-century writers, a group that included Paul Claudel and Jean-Paul Sartre. A romantic encounter with Suzanne Boland, wife of a military officer, Paul Pineau, began in 1913, resulting in both Pineau's challenging Giraudoux to a duel, which never took place, and, eventually, Suzanne's divorce. She gave birth to Giraudoux's only child in 1919, and the couple was married in 1921, a fact that led some early biographers to create a false date for the marriage to protect Giraudoux's reputation.

Military Service and a New Career as Dramatist

Giraudoux served in the military during World War I. After being wounded in the infamous Battle of the Marne—in which over two million men fought and more than five hundred thousand soldiers were killed or wounded—and again in the Dardanelles, he returned to service in the war ministry and then the foreign ministry. Having contracted dysentery while on diplomatic business in Turkey, Giraudoux was hospitalized eleven times due to injuries and illness related to war. Another lingering effect of the war was Giraudoux's apprehension regarding France's postwar reconciliation with Germany. This apprehension formed the subject of *My Friend from Limousin* (1922), a novel that was immediately admired.

A 1927 meeting with the actor and director Louis Jouvet proved to be a momentous occasion in Giraudoux's life. With Jouvet's encouragement and technical advice, Giraudoux adapted *My Friend from Limousin* for the stage. After the play's instant success under the direction of Jouvet, Giraudoux embarked on a new career in drama at the age of forty-five. Almost every year during the 1930s, Jouvet brought out a new Giraudoux play, placing Giraudoux among the most popular playwrights in Europe until his death in 1944.

Works in Literary Context

Classical Roots As evidenced by his own adaptations of stories from Greek mythology and the Bible, Giraudoux's work was significantly influenced by that of Jean Racine (1639–1699), whose tragedies were derived from various classical sources. Perhaps the most inspirational force in Giraudoux's career—and definitely in his career as a dramatist—was his collaboration with actor and director Louis Jouvet. For fifteen years, the pair enchanted Parisian audiences with productions of tragedies laced with irony and intellectual literary wit. Each man admired the other for his artistic gifts. Undoubtedly, Giraudoux and Jouvet complemented each other's strengths: Jouvet's imagination for staging scenes offered the perfect scenarios for Giraudoux's verbal virtuosity.

Clashing Cultures Contemplative of the gravest of human problems, Giraudoux's work demonstrates a passionate concern for the human condition, even as he introduces such fantastical elements as the encounter between the mundane and the supernatural. One of his key themes is the differences to be found between people of different cultures, specifically the French and Germans. This is observed in *My Friend from Limousin*, in which a French soldier struck with amnesia believes himself to be German; he returns “home” to Germany but finds it difficult to fit in. This theme is also addressed in the play *Tiger at the Gates* (1935), set the day before the beginning of the Trojan War. Although Hector offers sound reasons for the Trojans and the Greeks to work out their differences, other forces suggest that conflict is inevitable. Many viewed this work as a parallel to the relationship between France and Germany prior to World War II.

Ethereal Women Although most of the male characters in Giraudoux's theatrical works are brilliantly portrayed, the females in his dramas are often the most interesting. Giraudoux's optimistic, idealistic image of a pure, ethereal woman is juxtaposed with the coarseness and tedium of everyday life. In Giraudoux's plays, the true woman is a natural, instinctive creature endowed with subtle and delicate sensibility. Above all, she is the only one who could discover the poetic possibilities within common existence; she is compassionate and rare. Giraudoux's vision insists that the absolute or the ideal is

the only meaningful goal of humanity, and his female protagonists—from Electra in *Electra* to Lucile in *Duel of Angels* to Lia in *Sodom and Gomorrah*—personify this vision. In this, Giraudoux participates in a tradition that extends far behind and in front of him. Particularly in Christian cultures, the distinction between “perfect Madonna” (the Virgin Mary) and “fallen woman” or “whore” has been a key trope for (mostly male) writers ranging from St. Augustine all the way up to Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.

Works in Critical Context

In general, most critics agree that Giraudoux’s fiction and drama show superb craftsmanship. Early criticism tended to fault the “preciosity” of his language—that is, its elaborate affectation and excessive, maudlin refinement. As such, some scholars reject Giraudoux’s art as artificial and insignificant, too self-consciously literary and overly dependent upon its appeal to sensitive audiences. Because Giraudoux’s language, contends Robert Cohen, “is at once lyrical, witty, and searching, often turning on paradox,” the playwright was accused of verbal overindulgence. Cohen goes so far as to state that “words came too easily for him.” Nevertheless, most modern critics concede that Giraudoux’s ornamental language and “preciosity” are suited to his unique style of writing.

Mankind’s Last Recourse Wallace Fowlie has documented the fact that Giraudoux called himself a “journalist of the theater.” As Giraudoux gauged the receptivity and intelligence of his audience, so did the public evaluate his style and purpose. What they found, says Fowlie, was that “Giraudoux believed fervently in the cause of literature. He believed that literature was the last recourse of mankind.” Still, some critics questioned his commitment to both art and the concerns he presents in his work. These are the same detractors who criticize his characters as vague, undeveloped creations that confuse allegory, symbol, and reality instead of revealing any kind of truth.

Life’s Truths Giraudoux’s supporters, however, see his legacy as a writer as being due to his treatment of such serious themes as love, death, war, and humanity’s relationship to the universe. According to Robert Emmet Jones:

Giraudoux is the only contemporary French playwright . . . who has created a dramatic world at all comparable to those of the great dramatists of the past. His world contains people of all social classes and all educational levels, and whether they be ancient Greeks, Biblical characters, or provincial Frenchmen, they transcend their times and become as universal in significance as any characters in the modern drama.

Fowlie concurs, observing that Giraudoux’s theater “reveals to men the most surprising and the most simple truths, which they never fully realize, such as the inevitability of life, the inevitability of death, the meaning of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Giraudoux’s famous contemporaries include:

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): Born in the United States, Pound spent much of his adult life in Europe, where his poetry helped establish and define the modernist movement.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Joyce, an Irish-born novelist who lived in Italy and France, experimented with form and narrative in his modernist works.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924): Kafka’s fiction presents the dehumanization and isolation of the individual in twentieth-century society.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): A painter and sculptor, Picasso influenced most major art movements of the twentieth century, including surrealism and abstract expressionism.

Jerome Kern (1885–1945): Kern, who established the staged musical as an art form, wrote *Showboat*, which includes the famous song “Ol’ Man River.”

Erwin Rommel (1891–1944): Rommel was called the “Desert Fox” because of the skillful German military campaigns he waged in North Africa during World War II.

happiness and catastrophe, the fact that life is both reality and dream.” Giraudoux, it would seem, remains an important writer because of his distinct and interesting vision of the world.

Responses to Literature

1. Research French theater from 1900 to 1945, noting major authors, literary movements, historical figures, and world events taking place that had an effect on drama during that time period. Create a timeline that displays the facts you have learned. Designate one side of the timeline for people and the other side for literary movements and historical events.
2. Because of the creative spirit of French literary and artistic movements at the beginning of the twentieth century, many writers were drawn to France—Paris, in particular. Using your library, the Internet, or other available resources, find at least five writers or artists who moved to France to enjoy this creative environment. Why do you think France became such a center of artistic activity at this time? Were any works produced there that could not have been produced elsewhere? If so, what were they? Why could they have been made or published only in France?
3. Compare Giraudoux’s play *Tigers at the Gate* with ancient legends of the Trojan War such as Homer’s

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The collaboration between Giraudoux and Louis Jouvet was a key factor in Giraudoux's success as a playwright. Artistically, the men had complete trust in one another's creative processes. Because the magic of Giraudoux's dramatic speech was a crucial element of his plays, Jouvet faithfully followed the text. In fact, Jouvet once remarked that "he had to teach his actors how to speak the text rather than act it," notes scholar Wallace Fowlie. Listed below are other works that have resulted from the collaboration of creative minds:

The Waste Land (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. The poem's original manuscript of around 800 lines was cut to 443 by Ezra Pound, a fellow poet who edited and annotated the work in what many scholars consider a brilliant, creative act in itself.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love (1981), a collection of short stories by Raymond Carver. In addition to cutting about half of the manuscript's original words, writer and editor Gordon Lish rewrote the endings of ten of the thirteen stories in this collection.

Lyrical Ballads (1798), a compilation of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This important work of the English Romantic movement included "Tintern Abbey," one of Wordsworth's most famous poems, and Coleridge's renowned "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Iliad. How does each work depict the prospect of war? It has been said that Giraudoux used the Trojans and Greeks to parallel the tenuous relationship between France and Germany throughout the first third of the twentieth century. Which do you think Giraudoux intended the Trojans to represent—France or Germany? Why?

4. The premise of Giraudoux's play *The Apollo of Bellac* involves a sheltered woman who is told the secret to controlling men: Compliment a man's looks, and he will do whatever you ask. Do you think this is a valid observation? Why or why not? Do you think the opposite technique would work for a man complimenting women? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think Giraudoux did not begin writing plays until he was in his forties? In your opinion, would Giraudoux have ever written plays if he had not met Louis Jouvet?

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☒ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

BORN: 1749, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany

DIED: 1832, Weimar, Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774)

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795)

Faust, Part One (1808)

Faust, Part Two (1832)

Overview

Though he lived in late eighteenth-century Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a true Renaissance man whose influence touched not only literature, poetry, and drama, but ranged into philosophy, theology, and science. Best known for his novels and poems, Goethe influenced a generation of philosophers and scientists and created some of Germany's best-known works of literature. History has ranked Goethe alongside William Shakespeare, Homer, and Dante Alighieri: in the words of Napoléon I upon meeting the eminent poet, "There's a man!"

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt-am-Main in the state of Hesse in Germany on August 28, 1749. The eldest son of an imperial counselor and the mayor's daughter, Goethe balanced the personalities of



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, 1828 painting by Joseph Stieler. AP Images.

his reserved, stern father, Johann Kaspar Goethe, and his impulsive, imaginative mother, Katharina Elisabeth Textor Goethe.

Law Degree and Attempts at Writing Goethe was educated at home by his father and private tutors, who taught him languages, drawing, dancing, riding, and other subjects. The theater would have a profound impact on Goethe, who was allowed free access to the performances of a French theatrical troupe when the French occupied Frankfurt during the Seven Years War (1756–1763). He began writing early, composing religious poems, a prose epic, and even his first novel, which was written in German, French, Italian, English, Latin, Greek, and Yiddish, by the time he was sixteen years old.

Though he was more interested in literature than law, Goethe obeyed his father's wishes and began studying law in Leipzig in 1768. At this time, Goethe composed some of his early plays and poems. After going home in 1768 to recover from a serious illness, Goethe went to Strasbourg in 1770 to complete his law degree.

In Strasbourg, Goethe engrossed himself in reading, artistic discovery, and writing. There, he met Johann Gottfried Herder, a philosopher and poet who introduced him to new literary works, including the novels of English writers Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, and Henry Fielding, that would prove influential in his later writing.

Doomed Love Affairs and the *Sturm und Drang* Sensation After returning to Frankfurt to practice law in 1771, Goethe also launched his writing career. In addition to his legal practice, he visited with literary friends, wrote book reviews, traveled in Germany and Switzerland, and fell in love three times. It was the falling in love that would have the greatest impact on his career as a writer. Each relationship ended in tragedy: his entanglement with Charlotte Buff ended when he discovered she was engaged to his friend; he then fell in love with a married woman; and his engagement to Anna Elisabeth Schönemann was broken off in September 1775. However painful these attachments, they inspired a number of poems, and Goethe became a kind of center for the *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and Stress”) artistic movement that was sweeping Germany.

Inspired by ancient poetry, the *Sturm und Drang* movement tried to establish new political, cultural, and literary forms for Germany as a replacement for the French neoclassical tradition that dominated much literature and culture. The German movement was characterized by extreme emotion, individual feeling, even irrationality—all responses to what was seen as the cold rationalism of French neoclassicism. The members of the German movement idolized writers like William Shakespeare, whom Goethe celebrated as a poet of nature, writing an influential speech on Shakespeare's birthday that would prove a major milestone for Shakespearean literary criticism. He began to imitate Shakespeare's dramatic style in his own prose plays, focusing also on satire and poetic dramas. However, his most influential work of the period, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), would be inspired by the doomed relationship with Charlotte Buff that almost drove Goethe to suicide. This novel in letters, which explores themes of love, philosophy, religion, and nature, established Goethe as an overnight celebrity. The impact of *Werther* on Goethe's contemporaries is hard to overestimate: not only did “Werther fever” spread throughout Europe and Asia, but its sentimental tale of love and suicide encouraged a fad of melancholic, emotional romanticism.

The Weimar Years In 1775, Goethe received an invitation to join Duke Karl August, a young prince, in Weimar. Goethe, who was soon given a position of minister of state, would live there for the remainder of his life. He took on responsibility for the duchy's economic welfare, concerning himself with horticulture, agriculture, and mining; however, his growing responsibilities proved an irritating distraction from his writing. At this time, Goethe entered into an intense friendship with Charlotte von Stein, the wealthy wife of a court official and the most intellectual of Goethe's loves.

Though Goethe was a statesman and a writer, his interests extended to topics like alchemy, phrenology, botany, anatomy, and medicine. He made important

discoveries in anatomy and even came up with an influential theory on plant metamorphosis. Overburdened by competing interests and responsibilities, Goethe fled to Italy in 1786, taking a journey that would turn out to be an act of artistic rebirth.

Italian Journey for Artistic Inspiration In Italy, Goethe kept a detailed diary for Charlotte von Stein. In it, he recorded his reflections and inspirations, from his observations of the customs of the people to his studies of painting, sculpture, botany, geology, and history. He revised three influential “classical” plays: *Egmont*, *Iphigénie auf Tauris*, and *Torquato Tasso*. In these plays he drew on themes of conflicted love, intrigue, and mythology.

Upon his return to Weimar in 1788, Goethe experienced several life changes. He was relieved of all of his official duties aside from association with the court theater and libraries, and his relationship with Charlotte von Stein came to an end. Around this time, he entered into a relationship with Christiane Vulpius, a woman who would become his wife and bear him several children, of whom only one, Julius August Walther, would survive. The uneducated Vulpius was looked down upon by Goethe’s courtly friends, who cruelly referred to her as Goethe’s “fatter half.”

Unconcerned by public opinion, Goethe continued to study and write, though his literary output in the 1790s was sparse compared to that of his earlier years. After his Italian journey, Goethe was increasingly interested in classicism, writing his *Roman Elegies* during this time. These poems, which show a German traveler finding gradual acceptance into a Roman world of history, art, and classical poetry, were considered scandalous upon publication, but are now considered among the generation’s greatest love poems.

Friendship with Schiller and Major Literary Achievements During this time, Goethe formed one of the most influential relationships of his life: a friendship with Friedrich von Schiller, a poet and *Sturm und Drang* contemporary. After a rocky initial acquaintance, the pair formed a mutually supportive relationship, producing literary journals and helping forge a classical German literature. Hailed by key figures in Germany’s growing Romantic movement, Goethe continued to produce poems, plays, satire, and ballads.

Goethe’s next accomplishments would profoundly affect world literature: his novel *William Meister’s Apprenticeship* is considered a classic *Bildungsroman* (a novel that focuses on the protagonist’s growth from childhood to maturity). However, Wilhelm Meister was not Goethe’s only accomplishment during the 1790s: He rewrote and completed his dramatic poem *Faust* between the 1790s and 1808. The work, which tells of the legendary Dr. Faust’s deal with the devil, would prove immensely popular and influential, inspiring countless works of music, theater, and literature. The play can be

seen as a commentary on the pitfalls of the Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid modernization in agriculture, industry, and transportation that started in Europe in the late eighteenth century. Dr. Faust represents modern man’s thirst for dominion over nature. But nature, Goethe warns, has a power not fully understood by men, even geniuses like Faust, and mankind tinkers with nature at its peril.

A Meeting with Napoléon Around this time, Goethe’s friend Schiller died, and France’s emperor Napoléon and his army were marching from victory to victory across Europe. One such victory was at the Battle of Jena in 1806, which took place just twelve miles from Goethe’s home in Weimar. The French sacked Weimar, but Goethe’s home was spared because of Napoléon’s admiration of Goethe’s work. The feeling was mutual, apparently. Goethe kept a bust of Napoléon prominently on display in his study. The two famously met in 1808 and briefly discussed literature.

Goethe would continue to be productive for the remainder of his life, publishing an influential treatise on color, writing an autobiography, and recording his conversations and letters with luminaries of the era. Though his uncommon attitudes toward society and politics alienated him from many of his peers, Goethe was thought of as Germany’s greatest writer at the time of his death in 1832. His sequel to the first part of *Faust*, which was published after his death, is thought to be his most mature work. Goethe was buried next to his friend Friedrich von Schiller in Weimar.

Works in Literary Context

Though Goethe’s plays and poems are considered among the finest in German literature, he was never shy about pointing out his many literary influences. In turn, his own work proved profoundly influential to writers of the *Sturm und Drang* and Romantic movements along with writers and intellectuals as diverse as Nikola Tesla and Hermann Hesse.

As a young man, Goethe read widely in French, Italian, and the classical languages, but his writing was as influenced by the intellectual society of eighteenth-century Germany as it was by literary figures. During his *Sturm und Drang* period, Goethe embraced writers such as William Shakespeare, Oliver Goldsmith, and Hans Sachs, a sixteenth-century German satirist, as well as classical figures such as Homer.

The Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is considered a classic example of the *Bildungsroman*, a story that follows the growth and maturation of a character from youth to maturity. English author Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860), one of the most famous English-language *Bildungsromans* is considered a direct descendant of Goethe’s work. The *Bildungsroman* form has remained a favorite among fiction writers since Goethe’s time. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847),

Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (1915), Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922), John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (1959), and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) are all widely studied Bildungsromans.

Defining German Literature and Culture Much of Goethe's literary career concerned weighing the influences of other periods and searching for a German national language and literature. Unsatisfied by the French influence that saturated that period's philosophy and literature, Goethe turned to neoclassicism, upholding the influence of ancient writers, studying classical art and architecture, and embracing Roman ideals of beauty and culture.

Though he was never considered a true Romantic poet, Goethe's works had an undeniable influence in Romantic circles. His *The Sorrows of Young Werther* attracted a following that would go on to influence the moody writings of the young Romantics. During the last years of his life, he was considered a living monument to a German national literature he had helped create and define.

Goethe's influence was more than just literary: his philosophical works went on to inspire the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Gustav Jung, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, while his scientific writings inspired Charles Darwin.

In addition to his literary and scientific influence, Goethe researched German cultural and folk traditions. His cultural research resulted in many of the Christmas traditions observed in the Western world today. In addition, Goethe's theories on geography and culture (namely, that history and geography shape personal habits) are still relevant today. His balanced view of rational thought and aesthetic beauty would go on to shape the work of artists and thinkers like Ludwig van Beethoven, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and many others.

Works in Critical Context

Goethe was already considered the premier German poet and writer in his own lifetime and has since enjoyed a long career of critical success. However, the statement "Against criticism a man can neither protest nor defend himself; he must act in spite of it, and then it will gradually yield to him" is attributed to Goethe, implying that his critical reception was not always golden.

The Sorrows of Young Werther Goethe was often a figure of public controversy, with his work criticized for its romantic and sexual content, its rejection of French Enlightenment ideals, and its pagan or antireligious themes. Though *The Sorrows of Young Werther* appeared to almost unanimous critical success, it was controversial for its romantic excess, which led to a rash of suicides among *Werther* fanatics.

After *Werther*, Goethe faded into semi-obscurity, reemerging with his classical plays and receiving acclaim from the young movement of Romantic poets who responded to his sensitivity and natural approach. He

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goethe's famous contemporaries include:

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860): a German philosopher best known for his work on the limits of human knowledge.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): an English naturalist and originator of the theory of evolution.

Jane Austen (1775–1817): a British novelist known for her comedies of manners.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821): a French political leader known for his military prowess.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826): the third president of the United States and renowned inventor and philosopher.

Emily Brontë (1818–1848): a British novelist known for her classic novel *Wuthering Heights*.

was praised by Novalis, a Romantic philosopher and author, as "the true representative of the poetic spirit on earth;" however, Novalis and other Romantics soon turned against what they saw as Goethe's political apathy and elitist views. In his work *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography*, author John R. Williams points out that Goethe did not court good opinion during his life, but rather tried to bring other Germans up to his own standards of education and culture, remaining indifferent to public criticism.

Faust Goethe's almost universally praised verse drama *Faust* is considered one of the world's greatest plays. Based on an old Christian legend that Goethe had seen dramatized in a puppet show during his childhood, *Faust* utilizes a mythological, magic-laced context to explore with broad appeal and compelling results the dilemma of modern man. Goethe's drama made the legendary figure of Faust one of the best-known literary characters of all time. The ever-seeking, never-satisfied Faust has come to symbolize the human struggle and yearning for knowledge, achievement, and glory. Critic George Santayana wrote that Faust "cries for air, for nature, for all existence." Few critics have found fault with the play, and those who have, like Margaret Fuller, fault Goethe only in comparisons to such titans of world literature as Dante. She wrote, "*Faust* contains the great idea of [Goethe's] life, as indeed there is but one great poetic idea possible to man—the progress of a soul through the various forms of existence. All his other works, whatever their miraculous beauty of execution, are mere chapters to this poem, illustrative of particular points. *Faust*, had it been completed in the spirit in which it was begun, would have been the *Divina Commedia* of its age." Fuller mainly

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is considered to be the epitome of the *Bildungsroman*, a "self-cultivation" novel that follows a protagonist's development from childhood to maturity. Here are a few other examples of the genre:

Persepolis (2003), a graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi. This work chronicles the author's childhood in Iran during the Islamic Revolution.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943), a novel by Betty Smith. Smith traces the childhood and maturation of Francie Nolan, an Irish-American living in New York in the early twentieth century.

David Copperfield (1850), a novel by Charles Dickens. David Copperfield transforms from awkward child to writer in this classic English *Bildungsroman*.

Harry Potter series (1997–2007), novels by J.K. Rowling. The seven-book Potter series follows a young wizard and his friends as they grow up and take on adult responsibilities.

criticizes the second part of the play for being out of keeping with the first part.

Politics and Culture Goethe's critical reception after death has been mixed. His work was spurned by German nationalists who criticized his adoption of international philosophies, while his life was condemned as immoral due to his many love affairs, including one with a longtime live-in mistress. However, Goethe scholarship grew and changed, undergoing an important phase in the post-World War II years in which Germans grappled with questions of identity and national culture. Though more recent literary movements have tried to distance themselves from the German classical literature born in Weimar, Goethe scholarship has continued. Recent works of criticism have focused on Goethe's humor, his position in relation to Marxism, and his place between classical and Romantic literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Goethe combined his literary work with studies in science, philosophy, history, and culture. What might such a broad set of interests have contributed to Goethe's literary work? Or might his varied interests have detracted from his work? Is there a particular area of study that is more reflected in his works than others? Explain.
2. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* set off an international sensation with its melancholy and overblown sentimentality. What other works of literature have

sparked international fads? How have those fads presented themselves and how long did they last? Why were those fads particularly popular?

3. Goethe was strongly influenced by his friendship with Friedrich von Schiller, a German poet next to whom he was buried. Using your library and the Internet, research another pair of influential writers whose friendship contributed to their literary work. What do you think attracted these two friends to one another?
4. *Faust* is considered one of the most influential works of German literature and has spawned a number of related works by other writers and artists. Using your library and the Internet, compare and contrast two separate adaptations of Goethe's *Faust*. Which of these adaptations holds more relevance for today's audience? How so?

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Nikolai Gogol

BORN: 1809, Great Sorochyntsi, Poltava, Russia

DIED: 1852, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

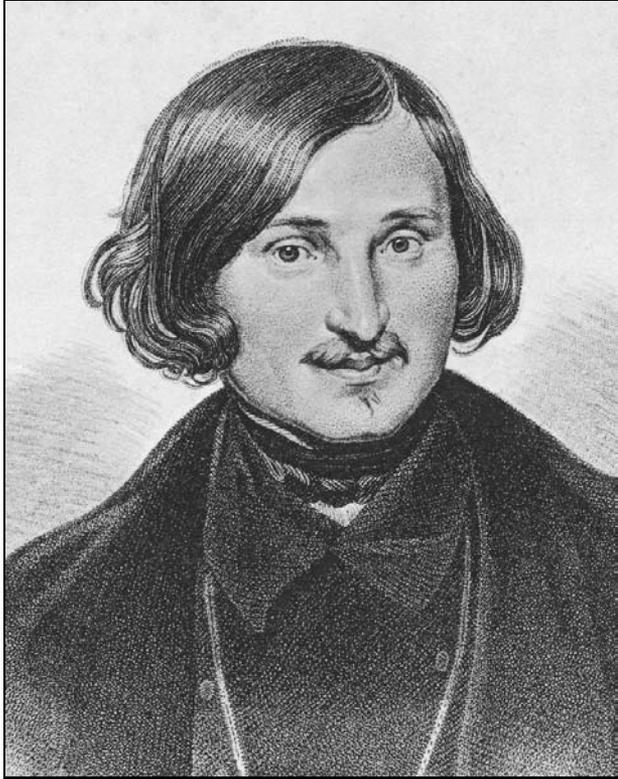
MAJOR WORKS:

The Inspector General (1836)

Dead Souls (1842)

"The Overcoat" (1842)

The Gamblers (1843)



Nikolai Gogol Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

Nikolai Gogol was an initiator of the Russian naturalist movement, which focused on descriptions of the lives of the lower classes of society. Gogol himself explored contemporary social problems, often in a satirical fashion. His best-known works—the novel *Dead Souls* (1842), the short story “The Overcoat” (1842), and the drama *The Inspector General* (1836)—are widely praised as masterpieces of Russian naturalism. Gogol is also seen by many as a progenitor of the modern short story. His fiction, written in a unique style that combines elements of realism, fantasy, comedy, and the grotesque, typically features complex psychological studies of individuals tormented by feelings of impotence, alienation, and frustration.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Boarding School, Vanity Publishing, and Friends in High Places Born into a family of Ukrainian landowners, Gogol attended boarding school as a young boy, developing there an interest in literature and drama. After failing both to find employment as an actor and to sell his writing, Gogol used his own money to publish his epic poem *Hans Kuechelgarten* in 1829. When this work

received only negative reviews, the ambitious young man collected and burned all remaining copies of the book. Soon after, he obtained a civil service position in St. Petersburg and began writing *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831), a volume of mostly comic folktales set in his native Ukraine. In these stories, Gogol depicted the world of the Cossack peasantry through an engaging mixture of naturalism and fantasy. Immediately acclaimed as the work of a brilliant young writer, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* brought Gogol to the attention of celebrated poet Alexander Pushkin and noted critic Vissarion Belinsky, who had been an early champion of Pushkin and now recognized similar promise in Gogol. Pushkin proved to be Gogol’s strongest literary inspiration, and their association from 1831 to 1836 fostered Gogol’s most productive period.

From Stories of Rural Life to the Alienation of the City *Mirgorod* (1835), Gogol’s next cycle of stories, comprises four tales that encompass a variety of moods and styles. “Old-World Landowners” is a light satire of peasant life, while “Taras Bulba,” often referred to as the “Cossack *Iliad*,” is a serious historical novella that portrays the Cossack-Polish wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “Viy,” described by Gogol as “a colossal product of folk-imagination,” is a tale of supernatural terror reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, and “The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Niki-forovich,” considered one of the most humorous stories in Russian letters, details the end of a long friendship due to a trifling argument.

The three stories in *Arabesques* (1835) rank among Gogol’s finest works. In a shift from Ukrainian settings to the more cosmopolitan milieu of St. Petersburg where he now lived, these pieces form part of what were termed Gogol’s Petersburg Tales. These stories reveal the city as nonsensical, depersonalized, and dreamlike. In “Diary of a Madman,” Gogol’s only first-person narrative, he recounts in diary form events that lead to a minor civil servant’s delusion that he is the king of Spain. This story has been interpreted as an indictment of the dehumanizing effects of Russian bureaucracy and a comment on the futility of ambition. Gogol wrote against the backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with the absolute authority of the czar (the Russian monarch). In 1825, St. Petersburg had seen the Decembrist revolt (so named because it took place in December), in which thousands of Russian soldiers led by officers who were members of the aristocracy refused to swear allegiance to the new czar, Nicholas I, and demanded instead that a constitution be put in place. Czar Nicholas put down the revolt, but revolutionary fervor continued to simmer.

Dramas, Both Real and Imaginary In 1836, *The Inspector General* was produced in St. Petersburg. This play, which is often considered the most original and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gogol's famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837): Russian Romantic poet, considered by many to be his country's greatest poet and the founder of modern Russian literature. His style, which blended satire, drama, romance, and realistic speech, came to define Russian literary style.

Nicholas I (1796–1855): During his thirty-year reign, starting in 1825, Nicholas I carved out a reputation as one of the most repressive and reactionary of Russian czars.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Considered one of the greatest novelists of all time, Tolstoy wrote works, particularly *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, that are considered the pinnacle of realist literature.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864): Like Gogol, Hawthorne was a master of the short story. His tales focused mostly on Colonial American history, most famously his work *The Scarlet Letter*, a tale of hypocrisy and guilt in Puritan New England.

Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882): Considered a national hero in Italy, Garibaldi was one of the leading figures in the *Risorgimento*, or reunification, of Italy in the nineteenth century.

enduring comedy in the history of Russian theater, examines the reactions of the prominent figures of a provincial Russian town to the news that a government inspector will be arriving incognito to assess municipal affairs. An impoverished traveler named Khlestakov, who is mistaken for the expected official, is bribed and treated like royalty; he attempts to seduce the mayor's wife and daughter, becomes betrothed to the latter, and departs shortly before the town's residents learn of their mistake and anticipate the arrival of the real government inspector. In this simple plot, constructed within the framework of perverse logic typical of his works, Gogol mocked both Russian officialdom and farcical literary conventions.

Although the play was an indictment of Russian bureaucracy, it passed the rigid censorship of the time because Czar Nicholas I had read and admired the drama. He ordered all his ministers to attend the premiere and announced, as the final curtain fell, "Everyone has got his due, and I most of all." However, despite the czar's official sanction, the play was violently attacked by a number of influential people who denied that it contained a single honest character. Stung by this criticism, Gogol moved to Italy in 1836, and, except for two brief visits home, remained abroad for twelve years. Most of this time was spent writing *Dead Souls*, perhaps his most

enduring work of all. Although he had originally planned this as a lighthearted novel, Gogol decided instead to create an epic in several volumes that would depict all elements of Russian life.

Social Critique and Death at the Direction of a Priest Gogol's final two Petersburg Tales, "The Nose" and "The Overcoat," published as part of *Sochineniya* (1842), were also written at this time. They are considered among the greatest short stories in world literature. Both pieces exhibit Gogol's subtle intertwining of humor and pathos and, like "Diary of a Madman," focus on the bizarre fate of petty government officials.

Toward the end of his life, Gogol became increasingly convinced that his works should spiritually enrich his readers. *Selected Passages of Correspondence with My Friends* (1847), a collection of didactic essays and letters, which many of Gogol's previous admirers condemned as reactionary, reflects this growing religious and moral interest. Following the critical failure of *Selected Passages from Correspondence with My Friends*, Gogol recommenced composition on a second section of his novel *Dead Souls*, a project he had previously abandoned due to a nervous breakdown. By this time, however, Gogol had fallen under the influence of Matthew Konstantinovsky, a maniacal priest who insisted that he burn his manuscript and enter a monastery. Gogol agonized over the decision but finally complied, convinced that this act would save him from damnation. At Konstantinovsky's insistence, Gogol undertook an ascetic regimen in order to cleanse his soul. He began a fast that weakened his already precarious health and died shortly thereafter. Following his death, a small portion of the second part of *Dead Souls* was discovered and published, but critics generally agree that the sequel does not demonstrate the mastery of the first section. Taken as a whole, *Dead Souls* is one of Russia's great abolitionist texts, focusing Gogol's satirical lens on the absurdities of the system of serfdom in Russia, which functioned as more or less a mode of slavery. While the first section of *Dead Souls* concentrated on the problems of the system, the unfinished second section was originally intended to offer solutions. As it happened, though, the manuscript went into the flames and the institution of serfdom was not abolished in Russia until 1861, well after Gogol's death. Though Gogol's critical appeal had waned during his final years, his funeral still brought out thousands of mourners. Commenting on the throngs, a passerby asked "Who is this man who has so many relatives at his funeral?" A mourner responded, "This is Nikolai Gogol, and all of Russia is his relative."

Works in Literary Context

Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol is the father of Russia's Golden Age of prose realism. Later nineteenth-century Russian authors wrote in the shadow of Gogol's thematics and sweeping aesthetic vision, while even twentieth-century

modernists acknowledge Gogol as an inspiration. Many readers compare Gogol's genius with that of Miguel de Cervantes, Laurence Sterne, and James Joyce. Gogol's work shows an extraordinary capacity for the manipulation of language, a confusion of the ridiculous and sublime, and a conflicted desire to capture in verbal images the cultural essence of Russia.

Social Realism or Spirituality in Decline?

While most readers of Gogol's day construed "The Overcoat" as an example of social realism, believing that the author displayed deep sympathy for his beleaguered hero, later scholars have viewed the story from a psychological perspective, asserting that the overcoat symbolizes a mask that enables Akaky to disguise his spiritual destitution. Others have taken a metaphysical viewpoint, interpreting the ironic loss of the coat and Akaky's futile pleas for help as indicative of humanity's spiritual desolation in an indifferent cosmos. Despite such diverse views, critics have consistently noted the resonant irony and lyrical power with which Gogol invested this story.

Stifling Bureaucracies In many of his works, Gogol focused on characters employed by governmental bureaucracies. This is true of the mysterious Inspector General in the play of the same name, and of Akaky Akakyvitch in "The Overcoat." There as elsewhere, Gogol focuses on how different levels of bureaucrats are treated by those around them, and how they fit into the rest of Russian society. The author depicts bureaucracy as a trap of sorts, in which a person's true desires and goals must be suppressed in order to fit in as a productive part of the governmental machine. In this, there was an implicit—though generally not explicit—critique of the czarist system that produced such bureaucracies in the first place.

The Overcoat behind Modern Russian Literature

Gogol's influence on Russian literature continued into the twentieth century and is most evident in the poetry of the Russian Symbolists. Such poets as Andrey Bely and Aleksandr Blok cite Gogol's rich prose and "visionary" language as embodiments of supreme fantasy. Yet many critics maintain that Gogol's mixture of realism and satire has proved most influential and remains his greatest achievement. Dostoyevsky acknowledged Russian literature's vast debt to Gogol by stating simply, "We all came out from under Gogol's 'Overcoat.'"

Works in Critical Context

Despite praise and recognition from his critics and readers, Gogol has been one of the most misunderstood writers of the modern age. The swarm of seemingly irrelevant details, inconsistencies, and contradictions that characterize Gogol's life and work have misled readers who look for monolithic purpose or truth. In his critical biography of Gogol, Victor Erlich says that "we are still

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Gogol's works are considered indictments of the soul-numbing effect of bureaucracy. Here are some other works that examine the power of bureaucracies:

The Trial (1925), a novel by Franz Kafka. This novel, published after the author's death, involves a man arrested, prosecuted, and executed for an unspecified crime.

Catch-22 (1961), a novel by Joseph Heller. This satirical novel takes aim at the U.S. military. The title comes from a fictional "catch" in the rule book that prevents any soldier from avoiding combat on the basis of insanity.

Brazil (1985), a film directed by Terry Gilliam. This cult classic set in a dull dystopia in the future features a hero who dreams of escape from a mind-numbing bureaucratic job.

far from agreement as to the nature of his genius, the meaning of his bizarre art, and his still weirder life." Vladimir Nabokov calls Gogol "the strangest prose-poet Russia has ever produced."

Dead Souls Liberal Russian critics called *Dead Souls* a true reflection of life, and gave Gogol the title of "supreme realist." Realism, according to Belinsky, required a simple plot, a faithful representation of everyday life, and a humorous exposure of the negative aspects of Russian society. Belinsky saw in *Dead Souls* the embodiment of these ideals, and considered it a plea for Russian writers to fight for civilization, culture, and humankind. More recently, *Guardian* reviewer A. S. Byatt has suggested that Gogol "resembles [Charles] Dickens in the way in which everything he started to imagine transformed itself and began to wriggle with life," and that *Dead Souls* "has that free and joyful energy of a work of art that is the first of its kind, with no real models to fear or emulate."

Responses to Literature

1. For over a century, beginning in the 1830s, debate raged among Russian thinkers over the role of Western influence on Russian culture and society. The two camps were called the "Westernizers" and the "Slavophiles"; Gogol was associated in his lifetime with the Westernizers. Research the two perspectives. Upon reading Gogol, would you place him in the Westernizer camp, as his contemporaries did? Could you make the argument that he was actually a Slavophile? Why or why not?

2. Choose one of Gogol's shorter stories and analyze its cultural and historical elements. What does the story tell you about nineteenth-century Russian society?
3. In Gogol's story "The Overcoat," how does the point of view of the narrator affect the way the story is told? How would it have been different if the story was told in the third person? How much like Gogol do you feel the narrator is?
4. The novel *Dead Souls* is incomplete thanks in part to the advice of a religious fanatic. Research the background of religion in nineteenth-century Russia, and what led to Gogol's decision to follow the fanatic's advice.

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William Golding

BORN: 1911, St. Columb, England

DIED: 1993, Perranarworthal, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

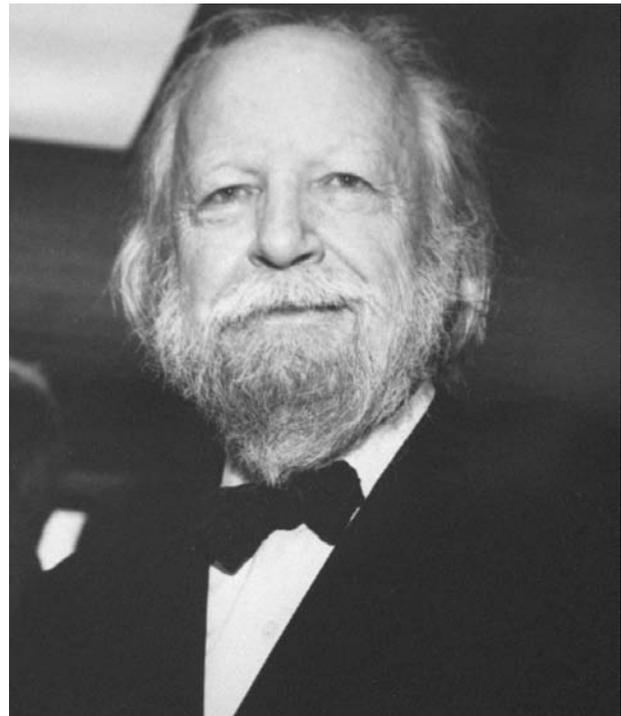
Lord of the Flies (1954)

Darkness Visible (1979)

Rites of Passage (1980)

Overview

William Golding was a British novelist, poet, and Nobel Prize laureate. With the appearance of *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Golding's first published novel, the author began his career as both a campus cult favorite and one of the most distinctive and debated literary talents of his era. The author's prolific output—five novels in ten years—and the high quality of his work established him as one of the late twentieth century's most distinguished writers. He won the Booker Prize for literature in 1980 for *Rites of Passage*, the first book of his *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy. Golding has been described as pessimistic, mythical, and spiritual—an allegorist who uses his novels as a canvas to paint portraits of man's constant struggle between his civilized self and his hidden, darker nature.



William Golding Golding, William, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Probing the Darkness Golding was born in England's west country in 1911. His father, Alex, was a follower in the family tradition of schoolmasters; his mother, Mildred, was a political activist for women getting the right to vote. The family home in Marlborough is characterized by Stephen Medcalf in *William Golding* as "darkness and terror made objective in the flint-walled cellars of their fourteenth-century house . . . and in the graveyard by which it stood." By the time Golding was seven years old, Medcalf continues, "he had begun to connect the darkness . . . with the ancient Egyptians. From them he learnt, or on them he projected, mystery and symbolism, a habit of mingling life and death, and an attitude of mind sceptical of the scientific method that descends from the Greeks."

After graduating from Oxford, Golding perpetuated family tradition by becoming a schoolmaster in Salisbury, Wiltshire. His teaching career was interrupted in 1940, however, when World War II found "Schoolie," as he was called, serving five years in the Royal Navy. Lieutenant Golding saw active duty in the North Atlantic, commanding a rocket-launching craft. Present at the sinking of the *Bismarck* and participating in the D-Day invasion of France by Allied forces, Golding later told Joseph Wershba of the *New York Post*: "World War Two was the turning point for me. I began to see what people were capable of doing." Indeed, the author's anxieties about both nuclear war and the potential savagery of humankind were the basis of the novel *Lord of the Flies*.

Writing to Please Himself On returning to his post at Bishop Wordsworth's School in 1945, Golding, who had enhanced his knowledge of Greek history and mythology by reading while at sea, attempted to further his writing career. He produced three novel manuscripts that remained unpublished. "All that [the author] has divulged about these [works] is that they were attempts to please publishers and that eventually they convinced him that he should write something to please himself," notes Bernard S. Oldsey. That ambition was realized in 1954, when Golding created *Lord of the Flies*.

For fifteen years after World War II, Golding concentrated his reading in the classical Greeks, and his viewpoint seems close to the Greek picture of humans at the mercy of powers erupting out of the darkness around and within individuals. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1983, and in his address at the awards ceremony, he said that the English language was possibly suffering from "too wide a use rather than too narrow a one." Stressing the significance of stories, Golding also expressed his concern with the state of the planet and raised the question of environmental issues. He then focused on the writer's craft, saying that words "may through the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Golding's famous contemporaries include:

J. D. Salinger (1919–): A reclusive author who wrote *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a classic novel about adolescence and the painful journey to responsibility and maturity—perhaps the main rival for *Lord of the Flies* in high school student popularity.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Prime minister of Great Britain from 1940 until 1945. Churchill's inspirational speeches were perhaps just as influential as his determination and brilliant military strategies in guiding Britain and her allies to victory in World War II.

Francis Ford Coppola (1939–): American film director who is behind some of the most detailed explorations of the violent psychology that has shaped twentieth-century culture: *Apocalypse Now* and the trilogy of *Godfather* movies.

Joseph Campbell (1904–1987): An American professor who became an expert on world mythologies, demonstrating in a series of widely popular books and media presentations that the great stories and religious mythologies throughout history share a limited number of recurring patterns and powerful spiritual symbols.

Elie Wiesel (1928–): A Jewish Holocaust survivor who has written over forty novels, memoirs, and political tracts, the most famous of which is *Night*, his memorable account of his imprisonment in several concentration camps in Germany and Austria during World War II. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

Works in Literary Context

Savagery Versus Civilized Behavior While the story has been compared to such previous works as *Robinson Crusoe* and *High Wind in Jamaica*, Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is actually the author's "answer" to nineteenth-century writer R. M. Ballantyne's children's classic *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean*. These two books share the same basic plot line and even some of the same character names. Although some similarities exist, *Lord of the Flies* totally reverses Ballantyne's concept of the purity and innocence of youth and humanity's ability to remain civilized under the worst conditions. In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding presented the central theme of his collective works: the conflict between the forces of light and dark within the human soul. Although the novel did not gain popularity in the United States until several years after its original publication, it has now become a modern classic, most often studied in high schools and colleges.

Shift of Perspective While none of Golding's subsequent works achieved the critical success of *Lord of the Flies*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Lord of the Flies shows that when people are abandoned in a faraway place, far from traditional external authorities, their deepest nature is exposed. Here are some other works that also explore humanity's place in the wilds of the world.

Paradise Lost (1667), an epic poem by John Milton. This extended meditation on the nature of Good and Evil takes the form of an epic poem about Satan's rebellion in Heaven, his subsequent banishment to Hell, and his attempts to get revenge on God by spoiling His new creation of Adam and Eve in Paradise.

Robinson Crusoe (1719), a novel by Daniel Defoe. What started out as a fake travel narrative of a sailor marooned on a deserted island has become a classic tale of self-reliance. One of the earliest British novels, this book has helped define the British middle-class ethics of faith, self-control, and hard work ever since.

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a work of fiction by Jonathan Swift. The best known of Jonathan Swift's works, this classic of English literature is a satire on human nature and a parody of the popular travel narratives of the time. Gulliver becomes marooned in various exotic locations, and Swift uses the situations for everything from outrageous comedy to searing satire on the human condition.

Cast Away (2000), a film directed by Robert Zemeckis. This movie, starring Tom Hanks, is about a time-obsessed Federal Express systems engineer who finds himself alone on a tropical island after a plane crash.

he continued to produce novels that attracted widespread critical interpretation. Within the thematic context of exploring the depths of human depravity, the settings of Golding's works range from the prehistoric age, as in *The Inheritors* (1955); to the Middle Ages, as in *The Spire* (1964); to contemporary English society. This wide variety of settings, tones, and structures presents dilemmas to critics attempting to categorize them. Nevertheless, certain stylistic devices are characteristic of his work. One of these, the use of a sudden shift of perspective, has been so dramatically employed by Golding that it has both enchanted and infuriated critics and readers alike. For example, *Pincher Martin* (1956) is the story of Christopher Martin, a naval officer who is stranded on a rock in the middle of the ocean after his ship has been torpedoed. The entire book relates Martin's struggles to remain alive against all odds. The reader learns in the last few pages that Martin's death occurred on the second page—a fact that transforms the novel from a struggle for earthly survival into a struggle for eternal salvation.

Morality By 1965, Golding had produced six novels and was evidently on his way to continuing acclaim and

popular acceptance—but then matters changed abruptly. The writer's output dropped dramatically: For the next fifteen years he produced no novels and only a handful of novellas, short stories, and occasional pieces. Of this period, *The Pyramid*, a collection of three related novellas, is generally regarded as one of the writer's weaker efforts. Golding's reintroduction to the literary world was acknowledged in 1979 with the publication of *Darkness Visible*, the title of which derived from John Milton's famous description of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. From the first scenes of the book, Golding confronts the reader with images of fire, mutilation, and pain, which he presents in biblical terms. Samuel Hynes observed in a *Washington Post Book World* article,

[He is] still a moralist, still a maker of parables. To be a moralist you must believe in good and evil, and Golding does; indeed, you might say that the nature of good and evil is his only theme. To be a parable-maker you must believe that moral meaning can be expressed in the very fabric of the story itself, and perhaps that some meanings can only be expressed in this way; and this, too, has always been Golding's way.

Myth and Allegory Golding's novels are often termed fables or myths. They are laden with symbols (usually of a spiritual or religious nature) so imbued with meaning that they can be interpreted on many different levels. *The Spire*, for example, is perhaps his most polished allegorical novel, equating the erecting of a cathedral spire with the protagonist's conflict between his religious faith and the temptations to which he is exposed.

Works in Critical Context

The novel that established Golding's reputation, *Lord of the Flies*, was rejected by twenty-one publishers before Faber & Faber accepted the forty-three-year-old schoolmaster's book. Initially, the tale of a group of schoolboys stranded on an island during their escape from atomic war received mixed reviews and sold only modestly in its hardcover edition. But when the paperback edition was published in 1959, thus making the book more accessible to students, the novel began to sell briskly. Teachers, aware of the student interest and impressed by the strong theme and stark symbolism of the work, assigned *Lord of the Flies* to their literature classes. And as the novel's reputation grew, critics reacted by drawing scholarly theses out of what was previously dismissed as just another adventure story.

While he has faced extensive criticism and categorization in his writing career, the author is able to provide a brief, simple description of himself in Jack I. Biles's *Talk: Conversations with William Golding*:

I'm against the picture of the artist as the starry-eyed visionary not really in control or knowing what he does. I think I'd almost prefer the word 'craftsman.' He's like one of the old-fashioned shipbuilders, who conceived the boat in their mind and then, after that, touched every single piece that

went into the boat. They were in complete control; they knew it inch by inch, and I think the novelist is very much like that.

Lord of the Flies *Lord of the Flies* has been interpreted by some as being Golding's response to the popular artistic notion of the 1950s that youth was a basically innocent collective and that they are the victims of adult society (as seen in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). In 1960, C. B. Cox deemed *Lord of the Flies* as "probably the most important novel to be published . . . in the 1950s." Cox, writing in *Critical Quarterly*, continued: [To] succeed, a good story needs more than sudden deaths, a terrifying chase and an unexpected conclusion. *Lord of the Flies* includes all these ingredients, but their exceptional force derives from Golding's faith that every detail of human life has a religious significance. This is one reason why he is unique among new writers in the '50s. . . . Golding's intense conviction [is] that every particular of human life has a profound importance. His children are not juvenile delinquents, but human beings realising for themselves the beauty and horror of life.

Not every critic responded with admiration to *Lord of the Flies*, however. One of Golding's more vocal detractors is Kenneth Rexroth, who had this to say in the *Atlantic*: "Golding's novels are rigged. All thesis novels are rigged. In the great ones the drama escapes from the cage of the rigging or is acted out on it as on a skeleton stage set. Golding's thesis requires more rigging than most and it must by definition be escape-proof and collapsing." Rexroth elaborates: "[The novel] functions in a minimal ecology, but even so, and indefinite as it is, it is wrong. It's the wrong rock for such an island and the wrong vegetation. The boys never come alive as real boys. They are simply the projected annoyances of a disgruntled English schoolmaster."

Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think Golding is so interested in the causes of violence and brutality? Research some of his interviews and consider his life history. Is it surprising that someone like Golding would be so involved in writing about the psychology of violence and be able to do it with such insight?
2. What exactly is the definition of a "fable," and how does it apply to *Lord of the Flies* and Golding's other works?
3. Many reality television shows today play on the stranded-on-a-deserted-island motif. Do you think that shows such as *Survivor* demonstrate the same psychology we see in *Lord of the Flies*? In particular, you might want to research the short-lived show *Kid Nation*, which put forty children from ages eight to fifteen alone together in a deserted town to see how they would manage.
4. Scientist James Lovelock is the creator of an idea known as the Gaia hypothesis; this name was recommended to him by his acquaintance, William Golding. Research the Gaia hypothesis. What are the basic ideas behind it? How did Golding's literary preferences lead him to come up with this name? Can you find any similarities between the Gaia hypothesis and Golding's views on humans and nature?

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Carlo Goldoni

BORN: 1707, Venice, Italy

DIED: 1793, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Good Wife (1749)

The Arcadia in Brenta (1749)

The Hostess (1753)

The Boors (1762)



Carlo Goldoni Goldoni, Carlo, engraving.

Overview

Known as the reformer of Italian drama, Carlo Goldoni introduced elements of naturalism to the Italian stage. His innovative comedies, including *The Hostess* (1753) and *The Boors* (1762), placed a new emphasis on realistic representation in drama. The importance of Goldoni's contribution to Italian literature lies in his substitution for an outworn dramatic tradition with a new kind of comedy that has been called the comedy of character.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood on the Move Goldoni was born in Venice in 1707 to an upper-middle-class family. Throughout Goldoni's childhood, changing family fortunes and his father's medical practice necessitated frequent travel around the Italian peninsula, with the result that Goldoni obtained his early education at several different schools. At the time, Italy was not a unified country but a group of principalities, territories, and city-states that were sometimes hostile to each other. Political and military conflicts were on the rise, and the region was in the midst of an economic decline.

Tumultuous Early Life Goldoni's fascination with the theater manifested itself early. At the time, commedia dell'arte, an improvised type of comedy originating in medieval Italy, was in decline but still the leading theatrical form in what would become Italy. There were also some popular farces, and opera was still in its infancy. At the age of fourteen, while unwillingly studying medicine in Rimini, Goldoni became acquainted with the members of a traveling theater troupe. So entranced was he by their company that when the troupe left Rimini, Goldoni ran away to spend three days with the actors before returning to his family.

Goldoni's life was one of frequent upheavals, including a series of unsuitable love affairs. At age sixteen, he entered Ghislieri College in Pavia, from which he was expelled three years later for writing an unflattering satire of several young women of prominent Pavia families. He returned to the study of law in Udine, but due to another illicit romance was obliged to remove to Modena for further study. Here he developed and pursued an interest in religion and would have become a monk had his father not intervened.

After holding a number of jobs, Goldoni completed his law degree at the University of Padua in 1731 and because of a clerical error was admitted to the Venetian bar without serving the mandatory two-year apprenticeship. However, Goldoni never fully applied himself to the practice of law. He interrupted his legal career several times to accept various temporary government posts. His propensity for financial and romantic indiscretions also disrupted his career, frequently forcing him to move abruptly.

Launched Career as a Dramatist Goldoni's efforts in serious opera had an inauspicious beginning. By his own account he brought a new drama, *Amalassunta*, to Milan in 1732 in hopes of selling it to an opera director. During an informal gathering of a group of friends, including the great singer Caffarelli, he gave the drama its first public reading—and it was laughed to scorn—at least partially because he had ignored most of the conventional “rules” of the genre. In the years to come, however, his willingness to ignore the “rules” would eventually mark his work as unique and influential.

It was in comedy that Goldoni truly excelled. In the 1730s and early 1740s he merely dabbled in theatrical poetry, while otherwise practicing law. It was only after 1748 that his career in the theater was assured. Contracted to write six spoken comedies for Venice, he simultaneously began a long and fruitful opera collaboration with the composer Baldassare Galuppi. Their first effort, *The Arcadia in Brenta* (1749), was an enormous success. In this work, which satirizes the summer retreats of the Venetian aristocracy and the affectatious behavior of cultivated society, Goldoni's elegant poetry and witty, fast-paced dialogue was ideally matched with Galuppi's comic musical pacing, his facile, tuneful melodies and lucid orchestration. Over the ensuing years, a long stream of collaborative works followed.

Redefined Drama It was not until 1747 that Goldoni at last found his niche as dramatist for the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice. It was for this theater that he made good his boast to write sixteen comedies in one year. Goldoni's gradual attempts to redefine drama inspired emphatic and widely divergent reactions. Those who preferred the old *commedia dell'arte* style were unsparing of their censure, while those who welcomed Goldoni's changes were equally lavish in their praise. Voltaire pronounced Goldoni the "painter and son of nature."

Ended His Life in France Goldoni left the Teatro Sant'Angelo to work for other theaters in Venice and Rome until 1762 when he journeyed to Paris to accept a position at the Comedie-Italienne where he was expected to write plays in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. After a short while, he left the Comedie-Italienne and became the tutor of the illegitimate daughter of Louis XV of France.

Pensioned by the French king, Goldoni eventually settled in Paris, where he spent the remainder of his life writing memoirs and plays, which included the critically acclaimed *The Beneficent Bear* (1771). Unfortunately, his pension was discontinued in the wake of the French Revolution which began in 1789. The revolution saw the French monarchy removed from power, and after a bloody conflict, a republican form of government was put in its place. Following Goldoni's death in 1793, the court reversed its decision and ordered the monies reinstated and given to his widow.

Works in Literary Context

Goldoni is most widely known as the "father of Italian comedy." From the 1730s to the 1760s, he revolutionized Italian spoken theater, purging many of the most affected, stylized traits of the *commedia dell'arte* and developing characters of more natural expression with believable and identifiable personalities.

Realism in Drama Goldoni has often been called the "Italian Molière," because he, like the French dramatist, drew his characters and plots from his observations of real life. Goldoni is also credited with increasing the significance of characters in his plays and decreasing the role played by the plot and plot twists. In turn, his characters have often been cited as being extremely realistic. In this, Goldoni defied the dramatic tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, established in the sixteenth century and still dominant in Goldoni's day. The *commedia dell'arte*—almost entirely improvisational in nature, creative and spontaneous at its inception—had degenerated into a stagnant formula by the eighteenth century, relying increasingly on "lazzi," outrageous and often indecent interludes of buffoonery. In *The Beneficent Bear*, for example, Goldoni deals with the superficial aspects of humanity in an imaginative, spontaneous way. He is gen-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goldoni's famous contemporaries include:

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): One of the founding fathers of the United States of America, Franklin had many talents, including those of a politician, a scientist, an inventor, and a writer.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809): The English political writer who influenced both the American and French revolutions through such pieces as "Common Sense" (1776).

Stanislaw Konarski (1700–1773): A Polish author whose work inspired the Polish Enlightenment. His writings include *Effective Way of Debating* (1760–1763).

David Hume (1711–1776): This Scottish philosopher wrote about theories of knowledge and is known as an important empiricist—a philosopher who holds that knowledge is based on experience. He wrote *Essays Moral and Political* (1744).

Marie Antoinette (1755–1793): Queen of France and wife of Louis XVI, she was executed by guillotine during the French Revolution.

Denis Diderot (1713–1784): The French philosopher and encyclopedist whose many fields of study included the subject of free will and the conventions that defined the novels of his time. His works include *Rameau's Nephew* (c. 1761).

ial and more kindly in his judgments, and, while lacking none of Molière's keenness of observation, is devoid of his bitter satire.

Works in Critical Context

Goldoni's role as a reformer of the Italian stage is a significant one. He was the first dramatist in Italy to provide an alternative to the standardized roles and stale scenarios of the *commedia dell'arte*. He has never been called a literary genius, but his innovations broke new dramatic ground and made possible the development of naturalism in Italian drama. Though his works are often conventionally structured around trivial incidents and employ morally traditional characters who speak plain language, it is his humor that, critics contend, never fails to delight and spark his audiences.

Goldoni's Comedies The author of more than 250 works, Goldoni wrote in a variety of dramatic genres—comedy, tragedy, melodrama, and opera bouffe—but his comedies are universally acknowledged to be his most important contribution to Italian literature. Commentators often claim that Goldoni's greatest attribute as a comic dramatist was his engaging naturalism. They have

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goldoni is lauded for his realism. Here are some more works considered prime examples of literary realism:

Middlemarch (1871–1872), a novel by George Eliot. This novel by Eliot (the pen name of Mary Ann Evans) is considered a landmark work of realism in English language literature. It focuses on the details of everyday people in 1830s England.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. French writers are credited with originating the realism movement, and Flaubert was chief among French realists. *Madame Bovary* centers on the adulterous affair of a bored provincial doctor's wife.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), a novel by Mark Twain. Considered one of the greatest American novels ever written, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is also a masterwork of American realism.

preferred those comedies that portray worlds similar to Goldoni's own, in which the characters speak the Venetian dialect and represent members of the Italian middle class. The comedies, in particular, also display the inventiveness that critics have characterized as ingenious and intuitive, though Goldoni's naturalism is faulted for being unenlightening, as it operates like a photographic rather than an interpretational device.

Goldoni's realistic depiction of families was specifically praised by critics. Joseph Spencer Kennard wrote in his book *Goldoni and the Venice of His Time*, "The distinctive quality of Goldoni's work, the trait that sets him entirely apart from every other modern playwright, is his insight into painting family groups. Compared with even the greatest, Goldoni better understood the psychology of the family, more subtly investigated the bonds that unite the members of a household and give it the unity of a living organism."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Good Wife* (1749). In what ways would you say this play is "realistic"? In your written response, cite specific examples.
2. Watch a few action and horror films. Then, read a couple of Goldoni's plays. Action and horror films are generally plot driven, while Goldoni's plays are often described as being more concerned with character than with plot. Based on the films you watched and the plays you read, what would you say is the difference between plot-driven literature and film and character-driven literature and film? Write a

paper in which you share your findings. Support your response with examples from the films and plays you examined.

3. Goldoni's work is considered realistic in its representation of its characters. In order to practice your ability at accurately representing the lives of those around you, write a short paragraph describing in appearance a person or animal you love. Try to choose those aspects of the person or animal that you think represent the personality of the described. For instance, maybe your dog is a bumbling, blundering, sloppy animal, so you might describe in greater detail your dog's long, slimy, textured tongue.
4. Goldoni has been quoted as saying, "The world is a beautiful book, but of little use to him who cannot read it." What do you think Goldoni meant by this? How do you think one learns to "read" the world? Consider these questions while responding to the Goldoni quote in a short essay in which you engage with the idea it expresses.

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Oliver Goldsmith

BORN: 1728, Ballymahon, Longford, Ireland

DIED: 1774, London, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

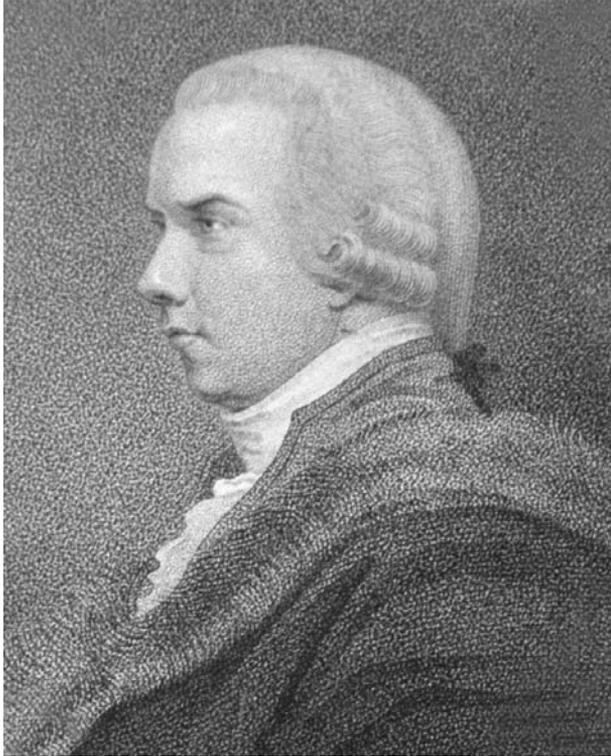
The Citizen of the World (1762)

The Vicar of Wakefield (1766)

The Good-Natur'd Man (1768)

The Deserted Village (1770)

She Stoops to Conquer (1771)



Oliver Goldsmith Goldsmith, Oliver, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Oliver Goldsmith was one of the most important writers of the Augustan Age, otherwise known as the neoclassical age or the Age of Reason. The most striking feature of Goldsmith's writing is his versatility; he wrote across genres, including the essay, the pseudoletter, the novel, poetry, history, and biography.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up the Son of a Poor Clergyman Goldsmith was the fifth child born to the Reverend Charles Goldsmith and his wife. During his youth, his family was poor, but not in serious financial straits. His parents had planned for a university education for their son, but his older sister's marriage necessitated a large dowry and left no money for tuition. As a result, Goldsmith entered Dublin's Trinity College in 1745 as a sizar. The sizar system enabled indigent students to attend college for a nominal fee in exchange for maintenance work on school property. They were often pressed into more menial labor, however, and were generally scorned by wealthier students.

A Neglectful Student Goldsmith attended school during an exciting time in the intellectual history of the Western world. Known as the Enlightenment, the eight-

eenth century was one of optimism and progress that coincided with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Biographers theorize that Goldsmith had looked forward to college as an opportunity to distinguish himself. However, profoundly disappointed with the uncongeniality of his situation at Trinity, Goldsmith neglected his studies and was frequently reprimanded for infractions of college regulations. The most serious of these was his participation in a riot that grew out of a protest of another student's arrest and ended with the death of several people. Although he left college briefly, he eventually returned and earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1749.

Interviewing in Tight Red Trousers Goldsmith spent the next several years idly. Casting about for a profession, he prepared halfheartedly to become ordained for leadership in the Church, but reportedly was rejected as a candidate after appearing for an interview with a bishop wearing tight red trousers. He also studied medicine for a short time in Edinburgh, Scotland, before embarking on a walking tour of the European continent in 1753; his wanderings provided the inspiration for several later works, including *The Traveller* and the adventures of George Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. After three years of travel, he arrived in London early in 1756, penniless and without an acquaintance in the city.

Introduction to Magazine Writing During the next several years, he held a variety of poorly paying jobs. However, an important opportunity was provided by Ralph Griffiths, the publisher and owner of the *Monthly Review*, who commissioned book reviews for his publication from Goldsmith. This arrangement introduced Goldsmith to professional magazine writing, a vocation that would eventually provide most of his income.

Proofreading, Theater Reviews, and Essay Contributions After his association with Griffiths ended, he obtained a proofreading job with the novelist and printer Samuel Richardson and continued to contribute essays as well as book and theater reviews to a number of journals. From October through November of 1759, Goldsmith wrote the entire contents of a new magazine, *The Bee*, commissioned by the bookseller John Wilkes (or Wilkie). Goldsmith furnished *The Bee* with miscellaneous essays, short pieces of fiction, and book and play reviews for its eight-issue run. One such essay by Goldsmith praising the works of Samuel Johnson and Tobias Smollett came to Smollett's attention, and he invited Goldsmith to contribute to his *Critical Review* and to a forthcoming publication, the *British Magazine*; another magazine publisher, John Newbery, also solicited contributions to his *Publick Ledger*. Goldsmith's first book, *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, appeared in 1759. This long essay on European culture and literature was published anonymously; however, members of London's literary scene were easily able

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goldsmith's famous contemporaries include:

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): Like Goldsmith, Johnson was a well-known English literary figure who wrote in a variety of genres. As an essayist, a poet, a biographer, and a critic, he is cited as the most quoted English writer after William Shakespeare.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778): Rousseau was a French Enlightenment philosopher who influenced the French Revolution and the development of romanticism.

Sarah Fielding (1710–1768): Fielding was a British author who wrote the first children's novel in English.

James Cook (1728–1779): Cook was a British explorer and cartographer who made three important voyages of discovery to the Pacific Ocean.

David Hume (1711–1776): Hume was an eighteenth-century philosopher and historian known for his naturalistic philosophy, which united humanity with divinity and advocated trust in human reason.

Denis Diderot (1713–1784): Diderot was a French philosopher during the eighteenth century who challenged conventional morality, attacked the French government, and promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment.

George William Frederick (1738–1820): Known as George III, he was king of Great Britain from 1760 until his death.

to learn the writer's identity, and Goldsmith's reputation as an author began to grow.

In the *Publick Ledger* in 1760, Goldsmith began his most famous series of periodical essays, the "Chinese Letters." Purporting to be a succession of letters from a Chinese philosopher visiting London, the essays—often humorous and witty, sometimes introspective and philosophical—provided thinly veiled social satire on the customs, manners, and morals of Londoners for more than a year and a half. The ninety-eight "Letters," with four additional essays, were published in 1762 as *The Citizen of the World; or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friends in the East*, the first book to appear under Goldsmith's name. He was becoming increasingly prominent in London literary society, a position that was reinforced through his association with a coterie of well-known intellectuals led by Samuel Johnson who called themselves The Club (later the Literary Club), a group that included the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, writers James Boswell, Edmund Burke, and Thomas Percy, and actor and theater manager David Garrick.

Anonymous Literary Hackwork The success of *The Citizen of the World* assured Goldsmith a readership that welcomed his subsequent works, but his own finan-

cial improvidence required that he spend much of his time at anonymous literary hackwork. Periodical essays, translations, and popularized versions of existing works could be quickly written and sold, providing him a precarious hand-to-mouth existence. Boswell's account of the sale of *The Vicar of Wakefield* indicates that Goldsmith's masterpieces were often hastily sold to the first publisher who offered any cash advance. Throughout the remainder of his literary career in London, his life followed a pattern of ever-mounting debts, paid with the income from his hack writing, with occasional intervals spent on the few but notable literary works on which his reputation rests.

Moving Characterizations Offered After Death Goldsmith died at the Temple on April 4, 1774. His death, probably caused by a kidney infection resulting from a stone in the bladder, was hastened by his prescribing for himself, against medical advice, huge doses of Dr. James's Fever Powders. His death occasioned widespread grief. "Epigrams, epitaphs and monodies to his memory were without end," wrote Sir Joshua Reynolds in his character sketch. "Let not his frailties be remembered," Samuel Johnson declared, "he was a very great man." But of course his frailties were remembered. Even before his death the *Westminster Magazine* of March 1773 had issued "Humorous Anecdotes of Dr. Goldsmith," a prelude to many later characterizations of him as an eccentric. In his own posthumously published *Retaliation* (1774), a brilliant series of epitaphs on his friends, Goldsmith described himself as "Magnanimous Goldsmith, a Gooseberry Fool." Reynolds's prose portrait, recovered among the Boswell papers and published in 1952, is a moving characterization of his friend, but it consolidates rather than corrects the picture of him as a social buffoon. As David Garrick put it in the epigram that inspired Goldsmith to write *Retaliation*, he "wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll."

Works in Literary Context

In a brief but intensely creative period of sixteen years, Goldsmith distinguished himself in a broad variety of literary forms, writing essays, biographies, histories, poems, plays, and a novel. In all he wrote he achieved a style of remarkable ease and charm. Goldsmith's most important literary works were in many respects inspired by his dislike of contemporary literary sensibilities. Indeed, he may have learned something from the manner of man of letters Joseph Addison and Irish writer and politician Richard Steele, but he despised and strongly condemned the Whig ideology and sentimentality that figure so largely in their works.

The Value of Sentimental Comedy In the eighteenth century, English literature had turned increasingly toward sentimentalism as a reaction against what was perceived to be the immorality of Restoration-period literature. In the service of the sentimental ideal, authors composed morally instructive works based on the premise

that human nature was essentially good and that human-kind was potentially perfectible. In drama, this trend took the form of the sentimental comedy—so termed because of formulaic and often implausible happy endings. The didactic purpose of a sentimental work often superseded such purely artistic elements as characterization or plot. In his critical works, Goldsmith had noted and deplored the absence of humor in contemporary sentimental literature, especially in drama. Goldsmith expressed his preference for the “laughing” over the sentimental comedy, and a widespread modern critical assumption is that he intended his own light and humorous plays to stand as a corrective to the popular sentimental comedies.

Goldsmith’s Moral Bent Running throughout all Goldsmith’s writing is a strong moral strain, attacking cruelty and injustice, while allowing amply for flawed humanity’s frailties and errors. Like Fielding, who heavily influenced his writing, Goldsmith strongly attacked perversions of the law that served selfish, powerful interests. His conservative social and political ideas, formed as he grew up in Ireland, ally him with the Augustan humanists such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, as well as Johnson, with whom he also shared a largely rhetorical conception of literature, far more than with any of those whose ideas would coalesce into Romanticism. He strongly and consistently attacked the emerging sentimental ethos, just as his rural settings always show man as nature’s steward, following the Christian humanist position. When Goldsmith satirizes human folly, he does so in a comic spirit; to use John Dryden’s broad classifications, Goldsmith’s approach is Horatian, or intimate and reflective, rather than satirical and Juvenalian like Swift’s or Pope’s, though his social and political ideas are close to theirs.

Works in Critical Context

A First-Rank Historian In an assessment of his importance as a writer, one returns inevitably to the charm of his style and the sheer breadth of his work across genres. In 1773, Johnson said: “Whether, indeed, we take him as a poet—as a comick writer—or as an historian, he stands in the first rank.” He held strong moral convictions, and though tolerant of human weaknesses, he was critical of injustice and cruelty, especially as these were aspects of prisons and the penal laws. The stylistic combination of utility and delight in his work puts him closer, perhaps, to his Augustan predecessors than to the Romantics who followed him, though his sentiment and rural subjects give some justification to the label “pre-Romantic,” with which literary historians used to describe him. His social satire is amiable in the tradition of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele rather than harsh in the manner of Pope and Swift. The authors of the *Spectator* papers were a clear influence on his essays and his novel, but politically his values are closer to those of Pope and the “Tory” tradition, especially in his defense of a traditional moral economy against commercial encroachments.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goldsmith’s works relied on a comic spirit to satirize human folly. Here are some other works with a similar approach:

The Misanthrope (1666), a play by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (a.k.a. Molière). This play points out the flaws all humans possess while directly satirizing the hypocrisies of the French aristocracy.

Anti-Matrimony (1910), a play by Percy MacKaye Wycherley. This play satirizes some of the moral folly and intellectual pretensions of the early twentieth century.

27 Heaven (2007), a play by Ian Halperin and author Todd Shapiro. This play is a rock musical that satirizes contemporary popular culture by depicting conversations among four rock icons who died at age 27.

Reduction in Readership His overall reputation was higher in the nineteenth century, when Thackeray dubbed him “the most beloved of writers,” than it is today. His histories, standard works until well into the Victorian period, are hardly read now. But *She Stoops to Conquer* still plays to amused audiences, and *The Deserted Village* retains its appeal even if its readership is reduced. Perhaps Goldsmith’s prose fiction carries most interest to modern readers. As a work comprised by a series of letters, *The Citizen of the World* is of much interest to critics of narrative. Additionally, as a novel that explores with some profundity a number of social, moral, and religious questions, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, as it is read today, is no longer the sentimental idyll it seemed to some former readers.

Enduring Popularity of *The Vicar of Wakefield* Unable to reconcile their varied interpretations of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, readers have been interested in the work for more than two hundred years, and it has become a standard text in the study of the English novel. Similarly, although literary commentators continue to debate Goldsmith’s intent in writing *She Stoops to Conquer; or The Mistakes of a Night: A Comedy*, audiences unconcerned with possible shades of authorial intent continue to enjoy the play as an entertaining theatrical comedy. While some modern critics reexamine Goldsmith’s life in an attempt to create an accurate portrait free of the sentimentalizing of earlier biographical efforts, far more readers and critics concur with Ricardo Quintana, who stated: “It is time that we concerned ourselves less with his ugly face, his awkward social presence, and more with the actual nature of his achievement as a writer.”

Responses to Literature

1. Goldsmith distinguished himself in a broad variety of literary forms. Make a list of other authors who have

successfully written across genres. Then, choose one of those authors and read a short selection from a few of their works. Write a paragraph explaining whether or not you think the author uses the same tone or voice in each of these works. Use examples from the text to support your opinions.

2. Commentators often disagree about whether Goldsmith's apparent sentimentality is meant to be taken seriously or is meant to be a satirical attack. With one of your classmates, discuss how both of these interpretations can coexist. Then shift the discussion to explore how only one interpretation can be accepted. Afterward, together with your classmate, write a paragraph answering the following question: Should readers attempt to consider which interpretation Goldsmith intended, or is it up to readers to decide for themselves which makes the most sense to them?
3. In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the reader is told no more than the vicar himself knows, which is much less than the entire story. Write an essay filling out what an omniscient, third-person narrator might have added to the story.
4. Much of Goldsmith's writing was inspired by a dislike of the literary sensibilities of his day. Make a list of present-day literary sensibilities that you dislike and explain the reasons for each of your choices.

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Witold Gombrowicz

BORN: 1904, Warsaw, Poland

DIED: 1969, Vence, France

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Ferdydurke (1938)

Trans-Atlantic (1953)

Ivona, Princess of Burgundia
(1957)

The Marriage (1963)

Cosmos (1965)

Overview

Witold Gombrowicz has been widely recognized as an important figure in twentieth-century Polish literature and is one of the most original and influential of European novelists, playwrights, and essayists of his time. His works, despite the extraordinary degree of technical difficulty involved in the process of their translation, have been rendered into all major languages and published or staged worldwide.



Witold Gombrowicz. Gombrowicz, Witold, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged Beginnings Gombrowicz was born on August 4, 1904, to proprietor and industrialist Jan Onufry Gombrowicz and Antonina née Kotkowski, in his parents' country manor located in the village of Maloszyce in what once was and would be again central Poland. (While Poland had existed as a country, it had been physically divided by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian empires in 1795. Poles retained their cultural unity despite lack of a political entity.) The youngest of four children, Gombrowicz was usually the most rebellious and undisciplined of them. His early years in the rural provinces, with their time-honored rituals of country life and social hierarchy, offered him much to rebel against. He would later exaggerate his family's pretenses and snobbery in his prose.

Studied Law in Warsaw In 1911, his family moved to Warsaw, where Gombrowicz was to receive his education. While he attended high school, Poland saw much of its traditional territory restored and received its full independence at the end of World War I, an international conflict that saw 30 million casualties. After graduating from high school, he reluctantly gave in to his father's wish and in 1922 began to study law at Warsaw University. He earned his degree in 1927 and left for France, where he spent a year mostly continuing his studies at the Institut des Hautes Études Internationales. Upon returning to Poland, he worked for a while as a legal apprentice in Warsaw courts, but he never applied himself seriously enough to really pursue a career as a lawyer. Instead, he began to devote himself entirely to writing.

Literary Debut In 1933, Gombrowicz made his literary debut by publishing a collection of short stories under the deliberately odd title *Memoirs Written in Puberty*. Though this first work was considered somewhat immature, by the mid 1930s he was enjoying moderate fame as a colorful personality and fascinating interlocutor as well as an insightful literary critic. He even had his "own" table in the exclusive literary café Ziemiańska. It was, however, his first novel, *Ferdynand*, that became a genuine event in Polish literary life. Published in 1938, it instantly prompted attacks by both extreme right- and extreme left-wing critics who often engaged in heated critical debates about avant-garde tendencies in modern Polish fiction.

Polish Literary Career Interrupted by World War II Before World War II, Gombrowicz also published his first play, *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia* (1938) in the leading literary monthly, *Skamander*. The outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, interrupted a serialized publication in a Warsaw tabloid of his parody of a Gothic

romance, *Possessed*, which was never resumed. On that day, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, had territorial ambitions and had already been allowed to take over parts of Czechoslovakia. Germany's invasion of Poland compelled Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany, thus officially beginning World War II.

As the last installments of *Possessed* were being printed, however, Gombrowicz was already in Buenos Aires. Only a few weeks before the German invasion of Poland, he had boarded the transatlantic liner *Boleslaw Chrobry* as a participant on a trip to Argentina of a small group of young Polish literati, sponsored by the shipping company Gdynia-American Lines. While in Buenos Aires, he learned about the outbreak of war and, being unfit for military service anyway, decided not to return. Gombrowicz did not foresee that the capital of Argentina would remain his home for the next quarter of a century.

At the time of his arrival, Argentina was ruled by a conservative oligarchy backed by the military, which was officially neutral but unofficially sympathetic to the Axis Powers led by Germany. After a regime change in 1943, Argentina was even more friendly to the Axis group. When Juan Domingo Perón was elected president of Argentina in 1946, he reportedly allowed a number of Nazi German leaders to hide in Argentina after the war.

Life in Buenos Aires Gombrowicz's first Argentinian years satisfied his need for solitary independence devoid of any ties or obligations. But they were also extremely difficult in terms of financial insecurity. Initially, the only source of income available to him was the articles he published sporadically in the local press. To make ends meet, he had to accept whatever job was available. Thus, in 1943 and 1944 he worked at the archive of the periodical *Jezuitor Solidaridad*, and in 1947, he took a seemingly better but in fact equally poorly paid job as a secretary in a Polish bank, Banco Polaco, in Buenos Aires.

Challenged Literary Efforts At the same time, Gombrowicz continued his writing with great determination and made numerous friends in Argentinian literary circles. Most of these friends were younger writers, some of whom eventually helped him translate his works into Spanish. During the 1940s, he was more likely to find some spiritual support among those Argentinian friends than among members of the Polish émigré community. These people remained put off, if not downright antagonized, by what they considered to be irreverent mockery and a general "lack of seriousness" in his writing.

Greater Fame with Postwar Novels Such charges came at Gombrowicz with increasing frequency and aggressiveness after he became more visible as a writer—thanks to his entering in 1951 into steady collaboration

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gombrowicz's famous contemporaries include:

Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980): Leader of the antifascist resistance in Yugoslavia during World War I, then president of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. Though Yugoslavia was a socialist country, Tito broke off relations with the Soviet Union and founded the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of nations that considered itself aligned with neither the Soviet Union nor the United States.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and writer of essays and short stories known for their complexity, intellectual brilliance, and postmodernism.

Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986): The English-born American novelist who was one of the first openly gay novelists to attract a wide readership. His books include *A Single Man* (1964).

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): The Chilean author and Communist politician. His winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 created quite a stir because of his political leanings. He is the author of *Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair* (1924).

B. F. Skinner (1904–1990): An American psychologist who made a great impact on his field of study with his theories on operant conditioning.

with the Paris-based émigré monthly *Kultura*. The consecutive installments of his *Diary, 1953–1956* began to appear on the pages of that periodical in 1953, and it was within the book series published by *Kultura* that most of his postwar works came out in book form. Also appearing in 1953 were his second novel, *Trans-Atlantic*, and his second play, *The Marriage*. One of the frequent contributors to *Kultura*, the critic Konstanty A. Jeleński, helped Gombrowicz enormously by promoting his works in Europe and translating them into French.

Living in West Berlin, Blacklisted in Poland In 1955, Gombrowicz quit his job at Banco Polaco. For a while, he tried to support himself with grants, royalties for his published and staged works, and the modest income he earned by giving private lectures on philosophy. The year 1958 marked the beginning of his serious respiratory problems, which would be the cause of his death eleven years later. In 1963, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation for a one-year stay in West Berlin, and in April of that year he left Argentina. West Berlin was technically in Communist-controlled East Germany; however, the city was divided after the end of World War II, and the western part of the city was

technically under the control of the Western Allies in the war: the United States, Great Britain, and France.

While in Berlin, Gombrowicz consented to give an interview to a Polish journalist in which he expressed sincerely his views on many touchy political subjects. Published subsequently in Poland along with a scathing commentary by his interviewer, his statements were met with a hostile campaign by the Communist media. As a result, no book by Gombrowicz was allowed to be published in Poland until his death.

A Brief Happiness In May 1964, Gombrowicz moved from Germany to France. During his stay at the Royaumont Abbey as a guest of the *Circle Culturel* of the Royaumont Foundation, he met Rita Labrosse, a young Canadian specialist in Romance literature. Labrosse became his companion and, in December 1968, his wife. In the fall of 1964 the couple settled in the small town of Vence in southern France.

The last years of Gombrowicz's life were marked by his rapidly growing international fame but deteriorating health. He published his last novel, *Cosmos* in 1965. Gombrowicz died July 24, 1969, in Vence after a long illness.

In the 1970s, the Communist authorities—who had taken charge of Poland after World War II as the Soviet Union was in control of Eastern Europe, forming the so-called Iron Curtain—were ready to relent and lift the publishing ban, but the writer's last will thwarted their designs to publish severely abridged editions. In his will, Gombrowicz stated that his work could be published in Poland only in its entirety—that is, without censorship cuts. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gombrowicz's books were read widely in Poland, but thanks only to the clandestine circulation of their émigré editions and underground reprints.

Works in Literary Context

While living in Poland, Argentina, West Berlin, and France, Gombrowicz came into contact with many intellectual and literary ideas. He was profoundly influenced by philosophical ideas and was an early proponent of existentialism. While themes of human interdependence can be found in both his novels and plays, his dramas are regarded as part of the Theater of the Absurd. The Theater of the Absurd was popular during the 1950s and 1960s, had its origins in France, and explored the idea that the human condition is essentially meaningless.

The Influence of Philosophy Philosophy—especially existential philosophy—had a profound impact on Gombrowicz's work. In *A Guide to Philosophy in Six Hours and Fifteen Minutes* (1995), he states, “Philosophy is needed for a global view of culture. It is important for writers.” Before he had read Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, his own writing anticipated the existentialist movement—which is primarily concerned with human essence, being, or identity and human will and choice.

After Gombrowicz read the French philosopher's work, he highlighted Sartre's statement: "Consciousness is, so to speak, outside of me." In response, he said, "When I read that in *Being and Nothingness*, I shouted with enthusiasm, since it is precisely the notion of man which creates form and which cannot really be authentic." It was this notion of the self, in conflict with a society that makes expectations, that provided the theme for much of his work.

Themes of Human Interdependence A central concern in Gombrowicz's prose is also the interdependence of human beings, or what he termed the "interhuman church." This philosophy reflects his belief that man has no essence of his own; his identity depends upon and is determined by the society around him and on their actions and reactions.

Most of Gombrowicz's plays explore concerns similar to those of his prose works. In *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia* (1957), for example, the fiancée of a prince provokes chaos in a fairytale kingdom when her shyness and lack of social graces prohibit her from responding in the expected manner to members of the royal court.

Dual Plots in the Theater of the Absurd Gombrowicz's dramas are usually associated with the Theater of the Absurd because of their black humor, bizarre situations, nonsensical dialogue, and disjointed structure. Accordingly, two basic models of fictional plot coexist in his works. In the model of an investigation, reality appears to the narrator/protagonist as a problem to solve. In the model of stage-setting, the narrator/protagonist becomes an active manipulator of reality.

Works in Critical Context

Gombrowicz's writing has met with an extremely wide range of criticism. Nevertheless, from his first work, Gombrowicz quickly won recognition in the circles of younger writers. His collection of short stories, *Memoirs Written in Puberty* (1933), garnered critical reaction that was rather discouraging, while his three-volume *Diary* (1957), has been hailed by many critics as the single most important Polish book of nonfiction in the twentieth century. Gombrowicz's sense of the absurd fared much better, for his readers in Poland, where the publication between 1957 and 1958 of *Ferdydurke*, *Ivona*, *Trans-Atlantic*, *The Marriage*, and *Bakakaj* turned him into a cultural idol of many young critics and readers.

Possessed While the history of Gombrowicz's *Possessed* was intertwined with the start of World War II, the novel is regarded as a transitional work by critics. Blake Morrison of the London newspaper the *Observer* notes, "Witold Gombrowicz's *Possessed* is [an] overt piece of harking back." While Morrison regards it as exemplary of the Gothic genre, he also comments that Gombrowicz begins to adapt the Gothic trappings to his own ends." Michael Irwin of the *Times Literary Supplement* also

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In nature there is an interdependence of all living things. In Gombrowicz's work there is a focus on the interdependence of human beings as they interact and get caught up in each other's lives. Here are a few works by writers who have a similar emphasis:

Hamlet (1599–1601), a play by William Shakespeare. In this ultimate tragedy, the profound influence of the characters on each other's sanity is immeasurable.

Hedda Gabler (1890), a play by Henrik Ibsen. In this nineteenth-century drama, Gabler gets entangled with the business of others and manipulates those around her to the point where she causes her own demise.

No Exit (1944), a play by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this existential drama, the classic Sartrean philosophy is uttered in the line, "Hell is other people."

A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), a play by Tennessee Williams. In this critically acclaimed drama, an aging southern belle and her working-class brother-in-law get entangled until one is driven to the brink of madness.

states that it is more than just a stereotypical Gothic novel, but believed it "is impossible to see *Possessed* as a 'serious' work. One or two themes, one or two formulations . . . are characteristic of the author's work, but only in a trivial way." Yet Ewa Thompson of *World Literature Today* praises the early novel. She writes, "*Possessed* is worth reading on two counts: as a fast-paced mystery story, and as an example of the importance of contexts."

Responses to Literature

1. Students interested in the connection between the administration of Argentina's Juan Perón and the former leaders of the Third Reich will be interested in reading *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón's Argentina* (2003) by Uki Goñi.
2. Given the theme of Gombrowicz's "interhuman church," conduct a brief debate with peers. One side will argue the pros of interdependence and one side will argue the cons. The group may decide to argue a specific relationship, such as a family, or to argue a global relationship, such as two countries dependent upon each other.
3. Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke* features a protagonist who undergoes an unexplainable physical transformation. In this respect, the novel is similar to other modernist masterworks such as Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. After reading *Ferdydurke*, write a paper comparing the transformation in that novel to the

transformations in “Metamorphosis” and *Rhinoceros*. What points are the authors able to make by giving their characters unstable identities? What new perspectives are they able to achieve?

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▣ Nadine Gordimer

BORN: 1923, Springs, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Guest of Honour (1970)

The Conservationist (1974)

July's People (1981)

Jump, and Other Stories (1991)

The House Gun (1998)



Nadine Gordimer Gordimer, Nadine, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Throughout her career, South African writer and Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer has detailed the corrosive effects of life in the racially segregated state. Gordimer has steered a difficult middle path between the conflicting claims of conservative white readers who resented her relentless analyses of white privilege, and those of other readers—both white and black, and often committed to social change—who regarded as trivial or indulgent her insistence that art should not become propaganda.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged Upbringing in Segregated South Africa Nadine Gordimer, the daughter of Jewish immigrants, was born in Springs, a mining town forty miles outside Johannesburg, in Transvaal, South Africa, on November 20, 1923. A shop-owning family, the Gordimers were part of the white, English-speaking middle class.

Gordimer attended a local Catholic school until the age of eleven. Because of a heart ailment, she was educated privately at home from her eleventh to her sixteenth year. Gordimer began writing in earnest in her teens as a response to the racial divisions she observed. Her early short stories illustrate both Gordimer's sharp

eye for detail and her indirect, ironic manner of commenting on the injustices resulting from racial separation. Three of her best-known stories illustrating this theme were published in 1947, before the victory of the National Party—which systematized white dominance and enforced racial separation in the practice known as “apartheid,” or “apartness.”

Gordimer married Gerald Gavron in 1949; the two divorced in 1952. In 1954 Gordimer married Reinhold Cassirer, a German Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime who had a distinguished career with British Intelligence during World War II.

The Apartheid Era Gordimer’s early work focuses on the intrusion of external reality into the comfortable existence of South Africa’s middle-class white society. *The Lying Days* (1953) portrays a sheltered Afrikaner woman who gains political consciousness through her affair with a social worker. Despite autobiographical elements, this novel shows Gordimer’s gift for creating individual truths that reflect more general, public truths.

A World of Strangers was published in 1958 at the height of the liberal movement in South Africa, during which time intellectuals and artists of all colors strove to resist the increasingly restrictive codes of official apartheid. The novel, banned by the South African government, relates a British writer’s attempts to unite his white intellectual companions with several black Africans whom he has recently befriended.

The liberalism of the 1950s ended violently with the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, when white police shot down sixty-nine blacks protesting laws that forbade non-whites from traveling freely in South Africa. The violence resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency and the subsequent arrest and detention without trial of many political figures. From that point, a police state was established, which silenced organized political opposition and drove into exile many black intellectuals.

The Limits of White Liberalism In her early work Gordimer depicts the ambiguity and compromises of white liberalism; in her writing published between 1960 and 1994 she analyzes its failure to produce any meaningful political changes in South Africa. The novella *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), for example, reconstructs events leading to the suicide of a white political activist who had betrayed his compatriots in exchange for leniency. *A Guest of Honour* (1970) is also the story of white liberal disillusionment.

The apartheid regime appeared to be permanently established in 1974 when *The Conservationist* appeared. It focuses on a wealthy white industrialist’s struggle to come to terms with his guilt and sense of displacement as he grows increasingly threatened by the presence of poor black squatters on his estate. The novel marked an important departure for Gordimer: it was the first of her books

to hint positively at an ultimate return of South Africa to black majority control.

Burger’s Daughter, banned briefly on publication in 1979, details the efforts of Rosa Burger, the daughter of a martyred leader of the South African Communist Party, to pursue an apolitical existence. Gordimer put further pressure on the idea that white liberalism in itself was of any use in South Africa with *July’s People* (1981). The book centers on a liberal white family forced to depend on the providence of a black man who was previously their servant. Through this reversal of roles, the novel reveals deep-rooted feelings of prejudice and racial supremacy in even the most open-minded individuals.

Gordimer felt deeply the need for South African white minority to become active in the cause of justice. She joined the African National Congress (ANC) while it was still an illegal organization because she felt it represented the best hope for the country. She even harbored ANC leaders in her home to protect them from government persecution. In 1986, Gordimer testified on behalf of nearly two dozen antiapartheid activists on trial for treason. She spoke out openly and often against apartheid, and participated in antiapartheid demonstrations within South Africa.

Post-Apartheid Work Antiapartheid activist Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. Gordimer won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. In 1994 the ANC won the first democratic election in the country. As apartheid ended and South African blacks were granted political power, critics scanned Gordimer’s fiction to see how her focus would change. Her novel *None to Accompany Me* (1994) looks at the fortunes of two families—one black, one white—as they move into the post-apartheid era. She examines the problems of those negotiating the change and returning from exile or underground.

Gordimer’s *The House Gun* (1998) is set in the new South Africa. The new regime, unquestionably in power, is nevertheless beset with the chronic problem of random violence and crime in a society casting off a recognition of civil authority together with the authoritarian trappings of the former era. Gordimer’s interest in *The House Gun* is not so much on the present but on the legacy of the past and how that past has produced the violent contemporary climate.

Recently, Gordimer has turned her attention to another scourge in South African society: the spread of HIV/AIDS. She has been an active fund-raiser for AIDS treatment in South Africa. Gordimer continues to live and write in South Africa.

Works in Literary Context

Gordimer was originally only one of a series of novelists working in South Africa after World War II. “Some of the writers, like [Alan] Paton, turned to nonfiction or

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gordimer's famous contemporaries include:

Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006): Egyptian novelist, screenwriter, and playwright who explored existentialism and modernized Arabic literature; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): Former president of South Africa and 1993 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize; under apartheid, he spent twenty-seven years as a political prisoner.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic who incorporates oral Igbo traditions into his work.

J. M. Coetzee (1940–): South African novelist, essayist, and translator; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003.

Aung San Suu Kyi (1945–): elected prime minister of Burma (Myanmar) in 1990 but placed under house arrest by the ruling military; awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

political work; even more, most notably [Peter] Abrahams and Dan Jacobson, expatriated,” explains John Cooke in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/Public Landscapes*. “By the early sixties Gordimer was almost the only member of the postwar group to continue producing fiction from within the country. That she should be the survivor was not altogether surprising, for she was in essential ways more a product of South Africa than her contemporaries. She attended university at home, not in England as colonial writers so regularly have; she did not travel abroad until she was thirty.”

The Tradition of South African Literature

Before Gordimer, the most famous white South African novelist of English language literature: Alan Paton, author of the 1948 best seller *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a moving protest novel about race relations in South Africa. Before Paton, however, white South African Olive Schreiner gained some short-term attention for her *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Schreiner's work fell into obscurity for decades until it was recovered by critics in the 1980s. Aside from Gordimer, the white South African author of greatest prominence today is J.M. Coetzee, winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature. Coetzee, author of such works as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), and *Disgrace* (1999) focused much of his writing on the complicated social issues facing his racially divided country.

The white population of South Africa comes from both British and Dutch descent, and the descendants of

the early Dutch settlers speak a language called Afrikaans. Two prominent writers of Afrikaans literature include André Brink (1935–) and Breyten Breytenbach (1939–) Both were active opponents to the apartheid regime; Breytenbach spent seven years in prison in South Africa for treason as a result of his activities, an experience recounted in his English-language work *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1983). Writer Athol Fugard, though of Afrikaner descent, writes in English to reach a wider audience. The author of numerous plays and novels, his most famous works include *Blood Knot* (1962) and *Master Harold . . . and the Boys* (1982).

Black South African writers of the apartheid era faced imprisonment for open criticism of the government, which obviously dampened output by members of those generations, and many fled the country. Peter Abrahams, for example, left South Africa at the age of twenty in 1939. His novel *Mine Boy* (1946) brought him to critical attention. Alex La Guma stayed in South Africa for much of his adult life, writing such protest novels as 1962's *A Walk in the Night* before leaving the country for good in 1966. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has experienced a small renaissance in literature by black South Africans.

White Minority Voice Much of Gordimer's fiction focuses upon white middle-class lives. It frequently depicts what Maxwell Geismar describes as “a terrified white consciousness in the midst of a mysterious and ominous sea of black humanity.” But the enduring subject of her writing has been “the consequences of apartheid on the daily lives of men and women, the distortions it produces in relationships among both blacks and whites,” says critic Michiko Kakutani. Much criticism of Gordimer has focused on her position as a white writer in a predominantly black African country. Many have questioned her ability to fully understand the reality of black South African life, or even her moral right to “speak” for black Africans. Christopher Heywood defends Gordimer's vision, seeing her as part of the Western tradition: “The adoption of a point of view approximating to that of the submerged majority in southern Africa calls for no superhuman effort, since there is abundant evidence and experience, and a tradition of writing stemming from the American writer W.E.B. DuBois, and from the English writers such as E.D. Morel and D.H. Lawrence, upon which it can be based.” He notes that her white status allows solutions that affect South Africans differently, depending on their race: “Gordimer's view [is] that the colour-bar . . . can be best repudiated and destroyed from within . . .”

Other critics have argued that Gordimer successfully aligned herself politically with other first-class “third-world” writers such as Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz, Nigerian Chinua Achebe, and Israeli Amos Oz. “Her attention is turned on writers whose work seems most engaged in the questions that have absorbed her for much of her

life,” critic Diana Jean Schemo writes, “how justice, wealth, power and freedom are parceled out in a society, and the repercussions for its people.” “For the past 40 years,” Anne Whitehouse writes, “Gordimer’s fiction has reflected and illuminated her country’s troubled history and the passions of individuals with integrity and detachment. *None to Accompany Me* is a sustaining achievement, proving Gordimer once again a lucid witness to her country’s transformation and a formidable interpreter of the inner self.”

Works in Critical Context

Declared “the literary voice and conscience of her society” by Maxwell Geismar, Gordimer has been praised for her incisive examination of complex human tensions generated by apartheid.

According to scholars like John Cooke and Stephen Clingman, Gordimer’s fiction tells of vast social change through the everyday experiences of individuals. Her fiction abounds with the most closely observed detail, and most critics agree that her insights have been as finely perceptive as her observations.

The volatile racial tensions in South Africa have affected the reception of Gordimer’s literature throughout her career. Many critics have attempted to categorize Gordimer as a political writer, though she makes no attempt to promote specific political views in her fiction. A few critics maintain that downplaying the politics of her stories evades her political responsibility.

Because Gordimer has chosen to write about the small moments in people’s lives, her writing receives almost a universal warm welcome today, in contrast with the 1950s and 1960s, when such “small moments” were sometimes criticized as both didactic and apolitical. Today, in light of the trend toward minimalism in fiction, “small moments” are almost universally acknowledged to be suitable topics for literature.

Several short stories in *Six Feet of the Country* (1956) and *Friday’s Footprint and Other Stories* (1960) display the influence of Guy de Maupassant, Honoré de Balzac, and Gustave Flaubert in their objectivity, realism, and satiric edge. Gordimer herself has cited Marcel Proust, Anton Chekhov, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky as major influences.

A Guest of Honour *A Guest of Honour* (1970), for which Gordimer received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, is regarded by many critics as her finest work. John Cooke says that a certain duality appears for the first time in Gordimer’s work in this novel: “she at once observes her world from without and envisions it from within.”

Burger’s Daughter *Burger’s Daughter* (1979) examines white ambivalence about apartheid in the person of Rosa, who can no longer sustain the antiapartheid cause of her imprisoned Afrikaner father after his death. This work, like several others before it, was banned in South Africa,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many nations throughout the world, even today, have permitted or encouraged barriers between ethnicities, religious groups, or genders. These barriers impose separation, or segregation. Here are some works that examine segregation’s effects.

Invisible Man (1952), a novel by Ralph Ellison. The award-winning novel follows the struggles of a bright, promising young African American boy who struggles against the pervasive racism of post–World War II America.

Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996), a book based on a true story by Doris Pilkington. Three adolescent Aboriginal girls defy forced separation from their homeland and relocation to isolated “native settlement stations.”

Biko (1978), a biography by Donald Woods. Biography of Steven Biko, the leader of the nonviolent South African Black Consciousness Movement, who died in 1977 under suspicious circumstances while in police custody.

Princess (1992), a book based on a true story by Jean P. Sasson. This work details how gender segregation within conservative Muslim society affects a contemporary Saudi Arabian princess.

but the ban was quickly removed due to the critical attention the novel had attracted in the West. Judith Chettle noted that it was one of the books that “gained Gordimer an international audience,” but added: “Gordimer astutely described the liberal politics of white and mostly English-speaking South Africa. She was much less incisive in dealing with those Afrikaners supporting the regime and was least successful in describing the blacks.”

July’s People *July’s People* (1981) focuses on a liberal white family forced to depend on the providence of a black man who was previously their servant. Through this reversal of roles, the novel reveals deep-rooted feelings of prejudice and racial supremacy in even the most open-minded individuals. Anne Tyler commented: “*July’s People* demonstrates with breathtaking clarity the tensions and complex interdependencies between whites and blacks in South Africa. It is so flawlessly written that every one of its events seems chillingly, ominously possible.”

Gordimer’s insight, integrity, and compassion inspire critical admiration among many. “She has mapped out the social, political and emotional geography of that troubled land with extraordinary passion and precision,” commented Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times*, observing in a later essay that “taken chronologically, her work not only reflects her own evolving political consciousness and maturation as an artist—an early lyricism has given way to an increased preoccupation with ideas

and social issues—but it also charts changes in South Africa’s social climate.”

Responses to Literature

1. Gordimer does not “preach” to her readers, but rather lets them draw their own conclusions from the details she presents. Do you think this is an effective literary technique, or do you think it leaves room for misinterpretation, depending on the reader?
2. Gordimer has been criticized for refusing to write fiction with an overtly political point of view. As a white woman, she was part of the “ruling class” during apartheid. Would any political solution she proposed be affected by her experiences as part of the privileged white society, or, because of her status, did she have a responsibility to promote specific political solutions in her work?
3. Research the definition of the word “propaganda” and find three examples of well-known novels that have been labeled as propaganda. What prompts such labeling? Do you think propaganda can be art?
4. Research how Africa and South Africa are portrayed by other writers. Write a paper examining the way African countries are represented. Do the representations differ according to the writer’s gender or race? If so, how?

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Maxim Gorky

BORN: 1868, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

DIED: 1936, Moscow, USSR

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Lower Depths (1902)

Mother (1907)

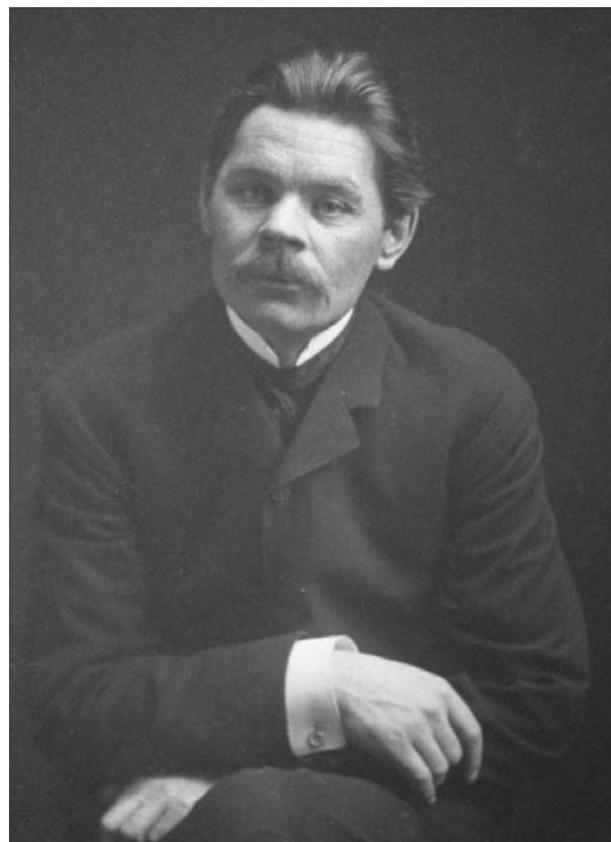
In the World (1916)

My Universities (1923)

My Childhood (1928)

Overview

Maxim Gorky (a pseudonym for Alexei Maximovich Peshkov) is recognized as one of the earliest and foremost exponents of socialist realism in literature. His brutal yet romantic portraits of Russian life and his sympathetic depictions of the working class had an inspirational effect on the oppressed people of his native land. From 1910 until his death, Gorky was considered Russia’s greatest living writer. Gorky the tramp, the rebel, is as much a legend as the strong, individual characters presented in his stories. His



Maxim Gorky *Gorky, Maxim, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

hero was a new type in the history of Russian literature—a figure drawn from the masses of a growing industrialized society; his most famous novel, *Mother* (1907), was the first in that country to portray the factory worker as a force destined to overthrow the existing order.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Orphan and a Runaway Gorky was orphaned at the age of ten and raised by his maternal grandparents. He was often treated harshly by his grandfather, and Gorky received what little kindness he experienced as a child from his grandmother. During his thirteenth year, Gorky ran away from Nizhny Novgorod, the city of his birth (later renamed Gorky), and lived a precarious existence as a tramp and vagrant, wandering from one job to another. Frequently beaten by his employers, nearly always hungry and ill-clothed, Gorky came to know the seamy side of Russian life as few writers before him. At the age of nineteen, he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest. The event became a turning point in Gorky's life; his outlook changed from one of despair to one of hope. Within a few years he began publishing stories in the provincial press. Written under the pseudonym Maxim Gorky (Maxim the Bitter), these stories stressed the strength and individualism of the Russian peasant. When they were collected and published in *Ocherki i rasskazy* (1898–99), Gorky gained recognition throughout Russia. His second volume of stories, *Rasskazy* (1900–10), along with the production of his controversial play *The Lower Depths* (1902), assured his success and brought him acclaim in western Europe and the United States.

Revolutionary Writer Gorky's fame in the West coincided with increasing suspicion from the Russian authorities, who considered the author a source of the country's growing political unrest. In 1901, he was briefly jailed for publishing the revolutionary poem "Song of the Stormy Petrel" in a Marxist review. Three years later, he established the Znanie publishing firm to provide a forum for socially conscious writers. The friendship and advice of revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin strengthened Gorky's growing political radicalism. He was very active during the revolution of 1905, and after its failure he was forced to flee abroad. He was allowed to return home in 1913, and again he resumed his revolutionary activities. During the 1917 revolution and the ensuing years of political chaos, Gorky saved the lives of several intellectuals by interceding on their behalf with the communist regime. He left Russia one last time and settled on the island of Capri for health reasons. In 1928, on his sixtieth birthday, he returned to the Soviet Union to a national celebration of his literary, cultural, and moral contributions to the socialist cause. His death several years later, allegedly by poisoning, is still enveloped in mystery.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gorky's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Edison (1847–1931): Edison was the first inventor to industrialize his efforts. His most notable inventions include the phonograph, the incandescent light bulb, and direct current (DC) electricity distribution.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): Polish-born Conrad did not learn English until adulthood, but became one of the greatest English-language novelists; several of his books were adapted into films, notably *Heart of Darkness*, which inspired the Vietnam War epic *Apocalypse Now*.

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): A leader in the Modernist movement and an American expatriate who once called America "a lunatic asylum," Pound remained a respected poet, translator, and literary critic to his death.

Edith Wharton (1862–1937): Wharton was an American novelist and short story writer known for her piercing, ironic critiques of the hypocrisies and mores of upper-class Edwardian society.

Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924): A leading revolutionary in Tsarist Russia, Lenin went on to lead the October Revolution of 1917 and became the first leader of the Soviet Union. His contributions to Marx's work spawned a new form of Communism known as Leninism.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904): A practicing doctor for most of his life, Chekhov was known for his short stories and plays.

Works in Literary Context

The Proletarian, or Working Class, Hero Gorky's heroes represent protest and unrest: either tramps, cold and hungry but free and without superiors to command them; or strong, positive, loners.

Gorky differentiates his characters according to their ideology; their personal relationships only emphasize their ideological clashes. The domestic conflict, for example, in *Smug Citizens* (1902) is projected onto a social canvas, and the play acquires a political dimension especially topical in pre-1905 Russia. Also in *Smug Citizens*, the worker Nil emerges as the first proletarian character in Russian theater. He, like Gorky himself, hates the small bourgeoisie and their materialism. Gorky once explained that Nil was "a man calmly confident in his strength and in his right to change life," the shortcomings of which aroused in his soul "only one feeling—a passionate desire to do away with them." The working men, "tattered, drenched with sweat," were singled out by Gorky as the only hope for the future. In the smug middle class he saw nothing but decay. Through this attitude, the formerly romantic Gorky arrived at the straightforward and rugged

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gorky practically defines the literary genre of social realism, yet other works address similar themes.

The Jungle (1906), by Upton Sinclair. Although written as a novel, this work by crusading journalist Sinclair was also intended as an exposé of the unsanitary conditions prevailing in American meat plants and of the inhumane conditions low-wage workers were forced to endure on the job. The novel sparked public outcry and forced the government to impose laws governing safe preparation of food.

Germinal (1885), by Emile Zola. Considered by many critics to be the greatest French-language novel ever written, this seminal work of realist literature tells the story of a coal miners' strike in harshly realistic terms.

Sister Carrie (1900), by Theodore Dreiser. Scandalous upon its initial publication, this novel tells the story of a young woman who uses her charms to seduce a succession of men in pursuit of becoming an actress.

Studs Lonigan (1938), by James T. Farrell. This trilogy of novels traces the coming of age of a young Irish-American living on the South Side of Chicago while it simultaneously takes a larger look at the self-perpetuating nature of ethnic ghettos.

realism that connected him with one of the basic traditions of Russian literature.

Attack Against the Intelligentsia After 1902, Gorky wrote a series of plays attacking the new intelligentsia. *Summer Folk* takes up where Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* leaves off: the inheritors of a cherry orchard have, instead of creating a better world, settled for the complacency and futility of their predecessors' lives. "We do nothing except talk an awful lot," says one character, while another ends a long diatribe on the intelligentsia's alienation from the masses with self-reproach: "We have created our alienation ourselves... we deserve our torments." *Summer Folk* is one of Gorky's most static plays; however, the topicality of the play excited the audiences of the day.

Writing Across Genres, From Short Stories to Plays Gorky's work can be divided into three distinct groups. The first comprises his short stories, which many critics consider superior to his novels. In a highly romantic manner, these stories portray the subjugation of Russian peasants and vagrants. Many of these tales, such as "Makar Chudra" and "Chelkash," are based on actual peasant legends and allegories. In them, Gorky championed the wisdom and self-reliance of vagabonds over the brutality of the decadent bourgeoisie. The second group consists of Gorky's autobiographical works, notably the trilogy *My Childhood* (1928), *In the World* (1916), and *My Universities* (1923), and his reminiscences of Tolstoy,

Reminiscences of Leo Nicolayevitch Tolstoy (1919). The trilogy is considered one of the finest autobiographies in the Russian language. The work reveals Gorky as an acute observer of detail with a particular talent for describing people. The third group, by far the largest, consists of a number of novels and plays that are not as artistically successful as his short stories and autobiography. Gorky's first novel, *Foma Gordeyev* (1900), illustrates his characteristic admiration for the hard-working, honest individual. The novel was the first of many in which the author portrayed the rise of Russian capitalism. Among the twelve plays Gorky wrote between 1901 and 1913, only one, *The Lower Depths*, deals with the "dregs of society." Though the play has most of the structural faults of his other dramas, primarily one-dimensional characters and a preachy tone, it is still regarded as one of the greatest proletarian dramas of the twentieth century. Gorky's other plays, including *The Smug Citizens* (1902), *The Barbarians* (1906), and *Yegor Bulichov and Others* (1932), focus either on the intelligentsia or on the struggle between capitalist and socialist forces in pre-Soviet Russia.

Works in Critical Context

Whatever the ambiguities of Gorky's political allegiances after the Bolsheviks (the early Communists of the 1917 Russian Revolution) came to power, the Soviet government saw him as a figure who could help bring prestige to the young regime. The authorities came to refer to him as the "father of Soviet literature" and even named various schools, theaters, institutes, ships, and factories after him during his lifetime. Yet, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, some of the most prominent entities reverted to their former names: hence, Gorky Street in Moscow again became known as Tverskaia Street, and the large city where he was born, located on the Volga River, reverted from Gorky to its earlier name of Nizhny Novgorod.

Ideology over Artistry Despite his success and importance as a socialist writer, most modern critics agree that Gorky deserves little of the idolatrous attention that he has received. They argue that his work suffers from an overly dramatic quality, a coarse, careless style, and an externally imposed structure that results in fiction motivated by ideology rather than by artistry. Many critics suggest that his failure to develop his characters and his tendency to lapse into irrelevant discussions about the meaning of life greatly damage the seriousness of his subjects. However, in his short stories and, especially in his autobiography, Gorky fully realized his artistic powers. In these works he managed to curb his ideology and focus on those talents for which he has been consistently lauded: realistic description and the ability to portray the brutality of his environment. For these, Gorky was called by Stefan Zweig one of "the few genuine marvels of our present world."

Intellectuals and Common Men While critical regard for his work fluctuates, Gorky has been positioned

as the precursor of socialist realism and, therefore, an important stimulus in twentieth-century Russian literature. With Vladimir Mayakovsky and Aleksandr Blok, he was one of the few Russian writers who played an equally important part in his country both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution. Although Gorky was an intellectual, and thus distanced from the common people who overthrew the Czarists and Mensheviks, he used his influence and talent after October 1917 to prevent the revolution from consuming itself in a savage blood-frenzy. As Janko Lavrin has noted, "It was here that his personality and his work served as a bridge between the creative values of the old intelligentsia culture and the culture of the risen masses, anxious to build up a new world."

Influence In the cultural world Gorky was the guiding force behind literary groups before the revolution, did all that he could to protect and nourish a fragile Russian culture during the Civil War, and later helped many young writers make their way into Soviet literature. Some of his own writings, in particular his novels, have had a mixed reputation, but many of the works that have largely fallen out of view—most of his plays of the 1910s and his stories of the 1920s—are worthy of rediscovery. Ultimately his literary reputation rests securely on a handful of acknowledged masterpieces: his play *The Lower Depths*, stories such as "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl"; his memoirs of leading writers (especially Tolstoy); and, finally, his autobiographical writings, which offer an unmatched view of provincial Russia.

Responses to Literature

1. Gorky infused his characters and place names with symbolic meaning. Read one of Gorky's short stories and analyze the symbolism behind its setting and characters in a 3–4-page essay.
2. Read Gorky's play *Summer Folk*. In a 5–7-page essay, analyze how the Russian Revolution might have impacted Gorky's work and literary style. Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
3. With a classmate, research the terms "socialist realism" and "simple realism". Then, discuss what you think makes Gorky's work socialist realism as opposed to simple realism.
4. In his play *The Lower Depths*, Gorky contrasts the moral standpoints of "truth" versus the "consoling lie." Write a personal essay describing your feelings on this issue. Is it better to always tell the truth, or to spare someone's feelings with an omission or half-truth?

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Patricia Grace

BORN: 1937, Wellington, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction, short fiction, children's fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Waiariki (1975)

The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories (1980)

Potiki (1986)

Baby No-Eye (1999)

Overview

Patricia Grace is considered New Zealand's foremost Maori woman writer. She writes short stories and novels that place the reader at the intersection between native and Western cultures in modern New Zealand, and her work explores the challenges her people have faced and continue to face as they seek to retain their traditions and their lands.



Patricia Grace Barry Durrant / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

New Zealand and the Maori People New Zealand was annexed by Great Britain in 1840, and British officials negotiated treaties with some of the native Maori tribes that, according to the British, acknowledged British control of the region in exchange for property and other rights. However, the Maori translation of the treaty did not accurately reflect these terms, and British control of New Zealand was disputed by many of the Maori people. The population of the Maori went into decline, with a drop of over fifty percent in the sixty years following British annexation. The varied Maori culture saw a resurgence in the twentieth century, particularly from the 1960s onward, though many Maori still face racism and the problems stemming from long-standing disputes over land and property rights, and the urbanization of the Maori people has raised concerns over the ability of the culture to remain distinct from Western influences.

Early and Enduring Success Patricia Grace was born in 1937 in Wellington, New Zealand. She studied

at St. Anne's School and St. Mary's College. She began writing after studying New Zealand literature at Wellington Teachers' Training College. At the age of twenty-five, she was a teacher and the mother of a growing family. Unlike many young authors who struggle to get into print, she had early success due to her subject matter and her grasp of Maori narrative techniques. After her first collection of short stories, *Waiariki*, won the PEN/Hubert Church Award, she was encouraged to write a novel. She has since taught writing and published several novels while raising her family of seven children.

Works in Literary Context

Grace is probably New Zealand's foremost Maori woman writer. Her collection of short stories, *Waiariki* (1975), was the first collection of short stories published by a female Maori writer. Her 1978 novel, *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, was the first novel by a Maori woman writer. Her writing is expressive of a distinctive Maori consciousness and set of values, but it is notable also for the varied portrayal of Maori ways of life and for its versatility of style and narrative technique. Though distinctly re-creating Maori stories, Grace's style of writing also borrows elements from the modernist realist tradition.

The Postcolonial Experience Many of Grace's stories deal with the determination of identity and the experience of cultural conflict that are part of postcolonial experience, especially in settler societies. In Grace's works, the experience of difference is neither presented as a way of finding identity nor as a matter of choice, negotiation, or even assertion. Instead it is represented as a nonnegotiable fact that simply has to be accepted.

Works in Critical Context

Grace is well-known in international literary circles and is widely considered a leading New Zealand writer. She has won numerous awards for her writing, including the PEN/Hubert Church Award for Best First Book of Fiction, inclusion in the fiction section of the New Zealand Book Awards, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement.

Potiki Grace is best known for her 1986 novel *Potiki*, which won the New Zealand Award for Fiction. This novel is made up of many stories, including personal accounts from the characters' lives as well as tribal myths and legends. In the book, Grace makes a case for the value of tradition and respect for the future. The book was praised for its presentation of the cadences of Maori language as well as for the more political tone. Two

themes—the difficulties faced by Maori children taught only in English and the attempts to wrest traditional lands from Maori hands—caused controversy when the work was published. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Michael Owen Jones remarked on the author’s “great sensitivity.” Commenting on Grace’s style, Jones maintained that it “captures the rhythms of the finest oral poetry. Her imagery is memorable and her observations are penetrating.”

Responses to Literature

1. Grace is a Maori who attended non-Maori schools. In what ways does her Western education present itself in her works? Is her Western education a positive or negative influence on her writing?
2. What unique obstacles face a woman writer emerging from a native tradition? In what ways are these obstacles evident in Grace’s works?
3. Grace is noted for expressing the distinctive Maori consciousness and the values of the Maori people. After reading some of her works, list the features of the Maori perspective that you have noted. Write an essay describing these features and indicating where in Grace’s writings you discovered them.
4. Grace explores the experiences of native people living within Western culture. Write a story or an essay about your experiences living within Western culture, whether it’s from an insider’s or outsider’s perspective. Be sure to note which perspective you have.

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LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grace’s famous contemporaries include:

- Václav Havel** (1936–): Czech author who became the president of Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism in 1989.
- Thomas Pynchon** (1937–): American novelist known for his dense and complex postmodern style of writing.
- Hunter S. Thompson** (1937–2005): American journalist and author best known for creating the “gonzo” style of journalism.
- Hans Herbjørnsrud** (1938–): Norwegian author whose works explore the connections between language and identity.
- Judy Blume** (1938–): American author who has achieved widespread popularity because of her books for children and young adults, which frequently tackle difficult and controversial issues.
- Germaine Greer** (1939–): Australian scholar who was one of the most important voices of feminism in the late twentieth century.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Grace’s fiction provides readers with a look at the cross-cultural experiences of natives living within Western cultures. Here are some other works with a similar perspective:

- House Made of Dawn* (1969), a novel by M. Scott Momaday. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel tells the story of a Native American who grew up on a reservation and subsequently lives both in and out of nonnative society.
- Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a novel by Leslie Marmon Silko. This novel, which tells a variety of stories about characters living in the American Southwest and Central America, pursues the theme of the reclamation of native lands.
- Ao Toa: Earth Warriors* (2005), a novel by Cathie Dunsford. This novel explores conflicts between local tribal interests and the demands of the corporate, globalized world through the story of a group of Maoris struggling against the use of pesticides and genetic engineering.

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☒ Kenneth Grahame

BORN: 1859, Edinburgh, Scotland

DIED: 1932, Pangbourne, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Golden Age (1895)

Dream Days (1898)

The Wind in the Willows
(1907)

The Reluctant Dragon
(1938)

Bertie's Escapade (1949)

Overview

British author Kenneth Grahame established an early reputation as a writer with his short stories about children and their imaginative worlds, but he is remembered by succeeding generations primarily for the novel *The Wind in the Willows* (1907). Critics have counted Grahame among a special group of writers who have successfully created “unreal worlds,” including J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, and Nikolai Gogol.



Kenneth Grahame Frederick Hollyer / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Death of Mother Grahame was born on March 8, 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland. When he was about a year old, his family moved to Argyllshire, where his father had been appointed to the post of sheriff substitute. There, in 1864, his mother died from scarlet fever (an infectious bacterial disease common before the development of antibiotics in the twentieth century) following the birth of her third son, Roland. Grahame also caught the infection but recovered under the care of his maternal grandmother. Shortly after this the four children went to live with her at Cookham Dene in Berkshire. Their father stayed behind to mourn his wife and developed a dependency on alcohol.

Raised Primarily by Grandmother Grahame would later recall these few years at Cookham Dene with affection in his two collections of reminiscences, *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898). “Granny” Ingles may not have been the stereotypical doting grandmother—hard financial circumstances and a stern Presbyterian nature worked against that—but the happy memories of those years were also, in part, the foundation for *The Wind in the Willows*.

Grahame and his brothers and sister first moved with their grandmother in 1866 to a smaller cottage after repairs became necessary to Cookham Dene, and then back to their father’s house when he unexpectedly summoned them home. Their stay there lasted less than a year. In the spring of 1867, their father resigned his post and went abroad, and the children were sent back to their grandmother. It was the last time they were to live with their father. He died in France in 1887, and of the three surviving children only Grahame was present at the funeral in Le Havre.

Unfulfilling Banking Career In 1868 both Grahame and his older brother, Willie, were enrolled in St. Edward’s School in Oxford, where Grahame excelled during the next seven years. However, in 1875, at the start of Grahame’s last year at St. Edward’s, Willie died from a severe inflammation of the lungs. The following year the family, refusing to support Grahame’s application for Oxford, insisted instead that he apply for a clerkship in the Bank of England. He spent much of the next three decades working for the institution.

Moving to London, Grahame came in contact with writers. He published his first piece in the *St. James Gazette* in 1888, and spent 1891 to 1895 publishing in the *National Observer*. Some of the essays from the *National Observer* were collected in his first book *Pagan Papers* (1894). While Grahame tried to emulate Robert Louis Stevenson, the works were not as intellectually tough as Stevenson’s. They do, however, introduce

themes that recurred in his later works, including the idea of the Pan myth that was part of *The Wind in the Willows*.

Writing for Children The first edition of *Pagan Papers* contains six short stories about children as well. Grahame continued to publish short stories about children over the next year—some in the literary magazine the *Yellow Book*—which were collected in *The Golden Age* (1895). The book was embraced by both critics and readers when it was first published, in part because of its originality. Grahame wrote more stories about some of the characters, which were collected in *Dream Days* (1898). Both books were reprinted several times in the early 1900s. In 1898, he became the secretary of the Bank of England, one of its three highest executive officers.

Origins of *The Wind in the Willows* As Grahame was succeeding professionally as both a banker and a writer, his personal life was also being transformed. He married Elspeth Thomson in 1899, and the couple had their only child, Alastair, in 1900. The child was blind in one eye and had severe defects in the other. Though Grahame's marriage was a failure, he enjoyed inventing tales for his son. Some of these bedtime stories became *The Wind in the Willows*, and were written down in book form by the author in 1907.

Grahame resigned from his high position at the Bank of England in June 1908, three months after his forty-ninth birthday and four months before the publication of *The Wind in the Willows*. Grahame may have seen retirement as preferable to continuing in a job that he had not chosen for himself. With the royalties that accrued from the unexpected and continuing success of *The Wind in the Willows*, he moved the family to Blewbury in 1910, put together *The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children* (1916), and traveled extensively. Even World War I, which engulfed much of Europe from 1914 to 1918 and saw eight hundred thousand Britons lose their lives, had little effect on the author.

Loss of Son While Grahame's literary endeavors were limited as he pursued a life of leisure, his life did suffer one significant tragedy. When his son entered Oxford University, he started to develop mental problems. In 1920, after his problems involving a religious crisis worsened, his decapitated body was found on the railroad tracks near the university. An inquest ruled it an accidental death, but the circumstances make it more likely that Alastair committed suicide.

Following Alastair's death, the Grahames went to Italy for an extended stay and then moved to Pangbourne in 1924. Grahame suffered from circulatory problems while he was there, and he died on July 6, 1932, of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Works in Literary Context

Evolution of Writing for Children As an author, Grahame was very much of his time, the golden age of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grahame's famous contemporaries include:

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): A French realist novelist who wrote the seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927).

Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953): An American playwright whose expressionistic psychological explorations were influenced by Freud and Nietzsche and included *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943) and *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956).

Mori Ōgai (1862–1922): A Japanese army physician, writer, and translator of Western literature. His works include *The Dancing Girl* (1890).

Georges Seurat (1859–1891): A French painter who was an originator of pointillism, a technique where the picture is made up of very small dots of pure color on a white canvas, as seen in his large masterpiece *Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886).

William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–1891): An American army officer who served during the Civil War. He captured Atlanta in 1864 and began his famous "March to the Sea," a campaign that effectively cut the Confederacy in half and precipitated the end of the war.

children's literature. It was the period when classics such as *Peter Pan*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Winnie the Pooh*, appeared. Scholars of children's literature have determined that the definition of what is appropriate reading for children changes with cultural notions of what it means to be a child, a concept that changed considerably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eighteenth-century popular views of children, dominated by religion and the doctrine of Original Sin, gave way to a literature dominated by moral tales and instruction in the early nineteenth century. Children were seen as rational but imperfect. By mid-century, the trend was shifting again, as romantic perceptions of unblemished purity, beauty, and innocence in children began to prevail. As a result, children's literature began to be characterized by more playful poems, stories, and entertainment based on fantasy or adventure.

Merging Fact and Fiction In 1859, when Grahame was born, the two dominant trends in children's literature, didacticism and entertainment based on fantasy, were blended to a certain extent. This meant that stories tended to offer a "sugared pill"—a lesson taken in through entertainment. But the trend to incorporate a moral lesson into a work otherwise dedicated to fantasy was already beginning to recede. In 1865, Lewis Carroll

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In Grahame's early works, he wrote about animal protagonists living in a world that was at once both real and wholly unreal. Here are some other works that share the same rich fantasy theme:

The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1902), a story collection by Beatrix Potter. Potter's classic tales and elegant watercolor illustrations use the animals of the countryside she observed around her home in the English Lake District to convey simple domestic morals.

Winnie-the-Pooh (1926), a novel by A. A. Milne. Milne was a dramatist, novelist, and satirist, but he will always be remembered best for the books he wrote for his son, Christopher Robin. What the adult sees as a shelf of stuffed animal toys, the child sees as a fully formed community of distinct personalities: the gloomy Eeyore, the excitable Tigger, the fussy Kanga, the shy Piglet, and the rest.

The Complete Calvin and Hobbes (2005), a collection of comics by Bill Watterson. While Calvin is certainly more badly behaved than the creatures of Toad Hall, Watterson captures all of the rebellious creative energy of childhood in these comic strips. Along with his best friend and conscience Hobbes, whom everyone else sees as just a stuffed tiger, Calvin lives in a richly imaginative world where nagging teachers are ghoulish space aliens, angry fathers are snarling dinosaurs, and friendly girls are conspirators aiming at world domination.

published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, an extreme fantasy for its time. The more realistic children's works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and Louisa May Alcott began to look out of date.

Grahame's works were finely tuned to a young child's mind, not least in the merging of outward facts with the inward fictions of fantasy. Such Industrial Revolution icons as motors and trains exist alongside medieval dungeons in his stories. And in *The Wind in the Willows*, the very size of the creatures varies from scene to scene. "The Toad was train-size; the train was Toad-size" was how Grahame answered questions about this.

English Pastoralism Much that is characteristic in *The Wind in the Willows* was foreshadowed in Grahame's two earlier books. *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* feature the camaraderie, the food and feasts, the secret haunts, the obsession with boats and water, the long days of summer, the pantheism, and the woods under winter snows as well as the literary ambiances. In these earlier books, the wide world is always near, however. In *The Wind in the Willows*, the days are always carefree

and the clock is stopped. Its potent English pastoral dream—reflected too in much eighteenth-century poetry—remains unchanged.

Influences Grahame's influence, especially through *The Wind in the Willows*, can be seen in animal fantasy writings of authors from Alison Uttley (1884–1976)—whose first books were a series of tales about animals, including Little Grey Rabbit, the Little Red Fox, Sam Pig and Hare—to Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down* (1972), a fantasy novel in which rabbits search for the promised land.

Works in Critical Context

While Grahame's short story collections have receded into obscurity over the years, *The Wind in the Willows* has proven highly popular with readers of all ages since its initial publication in 1907 and has received increasing critical attention for its satire, social commentary, and treatment of rural life.

The Wind in the Willows The modest literary success of *Pagan Papers* was eclipsed by the reception of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, which were so successful both in England and America that the initial reception of *The Wind in the Willows* was colored by the disappointment contemporary readers and reviewers felt when Grahame apparently abandoned his realistic, if poetic, evocations of childhood for a fantasy involving animal characters. Some even thought Grahame had forfeited his credentials as a serious writer of children's literature.

"For ourselves," one of the earliest critics wrote, "we lay *The Wind in the Willows* reverently aside, and again, for the hundredth time, take up *The Golden Age*." Another early critic took a bolder view, writing, "The author may call his chief characters the Rat, the Mole, the Toad—they are human beings, and are meant to be nothing but human beings. . . . The book is an urbane exercise in irony at the expense of the English human character and mankind. It is entirely successful."

Despite the book's nostalgic appeal, many commentators—such as Lois Kuznets—have accused *The Wind in the Willows* of displaying misogynistic tendencies due to its recurring dismissals of female characters and occasional lapses into negative language when speaking about the opposite sex. Claire Welsh asserted that "it can also be viewed as undermining its own apparent misogyny with a playful theatrical approach to gender construction."

Neil Philip believes that *The Wind in the Willows* has been able to retain its wide appeal because it "possesses in abundance that quality which Ezra Pound defined as the true classic: 'a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness.'"

Responses to Literature

1. How does Grahame portray the differences between children and adults in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*? Write a paper that outlines your findings.

2. Discuss the tension between the love of adventure and the nostalgia for home in *The Wind in the Willows*. Create a presentation with the results of your discussion.
3. Critics have drawn parallels between *The Wind in the Willows* and Homer's ancient Greek epic *The Odyssey*. Do some research on *The Odyssey* and describe any parallels you see to Grahame's story in a paper.
4. Describe the different social classes to which the animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows* belong. Do you think the story may be seen as an endorsement or criticism of class hierarchies in English society? Create a visual presentation with your conclusions.
5. Why do you think Grahame chose not to include any female animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows*? In a group setting, stage a debate using your findings.

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Günter Grass

BORN: 1927, Free City of Danzig, Poland

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction

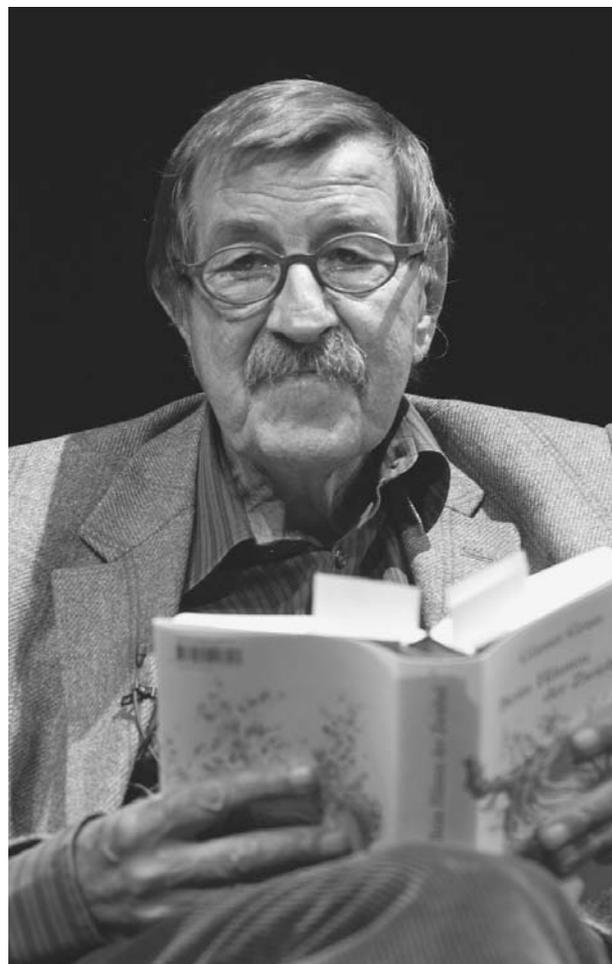
MAJOR WORKS:

The Tin Drum (1959)

Dog Years (1963)

Local Anesthetic (1969)

Peeling the Onion (2006)



Gunter Grass AP Images

Overview

Both inspirational and controversial, Nobel Prize-winning author Günter Grass has been called the conscience of postwar Germany. Internationally recognized for novels that grapple with issues of collective guilt and moral ambiguity, Grass is known for saying “The job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open”—and living up to that motto with work that calls the past, present, and future of Germany into question. Though his work has placed him in the position of moral yardstick and national ethical voice, his own past as a Nazi soldier has been condemned in recent years.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing up Under Nazism Günter Wilhelm Grass was born in the Free City of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) on October 16, 1927. The city, which is historically German, changed loyalties often during European wars and was a center for the German Nazi Party in Poland. Grass himself joined the Hitler Youth as a child, and tried to volunteer for the German navy in the early 1940s as a way of escaping his lower-class Catholic family. Although the name Hitler Youth implies indoctrination into the ideals of Nazism, joining the organization became essentially mandatory in areas under German control, and many of the children involved were indifferent or even opposed to Hitler’s aims. Grass’s family, who were grocers and cabinetmakers, raised him in a mundane environment not usually associated with social evil. However, Danzig and the rest of German-occupied Europe became a breeding ground for Nazism, resulting in the massacre of millions of Jews and civilians during World War II.

Though he served with the *Waffen-SS*, the elite Nazi army unit, during World War II, this period of Grass’s personal history remains somewhat mysterious due to his long silence on the matter. What is known is that Grass was wounded and sent to an American prisoner-of-war camp in 1945. Once the war was over, Grass was forced to tour the concentration camp at Dachau, an experience that led him to question Nazi philosophies for the first time.

Postwar Experiences After his release from American custody in 1946, Grass spent time working on a potato farm and in a potash mine. In 1947, he began an apprenticeship to a stonemason, playing drums in a jazz band by night and studying metal sculpture in Berlin after trips throughout Europe and time spent in an arts academy. He married Anna Schwarz, a Swiss dancer, in 1954.

Grass had begun writing years earlier: At age thirteen he entered a “novel” entitled *The Kashubians* in a contest sponsored by a Nazi school magazine, and was awarded third prize in a poetry contest sponsored by South German Radio in 1955. Some of his poems, short plays, and essays were published in *Akzente*, a literary magazine, and Grass’s first book of poetry, *The Advantages of Wind-*

chickens appeared in 1956. His early surrealistic plays *Hochwasser* (1963; translated as *Floor*, 1967) and *Onkel, Onkel!* (1965; translated as *Mister, Mister*, 1967) and his ballet *Stoffreste (Cloth Remnants)* premiered in small and experimental theaters around Germany.

Return to Gdansk In 1955, Grass read some of his writing at the Berlin meeting of the Gruppe (Group) 47, an informal but extremely influential association of political writers organized in 1947 by writer Hans Werner Richter. Grass’s talent was recognized by the group, who encouraged him to try his hand at a novel. In 1956, he moved to Paris with Anna to work in earnest on his novel, returning to Gdansk in 1958. This trip was partially financed by a prize he won from Gruppe 47 for reading portions of his work in progress aloud. The book, which would be titled *The Tin Drum*, was published in 1959 and permanently placed Grass among the leading literary figures of the twentieth century. The book uses Grass’s own experiences and insights as the basis for the fictional autobiography of a Danzig boy who decides not to grow up.

By 1963, when *The Tin Drum* appeared in the United States, Grass had published a second volume of poetry and drawings, *Gleisdreieck (Rail Triangle)*; a novella, *Katz und Maus* (translated as *Cat and Mouse*); and another novel, *Hundejahre* (translated as *Dog Years*). *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years* would complete what came to be known as the Danzig Trilogy (*The Tin Drum* being the first book in the trilogy), three works that deal with Germany’s past through the warped lenses of artists and outcasts.

Not content to limit his literary production to novels, Grass also composed a number of plays throughout the 1950s and 1960s. His play *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising: A German Tragedy* met with controversy in 1966, with its portrayal of “The Boss” (commonly thought to represent German playwright Bertolt Brecht) leading to criticism and scandal.

Assessment of Germany Grass continued to grapple with political issues of the day and his own growing inclinations toward socialism in books like *From the Diary of a Snail* (1972), a fictionalized account of his involvement with a 1969 political campaign, *The Flounder* (1977), which deals with radical feminism, and *The Rat* (1986), a novel about the sad plight of modern civilization. Throughout the 1980s, Grass continued to touch on politics and Germany’s past, culminating in a series of works concerning German reunification around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Grass’s view that, after Auschwitz, the Germans should not be permitted to live together in one nation, proved immensely unpopular, and his 1995 novel on the subject, *Ein Weites Feld* (translated as *Too Far Afield*), met with harsh criticism.

Unable to let go of his assessment and reassessment of Germany’s past, Grass published *My Century* in 1999. The book, which tells one hundred brief stories (one for every year of the twentieth century), met with mixed reviews. Its episodes are told from the perspective of

Nazis, working-class people, and other figures; some critics accused Grass's selection as being too random and arbitrary to hold much meaning, while others praised the technique. In 1999, Grass was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his body of work.

Around this time, Grass became more interested in politics, aligning himself with the Social Democratic movement in Germany and even writing speeches for German politician Willy Brandt. Grass responded to the growing student movement and other political changes in his poetry and drawings, publishing books like *Ausgefragt* and *New Poems* during the 1960s. *Örtlich betäubt* (*Local Anesthetic*), his attempt to address the political upheaval of the 1960s in novel form, met with poor critical reception and was accused of minimizing the political issues of the day.

Grass again stirred controversy with the release of his 2006 memoir *Peeling the Onion*, in which he revealed that he had been a member of the Waffen-SS during World War II.

Works in Literary Context

Though he has been praised by critics for his insistence on coming to terms with Germany's past, Grass was awaited by a new period of controversy in the twenty-first century. In a 2006 interview about *Peeling the Onion*, Grass revealed his past as a member of the Waffen-SS. This revelation was a huge shock for Grass's fans and admirers, who had assumed he was part of the generation of people too young to have played a relevant part during World War II. Grass was slammed in the press for his failure to disclose his past and was accused of hypocrisy and cowardice. In September 2006, a variety of authors, poets, and intellectuals stood in solidarity with Grass, praising his work and his contribution to German literature.

To date, Grass still faces questions and controversy over his SS past. Though Grass's past has partially overshadowed his longtime career as the upholder of Germans' moral compass, his body of work is more complicated. Ambitious, confused, and often confusing, it embodies the struggles of Germans to come to terms with their checkered past and their current reality.

Magic Realism Best known for his bizarre and immense novel *The Tin Drum*, Günter Grass has become a key figure in the European tradition of magic realism. The story grapples with the origins of World War II, the war itself, and the economic miracle that transformed Germany from downtrodden nation to world power in a matter of years. Reaction to *The Tin Drum*, which was an immediate best seller in Germany and abroad, ranged from critical acclaim to moral outrage. For example, the book won a prestigious literary prize from the city of Bremen, but the prize was withheld by the city senate on moral grounds.

Magic realism is not limited to German authors like Grass; in fact, it is a literary style practiced worldwide by writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grass's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): Russian American novelist known for his controversial work *Lolita*.

Boris Yeltsin (1931–2007): First president of post-Communist Russia.

James Dewey Watson (1928–): Molecular biologist and codiscoverer of the structure of DNA.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Movie director known for his thrillers and suspense films.

Madeleine Albright (1937–): First female U.S. secretary of state.

Anne Frank (1929–1945): Dutch writer who penned her famous *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* while she hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

Salman Rushdie, all of whom have been influenced by Grass in some form.

Depicting Germany Grass's work, while touching on broad political movements like socialism and Nazism, is distinctly German and reflects the concerns of postwar Germany. Destroyed by war and a morally bankrupt state, postwar Germans faced a "stunde Null" (zero hour) in which their society was literally forced to begin from ground zero—new currency, new government, new philosophies. The struggle to come to terms with Germany's violent past has been echoed in the works of Grass's literary contemporaries, such as Heinrich Böll, Christa Wolf, and filmmakers like Werner Herzog and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Works in Critical Context

Though Günter Grass's work has been viewed through the lens of controversy with recent revelations of his Nazi military past, his contribution to postwar German literature is undisputed. As the recipient of some of the most prestigious awards in literature and a central figure of modern German culture, Grass has taken on a role of national conscience despite his uneven reception from critics.

The Tin Drum Even before the publication of his most famous work, *The Tin Drum*, Grass received recognition for his literary talent. Gruppe 47 awarded him their coveted prize in 1958, allowing him to complete work on the novel. International response to *The Tin Drum* was immediate and overwhelming. Shortly before the book appeared in the United States, *Time* magazine pronounced it "the most spectacular example" of recent German literature, praising Grass as "probably the most inventive talent to be heard from anywhere since the war." Within Germany, criticism was mixed; Grass's unflinching portrait of madness and immorality struck a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Grass's novels are enhanced by his use of magic realist elements. Here are other famous works of magic realism:

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. This acclaimed novel tells the story of a one-hundred-year period in the history of the fictional Latin American town of Macondo.

Big Fish (2003), a film directed by Tim Burton. In Burton's film, based on the novel by Daniel Wallace, an old Southern man's life story takes on mythic proportions.

The Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. This award-winning novel tells the unusual story of a shipwrecked boy trapped for months on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger.

chord with reviewers, some of whom praised Grass's genius; others condemned Grass's portrait of Germany as obscene and blasphemous.

Local Anesthetic Grass's exploration of radical politics in *Local Anesthetic* was poorly received. The book, which involves a student's plot to set a professor's dog on fire to exhibit the futility of war, was seen as treating too lightly the concerns of the student movement and political radicals. Critics complained that Grass had made his point before and that his work was offensively dismissive; though some American critics praised the book, it was considered to be a popular flop.

My Century *My Century*, Grass's ambitious episodic work about the twentieth century, met with a similarly mixed reception. Some German critics complained that Grass failed to look directly at the perpetrators of atrocities such as the Holocaust; others, such as *New York Times* book reviewer Peter Gay, noted that Grass's attempt to address such a broad subject matter "fail[ed] to cohere."

Responses to Literature

1. Günter Grass added magic realist elements to his retelling of the horrors of World War II. Compare this technique to the documentary style of narrative favored in books like *Schindler's List* or *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. What are the benefits of a magic realist approach? What are the limitations?
2. The Free City of Danzig, now known as Gdansk, Poland, plays a central role in Grass's novels. Using your library and the Internet, write a brief report on the significance of Danzig in German history during the twentieth century.
3. In his later years, Grass's past as a Waffen-SS member was revealed to great public controversy. Do you feel that Grass's service in this elite Nazi military branch

affects the significance of his body of work? Why do you think he did not reveal this part of his history earlier? If you were Grass, would you have revealed your past or kept it private?

4. In books like *The Tin Drum* and *Cat and Mouse*, Grass uses humor and parody to deal with the atrocities of war. Can you think of other examples of humor in books about death or war? Is the use of humor or parody in this context out of place, considering the atrocities committed during wartime?
5. Grass's work can be compared to that of Kurt Vonnegut, an American writer who used elements of magic realism in his own writing about World War II. Using your library and the Internet, write a brief biographical study of Kurt Vonnegut and compare his work to that of Grass. How are their writing styles different and how are their perspectives on their own histories different? How are those differences present in their works?

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Robert Graves

BORN: 1895, London, England

DIED: 1985, Majorca, Spain

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Good-Bye to All That (1929)

I, Claudius (1934)



Robert Graves Graves, Robert, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Robert Graves is considered one of the most distinctive and lyrical voices in twentieth-century English poetry. Openly dismissive of contemporary poetic fashions and precepts, Graves developed his own poetic theory, principally inspired by ancient mythology and folklore. Although Graves regarded himself as a poet first, he was widely respected for his prose works. He is best known for his World War I autobiography *Good-Bye to All That* (1929) and for his novel *I, Claudius* (1934).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and World War I Robert von Ranke Graves was born in Wimbledon, England, on July 24, 1895, to Alfred Perceval Graves and his second wife, Amalie (Amy) Elizabeth Sophie von Ranke Graves. His father was an Irish poet, and his mother was a relation of Leopold von Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern historical studies. Graves won a scholarship to Oxford University in 1913.

Graves left school at the outbreak of World War I and promptly enlisted for military service. World War I began in eastern Europe when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated

in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. Subsequent diplomacy failed, and entangling alliances led to war, which soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe. Great Britain was allied with France and Russia, and, when it entered the war in 1917, the United States, against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Graves was sent to France where trench warfare was commonplace. He saw extensive military action and was injured in the Somme offensive in 1916, one of the biggest battles in the war, with 1.5 million casualties.

Poetry and *Good-Bye to All That* While convalescing from war injuries, Graves wrote two volumes of poetry: *Over the Brazier* (1916) and *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1918). These poems earned him the reputation as an accomplished “war poet” like fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon. While still in the army, Graves married and moved to Oxford to begin his university studies. Although Graves failed to finish his degree, he wrote a postgraduate thesis that enabled him to teach English at Cairo University in Egypt.

In 1929, he published *Good-Bye to All That*, an autobiography that was considered to be one of the best firsthand accounts of World War I. That same year, Graves left his wife for the American poet Laura Riding, who had considerable influence on his poetic development, and moved with her to Majorca, Spain. In Graves’s second volume of collected poems, *Poems, 1926–1930*, his previous idealized sentimentality is replaced by intensely personal and sad poems that explore the possibilities of salvation and loss through love.

More War and Personal Loss The Spanish Civil War (a conflict that began in 1936 between republican and nationalist forces for political and military control of the country) forced Graves and Riding to leave Majorca in 1939. They traveled to the United States, where Riding became involved with and eventually married an American poet, Schuyler Jackson. Distracted, Graves returned to England and began a relationship with Beryl Hodge.

In the 1940s, after his break with Riding, Graves formulated his personal mythology of the White Goddess, inspired by late nineteenth-century studies of female-headed societies and goddess cults. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) is Graves’s search for his muse through the mythology of Europe.

Historical Novels In the 1930s and 1940s, Graves supported himself financially by writing historical novels that earned him both popular and critical acclaim. His most memorable works of fiction are the popular historical novels *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (1934). These works document the political intrigue and moral corruption of the Roman Empire’s waning years in terms that suggest parallels with twentieth-century civilization. In *Count Belisarius* (1938), Graves displays his knowledge of the early Middle

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Graves's famous contemporaries include:

Harold Gillies (1882–1960): New Zealander surgeon and one of the founders of reconstructive, or plastic, surgery. He developed his techniques by providing facial repairs to injured soldiers during World Wars I and II.

Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949): American writer and author of *Gone with the Wind* (1936), a historical romance set during the American Civil War and Reconstruction period. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1937.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918): British poet, killed in action one week before the end of World War I; well-known for his bitter war poems “Anthem for Doomed Youth” (1917) and the posthumously published “Dulce et Decorum Est” (1920).

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Spanish artist who helped create the cubist movement. His famous painting *Guernica* (1937) expresses his anguish over the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica by the Nazis during the Spanish Civil War.

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967): English poet and novelist and friend of Graves during World War I. His poetry depicts the brutality of war rather than a more “patriotic,” idealized view.

Ages, while in *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth* (1940) and *Proceed, Sergeant Lamb* (1940), he demonstrates his understanding of military tactics through his depiction of a British soldier at the time of the American Revolution.

In *The Story of Marie Powell: Wife to Mr. Milton* (1943), Graves attempts to debunk John Milton's reputation as a great poet by viewing him through the eyes of his first wife, who is portrayed as Milton's intellectual equal. *The Golden Fleece* (1944) is a retelling of the legend of Jason and the Argonauts and is notable for its inclusion of poems and mythology informed by the White Goddess. *King Jesus* (1946) is a controversial novel in which Graves postulates that Jesus Christ survived the crucifixion. In *Watch the North Wind Rise* (1949), Graves presents a futuristic utopia that worships a goddess and follows customary rituals.

From 1961 to 1966, Graves lectured periodically at Oxford University in his capacity as professor of poetry, and in 1968 he received the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Throughout his career he published and revised numerous editions of his *Collected Poems*, and continued to publish original collections through the 1970s, including *Timeless Meeting* (1973). Graves died in Majorca in 1985 at the age of ninety.

Works in Literary Context

Graves writes in a traditional style—he employs short-line verse structure and idiosyncratic meters; however, the content of his work is filled with ironies, combining humor with emotional intensity. Graves's early volumes of poetry, like those of his contemporaries, deal with natural beauty and country pleasures in addition to the consequences of World War I. Because of his experiences in World War I, Graves had a lifelong preoccupation with the subject of war.

War Theme and Influence Neither *Good-Bye to All That* nor his war poems minimize the traumatic effect that the war had on Graves, but they avoid the nostalgia and bitterness of many contemporary works dealing with similar experiences. Paul Fussell sees *Good-Bye to All That* as less memoir than comedy of manners, following in the tradition of Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson. The ironic and farcical elements of Graves's treatment of war, Fussell argues, had a strong influence on both English writer Evelyn Waugh and American writer Joseph Heller.

Poetic Muse In the 1940s, Graves formulated his personal mythology of the White Goddess. Inspired by late nineteenth-century studies of matriarchal societies and goddess cults, Graves asserts in *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) that “the true poet” receives inspiration from a female Muse, “the cruel, capricious, incontinent White Goddess,” and seeks to be destroyed by her. Central to this mythology is the ancient Near Eastern story of Attis, the mortal male who becomes the consort of the goddess Cybele after she has driven him to madness and suicide. The yearly death and resurrection of Attis is a metaphor of the natural seasonal cycle to which Graves alludes in such poems as “To Juan at the Winter Solstice,” “Theseus and Ariadne,” and “The Sirens' Welcome to Cronos.” Randall Jarrell has written of these poems that they “are different from anything else in English; their whole meaning and texture and motion are different from anything we could have expected from Graves or from anybody else.”

For Graves, it was much more than that. He became the Goddess's acolyte and devotee, her high priest. In poet Alistair Reid's words, “Only he could interpret her wishes, her commands.” Writing *The White Goddess* gave order to Graves's deepest convictions and restored a sanctity to poetry he felt had been lost by rejecting myth for reason. She was also his muse, and his devotion to her was such that much of his last work from the 1960s on was given over to love poetry, inspired at the moment by whichever young woman had stepped into the muse role (there were at least four).

Works in Critical Context

Robert Graves has a secure reputation as a prose writer. *Good-Bye to All That* is considered one of the finest books to come out of World War I, and many commentators

praise the imaginative re-creation of imperial Rome in *I, Claudius*.

Poetry Graves wished to be remembered as a poet. Critics acknowledge his technical mastery and lyrical intensity, but there is a divergence of opinion. Many have claimed that the work of poets such as W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, whom Graves dismissed, is more enduring and memorable than that of Graves. Other critics, however, have argued that Graves's independence from twentieth-century trends had a lasting impact on younger English poets. In 1962, W. H. Auden went as far as to assert that Graves was England's "greatest living poet."

Having founded no school and with few direct disciples, Graves, through his mythologically inspired love poetry, occupies a unique position among twentieth-century poets writing in English. As scholar John Carey wrote in Graves's obituary, "He had a mind like an alchemist's laboratory: everything that got into it came out new, weird and gleaming."

Seconding Carey's view of Graves's importance as a poet, Randall Jarrell, in *The Third Book of Criticism*, concludes that "Graves is a poet of varied and consistent excellence. He has written scores, almost hundreds, of poems that are completely realized, different from one another or from the poems of any other poet. His poems have to an extraordinary degree the feeling of one man's world."

Responses to Literature

1. After reading *Good-Bye to All That*, write a brief analysis commenting on Graves's tone. Describe your emotions toward his war experiences in a paper.
2. Read several of Graves's poems about war. Hold a class discussion stating whether the images and themes are relevant today. Would a soldier today hold the same views as Graves? Why or why not?
3. Graves is known for historical novels. Think of a period in history or a specific historical event that interests you and write two or three paragraphs about how you could develop the event into a historical novel. Whose point of view would you take?
4. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the mythic figure of the White Goddess, then read Graves's poem by the same name. Hold a group discussion as to why you think Graves devoted an entire book to his own mythology of the White Goddess.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

War has been a common theme in literature throughout time. Here are some works that address various aspects of the war experience:

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. This novel, based on the author's own experience, tells of the German soldiers' experiences during World War I and their difficulty reintegrating into society after the war.

The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1953), a novel by James Michener. This novel, which follows a group of American fighter pilots in the Korean War, is based on a true story.

Iliad (c. ninth or eighth century B.C.E.), an epic poem by Homer. This Greek epic poem tells of events during the tenth and last year of the Trojan War, between the Greeks and the Trojans.

The Return of the Soldier (1918), a novel by Rebecca West. This novel tells the story of a British soldier suffering from what was then known as "shell shock" (today called post-traumatic stress disorder) and his struggles to return to civilian society after World War I.

Under Fire (1917), a novel by Henri Barbusse. Written by a soldier and based on his own experiences in World War I, this novel was published during the war and was one of the first war novels. It tells of French soldiers fighting the Germans in occupied France.

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Thomas Gray

BORN: 1716, London, England

DIED: 1771, Cambridge, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College"
(1747)

"Ode on the Spring" (1748)

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"
(1751)

Essays and Criticism (1911)

Overview

Thomas Gray is generally regarded as a transitional figure in eighteenth-century poetry, providing a bridge between



Thomas Gray Gray, Thomas, photograph. The Library of Congress.

the poetic sensibility of his own generation and the Romantic revolution of the future. He combines in a unique way a classic perfection of form typical of the Augustan era with subject matter and attitudes that are clearly Romantic and that anticipate still later developments. Gray's special gift for precise and memorable language was the result of rigid discipline in long years of studying Greek and Roman literature. Steeped as he was in the past, in his ideas and emotions Gray looked to the future.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A "Proper" Education to Escape the Horrors of Home Life Thomas Gray was born on December 26, 1716, in London, England. Although his family was fairly prosperous, Gray's father was a morose and violent man who at times abused his wife unmercifully. There is uncertainty as to whether Gray's parents separated, but it is well documented that it was arranged for Gray to attend Eton College when he was eight years old so that he could be properly educated. A studious and solitary boy, Gray formed intimate friendships with only three other students: Thomas Ashton, Horace Walpole, and Richard West. They proclaimed themselves the "Quadruple Alliance" and were given to precocious conversation on life and literature. West and Walpole figured significantly in Gray's literary development and later in his poetic career, which blossomed during Gray's four years at Cambridge University. While at Cambridge, Gray attracted attention as an accomplished writer of Latin verse, though he left in 1738 without taking a degree. Shortly thereafter, Gray joined Walpole on an extended tour of Europe, but in 1741 they quarreled violently, the cause of their differences still a matter of speculation, and the two parted company until their reconciliation in 1745. In November 1741, Gray's father died; Gray's extant letters contain no mention of this event.

The Loss of a Dear Friend Except for his mother, Richard West was the person most dear to Gray, and his death from tuberculosis (a common, deadly disease in Europe throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) on June 1, 1742, was a grievous loss to the young poet. West died in the year of Gray's greatest productivity, though not all of the work of that year was inspired either by West's death or by Gray's anticipation of it.

Gray's "Ode on the Spring" was written while West was still alive and is to some extent a response to the ode he had sent Gray on May 5, 1742. Gray's "Ode on the Spring" was sent to West at just about the time of his death and was returned unopened. The ode takes the implicit form of elegy, displacing spring from the context of renewal to that of death, and is consistent with a May

27, 1742, letter to West in which Gray explains that he is the frequent victim of “a white Melancholy”

From Bard to Professor Gray’s mother died on March 11, 1753, shortly after Gray had begun his famous *Pindaric Odes*, which were published by his friend Horace Walpole in a slim volume in 1757 and were received by a less than appreciative public. When the poet laureate, Colley Cibber, died, also in 1757, Gray was offered the position, but he declined it on the basis that it had become a meaningless post. From this point on, Gray wrote little more poetry, and, in July 1759, he moved to London to study at the British Museum, which had been opened to the public in January. In December 1761, he returned to Cambridge; except for frequent trips to London, other parts of England, Scotland, and Wales, he remained in Cambridge for the rest of his life. This was the period of the Seven Years War (1756–1763) between France, England, and nearly all the other major colonial powers of the time. Although he did not respond directly to these world events in his poetry, Gray’s “The Bard” may perhaps be understood as an obliquely patriotic commentary, focusing as it does on the final English conquest of Wales.

In July 1768, Gray was made professor of modern history at Cambridge, though he never actually lectured or published on the subject, focusing his scholarly efforts rather on antiquity and natural history. Meanwhile, modern history was taking place in the colonies, as the British East India Company conquered more and more of India in the name of the Crown, and the settlers in America grew increasingly restless under British rule. The most significant event of Gray’s last years, however, was personal: it was his brief, intense friendship with a young Swiss student, Karl Victor von Bonstetten. The friendship was apparently complicated by physical desire on Gray’s part, though many scholars concur that the two had no actual sexual relations. In July 1771, Gray became ill while dining at Pembroke College in Cambridge; a week later, on July 30, he died.

Works in Literary Context

Gray remains an important poet in the context of a less than striking era for poetry during the latter half of the eighteenth century. In this sense he is one of a group, including William Collins, James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton, William Cowper, Christopher Smart, and Joseph and Thomas Warton, who largely failed to provide English poetry with a distinctive period identity, and whose achievements were shortly to be overshadowed by the emergence in the 1780s and 1790s of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the quickly succeeding second generation of Romantic writers.

Sexual Desire and Castration Gray’s poetry is frequently concerned with the rejection of sexual desire. The figure of the poet in his poems is often a lonely, alienated, and marginal one, and various muses or

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gray’s famous contemporaries include:

James Wolfe (1727–1759): Respected by his men, noted for his generalship, Wolfe achieved lasting fame after his victory over the French outside Quebec secured Canada for Britain in the French and Indian War. He recited Gray’s “Elegy” to his men the day before the assault on Quebec.

John Dyer (1699–1757): A Welsh pastoral poet best known for writing “Grongar Hill” and “The Fleece.”

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): A British essayist, biographer, lexicographer, and critic, Johnson is the most-quoted English writer after Shakespeare. He is best known for his aphorisms, prose style, and great wit.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): One of the Founding Fathers of the United States, Franklin was also a noted scientist, writer, diplomat, and inventor. Around the time of Gray’s writing, Franklin was conducting his famous experiments with electricity.

Georg Friedrich Handel (1685–1759): A Prussian composer of astonishing vigor, through his *Messiah* and other works, Handel was an important influence on such later artists as Mozart and Beethoven.

surrogate-mother figures are invoked—in a manner somewhat anticipatory of John Keats’s employment of similar figures—for aid or guidance.

One of Gray’s typical “plots” has to do with engaging some figure of desire in order to reject it, as in the “Ode on the Spring,” or, as in the “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” to lament lost innocence. Sometimes, as in the “Hymn to Adversity,” a harsh and repressive figure is conjured to reject excessive desire and to aid in the formation of a modest friendship, the socially acceptable substitute of sexual desire. In the “Hymn to Ignorance,” a goddess is used to rebuke the “I” who longs for her maternal and demonic presence.

Such figures indicate a radical sexual distress. Though one might argue that the reduction of humanity to insect life in the “Ode on the Spring” is a significant form of sexual loss, in the “Hymn to Adversity,” Gray has arrived at the first clear symbolism of castration. The threat of castration is transposed into an acceptance of it. That is, the threatening figure of Adversity is pacified but requires a surrender of sexual identity.

Reverberations Greater than Their Source The longer ode on “The Progress of Poesy” finds Gray tracing the evolution of the power of verbal harmony from Greece to Rome to England, with eloquent passages on William Shakespeare, John Milton, and John Dryden. It

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the keys to the success of Gray's "Elegy" lies in the universal themes it touches upon: death and the passage of time, as seen in the quiet splendor of overgrown ruins. Here are some other works that share these themes:

"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13th, 1798" (1798), a poem by William Wordsworth. This melancholy meditation on the passage of time, both over the poet's own life and across the centuries, echoes the pensive nature of Gray's "Elegy."

Ozymandias (1818), a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley. This poem examines with the ruined monument of a once mighty ruler, now long dead and mostly forgotten.

Sunset Boulevard (1950), a film directed by Billy Wilder. This classic American film presents a dark vision of a person who refuses to yield to the passage of time. An aging silent movie actress inhabits a ruined mansion living amid mementos of her former glory. A down-on-his-luck screenwriter becomes her companion.

was from this progress that Gray would draw his chief influences.

Although his poetic canon is small—throughout his lifetime he wrote around one thousand lines of verse—Gray was a major transitional figure between the sensibility and classical perfection of the Augustans and the emotional reverberation of the Romantics. While the influence of the Augustans is manifested in Gray's concentration on complicated metrical schemes and intellectual ideals, he is appropriately seen as a precursor to the Romantic movement because of his sensitive and empathetic portrayal of the common man. Nowhere is this more evident than in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), Gray's most famous work and one of the most beloved poems in English literature. While Gray wrote a number of odes, among them "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747) and "Ode on the Spring" (1748), it is the diction of the "Elegy" that has infused modern language more than any other piece of English literature that contains so few consecutive lines. Alfred, Lord Tennyson recapitulates the "Elegy"'s universal appeal by declaring that it contains "divine truisms that make us weep."

A Style Bound to Be Remembered The same combination of classic form and emotional attitudes is observable in Gray's fine odes. The "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" evokes a nostalgic picture of the care-free life of college boys and grim forebodings of their adult futures. The poem may suffer somewhat for mod-

ern readers from excessively "poetic" diction and rather wooden abstractions, but it is redeemed (though to a lesser extent than the "Elegy") by some unforgettable phrasing. Lines such as the following, on schoolboys escaping on adventurous rambles, "They hear a voice in every wind, / And snatch a fearful joy," or the famous closing thought, "where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise," distill the special magic of Gray's style at its best.

Works in Critical Context

"Gray wrote at the very beginning of a certain literary epoch of which we, perhaps, stand at the very end," wrote famed literary critic G. K. Chesterton in 1932. "He represented that softening of the Classic which slowly turned into the Romantic."

In his *Souvenirs* (1832), Gray's young Swiss friend Bonstetten reflected on the older man: "I think the key to the mystery is that Gray never loved; the result was a poverty of heart contrasting with his ardent and profound imagination, which, instead of comprising the happiness of his life, was only its torment."

Responses to the "Elegy" From the time of his first publication to the present day, Gray's poetry has had as many admirers as detractors. Although scholars continue to praise the "Elegy" as a brilliant piece of verse, they also puzzle over the inconsistencies in theme and approach that marbled the rest of Gray's poetic output. Yet critics have been almost unanimous in agreeing that in the "Elegy" Gray broke new ground in concepts and attitudes by tapping into the pulse of the common man with great insight and passion. A recent commentator, Linda Zionkowski, writes in *Men's Work: Gender, Class, and the Professionalization of Poetry, 1660–1784*, "Gray's portrayal of the isolated speaker seems to voice, and indeed validate, his own feeling of detachment from an understanding public; the 'Elegy' mystifies and personifies this alienation, transforming it from a result of commodified print to a feature of the sensitive poet's temperament." That is, not only was Gray breaking new ground, but he was trying to do so in a way that would challenge the reduction of his poetry to just another thing to be bought and sold, a commodity.

Responses to Literature

1. Despite the fact that it was written two and a half centuries ago, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" continues to be one of the most beloved poems in the English language. What do you think accounts for its lasting popularity?
2. Gray was heavily influenced by the ancient Greek lyrical poets, such as Pindar. Study the lyricists of Greece. What were the characteristics of their poetry? How was their poetry similar to the

works of later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets that they influenced? How was it different?

3. Like Gray did for his “Elegy,” visit a nearby cemetery. Write about one of the tombstones: who was buried there, and when? What do you think their lives were like? What does their age and the place they were buried tell you about their life?
4. Gray’s “Elegy” focused on lower-class inhabitants of a cemetery because he was purposely working against the assumption that only upper-class people were worthy of remembrance. Discuss whether you think that, in today’s society, we are more likely to remember the poor, or if we are still just as focused on the exploits of the rich and famous.

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Graham Greene

BORN: 1904, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England

DIED: 1991, Vevey, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Travel, nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Power and the Glory (1940)

The Heart of the Matter (1948)

The End of the Affair (1951)

The Quiet American (1955)

Ways of Escape (1980)

Overview

Graham Greene’s life and literature were played out on a global stage; he traveled widely and wrote works set in locales as disparate as Hanoi and Havana, Liberia and Lithuania, Mexico and Malaysia. His works focused on the borders and conflicts between the European world and



Graham Greene *Greene, Graham, 1969, photograph. AP Images.*

the “other” world abroad. During Greene’s lifetime—which spanned two world wars and the advent of the nuclear age—he documented the changes that affected both strong empires and struggling nations.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Restless Youth Born in Berkhamsted, England, in 1904, Greene as a child was a passionate reader of books. His father was headmaster of a local school, and his mother was a first cousin of noted author Robert Louis Stevenson.

Greene entered his father’s school in 1915 and left in 1921, when he was seventeen. Greene continued his education at Oxford, where he received a BA from Balliol College in 1925. His restlessness and sense of adventure, however, had already taken hold. While still a student, he made a long walking trip in Ireland, and, in the same year that he took his degree at Oxford, his first book was published: a collection of poetry, *Babbling April*, which critics saw as imitative.

Greene met his future wife, Vivien Dayrell-Browning, shortly before leaving Oxford in 1925, and he began an intense courtship that precipitated his conversion to her religion, Catholicism, a year before their marriage in 1927. This conversion proved to be more than a matter of expedience. Greene’s Catholicism deeply influenced his work. Many of his novels, including *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory*, *The End of the*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Greene's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Graves (1895–1985): an English poet, novelist, and scholar best known for his First World War memoir and his historical fiction.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): an American novelist and journalist whose economical writing style had a significant influence on twentieth-century fiction.

Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966): an English writer best known for his satirical novels, he was widely popular with both readers and critics.

W. H. Auden (1907–1973): an Anglo-American poet, widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century because of his stylistic and technical achievements along with his engagement with moral and political issues.

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993): a British novelist, critic, and composer who launched his career with novels exploring the dying days of the British Empire.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro led the Cuban Revolution and ruled the country from 1959 until 2008.

Orson Welles (1915–1985): an American director, writer, actor, and producer. His film *Citizen Kane*, which won two Academy Awards, is widely considered one of the best films ever made.

Affair (1951), and others, center around religious faith and morality.

Writer and Spy Greene held jobs at the British American Tobacco Company and the *Nottingham Journal* (both of which he found tedious) before landing a subeditor's position at the *Times* of London. At the *Times* he advanced steadily from 1926 until the success of his first novel in 1929, at which point he became a full-time writer. Greene also wrote film criticism for *Night and Day* and the *Spectator* in the 1930s.

Greene went to Mexico in the late winter of 1937–1938. He had been commissioned by a London publishing house, Longmans, Green, to study the plight of the Mexican Catholic Church, which had for over a decade been engaged in a running feud with the revolutionary government—the government having decided to enforce a clause in the revolutionary constitution that would prevent clergymen from voting or commenting on public affairs. His experiences in Mexico inspired one of his greatest novels, *The Power and the Glory*. Then, during World War II, Greene again found himself in the thick of things, if also on the periphery; he worked several months with the Ministry of Information and later served with

the British Foreign Office in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, experiences that inform his spy thrillers and adventure stories, including the 1948 novel *The Heart of the Matter*.

Success in Print and on Screen Greene and his wife permanently separated in 1947 after she discovered he had a mistress, an American woman named Catherine Walston. Though his private life was troubled, Greene's career was taking flight. He wrote the screenplay for director Orson Welles's classic film noir *The Third Man*, which won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1949. Greene's affair with Walston inspired his 1950 novel *The End of the Affair* (in fact, the novel was dedicated to her). This acclaimed work was adapted for film in 1955 and again in 1999.

Prescient Novels of International Intrigue World travel was an integral part of Greene's life and work. His impressions and experiences during his trips, recorded in his nonfiction, contributed to the authenticity of detail and setting in his novels. Greene traveled to Cuba, the Belgian Congo, Russia, Brazil, Tunisia, Romania, East Germany, and Haiti.

Greene's increasingly international political enthusiasms provided the background to many of his postwar novels, from *The Quiet American* (1955), set in Vietnam, to *The Human Factor* (1978), which explains Cold War espionage. *The Quiet American*, in particular, offers a realistic picture of how American involvement in the French war to retain control over what was at the time the French colony of Indochina (and what is now called Vietnam) might eventually lead to a full-scale American military commitment in the region. Indeed it did: within ten years America found itself increasingly involved in what became the Vietnam War.

Greene's 1958 novel *Our Man in Havana* is a comic spy story about British intelligence agents working to uncover information on a secret Cuban military installation. The novel seems in some ways to predict the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

A Citizen of the World Dies in Switzerland In the 1960s and 1970s Greene's popularity continued to grow with the success of such works of fiction as *The Comedians* (1966), *Travels with My Aunt: A Novel* (1969), and *The Honorary Consul* (1973). Although he also produced two volumes of memoirs, *A Sort of Life* in 1971 and *Ways of Escape* in 1980, Greene undertook no further travel narratives as such, but he did write one extended "biography-travel book escapist yarn memoir," as J. D. Reed, the reviewer for *Time* magazine, jokingly called it. Published in 1984, *Getting to Know the General*, Greene's account of his friendship with Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos, once again took Greene to the borderland between privilege and squalor, and idealism and cynicism that he had encountered in West Africa and Mexico.

Greene died in Vevey, Switzerland, on April 3, 1991.

Works in Literary Context

Greene's work is as paradoxical as the man himself. He is repeatedly ranked among the great serious novelists of the twentieth century, yet his books have had enormous success in mass culture as well. He is one of the twentieth-century novelists most frequently and successfully adapted for film. Yet, in spite of its modern cinematic nature, his prose owes virtually nothing to the modern and the experimental, and in fact has more in common with the best nineteenth-century models. Greene more than any modern writer has mixed genres, so that his "entertainments" often seem relatively serious and his religious and political books sometimes resemble spy or mystery stories.

The Thoughtful Thriller Greene frequently wrote what might be termed "thoughtful thrillers." While *The Quiet American*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The Human Factor* are all gripping in their various ways, they also are all thought-provoking, prompting readers to consider more deeply the meanings and dynamics of international politics, and the intersections between the personal and the political. The reader of Greene's political thrillers may leave satisfied that the roller-coaster of espionage and drama has arrived at a safe conclusion (sometimes), but he or she also leaves more concerned than ever about the state of the world itself. What, Greene challenges us to ask long after we have put down the book, is *really* going on—around us and within us?

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Greene's novels has been favorable, with several exceptions. Some critics fault Greene's prose style for not developing beyond straightforward journalism, for avoiding the experimental modes of twentieth-century literature. Other naysayers argue that Greene's characters are little more than two-dimensional vehicles for Greene's Catholic ideology. Most commentators, however, would agree with Richard Hoggart's assessment: "In Greene's novels we do not 'explore experience'; we meet Graham Greene. We enter continual reservations about what is being done to experience, but we find the novels up to a point arresting because they are forceful, melodramatic presentations of an obsessed and imaginative personality." When he died in 1991, Greene was eulogized widely as one of the most important novelists of the twentieth century.

The Quiet American Responses to *The Quiet American* have frequently focused on the 1958 Joseph Mankiewicz film adaptation, an important cinematic effort, but also limited because Cold War politics had prevented the filmmaker from fully following Greene's critical attitudes toward United States involvement in Vietnam. For instance, Kevin Lewis notes that "although the 1958 film is artistically compromised, full of evasions and half-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Greene's protagonists typically struggle to emerge from the darkness of human suffering into the light of redemption. This redemption is usually preceded by an instance of *felix culpa*—the "fortunate fall" that strips the characters of human pride, enabling them to perceive God's grace. Here are some other works that consider the theme of the fortunate fall:

Paradise Lost (1667), an epic poem by John Milton. This work, Milton's effort to "justify the works of God to man," retells the biblical story of Adam and Eve's temptation by Satan and subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The Marble Faun (1860), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This novel is an unusual romance that explores the idea of guilt and the Fall of Man by focusing on the transformations of four characters living in Italy.

The Fortunate Fall (1996), a science-fiction novel by Raphael Carter. This novel deals with the consequences of a highly computerized and networked society.

truths, it is fascinating as a barometer of liberal American political opinion during the height of the Cold War." In a similar vein, film critic Paula Willoquet-Maricondi considers the film adaptation's influence on later Hollywood treatments of Vietnam, suggesting that in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), for example, "We are taken back to the origins of American involvement in Vietnam evoked in *The Quiet American* and thus to the myths that motivated that involvement." For all that, some critics do still focus their attentions on the book itself—even then, though, the tendency is to treat it as a sort of history-prophecy combination, even more than as a piece of literature. In the words of Peter McInerny, "Readers have recognized that the novel is a visionary or proleptic history of what would happen to Americans in Vietnam. 'He had always understood what was going to happen there,' Gloria Emerson writes in her account of an interview with Greene, 'and in that small and quiet novel, told us nearly everything.'"

Whatever his ultimate ranking as an artist, Greene will surely be remembered as one of the most articulate spokesmen of his time. Greene has called his method journalistic, but he has been a journalist of political motive and religious doubt, of alienation and commitment, recording the lives of both the underground agent and the teenage tough. His work, a history of our paradoxical and turbulent times, fathers the principle of moral uncertainty that underlies so much of modern spy and political fiction: the individual in conflict with himself.

Responses to Literature

1. Greene explored the borders between the European world and the world of its former colonies, exploring realms that had been brought closer together during his lifetime. With the Internet and e-mail, these worlds are even closer today, and travel to distant locations can be accomplished while maintaining much greater contact with the world back home. Do you think the kinds of experiences Greene's characters had would be different in today's world? Are the kinds of novels and travel books that Greene wrote a relic of the past, or is there a place for this kind of writing in today's world?
2. Greene has been criticized for using his writings to further Catholic ideology. Does Catholicism play a central role in his works? If so, does it make them less or more worthy of study and reflection, or does it have no effect? Why?
3. Greene wrote about the modern world in prose that was neither modern nor experimental and has been likened to the style of nineteenth-century writers. What are the strengths of this choice of prose style, and what aspects of modern life was Greene unable to convey adequately because he chose to use a style borrowed from a previous century?
4. Much of Greene's work was based on his personal travels to exotic and faraway lands, but he was also able to turn his journeys closer to home into widely read travel essays. Write an essay about one of your own journeys, even one that did not take you far from home.

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Nicolás Guillén

BORN: 1902, Camaguey, Cuba

DIED: 1989, Havana, Cuba

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Motifs of Son (1930)

Songoro Cosongo (1931)

West Indies Ltd. (1934)

The Dove of Popular Flight (1958)

I Have (1964)

Overview

Nicolás Guillén was a significant Latin American poet of the twentieth century. He was one of the first writers to affirm and celebrate the black Cuban (or Afro-Cuban) experience, beginning with his celebrated and controversial *Motifs of Son* (1930). Guillén chronicled the turbulent history of his native land from a Marxist perspective, addressing what he perceived to be the injustices of imperialism, capitalism, and racism. He came to be regarded as Cuba's national poet, and was recognized as such by the nation's leader, Fidel Castro, in 1961. His work as an essayist and journalist also won him acclaim.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Political Beginnings Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén was born in Camaguey, Cuba, on July 10, 1902—just seven weeks after Cuba achieved its independence from Spain. He was the eldest of six children; his parents were both of mixed African and Spanish ancestry. His father, a newspaper editor, senator, and leader of the Liberal Party, was assassinated by soldiers in 1917 during an electoral conflict between Liberals and Conservatives. This loss profoundly affected Guillén's political outlook and creative writing.

The Son Cubano Guillén began writing poems in 1916, and his work first appeared in print three years later. Printing, which he had learned as a hobby from his father, became the means by which he supported his needy family. His secondary education had to be undertaken at night. In 1920, he left the provinces to study in the University of Havana's School of Law. Soon afterward, pressing financial need forced him to return to Camaguey and to his printing work. He became a journalist and editor of the newspaper *El Camagueyano*, founded a literary journal, and participated in the city's cultural institutions.

In 1926 Guillén decided to accept again the challenge of the capital city, where, thanks to a friend of his



Nicolás Guillén (right) receiving the Stalin Peace Prize Guillén, Nicolás, photograph. AP Images.

late father, he secured a job as a typist in the Ministry of the Interior. He began writing poetry again in 1927, and was invited to contribute to a newspaper supplement highlighting the cultural achievements of Cuba's black population. This writing developed into his first important collection, *Motifs of Son* (1930).

The *son cubano*, a sensual Afro-Cuban dance rhythm, inspired Guillén to open a literary window on the reality of the black presence in Cuba. He simulated African rhythms in his verse, and he used black dialect and speech patterns. These were departures from his earlier poetic style and from European traditions that treated blacks as an exotic Other. The *son* became a vehicle to convey the indignation of Havana's poor blacks and their struggle against oppression and injustice, which connected back to slave rebellions and the previous generation's quest for national independence.

Deepening Social Consciousness Guillén expanded his focus in his next publication, *Songoro Cosongo* (1931). In this volume he emphasized the importance of mulatto culture in Cuban history, striving to reflect Cuba's true history and racial composition. The title is an example of the nonsense phrases Guillén uses to turn his poetry into syncopated rhythms reflecting the music of the people. *Songoro Cosongo* earned its author a worldwide reputation; many call it his masterwork.

After the fall of the corrupt government headed by Gerardo Machado in 1933 and the increasing U.S. presence in Cuba, Guillén's poetry grew overtly militant. *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), depicts in bitterly satirical tones the cruel and exploitative history of slavery, Spanish colonialism, and American imperialism in the West Indies. The verses describe the Caribbean as a factory profitably exploited by foreign nations. In 1936, under the new regime of Fulgencio Batista, Guillén was arrested and briefly jailed with other editors of the journal *Mediodía*.

Now a Communist Party member, the poet's commitment to social change grew in 1937, when he traveled to Spain to cover the civil war for *Mediodía* and to participate in an international antifascist writers' conference. Before departing for Europe, he wrote a long elegy called *Spain: A Poem in Four Anguishes and a Hope* (1937). In another volume of poetry released that year, *Songs for Soldiers and Sonnets for Tourists*, Guillén biting satirizes both types of invasion, by soldiers and by tourists, that Cuban society was enduring.

Exile and Revolution Guillén spent much of the next two decades abroad, traveling around Europe and Latin America as a lecturer and journalist. His first volume available in English, *Cuba Libre* (1948), was translated by his friend, the iconic American poet Langston Hughes. After an uprising, led by Fidel Castro, was

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Guillén's famous contemporaries include:

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine writer whose works were banned in Cuba under Castro.

Langston Hughes (1902–1967): American poet of the Harlem Renaissance; a friend and English translator of Guillén.

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): Cuban novelist, literary theorist, and scholar of Cuban music.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet and communist diplomat.

Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001): Senegalese poet, developer of the theory of Negritude, and President of Senegal from 1960 to 1980.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Cuban revolutionary leader and head of state from 1959 to 2008.

suppressed in 1953, the Batista dictatorship denied Guillén permission to return to Cuba. He spent several years in unhappy exile in Paris. He wrote a volume of protest poems against the regime, *The Dove of Popular Flight* (1958), and a work of *Elegies* (1958) mourning the loss of friends and victims of political repression.

The triumph of the Cuban revolution in early 1959 immediately brought Guillén back to his homeland, where he enthusiastically embraced the cause. There his first public reading, at the invitation of Che Guevara, was to the recently victorious rebel soldiers. Guillén readily took on the role of poet laureate of the revolution. He helped found the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) and headed it for more than twenty-five years. His 1964 verse collection *I Have* joyfully celebrates the flight of Batista, the Cuban victory over the American-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs, and the nation's abolition of racial and economic discrimination.

Among Guillén's later works, the most notable are *The Great Zoo* (1967), a poetic visit to a metaphorical zoo containing some of the world's curious and beautiful natural, social, and metaphysical phenomena; *Hasty Prose, 1929–1972* (1972), a three-volume collection of his journalism; and *The Daily Diary* (1972), which combines narrative, journalistic, and poetic arts in a parody of the Cuban press of times past.

In 1981, Guillén garnered Cuba's highest honor, the Order of José Martí. In his later years, he became a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. He died in 1989 after a long illness; the Cuban people mourned as his body lay in state in Havana's Revolution Square.

Works in Literary Context

Guillén frequently refers to the works of other poets as sources of reinforcement and debate. Among his influences are major Spanish and Latin American poets of the nineteenth century, such as Gustavo Adolfo Becquer, Ruben Dario, and the hero of Cuba's independence movement, José Martí. Guillén's reliance on "nonsensical" phrases and imagery in his early work, and his occasional use of the ballad form, show the influence of the acclaimed Spanish poet Federico García Lorca.

Afro-Cuban Synthesis Nicolás Guillén strove to capture the everyday reality and social complexity of Cuba. Combining European and African elements, Guillén developed a "mulatto" or "mestizo" poetry, a Caribbean poetic mold that is musical and revolutionary. His synthesis of traditional Spanish metric forms with Afro-Cuban rhythms and folklore uniquely captures the cultural flavor of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, critics have noted. He was also credited with capturing the genuine dialect and speech patterns of Cuban blacks, which he blended with onomatopoeic African words to create a unique language in which sound replaces semantic meaning. Some poems in *Songoro Cosongo* are abstract word-paintings, carefully crafted in rhyme, meter, and tone, but with no meaning other than rhythm and symbolic suggestion.

Love and Indignation Themes of protest against social injustice are a constant in the writing of Guillén. In melancholy or caustically satirical tones, a pronounced indignation shines through. From his earliest work, he gave poetic voice to the lives of poverty and pathos behind the picturesque facade of Havana's black slum dwellers. He frequently invokes the historical memory of slavery, which lasted in Cuba for more than three and a half centuries. His poems, and his nonfiction, place issues of race in the context of the economic imperialism he saw as draining the lifeblood from Cuba. Guillén starkly illuminates the contradiction between harsh socioeconomic circumstances and the universal aspirations for security, solidarity, and love.

National Institution Two decades since his death, Guillén remains Cuba's most celebrated literary figure. Along with the Puerto Rican poet Luis Pales Matos, he was the leading practitioner of *poesia negra* ("black poetry"), which became an influential cultural genre for decades. The forthright social criticism in works such as *West Indies Ltd.* contributed to a tradition of political art and literature in Cuba that goes back to Martí. As the poetic spokesman for the Cuban revolution, and long-time leader of the writers' union, he became a venerable institution in his home country, and inspired and helped many in the younger generation.

Works in Critical Context

With his *Motifs of Son*, Nicolás Guillén brought a burst of energy to the artistic world of Havana. “The stir these poems provoked,” literary scholar Vera Kutzinski writes, “remains unparalleled in Cuban literary history: While their reception was largely enthusiastic, some critics were also disturbed by the aesthetic and social implications of Guillén’s literary use of the *son*.” Poems like “*Negro Bembon*” (translated by Langston Hughes as “Thick-Lipped Cullud Boy”) prompted some readers to accuse Guillén of promoting negative images of black Cubans. Nevertheless, the originality and infectious musicality of his first two publications, especially *Songoro Cosongo*, brought him wide acclaim.

Black or Red? With *West Indies Ltd.*, the protest element in Guillén deepened and also broadened from a racial to a social dimension. Many commentators have distinguished between his early works of *poesia negra* (black poetry) and the poems he produced after converting to communism. Some critics, whom Guillén, in his *Hasty Prose*, called “urgent and hasty,” have emphasized what they call the Afro-Cuban—playful, hypnotic, or folkloric—aspects of his poetry. Such a superficial reading can give short shrift to the sociopolitical and revolutionary focus of his work. Guillén himself rejected the term “Afro-Cuban,” pointing out that the Cuban nation is in fact “Afro-Spanish.”

Contemporary scholars have begun to focus on his work’s artistic elements, his mastery of numerous poetic genres, and his commitment to revealing the authentic voice of his people. Their appreciation of Guillén has gone beyond labeling him a black poet or a political poet. According to Kutzinski, “[Guillén’s] poetic texts are engaged in the forging of a literary tradition from the many disparate elements that constitute the cultural landscape of that region.” Alfred Melon, in his contribution to *Tres ensayos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (Three Essays on Nicolas Guillén, 1980), shares this assessment, naming Guillén a “poet of synthesis.”

A Nation’s Poet After the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power, Nicolás Guillén came to be regarded as Cuba’s national poet. Other countries were equally appreciative. Like Pablo Neruda, he was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union. Literary critics and fellow writers in many countries nominated him for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His poetry, much of which has been set to music, is sung and recited by people worldwide and has been translated into more than thirty languages.

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library or the Internet, find a recording of *son cubano* music. What do you hear in the music that helps you appreciate Guillén’s *Motifs of Son*? What elements can you identify that Guillén incorporated into his work?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Nicolás Guillén gave voice to the black contribution to Cuban life in his poetry. The following works all represent the African voice in twentieth-century poetry and popular culture.

Drumbeats of Kinkiness and Blackness (1937), a poetry collection by Luis Pales Matos. The most well-known volume of poetry by the acknowledged cocreator, along with Guillén, of the Latin American *negrismo* movement.

Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in French (1948), a poetry anthology edited by Leopold Senghor. This collection was a breakthrough for the French-speaking *negritude* movement, founded by Senghor and Aime Cesaire in Paris.

Black Orpheus (1959), a film directed by Marcel Camus, from a play by Vinicius de Moraes. This Cannes Film Festival winner sets the Greek myth of Orpheus in Rio de Janeiro during the celebration known as Carnaval.

Zombie (1977), an album by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Afrika 70. Fela Kuti, the Nigerian pop music star and so-called “black president,” aroused the wrath of his government with this scathing attack on the misuse of military authority.

2. Some critics thought Guillén’s Afro-Cuban poems contained words and images that demeaned black Cubans. Based on your reading, do you agree? Why or why not? Provide examples from the author’s work to support your view.
3. Compare and contrast Guillén’s early poems to the poetry of Langston Hughes, who translated Guillén’s work into English. Was Hughes similarly inspired by music?
4. After the triumph of Fidel Castro’s insurgency in 1959, Guillén went from being a revolutionary poet to a poet celebrating and defending a revolution. What differences of tone and substance do you detect between his earlier and later writing?

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H-J

Thomas Hardy

BORN: 1840, Dorset, England

DIED: 1928, Dorset, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874)

Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891)

Jude the Obscure (1896)

Overview

The works of the English novelist, poet, and dramatist Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) unite the Victorian and modern eras. His work revealed the strains that widespread industrialization and urbanization placed on traditional English life. Major social changes took place during Hardy's life. When he was a young man, England still had a largely agricultural economy and Queen Victoria presided over an ever-expanding worldwide empire. By the time he died, the forces of modernization had changed England forever.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years During a Period of Rapid Industrialization in England Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, England, which later would form part of the “Wessex” of his novels and poems. During his early years, Hardy witnessed the changing of his landscape and rural community brought on by the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution had begun at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was ongoing through the beginning of the twentieth century. Populations increasingly shifted from the country to the cities. Railroads linked towns and villages that were once remote to major urban cen-

ters. And with new mobility and new economic pressure, people faced new social issues, too, including a sharp spike in prostitution rates and infamous abuses of child labor in factories and mines

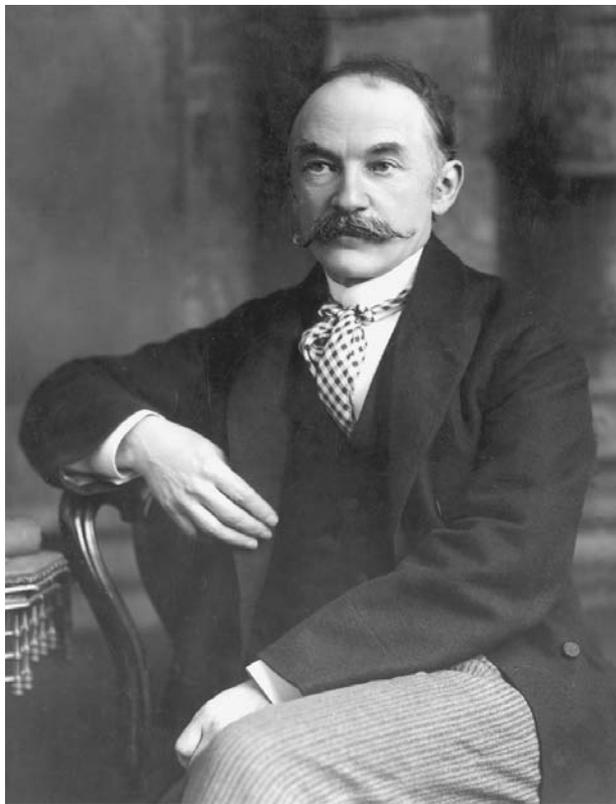
After attending local schools, Hardy was apprenticed in 1856 to John Hicks, an architect in Dorchester. During his time as apprentice architect, Hardy read many of the influential works of the era, such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), which was published when Hardy was nineteen. By the time he was twenty, Hardy had abandoned religion after being convinced of the intellectual truth of a godless universe.

Early Writing Experience: Failures, Then Success

In 1862 Hardy began to write poems but was unable to get them published. Eventually, he accepted that he must become a novelist to succeed as an author. The novelist's profession had by this time become well paid and well regarded. Hardy wrote his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, in 1867, but was advised not to publish it. His next novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), was published but unsuccessful. On March 7, 1870, he met Emma Lavinia Gifford, with whom he fell in love. In spite of his continuing lack of success with literature, he decided to continue with it, hoping eventually to make enough money to enable him to marry Emma.

Hardy was paid thirty pounds for his next novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). The following year it was published in New York by Holt and Williams. The book was well received, and he was asked to write a novel for serialization in a magazine. In September 1872 *A Pair of Blue Eyes* began to appear, which records Hardy's courtship with Gifford.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), also serialized, was a financial and critical success, allowing Hardy to give up architecture and marry Emma in 1874. *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) also appeared as a serial but was not as successful. It did not have the country setting of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which his audience had been previously responsive to. Hardy began to feel a sense of



Thomas Hardy Downey / Getty Images

discontent as a novelist because his real desire was to succeed as a poet. He preferred his poetry to his prose and considered his novels to be merely a way to earn a living.

Mid-Career Work His next novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878), received mixed attention. The novel's theme of the collision of Old World and New World, of rural and modern, allowed Hardy to explore his growing sense that humans are driven by impulses that are not under rational control. Some reviewers praised the graphic descriptions, but others found Hardy's writing strained and pretentious.

The Trumpet-Major (1880), set in the Napoleonic period, represents Hardy's attempt at historical fiction. It was followed by *A Laodicean* (1881), which Hardy dictated to his wife while he was ill. In September 1881, while that novel was still running its course, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* invited Hardy to write a serial for his magazine. The result was *Two on a Tower* (1882).

Later Fiction and Controversy over "Immoral" Content During this time, Hardy decided to return to his native Dorset for good. This move initiated a major period of Hardy's creative life as a novelist. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), his next novel, presents Hardy's belief that "character is fate." Heralded as a turning point

in the writer's career, primarily for the skill with which he presents his male protagonist, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is further acclaimed as a pivotal work in the development of the English novel, demonstrating that the genre could present a significant psychological history and still serve as an important social document.

Hardy's next novel, *The Woodlanders* (1887), a traditional pastoral, actually ends on a happy note. The same cannot be said, however, for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), in which an innocent country girl falls victim to Victorian social hypocrisy.

The *Well-Beloved* (1892) is thin by comparison. Hardy described it in a letter to his American publishers as "short and slight, and written entirely with a view to serial publication." It was followed in 1896 by what would be his final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, which follows the life and early death of Jude Fawley. More than any of Hardy's other novels, *Jude the Obscure* was met with savage critical attacks, mainly for what was perceived as immoral content. Despite the controversy it inspired immediately after publication, the novel was eventually widely translated and recognized as a masterpiece before Hardy's death.

Apart from his fourteen novels, Hardy was a prolific writer of short stories, most of which were collected in four volumes. They were written for magazine publication and are of uneven quality. Most were written in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Return to Poetry After 1896, Hardy returned to his first love: poetry. Hardy the poet is best known for verses that borrow from the tradition of the ballad. *Wessex Poems* appeared in 1898. Later work encompassed everything from the monumental drama "The Dynasts" to simpler and even joyful poems celebrating nature and the moment of being, such as "The Darkling Thrush."

After declining the offer of a knighthood, in 1910 Hardy accepted the Order of Merit—the highest honor that can be accorded to an English author. Two years later his wife died. Filled with remorse over the fact that their marriage had not been better, Hardy wrote several poems about their relationship. In 1914, Hardy married again, this time to teacher and children's book author Florence Emily Dugdale, a woman forty years his junior. From 1920 to 1927, Hardy worked on his autobiography, which, when it appeared, was disguised as being the work of his wife. He died on January 11, 1928. While he requested that he be buried next to his first wife, that wish was only partly granted. Hardy's body was interred in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, in London, while his heart was buried in his first wife's grave.

Works in Literary Context

Strongly identifying with the county of Dorset, Hardy saw himself as a successor to the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes, who had been a friend and mentor. Author William Rutland cites the Bible, the Romantic

poets—especially Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and William Wordsworth—and Barnes as early influences on Hardy. Hardy also turned to the classics, reading Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, whose recurring theme was “call no man happy while he lives.” In later years, scores of younger authors, including William Butler Yeats, Siegfried Sassoon, and Virginia Woolf, visited Hardy. The poet and novelist also discussed poetry with modernist poet Ezra Pound.

Classic Tragedy *Return of the Native* borrows the structural pattern of a Greek tragedy and follows the five-part division of a Shakespeare tragedy. The sense of place is intensified by the numerous references to local folk customs. The character of Eustacia has been compared to Emma Bovary, though Hardy claimed that he had not read Flaubert’s 1856 novel at this time.

Shakespearean Tragedy As with *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* invites comparisons to Shakespearean tragedy, especially *King Lear*. A parallel with the Old Testament story of Saul and David has also been suggested. The professional reviewers were disappointingly unappreciative, but three writers all praised it privately—novelists George Gissing and Robert Louis Stevenson in letters to Hardy, and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in a letter to Robert Bridges, fellow poet and later poet laureate of England.

Works in Critical Context

Early critics viewed Hardy as a consummate realist, while later evaluations by such critics as Albert J. Guerard suggest that he may be recognized as a predecessor of antirealist trends in twentieth-century fiction. For the integrity of his moral and philosophical views and for the imaginative achievement in creating the world of Wessex, Hardy continues to receive undiminished acclaim from critics, scholars, and the reading public.

Far from the Madding Crowd Author Dale Kramer calls *Far from the Madding Crowd* “the non-tragic predecessor” to Hardy’s later novels. The story ends happily, although the darker side of life is never far away. Kramer declares that this situation is based on the idea of dichotomy: “The assumption of the aesthetic in the novel is that any and all reactions to situations will be between two extremes, or on one of two extremes.” Hardy’s skill in describing the countryside, the farms, and the setting of the novel is emphasized by author Joseph W. Beach: “[W]e know by evidence of all our senses that we are dealing here with ‘substantial things.’”

Tess of the d’Urbervilles Critics of Hardy’s day have been joined by their modern counterparts in citing *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as the culminating point in Hardy’s efforts at creating a modern form of tragedy. Many consider it Hardy’s greatest novel.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hardy’s famous contemporaries include:

- George Eliot** (1819–1880): Pen name of Mary Ann Evans, English novelist. Eliot was a leading realist writer.
- Émile Zola** (1840–1902): French novelist and playwright; leader of the literary school of naturalism.
- Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900): German philosopher who criticized religion. Nietzsche is best known for announcing that “God is dead.”
- Paul Gauguin** (1848–1903): Leading Primitivist painter. Gauguin moved to Polynesia and painted local scenes using bold colors and simple lines.
- Olive Schreiner** (1855–1920): White South African novelist and early feminist. Schreiner lived in London in the 1880s and wrote about prostitution and birth control.

Author Byron Caminero-Santangelo writes, “During the second half of the nineteenth century, much of the British intellectual and scientific community believed that ethical and social progress was linked with the natural process of evolution. Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer all believed that ethics and values could be understood and formulated using the knowledge they had of the natural, material world. . . . In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Hardy . . . severs the link between ethics and nature, but he hardly portrays British society as ethical, kind, or just. In *Tess*, society, technology, and law all contribute to the harshness of the ‘cosmic process.’ In particular, the novel exposes the way that a patriarchal society uses a ‘natural’ discourse to oppress women. Thus, *Tess* challenges the linking of the ethical and the natural as well as the social structures which are validated by this link.” He continues, “For Hardy, a humane ethical system could not be grounded in nature because nature itself is harsh and ‘cruel,’ and it could not be rooted in religion because he does not posit the possibility of a just deity.”

Jude the Obscure Of *Jude the Obscure*, author David Grylls writes, “It is true that the book’s hero tries hopelessly to harmonise the dual demands of his nature; true, too, that he is trapped between two contrasting women, spiritual Sue and fleshly Arabella. But behind this theme lies something even larger—what Hardy called ‘the tragedy of unfulfilled aims.’ *Jude the Obscure* is about the pain of disappointment—frustration, disillusion, loss.”

Grylls continues: “[T]he book also mounts an onslaught on marriage. In this it has affinities with the contemporary New Woman novels, which questioned marriage and urged ‘free union’ . . . underlying such gleefully grim ridicule is a serious critique of monogamous

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

With the birth of modern scientific inquiry, the Victorians required a radical readjustment to new concepts of space as well as time. Not only had the earth been shown to be immensely more ancient than had previously been believed, the discoveries of nineteenth-century astronomy revealed a universe of boundless space. Here are some other works that deal with societal change:

Where the Air Is Clear (1958), a novel by Carlos Fuentes.

This novel employs a tone of bitter and violent protest and describes many grave social problems in contemporary Mexico City.

The Vortex (1924), a novel by José Eustacio Rivera. This was the first novel written by a Colombian to offer realistic descriptions of Colombian cowherders of the plains and jungle rubber workers.

Les Misérables (1862), a novel by Victor Hugo. Hugo paints a vivid picture of Paris's seamier side while discussing the causes and results of revolution, the moral redemption of its main character, an ex-convict, and the moral redemption of a nation through revolution.

The Faerie Queene (1590), an epic poem by Edmund Spenser. This epic poem portrays the England of Spenser's dreams at a time when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne and there was no heir to the crown.

Dragon's Teeth (1942), a novel by Upton Sinclair. This novel explores the rise of Nazism and won Sinclair the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for Literature.

morality—the belief that all sexual relations outside marriage must automatically be condemned, all inside sanctioned and approved. This belief, or the pressure it exerts, is responsible for virtually every disaster.”

Responses to Literature

1. Thomas Hardy is known mainly as a novelist, but he considered his poetry better than his novels. After reading a selection of Hardy's prose and poetry, what is your opinion? Was he a better poet than novelist? Write a paper stating your position, using examples from the novels and poems to support your points.
2. Hardy shocked his readers by writing about such things as sexual relationships outside of marriage. Hip-hop artists today shock some people by writing about violence, drug use, and crime. One hundred years from now, do you think society will have changed so that those topics are no longer considered shocking?
3. How do you interpret the end of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*? Does Hardy have Tess end tragically because society demanded that fallen women be “punished”? Or is the ending an indictment of Victorian society? What would have to change in the novel for Tess to find happiness?
4. Readers interested in works that bear a kinship to Hardy's should try the works of D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930). Lawrence, like Hardy, is considered a realist who looked fearlessly at changing terms of the most intimate human relationships. His major novels include: *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920).

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Jaroslav Hašek

BORN: 1883, Prague, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic)

DIED: 1923, Lipnice, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War (1923)



Jaroslav Hašek Jaroslav Hasek, 1904, photograph. Courtesy of Richard Hasek. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Czech writer and humorist Jaroslav Hašek became internationally known for his novel *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (1923). He was also the author of approximately fifteen hundred stories, sketches, and newspaper columns; in addition, he wrote plays for cabarets. Hašek's work was closely linked to his unconventional lifestyle, which became the subject of many stories and legends that Hašek himself helped to create. In his best works, the spontaneity of his storytelling and overall ironic detachment indicate his belief in unpretentiousness and tolerance.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Tumultuous Early Life Hašek was born on April 30, 1883, in Prague, in what is now the Czech Republic. Both his father, Josef Hašek, a mathematics teacher and bank official, and his mother, Kateřina (née Jaresová), came from south Bohemian families of farming stock.

They lived in Prague under precarious circumstances, moving often because of Josef Hašek's alcoholism and financial troubles. Hašek attended secondary school, but left in 1898 after experiencing academic difficulties and began working in a pharmacist's shop.

First Publications From 1899 to 1902, he studied at the Commercial Academy on Resselova Street, and, after his final examinations, he worked in the Slavia Bank. A year later, however, he gave up that job and set off on a journey through Slovakia, Hungary, the Balkans, and Galicia. In the next few years, he visited such places as Bavaria, Switzerland, and Austria and often traveled around Bohemia. He had already begun writing when he was still a student, and his first efforts had been published in newspapers and magazines. These were chiefly amusing accounts of his travels and short literary essays inspired by his roaming through Moravia, Slovakia, and Poland. Gradually, his studies of everyday life and original portraits of simple people became realistic rather than romantically charming, and his extravagant humor was already a signature element.

Break with Modernists At the beginning of the century, Czech cultural life was profiting from the modernist influences of the 1890s. Hašek counted himself one of the rising generation that stressed individual skepticism and revolt against convention. Reacting against aesthetic decadence and symbolism, they turned their attention directly to their own experiences in their daily lives. They tended to take up anarchic attitudes and to write in a loose, popular, mocking style. Hašek, however, was by nature cynical and anti-literary establishment, and he soon broke away from contemporary literary movements.

For him, writing was a mere job. He wrote mainly for amusement—his own and the public's. Even his first book, *Cries of May, and Other Verse* (1903), jointly written with Ladislav Hájek Domazlický, was a parody, shattering the sentimental delusions of poets and juxtaposing them with the unattractiveness of ordinary life and the contrasts between rich and poor. The activities and the naïveté of writers and artists—including himself—often became the targets of Hašek's mockery. Hašek later only rarely wrote satirical verse, such as *Kalamajka* (1913), which takes its title from the name of an old Czech dance.

Military Life during World War I World War I soon broke out, greatly affecting Hašek's life. The war began in 1914 when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. At the time, Prague and Bohemia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as was much of what would later become Czechoslovakia. Because of entangling diplomatic alliances, what could have been a local conflict became a massive war engulfing much of Europe and territories worldwide. Austria-Hungary was allied with Germany and Turkey against Russia, Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hašek's famous contemporaries include:

James Joyce (1882–1941): The Irish author whose novel *Ulysses* (1922) was initially banned because of its sexual content.

Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931): The Lebanese author whose *The Prophet* (1923), a collection of poetic essays, is still extremely popular.

Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967): An influential Chinese essayist and translator who rendered many myths and fictional writings into vernacular Chinese. He published a translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold-Bug" in 1905.

Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919): A Mexican rebel, Zapata created and led the Liberation Army of the South during the Mexican Revolution.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, he served in office from 1933 until his death in 1945.

In February 1915, Hašek joined the Ninety-first Infantry Regiment of the Austro-Hungarian Army in České Budejovice. In September, he was taken prisoner by the Russians and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Dárnice, near Kiev, and then to Totskoye, near Buzuluk, where he survived a typhoid (a bacterial disease) epidemic. In the spring of 1916, Hašek enlisted in the Czech Foreign Legion, fighting against Austria on the side of the Russians.

Wartime Writing Efforts In the legion, Hašek worked as a typist and was secretary to the regimental committee. He also wrote humorous articles and reports for the magazine *Czecho-Slav*, in which he supported the fight for an independent state for Czech and Slovak territories then controlled by other countries. In 1917, he was involved in the battle of Zborov (the last Russian offensive of the war), and his valorous conduct was mentioned in dispatches. After the retreat to the Ukraine, however, he came into conflict with his superiors when he criticized the small-mindedness and the overcautious attitude of the Czech National Council in Russia and the leadership of the legion.

Continued Radical Military Service After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which saw the Russian monarchy removed in favor of what became the Communist-controlled Soviet Union, Hašek refused to go with the legion to France, and in the subsequent chaos at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, he became involved in the attempt to establish a revolutionary council of Czech

workers and soldiers in Kiev. After that, he went to Moscow and joined the Czech Social Democrats (the Bolsheviks). He became a political activist in the Red Army, serving as a press organizer, editor of army magazines in various languages, and publicist. He organized recruitment in Samara. In 1919, he was in charge of the army printing works in Ufa.

During the five years of war and revolution the serious side of Hašek's nature revealed itself. Still impulsive and politically a radical, he gradually began to believe in the idea of social justice for which he might be able to work and live respectably. If the idea of social justice was to be put into practice, it would improve conditions even in Bohemia. Hašek, always keenly aware of the conflict between dream and reality, eventually seems to have lost this faith.

Final Years In August 1921, Hašek moved to the village of Lipnice nad Sázavou in southeastern Bohemia, which was then part of the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic. There, he worked on his novel, *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War*. He had already begun writing it in Prague, where it appeared in installments from 1921 to 1923. When his health deteriorated, he dictated the text of the novel, almost ready for publication, using his encyclopedic memory. However, he did not complete the task. He died on January 3, 1923, as a result of pneumonia and heart failure.

Works in Literary Context

Critics often compare *The Good Soldier Svejk* to the works of Rabelais and Cervantes. Like the works of these predecessors, Hašek's novel is bawdy, disrespectful, and unrelentingly ironic. In fact, some critics have called *Svejk* the most thorough attack upon bourgeois values ever written. Even though *Svejk* has been analyzed on anarchist, nationalist, and socialist grounds, his individual and ambivalent nature defies absolute categorization. Given the critical nature of *The Good Soldier Svejk* and the sprawling nature of its plot, Hašek's most famous fictional work is best understood as a picaresque satire. That is to say, Hašek makes pointed attacks on his contemporaries (satire), and the novel follows the adventures of a wanderer.

Satire The originality of *The Good Soldier Svejk* is unquestionable, as is its status as a uniquely Czech work responding to particular historical circumstances. *Svejk* is hardly just historical fiction. It is clearly satirical, and it has been compared with the satires of British writer Jonathan Swift. Similarly, in his boisterous and often obscene humor Hašek has been compared with French satirist François Rabelais. Robert Pynsent, in *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Literary Essays*, compared Hašek's attack on the Austrian war effort with that of the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus, while J. P. Stern, in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, likened *Svejk* to American writer Joseph Heller's antiwar novel *Catch-22*.

“*Svejkism*” Commonly, satire focuses on situations rather than characters. Indeed, with *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Hašek was not concerned with delving deeply into the minds of his characters, who are all lovingly sketched *types*. The crucial factor is the situation created by the juxtaposition of these types and their collective involvement in the insanity of the world war. Thus Svejk’s idiotic, literal-minded obedience to orders from his superiors is a device used by Hašek to reveal the absurdity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its military bureaucracy, and ultimately the futility of war in general. This inimitable technique of subverting a military machine through excessive zeal, whether genuine or pretended, has inspired the term “Svejkism,” familiar to most central Europeans, even those who have not read the novel.

Picaresque *The Good Soldier Svejk* also belongs to another subgenre, possibly fiction’s oldest: the picaresque novel, which relates the adventures of a wanderer. *Svejk*’s episodic plot, its depiction of a central character from the underclass, and, above all, its perspective mark it as a classic twentieth-century example of this genre. The picaresque perspective is one that exposes pretense, and in *Svejk* codes of honor receive particular scorn, as do any notions that causes are worth dying for. This perspective is limited to the current state of society—Svejk himself is only interested in self-preservation, and the narration never points to any ideological or revolutionary solution to the problems depicted.

Works in Critical Context

Most critical attention has been focused on *The Good Soldier Svejk*, primarily because only a few of his short stories have been translated into English and because of the popularity of *Svejk*. However, in both the stories and *Svejk*, critics have commented on the satire therein and regard the shorter fiction as a preparation, in style and theme, for the longer work.

The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War Despite the impressive nature of his satirical perspective, particularly in *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Hašek did not initially find favor with most Czech critics. Apart from the expected condemnations prompted by Hašek’s personal reputation, objections were raised concerning *The Good Soldier Svejk*’s vulgar expressions, allegedly obscene subject matter, invariably blasphemous treatment of religion, the crudeness of prose, and—above all—the unflattering light that the novel’s protagonist cast on the Czech national character. Those who took pride in the heroic exploits of the Czech Foreign Legion and justified World War I because it led to Czech independence did not wish to see Czechs presented as antimilitarist malingerers and saboteurs, least of all by a legion deserter.

Only the enthusiastic reception of *The Good Soldier Svejk* abroad—most notably in Germany, where Grete Reiner’s 1926 translation and subsequent theatrical versions created a genuine craze—compelled many Czech

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whatever else might be said of *The Good Soldier Svejk*, the novel is above all else an adventure novel—a novel about the travels and travails of its protagonist. Here are a few other novels and films that take place on the road:

The Crossing (1994), a novel by Cormac McCarthy. In this novel, young Billy Parham captures a wolf on his farm in New Mexico. He decides to return the wolf to Mexico, where he thinks it has come from, and in crossing over into Mexico, his life changes forever.

The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955), three novels by J. R. R. Tolkien. This trilogy of fantasy novels describes protagonist Frodo’s perilous trip across Middle-earth to Mordor and back to his home, the Shire.

Without a Paddle (2004), a film directed by Stephen Brill. In this film, three childhood friends reunite in their early thirties to travel to Oregon in search of the lost, stolen treasure of D. B. Cooper.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This defining work of the postwar Beat generation is a largely autobiographical work written as a stream-of-consciousness creation. The story is based on the spontaneous road trips taken by the author and his friends across mid-century America.

critics to reexamine Hašek’s novel. This reevaluation, completed under the Communist regime, eventually led to Hašek’s reputation as a literary master.

While *The Good Soldier Svejk* has been hailed as a masterwork, its protagonist has been the subject of a critical debate: Is he *really* the idiot he seems, or is his idiocy a mask deliberately assumed to thwart the Austrian military bureaucracy? Ample evidence exists for either point of view. The assertion that Svejk’s idiocy is a deliberately assumed mask points to a crucial issue concerning the character, the author, and the very nature of writing under an oppressive regime. Though Hašek wrote the final version of *The Good Soldier Svejk* in the relatively free atmosphere of the Czechoslovak Republic, his literary style and even his personality, as Gustav Janouch has suggested in *Jaroslav Hašek*, was formed by living under a repressive system—one that imposed censorship—and by the resulting need to mask one’s true sentiments.

Responses to Literature

1. Based on your reading of *The Good Soldier Svejk*, do you think that Svejk is the idiot he seems to be? In what ways, if at all, will the answer to this question affect your reading and enjoyment of the text? Write a paper in which you outline your opinions.

2. Read Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Crossing* after reading *The Good Soldier Svejk*. How do McCarthy and Hašek use travel differently or similarly? In other words, why do you think each chose to use travel to initiate their respective plots? Cite passages from each text to support your response in an essay.
3. Think of a trip you took in your life. What happened during this trip? In what ways did the trip affect your life—who you are, what you feel, what you believe? What interesting or bizarre people did you encounter on this trip? Write the story of this trip.
4. Hašek is largely remembered as a satirist—a person who creatively criticizes those people, practices, or sets of beliefs that he or she finds ridiculous or unjustifiable. Write a satire while keeping these questions in mind: What practice or set of beliefs do you find ridiculous or unjustifiable? How can you show that this practice or set of beliefs is ridiculous or unjustifiable? What characters would you need to create in order to demonstrate the superiority of your alternative set of beliefs or practices?

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☒ Gerhart Hauptmann

BORN: 1862, Obersalzbrunn, Silesia, Germany

DIED: 1946, Agnetendorf, Silesia, Poland

NATIONALITY: German, Polish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Before Dawn (1889)

The Weavers (1891)

The Rats (1911)



Gerhart Hauptmann Hauptmann, Gerhart, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

When dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann became the thirteenth recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912, only two of his predecessors (Rudyard Kipling in 1907 and Maurice Maeterlinck in 1911) had received this recognition at an earlier age. In his heyday during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hauptmann was one of the most prolific and most imitated German dramatists.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years of Quiet Influence Gerhart Hauptmann was born Gerhard Johann Robert Hauptmann on November 15, 1862. Hauptmann's elementary schooling, which began in his birthplace, Ober-Salzbrunn (now Szczawno-Zdrój, Poland), and continued in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), ended abruptly in 1878 as a consequence of his father's loss of the resort hotel he owned. He was sent to learn a trade in Breslau and then on to study farming with his uncle, but he soon abandoned farming and went to art school with the aim of becoming a sculptor. He traveled to Italy in 1883 and 1884.

These early years of Hauptmann's life coincide with a momentous time in the history of what is now Germany. When Hauptmann was born, modern Germany did not exist. What is now Germany was a loose confederation of

independent kingdoms. The most powerful of these was Prussia. In 1864, the newly appointed prime minister of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, waged war on Denmark, resulting in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. The war established Prussian dominance in German affairs and allowed Prussia to annex many German states. By 1871, Germany was unified, becoming a modern nation-state, and building a powerful empire that would last until the end of World War I in 1918.

Learning the Trade On May 5, 1885, Hauptmann married Marie Thienemann and moved with her to Berlin. In September they moved to Erkner, a suburb of Berlin, where Hauptmann met many of the people who would appear as characters in his plays. It was during this time his focus shifted from sculpting to drama. He encountered young writers such as Max Kretzer (later called the “Berlin Zola”); Wilhelm Bolsche, whose *The Scientific Foundations of Literature* would be one of the most important manifestos of German naturalism; and Bruno Wille, a strong advocate of the Social Democratic Party. Since 1884 Hauptmann had been taking acting lessons from Alexander Hessler, who would provide the model for the politically and artistically conservative theater director Hassenreuter in *The Rats*. This instruction, which lasted until 1886, offered Hauptmann insights into conventional modes of acting, the practical demands of the theater, and, as *The Rats* reveals, a clearly defined target against which his own first plays could be directed.

1889: A Great Year for Naturalists The year 1889 was a turning point in the development of naturalism and also in Hauptmann’s career. In Germany and abroad, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing; one of its cultural ramifications was an increasing tendency to apply scientific concepts to the study of human behavior. In literature, this produced a style called naturalism. New naturalist drama would find a home at the “Freie Bühne” (Free Stage), a club devoted to the performance of “modern” (naturalist) drama. Its first chairman was Otto Brahm, who developed the naturalist style of stage direction and production that would dominate the German theater. In August of 1889 Hauptmann’s first mature, modern play, the social drama *Before Dawn*, had been published in Berlin and had caught the attention of many literary figures there. Needing a German playwright to make his undertaking a success, Brahm premiered Hauptmann’s play on October 20, 1889. The work launched not only a series of imitations but also a frenzied conflict between conservative literary forces and the naturalists.

Continued Success Hauptmann followed up his success with *Before Dawn* with three more plays produced in rapid succession: *Das Freidensfest* (1890), *Einsame Menschen* (1891), and *Die Weber* (*The Weavers*, 1892). *The Weavers* focused on an uprising of Silesian weavers in 1842. Two later tragedies, *Fuhrmann Henschel* (1898) and *Rose Bernd* (1903), also focused on Silesian folk life.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hauptmann’s famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): Polish novelist who wrote many of his works in English, including *Heart of Darkness*.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): American novelist, essayist, and humorist whose *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is often cited as the greatest American novel ever written.

Sigmund Freud (1859–1939): Pioneering Austrian psychiatrist who founded the school of thought known as psychoanalysis.

Susanna M. Salter (1860–1961): At the age of twenty-seven, in 1887, Salter became the first female mayor after being elected in the town of Argonia, Kansas—a notable achievement at least in part because women in Kansas were only granted the right to vote a week prior to the election.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914): The assassination of this Austro-Hungarian empire’s heir-presumptive began a series of events that triggered World War I.

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925): Chinese revolutionary and political leader who is often referred to as the “Father of Modern China.”

Hauptmann divorced his first wife in 1904 and married an actress who had been his mistress. He subsequently began an affair with a young Austrian actress Ida Orlov, who would serve as inspiration for several of Hauptmann’s later characters.

Hauptmann reached the pinnacle of his career in 1911 with the production of *The Rats*. One year later he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

A Long Twilight World War I, a devastating conflict that involved all of Europe and killed tens of millions of people, engulfed Germany in 1914. Hauptmann declared himself a pacifist and continued to write, but he never regained the stature of his pre-war years even after the war ended. Hauptmann died in 1946, shortly after the end of World War II.

Works in Literary Context

Hauptmann’s naturalistic plays of the late nineteenth century established him as a major artist in modern drama. Though he produced a vast assortment of works in various genres throughout his long career, it is these early dramas on which his literary standing was founded and endures.

Naturalism Hauptmann is recognized primarily for initiating the naturalist movement in German theater

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hauptmann's play *The Weavers*, though set in the 1840s, dramatized a social injustice that persisted even when the play was staged. Other works that call attention to social injustice include:

The Grapes of Wrath (1939), a novel by John Steinbeck. Depicting the troubles facing Oklahoma farmers—as exemplified by the Joad family—during the time of the Great Depression, this novel has become a lasting portrait of a family in crisis with nowhere to turn for lasting, sustained help.

The Jungle (1906), a novel by Upton Sinclair. This text reveals the gritty underside of the meatpacking industry and was so effective in portraying these horrors that then-president Theodore Roosevelt enacted new regulations for the industry because he was so moved by the book.

Hotel Rwanda (2004), a film directed by Terry George. In this film, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide are depicted in all their brutality. Given the problems in Darfur, the film not only draws attention to the bitter tribulations that Rwandans underwent in the mid-1990s but also calls for intervention in the genocide being committed in the Sudan.

Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002), a film directed by Philip Noyce. This film—based on a true story—dramatizes the plight of Australian aboriginal peoples during the 1930s, when many children were removed from the custody of their parents in order to be educated by the state or made to work for white families.

with his first drama, *Before Dawn*. Influenced by the work of Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola, Hauptmann became his country's most prominent exponent of dramatic techniques that sought to portray human existence with extreme faithfulness, particularly focusing on the social problems of the lower classes. Naturalism is an attempt to capture in art realistic situations, characters, and behaviors without exaggeration or self-consciousness. Many contemporary naturalists in Germany during the late nineteenth century had been calling for “truth” rather than beauty, and Hauptmann's play responded to this demand.

Works in Critical Context

Though highly praised during his lifetime as an innovative force in German literature, Hauptmann is no longer widely read. Ultimately his reputation seems to have suffered because of his versatility. Some critics contend that his concern for experimentation and innovation in drama, poetry, and prose kept him from attaining mastery

in any single genre. Nonetheless, Hauptmann's naturalistic plays have generally received fair reviews from critics but have often been censored for their supposedly controversial content. His masterwork, *The Rats*, is an excellent example.

The Rats *The Rats* is the most complex and subtle play in Hauptmann's canon. Its main plot is strongly naturalistic: Frau John, a cleaning woman who lives in a rat-infested former barracks, adopts the illegitimate child of a Polish maid but convinces her husband, a bricklayer, that she has given birth to it. She is discovered despite her brother's murder of the true mother and commits suicide. After Hauptmann gained a court decision against a petty objection by the censor regarding the play, the premiere took place on January 13, 1911, in Berlin. The reaction was subdued. Even Alfred Kerr, one of the most perceptive theater critics, an exponent of naturalism, and an enthusiastic supporter of Hauptmann, had little to say about *The Rats* that was good. But five years later, when the play was performed again, another critic, Siegfried Jacobsohn, wrote in the periodical *Die Schaubühne*: “Criticism is self-criticism. Why did I flop in 1911 when confronted by *The Rats*?” In retrospect, it can be seen that the cause of the rejection in 1911 is the very “modernity” and relevance of *The Rats*—its complex intertwining of the tragic and comic and its ironic, disquieting view of human existence and social values.

Although no longer popular, Hauptmann enjoys an enduring reputation of significance. Of Hauptmann's status today literary critic Roy C. Cowen writes, “Hauptmann remains for most theater-goers and literary historians alike the outstanding representative of strongly realistic, character-oriented, socially critical plays.”

Responses to Literature

1. Hauptmann has been described as a humanitarian, and his *Before Dawn* is often cited as proof. Read this play. In what ways does Hauptmann express his humanitarian concerns in the play? Cite specific examples in your response.
2. Read *The Weavers* and Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Each of these texts deals with the problems facing workers in two specific industries. In a short essay, describe your reaction to these portrayals. Consider these questions while drafting your essay: What are the problems these workers face? Which work is more effective in making you understand and care about the subjects? Why?
3. Hauptmann's work is remarkable for his ability to portray real people in his dramas, particularly the way they speak. Think of someone you know who has a unique way of speaking, and write an imaginary conversation between yourself and that person. Try to keep in mind the words and phrases the person would use, as well as the sentence structure the

person uses when speaking (which may not be the same as “correct” written sentence structure). If the person has a distinctive way of pronouncing or emphasizing certain words, try to reflect this as well.

- Using the Internet and the library, research the “realist” tradition in American literature, a literary movement exemplified by the works of Mark Twain. Then, in a short essay, compare this movement to the naturalism movement that Hauptmann led. What were the origins, concerns, and results of each movement? Do you agree with the principles Hauptmann stood for? Why or why not?

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Václav Havel

BORN: 1936, Prague, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Drama, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Memorandum (1965)

Audience (1975)

“The Power of the Powerless” (1978)

Temptation (1985)

Living in Truth (1987)



Václav Havel Havel, Vaclav, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

A world-renowned playwright and human rights activist, Václav Havel became the president of Czechoslovakia in December of 1989, the country’s first leader following the fall of the authoritarian regime he had helped to overcome. His literary brilliance, moral authority, and political victories served to make him one of the most respected figures of the late twentieth century and led to his country being one of the first Eastern European nations to be invited into NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Privileged Childhood in Prague Václav Havel was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, to a wealthy and cultivated family. His father was a restaurant owner, real estate developer, and friend of many writers and artists, and his uncle owned Czechoslovakia’s major motion picture studio. The coming of World War II, however, with Nazi troops marching into Prague in March of 1939, shifted—though it did not destroy entirely—the family’s lifestyle. While much of Europe was in flames, Havel grew up amid the trappings of luxury, with servants, fancy cars, and elegant homes—but he also grew up in a country occupied by Nazi troops, where mass killings occurred.

After the conclusion of World War II, world-level tension increasingly took the form of animosity between Russia- and China-centered Communist regimes and the United States and Western Europe. A coup d’état in 1948 ensured that Czechoslovakia would belong to the

list of states sympathetic to—and often wholly dependent upon—the Soviet Union. The 1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia radically changed the Havels' lives. Their money and properties were confiscated, and Havel's parents had to take menial jobs. Havel and his brother were not allowed to attend high school, but after discovering a loophole in the system, Havel attended school at night for five years while working full-time during the day. His friends, like himself, wrote poetry and essays and endlessly discussed philosophical matters.

From 1957 to 1959 Havel served in the Czech army, where he helped found a regimental theater company. His experience in the army stimulated his interest in theater, and following his discharge he took a stagehand position at the avant-garde Theater on the Balustrade. The eager would-be playwright attracted the admiration of the theater's director, and he progressed swiftly from manuscript reader to literary manager to, by 1968, resident playwright. It was while at the Theater on the Balustrade that Havel met, and in 1964, married Olga Splichalova. Of working-class origin, his wife was, as Havel later said, "exactly what I needed. . . . All my life I've consulted her in everything I do. . . . She's usually first to read whatever I write." This marriage of working-class and bourgeois values symbolized perfectly the period of 1968 reforms known as the Prague Spring, when reformers in the Czechoslovak government (chief among them Alexander Dubcek) loosened restrictions on the media, on personal speech, and on travel—in effect, allowing the arts to flourish and democracy to begin to function in Czechoslovakia.

The Prague Spring Gives Way to Soviet Winter

A Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 brought an abrupt end to the cultural flowering of the "Prague Spring" and marked a watershed in Havel's life. He felt he could not remain silent about conditions under the Communist regime, especially as reconstituted in occupied Czechoslovakia, so he began his long career as a human rights activist. He ran an underground radio broadcast asking Western intellectuals to condemn the invasion and to protest the human rights abuses of the new and repressive administration of Gustav Husak. The government responded by banning the publication and performance of Havel's works and by revoking his passport. Although he was forced to take a job in a brewery, he continued to write, and his works were distributed clandestinely. He courageously refused to leave Czechoslovakia during this time. In 1975, Havel wrote an "Open Letter to Doctor Gustav Husak," decrying the state of the country as a place where people lived in fear and apathy. The "Letter" attracted much notice and put Havel at risk.

In January of 1977, hundreds of Czech intellectuals and artists, Marxists and anti-Communists alike, signed Charter 77, which protested Czechoslovakia's failure to comply with the Helsinki Agreement on human rights.

Havel took an active part in the Charter 77 movement and was elected one of its chief spokespeople. He was subsequently arrested and jailed and tried on charges of subversion. Given a fourteen-month suspended sentence, Havel was unrepentant, stating: "The truth has to be spoken loudly and collectively, regardless of the results." Arrested again in 1978 for similar activities, Havel was finally sentenced to four and a half years at hard labor. He served the sentence at a variety of prisons under arduous conditions, some of which are chronicled in his book *Letters to Olga* (1988). A severe illness resulted in his early release in March of 1983.

A Symbol of Freedom, and Its Champion From this point forward, Havel was viewed both at home and abroad as a symbol of the Czech government's repression and the Czech people's irrepressible desire for freedom. He continued his dissident activities by writing a number of significant and powerful essays, many of which are collected in *Václav Havel: Living in Truth* (1987). Highly critical of the totalitarian mind and regime while exalting the human conscience and humanistic values, the essays contain some splendid and moving passages. The government responded by tapping his telephone, refusing to let him accept literary prizes abroad, watching his movements, and shooting his dog.

In January of 1989 Havel was arrested again, following a week of protests, and was sentenced this time to serve nine months in jail. On November 19, 1989, amid growing dissatisfaction with the regime in Czechoslovakia and similar discontent throughout Eastern Europe, Havel announced the creation of the Civic Forum. Like Charter 77, a coalition of groups with various political affiliations and a common goal of nonviolent and nonpartisan solution, the forum was quickly molded by Havel and his colleagues into a responsive and effective organization. The week following the creation of the forum marked the beginning of the so-called "Velvet Revolution," in which Czechoslovakia's Communist regime collapsed like a house of cards. With almost dizzying speed, a new, democratic republic was smoothly and bloodlessly established. On December 19, Parliament unanimously elected Havel to replace the former Communist leader. To the cheering throngs that greeted him after his election, Havel said, "I promise you I will not betray your confidence. I will lead this country to free elections." On July 5, 1990, Parliament reelected an unopposed Havel as president for a two-year term, and in 1993 Parliament elected him first president of the Czech Republic, following the political division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Joining Hands with the West The positive changes in the former Soviet bloc country under Havel's leadership led to a landmark event. On July 8, 1997, NATO invited the Czech Republic, along with Poland and Hungary, to be the first Eastern European nations to become a part of the Western alliance. French president Jacques

Chirac honored Havel, comparing the playwright-turned-president to Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela.

Works in Literary Context

Dehumanization and Communist Modernity

Havel's plays are powerful condemnations of the bureaucratization and mechanization of modern Czech society and their effects on the individual. His satires depict the prevalence of cliché and official doublespeak under a totalitarian government and the resulting disintegration of meaning. His works are political theater, but they are also recognized as being much more than that. Many of Havel's works are considered absurdist black comedies because they incorporate grotesque and ludicrous elements, giving expression to humanity's fundamental discomfort in a godless universe. Many of his plays also clearly take place in Communist Czechoslovakia, and his characters' behavior is motivated by circumstances of that time and that place.

But Havel also wrote plays such as *The Memorandum* and *Temptation*, which are more like parables than explorations of real life. Sometimes they border on anti-utopian fantasy. Instead of a realistic setting, such dramas revolve around fictitious institutions like the Orwellian office in *The Memorandum*, complete with watchmen hidden in the hollow walls to keep an eye on employees through special cracks, or the scientific institute at war with society's "irrational tendencies" in *Temptation*. What goes beyond realism in these plays, actually, is not so much the setting as the plot's starting device: the introduction of Ptydepe, the artificial language for interoffice communication in *The Memorandum*, and the bureaucratic forms of idolatry of "rational science" that produce the rebellion of the protagonist in *Temptation*. Such works owe much to the literary legacy of greats like George Orwell and Samuel Beckett. In particular, though, his emphasis on nightmarish visions of bureaucratic incompetence and dominance draws from the well of fellow Prague writer and absurdist extraordinaire, Franz Kafka.

Vanek the Recurring Protagonist One deep link between Havel's realistic and parable-like plays is their shared protagonist. In almost all of Havel's plays, a single protagonist by the name of Ferdinand Vanek pops up at the center of the plot. The now legendary figure of Vanek appears first in *Audience* and then reappears in Havel's next two one-act plays, *Unveiling* and *Protest*. At the same time, the underground success of *Audience* gave rise to a one-of-a-kind literary phenomenon: a constellation of plays employing the same protagonist but written by different authors. "The Vanek plays" therefore include works written by Pavel Kohout, Pavel Landovsky, and Jiri Dienstbier, as well as of course Havel, all reprinted in *The Vanek Plays: Four Authors, One Character*.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Havel's famous contemporaries include:

Tom Stoppard (1937–): British playwright, born in Czechoslovakia. Among Stoppard's many recent plays is *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006), about the years leading up to and including Czechoslovakia's 1989 "Velvet Revolution," and dedicated to his friend Václav Havel.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): Irish playwright, a founding figure in both literary modernism and postmodernism, whose bleak dramas reveal the absurdity of life and the unavailability of simple human determination.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): South African revolutionary and president (1994–1999). Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison for his resistance to the racist apartheid government in South Africa, becoming an effective leader and an even more effective moral symbol when he became the country's first black president.

Boris Yeltsin (1931–2007): President of Russia from 1991 to 1999. Yeltsin, always a colorful and contrary political figure, was instrumental in Russia's transition away from state Communism during the 1990s.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): Russian writer and political activist. After spending time in prison for criticizing Stalin, Solzhenitsyn wrote an account of his experiences in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), which resulted in his expulsion from the Soviet Union.

The Plight of the Dissident What the Vanek characters share is a position in society. All of them can be roughly defined as dissidents in a totalitarian state or cogs in the wheels of a powerful institution. This position entails a number of consequences, the most crucial of which is the character's being part of a political and moral minority. Such characters stand opposed to a way of life that privileges blind obedience to authority, thoughtless concentration on the necessities of everyday life, and a deep-seated distrust of any protester or reformer. Vanek, therefore, is by no means a valiant knight in shining armor or a modern Robin Hood who serves the poor. Despite all the words of cautious support and solidarity that some of his acquaintances occasionally dare whisper into his ear, Vanek is hated and despised. He is hated because he "disturbs the peace" of pacified minds, and he is despised because he cannot help being a loser. The forces that he opposes are too powerful. Particularly in the wake of the Soviet crushing of the Prague Spring of 1968, authoritarian regimes behind the Iron Curtain seemed quite nearly all-powerful: One had a moral obligation to resist, but that resistance was futile.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Creative writers are often intensely aware of the power of language, and not only for its capacity to describe and open up new thoughts. Language can also hide the truth and limit the freedom of thought. Here are some works that focus not only on the power, but also on the dangers of language:

1984 (1949), a novel by George Orwell. In Orwell's not-so-imaginary world of a totalitarian dictatorship, the government invents a language called "Newspeak" designed to shut down common sense and independent thinking.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953), a novel by Ray Bradbury. Bradbury uses science fiction to satirize the ways repressive governments limit human thought by banning works of literature. The hero of the novel is a "fireman," or book burner, who starts hiding books to share with a group of underground readers.

"On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations" (1932), a decree by Joseph Stalin. This was the decree that made "Soviet Realism" the official artistic policy of the Soviet Union. Writers and artists of all kinds were to reject all forms of "decadent bourgeois art," especially anything that was abstract or impressionistic, in favor of plain-spoken texts that glorified the working class and Soviet society.

The Uses and Abuses of Words for Life Heavily influenced by theater of the absurd playwrights, Havel's early plays were clever, sometimes grim exposés of the relationship between language and thought. It is obvious that much of this sharp critique of language is directed against a totalitarian system. Havel reveals the vastly different ways in which language may be used. On the one hand, language can express the highest flights of man's intellect—his ability to reason and analyze the complexities of his physical and spiritual existence, defining a perception of truth. On the other hand, language can propagandize, conceal, and blur the reasoning process—jumbling analysis, burying the truth, and masking lies with the makeup of smooth rhetoric. The weight of an ideologically controlled bureaucracy smothers honest communication.

Language and Power Havel's work, which has influenced a generation of Czech authors after him, revolves around some common themes: the unwillingness to give up one thing for another, the refusal to adhere to a hierarchy of values, and criticism of the ways authority figures construct arguments to rationalize their lies. Many of these themes are interconnected and interrelated with one of the author's other major themes, the temptation to achieve goals through the manipulation of language. Havel shows

how this process occurs through omission, deliberate confusion, and exaggeration. The theme of language temptation extends to other types of temptation in Havel's works, including the temptation to power. Havel relies on implied shades of meaning to simultaneously mock and "tempt" his readers, taking them through a spectrum of philosophical questions about truth and falsehood, reason and rationalization, and good and evil. Beyond his fictional work, Havel has also written a number of very influential political and philosophical essays, the most important among these being perhaps his seminal "The Power of the Powerless" (1978).

Works in Critical Context

From the start, Havel's politico-philosophical essays and plays were translated into many languages. The plays, in particular, were performed and appreciated by the public in a number of countries. His earliest plays, including *The Garden Party* (1963), *The Memorandum* (1965), and *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968), were instant successes in Czechoslovakia and abroad, where they received much popular as well as critical acclaim.

Relegation to Dissident Status When approaching a play by Havel, critics often had certain preconceptions. They knew, for example, that Havel was one of the most famous dissidents under the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, that none of his plays were performed in official theaters there, and that he was harassed and imprisoned several times. Consequently, many critics have argued that as a literary figure, Havel's life and writings were so closely interwoven with the political situation in his country that they, as critics, must have been provided with a ready-made guide to the interpretation of his works. Journalists, reviewers, and academic commentators followed this obvious approach and discussed Havel's writings largely as the direct outcome of what he was observing in his society. The "dissident playwright" label stuck hard and fast to Havel's image.

Temptation Often, however, how critics responded to Havel's dissident works depended on where they were from, telling perhaps as much about the assumptions and the degree of receptivity of the critics' culture as about the plays themselves. For example, responding to a flashy but shallow production of *Temptation*, New York critics regarded the play largely as the manifesto of someone who opposes an oppressive political regime. They appreciated the author's wry insights on the broader nature of dogma. The Viennese papers, on the other hand, were mostly concerned with Havel's allegedly unsatisfactory treatment of other literary figures, such as the German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe, they complained, was put into the service of antitotalitarian criticism. The reaction of the British papers and other media was remarkably different. Brought up on William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard, the British critics were aware that "the play's the thing" and regarded the drama as an "intoxicatingly"

theatrical piece. Although they recognized that the workings of evil that was depicted sprang from a totalitarian system, they believed Havel succeeded in going beyond this and did not confine the play to that system. In Britain, critics concluded that *Temptation* was one of the great artistic adventures of its day.

Responses to Literature

1. What is “Theater of the Absurd”? Is it a fair description of Havel’s plays? What are some of the absurdist themes and situations in Havel’s works, particularly *The Memorandum*?
2. What are the pros and cons of reading Havel’s plays through the lens of his political life? What has Havel himself said about this in interviews?
3. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley once said that poets are the “unacknowledged legislators of the world.” What did Shelley mean by this? What do you think of poets and playwrights becoming political leaders, or political leaders becoming poets and playwrights? What are other examples of politicians who have become creative writers, or vice versa?
4. Read “The Power of the Powerless” and consider the arguments about freedom and responsibility Havel makes there. In your assessment, to what extent are these arguments plausible. Support your thesis with detailed analysis of the logic and rhetoric of Havel’s text.

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■ Bessie Head

BORN: 1937, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa

DIED: 1986, Botswana

NATIONALITY: Botswanan

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

When Rain Clouds Gather (1968)

Maru (1971)

A Question of Power (1973)



Bessie Head Head, Bessie, photograph. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Estate of Bessie Head.

Overview

Bessie Head explored the effects of racial and social oppression and used the theme of exile in her novels and short stories. She was of mixed race, and she experienced discrimination both in her birthplace of South Africa and in her adopted land of Botswana. Her novels, unlike many other works of protest literature, cast a distinctly female perspective on social injustice and the psychological costs of alienation. Head, however, refused to be called a feminist, insisting instead that she abhorred all oppression—racial, sexual, and political.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An African Childhood Bessie Amelia Emery was born on July 6, 1937, in a mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Her white mother, Bessie Amilia Emery, had been committed there because the father of her child was a black stable hand, whose name is now unknown. Their relationship was forbidden under South Africa's Immorality Act of 1927, which barred sexual relations between people of different races. This was one of many such rules found under the government-sponsored system of rule later known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for "separateness." Apartheid also designated certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups separated from each other as well as separated from whites.

Bessie was handed over to "Coloured," or mixed-race, foster parents, who cared for her until she was thirteen. Because her natural mother had provided money for Bessie's education, she was placed in a mission orphanage, where she earned a high school diploma and was trained to be a teacher. She taught elementary school and then wrote for the African magazine *Drum*.

Marriage and Divorce In September 1961, she married Harold Head, a journalist with whom she later had a son, Howard. Around this time she also entered the world of literature, publishing a poem and several autobiographical pieces in the *New African*, a left-wing journal that followed most of its contributors into exile later in the decade.

The Head family lived in a slum in Cape Town because apartheid laws dictated that people of different races had to live in specific districts. While living there, Head worked on a novel, *The Cardinals* (published posthumously in 1993). Her marriage broke up after a few years, and she accepted a teaching job in the British Bechuanaland Protectorate (later Botswana), because, in her words, she could no longer tolerate apartheid in South Africa. Head left South Africa with her infant son in March 1964. Because of her political affiliations and friendships with left-wing activists, however, she was

denied a passport and instead was given a canceled exit visa, depriving her of South African citizenship.

Life in Exile When the teaching job did not materialize, Head was declared a political refugee in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and was required to report to the police daily. She had no income other than a small allowance provided by the World Council of Churches and without a passport she was unable to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Head did much of her writing in a small home without electricity and sold homemade guava jam for extra money during the early years of her life in Botswana. For fifteen years, she lived as a refugee at Bamangwato Development Farm.

The Novels On the strength of *The Cardinals*, which was still unpublished, Head was offered a contract with New York publishing house Simon and Schuster to write a novel about Botswana, which became independent from Britain in 1966. The result was *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968). Head's first published novel is the story of Makhaya Maseko, a political refugee from South Africa who escapes to Botswana after serving a prison term for sabotage. *When Rain Clouds Gather* was widely acclaimed as a surprisingly mature first novel.

Head was less concerned with political or economic ideology than with moral principles, such as generosity, courtesy, and respect for the common person. For her, both white neocolonial oppression and the black nationalist backlash were impediments to African progress. With what she called in *When Rain Clouds Gather* the "hate-making political ideologies" of newly independent Africa came a new set of reactionary ideas, and she regarded people who promoted those ideologies as "pompous, bombastic fools."

During 1969–1970 Head suffered sporadic attacks of mental illness. Nevertheless, in 1971 she published her second novel, *Maru*. The theme of this novel is racism, not of whites against blacks as might be expected, but the prejudice of the Tswana people, the Botswana majority, against the Masarwas, the Bushmen or indigenous people of the Kalahari Desert. As in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head cannot unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfillment.

A Question of Power (1973) is Head's most perplexing novel and the one that has received the most attention from critics. Openly autobiographical, the novel charts the terrifying course of her mental breakdown, her recovery, and her ultimate affirmation of the values—humility, decency, generosity, and compassion—that provide the basis for Head's moral perspective in all three novels.

Head did come to love her adopted country and was fascinated by its history. In the early 1970s, Head became interested in the history of the Bamangwato people, one of Botswana's main tribes. Her oral history of the tribe, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, was commissioned but

then rejected by Penguin. The book was virtually complete by 1976 but did not appear in print for another five years. Meanwhile, a collection of stories that Head was inspired to write by her interviews with the Serowe villagers was published in 1977 as *The Collector of Treasures, and Other Botswana Village Tales*. This collection was considered for the *New Statesman's* Jock Campbell Award. The stories vividly and richly evoke the sense of a living, bustling village struggling to cope with the intrusion of new forces into the traditional social fabric and explores the social condition of women.

Global Recognition and Later Life Head gained further renown as a writer in the 1970s. She was invited to speak at a 1976 workshop at the University of Botswana alongside other notable South African writers and was invited to international writers' conferences, to which she traveled after being granted a special United Nations refugee travel document. Finally, in 1979, she was granted Botswanian citizenship and visited Europe for the first time when she took part in Berlin's Horizons '79 Africa Festival. In 1984, she traveled to Australia. Though she was hailed as one of the most important female African writers in English, Head had endured a difficult life and began to drink in her later years. Her health declined, and she contracted hepatitis. After sinking into a coma, she died in April of 1986 at the age of forty-eight.

Two volumes of Head's writings have been published posthumously: *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989) and *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990). Each collection begins with a substantial biographical introduction and ends with Head's observations about the role of storytellers in South Africa.

Works in Literary Context

African Feminism Head has been acclaimed by such internationally renowned authors as Angela Carter and Alice Walker and has served as an inspiration to female writers of Africa, and, more particularly, to the suppressed women of her native South Africa. Noting in *Black Scholar* that Head has "probably received more acclaim than any other black African woman novelist writing in English," Nancy Topping Bazin adds that Head's works "reveal a great deal about the lives of African women and about the development of feminist perspectives." According to Bazin, Head's analysis of Africa's "patriarchal system and attitudes" enabled her to make connections between the discrimination she experienced personally from racism and sexism and the root of oppression generally in the insecurity that compels one person to feel superior to another.

Old Ways Versus New Ways The theme of conflict between old and new, a recurring one in African fiction since Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is given a fresh direction by Head, notably in *When Rain Clouds*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Head's famous contemporaries include:

Lewis Nkosi (1936–): South African writer and essayist whose work explores politics, relationships, and sexuality; he has lived outside of South Africa since 1961.

Lilian Ngoyi (1911–1980): South African antiapartheid activist and orator; the first woman elected to the executive committee of the African National Congress, the antiapartheid political party, and cofounder of the Federation of South African Women.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (1936–): Controversial South African activist and politician, as well as ex-wife of former South African president Nelson Mandela. She has headed the African National Congress's (ANC) Women's League and currently sits on the ANC's National Executive Committee.

Sipho Sepamla (1932–2007): One of the leading South African "Soweto poets" that rose out of the Black Consciousness movement in the 1960s and 1970s; awarded the French *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 1985.

Mao Zedong (1893–1976): Head of the Communist Party and the People's Republic of China from its founding in 1949 until his death. He oversaw the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

Sheila Rowbotham (1943–): British feminist and writer who argues that socialist feminism is necessary because women are oppressed by economic as well as by cultural forces.

Gather. The novel diverges from other works that deal with this theme in at least two important ways: It inverts the customary story line, which focuses on the passage of the protagonist from a rural village to the bright lights of the city, and it avoids a simplistic pattern of racial conflict by allowing for the possibility of interracial cooperation and friendship.

The African Individual in Fiction Many works by African writers in the twentieth century dealt specifically with political issues facing developing nations. Head departed from this tradition. In Head's concern with women and madness in *A Question of Power* (1973), critic Charles Larson claims, she "almost single-handedly brought about the inward turning of the African novel." The novel was ranked eighth of fifteen "most influential books of the decade" by the journal *Black Scholar* in its March–April 1981 issue.

Larson credits the importance of *A Question of Power* not just to the introspection of its author, but to her exploration of subjects previously "foreign to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Head's first works focus on themes of refugeeism and racism, but in her later works she shifted the focus from an individual's struggle for dignity to helping preserve the cultural and historical heritage needed to achieve dignity. Here are some works that examine similar themes.

Emperor Shaka the Great (1979), a poem by Mazisi Kunene. An epic poem originally written in Zulu, this work tells the story of the rise of the Zulu people under the great leader Shaka.

Daughters of the Twilight (1986), a novel by Farida Karodia. A fourteen-year-old girl of Asian and "Coloured" (mixed black and white) parents tells of her life under apartheid in this novel.

Have You Seen Zandile? (1990), a play by Gcina Mhlope. In this award-winning play, a girl raised in Durban, South Africa, by her grandmother is kidnapped by her mother to live in the rural Transkei region and become a "traditional and proper" woman.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow (1997), a novel by Phaswane Mpe. This novel addresses the mixture of tradition, the black middle class, inner-city violence, and AIDS in post-apartheid Johannesburg, South Africa.

African fiction as a sub-division of the novel in the Third World: madness, sexuality, guilt." Noting that the protagonist's "Coloured classification, her orphan status at the mission, and her short-lived marriage" represent the origin of most of her guilt, Larson attributed these factors directly to "the South African policy of apartheid which treats people as something other than human beings."

Robert L. Berner considered the novel "a remarkable attempt to escape from the limitations of mere 'protest' literature in which Black South African writers so often find themselves." Berner recognized that Head could have "written an attack on the indignities of apartheid which have driven her into exile in Botswana," but instead chose to write a novel about the "response to injustice—first in madness and finally in a heroic struggle out of that madness into wholeness and wisdom."

Bessie Head's achievements result from her uncompromising attitude to her work and to life in general. When many black South African writers of the period went into exile in Britain, Europe, and the United States, Head chose Botswana, which was then almost completely undeveloped. And while her contemporaries were producing searing indictments of apartheid South Africa, Head turned to local sources for inspiration and recorded in stories of parable-like intensity the daily lives of people in a remote African village.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have analyzed Head's novels in terms of their thematic concerns and their thematic progression. Suggesting that the works "deal in different ways with exile and oppression," Jean Marquard noted that "the protagonists are outsiders, new arrivals who try to forge a life for themselves in a poor, underpopulated third world country, where traditional and modern attitudes to soil and society are in conflict." Unlike other African writers who are also concerned with such familiar themes, observed Marquard, Head "does not idealize the African past and "resists facile polarities, emphasizing personal rather than political motives for tensions between victim and oppressor." "It is precisely this journeying into the various characters' most secret interior recesses of mind and "of soul," Arthur Ravenscroft observed, "that gives *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power* a quite remarkable cohesion and makes them a sort of trilogy."

Maru Critical reaction to *Maru* has been diverse, ranging from Lewis Nkosi's view that it is "as nearly perfect a piece of writing as one is ever likely to find in contemporary African literature" to Cecil Abrahams's dismissal of it as "a rather weak vapoury study on theme of racial prejudice." *Maru* is Head's attempt to universalize racial hatred, pointing out that victims seek other victims lower in power and prestige than themselves.

A Question of Power The symbolic richness in *A Question of Power* invites a wide range of critical interpretation. The extensive sexual content and dominant concern about insanity have prompted readings, including that of Adetokunbo Pearse, drawing heavily on psychology and arguing that the sexual negativism expressed in the book is the result of the negative self-image projected on black Africans by the South African government.

Readers who seek in Head's work metaphorical statements about the future of Africa find a picture of enduring hope touched by a cynical mistrust of politics. Feminists, including Femi Ojo-Ade, have been attracted by the female protagonist of *A Question of Power* and the nature of the battle she wages.

Religious interpretations (such as those of Linda Susan Beard and Joanna Chase) are also common, fed by the Christian symbolism of the main character, Elizabeth, as a Christlike figure who redeems herself and the world through her suffering. These readings are not incompatible with Head's overriding humanistic message that God and goodness are to be found in people. Similarly, Arthur Ravenscroft discerned no "confusion of identity" between the character and her creator: "Head makes one realize often how close is the similarity between the most fevered creations of a deranged mind and the insanities of deranged societies."

Responses to Literature

1. Should immigrants to the United States keep their cultural traditions, or should they try to fit in with

American culture? What if they are political refugees? Are the personal costs greater for those who try to melt into the big American “pot,” or those who try to maintain their traditions?

- Using the Internet and your library’s resources, research the social fabric of a country that you are unfamiliar with in terms of the feel of its general society. As well as looking at official Web sites and sources, read several blogs by people, both male and female, from that country. Write a paper examining the country as presented by traditional sources versus the blogs. What hidden details are revealed by ordinary people’s lives?
- Prejudice is not just about race (black/white); people of different ethnic groups (Serbs/Bosnians), religions (Muslim/Christian), or even divisions of the same religion (Roman Catholic/Protestant) can be prejudiced against each other. Research two or three authors who write about different forms of prejudice. Write a paper examining their conclusions about the causes of prejudice and how these prejudices manifest themselves in people’s every day lives and families. Where do you see discrete or overt prejudices in your social circles? How do your peers respond to these prejudices?

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Seamus Heaney

BORN: 1939, County Derry, Northern Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

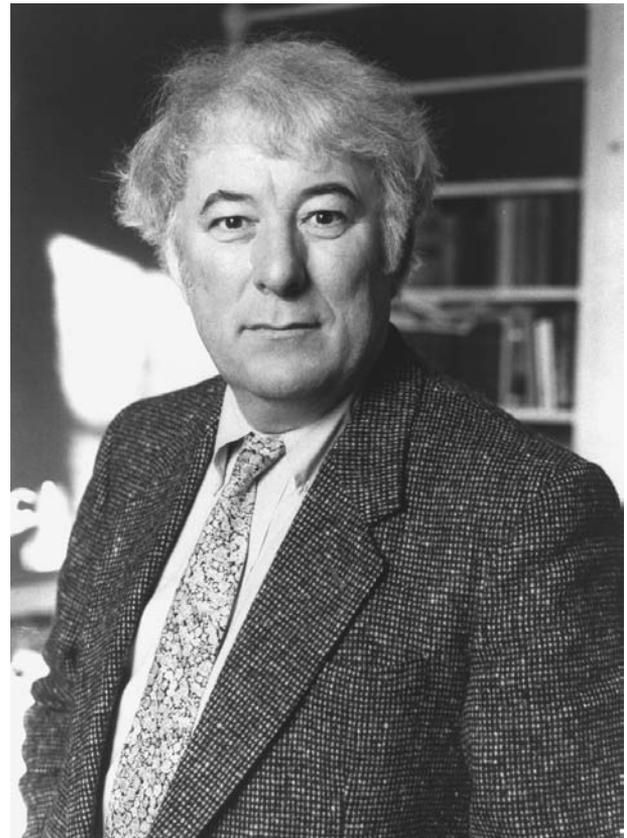
Death of a Naturalist: (1966)

North (1976)

The Haw Lantern (1987)

Beowulf: A New Translation (1999)

District and Circle (2006)



Seamus Heaney Heaney, Seamus, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

From the beginning, critical as well as popular acclaim has greeted each volume of Seamus Heaney's poetry. In 1966 his first full-length book appeared. Few would have predicted the impact such poetry would have. It is, after all, a poetry about rural subjects and traditional in structure—a poetry that appears to be a deliberate step back into a premodernist world and that rejects most contemporary poetic fashions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Northern Ireland Heaney was born April 13, 1939, in a rural area near Ulster, Northern Ireland. His childhood shaped much of his poetry, including the first volume, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), for which he won immediate success. In most of these poems, Heaney describes a young man's response to beautiful and threatening aspects of nature. In "Digging," the poem that opens this volume, he evokes the rural landscape where he was raised and comments on the care and skill with which his father and ancestors farmed the land. Heaney announces that as a poet he will metaphorically "dig" with his pen. In fact, many of the poems in his volume *Door into the Dark* (1969) search for hidden meaning.

Seamus Heaney was born the oldest of Margaret and Patrick Heaney's nine children and lived in Mossbawn, the place of the family farm in County Derry, Northern Ireland, about thirty miles northwest of Belfast. This landscape offered a definite sense of belonging and tradition and lifestyle that became part of the local rhythm.

Old and New Conflicts The landscape also offered reminders of ancient conflicts and losses, some reaching back in history to the threshold of myth. Old tensions also extended in the other direction, right into the present. Although his family was part of the Catholic majority in the local area living in relative harmony with the Protestants, at an early age Heaney was conscious of living in what he has called the "split culture of Ulster." Between the villages of Castledown and Toome, he was "symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between 'the demesne' [representing English and Unionist power] and the [native] 'bog' . . . The demesne was walled, wooded, beyond our ken."

In the decade before Heaney was born, the people of Ireland were embroiled in a devastating civil war over the country's fate as either a dominion of Great Britain or as an independent nation, and the conflict remained far from resolved. According to a treaty signed in 1921, Northern Ireland was established as an administrative region of Great Britain separate from Ireland, and maintained its own government. Some of its citizens—primarily Catholics known as Nationalists—believed that Northern

Ireland should be reunited with the Republic of Ireland to form an independent nation free of British control. Other citizens of Northern Ireland—primarily Protestants known as Unionists—believed that Northern Ireland should remain a part of Great Britain. This led to a decades-long series of violent clashes between the two groups known as The Troubles. Heaney grew up in the region at the heart of these conflicts, which grew more violent as the years passed.

Heaney attended St. Columb's College in Londonderry and then Queen's University in Belfast; all the while, he carried with him the impressions of his childhood world that would become such an important part of the substance of *Death of a Naturalist*. He studied at Queen's until 1961 when he received a first-class honors degree in English language and literature. The following year, he took a postgraduate course of study leading to a teacher's certificate at St. Joseph's College of Education in Belfast. These development years provided an essential prelude to the writing of his poems.

Teaching While he was teaching at St. Thomas's Secondary School in Ballymurphy, Belfast, from 1962–1963, Heaney collected some of the first poems that were published in *Death of a Naturalist*. From 1963 through 1966 he was a lecturer in English at St. Joseph's College. It was during these years when he was associated with the Hobsbaum group that he became firmly established in the literary world. Three of his poems published in the *New Statesman* in December 1964 came to the attention of Faber and Faber, who eventually became his chief publisher. Heaney also obtained a position at Queen's University where he had once attended. In 1965 his *Eleven Poems*, a pamphlet, was published by Festival Publications, Belfast, and in August of the same year he was married to Marie Devlin. *Death of a Naturalist*, which appeared in May 1966, brought Heaney the E. C. Gregory Award. In July of that year, his son Michael was born.

After the publication of *Door into the Dark* in 1969, Heaney's poetic views quickly came under the heavy pressure of political events and violence in Northern Ireland. Heaney left the political turmoil in Northern Ireland to teach at University of California, Berkeley, in 1970, only to find that Berkeley was experiencing its own turmoil over the Vietnam War at that time.

Writing in Wicklow The source of his writing remained in Ireland. While in Berkeley, he began writing a series of twenty-one prose paragraphs that drew on his childhood. These would be published in pamphlet form in Belfast with the title *Stations* (1975). Soon after the family's return from California, Heaney resigned his position at Queen's University and moved his growing family south to Glanmore, County Wicklow, in the Irish Republic. During these years, as he attempted to earn his living as a writer, he gave several poetry readings in the United States and England, wrote essays, and edited two poetry

anthologies: *Soundings: An Annual Anthology of New Irish Poetry* (1972) and *Soundings II* (1974).

In 1975, Heaney assumed a teaching position at Caryfort College, a teacher-training institution in Dublin, where he became head of the Department of English. In the following year, after four years in Glanmore, he and his family moved to Dublin, acquiring a house along the bay about halfway between the center of the city and Dun Laoghaire. Heaney kept up his transatlantic ties, frequently giving readings of his poems in America. The connection with America became stronger after 1981, when he resigned his position at Caryfort College and, in February 1982, began a five-year arrangement to teach each spring semester at Harvard, where he had already taught in the spring semester of 1979. The arrangement was now permanent, with Heaney acquiring the title Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory. Another tie with America was Robert Lowell, with whom the Heaneys became close during the last few years of Lowell's life.

A Major Poet Following the well-received *Field Work*, Heaney published *Selected Poems 1965–1975* and *Preoccupations: Selected Prose*, both in 1980. *Preoccupations* offers candid and engaging accounts of his poetic origins and development; the critical essays on other poets are also revealing of his own interests. Another of his preoccupations has been the medieval Irish work *Buile Suibhne*, a story of a mad northern king transformed into a kind of bird-man. Heaney followed this with a translation of *Beowulf* in 1999 and further collections of both prose and poetry in the new century.

Works in Literary Context

Depictions of Northern Ireland In 1995, Heaney became the fourth Irish writer and second Irish poet to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The first was William Butler Yeats whose influence can clearly be seen in Heaney's work. Part of Heaney's popularity, however, stems from his unique subject matter—modern Northern Ireland, its farms and cities beset with civil strife, its natural culture and language overrun by English rule. The landscape he was born into offered a definite sense of place and tradition. Critics have seen this in both the *North* and *Wintering Out* collections.

American Modernism In 1970, Heaney and his family moved to America. Heaney became guest lecturer at the University of California Berkeley, where he was exposed to the poetry of Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Robert Bly, and, perhaps most importantly, William Carlos Williams. This exposure helped loosen his own verse in *Wintering Out* so that it ceased being “as tightly strung across its metrical shape.”

Ancient Traditions and Myths Heaney's preoccupation with ancient traditions and myths—and not just those of Ireland—are evident in many of his works. His

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Heaney's famous contemporaries include:

- Frank McCourt** (1931–): Irish-American author of the award-winning 1996 memoir *Angela's Ashes* (1996).
- Peter O'Toole** (1932–): Academy Award-winning Irish actor famed for such films as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *The Stunt Man* (1980).
- Ted Kooser** (1939–): The Poet Laureate of the United States from 2004–2006 and winner of a 2005 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.
- Gerry Adams** (1948–): President of Sinn Féin, an Irish Republican political organization.
- Shane McGowan** (1957–): Lead singer and songwriter for the Irish band The Pogues.

Bog Poems recall both the myths of ancient Celtic peoples and the history of those who invaded the region such as the Norse. One of Heaney's most successful projects was a modern translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, considered one of the greatest mythical tales of Europe. Heaney has also translated a series of laments from sixteenth-century Poland, and has written two plays that are updates of ancient Greek works by the classic dramatist Sophocles.

Works in Critical Context

A native of Northern Ireland who divides his time between a home in Dublin and a teaching position at Harvard University, Heaney has attracted a readership on two continents and has won prestigious literary awards in England, Ireland, and the United States.

Heaney's ambiguous status as an “émigré” may well have contributed to the rather cool, even sour, reception of *North* by critics in Belfast. The reception elsewhere, however, was mostly positive, as in Anthony Thwaite's praise in the *Times Literary Supplement* of the “pure and scrupulous tact” of the poems, which are “solid, beautifully wrought.” Popular response is measurable by the six thousand copies sold in the first month. The book also won the W. H. Smith Award and the Duff Cooper Prize, which was presented, in accordance with Heaney's wishes, by Robert Lowell. It was also the Poetry Book Society Choice.

Field Work Generally, reviewers of Heaney's fifth major poetry collection, *Field Work*, treated Heaney as an important literary figure, placing him in the same poetic pantheon as William Butler Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Walt Whitman, and other major poets. Denis Donoghue suggests in the *New York Times Book Review* that in *Field Work* “Heaney is writing more powerfully than ever, more fully in possession of his feeling, more at home in his style.”

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Heaney's work is often inspired by the landscape of his homeland and the rich history attached to it. Other works deeply rooted in the historical significance of landscape include:

"Nature" (1836), a collection of essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's famous essay details the many practical, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits of the American landscape.

Wuthering Heights (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. The story of a dark romance in which the bleak moors of northern England feature almost as a character in their own right.

West-Running Brook (1928), a book of poems by Robert Frost. This collection of poetry was created at the height of Frost's illustrious career. Many poems are inspired by the New Hampshire countryside.

Out of Africa (1937), a memoir by Isak Dinesen. This memoir by Danish writer Dinesen covers her life on a farm in Kenya in the first part of the twentieth century.

Responses to Literature

1. What is the connection between Heaney's poetry and Northern Ireland? Is he nostalgic or bitter about the places of his childhood?
2. As a Catholic farmer in a Protestant country, Heaney grew up in many ways an outsider before moving to County Wicklow in 1972. How does this theme of polar opposites and outsiders appear in Heaney's work?
3. Many critics note that Heaney's work is at least superficially easy to understand, but also that many of his poems are also about the making of poetry. Choose one passage that illustrates his approach to writing poetry and write a paper discussing Heaney's craftsmanship.
4. Heaney won the Whitbread Prize for his translation of *Beowulf* in the year 2000 over other contenders like the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling. Write a paper evaluating the judge's decision. Be sure to research and reference the actual criteria used by the judges.
5. All twentieth-century Irish literature has been colored on some level by Ireland's relationship with England. Research the political situation in Ireland and discuss how Heaney addresses the situation in his poetry. Be sure to include specific references to the poetry.

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Lafcadio Hearn

BORN: 1850, Leukas, Greece

DIED: 1904, Okubo, Japan

NATIONALITY: American

GENRE: Travel, criticism, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan
(1894)

Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things
(1903)

Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation
(1904)



Lafcadio Hearn Hearn, Lafcadio, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

In a relatively short life of fifty-four years, Lafcadio Hearn managed to have several different literary lives. Today, it is Hearn's work on Japan—where he was known as Kozumi Yakumo after becoming a citizen—that has maintained his literary reputation, although the locales of his travel writing are extensive and international. Also considered one of modern America's leading prose impressionists, Hearn produced a large body of work that is more closely related to nineteenth-century European than American literature. His sketches, short stories, and novellas demonstrate a vision of evil and the supernatural reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. Hearn is also recognized as a perceptive literary critic whose readings and theories reflect his devotion to the beautiful and the bizarre. His lectures on American and European literature, published in collections such as *Interpretations of Literature*, are exceptional for their break with the conventions of Victorian criticism, and his essays on Japanese culture long influenced Western perceptions of East Asia.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Life in Transit Hearn was born on the Ionian island of Levkas, off the coast of Greece. His parents, a

British army surgeon and his Greek wife, separated six years later and placed Hearn with an aunt in Ireland. He attended St. Cuthbert's College and there suffered a mishap on the playing field that resulted in the loss of sight in his left eye. This injury, coupled with Hearn's severe myopia, caused the abnormal enlargement of his right eye, giving him an odd appearance that commentators often use to explain his lifelong sense of estrangement and, consequently, his affinity for subjects outside the mainstream of human experience. Hearn immigrated to the United States in 1869 and eventually settled in Ohio. There he met an English printer, Henry Watkins, who trained him as a proofreader and encouraged his literary ambitions.

Hearn began his career as a feature writer for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, gaining notoriety for his stories on slum and riverfront life. He received national attention with his report of the sensational "Tan Yard Murder." Hearn's account, written after viewing the coroner's autopsy, contains vivid descriptions of the gruesome crime and the victim's charred corpse. In the late 1870s, Hearn moved to New Orleans, where he wrote for local newspapers and contributed to national magazines. His writings included editorials, book reviews, short stories, local color sketches, adaptations of Creole and foreign folktales, and translations of Spanish and French works. During this period, Hearn pledged himself "to the worship of the odd, the queer, the strange, the exotic, the monstrous."

In 1887 he traveled to the West Indies. Two years later, under commission to *Harper's Magazine* for a series of articles, Hearn left for Japan. He remained there for the rest of his life, lecturing in English and comparative literature at schools and universities and recording his impressions of the East for Western readers. This resulted in many of his most enduring works, including *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), a collection of folk tales and ghost stories largely derived from older Japanese texts that was published just prior to his death from heart failure.

Works in Literary Context

The Bizarre, the Supernatural, and the Sensuous

Hearn's work is divided into three periods, each corresponding to a juncture in his life. The first consists of the sketches, short stories, and journalism that appeared in New Orleans newspapers and various national magazines. These works, collected in *Exotics and Retrospectives, Fantastic and Other Fancies*, and *Leaves from the Diary of an Impressionist*, focus on the bizarre, the supernatural, and the sensuous. Set in New Orleans, they offer colorful, romantic descriptions of Creole society conveyed in an ornate and consciously affected style. *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* and *Some Chinese Ghosts*, also of this

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hearn's famous contemporaries include:

Yone Noguchi (1875–1947): This bilingual Japanese author, who published works both in English and Japanese, wrote influential fiction, poetry, essays, and literary criticism.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Ruling monarch of the United Kingdom and the British Empire whose reign spanned sixty-three years. Victoria remains an important symbol of her time and of the expansion of the British Empire.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1904): Nietzsche was an influential German philosopher who wrote critically about a variety of subjects, including morality, religion, culture, and science. His work's influence can be seen in both the existentialist and postmodern movements.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900): A popular figure in Victorian England, this Irish author and playwright enjoyed considerable success until details of his personal life emerged in a criminal libel trial, resulting in his imprisonment.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): Neurologist, medical scientist, biologist, and writer, this Austrian is widely regarded as the father of psychoanalysis.

period, are volumes of obscure fables freely adapted from Eastern legends.

The Caribbean Hearn's second period, encompassing material based on his life in the Caribbean, comprises the book of sketches *Two Years in the French West Indies* and the novellas *Chita* and *Youma*. Extravagant diction and lush imagery pervade these efforts, as do the motifs of death and ruin. Moreover, these works, which depict the interrelationship of nature and humankind and the struggle for survival between civilized and primitive peoples, manifest Hearn's interest in the evolutionary philosophy of Herbert Spencer.

Late Life in the Far East The Far East, particularly Japan, is the dominant subject of Hearn's third period. Although the author's predilection for the grotesque is still evident, his style became more subtle and controlled. Hearn's first impressions are recorded in *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, a series of vignettes that extol the land and its people. *Out of the East* and *Kokoro* contain similar sketches, while *In Ghostly Japan* relates traditional ghost stories and fairy tales. Hearn's final book on the East, the posthumously published *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, stands in contrast to his earlier volumes,

which were largely uncritical of East Asian culture. In this collection of essays, Hearn, warning against the trend toward westernization, expressed his disillusionment with contemporary Japan and his concern for its economic and cultural independence.

Works in Critical Context

Lafcadio Hearn's reputation as a writer and, in particular, as a travel writer, benefited from the initial fascination of the West for the "Mysterious East." Although the present postcolonial and postmodern context would sometimes make of him the practitioner of a bygone exoticism, the often earnest quality of his work and the sheer quantity of his output—whether set in America, the Caribbean, or Japan—make him a figure to be reckoned with. Today, Hearn is best remembered as a literary pioneer of the East.

Critics find that at his best, Hearn was an exacting author whose work displays craftsmanship and integrity. At his worst, he appeared a flowery, mannered stylist rather than a creative artist. He has been praised for his ability to arouse the senses but criticized for the lack of variety in his sketches and short stories. Critics contend that, with the exception of *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, he sentimentalized and misrepresented various aspects of Eastern culture. Yet, these works are credited with familiarizing Western readers with the people and traditions of the East. Despite the unevenness of his work, most reviewers agree that Hearn is an important prose stylist; a perceptive, albeit unconventional, critic; and an intriguing literary personality.

Chita, a Memory of Last Island (1889) *Chita*, Hearn's novella about the Last Island hurricane that struck southern Louisiana in 1856, was inspired by events well-known to his contemporary readers. An unsigned review in the *Nation* called it "the slightest possible melody set to an elaborate accompaniment," noting that the author seems more concerned with describing the sea itself than with the characters or the island that was destroyed by the hurricane. The reviewer concludes, "On the whole, the impression left by the book is that of an ill-treated opportunity, a rarely fine subject made tiresome by a lush style." Ferris Greenslet, writing in 1911, finds more to love in the work, noting that it "is still in many respects his most astonishing *tour de force* in word-painting." Greenslet acknowledges, however, that "the only logic in the harrowing conclusion is the emotional logic of a temperament immitigably macabresque, that must make a tale of terror intensify in poignancy to the end."

Responses to Literature

1. Select one of Hearn's travel essays from Japan. What biases does Hearn bring to his writings on the Far East?

Discuss your emotional reaction to the essay. Discuss any biases that influenced your reading of the essay.

2. Why does Hearn include a study of insects in the collection *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*? How does this section relate to the other stories?
3. Compare and contrast the three literary lives led by Hearn. How did the locations of New Orleans, the West Indies, and Japan affect his writing style?
4. Discuss the influence of Hearn's personal background on his works. Where is it most apparent? Citing specific examples from his texts, discuss the role that biographical details have on the emotional impact of his work.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

As a sufferer of early disfigurement, much of Hearn's work is characterized by a responsiveness to the world's outcasts. Other works that explore themes relating to social alienation include:

The Metamorphosis (1915), a novella by Franz Kafka. In this novella, Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up to find that his body has been transformed into a "monstrous vermin."

The Sun Also Rises (1926), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. Jake Barnes, the novel's narrator, remains alienated in his pursuit of Lady "Brett" Ashley as a result of an injury incurred during World War I that rendered him sexually impotent.

"Good Country People" (1926), a short story by Flannery O'Connor. The self-named Helga, a university-educated nihilist, is hoodwinked by a traveling Bible salesman who steals her wooden leg.

George Herbert

BORN: 1593, Montgomery, Wales

DIED: 1633, Bremerton, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Memoriae matris sacrum (1627)

A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson His Character, and Rule of Holy Life (1632)

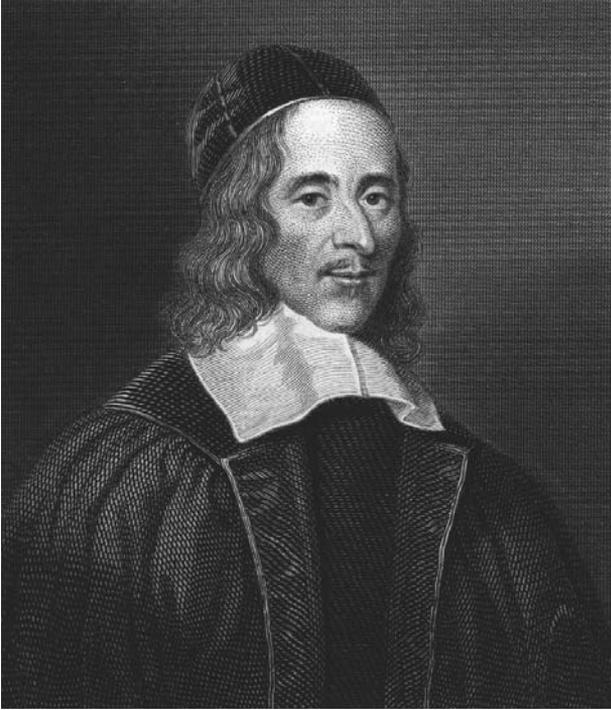
The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations (1633)

Overview

George Herbert was a seventeenth-century English poet best known for writing intensely devotional verse using simple, direct speech. Although considered a metaphysical poet, alongside John Donne and Andrew Marvell, Herbert avoided secular love lyrics in favor of sincere, holy worship. His best-known work, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633), is admired as a profound exploration of humanity's relationship with God.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Educated in England The fifth of ten children, George Herbert was born on April 3, 1593, into a family of political prominence in Montgomery, Wales. After the death of his father in 1596, Herbert's mother moved the



George Herbert © Michael Nicholson / CORBIS

family to Oxford so that she could supervise the education of her oldest son, Edward, who later became known for his philosophical writings. At the time, England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I, who was overseeing both the beginnings of the British colonial empire as well as a golden age of drama, literature, and music.

While at Oxford, Herbert's mother befriended John Donne, a writer whose metaphysical poetry would considerably influence Herbert's career as a poet. In 1604, Herbert began attending the Westminster School in London. An excellent student in Greek and Latin, Herbert received one of three Westminster nominations to Trinity College at Cambridge University in 1609. By this time, England was ruled by Elizabeth's successor, James I of England, who had taken the throne in 1603 and established the Stuart line.

Decided on Career as a Poet In 1610, Herbert wrote a letter to his mother in which he declared he would be a poet dedicated to celebrating God's glory. Included in this letter were two poems, "My God, Where Is That Ancient Heat toward Thee" and "Sure, Lord, There Is Enough in Thee to Dry." Throughout his years at Cambridge, Herbert wrote verse in both Latin and English, much of it remaining unpublished during his lifetime. In 1616, after earning bachelor's and master's degrees, Herbert was elected a fellow of Trinity College, a post that required him to take holy orders within seven years.

At Cambridge, Herbert held several positions, including lecturer in rhetoric and deputy orator. Elected

university orator in 1620, he assumed responsibility for speaking on occasions of state and composing official correspondence. Four years later, Herbert requested through the archbishop of Canterbury that the probationary period for his ordainment as a deacon be waived. At this time, Herbert was also involved in politics. He was a courtier at the court of James I from 1620 to 1625 and a member of parliament for Montgomery, Wales, from 1624 to 1625. In 1625, James I was succeeded by his son Charles I, who soon faced opposition, as he often attempted to act without the consent of Parliament. While the date of Herbert's ordination is uncertain, it is known that he became a canon of Lincoln Cathedral in 1626.

Published First Poetry A year later, Herbert published his first work, *Memoriae matris sacrum* (1627), a collection of poetry written in Latin on the death of his mother. It included a funeral oration by John Donne. Herbert was appointed rector of Bremerton and ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1630. During the following two years, he revised many of his earlier poems and wrote *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson His Character, and Rule of Holy Life* (1632), a prose discourse on Anglican pastoral practice. Herbert then began working on his most famous work, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633).

Falling ill with tuberculosis—a contagious bacterial disease of the lungs that had no cure and was easily spread—Herbert completed the manuscript of *The Temple* and sent it to a friend, Nicholas Ferrar, to ensure its publication. Herbert died of the disease on March 1, 1633, before the volume was put in print.

Works in Literary Context

Herbert meticulously experimented with form and meter, rarely repeating rhyme schemes and often creating patterns with an intent to break or alter them. Herbert's structural artistry may have been influenced by the *Greek Anthology*, a collection of poems used by Renaissance poets as a reference for poetic practice. Additionally, the Bible provided a model of stylistic diversity for Herbert, especially the book of Psalms, which has long been described as an encyclopedia of poetic genres and voices. Verse translations of the psalms, particularly those by Sir Philip Sidney, may have inspired Herbert's formal experimentation—perhaps Herbert believed that a variety of religious experiences could be captured only in a variety of poetic forms.

Metaphysical Poetry Herbert belonged to the group of seventeenth-century writers known as the metaphysical poets. In deliberate contrast to the English poetic tradition of using common metaphors, the work of the metaphysical poets is characterized either by new and unusual metaphors or by traditional metaphors used in new ways. Metaphysical poetry combines ordinary speech with puns, paradoxes, and conceits, metaphors that shock the reader

by comparing two highly dissimilar things. Often, these poems are presented in the form of an argument, have complicated subjects, and attempt to show a psychological realism when describing the tensions of love, whether the love is physical or spiritual.

Evident in Herbert's poetry is his debt to John Donne, pioneer of the metaphysical movement. However, Herbert made the form his own with a simplicity of diction and metaphor. Presenting ideas with logical persuasion, Herbert finds metaphors in everyday experience, using commonplace imagery as opposed to the sophisticated language of other metaphysical writers. This results in work that appears less intellectual than that of Donne, who expresses his uncertainty in rational terms and then resolves it in the same way. In contrast, Herbert will end a poem with two lines that resolve the argument without addressing each specific point raised in the poem. Because Herbert's arguments encompass recognizable human emotions, his work is easy to comprehend, while understanding Donne often requires concentrated effort.

In comparison with other metaphysical poets, Herbert puts less emphasis on conceits and striking imagery, relying instead on the Bible for stylistic inspiration. Herbert favors ordinary images, as illustrated by the thorn, wine, and fruit he uses to great effect in "The Collar." By exploring his own faith through the techniques of metaphysical poetry, Herbert expanded the genre to allow the poet a more personal approach.

Legacy Although Herbert was a writer of humility and integrity—not one in search of celebrity—he has nonetheless been a popular, influential writer through the years. Many seventeenth-century poets—metaphysical poets Richard Crawshaw and Henry Vaughan, for example—openly acknowledged their debt to Herbert's techniques and subjects. The impressive reach of Herbert's influence includes such later writers as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Elizabeth Bishop.

Works in Critical Context

Herbert was a well-respected figure in his lifetime, praised by Francis Bacon and John Donne, for example. During the 1600s, *The Temple* was valued for the simple piety of its religious sentiments, and many of its poems were adapted as hymns. Between 1633 and 1679, thirteen editions of the collection were published. Although Methodist leader John Wesley did adapt some of Herbert's poems for his church, interest in the works of Herbert and other metaphysical poets declined during the eighteenth century, and no new editions of *The Temple* were issued from 1709 to 1799. The Romantic age, however, saw a revival of appreciation for Herbert's poetic skills and moral values. His reputation was enhanced by such writers of the eighteenth century as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herbert's famous contemporaries include:

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Galileo built the first high-powered astronomical telescope and confirmed the Copernican theory of the solar system.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640): Considered by many to be Europe's most influential artist of the seventeenth century, Rubens created vibrant paintings that united the classical with the romantic. His pieces include *The Raising of the Cross* (1610).

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680): In addition to inventing the baroque style of sculpture, Bernini was also a brilliant architect. His sculptures include *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–1652).

Francis Bacon (1561–1626): A leading figure in the fields of natural philosophy (now known as physical science) and scientific methodology, Bacon also explored questions of ethics, law, and religion. His books include *New Atlantis* (1627).

Robert Herrick (1591–1674): Herrick's *His Noble Numbers* (1648) contains more than twelve hundred short religious poems in an assortment of forms, including epigrams, epistles, and verses of love.

Louis XIII (1601–1643): King of France from 1610 to 1643, Louis XIII was a strict Catholic as well as a soldier intent on protecting his subjects.

While scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century considered Herbert a relatively minor writer of popular didactic verse, an increasing number of studies have approached his poetry from various perspectives: biographical, rhetorical, liturgical, and literary. Contemporary critics generally praise Herbert's work as a noble attempt to express the indescribable complexities of spiritual life. What was regarded as simple in the past has been reevaluated as subtle. Because his writing demonstrates technical flexibility, analytical intelligence, an exceptional talent for capturing spiritual crises in verse, a distinctive style, and a voice mindful of literary traditions and conventions, many scholars consider Herbert to be one of the most important literary figures in the English language.

The Temple Because Herbert's final manuscript of *The Temple* has never been discovered, the arrangement of the poems in *The Temple* has been the subject of extensive controversy among scholars, who have surmised several possible organizational patterns for the collection's arrangement of poems, including events of the Christian liturgical calendar and the progression of the soul from birth to death.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Two of Herbert's most anthologized poems are "The Altar" and "Easter Wings," shape poems—also called figure poems—in which the poem is written or printed in a shape that reflects the subject of the poem. The earliest shape poem known was written about 300 B.C.E. by the Greek poet Simias of Rhodes. His poem, in the shape of an axe, was probably written to be inscribed on a copy of the ancient axe that was used to build the wooden Trojan Horse. Other well-known shape poems include:

Calligrams (1918), poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. With the publication of this work, which is composed of complex shape poems, Apollinaire coined the word *calligram* to describe literature in which words are assembled to form an object.

Come to My Party, and Other Shape Poems (2004), a children's poetry collection by Heidi Roemer. Springtime rain, ocean waves on a summer day, Halloween pumpkins, snow-covered hills—the poems in this book celebrate the shapes one can find in each season.

Types of Shapes (1991), a poetry collection by John Hollander. Some playful, others artistic, these poems show that form can enhance meaning in poetry.

The general consensus is that *The Temple* can be divided into three major sections: "The Church Porch," "The Church," and "The Church Militant." Composed of seventy-seven six-line stanzas that read like epigrams, "The Church Porch" provides moral instruction on conducting oneself in day-to-day activities, avoiding sin, and worshipping with a proper attitude. To a great extent, critical attention has focused on the "Church" section of *The Temple*, which contains most of the individual pieces that make up the volume. The poems in this section display a range of metrical patterns and rhyme schemes. "The Church Militant," the closing section, provides an allegorical history of Christianity from antiquity to Herbert's time.

Responses to Literature

1. Choose a concrete object and write a shape poem at least fifteen lines long about the object. On a separate page, write one short paragraph explaining why you chose the particular object you did. In another paragraph, answer the following: Stylistically and thematically, how is a writer limited by choosing to use shape poetry as a poetic form? Does writing a poem in the shape of its subject enhance the meaning of the poem? Why or why not?
2. In "The Altar," the speaker describes his heart as a stone altar. What else do you think the stone motif might refer to? What collaboration between the human and the divine is necessary to make a Christian poem? Write a paper in which you outline your ideas.
3. Read "The Altar" and "Easter Wings." Why do you think Herbert chose to write serious religious poetry in this form? Why is each poem in its particular shape? Are there other shapes that would have been effective for these two poems? Create a presentation in which you show and share your findings with the class.
4. The most celebrated English religious poet is John Milton, author of the epic *Paradise Lost* (1667). Though both writers exhibit devout spirituality, the works of Herbert and Milton are quite different in aim, scope, and method. To Milton, for example, God is revealed in the Bible, while Herbert finds God in everyday life, even in the most mundane of tasks. After finding three to five additional significant thematic and stylistic differences between the two men's works, evaluate which writer is most effective in demonstrating his faith. What criteria have you used to assess their works? Which writer do you believe offers a path to salvation for common individuals? Write a paper that outlines your conclusions.

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Robert Herrick

BORN: 1591, London, England

DIED: 1674, Dean Prior, Devonshire, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine (1648)

Overview

Almost forgotten in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century alternately applauded for his poetry's lyricism and condemned for its "obscenities," Robert Herrick has, at the start of the twenty-first century, finally been recognized as one of the most accomplished English poets of his age. Scholars and critics are gradually appreciating the achievement represented by his only book, *Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine* (1648). While some of his individual poems, such as "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time," "Upon Julia's Clothes," and "Corinna's Going a-Maying," are among the most popular of all time, recent examinations of his *Hesperides* as a whole have begun to reveal a Herrick whose sensibility is complex, subtle, and coherent.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Elizabethan Upbringing Marked by Tragedy
Herrick was born in Cheapside, London, in 1591, and



Robert Herrick *Herrick, Robert, illustration. International Portrait Gallery.*

baptized on August 24 of that year. He was the seventh child of a London goldsmith, Nicholas Herrick, and was little more than fourteen months old when his father fell to his death from a window in an apparent suicide. His mother never remarried, and it seems more than a coincidence that father figures would loom large in the poet's *Hesperides*. At the time, England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I, who oversaw the beginnings of the British Empire as well as a golden age of drama, literature, and music.

Educated at Cambridge By age sixteen, Herrick was apprenticed to his uncle, but he apparently found either Sir William Herrick or the goldsmith trade undesirable, for the ten-year apprenticeship was terminated after six years. In 1613, at the comparatively advanced age of twenty-two, Herrick enrolled at Saint John's College, Cambridge. Limited means would eventually force Herrick to transfer to a less expensive college, Trinity Hall. His studies culminated in 1620 with a master of arts degree. By this time, James I had succeeded Elizabeth and established the Stuart line.

The "Sons of Ben" Between his graduation from Cambridge and his appointment, in 1629, as vicar of Dean Prior in Devonshire, little is known about Herrick's life. It is almost certain, however, that some of this time was spent among the social and literary circles of London. Here the budding poet at last found a surrogate father in Ben Jonson, the eminent poet, dramatist, actor, and literary lion of London. Herrick became one of several "sons of Ben" who had notable literary careers themselves. Others include Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, and Richard Lovelace. This group, sometimes called the Cavalier Poets by scholars, carried on Jonson's revival of classical poetic styles.

Meanwhile, Herrick was cultivating a style distinctly his own, earning a reputation as a fashionable poet. His work likely circulated in manuscript form. Some of his works were set to music by the well-known musician Henry Lawes and sung before King Charles I. Charles was the son of James I and had succeeded him in 1625. Herrick also cultivated the royal family with a series of flattering poems. Indeed, the king, though he was nine years younger than Herrick, emerges in *Hesperides* as yet another father figure.

Country Vicar Herrick took holy orders in 1623. This step, at the mature age of thirty-two, may indicate that he was unable to find a position elsewhere. In 1627, he became one of several chaplains to accompany George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, on a failed expedition to the Isle of Rhe to liberate French Protestants. In 1629 Charles I awarded Herrick for his service by nominating him to the vicarage of Dean Prior, a hamlet in Devonshire, far to the southwest of London. He was installed there the following autumn.

To become a country parson had to have been a radical change from Herrick's former life among the literary set at court. Some critics believe he resented this appointment to the remote West Country, viewing it as banishment from London. He wrote one poem

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herrick's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): English philosopher, whose treatise *Leviathan* (1651) is a fundamental work of political theory.

George Herbert (1593–1633): Welsh-born religious poet and Anglican priest who wrote *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633).

Thomas Carew (1595–1640): An English Cavalier poet who associated with Ben Jonson and his circle of literary friends. His poetry collections include *Poems* (1640).

René Descartes (1596–1650): French mathematician and rationalist philosopher, often remembered for his adage “I think, therefore I am.” His books include *Discourse on Method* (1637).

John Milton (1608–1674): This highly celebrated English poet is most famed for the epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Charles I (1600–1649): King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1625–1649. A proponent of divine right, he was convicted and executed during the English Civil War.

describing the people of his parish as “currish; churlish as the seas; / And rude (almost) as rudest savages.” He may have been exaggerating for effect, but whatever Herrick's true feelings about his congregation, he nevertheless carried out his duties faithfully for seventeen years.

Affected by English Civil War His service was interrupted, however, at a key moment of the English Civil War. (The English Civil War officially began in 1642 as a struggle between Charles—who believed in the divine right of kings as well as absolute sovereignty and rule—and Parliament, over their proper roles in government, though these tensions had been building for decades. Over the next few years, there were battles primarily between ultraradical Independents—also known as Puritans—like Oliver Cromwell, who wanted to do away with the monarchy and the organized church, and royalists, who wanted the monarchy to remain in power and to retain the church.) Herrick was every inch a royalist (as his poems of praise for Charles I and the royal family make evident) and a rather traditional Anglican in a part of the country sympathetic to the Puritan cause and the parliamentary forces. In 1647, Herrick and more than one hundred Devonshire clergymen were expelled from their parishes for their convictions. He returned to London and took up residence in St. Anne's, Westminster, sustained by wealthy friends and relatives.

Thus, Herrick was in London when he published his one and only poetry collection, *Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine*. The “Divine” part of the title

refers to a smaller book of poems titled *His Noble Numbers; or, His Pious Pieces, Wherein (Amongst Other Things) He Sings the Birth of His Christ, and Sighs for His Savior's Suffering on the Crosse*. This book, appended to *Hesperides*, has its own title plate, which curiously bears the publication date 1647. Some critics believe Herrick intended to publish *His Noble Numbers* first, then realized the aesthetic value of displaying a progression from secular to religious poetry.

Restored to Position Shortly after *Hesperides* was published, Charles I was removed from the throne by the victorious Independents led by Cromwell. The king was executed in 1649, and Cromwell ruled England as a commonwealth until he died in 1648. Cromwell's son Richard succeeded him, but his rule was even more unpopular than his father's, and Parliament invited the return of the monarchy in 1660. The year of the Restoration, Herrick personally petitioned to be returned to his former vicarage. Charles II, the son and heir of Charles I, granted his petition and sent him back to Dean Prior in 1662, where he served until his death at the end of harvest season in October 1674. There is no verifiable evidence that he continued to write poetry in his later years.

Works in Literary Context

More than the other “sons of Ben,” Herrick follows Jonson's prescriptions for writing well, especially by reading the ancients. Herrick often mentions, quotes, or borrows from the works of classical writers such as Anacreon, the legendary Greek poet of wine, women, and song, and with Roman poets such as Horace, Ovid, and Martial. The aspiring poet's own sensibility, Jonson counseled, should be imposed on the borrowed subjects and formal elements. Herrick obeys, in scores of classically styled epigrams, odes, and lyrics, even in imitations of Jonson himself, such as “Delight in Disorder.”

Carefully Constructed Poetry Collection Today most readers encounter Herrick in anthologies, a few poems at a time, as he was read when a limited number of his lyrics circulated in manuscript. When he published *Hesperides*, however, he had something else in mind. His was a rare literary feat. He seems to have been the first poet, and still the only important poet, to gather practically all of his verses (more than fourteen hundred poems) into one elaborately designed volume and see it through the presses. *Hesperides* is also the only major collection of poetry in English to open with a versified table of contents.

Carpe Diem: Seize the Day Among Herrick's most admired work is “Corinna's Going a-Maying,” a tightly structured lyric combining Christian and classical elements and examining mutability. Corinna is being seduced *out* of bed, to join in the ceremonies of May Day, when the townspeople go into the country to gather greenery. Lying in bed, she is warned, is a sin against the religion of nature. The final stanza reminds Corinna (and the reader) that as creatures of nature, we are all subject to time, and thus youth and love are not forever.

This is one of Herrick's recurrent themes, generally called "carpe diem," a Latin phrase meaning "seize the day." Herrick muses on the brevity of life and the importance of living it to its fullest every day. It is captured most famously in "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," with its well-known opening "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, / Old time is still a-flying: / And this same flower that smiles today / Tomorrow will be dying." Though a Christian priest, Herrick seems to perceive death as ultimate oblivion, without transfiguration. Like the classical Stoics, he responds to the prospect of inevitable death by affirming life, lived modestly and taken as it comes.

Works in Critical Context

Over the past three centuries, the perceived unevenness of Herrick's poetry, its mixture of high and low forms and themes, has divided literary critics. Whereas one nineteenth-century poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne, hailed Herrick as "the greatest song-writer—as surely as Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist—ever born of the English race," Robert Southey called Herrick "a coarse-minded and beastly writer, whose dunghill . . . ought never to have been disturbed." Even so, his reputation has steadily increased with nearly every close study of *Hesperides*. Critics have uncovered complex nuances in Herrick's simple poetic style, causing them to reevaluate the country parson's genius. Today, Herrick's poetry has attained the critical renown he always knew it deserved.

Little Acclaim in His Lifetime The earliest known criticism appeared in *The Muses Dirge* (1625) by Richard James, who compared Herrick to Jonson and Michael Drayton. Other poets favorably mentioned Herrick, indicating that he may have enjoyed some literary popularity in his lifetime. In the absence of much evidence, it is difficult to determine the reception *Hesperides* received on its publication in 1648. The timing was unfortunate, as the Civil War took center stage.

Critical Attention in Nineteenth Century In the century after his death, Herrick gained only marginal recognition from English commentators. Interest revived around the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1804, Nathan Drake provided one of the first comprehensive retrospectives on Herrick, calling him instrumental in developing a trend toward simpler poetic structure. Some critics found his work too vulgar to deserve high praise, but the American commentator Ralph Waldo Emerson considered Herrick's lyrics unrivaled in diction and structure. Later in the century, Swinburne and other critics wrote favorably of Herrick, and George Saintsbury's *Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (1893) acknowledged him as a "natural man" whose poetry is an expression of his delightful surroundings.

Twentieth Century Twentieth-century scholars cite a 1910 study by F. W. Moorman as pivotal to the revival of Herrick's reputation. Later critics offered fresh insights into the sources, structure, and themes of *Hesperides*. Several noted theorists, such as C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and Northrop Frye, examined Herrick's poetry in the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" could be the most famous "carpe diem" poem in the English language. Here are other verses expressing, or questioning, the same universal theme:

"Mignonne, allons voir si la rose" (1553), a poem by Pierre de Ronsard. This French poet famously compares his reluctant lover's beauty to a flower destined to droop and wither.

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (c. 1590), a poem by Christopher Marlowe. A famous English pastoral love poem with romantic ideals as straightforward as its meter: "Come live with me and be my love."

"Song to Celia" (1607), a poem by Ben Jonson. A brief seduction poem from the literary patriarch of the Cavaliers: "'Tis no sin love's fruit to steal; / But the sweet theft to reveal."

"To His Coy Mistress" (c. 1680), a poem by Andrew Marvell. A strong carpe diem argument is presented in a courtly seduction poem featuring the lines: "Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime."

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1943), by Dylan Thomas. This lament upon mortality, Thomas's most famous poem, urges the reader to "Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

course of presenting their own literary principles. Another milestone in Herrick criticism, Sydney Musgrove's *The Universe of Robert Herrick* (1950), perceives Herrick's poetry as neither "trivial" nor "pagan," but as a reflection of a seventeenth-century English Christian worldview. As he predicted, Herrick's tombstone has vanished, but at last, "the eternizing power of poetry" has brought him more admiration than he might have imagined.

Responses to Literature

1. How well does Herrick handle the tension between his religious faith and the vivaciousness of his secular poetry? Create a presentation for the class in which you explain your point of view.
2. Some scholars have deemed Herrick to be an "occasional" poet—that is, a poet who writes about special or ceremonial occasions. Citing several of Herrick's works, identify some characteristics of this type of poetry and write a paper with your findings.
3. *Hesperides* was published at the height of the English Civil War. Study the history of this conflict and write a paper about several poems in which Herrick refers to the war or reveals a position toward it.
4. Perform a close reading of the opening poem of *Hesperides* "The Argument of His Book" in a small group. With the group, examine questions such as:

How does Herrick's view of his poetry concur with, or differ from, your own?

5. Herrick's literary mentor, Ben Jonson, championed a revival of classical styles of poetry. In a short essay, describe how Herrick emulates thematic or formal elements of classical poetry. Cite two or more specific examples.

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James Herriot

BORN: 1916, Sunderland, England

DIED: 1995, Thirsk, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

All Creatures Great and Small (1972)

All Things Bright and Beautiful (1975)

All Things Wise and Wonderful (1977)

The Lord God Made Them All (1981)

Every Living Thing (1992)

Overview

James Herriot was the pen name of James Alfred Wight, a veterinarian who practiced in northern England. He began writing about his experiences with animals at the age of fifty, becoming one of Britain's most successful authors. Gentle, humorous, and heartwarming, Herriot's books, such as his first best-seller *All Creatures Great and Small*, include reminiscences about his life and career: relationships with family and colleagues, his animal patients, the farmers who owned them, and the Yorkshire countryside.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Idyllic Childhood James Alfred Wight was born on October 3, 1916, in Sunderland, England, to bar and movie-house piano player James and singer Hannah Wight. Three weeks after his birth, the family moved to Glasgow, Scotland. He attended schools in the nearby town of Hillhead, where he went to Yoker Primary School and then Hillhead High School. Herriot described his childhood as "idyllic," explaining, "I spent much of my childhood and adolescence walking along with my dog, camping and climbing among the highlands of Scotland so that at an early age three things were implanted in my character: a love of animals, reading, and the countryside."

After reading a magazine article describing a veterinarian's life, Herriot decided at the age of thirteen that he wanted to be a vet. After receiving his degree from Glasgow Veterinary School, Herriot started his first job as an assistant



James Herriot *Herriot, James*, photograph. AP Images.

vet in North Yorkshire, England, in the practice of Dr. John Sinclair. "I hadn't thought it possible that I could spend all my days in a high, clean-blown land where the scent of grass or trees was never far away... [and] find the freshness of growing things hidden somewhere in the cold clasp of the wind... My work consisted now of driving from farm to farm across the roof of England with a growing conviction that I was a privileged person." Thirty years later, the work and the countryside would become the focal points of his books.

A Wife's Challenge "The life of a country vet was dirty, uncomfortable, sometimes dangerous," Herriot wrote in *All Creatures Great and Small*. "It was terribly hard work, and I loved it. I felt vaguely that I ought to write about it and every day for twenty-five years I told my wife of something funny that had happened and said I was keeping it for the book," Herriot told *Scotsman* journalist William Foster. "She usually said 'Yes, dear' to humour me but one day, when I was fifty, she said: 'Who are you kidding? Vets of fifty don't write first books.'" Her words were the motivation he needed. "I stormed out and bought some paper and taught myself to type."

Writing proved difficult at first. "I started to put it all down and the story didn't work," he recalled to Foster. "All I managed to pick out on the machine was a very amateur school essay. So I spent a year or two learning my craft, as real writers say." His writing process included his adopting a pseudonym. "It's against the ethics of the veterinary profession to advertise and when I first started writing my books, I was afraid some of my peers might think it unprofessional of me to write under my own name," Herriot explained to Arturo F. Gonzalez in *Saturday Review*. "So, I was sitting in front of the TV tapping out one of my stories and there was this fellow James Herriot playing such a good game of soccer for Birmingham that I just took his name."

Bright and Beautiful Success After four years of improving his writing skills and enduring publishers' rejections, Herriot saw the 1970 publication of *If Only They Could Talk* in England. By itself the book sold only twelve hundred copies, but this number did not accurately predict the career about to unfold. "I thought it would stop at one book and nobody would ever discover the identity of the obscure veterinary surgeon who had scribbled his experiences in snatched moments of spare time," Herriot wrote in *James Herriot's Yorkshire*. His next book, however, eliminated the possibility of his fading into obscurity.

It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet was published in the United States together with *If Only They Could Talk* under the title *All Creatures Great and Small*. The book was an instant best seller. It proved to be his most popular book and launched a series that included *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *All Things Wise and Wonderful*,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herriot's famous contemporaries include:

Heinrich Böll (1917–1985): This German author is respected for his post–World War II writings as much as for his successful resistance to join the Hitler Youth movement.

Ella Fitzgerald (1917–1996): African American "First Lady of Song," Fitzgerald is considered one of the most influential jazz singers of the twentieth century.

Anthony Hopkins (1937–): This Academy Award–winning Welsh actor has portrayed many fine gentlemen throughout his career, but he is popularly known for playing the cannibalistic Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Walter Farley (1915–1989): Farley was the original author of the immensely popular *Black Stallion* series.

Ted Hughes (1930–1998): Hughes was a British poet whose work often uses animals as metaphors.

The Lord God Made Them All, and *Every Living Thing*. Every volume was met with great enthusiasm.

The Last "Big" Book In 1984, Herriot expanded his writing to include children's stories with *Moses the Kitten*, the first of several cat stories written for young readers. Dogs have received equal billing in books including *The Market Square Dog* (1991) and *James Herriot's Dog Stories* (1995), in which many of the pieces were adapted from his previous works.

Although Herriot had told Foster and others that *The Lord God Made Them All* would be his last "big" book, he relented, and *Every Living Thing* was published in 1992, on the twentieth anniversary of the release of *All Creatures Great and Small*. The book was a best seller. Among the reviews expressing delight, Cathy Collison of the *Detroit Free Press* remarked that the book "offers more of Herriot's personal life," and concluded that it "is enough to keep the reader hoping Herriot, now retired from surgery, will turn his hand to one more volume." Unfortunately for his admirers, *Every Living Thing* was to be Herriot's last original book.

In the winter of 1995 Herriot died of prostate cancer at his home in England, leaving his son, James, also a veterinarian, and his daughter, Rosemary, a doctor. Before he died, Herriot insisted that he had everything he wanted. "If you get married and have kids, that's the main thing, isn't it?" he asked Claudia Glenn Dowling in a *Life* magazine profile. "And I've lived in this beautiful district, having the great pleasure of being associated with animals. Oh aye, it's been a marvelous life."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other writers who have also succeeded in offering heartwarming tales centered around animals:

Born Free (1960), a nonfiction work by Joy Adamson.

Readers fall in love with Elsa, a lioness that was adopted by humans when she was an orphaned cub.

Travels with Lisbeth (1993), a nonfiction work by Lars

Eighner. Eighner shares a provocative autobiographical tale of homelessness for man and pet.

Marley and Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog

(2005), a nonfiction book by John Grogan. Grogan's nonfiction account of his family's life with Marley humorously describes antic after antic of the lovable, troublesome, hyperactive dog.

Travels with Charley (1961), a memoir by John Steinbeck.

This memoir recounts Steinbeck's drive through America with Charley, his poodle.

Works in Literary Context

Herriot's books are largely autobiographical; although most place and character names are fictitious, they are based on real places and people. For example, master vet Donald Sinclair, Herriot's first employer, inspired the protagonist for several of his books. Herriot's works cover forty years of his life as a veterinarian in the uplands of Yorkshire, including his marriage to a farmer's daughter and his military service in the Royal Air Force during World War II. His affection for the landscape, the rugged farming population, and his patients is apparent in all his books; the volumes are laced with humorous anecdotes of man and beast, often with himself as the target of the joke.

A Charming Reality Based on the day-to-day realities of a gentle man, Herriot's books have almost magical soothing or healing powers in their candor, humor, and simple humility. As Mitzi Brundsdale noted, "An audience buffeted by brushfire wars, continent-spanning plagues, voice mail, E-mail, lost mail, MTV, and the Information Superhighway can still find solace in the disarming tales of a gentle veterinarian from a Yorkshire town . . . and a . . . world far removed from the horrors of the nightly news, yet as intimate as the decency and compassion of the human heart." Brundsdale further noted that Herriot's work "charms his readers with a healthy nostalgia for what used to be best in our world as well as an unquenchable hope for what we want to think—in spite of ourselves—remains a constant good in what Mark Twain called 'the damned human race.'"

Children's Books Herriot's later children's stories also work on charm. Short and uncomplicated, they

exude love and humor, and, at times, elicit tears. They have, in fact, the same peculiar magic that his adult fiction has, a blend, according to Mary Ann Grossmann in the *Chicago Tribune*, of "finely drawn and colorful characters, empathy for humans and animals, a good story set in a gentler time, humor, respect for uneducated but hard-working people and an appreciation of the land." Grossmann further commented, "There's something else in Herriot's writing that I can't quite articulate—a glow of decency that makes people want to be better humans. I guess we'd call it 'spirituality' these days, this profound belief of Herriot's that humans are linked to all animals, whether they be the cows he helped birth or pampered pets like Tricky Woo, a lovable but overfed Pekinese."

Lasting Influence Not only did Herriot reach readers all over the world with his chronicles of agricultural, medical, and veterinary industries, but his legacy lives on. His fame has fueled a thriving tourist economy in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, with such attractions as the World of James Herriot Museum, housed in the building of his vet practice.

Works in Critical Context

Though a few critics have found his books "rather lightweight stuff," most reviewers have approved of them as warm, likable, inspirational stories of places where people take pleasure in hard work and simple living. Although the majority of Herriot's tales may be heartwarming, they contain enough of the grim realities of farm life to avoid sentimentality. Most of all, the author's affection for his subjects is clearly demonstrated, and several reviewers have concluded that in their sincere portrayal of a man who loves his chosen home and lifestyle, Herriot's books have earned their popularity.

All Creatures Great and Small Reviewers described *All Creatures Great and Small* as a welcome change of pace. "What the world needs now, and does every so often, is a warm, G-rated, down-home, and unadrenalized prize of a book that sneaks onto the best-seller lists for no apparent reason other than a certain floppy-eared puppy appeal," William R. Doerner wrote in *Time*. "However, it is only partly because warm puppies—along with cows, horses, pigs, cats and the rest of the animal kingdom—figure as his main characters that James Herriot's [*All Creatures Great and Small*] qualifies admirably." *Atlantic Monthly* reviewer Phoebe Adams concluded that the book "is full of recalcitrant cows, sinister pigs, neurotic dogs, Yorkshire weather, and pleasantly demented colleagues. It continues to be one of the funniest and most likable books around."

Other Books in the Series The popularity of *All Creatures Great and Small* prompted Herriot to continue in the same vein with *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The *New York Times Book Review's* Paul Showers described *All Things Bright and Beautiful* as "Herriot's

enthusiastic endorsement of a simple, unpretentious life-style,” adding, “No wonder the earlier book was so popular. Here is a man who actually enjoys his work without worrying about the Protestant Ethic; he finds satisfaction in testing his skill against challenges of different kinds. Beyond that, he delights in the day-to-day process of living even when things aren’t going too well.”

The Lord God Made Them All, the fourth in Herriot’s original tetralogy, “begins as if the others had never ended, the same way old friends meet again and talk, at once forgetting they have been apart,” Lola D. Gillebaard remarked in the *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

Cats and Dogs Of Herriot’s cat tales, such as *The Christmas Day Kitten*, Jack Miles of the *Los Angeles Times* said it was “simply another yarn of the sort Herriot spins so effectively, a memory shared, this time, as a doctor might share it with a child on his knee. I think the average kid would be all ears.” And of his equally appreciated dog tales, *Washington Post Book World* critic Donald McCaig wrote, “In one story, a dying woman worries that after her death she will be reunited with her loved ones, but not with her animals, because she has been told that animals have no souls. Herriot convinces her that they do, because ‘if having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.’ I suppose there’s someone who will find this ‘soppy.’ Me, I think it’s true.”

Responses to Literature

1. Find the hymn from which Herriot took the titles of *All Creatures Great and Small*, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *All Things Wise and Wonderful*, and *The Lord God Made Them All*. Why do you think Herriot chose this particular hymn as his inspiration? Think of another hymn or song that you would use if you were Herriot writing those works today.
2. Much of today’s television programming consists of reality-based shows. With this in mind, Discuss the medical emergencies that form the conflict of some of Herriot’s most intense scenes. Do you think his particular veterinary experiences and outlook on life would make for good reality television?
3. Research the career of a veterinarian. Prepare a presentation showing your findings. Be sure to include information about the education needed to pursue this profession, common duties associated with the job, and different fields or branches within the profession.

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Hermann Hesse

BORN: 1877, Calw, Germany

DIED: 1962, Montagnola, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: German, Swiss

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Demian (1914)

Siddhartha (1922)

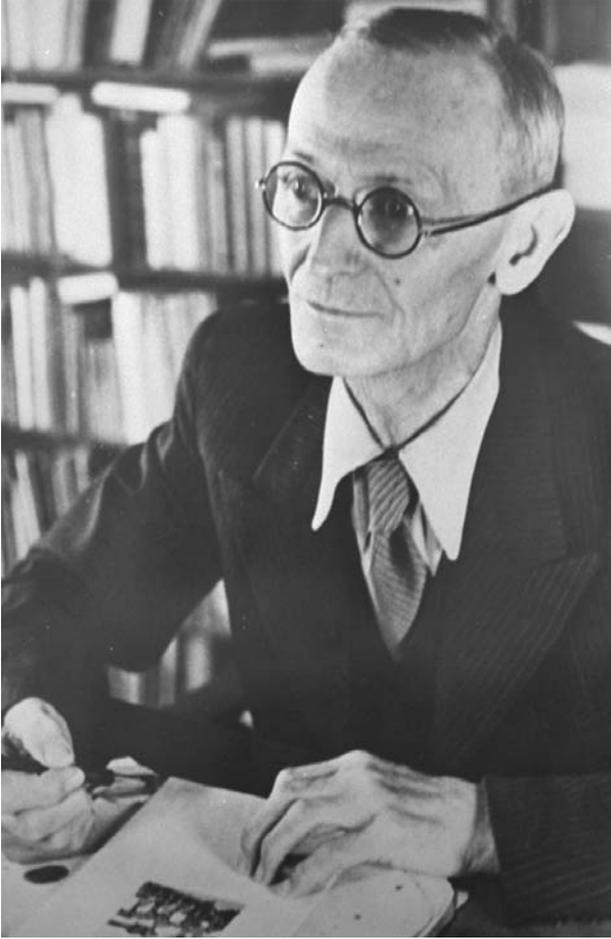
Steppenwolf (1927)

Narcissus and Goldmund (1930)

The Glass Bead Game (1943)

Overview

The most-translated German twentieth-century author, Hermann Hesse’s primarily autobiographical work focused on matters of the soul. Through novels and poems that draw on Eastern philosophy and ideas of enlightenment, Nobel laureate Hesse enjoyed success both during his lifetime and during the countercultural movement of the 1960s, when a generation of authors found inspiration in his characters’ search for enlightenment outside the bounds of normal society. Contemplative, artistic, and confessional, Hesse’s work has



Hermann Hesse Hesse, Hermann, photograph. The Library of Congress.

survived as a testament to humankind's search for spiritual meaning.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Birth and Early Rebellion Born on June 2, 1877, in a small German village, Hermann Hesse inherited his literary and spiritual interests. His father worked for a publishing house owned by Hesse's family, and both of his parents served as missionaries in the East Indies. Hesse's grandfather, Hermann Gundert, lived and worked in India, and was fascinated by the language and culture of the Far East. Gundert passed this passion on to his grandson.

In 1891, Hesse won a scholarship to a Protestant church school, but struggled with the discipline he found there. Dissatisfied, he dropped out. His concerned parents forced him into two other schools, but finally relented and allowed their son to come home in 1893 after at least one suicide attempt and time spent in a mental institution.

Though Hesse convinced his parents to let him come home, he had a harder time persuading them to let him follow his dream of becoming a writer. Instead, they forced him to become an apprentice machinist at a local clock factory. Depressed and dissatisfied with the monotonous work, Hesse dreamed of becoming a writer. In 1895, he began a new apprenticeship, this time with a bookseller in Tübingen, a town that had produced one of Hesse's poetic idols, the German lyricist Friedrich Hölderlin.

First Poems Supported by an indulgent boss and buried in a world of books, Hesse thrived at his job at the Heckenhauer bookshop. Inspired by the German Romantics like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Novalis, Hesse began to write poetry, publishing his first poem in 1896. Much of Hesse's early work was rooted in Romantic ideals of melodramatic fantasy. (Romanticism was a literary, as well as an artistic and philosophical movement that was a reaction against the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism. Romanticism also emphasized the individual, the personal, and the subjective, as well as the imaginative, the spontaneous, the emotional, and transcendental.) Disillusioned by modern society and moved by Romantic poetry, Hesse saw himself as a social outcast and sought out the mysteries of nature and poetry. His first two major works, however, were commercial failures, with only fifty-four copies of his *Romantic Songs* (1899) selling in two years.

Financially independent and ready to see something new, Hesse moved to Basel, Switzerland, in 1899. There, he continued to work with book dealers and made many friends among the city's intellectual and literary elite. However, Hesse was not content to stay in Basel, and in 1901 he traveled to Italy for the first time. He met Maria Bernoulli, member of a famed family of mathematicians, on a second trip to Italy in 1903. Bernoulli, who was nine years Hesse's senior, would later become his wife.

Literary Fame Around this time, Hesse embarked on his first important literary work, *Peter Camenzind* (1904). This highly autobiographical novel drew from Hesse's own feelings of demoralization, isolation, and bitterness. The main character, Peter Camenzind, is a frustrated writer who moves from his isolated mountain home to the city and discovers himself along the way. The novel won Hesse critical acclaim and his first taste of fame, bringing him the coveted Bauernfeld Prize and giving him the financial means to marry Bernoulli in 1904. The pair moved to their own mountain retreat in Gaienhofen, where they hoped to pursue artistic goals while living a simple, country life. However, the arrival of their first son, Bruno, in 1905 shattered these dreams, and the marriage began to suffer.

Hesse's next novel, *Beneath the Wheel* (1906), used a fictional setting to criticize Germany's harsh educational system. The novel, which follows two boys through their

careers at a school much like the seminary Hesse attended, uses both characters as a means of exploring Hesse's own personality and represents his own struggle to understand the person he was and the person he wished to become.

While in Gaienhofen, Hesse had become increasingly interested in Eastern culture and Buddhism. Eager to escape his unhappy marriage, he traveled to Asia with a friend in 1911. Hesse was shocked by the poverty and overcrowding he saw there. His plans to travel in India were interrupted by an illness, and he returned to Germany to an increasingly unpleasant married life. The couple moved to Bern, where Hesse worked on his next novel, *Rosshalde* (1913). The novel, which follows a painter and his older wife, clearly reflected Hesse's dissatisfaction with his marriage.

Disillusionment Family troubles were not Hesse's only stressors at the time, as World War I soon began. In 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. Ongoing conflicts in the region as well as entangling alliances soon brought many major European countries into war. Germany, led by Emperor Wilhelm II, was allied with Austria-Hungary and Turkey against France, Great Britain, Russia, and, later, the United States. Germany hoped to gain influence, if not territory, in eastern Europe and the Balkans through these actions.

Unable to engage in armed conflict, Hesse spoke out against World War I and performed relief work for German prisoners of war. The German press condemned him as a pacifist and traitor, allegations that would color his literary reputation. By war's end in 1918, however, Germany and its allies were defeated, and some 1.6 million Germans had lost their lives. World War I also marked Hesse's first encounter with Jungian analysis in his attempt to discover the path inwards. Influenced by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Hesse was dismayed to find the world's thirst for war reflected in himself. He tried to engage with that self and learn more about it through psychotherapy and an increased interest in religion and spirituality.

Postwar Works In 1919, Hesse published his fifth novel, *Demian*. He used a pen name, Emil Sinclair, and won the Theodore Fontane Prize for best debut novel, an honor he was forced to return when he admitted that he had actually written the work. The novel, which follows a young boy's destructive friendship with an older teen, used a psychological approach that differentiated it from other novels. Around this time, Hesse's marriage ended and he settled permanently in Montagnola, Switzerland.

There, he delved into his novel *Siddhartha* (1922). A reaction to both world events and the criticism he had received for his antiwar stance, *Siddhartha* was what Hesse called "the biography of a soul." The book follows a man's attempt to find inner peace as he transforms from

wandering monk to enlightened, self-realized man. Though *Siddhartha* appeared to critical favor, it did not gain true popularity until its English translation in the 1950s and 1960s, when it influenced an entire generation of American Beat poets and hippies on a search for spiritual fulfillment.

Became Swiss Citizen In the meantime, Hesse, still hurt by his treatment during World War I, abandoned his German citizenship and became a Swiss citizen in 1922. He entered into a short-lived marriage with Ruth Wenger in 1924, but the marriage soon ended, and he sought comfort in Zurich's jazz clubs and bars during the winter months from 1925 to 1931. However, Hesse found no relief from sex, alcohol, and jazz. Isolated and alone, he expressed his disillusionment and loner status in his 1927 novel *Steppenwolf*, a title which roughly translates as the "lone wolf." An experimental, highly pessimistic work, *Steppenwolf* deals with questions of suicide, existence, and higher realities and is thought to reflect Hesse's disappointment in his failed marriages and his unsatisfactory attempt at hedonism.

Later Works Influenced by Events in Germany

After meeting an art historian twenty years his junior, Hesse finally found personal fulfillment in a romantic relationship. He married Ninon Dolbin in 1931. This return to happiness was reflected in his next novel, *Death and the Lover* (1930). Though rejected by many critics as inferior to Hesse's other work, this more optimistic novel proved to be one of Hesse's most popular.

When Hesse began writing his next novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (1949), he had no idea it would take eleven years to complete. Hesse wrote the novel amidst growing political crises in Germany. After World War I, Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which forced it to cede territory and to pay billions in reparations, despite a destroyed economy. Humiliated and impoverished, Germans saw their country's standing restored when Adolf Hitler came to power in the early 1930s. The leader of the Nazi Party, Hitler infused Germany with military, territorial, and economic ambitions. These objectives were a primary cause of World War II, which officially began in Europe when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939.

Hesse was condemned by the Nazi Party for betraying his German roots and applying for Swiss citizenship. Though upset by political events, Hesse was finally fulfilled in his personal relationships and had many visitors as his intellectual and literary friends fled Germany to neutral Switzerland. *The Glass Bead Game*, which deals with a futuristic utopia, earned Hesse the Nobel Prize in 1946. It would be his last major work.

The last years of Hesse's life were relatively peaceful. He spent his time writing letters to the many young people now interested in his philosophies and novels, writing poetry, and enjoying a quiet life in Switzerland. He died in 1962 after a battle with leukemia.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hesse's famous contemporaries include:

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): German fascist leader and head of the ruling Nazi Party before and during World War II.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): German playwright known for his innovative modern theatrical techniques and epic theatrical productions. His plays include *The Threepenny Opera* (1928).

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist who founded the field of analytical psychology; he is best known for introducing the idea of a collective unconscious shared by all human beings.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Indian spiritual and political leader who fought for India's independence from Britain and promoted nonviolent protest.

Works in Literary Context

As a young writer, Hesse greatly admired German Romantic poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Novalis, and his early poetry reflects those influences. Over time, he also drew on the religious background given to him by his parents and grandparents, which included the Bible, the tenants of Pietism, and Eastern philosophy. In addition, Hesse maintained a lifelong fascination with fantasy and folklore, and was inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Rejection of Society Hesse's work was always influenced by ideas of solitude, isolation, and a desire to escape from modern society. In addition, Hesse was profoundly impacted by his experiences in a Protestant seminary and the writings and work of his grandfather, a renowned Orientalist. He would draw on these themes of Eastern and Western religion in works like *Siddhartha*, which follows a man as he searches for spiritual fulfillment. In his quest, Siddhartha leaves behind the society he knows. This paradoxically allows him to attain an understanding of human nature that he could not reach while living a "normal" life. In his earlier novel *Steppenwolf*, the main character, Harry Haller, views himself as a "lone wolf" who stands apart from—and even above—the rest of society.

Search for Fulfillment and Meaning In Hesse's work, a rejection of society goes hand-in-hand with a greater search for enlightenment and meaning. This is the main focus of *Siddhartha*, which is regarded at least as much for its philosophical ideas about enlightenment as it is for its narrative elements. *Steppenwolf*, too, is about one man's search for meaning in his life, which he finds in this case through a "magic theater" where reality becomes

difficult to distinguish from the creations of the mind. *The Glass Bead Game* pushes this theme to an extreme, postulating a branch of society that does nothing but pursue knowledge and enlightenment through books and through the mysterious game mentioned in the title.

Influence As the most-translated German-language author, it is difficult to estimate just how influential Hermann Hesse's work was to his generation and the ones that followed. Hesse passed on his work to a generation of poets, politicians, hippies, and countercultural icons, who used it as a means of self-exploration during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. He was especially embraced by Beat poets and countercultural figures such as Andy Warhol, who produced a painting of Hesse, and Timothy Leary, who felt that Hesse's works encouraged a psychedelic consciousness.

Works in Critical Context

Response to Hermann Hesse's body of work varied during his lifetime. Currently, however, he is widely regarded as one of the masters of German literature. Hesse got off to a poor start with his first literary works, which barely sold any copies and are considered of little literary merit. Critic Joseph Mileck has described Hesse's earliest works as melodramatic and unnoticed, stating that "neither book attracted more than a modicum of attention."

Popularity of Novels Hesse's first novel, however, did attract attention. The autobiographical novel *Peter Camenzind* appeared to critical acclaim, winning prizes and putting Hesse's name on the map. Hesse continued to win prizes with works like *Demian*, though he had to turn down one prize because he had written the work under a pen name. *Siddhartha* is widely known as Hesse's masterpiece, but the work did not gain general critical acclaim until its publication in English in the 1950s. At that time, the work's emphasis on Eastern religion and spiritual self-discovery struck a chord with scholars and students, and it attracted much critical and popular attention.

Hesse's last major work, *The Glass Bead Game*, appeared to wide critical acclaim and garnered Hesse the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. The award marked a period of revived interest in Hesse's work, with more and more critics turning to his early output, and around this time Hesse began to be recognized as one of the great lights of German literature.

Though criticism and public opinion of Hesse varied during his lifetime, his writing was embraced by the English-speaking world during the 1950s and 1960s, when his works appeared in translation in England and the United States.

Steppenwolf Though Hesse was considered to be a major German author by the beginning of World War I, his antiwar position and renunciation of his German citizenship earned him negative critiques from patriots who felt he had betrayed Germany. His 1927 book *Steppenwolf* is widely seen as a reaction to this criticism. The

book, which includes a scene in which the main character hallucinates a conversation with Mozart, also received wide critical attention and acclaim during the 1950s and 1960s, when critics turned to it as a countercultural rejection of society complete with psychedelic elements. By the late 1990s, critics like Ritchie Robertson, writing in the *Journal of European Studies* rated the novel higher than other works by Hesse. Robertson noted that “the ambiguities of *Steppenwolf*, along with its use of multiple perspectives and mirroring techniques, make it far more interesting than the bland dualism and vaticinations of *Siddhartha*.”

Responses to Literature

1. Hesse’s work was deeply influenced by his studies of Eastern philosophy and spirituality. What other authors can you think of whose work was influenced by their religious worldview? Using the Internet and the library, write a paper about one of these authors and the influence of religion on his or her literary output.
2. Hesse is known for his focus on the individual trying to escape from society. What parts of Hesse’s own experience influenced this interest in countercultural ideas? Create a presentation of your findings.
3. *Siddhartha* enjoys enduring popularity in high school and college classrooms. Compare its relevance with that of other commonly assigned books like *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), by J. D. Salinger, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), by Harper Lee. Why do you think the ideas in *Siddhartha* would be particularly appealing to young people? Write a paper voicing your conclusions.
4. Hesse was mocked and put down in the German press for his antiwar stance during World War I. Using the Internet and library, research with a partner other writers whose political views threatened their literary careers. Make a presentation of your findings, comparing and contrasting Hesse’s experiences with at least two other writers.
5. Discouraged by his unpopularity in Germany, Hesse published his novel *Demian* under an assumed name. Using the Internet and your library, research other writers who published their work under pseudonyms. What reasons can you find for authors to use pseudonyms? Write a paper that outlines your findings.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hesse’s *Siddhartha* explores questions of spirituality and the inner self. Here are a few other examples of works whose heroes embark on a mission of self-discovery:

Into the Wild (1996), a nonfiction work by John Krakauer.

This bestselling book deals with a young man’s ill-fated journey into the Alaskan wilderness.

Walden (1854), a nonfiction work by Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps the most famous American nonfiction book of all time, *Walden* contains its author’s observations and philosophical musings during a solitary time in a simple cabin in rural Massachusetts.

On The Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This classic novel of the Beat Generation in America is loosely based on the real adventures experienced by the author on his road trips across America.

The Razor’s Edge (1944), a novel by W. Somerset Maugham. This novel tells the story of a World War I fighter pilot who returns home after the war, but quickly decides to reject society’s conventions and strike out on a round-the-world search for knowledge and meaning.

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Nazim Hikmet

BORN: 1901, Salonika, Greece

DIED: 1963, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Turkish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Seyh Bedreddin destani (*The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin*) (1936)

Memleketimden insan manzaralari (*Human Landscapes*) (1938–1950)

Things I Didn’t Know I Loved (1975)



Nazim Hikmet *Hikmet, Nazim, photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

Nazim Hikmet is posthumously considered one of the giants of twentieth-century Turkish literature, though his poems, plays, and prose were banned in his homeland during most of his lifetime.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Political Activism and Trouble Born in 1901 in Salonika, Greece (then under Turkish rule), Nazim Hikmet published his first poems when he was fifteen years old. In 1921 he went to the Soviet Union to study at the University of the Workers of the East and returned to Turkey in 1924, when he joined the Turkish Communist Party as a supporter of the rights of farmers and workers. A year later, after publishing his first political poems, he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, so he fled back to the Soviet Union. In 1928 he again returned to his homeland and worked on the progressive periodical *Resimli Ay* (*Pictorial Monthly*).

From Prison to Exile Hikmet found himself in and out of prison between 1928 and 1933. The offending actions or affronting works that caused Hikmet's continual incarceration remain vague, and sources contradict each other. For instance, in 1938 Hikmet was sentenced to thirty-five years in jail either for inciting military cadets to rebel, for his antifascist poem "Madrit kapilarinda" ("At the Gates of Madrid"), or for his long poem "Seyh Bedreddin destani" ("The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin"). Regardless of the specific charge, Hikmet remained in prison until 1950.

There are also contradictory accounts surrounding the end of his prison time in Turkey. Some sources say he was released and sent into exile in the Soviet Union. Others credit a dramatic escape from Istanbul to Moscow through Romania. It is certain that in 1950 he left Turkey for the Soviet Union. He was stripped of his Turkish

citizenship but given a hero's welcome in the Soviet Union. From 1950 until his death in 1963, Hikmet lived both in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries. He emerged as a prominent figure in the peace movement of the European left, lending his poetry to the cause of Communism. He remained critical of the rising political reaction in Turkey, but also grieved over his forced separation from the country that continued to provide inspiration for his poetry.

Works in Literary Context

Hikmet's poetry, often compared with that of American poet Walt Whitman, is credited with revolutionizing Turkish verse by challenging its traditional forms: Hikmet introduced modernist techniques—including the use of broken lines and a style influenced by street vernacular—and confirmed contemporary issues as legitimate thematic material. "Free verse with alternations of short and long lines, occasional rhyming, and wide use of alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia, a staccato syntax, were to remain the hallmarks of his art and his major influences on modern Turkish poetics," wrote Talat Sait Halman in *Books Abroad*. Because of his verse's impact, Hikmet was the first Turkish poet to establish an international reputation.

Poetry and Marxist Politics Hikmet's poetry, inseparable from his Marxist politics, drew admiration and applause from some of the foremost intellectuals and artists of the century, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertolt Brecht to Pablo Picasso and Pablo Neruda. Hikmet was remarkably successful in bringing poetic lyricism to politics. His populist patriotism, and passionate but critical commitment to the Communist promise, found expression in a poetry that is as striking for its musical qualities as it is for intense visual aesthetic.

His poems ranged in genre from the poetry of love composed for his many mistresses to epic works, such as *The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin* and *Human Landscapes*. The poems drew their power not just from a superb use of Turkish free from pedantic ornamentation, but also the sensibility that he brought to his politics, in which sadness played against defiance, tenderness against toughness, and a deep sense of the vagaries of life against his utopian hopes for the future.

Love for Nature and Humanity Hikmet wrote volumes of short pieces, many of them concerned with his love for nature, for his fellow human beings, and for his wife, Piraye. Critics note that Hikmet's loves were what fueled his communism and not a logical or economical appreciation of theoretical politics. "His communism never appears cold and doctrinaire but seems a natural outgrowth of his love for people, his desire that humankind grow in love and cooperation and his deep reflection on life and living—and beneath it all he is himself a loving, hurting, feeling human being," judged Walter G. Andrews in *World Literature Today*. Another reviewer

wrote, “The composite picture of Nazim Hikmet . . . is that of a man with a total commitment to life. He is in love with nature’s splendors as well as the machine age. . . . When he wrote of human love and tragedy in lyric and dramatic terms, he was a great modern poet by any and all criteria.” “What emerges from his poems,” wrote Mutlu Konuk in the introduction to *Things I Didn’t Know I Loved: Selected Poems of Nazim Hikmet*, “is his human presence; the strongest impression that we get from his poetry is a sense of Hikmet as a person.”

“I conceive of art as an active institution in society,” Hikmet once said. “To me, the artist is the *engineer of the human soul*.” Hikmet also once said, according to *Village Voice Literary Supplement* contributor Don Shewey, “Living is no laughing matter, we must live as if one never dies.”

Works in Critical Context

The most notable critical response to Hikmet’s poetry came from the Turkish government, which banned his writings for most of his lifetime. Exiled from Turkey after twelve years of imprisonment, Hikmet was virtually unknown in his homeland, but when he died in 1963, he was a prominent figure in international literary circles. Much of his work was only published in Turkey many years after his death, and he has more and more been regarded as one of Turkey’s greatest poets.

Human Landscapes Hikmet’s most ambitious project was written while he was imprisoned between 1938 and 1950: a five-volume poem titled *Memleketimden insan manzaralari* (*Human Landscapes*) that was published, as is true of much of his work, only after his death. In the poem, Hikmet crafts what one critic called “a sprawling, episodic saga of the twentieth century.” Originally conceived as an encyclopedic survey of modern Turkish life, the poem, consisting of nearly twenty thousand lines, touches on a range of themes, cinematically painting the portraits of individuals drawn from all segments of Turkish society. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor called *Memleketimden insan manzaralari* “a grand, impressive, sophisticated work, rich in dramatic incident and varied in tone and language.” Robert Hudzik, writing in *Library Journal*, found that “Hikmet’s ability to particularize the general helps make this a bold, remarkable work.” The *Hudson Review* wrote, “Hikmet has an uncanny way of bringing characters to life in a few lines so vividly that, whether they are scurrilous or noble, one can’t help but care about them. . . . His special gift is to show that every human life is a story, and a compelling one.”

Responses to Literature

1. Hikmet was jailed and censored in Turkey because the government considered his communist ideas to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hikmet’s famous contemporaries include:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): Brecht was a German playwright and theater director whose writings and productions significantly influenced twentieth-century theater.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Hemingway was an American writer who is considered one of the greatest influences on twentieth-century literature.

Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968): Quasimodo was an Italian author considered one of the most important Italian poets of the twentieth century; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1959.

Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986): Seifert was a Czech writer who was a leading member of the Czechoslovakian avant-garde; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984.

Walt Disney (1901–1966): Disney was an American animator and entrepreneur who was one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century entertainment.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Neruda was a Chilean writer and politician associated with the international Communist movement; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): Sartre was a French philosopher who was a leading figure in the existentialist movement.

be dangerous to the country. Do his ideas still seem dangerous from today’s perspective? Would a writer producing such works today face the same repressive treatment?

2. Hikmet wrote many poems on the theme of his love for nature and for humanity. In what ways were his communist ideas fueled by this love? Do his expressions of love fit consistently within the system of his communist ideas, or are there contradictions and points of tension? Explain.
3. Through his poetry, Hikmet was able to turn common people’s lives into compelling stories about humanity, history, and current issues. Using his poetry as a model, write a poem or short story about a common person that tells a larger story.
4. Hikmet’s works were banned in Turkey throughout much of his life, and he was frequently jailed for the ideas expressed in his poetry. Do you think a government has a right to control the products of its nation’s authors? Write an argumentative essay supporting your position on this question.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hikmet's poetry often depicted the suffering created by repressive governments and hailed the promises of communism, which promoted sharing of wealth among all citizens. Here are some other works written for these purposes:

El tungsteno (1931), a novel by César Vallejo. This social realist novel depicts the oppression of Peruvian miners by foreigners.

Mother (1907), a novel by Maxim Gorky. This socialist realist novel tells the story of a man and his mother who transform into revolutionaries.

Cement (1925), a novel by Fyodor Gladkov. This novel shows the struggles of workers rebuilding their lives after the Communist revolution in Russia.

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Rolf Hochhuth

BORN: 1931, Eschwege, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Deputy (1963)

Soldiers (1967)

A Love in Germany (1968)

The Midwife (1971)

Lawyers (1979)

Overview

Rolf Hochhuth is widely considered one of the most controversial German playwrights of the 1960s. Some of his plays have been challenged by the Catholic Church, while others have been banned by the British parliament. Besides being severely criticized for his choice of subject matter, Hochhuth has had his writing dismissed as historically inaccurate and derided as technically inept. Yet several of his plays have effected sig-

nificant social and political consequences and continue to enjoy public popularity.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Reluctant Hitler Youth Hochhuth was born on April 1, 1931, in Eschwege, east of Kassel, Germany, to shoemaker and manufacturer Walter Hochhuth and his wife, Ilse Holzapfel Hochhuth. After being forced to close his shoe factory in the Depression, in 1932, Hochhuth's father managed the wholesale business of his wife's family.

The family had liberal leanings in politics, though the young Hochhuth was an unenthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth. The Hitler Youth were a paramilitary arm of the Nazi Party whose membership included older teenage boys, and after 1936, all eligible German boys had to join the group. Hitler took power in Germany in the early 1930s, and imbued the floundering country with pride through massive military expansion and aggressive territorial ambitions. Under Hitler's dictatorship, Germany forced the beginning of World War II in Europe by invading Poland in 1939. Hitler's actions determined Hochhuth's early life to such an extent that he now, ironically, calls Hitler his father.

The Success and Failure of The Deputy After leaving school at the Realgymnasium of Eschwege early, Hochhuth became a bookseller's apprentice in Marburg, Kassel, and Munich. In 1955, he became a reader for the Bertelsmann publishing house, and in 1957, he married Marianne Heinemann, a former schoolmate. They had two sons.

Hochhuth's first and best known play was *The Deputy* (1963). Starting in 1959, Hochhuth worked on the play daily, using records of the events at Auschwitz (the largest concentration camp where Nazis took Jews to complete the goals of the Holocaust; over 1.1 million people were killed there), the testimony of witnesses he interviewed in Rome, the accounts of Nazi officer Kurt Gerstein (who tried to sabotage the mass murders of Jews), and secondary sources on the Vatican's attitude regarding the deportation of Roman Jews. The play was completed in 1961, but fears of legal action by the Vatican prevented its publication. A prize for promising young authors was awarded for it in 1962, but its future was still in doubt until H. M. Ledig-Rowohl of the Rowohl publishing house decided to publish it. Ledig-Rowohl showed the proofs to the producer Erwin Piscator, who agreed to stage it. It caused a tempest of controversy in Western Europe and North America.

The Deputy points to the failure of the Vatican—specifically Pope Pius XII—to speak up about, and possibly halt the Holocaust. Before the first performance, the secrecy surrounding the play and excerpts leaked from it stirred up an atmosphere of impending scandal. After



Rolf Hochhuth Hochhuth, Rolf, photograph. AP / Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.

positive response from audiences on opening night, the first production ran for 117 performances in Berlin and then toured to 21 cities in Germany. The next season there were 13 productions in Germany, reaching a total of 504 performances. In France, the play was even more popular, with 346 performances of Peter Brook's production. Other early versions were staged in Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the United States.

In Rome, however, the play was almost banned. The Catholic Church—shaken by the threat of losing its moral authority—considered legal action against Hochhuth for antichurch utterances or for libel of a dead person. Then it started a campaign that led to serious public disorder in Basel. On seeing how the Swiss defended his freedom of speech against six thousand Catholic and right-wing demonstrators, Hochhuth moved with his family to Riehen, near Basel. In the long run, the church had to take Hochhuth seriously. They released materials from the Vatican archives and began looking more critically at Pius XII, who had up to then been thought a candidate for canonization. Because the Catholic Church was a pillar of the West German state (created after World War II when Germany was divided into two countries: the Western democracy of West Germany and the Soviet-influenced East Germany) and interdependent with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the ruling party, the ecclesiastical scandal was also a threat to the government.

The Wrong Effects In his next play, *Soldiers* (1967), Hochhuth tried to give Winston Churchill—as the man responsible for ordering the bombing of Dresden—the same treatment he had given Pope Pius XII. (Churchill had been Great Britain's leader for much of World War II. In 1945, he played a key role in ordering the bombing of the German city of Dresden, in which 527 bombers spent two days essentially annihilating the city. There

were also casualties in the thousands.) When Sir Laurence Olivier accepted the play for an English-language production at the National Theatre in London, *Soldiers* caused a controversy in the British press because of its view of Churchill. It was banned by Lord Chamberlain (a chief officer of the royal household in the British government), whose office as censor of plays was abolished as a consequence of the affair. Thereafter, the play had its biggest success in London, with 122 performances.

The play had no noticeable effect, however, on the regulation of aerial warfare—a subject important to Hochhuth, who was shocked by indiscriminate bombing during the Vietnam War (a conflict in Vietnam in which the United States tried unsuccessfully to ensure the country would not fall into the control of Communists). Hochhuth had started writing the play in order to press for the extension of the Geneva conventions to aerial warfare. He had apparently intended it as a contribution to the attacks on American strategy in Vietnam, but this aspect was little discussed in connection with the play.

Message about America In 1968, in response to civil unrest in America, the murders of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon's election as president, and the rise in Germany of the extraparliamentary opposition, Hochhuth started work on *Guerillas* (1970). The material of the play was seen as worth a dramatic exploration, but too many problems with the work rendered it ineffective—including the grand scale Hochhuth chose, the melodramatic events and sensational incidents the playwright attempted to cover, and the intrusions of theory. In the early 1970s, Hochhuth's personal life was also transformed. He divorced his first wife in 1972, and was married again to a medical student, Dana Pavic, in 1975. The couple later had one son.

Improved Dramatic Construction In *Lawyers* (1979), Hochhuth returned to the formula of his first plays. As did many others, Hochhuth maintained his criticism of post-World War II politics and law in Germany. In *Lawyers*, he focuses on the fact that no German lawyer was ever prosecuted after 1945 for anything he did under Hitlerian laws. In fact, attorneys were exonerated because they were “only obeying orders”—whereas the same defense was rejected when it was used by military personnel. The play could have ended the career of a leading Christian Democratic Union (CDU) politician Hans Filbinger, but Hochhuth let some of his evidence out beforehand in an advance extract published in the newspaper *Time* of a narrative work, *A German Love Story* (1980). Hochhuth, who had just moved from Basel to Vienna, was sued by Filbinger for five hundred thousand marks in damages.

Additional Protests In *Judith* (1984), Hochhuth reworked the subject matter of *Guerillas*. The work was found to be rambling, containing inconclusive discussions

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hochhuth's famous contemporaries include:

Alvin Ailey Jr. (1931–1989): The American modern dancer and choreographer who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Edward M. Kennedy (1932–): The United States senator from Massachusetts known both for his liberal political stance and as the younger sibling of two slain brothers—president John F. Kennedy and senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Günter Grass (1927–): German novelist and playwright and Nobel laureate whose 2006 admission that he was a member of the Waffen-SS, an elite Nazi military group, stirred an international controversy.

Toni Morrison (1931–): The American author and winner of both the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes. Her novels include *Beloved* (1988).

on the ethics of assassination, offering improbabilities from the world of the cheap thriller, and suffering from a parade of topics Hochhuth was fixated on. In *Summer 14* (1989), Hochhuth offered an argument aired in the notes to *Judith*. That the arms race produces war and that there are parallels between the increase of armaments in the 1980s and the growth of the German armed forces before 1914. The argument of *Summer 14* was found, again, to be inconsistent.

Continued Complaints and Demands Hochhuth continued to produce original plays as well as essays and nonfiction in the 1990s and early 2000s, though none have matched the importance or popularity of his early works and few have been translated into English. Later works include *Heil Hitler* (2001) and *McKinsey kommt* (2003). The latter is a play that focused on the problems of capitalism in postwar Germany. He continues to reside near Basel.

Works in Literary Context

Much of Hochhuth's work is directly influenced by the author's experiences in and the outfall from World War II. In addition to dubbing former Nazi leader Adolf Hitler his father, Hochhuth drew on what happened to Germany in the postwar period and the lack of consequences for actions taken during the conflict. While realism, historicism, and even current events were important to the author's works, he also employed symbolism, myths, and metaphysical aspects as well. Thus many of Hochhuth's dramas are thesis plays; that is, they have a strong political message and focus on contemporary problems.

Shocking Style Hochhuth's style relies heavily on shock value to express his convictions. The strength of his two first plays, for example, lay in their eliciting reactions of shock from the audience to historical events and the actions of historical personages. His third play, *Guerillas*, even puts forth the suggestion that the audience will be shocked by the undemocratic nature of the United States.

Controversial Presentation of Themes Hochhuth's coverage of vital themes has been controversial to the point of being scandalous. This is demonstrated in plays like *The Deputy*, for instance. Since 1945, various dramatists have dealt with the crimes of the Hitler era, mainly in highly symbolic, mythical, metaphysical, or philosophical ways. In narrative literature, a more realistic approach has often been used, though only prose works like Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959) have attracted mass attention. *The Deputy* is an attempt at what is called in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—managing, or coming to terms with, the past.

Hochhuth's Wide-Reaching Influence Despite or because of the controversial critical attack on Pope Pius XII in *The Deputy*, no other postwar German drama reached out as this one did to influence people who never visited a theater. Much of the discussion, to be sure, left the play itself to one side, addressing matters Hochhuth had not raised, such as whether papal protest would have hastened the end of the Nazi regime. But none of it would have happened without the catalyst provided by Hochhuth.

The greatest effect comes when Hochhuth—a militant pessimist—attacks. Twice, with his attacks on Pius XII and on Hans Filbinger, Hochhuth signaled changes of direction in West German society and helped to strip away conspiracies of silence. His plays have been at their most effective when he has seized on a historical cover-up or a social injustice and presented it in a direct and realistic way.

Works in Critical Context

Hochhuth's plays have received little critical praise. From a literary perspective, the consensus is that he is incapable of structuring a play, of writing dialogue that is not impossibly wooden, or even of thinking clearly about the kind of aesthetic effect he intends. With *Guerillas*, for instance, critics pointed to a plot overloaded with sensational incidents that distract attention from the political analysis, supposedly shocking social injustices that never appear onstage, cheaply introduced sex, and shallow characterizations.

But whatever their artistic failings, a number of his plays have had direct social and political consequences. At least three have had considerable success with the public—regardless of the critical issues with either the topics or the treatment of those topics. This success is demonstrated, for example, in such plays as *The Deputy*.

The Deputy Critics almost universally found that no previous post–World War II dramatic work shook the conscience of Europe as did Rolf Hochhuth’s *The Deputy*. Such critics noted that where other playwrights gave sophisticated artistic presentations of nothing much, Hochhuth gave a depiction of important subjects that was sneered at by experts but capable of keeping the audience arguing for hours after the curtain fell. As David Boroff wrote in the *National Observer*, “Though it is both flawed and arguable, it has restored seriousness to the Broadway theater. Not since *Death of a Salesman* or *The Diary of Anne Frank* have audiences been so profoundly shaken.”

Literary critics, glad of a serious political subject to write about, paid much attention to the accuracy of Hochhuth’s treatment but had no criteria other than Hochhuth’s own historical notes for judging it. Such discussions tended to increase the respect paid to his qualities as a self-taught historian. There also has been much argument as to whether Hochhuth portrays Pius XII fairly. Some critics have expressed the wish that the theme had been treated more competently, though no other writer had thought of treating it at all. Others believe that much of the depiction of Nazism should be omitted as irrelevant to the plot. Walter Kerr, drama critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, agreed that the work is flawed, but he, too, concluded, “We are also left with the aftermath of *The Deputy*, making a clamor in the world which may, hopefully, become the equivalent of a call to prayer. Any virtues the work possesses are extra-theatrical. They may indeed become virtues.”

Responses to Literature

1. Hochhuth’s *The Deputy* is centered on working out a proper moral response to Nazism. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the response of the German people to the rise of the Nazi Party. Were they all enthusiastic? Did some resist Nazi activities? How? What consequences might a resistor face? As a group, discuss how you think you would have reacted if you were a German civilian in Germany during the late 1930s and 1940s.
2. Read a Hochhuth play that has been censored by some group or government. Highlight specific parts of the play that you think might have prompted its censorship. Do you think the censors were right to try to block the play? Do you think censoring a work of literature serves a productive purpose? Or does it serve only to make the work of literature more intriguing to readers?
3. Hochhuth’s play *The Deputy* highlights a phenomenon of worldwide significance. He shows that during the Holocaust there were cultures that were quiet or intentionally neglectful about the atrocity, and afterward there were many people who denied it ever happened. Investigate Holocaust denial, look-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also explored political or social injustice as major themes:

Anthem (1938), a novel by Ayn Rand. In this work the author presents a dystopian (anti-utopian) society where socialism, or collectivism, rules.

Johnny Got His Gun (1939), a novel by Dalton Trumbo. This story is told from the point of view of World War I American soldier Joe Bonham, who loses his arms, legs, eyes, nose, and ears in battle and must learn to exist and communicate quite differently than he did before.

The Satanic Verses (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. This work, which centers on Muhammad as he is “tricked” by Satan, elicited death threats against its author.

Red Azalea (1994), a memoir by Anchee Min. In this autobiographical work, the author recounts her biggest challenge, in which she was forced to choose between self-will and the will of the Chinese Communist Party.

ing into the arguments of such Holocaust deniers as David Irving. What supportive evidence do these people offer to insist there was no such occurrence? Provide a list of examples of the “evidence.” What is the Holocaust denier’s purpose? What does he (or she) gain from this argument?

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❏ Fritz Hochwaelder

BORN: 1911, Vienna, Austria

DIED: 1986, Zurich, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Strong Are Lonely (1943)

Donnerstag (1959)

Holocaust (1960)

1003 (1963)

Overview

A significant German-language dramatist who is not widely known outside Europe, Fritz Hochwaelder wrote well-crafted plays that center on weighty moral issues. His plays are conventionally structured, emphasizing plot, fully developed characters, and thematic unity, and they appeal to both the intellect and the emotions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Driven to Write Fritz Hochwaelder was born May 28, 1911, in Vienna, Austria, to Leonhard Hochwaelder, an upholsterer, and Therese Koenig Hochwaelder. To escape capture and persecution by Nazi soldiers, Hochwaelder fled his homeland after the invasion of the German army in 1938. Like other Austrians, he entered Switzerland illegally, where he then spent time in refugee camps. Unfortunately, Hochwaelder's parents, like millions of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), did not



Fritz Hochwaelder *Imagno / Getty Images*

escape the genocide of the Holocaust. They both died within the confines of the Nazi-run Terezienstadt concentration camp in what is now the Czech Republic. Because Hochwaelder was categorized as a non-citizen in Switzerland and therefore barred from seeking employment, he decided to concentrate on writing plays instead.

World War II: Accepting the Reality of Atrocity

Hochwaelder's play *The Strong Are Lonely* (1942) was a major success in several European countries during the 1940s. Like most of his early works, this play explores universal themes through historical settings. *The Strong Are Lonely* is based upon the rise and fall of a utopian Jesuit settlement in Paraguay during the eighteenth century. The settlement is ordered to disband by both religious and secular officials; Father Alfonso, the protagonist and head of the settlement, acquiesces to authority, but he later realizes that he should have trusted his own conscience rather than let others decide his fate. The emphasis on the consciences of the individual over the conscience of a nation is a theme that develops directly out of the problems the world faced during World War II. The truth that people had to face and accept was that the atrocities that led to the deaths of so many during that war and the upheaval of Hochwaelder himself were committed not by countries but by individuals who chose to follow the imperatives of their superiors. Although Hochwaelder was never able to repeat the initial success of *The Strong Are Lonely*, his subsequent plays were well received, and he continued writing solidly composed works until his death in 1986.

Post-World War II Theater After the end of World War II, views on traditional German drama within the literary community shifted significantly. Much of the postwar drama produced during this period reflects these changing sentiments, with playwrights treating traditional German theater as passé, unable to stimulate social improvement or critical thought. The Germans were eager to perform imported works from America, England, France, and Italy. Hochwaelder was disturbed by dependency on foreign drama, techniques, and philosophy: He was equally concerned that the German theater was not producing enough of its own drama and—except for Bertolt Brecht—was not exerting a truly international dramatic influence. Hochwaelder criticized the German theater by comparing it to a tubercular patient, outwardly a sun-tanned picture of blooming life, but on the inside a moribund creature hastening to the grave. Generous subsidies to the theater by the cities and states suggest vigor, yet inwardly the theater is dying because it has intellectualized the drama instead of having encouraged vital, absorbing plays. His criticism was leveled at German drama in general, but it was especially applicable to the contemporary trend of the theater of the absurd. Where the theater of the absurd claimed that existence is meaningless because man is born and dies without a choice, Hochwaelder's philosophy maintained that life does have

a meaning because man is rational. Where the theater of the absurd usually resists the traditional structure of imitation, Hochwaelder's technique for the most part creates the illusion of reality through a lifelike stage setting. Hence, the drama Hochwaelder produced during this time differed significantly from that of his contemporaries.

Exploring Guilt through Drama Fritz Hochwaelder presented unusual twists of religious and moral themes in *Das heilige Experiment* and most of his later plays. According to Frederick Lumley, the Viennese-born playwright first attracted attention in 1952 when *Das heilige Experiment* was presented in Paris, where it "caused an immediate stir through the relationship of its theme with that of the worker-priest controversy then topical." *The Inn* (1955) is considered a transitional work in Hochwaelder's career, initiating his increasing interest in contemporary topics. Hochwaelder's later works display his skill with various types of drama, including comedy, mystery, social criticism, and plays based on legend. *The Inn*, about a corrupt usurer who is suddenly forced to account for his actions, is one of several later plays that explore guilt. In *The Raspberry Picker* (1965), Hochwaelder depicts a group of Austrians who repress their guilt for having profited from a nearby concentration camp. *Lazeretti or the Saber-Toothed Tiger* (1973) focuses on the problem of terrorism in its portrayal of hypocrites whose actions counter their professed ideals.

Critic Lumley summarizes Hochwaelder's constant experiment both in ideas and form; the play *1003* (1963), for instance, has only two characters—the author and his imagination, with the author in the process of losing his creation, who seems more alive than himself. The development of Hochwaelder, Lumley notes, "makes him not only an important dramatist for the German-speaking theater, but together with Duerrenmatt and Frisch, also living in Switzerland, and Peter Weiss, another 'exile' living in Sweden, it may be said that the most interesting living dramatists anywhere today are to be found in these [four] representatives of the German language." Three of Hochwaelder's plays have been published in Buenos Aires, and several in Paris.

Hochwaelder died of a heart attack in Zurich on October 21, 1986; although he lived most of his life after World War II in Switzerland, he was buried in Vienna.

Works in Literary Context

Predominant influences on Hochwaelder's theater include traditional classical drama, the work of George Kaiser, the atrocities of World War II, and, above all, the Viennese theater. Hochwaelder's works characteristically focus on a secure protagonist who experiences a devastating moment of self-realization. According to Alan Best, "The shock of self-recognition, the trauma of coming to terms with an identity one did not even suspect in one-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hochwaelder's famous contemporaries include:

- Jackson Pollock** (1912–1956): American painter known as one of the leaders in the abstract expressionism movement.
- Pierre Boule** (1912–1994): French author who wrote the novel *Planet of the Apes* (1963).
- Arthur Lewis** (1915–1991): Saint Lucian economist who was the first black to win the Nobel Prize in Economics.
- Masaki Kobayashi** (1916–1996): Japanese film director whose film trilogy, *The Human Condition* (1959–1961), explores the effects of World War II on a Japanese pacifist.
- Isaac Asimov** (1920–1992): Russian-born science fiction author who wrote the novel *I, Robot* (1950).
- Alistair MacLean** (1922–1986): Scottish author who wrote the novel *The Guns of Navarone* (1957).

self, underlines Hochwaelder's dramatic message: no one is safe from such a moment of unmasking."

The Viennese Theater The Viennese *Volkstheater* stems from two basic sources: the baroque Jesuit drama of the seventeenth century, which presented metaphysical truths through the senses by means of plays rather than by intellectual discourses, and the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, which was noted for its improvisations, fantasies, parodies, and *Hanswurst* (that is, vulgar and gluttonous) figures. Hochwaelder, influenced especially by the Jesuit theater, aimed to combine theatrical experience and understandable truth. He believed that the ideal theater should combine life's serious and comic sides.

War, Militarism, and Violence Hochwaelder's plays display a hatred of war, militarism, and violence. They also call for a regeneration of man. Personal enlightenment and regeneration are possible and even attainable in many of Hochwaelder's dramas. Outer conflicts, however, caused by external forces such as the church, the state or society, are never completely resolved. The lesson, however, that an individual is capable of interior change is meant to be a positive message to the audience.

Works in Critical Context

Hochwaelder's dramatic output after *The Strong Are Lonely* has not been accorded the same critical acclaim as his earlier plays. Thus, the playwright's reputation rests mainly on the uncompromising humanism of *The Strong Are Lonely*.

The Strong Are Lonely Initial responses to *The Strong Are Lonely*, which critic Douglas Russell describes

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hochwaelder's dramas often revolve around issues of morality and, ultimately, guilt. Here are some other works that explore similar themes:

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. After murdering a cantankerous pawnbroker, Raskolnikov, the protagonist, is overcome with guilt and experiences physical illness until he is at last punished for his crime, at which point he becomes well again, both physically and emotionally.

Oedipus Rex (429 BCE), a play by Sophocles. Oedipus, the main character in this play, unknowingly kills his father and marries his own mother. When he discovers what he has done, Oedipus, guilt-stricken, blinds himself.

Atonement (2007), a film directed by Joe Wright. In this movie—an adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel of the same name—young Briony Tallis falsely accuses her sister's lover of molesting one of their cousins. This false accusation ultimately leads to the death of the accused and a lifelong rift between the two sisters. Briony bears the guilt of her childhood lie the rest of her life.

as “a brilliant look at power politics and ethics,” tended to privilege its moral vision in the wake of the Holocaust. In recent years, however, scholarly audiences have moved toward reading Hochwaelder's work as both a mode of philosophizing and a piece in a literary tradition. Sarah Stanton and Martin Banham, for example, observe, “His most successful play, *The Strong Are Lonely*, uses the destruction of the autonomous Jesuit state in 18th-century Paraguay to discuss spiritual and religious utopias and the right of pacifism to self-defence.” In a more literary vein, Mary Garland notes, “Structurally and in the presentation of arguments the play follows the traditional idealist tragedy and ‘Ideendrama’ [drama of ideas].”

Responses to Literature

1. Do you believe Hochwaelder's representation of his characters' psychological change in *The Strong Are Lonely* is realistic? Why or why not? Use examples from the text to support your response.
2. How would you describe the moral dilemma represented in Hochwaelder's *The Fugitive*? How do you think it should be resolved? Explain your answer in a short essay.
3. Compare and contrast Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* with Hochwaelder's *The Inn*.

Whose description of the feelings of guilt do you find more believable? Why?

4. Discuss Hochwaelder's interest in the French Huguenot wars as settings for drama.

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Peter Hoeg

BORN: 1957, Copenhagen, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The History of Danish Dreams (1988)

Smilla's Sense of Snow (1992)

Borderliners (1993)

The Woman and the Ape (1996)

Overview

The most recognized contemporary Danish writer on the international literary scene, Peter Hoeg gained widespread acclaim for his second novel, *Froken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992; translated as *Smilla's Sense of Snow*), which was sold to publishers in more than thirty countries. In the United States the novel spent twenty-six weeks on the *New York Times* paperback best-seller list, and both *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* chose it as their 1993 book of the year. In his works, Hoeg questions the cultural and political values of modern Denmark, particularly as they relate to the struggle between individuality and societal conformity, values that he believes have detrimental effects on the lives of Danish children.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Young and Very Friendly Pirate Peter Hoeg was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 17, 1957, the son of Erik Hoeg, a lawyer, and Karen Kjellund, a classical philologist. He graduated from Frederiksberg Gymnasium in 1976 and went on to study literary theory

at the University of Copenhagen, where he received his master of arts degree in 1984. Before devoting himself to full-time writing, Hoeg performed in classical ballet, acted, taught acting, competed as a professional fencer, and worked as a crewman on pleasure boats. One interviewer described Hoeg as “en ung og meget venligtsindet pirat” (a young and very friendly pirate). An extensive traveler, Hoeg often entertains audiences with stories of his mountain-climbing adventures or his travels throughout Africa. Hoeg’s wife, Akinyi, is a native of Kenya. They live with their two daughters in Copenhagen and make frequent trips to Kenya to visit Akinyi’s family.

Hoeg was twenty-five years old when he began his first novel, *Forestilling om det tyvende århundrede* (1988; translated as *The History of Danish Dreams*, 1995), which he worked on for six years, rewriting one chapter twenty times and discarding hundreds of pages. In one interview, Hoeg referred to this early book as his apprenticeship in writing. Danish critics were quick to praise the work, and some have called it the most significant novel debut of the 1980s.

Embracing Genre Fiction Nonetheless, Hoeg’s work did not reach an international audience until he wrote his second novel, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*. Although it may not appear so to Anglo-American readers, whose introduction to Hoeg came with this work, Hoeg’s second novel signals a departure from his previous work. With *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, Hoeg entered the world of genre fiction, specifically the thriller.

When *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* first appeared in the United States in 1993, it led sales for all translated novels that year. Both popular and literary magazines printed positive reviews of it, and the National Public Radio program *Talk of the Nation* featured the novel on one of its call-in shows. All of this attention was not entirely welcomed by the author. Since the publication of his first novel, Hoeg has maintained that he is not interested in fame. After the worldwide success of *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, however, Hoeg’s popularity in Denmark reached celebrity status. He grew reluctant to give interviews, and in those that he did give he often complained of having to hide his private affairs and to keep his address secret.

The Writing Process: A Search for Serenity After the fanfare surrounding *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, Hoeg expressed a desire to return to the calmness of his life outside Copenhagen and work on his next project, a novel titled *Borderliners* (1993; translated version published in 1994). In various interviews, Hoeg has described his process of writing a novel as a matter of quiet intensity, usually lasting two years, during which he works every day, striving to remain “totally focused and totally relaxed, to save any buildup of tension.” Called “otherworldly calm” by one interviewer, Hoeg insists on periods of obscurity for the sake of his work.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hoeg’s famous contemporaries include:

Isabel Allende (1942–): Chilean novelist who utilizes magic realism in her books. Allende is perhaps best known for her novel *The House of the Spirits*.

Gabriel García Márquez (1928–): Colombian novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

John Lennon (1940–1980): A singer in the influential rock band The Beatles. Lennon was murdered at the age of forty.

Princess Caroline of Hanover (1957–): An aristocrat born in the same year as Peter Hoeg. Princess Caroline, since her father’s death in 2005, is next in line, after the currently reigning Prince Albert, to take the throne in Monaco.

Saddam Hussein (1937–2006): The president of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. He was executed on December 30, 2006, for crimes against humanity.

To this day, Hoeg continues to produce work in his slow methodical way, producing more and more complex novels as his talent grows.

Works in Literary Context

Methodical in his research and in his application of literary traditions, Hoeg’s work has been seen as a continuation and tweaking of traditional detective novels and the reimagining of magic realism.

Magic Realism The narrative of *The History of Danish Dreams* encompasses four centuries and weaves the history of four families until they eventually mesh into one family. Their story is described in a series of dreams. Written in the style of magic realism, this novel often recounts stories of the fabulous in a detached, matter-of-fact manner. Grandmother Teandor, for instance, has the power to read the future, and her predictions of deaths, births, and divorces are printed in the family-owned newspaper and read by Danish citizens who believe that her predictions are infallible. Anna Bak, the daughter of an Evangelical priest, has the ability to duplicate herself, and her second self reaches out and heals people. Her father takes her power as a sign that she will bear the Messiah, and he tells everyone of his conviction until Anna’s child is born and turns out to be a girl.

A Twist on the Detective Novel Genre The first of Hoeg’s novels to be translated into English, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* is told in the first person by Smilla Qaavigaaq Jaspersen, a half-Inuit/half-Danish glaciologist who lives in Copenhagen. Smilla stumbles upon a conspiracy when

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hoeg is on record as saying one of his major concerns in writing *Smilla's Sense of Snow* was accurately portraying what it is to be a "Greenlander." Here are some works that deal with identity, individuality, and ethnicity:

Pocho (1970), a novel by José Antonio Villarreal. In this text, Villarreal follows the development of Richard, the son of Mexicans who immigrate to the United States when he is very young. As Richard grows, he begins to understand that while he is both Mexican and American, he feels distance from both Mexicans and Americans, sensing, in essence, that neither culture fully embraces or explains his own perspective on the world.

The Human Stain (2000), a novel by Philip Roth. In this novel, the light-skinned African-American Coleman Silk, for emotional and financial reasons, passes himself off as white for the majority of his life, until at last he is accused of racism in his later years.

The Wind That Shakes the Barley (2006), a film directed by Ken Loach. This moving film, set in the 1920s, explores the conflict between two Irish brothers who take different personal and political positions on the question of Ireland's independence.

she investigates the death of a neighbor boy who has fallen from the snow-covered roof of their apartment building. The intrigue eventually takes Smilla to Greenland in search of a mysterious and valuable object, which is also sought after by a host of minor characters.

In its outline, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* certainly fits the traditional detective novel, but in many other ways it transcends the genre. Smilla, for instance, strikes many readers as a fascinating and unusual sleuth. An expert on glaciers, a loner who reads Euclid for fun, her ruminations on mathematics and philosophy would seem dry if it were not for her wit and the way in which Hoeg uses her background to delineate her character and move the plot along. Smilla's erudition comes into play at crucial moments, such as when she sees Isaiah's footprints in the snow and determines from subtle clues that he was not playing on the rooftop of a Copenhagen apartment building but was most likely being chased. At other times her background allows her to explain her own character, as when she refers to the German mathematician Georg Cantor's concept of infinity to show why she values her personal space, the English philosopher Bertrand Russell's definition of pure math to indicate why she feels confused about cooking, or an Inuit legend to clarify her relationship with her mother.

Furthermore, Smilla's background figures prominently in the development of certain themes. The daugh-

ter of a Greenlandic mother and a Danish father, Smilla has spent the early part of her childhood in Greenland with her mother, a nurturing woman who could hunt as well as any man. While Smilla was still a child, her mother died during a hunting trip, but the adult Smilla has vivid memories of her. These scenes reveal the mother's tenderness for her daughter and the simple but harsh lives of Inuit people. In an interview with Jes Stein Pedersen for *Smilla's Sense of Snow: The Making of a Film by Bille August, Adapted from the Novel by Peter Hoeg* (1997), Hoeg said that he tried to portray Greenlanders as realistically as possible. "The book has a subtly shifting view of Greenlanders. I have tried my best to render it unsentimental. There are so many ridiculously romanticized images of the Third and Fourth Worlds which completely forget the harshness that characterizes living conditions in such places."

Hoeg's Legacy Although the assessment of his influence on contemporary Danish literature must be considered incomplete, his existing books have already raised the standards for other Danish writers. In terms of craft, linguistic ability, and scientific knowledge, he has made something new out of the novel. Perhaps most remarkably, however, Hoeg has managed to draw a wide audience and his books have thus had success in the elite literary community as well as in the broader commercial market.

Works in Critical Context

Hoeg has enjoyed a devoted following from the very beginning. His first novel was considered a tremendous and important debut work. Despite the enthusiasm of Hoeg's supporters, however, he has also been the recipient of criticism. For instance, many critics found little to fault in *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, but the conclusion of the work troubled a number of readers. Writing for the *Parisian Review*, Pearl K. Bell complained about the sudden shift in the novel from the themes of the murder case and corporate corruption (which are consistent with the thriller genre) to the dangers of the meteorite, the existence of strange parasitic worms, and the evil plot of a ruthless scientist (which are more typical of science fiction). Still other critics considered the ending ambiguous and unsatisfying.

Smilla's Sense of Snow After a year on the best-seller list in Denmark, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* reached U.S. readers. Writing in the *New Republic*, Brad Leithauser noted that the plot of *Smilla's Sense of Snow* is typical of a thriller in its use of a small event leading to the discovery of a conspiracy. Such a plot, he remarked, "presents a monumental task to a writer bent on presenting it with artistic freshness." Leithauser commented that the author overcomes this obstacle, maintaining that "this is a task that Peter Hoeg handles with great deftness. Everything in the story seems to build simultaneously." While calling the "sinuous turns of his story deeply engrossing,"

Richard Eder of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* faulted the work's ambiguous finale: "The book's only real weakness is an ending that doesn't live up to what has gone before and that fails to satisfy, not our emotional expectations, but our logical ones. It is not a matter of anti-climax . . . but of not quite making sense."

Still, the critical and audience response to *Smilla* was overwhelmingly positive. The novel won several prizes in Denmark, including De Gyldne Laurbær (The Golden Laurels), a prestigious award given by the Danish book-sellers to the author of the year. Current world sales for *Smilla*, which has been translated into thirteen languages, are estimated at nearly 40 million copies.

Responses to Literature

1. Critics have been divided over the ending of *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. Do you find the conclusion of the novel "unsatisfying" and "ambiguous"? Why or why not? What effect do you think Hoeg was attempting to achieve with the ending and its dramatic shift from the rest of the novel?
2. Some critics focused on character instead of plot in *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. They found Smilla so complex and interestingly drawn that any problems with the plot seemed beside the point. Do you agree? Why or why not? Provide examples of other works that feature an equally compelling protagonist.
3. Using the library and the Internet, research the term "Renaissance man." In your opinion, do there exist any "Renaissance men" or "Renaissance women" today? If so, who are they and how do they qualify? If not, why do you think there are none today? Considering Hoeg's diverse background and the research he has done for his novels, how do you think Hoeg compares to other "Renaissance Men?"
4. The literary tradition is filled with successful writers who, like Peter Hoeg, are reluctant celebrities. Can you think of other famous writers who avoid the press whenever possible? Why do you think writers, in particular, tend to not embrace celebrity?

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Homer

BORN: *c. eighth century BCE*

DIED: *c. seventh century BCE*

NATIONALITY: *Greek*

GENRE: *Poetry*

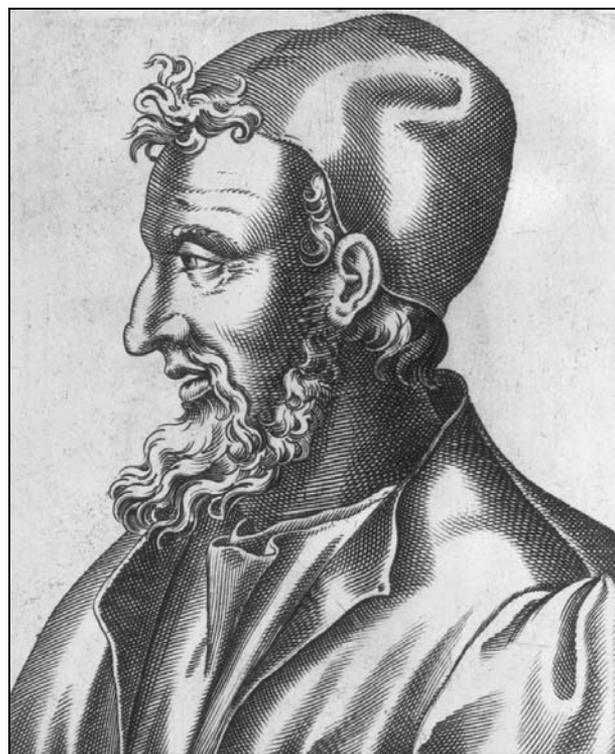
MAJOR WORKS:

The Odyssey

The Iliad

Overview

Homer is generally considered the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two greatest epics of European literature. The poems celebrate the values of ancient Greek civilization, incorporating many ancient myths and folk motifs and examining such themes as heroism, fate, honor, loyalty, and justice. Admired over the centuries for the artistic mastery they demonstrate, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have exerted a profound influence on all later Western poetry and have served as the primary models for subsequent epics. Although critics do debate the exact authorship of the two poems, questioning whether Homer was the poems' originator, their most famous bard, or even just a name representing the tradition of singing the poems themselves, there is little question that these two works have been two of the most influential in



Homer Hulton Archive / Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Homer's famous contemporaries include:

Lycurgus (c. 700–c. 630 BCE): Legendary Spartan king who established the militaristic foundations that would build the city-state into one of the greatest of the Greek powers.

Romulus (c. 771–c. 717 BCE): Mythical founder of the city of Rome. After slaying his twin brother Remus, Romulus not only founded the city but began many of its most ancient traditions, such as the senate and the Roman legions. Although he is often regarded as mythological, there remains some debate as to whether Romulus may have been a real, historical figure.

Hesiod (c. eighth century BCE): Generally thought to have lived well after Homer, Hesiod is considered his equal in importance. His poetry spans a wide range, from everyday life to the creation of the universe, and is a vital source of understanding ancient Greek life and beliefs.

Alcmaeon (?–c. 753 BCE): Last hereditary *archon* (ruler) of Athens. Upon his death in 753, the office of archon became an elected position.

Sennacherib (ruled c. 705–c. 681 BCE): Conqueror of Babylon and invader of Judah; he was famously unable to take Jerusalem, as described in the Bible and his own personal accounts.

Western history, working their way into centuries' worth of art in all genres.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Uncertain Existence Almost nothing is known about the life of Homer himself. He was most likely an Ionian Greek, probably from the coast of Asia Minor (in modern-day Turkey) or one of the adjacent islands, who lived in approximately the eighth century BCE. According to legend, he was blind and made a living as an itinerant bard. It has been suggested that his purported blindness may have been used to conceal his illiteracy, or that he may have lost his sight only late in life. Biographies of Homer exist in the form of six early "lives" and various commentaries written by Byzantine scholars, but these are generally considered unreliable. Although the ancient Greeks, from the fourth century BCE or so on, developed a lively tradition of art and scholarship responding to the work of someone they clearly considered to be a historical personage, modern scholarship has raised a number of questions about Homer's very existence. Some have even suggested that the *Odyssey* attributed to Homer was actually the work of a young Sicilian woman. Nonethe-

less, "the poet Homer" remains—as a concept—a convenient way of getting a handle on two of history's greatest poems, giving us a name to associate with the work.

The Trojan War The Trojan War figures prominently in both of Homer's epic poems. According to legend, this was a battle fought between the people of Troy, located on the coast of Asia Minor, and the people of Greece. Although records suggest that the ancient Greeks believed the war to be an actual historical event, very little archeological evidence has been found to confirm this. If the battle did indeed take place in the centuries prior to Homer's existence, it likely bore little resemblance to the battle depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. That said, the poems certainly derive their vigor from a real historical context. Even if the Trojan War itself was not a historical fact, the tensions between the Trojan and Greek cultures were quite real, and the legendary Trojan War serves to explain why the two societies were at odds.

Works in Literary Context

The scarcity of information regarding Homer and his relation to the works attributed to him has prompted much scholarly inquiry, bringing together experts from the fields of archeology, linguistics, art, and comparative literature. Even more, though, scholars and artists in every century since the works' emergence have responded—in philosophy, poetry, painting, sculpture, novels, and more—to both the content and structure of Homer's poems, with the result that these works now have tremendous cultural resonance. It is rightly said that echoes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may be found in nearly every work of literature in the Western canon.

Beginning the Textual Tradition The *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, it is generally agreed, evolved from oral folktales about a great war and a great hero. The oral versions of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were transmitted by local bards from generation to generation and eventually were written down on papyri, most likely after Homer's death. Once set down in writing, the poems probably became the exclusive property of the Homeridae, or "sons of Homer," a bardic guild whose members performed and preserved the poems. In the second half of the sixth century BCE, the Athenian dictator Peisistratus established a Commission of Editors to edit the texts of Homer's poems and remove any errors or digressions accumulated in the process of transmission. The first printed edition of Homer's works appeared in Europe only in 1488, however, and remained in use until the seventeenth century; since then, there have been numerous other translations, in both prose and verse.

A Contradictory Simplicity The language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represents a bit of a contradiction. On the one hand, in a perfectly plain and direct manner, the

narrator carries the action forward, examining the events in great detail and occasionally digressing from the main narrative, but always in such a manner that the course of the tale seems completely natural and inevitable. On the other hand, the epic language of the poems was never used for everyday communication. It is a stylized language made up of formulas, noun and adjective combinations having metrical values that fill certain segments of a dactylic hexametric poetic line. The dactylic hexameter, one long syllable followed by two short syllables (for which another long syllable can be substituted), is possibly an inheritance in Greek from an earlier Indo-European poetic language. In any case, the epic language seems to be based on creative combinations of phrases rather than of individual words. Readers of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are likely to remember expressions such as “the wine-dark sea,” “Menelaus of the loud war cry,” or “swift-footed Achilles.”

Repetition and Orality A great part of the narrative of the poems is made up of repeated phrases of a given metrical value. Modern-day readers are sometimes put off by what they consider the heavy, dragging effect of the repeated phraseology, but this reaction simply marks the great difference between literate and oral cultures. What is heard in repetition becomes part of the texture of the continuous utterance and does not have the prominence that the reader assigns to each word as he or she reads it from the printed page—at varying speeds, depending on his or her concentration or reading ability. Oral poetic narrative is in this sense more like late-twentieth-century rap music, the language of which is both repetitive and shaped and delivered by the singer. Unlike the written poem, the speed of delivery is more in the control of the performer than the listener, and it is thus by repetition principally that the singer makes the words accessible to his or her audience.

Bedrock of Western Literary Tradition It would be almost impossible to overstate the influence that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have had on Western culture. Informing works ranging from the ancient Roman Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the Renaissance Englishman John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* to Irish modernist James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “Homer’s” epic poems form the bedrock of the Western tradition in literature.

Works in Critical Context

A breakthrough in Homeric studies came in the 1920s, when Milman Parry argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed orally. Parry proved that the poems were formulaic in nature, relying on generic epithets (such as “wine-dark sea” and “rosy-fingered dawn”), repetition of stock lines, and descriptions and themes typical of oral folk poetry. Suggesting that Homer was most likely a rhapsode—an itinerant professional reciter—who improvised pieces to be sung at Greek festivals, Parry deduced that Homer probably learned to weave together threads

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The works of Homer participate in a tradition of tales of heroism and tragedy set against a legendary, mythological past, a tradition that may be found in the literatures of many different cultures, even in the present day. Some prominent examples are:

Aeneid (first century BCE), an epic poem by Virgil. This work picks up where Homer’s tales leave off, telling the tale of the Trojan Aeneas, his eventual journey to Italy, and his victory over the tribe of the Latins. In writing this poem, Virgil explicitly connected Rome’s past to the heroic age of Greece.

Dr. Faustus (first published in 1604), a play by Christopher Marlowe. This masterpiece of Elizabethan playwright Marlowe features two appearances by the spirit of Helen of Troy, summoned by the magician Faust.

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. Often considered a foundational text for the literary movement known as modernism, Joyce’s masterwork traces a very unheroic Leopold Bloom through the course of an ordinary day—an ordinary day carefully structured along the lines of Ulysses’ (Odysseus’s) journeys and travails in the *Odyssey*.

of standard epic plot in order to sustain his narrative, relying on mnemonic devices and phrases to fill the poetic lines. Still largely accepted today, Parry’s theory stresses the derivative and evolutionary character of Homer’s poetry, but also affirms Homer’s individual genius as a shaper of traditional poetic elements into works that far exceed the sum of their borrowed parts.

Disputed Authorship In the Classical period it was commonly assumed that Homer was the sole author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, became embroiled in a lengthy debate—referred to as “the Homeric question”—about whether both poems were written by the same author. Though each epic contains a number of inconsistencies and factual lapses, each also exhibits a remarkable degree of structural, stylistic, and thematic unity. Critics are not surprised to encounter inconsistencies in the poems, given their oral beginnings and spontaneous transmission through recitation; however, that line of argument has not disproved Homer’s authorship of the two poems. The dispute continues, however, and today’s scholars believe, on the basis of internal evidence, that the *Iliad* was probably written much earlier than the *Odyssey*, though there is not quite enough evidence to prove that Homer did not write both poems. Several other poems, including the *Margites* and the *Batrachomyomachia*, have also been attributed to Homer, but they were most likely written by his successors and popularizers.

The Iliad and the Odyssey in Contemporary Perspective Modern Homeric studies focus—as past ages have done—on purely textual exegesis, on parsing the fine meanings of words and the most accurate translations, but they also look at the sociocultural and political messages in the work. For instance, Dean C. Hammer argues, “The *Iliad* is not simply a reflection of, but a reflection on, the nature of political authority. The nature of this reflection suggests a fundamental shift in the type of political questions asked, from the ‘power of authority’ to carry out decisions suggestive of Dark Age politics to the legitimacy of authority in making these decisions, a question critical to the formation of an increasingly interdependent polis form of political organization.” Other scholars focus on how best to teach Homer’s text, focusing, for instance, on the Perseus Digital Library, which, writes Professor Anne Mahoney, “is useful here, because it allows students who do not know Greek to work intelligently with the Greek text.”

Responses to Literature

1. Odysseus forms a common thread through both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Compare and contrast how he is portrayed in both works. Does he change over time? How do his actions and personality differ between the two stories?
2. Virgil’s *Aeneid* takes a minor character from the *Iliad* and creates a “sequel” describing his fate after the Trojan War. Choose another minor character and do the same thing—create a story describing the character’s life and adventures after the fall of Troy. Research the world of ancient Greece and use that knowledge in the story.
3. Homer’s view of the gods and humanity’s role in the cosmos is fundamentally a bleak one: humans are essentially pawns in the wars and rivalries of the gods. Why do you think the ancient Greeks imagined their gods as behaving like humans, subject to the same emotions? What limits do the gods have to their powers? Is there something appealing about this view of the cosmos?
4. What can you infer about Greek cultural customs from Homer’s works? How did the Greeks treat strangers and guests? What did they value most?

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Gerard Manley Hopkins

BORN: 1844, Stratford, Essex, England

DIED: 1889, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

“The Wreck of the Deutschland” (1875)

“Thou art indeed just” (1889)

“Pied Beauty” (1918)

“The Windhover” (1918)

Overview

Frequently dealing with religious themes and evoking imagery from nature, the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins are distinguished by stylistic innovations, most notably his striking diction and pioneering use of a meter he termed “sprung rhythm.” Because his style was so radically different from that of his contemporaries, his best poems were not accepted for publication during his lifetime, and his achievement was not fully recognized until after World War I.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Religious Childhood and Introduction to the Arts
The oldest of Manley and Kate Hopkins’s nine children, Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Stratford, Essex, England, and raised in a cultured and religious environment. Both parents were readers and devout High



Gerard Manley Hopkins Hopkins, Gerard Manley, photograph.

Church Anglicans; his father also taught Sunday School and was a published poet.

At grammar school, Hopkins excelled in his courses, especially painting and writing. Though he wanted to be a painter, he eventually made a shift from the visual to the verbal. The young poet's verses were filled with colorful pictorial images characteristic of Victorian word-painting. In 1863 Hopkins obtained a scholarship to Oxford University. There he pursued his interests in poetry, music, sketching, and art criticism, established important friendships, and, most importantly, came under the influence of John Henry Newman, an important Catholic educator.

Hopkins was educated during what is known as the Victorian era of the United Kingdom. During the rule of Queen Victoria, a ruler known for expanding the British Empire and catalyzing the Industrial Revolution, England experienced immense prosperity. The literature produced during this period bridges the Romantic period with twentieth-century literature; it was during this period that the novel became the most significant literary form.

Leaving the Church of England After months of soul-searching, Hopkins resolved to leave the Church of England and become a Roman Catholic, which led to a permanent estrangement from his family. He graduated from Oxford in 1867, and in the spring of 1868, he decided to become a Jesuit priest. He burned all his early

poems, vowing to give up writing and dedicate himself fully to his religious calling. After his ordination in 1877, Hopkins served as a priest in London, Oxford, Liverpool, and Glasgow parishes and taught classics at the Jesuit Stonyhurst College. In 1884 he was appointed a fellow in classics at the Royal University of Ireland and professor of Greek at the University College in Dublin. As time passed, he became progressively more isolated, depressed, and plagued with ill health and spiritual doubts, particularly during his years in Ireland.

Sprung Rhythm After destroying his early poems, Hopkins wrote essentially no poetry for nine years. But, in 1875, with the approval of his superior, he returned to writing verse, strictly limiting the time he spent on composition. The first work Hopkins produced after he resumed writing, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (1875), is an account of the widely publicized loss at sea of a German ship, in which he also examines his spiritual struggles. In this poem, Hopkins introduces his revolutionary sprung rhythm.

Unlike conventional poetic meter, in which the rhythm is based on regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, the meter of sprung rhythm is determined by the number of stressed syllables alone. Thus, in a line where few unstressed syllables are used, the movement is slow and heavy, while the use of many unstressed syllables creates a rapid, light effect. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" also introduces the central philosophical concerns of Hopkins's mature poetry, reflecting both his belief in the doctrine that humans are created to praise God and his commitment to the Jesuit practices of meditation and spiritual self-examination.

Nature Poetry Hopkins continued to experiment with style, language, and meter. He is perhaps best known for his shorter poems on nature, many of which were written in the early years of his priesthood. In such celebrations of natural beauty as "Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur," and his best-known sonnet, "The Windhover," Hopkins strove to capture the essence of creation as a means of knowing and praising God. For most of his contemporaries, however, nature existed only to be exploited, as the effects of the Industrial Revolution consumed the wilderness. This apparent disappearance of God from nature in the nineteenth century inspired some of the didacticism that pervades Hopkins's later nature poetry.

The "Terrible Sonnets" Hopkins's last works, known as the "terrible sonnets," express spiritual struggle. These consist of the six original "terrible sonnets" of 1885—"Carrion Comfort," "No worst, there is none," "To seem the stranger," "I wake and feel," "Patience," and "My own heart"—and three sonnets of 1889—"Thou art indeed just," "The Shepherd's Brow," and "To R. B." Most of these poems focus on *acedia*, the fourth deadly sin, the sin of "spiritual sloth" or

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hopkins's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Bridges (1844–1930): Bridges, an English poet and poet laureate in 1913, was friends with Gerard Manley Hopkins and assembled Hopkins's posthumous first volume of poetry.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): In 1859, this English naturalist published *On the Origin of Species*, a book that highlights his theory of evolution through variation and natural selection.

John Fowler (1826–1864): Fowler, an English agricultural engineer and inventor, developed a much faster method of plowing fields, enabling more land to be cultivated than previously possible.

William Morris (1834–1896): Morris, an English artist and writer, founded the British arts and crafts movement, which originated as a reaction against the mass production made possible by the Industrial Revolution.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894): English poet and sister of the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti; she is best known today for her poem "The Goblin Market."

"desolation." In others he works toward a resolution of his spiritual questionings. Although Hopkins feared that his poetic power was declining in his final years, the terrible sonnets are highly regarded by critics for his unguarded self-revelation and mastery of the sonnet form.

In 1889 Hopkins died in Dublin, Ireland of typhoid fever, apparently caused by the polluted urban water supply. He is buried in Glasnevin cemetery. None of Hopkins's major works were published in his lifetime. He submitted a few of them to periodicals and anthologies, but they were rejected. Following Hopkins's death, Robert Bridges, his literary executor, arranged for a few of his simpler works to appear in verse anthologies. The selections by Hopkins in these works received little notice, however, except in Catholic circles, where "Heaven Haven" and "The Habit of Perfection" were praised for their religious content.

Works in Literary Context

As a young writer, Hopkins had several great influences. The poet Christina Rossetti became for Hopkins the embodiment of the pre-Raphaelites and Victorian religious poetry. In the 1860s he was profoundly influenced by her example. Both Hopkins and Rossetti believed that religion was more important than art. The outline of Hopkins's career followed that of Christina Rossetti's: an outwardly drab, plodding life of submission quietly

bursting into splendor in holiness and poetry. Both felt that religious inspiration was more important than artistic inspiration: Poetry had to be subordinated to religion.

During the early 1870s, Hopkins began to study the teachings of the thirteenth-century Franciscan scholar John Duns Scotus. From Duns Scotus's teaching of the "thisness" of all things, Hopkins developed the concepts of "inscape," a term he coined to describe the inward, distinctive, essential quality of a thing, and "instress," which refers to the force that gives a natural object its inscape and allows that inscape to be seen and expressed by the poet. These teachings are what inspired Hopkins to write again.

Sprung Rhythm Many of Hopkins's poems are noted for their musical rhythm. His use of sprung rhythm was new and quite different from that of his contemporaries. However, Hopkins claimed that his meter of sprung rhythm appears in classical literature, Old English and Welsh poetry, nursery rhymes, and the works of William Shakespeare and John Milton. Moreover, he valued it as "nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is, the native and natural rhythm of speech."

By using sprung rhythm, Hopkins recovered the rhythms of early English prose, with its two-beat phrases held together by stress patterns within and between phrases, its dependence on rhythm more than syntax to determine meaning, and its stringing together of main clauses connected by *and* and *but*. Just as Hopkins's poetry was influenced by Old and Middle English alliterative verse, his prose was influenced by early English prose. Understanding Hopkins's relationship to medieval prose and verse traditions helps to lead us to the heart of Hopkins's literary achievement. He brought poetry closer to the rhythm of prose.

In addition to experimenting with meter in this poem, Hopkins employed several other poetic techniques for which he is known. His diction is characterized by unusual compound words, coined phrases, and terms borrowed from dialect. He adds more complexity by adding intentional ambiguities and multiple meanings. In addition, he frequently utilizes elliptical phrasing, compression, internal rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and metaphor.

Enduring Reputation as an Innovative Stylist

Hopkins has been the subject of numerous studies undertaken from a wide range of critical perspectives, and though a few commentators maintain that he is essentially a minor author because of the narrowness of his experience, he is now regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Victorian era. Acclaimed for his powerful influence on modern poetry, Hopkins continues to be praised as an innovative and revolutionary stylist who wrote some of the most challenging poems in the English language on the subjects of the self, nature, and religion.

Works in Critical Context

Because much of Hopkins's work was not published during his lifetime, his critics did not emerge until Bridges compiled and published *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, the first collection of the poet's works. A few reviewers of the collection praised Hopkins's expression of religious feeling, but the predominant response was one of bewildered incomprehension.

A Model of Stylistic Originality In the 1920s, the poems found a small but select following among such writers as Laura Riding, Robert Graves, I. A. Richards, and William Empson. Early proponents of a close reading of the poetic text, these critics valued the complexity of Hopkins's works and his stylistic originality.

The 1930s saw an enormous growth of interest in Hopkins's works. In 1933 literary critics Joseph Sheed and Maisie Ward, writing for *Form in Modern Poetry*, describe the fate of Hopkins's work in deterministic terms, citing his genius as the reason for the late discovery of his work, "Hopkins is only just emerging from the darkness to which his original genius condemned him. It is a familiar story; nothing could have made Hopkins's poetry popular in his day: it was necessary that it should first be absorbed by the sensibility of a new generation of poets, and by them masticated to a suitable pulp for less sympathetic minds." In that decade his letters and personal papers were first published, together with a second, enlarged edition of the poems. Among the young poets of the 1930s, Hopkins was revered as a model. His influence is evident in the works of writers as diverse as the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, British poet W. H. Auden, Irish poet Cecil Day Lewis, and American poet Robert Lowell.

With the centenary of Hopkins's birth in 1944, numerous critical essays and appreciations appeared, and since that time his works have continued to attract extensive analysis. However his work as a whole has consistently resisted categorization. Critic Alan Heuser acknowledges this while offering a suggestion in his critical essay "The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (1958), "Placing Hopkins's poetry in the English poetic tradition has been found a difficult task. . . . If a distinct label is needed, perhaps 'baroque' is almost satisfactory, expressing the vehement and fiery incarnation of idea in word-made-flesh, the word rendered sensational." Hopkins's writings have proved highly suited to New Critical approaches, which emphasize explanation and interpretation of individual poems with particular attention to their style, rhythm, and imagery. His poems have also received the examination of poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics, who consider his use of deliberately ambiguous language of profound interest.

Recent scholarly publications on Hopkins's work reveal the endless possibilities for interpretation his work affords. Examining the scientific context of his day, critic Marie Banfield describes Hopkins's poetry as reaching far

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hopkins's poems about nature explore its mysterious beauty and see the hand of God in its creation. Here are some other works that examine nature and ways of considering it:

"Nature" (1836), an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In this work, the American philosopher explores how the divine can be discovered through nature.

Refuge (1991), a memoir and natural history book by Terry Tempest Williams. A Mormon naturalist tells of the flooding of a bird refuge on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and her mother's death from cancer, linked to nuclear testing in a nearby state.

Remarkable Trees of the World (2002), a photography book by Thomas Pakenham. This work includes sixty photographs of extraordinary trees from Europe, Africa, Australia, and the United States, among other places, as well as commentary.

Secrets from the Center of the World (1989), a poetry collection by Joy Harjo, photographs by Stephen Strom. This book of prose poems by Harjo, the Native American poet, and photographs of the American West emphasize the traditional Native American belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

beyond mere innovations in style. In her article "Darwinism, Doxology, and Energy Physics: the New Sciences, the Poetry and the Poetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (2007), she writes, "He engages with Darwin's multi-form, individuated, and diverse world but characteristically draws back in his desire for order, design, and unity, positing a power beyond the purely mechanical. He is attracted to and recoils from the universe created by thermodynamics, with its seemingly contradictory laws." While not all scholars agree on the most appropriate lens through which to view his work, the diversity of contemporary scholarship on Hopkins's poetry speaks to his contribution to English literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Read "Pied Beauty" and "God's Grandeur." Compare and contrast how Hopkins views nature, God, and human nature in these poems.
2. Gerard Manley Hopkins put his calling as a priest ahead of his talent and love for poetry. Do you think that the two are compatible? Can someone devote their life to two callings?
3. Hopkins coined the phrase "sprung rhythm" to describe his poetic style. In sprung rhythm a single line may have many stressed syllables right in a row rather than having them spaced out with unstressed

syllables. Write a poem about something you believe in strongly, loading the lines with stressed syllables. Use the poem “The Wreck of the Deutschland” as a guide.

4. Read Hopkins’s “terrible sonnets.” In a class discussion, explain how the images and themes of these last sonnets are different from his earlier works. Use specific lines to support your argument.

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📖 Nick Hornby

BORN: 1957, Redhill, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

Fever Pitch (1992)

High Fidelity (1995)

About a Boy (1998)

A Long Way Down (2005)

Overview

Nick Hornby is an award-winning English novelist best known for his works *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, and *Fever Pitch*, all of which have been made into films.



Nick Hornby Cambridge Jones / Getty Images

Hornby’s novels offer honesty about emotion and an awareness of the deficiencies of modern men, an awareness that is charming rather than defensive or apologetic.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Student of Literature and Popular Culture

Nick Hornby was born on April 17, 1957, the child of middle-class parents who lived outside of London. His father, Sir Derek Hornby, is an international businessman. When his parents divorced, he lived with his mother and younger sister, Gill, who is also a writer. He spent Sunday afternoons with his father, who, in his need to find ways to entertain his son, took him to a football (soccer) match, thus beginning the younger Hornby’s lifelong obsession with the Arsenal Football Club.

After graduating from Cambridge University with a degree in English literature, he worked as a high school English teacher and taught English as a second language to foreigners. He later began writing reviews and articles about popular culture for such magazines as *Time Out*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, and the *New Yorker*.

From Football to Fiction and Film Hornby's first book, his 1992 memoir *Fever Pitch*, is an account of his years as a fanatic supporter of the Arsenal Football Club. Hornby followed this by editing another book about football, *My Favourite Year: A Collection of New Football Writing* (1993), and in 1996 he co-edited a book of sports writing.

Hornby turned to novel writing with *High Fidelity* (1995), a book that shows the author's passion for music. His third novel, *About a Boy* (1998), concerns a man who likes to date women but has commitment issues. Both novels sold well and were made into feature films. He also wrote the screenplay for the 1997 film adaptation of *Fever Pitch*. Hornby has continued to write popular novels, including a novel for young adults—*Slam*—as well as nonfiction and screenplays.

Works in Literary Context

Hornby is a writer noted for his sense of humor and earthiness, primarily writing about male obsessions and crises. He writes about his subjects in a way with which some critics strongly identify.

Football and Modern Men When *Fever Pitch* was first published in 1992, critics asserted that the novel is more about obsession than about football. When *Fever Pitch* was a nominee for a Whitbread Prize, it received remarkable critical praise, including the admiration of many people indifferent or even hostile to British football. Andrew Anthony called Hornby "the most successful British author of his generation." Hornby followed that success by editing another book about football, placing himself in a niche as the intellectual's football fan.

Like *Fever Pitch*, *High Fidelity* is about a sort of addiction, in this case to rock-and-roll music and the making of lists. In this novel, Hornby extends his range beyond football to the concerns and shortcomings of modern men in general.

In *About a Boy*, Hornby focuses on the shortcomings of his protagonist, a somewhat affectless man who becomes involved in the lives of two people who have serious problems. One critic wrote that "*About a Boy* is another guy's book: female characters are drawn with sympathy, but halfheartedly." Hornby has admitted to some hesitation in writing about women: "I think that I still have a certain degree of caution about it, I think that I've been very hard on the men in my books and I think it would be quite hard for a male writer to be—in this current climate—as hard on a certain kind of woman."

Works in Critical Context

Hornby's books are genuinely well liked, in some cases with readers who are not customarily bookish, in part because of Hornby's familiarity with contemporary popular culture—rock music, television, and movies as well as football. Other critics attribute his success to his ability to represent contemporary masculinity, especially its short-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hornby's famous contemporaries include:

Jay McInerney (1955–): American writer who is considered a member of the American "literary brat pack" that came to prominence in the 1980s.

Nicholson Baker (1957–): American novelist whose unconventional novels use stream-of-consciousness narrative to focus on the minutiae of everyday life.

Cameron Crowe (1957–): American writer and film director best known for his works depicting popular culture, such as *Almost Famous*.

Rick Bragg (1959–): American journalist and memoir writer who won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1996.

comings, with honesty and emotion. David Gritten writes: "He is beloved by some people who rarely read books at all, but to whom he appeals on a direct, emotional level." Andrew Anthony agrees that he has achieved "that most delicate and difficult of acts: a literary writer with mass appeal."

Reviewers, however, have sometimes accused Hornby of being too ingratiating to readers. Others have noted that his plots are slight and conventional, and that he breaks no new literary ground. He is often considered to be merely a popular writer who makes no real intellectual demands on his readers. While critics may disagree about his literary value as a writer, his status as the most successful British author of his generation seems secure.

High Fidelity Tony Parsons of the *Daily Telegraph* (London) noted that in *High Fidelity*, Hornby "writes like Martin Amis with a heart or Roddy Doyle with an unfeasibly large record collection." Molly Gould of the *San Francisco Review of Books* praised the novel for its solid representation of how music affects human life and added that "although [*High Fidelity*] is a trip through territory that in real life is mundane, depressing, and trite, the novel is anything but." Hornby was also commended by Mark Jolly of the *New York Times Book Review* for capturing "the loneliness and childishness of adult life with such precision." Jolly also said that one of the many good things about the novel was that it "fills you with the same sensation you get from hearing a debut record album that has more charm and verve than anything you can recall." Joan Wilkinson of *Booklist* called the novel "a rare, touching glimpse of the masculine view of affairs of the heart."

A Long Way Down Hornby's 2005 novel, *A Long Way Down*, has also been well received by critics, and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hornby's works explore the concerns and shortcomings of modern men. Here are some other works that touch on similar themes:

A Fan's Notes (1968), a novel by Frederick Exley. This novel is an introspective fictional memoir that examines celebrity, masculinity, self-absorption, and addiction.

Something Happened (1974), a novel by Joseph Heller. This novel consists of the internal monologue of a man facing the futility of his career, the stagnation of his marriage, the impossibility of being a good parent, and the loss of opportunities and time.

Bridget Jones's Diary (1996), a novel by Helen Fielding. This novel chronicles the attempts of a thirty-something woman to make sense of single life in the 1990s.

Hornby has been praised for knowing "how to write dialogue that comments on human experience without drowning in a vat of sap," in the words of Yvonne Zipp of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Gail Caldwell of the *Boston Globe* agreed, adding that while "Hornby has long since proven his hilarity," it was his "depth and generosity of his grasp of the tragic" that endears him to his readers. Ken Babstock of Toronto's *Globe And Mail* commended the characters in the story, saying that he "does social misfits exceedingly well. He does misfits interacting with other misfits near perfectly." D. J. Taylor of the *Independent* (London) regarded *A Long Way Down* as "one of those transitional novels in which the interest lies in the spectacle of the novelist trying to break new ground."

Responses to Literature

1. Hornby has been noted for his insightful portrayals of modern men. Based on his portrayal of men, what kinds of insights does he offer into modern women? Discuss whether these insights are as revealing and poignant as his depictions of men.
2. Hornby wrote for magazines for many years before turning to novels. What aspects of his magazine-writing show up in his novel-writing? In what ways might his magazine experience have helped or hindered his fiction writing?
3. Critics have accused Hornby's works of being too easy to read to have much intellectual or literary value. Write an essay either supporting or opposing this criticism of Hornby's writing. Consider other authors you have read whose works might be subject to a similar criticism.
4. In *Fever Pitch*, Hornby writes honestly and revealingly about one of his passions. Choose an activity that you are passionate about and write an essay modeled on *Fever Pitch*.

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A. E. Housman

BORN: 1859, Worcestershire, England

DIED: 1936, Cambridge, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

A Shropshire Lad (1896)

Last Poems (1922)

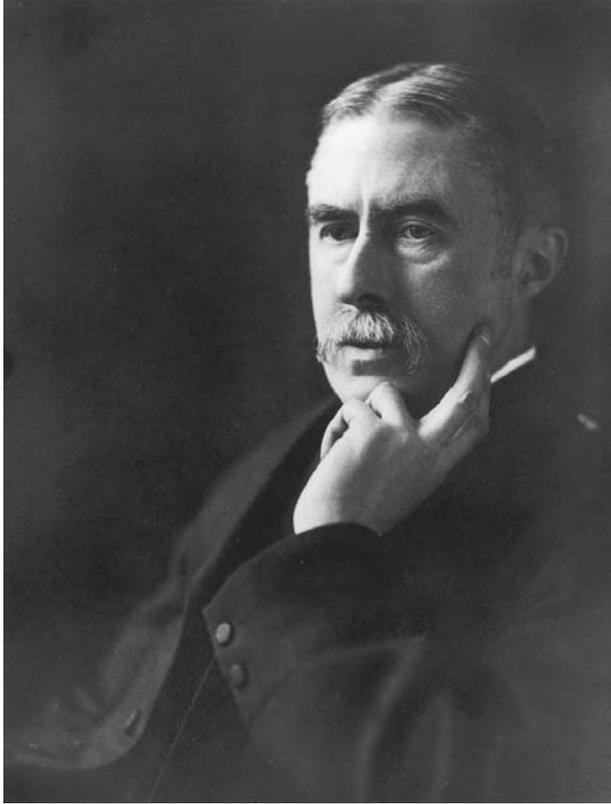
More Poems (1936)

The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman (1939)

Manuscript Poems: Eight Hundred Lines of Hitherto Uncollected Verse from the Author's Notebooks (1955)

Overview

A. E. Housman continues to be a frequently read poet despite the fact that, since the initial publication of his verse, his work has been intermittently praised and rebuffed for what has been called its "obvious limitations." Although Housman's creative output consisted of three slim volumes, his first collection, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), has become one of the most celebrated and best-selling books of verse in the English language and has secured his standing in literary history as a great but thematically restrained poet. Housman's open investigations of the mysteries of death and the dual nature of humankind have earned him acknowledgment as a precursor to the development of modern poetry. Critic Stephen Spender attempts to identify the elements that make his poetry satisfying: "At his best, Housman is a poet of great force and passion whose music is quite unforced, combining sensuousness with a cold discipline." Whatever Housman's limitations, his poems, by virtue of their emotional force and classical beauty, continue to attract attention and praise.



A. E. Housman E. O. Hoppe / Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Pastoral Childhood and Early Tragedy Alfred Edward Housman was born in Fockbury in the county of Worcestershire, England, within sight of the Shropshire hills, a place that he would later allegorize in his poems. He was the eldest of seven children in a family that would produce a famous dramatist, Housman's younger brother, Laurence, and a novelist and short-story writer, his sister Clemence. He attended Bromsgrove School, a notable institution that emphasized Greek and Latin studies, where he worked diligently and developed a talent for precise translation that would later earn him a reputation as a formidable classical scholar. Despite his academic success, Housman's childhood was not a happy one. In addition to being a small and frail boy who did not easily form friendships, Housman also had to confront the death of his mother when he was twelve years old. This tragedy affected him profoundly and set into motion the slow erosion of his religious faith. Years later, Housman wrote that he "became a deist at thirteen and an atheist at twenty-one." This religious disillusionment was reflected in his poetry in the form of stoic despair and a fatalistic view of life.

Housman grew up in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than

any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also saw an extended period of peace and prosperity, leading many free to pursue intellectual interests and occupy themselves with the complex rules of behavior found in "proper" society.

University and A Shropshire Lad Housman entered Oxford University in 1877. He continued to immerse himself in his favorite subjects, Latin and Greek, and also helped to found *Ye Round Table*, an undergraduate magazine featuring humorous verse and satire. Housman's contributions to this publication demonstrate not only his wit but his talent for nonsense verse, which he kept well-concealed in later years even as his critics were condemning his poetry for being stark and humorless. While at first excelling in his work at Oxford, Housman later inexplicably failed his examinations in 1881 and did not earn his degree until 1892, when he was made professor of Latin at University College in London. The cause for Housman's failure was for many years a subject of speculation among critics and biographers. Today, it is known from Housman's diaries that the reason for his failure at Oxford was at least partially caused by his hopelessness over his relationship with a young science student named Moses Jackson. The realization of his own homosexuality and the eventual rejection by Jackson embittered Housman. He became a repressed and melancholy recluse who later declined all honors he was offered, including the poet laureateship of England and the Order of Merit, one of the most prestigious distinctions bestowed by the British government. Housman scholars contend that other than the death of his mother, this rebuff by Jackson was the most determinative event of Housman's life.

It was shortly after the crisis at Oxford that Housman wrote all of *A Shropshire Lad*. His declaration that "I have seldom written poetry unless I was rather out of health" seems to substantiate the opinion that emotional trauma greatly influenced his work. Such poems as "Shake Hands We Shall Never Be Friends, All's Over" and "Because I Liked You Better" make direct reference to his relationship with Jackson, although Housman did not allow them to be published during his lifetime. While Housman wrote an ironic poem on the occasion of Oscar Wilde's imprisonment for homosexual acts, stating in part that "they're taking him to prison for the colour of his hair," he nonetheless was an extremely proper and reserved Victorian gentleman and dreaded being associated with homosexuality.

In *A Shropshire Lad*, Housman adopted the persona of a young Shropshire yeoman, whom he called Terence Hearsay, in order to distance himself from the autobiographical aspects of his work. This technique has caused some commentators to charge that Housman never developed his themes of unrequited love, the oblivion

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Housman's famous contemporaries include:

Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet who wrote with great passion and possessed a love of nature.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): The ruler of England for most of the Industrial Revolution, from 1837 until her death.

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898): Author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and fellow Oxford scholar.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900): Flamboyant British playwright and novelist known for his wit.

of death, and idealized military life beyond the emotional and intellectual capabilities of his main character. Two well-known poems contained in this volume, “To an Athlete Dying Young” and “When I Was One-and-Twenty,” concentrate solely on the loss of youthful dreams. The thematic limitations of *A Shropshire Lad* and the lack of emotional development led Cyril Conolly to state that “many of Housman’s poems are of a triteness of technique equaled only by the banality of thought.” However, other critics praise the economy of Housman’s verse and his expertise with the pastoral tradition. Most of the poems included in *A Shropshire Lad* are short, sometimes not more than one stanza in length, and written in the four-line ballad style with rhyming alternate lines. According to many critics, this stylistic symmetry demands great discipline and sophistication and in this sense Housman’s poems rival the classics in their mastery of conciseness and subtlety. Concentrating on the stylistic elements of his verse, H. P. Collins justifies Housman’s thematic limitations by declaring that “the greatest poetry does not need complex emotions.”

Last Poems and More Poems Housman’s *Last Poems* (1922) appeared twenty-six years after the first publication of *A Shropshire Lad*, leading some critics to speculate on the nature of Housman’s poetic talent. While this volume was also praised for its fine craftsmanship, it was noted by many reviewers that the themes presented were mere continuances of those expounded upon in his previous volume. This did not prevent *Last Poems*, which included “Epithalamium,” a piece commemorating the wedding of Moses Jackson, and “Hell Gate,” which chronicles a successful rebellion against the forces of death, from becoming quite popular. *More Poems* (1936), published posthumously by Housman’s brother, Laurence, was also a popular success, but since most of the poems included had been omitted from the previous volumes by Housman himself, it is generally considered an inferior body of work.

Housman’s famous lecture at Cambridge University in 1933 represents the only statement that Housman ever made about his personal theories of poetry. Housman cited William Shakespeare’s songs, Heinrich Heine’s poetry, and the Scottish border ballads as his major poetic influences. Metrically, his poems stand midway between the lyric and the quatrain form of the ballad, while thematically the influence of Shakespeare is apparent in Housman’s dismissal of the theological and emphasis on everything mortal. Dramatic irony and surprise endings are important elements in the work of Heine, and Housman uses them in much the same fashion as the German poet. While critics contend that Housman’s comments offer important insights into the motivations behind his own verse, they also speculate that Housman intended to be deliberately vague and misleading to provoke controversy. However, Housman prefaced his lecture with the statement that although he would be attempting to delve into the characteristics of poetry, he was not by nature a critic and preferred instead the discipline of writing verse.

Works in Literary Context

In all of his poetry, Housman continually returns to certain favorite themes.

Time and Death The predominant theme in Housman’s work, according to Cleanth Brooks, is that of time and the inevitability of death. As Brooks states, “Time is, with Housman, always the enemy.” Housman frequently deals with the plight of the young soldier, and he is usually able to maintain sympathy both for the youth who is the victim of war and for the patriotic cause of the nation. Robert B. Pearsall suggested in a 1967 essay that Housman dealt frequently with soldiers because “the uniform tended to cure isolation and unpopularity, and soldiers characteristically bask in mutual affection.”

It is not only war but nature, too, that brings on thoughts of death in Housman’s poetry. In the famous lyric beginning “Loveliest of trees, the cherry now,” the speaker says that since life is all too short, he will go out “To see the cherry hung with snow,” a suggestion of death. In a well-known verse from *Last Poems*, a particularly wet and old spring causes the speaker to move from a description of nature—“The chestnut casts his flambeaux, and the flowers stream from the hawthorn on the wind away”—to a sense that his lost spring brings one closer to the grave. To his credit, Housman often does not merely wallow in such pessimistic feelings but counsels a kind of stoical endurance as the proper response: “Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.”

The Hostile Universe Another frequent theme in Housman’s poetry, one that is related to the death motif, is the attitude that the universe is cruel and hostile, created by a God who has abandoned it. In the poem “Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries” in *Last Poems*, mercenaries must take up the slack for an uncaring deity: “What God abandoned, these defended, / And saved the

sum of things for pay.” R. Kowalczyk, in a 1967 essay, summed up this prevalent theme: “Housman’s poetic characters fail to find divine love in the universe. They confront the enormity of space and realize that they are victims of Nature’s blind forces. A number of Housman’s lyrics scrutinize with cool, detached irony the impersonal universe, the vicious world in which man was placed to endure his fated existence.”

Furthermore, society sometimes intrudes into Housman’s world of nature, and when it does, his rustic youth frequently comes in conflict. As Oliver Robinson noted, “Housman is especially sympathetic with the man who is at odds with society, the man who cannot keep “these foreign laws of God and man.””

Works in Critical Context

The themes of his poetry and his emotional handling of them mark Housman as an extension of the Romantic movement that flourished in England in the early part of the nineteenth century and had a resurgence in the aesthetic movement of the 1890s. The critical evaluation of Housman’s work in the two decades after his death in 1936 is tinged with the anti-Romanticism of the period.

A Shropshire Lad As Maude M. Hawkins noted, *A Shropshire Lad* “sold so slowly that Laurence Housman at the end of two years bought up the last few copies.” Though the volume was better appreciated in the United States than in England, Hawkins called most of the critical reviews “lukewarm or adverse.” *A Shropshire Lad* did not sell well until it was published by Grant Richards, a man with whom Housman became lifelong friends. Richards’s first edition was five hundred copies in 1897, which sold out; he then printed one thousand copies in 1900 followed by two thousand in 1902. Hawkins summed up the volume’s early public reception: “After the slow stream of Housman readers from 1896 to 1903, the momentum of popularity increased rapidly.”

During the twentieth century *A Shropshire Lad* has been more of a popular than a critical success. In accounting for this popularity, the writer George Orwell spoke of certain elements in the poetry: a snobbism about belonging to the country; the adolescent themes of murder, suicide, unhappy love, and early death; and a “bitter, defiant paganism, a conviction that life is short and the gods are against you, which exactly fitted the prevailing mood of the young.”

Responses to Literature

1. The speaker in “When I Was Young and Twenty” learns a lot in one year. List some more modern works that deal with similar coming-of-age themes and explain what the main character or speaker learns and at what cost. Does the similarity in theme constitute a similarity in the coming-of-age character? Does this universal theme that repeats itself throughout the generations continue to have the same face or does this theme present itself differently in modern times?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Housman’s poetry examines the surprisingly short distance between youth and death. Being an atheist, he believed that life was fleeting and death final. Here are a few other works that explore similar ideas about the finality and inevitability of death.

- The Seventh Seal* (1957), a film directed by Ingmar Bergman. A medieval knight must play a tense game of chess with Death to determine the outcome of his life.
- “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (1951), a poem by Dylan Thomas. The speaker in this poem fiercely urges an unknown subject to “rage, rage against the dying of the light.”
- “Ozymandias” (1818), a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley’s famous poem treats the subject of mankind’s pride and the eradicating forces of nature and time.
- Death Be Not Proud* (1949), a memoir by John Gunther. This book is about the author’s son, who died of a brain tumor at the age of seventeen.

2. Read “To an Athlete Dying Young” and determine whether Housman owes more to Greek mythology or to William Shakespeare. What elements in either Greek mythology or Shakespeare support your answer?
3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the typical characteristics of Victorianism and Romanticism in literature. In which camp do you think Housman’s poetry belongs? Why?

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▣ Ted Hughes

BORN: 1930, Mytholmroyd, England

DIED: 1998, North Tawton, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Hawk in the Rain (1957)

Earth Owl (1963)

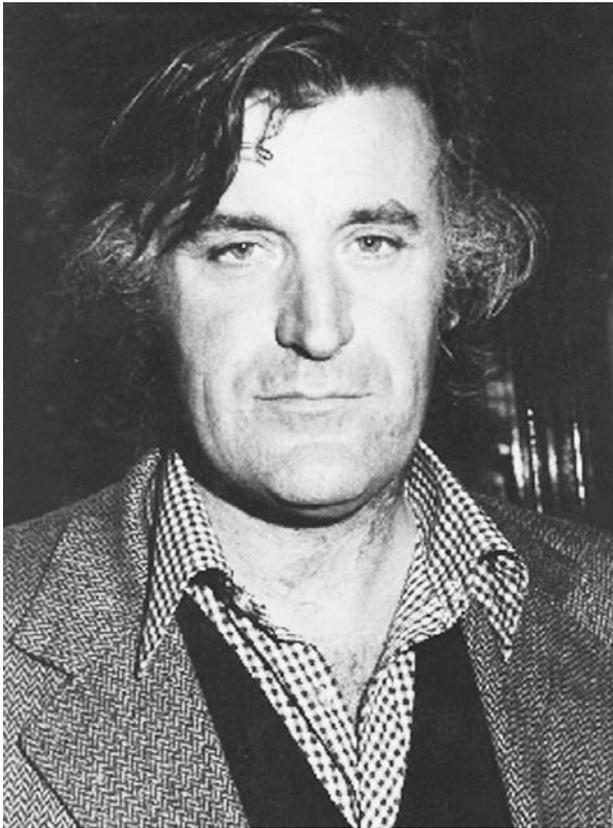
The Iron Man: A Story in Five Nights (1968)

Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow
(1970)

Birthday Letters (1998)

Overview

Ted Hughes used a rich, vibrant language to explore themes that were mythic, earthy, and elemental. Throughout his long poetic career, Hughes was interested in confronting the rougher instincts that govern people's relationships with one another and with nature. When he began writing poetry in the 1950s, Hughes's verse signaled a dramatic departure from the more polite



Ted Hughes Hughes, Ted, photograph by Mark Gerson. Reproduced by permission.

and understated styles of the period. He is also widely remembered, not always positively, as the husband of the brilliant but troubled poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Poetry and Plath Ted Hughes was born as Edward James Hughes on August 17, 1930, in Mytholmroyd, a small town in Yorkshire, England. His father was a carpenter who had seen service in World War I. Throughout his life (and even in his death, where his ashes were scattered on a remote hillside miles from any road), Hughes remained connected to the atmosphere of the English countryside. He did not write about rolling in the daffodils as his predecessor William Wordsworth did; Hughes employed a darker vision of the literal and symbolic ruggedness of the landscape.

After attending school in South Yorkshire, where he began writing poetry, he was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge in 1948 that he took after a brief stint in the Royal Air Force. He studied English literature for two years, then switched to archaeology and anthropology, two subjects that were of immense importance to his work.

While at Cambridge, he published little, but spent his time working as, among other things, a rose gardener, a schoolteacher, and a zoo attendant. All three of these jobs are reflected in his poetry in later years. It was at a literary party in Cambridge in 1956 that he met a fellow student, the American poet Sylvia Plath. Within four months they were married. Plath encouraged Hughes to work harder at getting his poems published, and his first book, *The Hawk in the Rain*, was published to acclaim in both the United States and Britain in 1957.

Suicides After a short period teaching in Massachusetts, Hughes and Plath returned to settle in England. They had two children and moved to a thatched cottage in a small Devonshire village. When Hughes fell in love with another woman, his marriage to Plath collapsed. Plath moved back to London, where, in a depressed state, she committed suicide in February 1963. Hughes was deeply affected by her death and wrote little poetry for the next three years. He instead devoted much time and studious care to the editing of Plath's poems and journals. After many decades of refusing to speak about her to the public, he surprised everyone shortly before his own death by publishing *Birthday Letters* (1998), a series of candid and intimate poems about Plath and their stormy relationship.

From the early 1960s on, Hughes published a great deal of prose, which contains valuable hints for understanding his later poetry. Hughes's prose demonstrates his continuing interest in myth, folklore, the occult, and

the spirituality of primitive man. These ideas eventually fused with his established interests in animals and nature, which resulted in what is widely considered Hughes's major work, *Crow* (1970). Hughes in fact created, in the course of writing these poems, an elaborate folktale about the dark side of nature. Hughes has said in an interview: "The first idea of *Crow* was really an idea of style. . . . to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say." The pessimistic view of life found in *Crow* can perhaps be explained by personal tragedies that happened in Hughes's life a year and a half before *Crow* was published. His companion, Assia Wevill, killed herself in March 1969 in the same manner as Plath and also took the life of the young daughter she had with Hughes.

A New Direction Hughes married his second wife, Carol Orchard, in 1970. Hughes began expanding his work to drama, children's literature, literary criticism (especially of William Shakespeare), translations of Greek classics, and illustrated books. He settled in the countryside of Devon and became involved in farming, especially sheep and cattle raising, which he writes of in *Moortown* (1979). These poems, written in a wide variety of styles, describe the everyday experience of life in the countryside. Rather than stressing the unbridgeable gaps between mankind and animals, as in his earlier poems, Hughes writes of livestock here with a farmer's easy familiarity. The farm presents a continuing cycle of birth and death in which the human beings participate, as in bringing calves and lambs into the world or putting diseased animals out of their misery. The book is dedicated to the memory of Jack Orchard, Hughes's father-in-law. Hughes remembers him at work about the farm, shearing sheep, building a fence in a December downpour, and doing everything as a man who is instinctively at home with his work and moving in harmony with nature.

In 1984 Hughes was appointed poet laureate, the honor of being the "national poet" of Britain, given to just one person at a time until their death. The laureateship is usually given to poets whose writings are uncontroversial in style and theme, but Hughes shattered that stereotype for all future poets of his country. He died at his home in North Tawton, England, on October 28, 1998.

Works in Literary Context

Hughes's poetry takes part in the modernist movement, dating from the 1900s up to the 1950s and beyond, which was a reaction to the strict realism and conventional morality of literature in the Victorian 1800s. Modernist art is more abstract, impressionistic, and symbolic than Victorian art. It is also less confident than Victorian art, expressing themes of self-exploration, pessimism

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hughes's famous contemporaries include:

The Beatles (1960–1970): John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr became the most popular and progressive rock band of their time, inspiring an outburst of artistic creativity and confidence throughout Europe and America during the 1960s.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): Irish playwright and poet who found a dark humor and sense of futility in people's attempts to find meaning and lasting happiness in an uncaring universe.

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Swiss analytical psychologist who theorized that "archetypes"—familiar myths, symbols, and images—are part of the "collective unconscious" of mankind.

Philip Larkin (1922–1985): A witty, satirical, and nostalgic poet who many assumed would become the English poet laureate when Hughes was appointed to the position in 1984.

Robert Lowell (1917–1977), American poet who, like Hughes, wrote technically sophisticated and heavily symbolic verse.

about the present and future, and doubt about what a single individual can do to stem the tide of violence and cultural decay—all themes made urgent throughout the period of the two world wars. T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf shared with Hughes an exploration of individual consciousness sometimes expressed in fragmented, difficult language.

Animals Hughes's works, however, perhaps have the most in common with the poetry of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence is more widely known for his novels, but his poetry often deals with the alien world of animals in a flexible language that seeks to capture something of each animal's style and nature. Where Lawrence's work deals with one animal at a time, often focusing on themes of sexuality and violence, Hughes often places his animals in a much wider context of nature as a whole and frames them with mythology and symbolism. Hughes often wrote about mankind most effectively by excluding it entirely: By writing about animals and showing us what mankind is not, he offers insight into what mankind is and has the potential to be. Animals participate in the cycles of natural energy from which man has grown distant. For example, in *Crow*, the black bird symbolizes the lowest common denominator of life, the stubborn will to live that outlasts even the worst disasters.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hughes often examined animals and the natural world in contrast with human action and society. Here are other works that focus on nature as a means of understanding humans:

“Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798), a poem by William Wordsworth. This classic poem of the Romantic period captures Wordsworth’s philosophy on the power of nature.

Walden (1854), a collection of essays and recollections by Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau famously spent more than two years, mostly in solitude, in a cabin near Walden Pond in Massachusetts. His book contains many close descriptions of the animals and natural features of Walden.

Birds, Beasts, and Flowers (1923), a collection of poetry by D. H. Lawrence. These poems describe the sometimes shocking and amusing nature of animals and plants, showing what we can learn from the unselfconscious way they are in tune with the cycles of birth, life, and death.

The Call of the Wild (1903), a novel by Jack London. This short novel is told from the perspective of a domestic pet dog, Buck, who returns to a primitive world to become the leader of a pack of wolves.

Landscape Hughes is also one of the most important contemporary poets of the natural landscape. There is a long tradition of “pastoral” poetry that dates back to the ancient Greeks. These decorative and exaggerated poems (almost always written by courtly city dwellers who spent little time in the actual countryside) celebrated the simple, romantic lives of idealized shepherds and shepherdesses who spent their days pining for one another and gazing at the peaceful hillsides. With the Romantic movement (1790s–1830s), poets such as William Wordsworth and John Keats found a new (although sometimes sentimentalized) realism in nature, making claims of its restorative power for mankind’s gentler nature. Modernist poets generally avoided nature poetry—Hughes is one of the few exceptions—as they tended to focus instead on the psychology of the individual. The untamable wildness that Hughes finds in animals and nature has been a dominant influence on many contemporary poets, such as Michael Longley and Thom Gunn. As interdisciplinary scholars shape the new field of animal studies, Hughes’s distinctive voice is likely to find an even wider audience.

Plath’s Influence The one poet who had the greatest impact on Hughes was the same poet on whom he had the greatest impact—Sylvia Plath. Plath and Hughes encouraged one another to strive for more complex and personal expression and to explore with great honesty themes of longing, memory, and identity. After Plath’s death,

Hughes edited and promoted her writing (as well as destroying some of it to protect their children, as he claimed), and his last major work was a collection of poems he wrote about their life together titled *Birthday Letters*.

Works in Critical Context

Ted Hughes enjoyed a rapid rise to fame, thanks in part to a prestigious poetry contest he won at the age of twenty-seven. His first book, *The Hawk in the Rain*, was picked up by a major publisher in England and the United States in 1957 and received very favorable reviews. Critics were impressed by the surprisingly confident and mature poetic voice of the young poet.

There were some misfires in Hughes’s career. One was his collaboration with theater director Peter Brook, *Orghast*, which was written and performed in Iran. Hughes created an entirely new language with the intention of communicating emotionally, beneath the level of logical comprehension. Another critical failure was his narrative poem *Gaudete* (1977), a grim and poorly constructed tale of a priest who is replaced with an evil double who seduces his parishioners into a sexual cult.

Hughes has also received criticism from Sylvia Plath’s devoted readers, some of whom would boo at Hughes’s readings, blaming him for her depression and suicide. Judged on its own merits, however, Hughes’s poetry for adults has consistently received favorable reviews, and even those critics who find it unnecessarily violent or pessimistic still appreciate its vigor and technical virtuosity.

Hughes received many honors for his children’s writing, including the Kurt Maschler Award, the Guardian Award for Children’s Fiction, and, on three occasions, the Signal Poetry Award. In assessing Hughes’s contributions as a children’s writer, critic and editor Keith Cushman noted the continuity between his work for younger and older readers, especially in his later years, when poetry for children was an integral part of Hughes’s overall artistic achievement. Cushman writes, “The effort to reach the child’s imagination with poetry, to nurture it, to preserve it and keep it whole, must be recognized as being of paramount importance to the literary faith of Ted Hughes.”

Responses to Literature

1. How did Sylvia Plath influence Ted Hughes’s life and work? How did he influence hers?
2. Read Hughes’s *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*. Do you find the crow to be symbolic, or do think the poems are more meaningful if the crow is just a crow?
3. Is poetry about nature more or less relevant in our time, with the rise of cities and the spread of suburbs? What new perspectives can nature poetry take, and how has Hughes’s work contributed to that?
4. How do archeology and anthropology influence Hughes’s work?

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Victor Hugo

BORN: 1802, Besançon, France

DIED: 1885, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

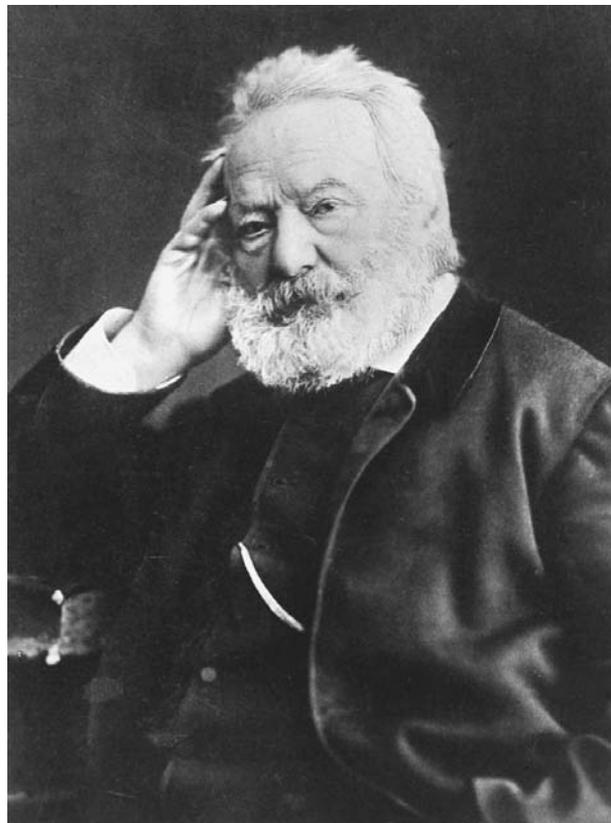
MAJOR WORKS:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831)

Les Misérables (1862)

Overview

Victor Hugo is considered one of the leaders of the Romantic movement in French literature. Although chiefly known outside France for the novels *Les misérables* (1862) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), he is famous in France for his revolutionary and controversial style as a poet.



Victor Hugo Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

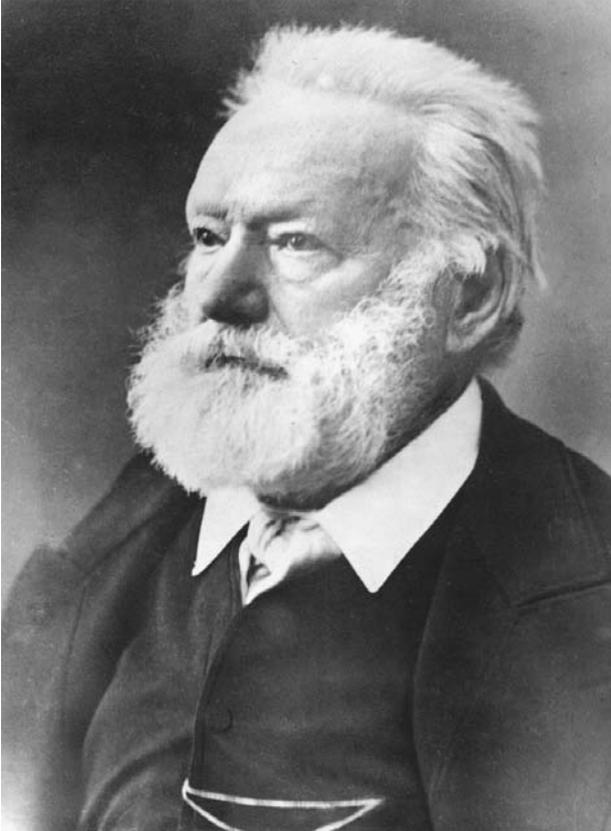
Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Years Victor-Marie Hugo was born in Besançon, France, on February 26, 1802, less than fifteen years after the French Revolution. The French Revolution had been a revolt of the working class against the rule and power of the nobility and the clergy. Royalists, who supported the nobility and former king who had been overthrown, were stripped of much of their power and wealth, and control of the country was eventually taken by the military leader Napoléon Bonaparte.

Victor-Marie Hugo was the third son of Sophie Trébuchet, daughter of royalist sympathizers, and Joseph Hugo, member of the military under Napoléon. Hugo traveled extensively during his childhood until, when he was twelve years old, his parents separated, and he moved to Paris with his mother.

When Napoléon was forced into exile in 1814, Madame Hugo rejoiced; her lover had been executed because he had plotted to overthrow the military leader. Her reaction might account for Victor's early hatred of Napoléon, his preoccupation with the death penalty, and the fascination with exile that appeared so often in his works.

First Works and the Beginnings of Romanticism Hugo gained literary recognition at a young age from



Victor Hugo Hugo, Victor, after 1860, photo by Pierre Petit. Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

Louis XVIII, who ruled France after Napoléon's exile, as well as from French writer François-René de Chateaubriand and other literary figures. He published his first volume of poetry, *Odes et poésies diverses* in 1822, which earned him a pension from Louis XVIII and enabled him to marry his childhood sweetheart, Adèle Foucher. They would have five children together.

Hugo's home became a center of intellectual activity, and he counted among his friends the writer and critic Charles Sainte-Beuve and writer Théophile Gautier. During this period, Hugo wrote several novels and volumes of poetry that foreshadow his Romantic tendencies.

His 1826 poetry collection *Odes et ballades* was received with great enthusiasm. Though the royalist and Catholic press, disappointed with not seeing church and throne exalted, condemned the poems, they were loudly praised by the youthful Romantic school for their extravagance.

Hugo's dramatic work began with the publication of the controversial preface to his lengthy and unstageable verse drama *Cromwell* (1827). This preface sought to establish a new set of dramatic principles that were to become the manifesto of the Romantic movement. Hugo

demanded a new form of verse drama that abandoned the formal rules of classical tragedy. One of his most important principles concerns the necessity of portraying the grotesque as well as the beautiful. Since both are found in nature, and since all that is in nature should be in art, both should be presented in a play.

These precepts were put to the test in 1830, with the production of Hugo's *Hernani* (1830). Its debut was referred to as the "battle of *Hernani*" because of the heated reaction of the theatergoers. Groups of Romantic writers and artists attended performances to demonstrate support for Hugo's revolutionary use of language and innovative dramatic techniques; traditionalists tended to denounce Hugo's disregard of the classic precepts of drama, including unity of time, place, and action.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame and Further Success Hoping to benefit from this publicity, Hugo's publisher pressed him for a novel. Hugo returned to a novel he had begun researching in the late 1820s about Parisian life during the Middle Ages and completed the book in January 1831. It was published as *Notre-Dame de Paris* (the English title became *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) that March.

The novel, set in Paris in 1482, recounts three men's love and one woman's hatred for a young Gypsy dancer, who in turn loves a fourth man. Completed in the months immediately following the July Revolution of 1830, in which King Louis X was overthrown by his cousin, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* also illustrates Hugo's views on numerous social and political issues, particularly the development of the common people as a significant political force.

During the production of *Hernani*, Hugo's friend Sainte-Beuve had begun a lengthy affair with Hugo's wife, and Hugo in turn began a series of affairs. His most lasting relationship began in 1833 with the actress Juliette Drouet; although he was unfaithful to her, their relationship continued until death.

From 1834 until 1862, Hugo concentrated on the theater, poetry, and politics. Hugo was very successful in the theater during the 1830s, focusing on historical drama. While certain themes—fate, virginity, death, and class conflict—recur in his plays, Hugo's dramas differ from his novels through their emphasis on political power.

Hugo's literary achievement was recognized in 1841 by his election to the Académie française and in 1845 by his elevation to the peerage. During the latter half of that decade, he devoted most of his time to politics, delivering a number of political speeches condemning the legal system and society's persecution of the poor.

In 1849, he was elected to the National Assembly. Because of his opposition to Louis Napoléon's dictatorial ambitions, he was forced to leave France following

Napoléon's coup d'état of 1851. He initially fled to Belgium but finally settled on the British island of Guernsey.

Les Contemplations While exiled, Hugo published *Les Contemplations* (1856), poems centered around the 1843 death of his daughter Léopoldine. The volume contrasted lighthearted, lyrical works in one section called *Autrefois* (Before) and more pessimistic, philosophical works in the other part, *Aujourd'hui* (Today). Both question the poet's relation with others and God. This collection is often considered his poetic masterpiece.

Les misérables After publishing several other volumes of poetry, Hugo published *Les misérables* (1862), which was an amazing financial success. It is the story of a released convict, Jean Valjean, who faces repeated hardships despite his efforts to reform. Valjean's tragic history is a condemnation of unfair legal penalties, and his life in the underworld of Paris illustrates Hugo's conviction that social evils are created and fostered by existing laws and customs. *Les misérables* was influential in the movement for legal and social reform in nineteenth-century France.

Upon his return to France in 1870, Hugo received widespread public recognition. Though nominated for public office, he took little further interest in national affairs. His death from pneumonia on May 22, 1885, warranted national mourning. He was buried in the Panthéon in Paris, an honor reserved for only the most significant figures in French history and art.

Works in Literary Context

Some say that Victor Hugo had no "followers." More specifically, French poet Charles Baudelaire once announced that what influence Hugo had was harmful, sapping the originality of those who came too close. Certainly Hugo never created a new aesthetic, such as the one begun by Baudelaire and continued by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry. He may have simply lived too long: by the time he died, those who would have taken up where he left off were already dead or had been left behind.

A Stylistic Revolution in Poetry Hugo's 1826 poetry collection *Odes et ballades* marked a stylistic revolution. The ballad form freed Hugo from the constrictions of classical lyric and allowed him to articulate the poetics announced in *Odes et poésies diverses*, one based not on form but on idea. In this regard, he may be considered the precursor of both Surrealism and Symbolism, movements that opposed Realism and Naturalism in their attempt to portray the particular and the true, not through description and specifics but through symbolic imagery.

The Dark Power in Hugo's Dramatic Poetry Although critical attention to Hugo's work diminished shortly after his death, he has always been distinguished as an outstanding poet whose technical virtuosity advanced French poetry. In fact, in 1855, a critic for the *North American*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hugo's famous contemporaries include:

Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870): French writer best known for his historical novels, including *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Franz Liszt (1811–1886): Hungarian Romantic composer and pianist, famous for his prodigious output and virtuosic technique.

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867): French poet and critic. Baudelaire was famous for *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), a volume of poetry that was controversial because of its themes of sex and death.

Flora Tristan (1803–1844): French feminist, activist, and writer. Tristan argued that women's rights would also benefit men and the working class.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901): Italian Romantic composer specializing in opera. His *Rigoletto* (1851) is based on a play by Hugo.

Review suggested that Hugo's dramatic poetry "inaugurated a new era in French literature" because of his intensity and break with convention. Hugo sought to express "the real" in drama and embraced characters and themes that were grotesque or sublime, an unusual practice that disgusted much of the literary public. He saw beauty in what was traditionally considered dark and disturbed. This interest in exposing truths normally hidden spilled through his other writings, from his political commentary about the Revolution of 1848 to his well-known prose.

Works in Critical Context

It has often been claimed that Hugo's works are fantastic and that they fail to achieve the psychological or descriptive truth characteristic of the novel. Richard B. Grant, writing about Hugo's early books, argues that *roman* should be translated as "romance," not "novel." While the novel tries to represent "real people" through the analysis, description, and evolution of character, the romance deals in archetypes and tends toward myth. Hugo sought to represent a general, archetypal reality, more similar to myth than to modern novels.

Desire and Disgust in Hugo's Prose Hugo's deviation from French dramatic and literary tradition challenged critics and readers alike. His predilection for violent, gritty language, often considered a form of "bestiality," as noted by a reviewer for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1865, confronted conventional literary standards and morality. But this same style also intrigued and excited readers, and a few years before *Les misérables* was even

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Romantic movement in the 1820s examined exceptional individuals and their struggles. Here are some works by other major European Romantic writers.

The Betrothed (1827), a novel by Alessandro Manzoni.

Two young lovers, Lucia and Renzo, struggle to be together in seventeenth-century Italy during the Thirty Years' War.

The Count of Monte Cristo (1844), a novel by Alexandre Dumas. Frenchman Edmund Dantes is betrayed by a friend and imprisoned. Upon his escape from jail, he vows to dedicate his life to revenge.

Don Álvaro (1835), a play by Ángel de Saavedra. Spanish lovers Don Álvaro and Leonor de Vargas are caught by her father as they are about to elope, and her father is accidentally killed. Don Álvaro flees and becomes a soldier, and then a monk, until Leonor's vengeful brother discovers him.

Eugene Onegin (1831), a novel in verse by Aleksandr Pushkin. Eugene Onegin is a bored Russian nobleman who rejects a young woman, only to fall in love with her and be rejected in turn several years later when she has become more cosmopolitan.

The Red and the Black (1831), a novel by Stendhal. Julien, ambitious but born into the working class, uses hypocrisy to rise in French society, but he is undone by an impulsive act of violence.

published, public gossip proclaimed that Hugo's new novel would "sap the foundations of Imperialism, and shake society to its very centre." Hugo's work was the proverbial forbidden fruit, and everyone wanted a taste. The novel's title alone alluded to the deviance within; the entire book was about *les misérables*, or the wretches, the wretched. In the preface to the novel, Hugo writes that *Les misérables* reflects the way contemporary "laws and customs" create a "social damnation" that leads to "artificial hells in the middle of civilization."

The Hunchback of Notre Dame Contemporary French reviewers were generally unimpressed by this novel when it was published. Max Bach has attributed this to the partisan concerns of various groups of critics, including those who objected to the absence of religion in the novel and those who believed that Hugo had slighted the middle class. Critics agree that it is not the plot, but the evocation of the Middle Ages that constitutes the center of the novel's interest, and the statement that the cathedral is its main character is of great validity.

Les Contemplations A lyric meditation on mortality, love, and the fate of humankind, this collection was charac-

terized by Suzanne Nash as an allegory of evolving spiritual awareness, each book disclosing a new level of metaphysical insight, progressing from nature, love, and social awareness to suffering, duty, and prophetic clairvoyance. Other scholars—John Frey, for example—dispute this assessment, arguing that since there is no clear resolution to the problems posed by the poems in the collection, if *Les Contemplations* is an allegory, then it is of failure, not of progress. All agree *Les Contemplations* combines passion and faith in an intensely personal drama of loss and salvation.

Responses to Literature

1. In his outline of Romanticism, Hugo stated that the "grotesque" must be treated alongside the beautiful. Look up *grotesque* in a dictionary. Using the definition, write a paragraph exploring what you think he meant by that statement.
2. With your classmates, discuss characterization: When you read a book or watch a movie, are you interested in realistic characters who seem true to life, or do you prefer archetypes—that is, characters who symbolize a particular type of person, such as the Hero, the Misunderstood Genius, and so forth? How do you view the characters in Hugo's *Les misérables*?
3. Hugo's novel *Les misérables* was adapted to the musical *Les Misérables* in the 1980s. It has been hugely successful, being translated into twenty-one languages and playing almost continuously since then. Using resources at your library or on the Internet, research the musical. Create a poster or electronic presentation that describes the popularity of this adaptation. Why do you think it has struck such a chord with the public?
4. Some musicians and celebrities, like U2's Bono, Wyclef Jean, and Angelina Jolie, are publicly involved in social issues. Does their opinion on issues influence you? Does it depend on who the celebrity is? Write a short essay outlining your views, giving specific reasons for your opinions.
5. Victor Hugo was strongly opposed to the death penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark decision about the death penalty in the case *Baze v. Rees* in April 2008. Using sources from your library or the Internet, research their decision and write a report that presents the case. At the end of the report, include a paragraph in which you offer your personal opinions about the Court's decision.

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📖 Aldous Huxley

BORN: 1894, Godalming, Surrey, England
DIED: 1963, Los Angeles, California, United States
NATIONALITY: English
GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction
MAJOR WORKS: *Crome Yellow* (1921)
Point Counter Point (1928)
Brave New World (1932)
Brave New World Revisited (1958)



Aldous Huxley Huxley, Aldous, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

British author Aldous Huxley published more than thirty nonfiction pieces that ranged from travelogues to social criticism to examinations of literature. He wrote plays, short stories, poetry, and screenplays. Despite Huxley's facility and prolific output in these various genres, he is best known for novels such as *Crome Yellow*, *Point Counter Point*, and *Brave New World*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born on July 26, 1894, in Godalming, England, into a family of intellectuals. Huxley and his siblings were strongly encouraged to carry on the family tradition of intellectual pursuit. His brother Julian became a practical biologist who gained considerable fame for popularizing science. Aldous himself was pursuing a career in science when he was beset with an eye affliction that left him blind for over a year. The condition made the long hours of reading and research that the scientific field required impossible. He never completely recovered, and the course of his life's work was forever changed.

Literary Friendships Huxley attended Balliol College at Oxford University, where he completed his studies

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Huxley's famous contemporaries include:

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): An American novelist best known for his critique of high society in the 1920s, as expressed in *The Great Gatsby*.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): A Mexican painter widely recognized for her vibrant style. She was influenced by Realism, Symbolism, and Surrealism.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): An American novelist associated with the Southern Gothic tradition of literature.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): An Irish poet honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, who served four terms in office.

with high honors in English. While at Oxford, Huxley was introduced to Philip Morrell, a member of the British Parliament, and his wife, Lady Ottoline. Because of his family's reputation, Huxley was soon accepted into the Morrells's circle of friends. He began spending time at Garsington, the Morrells' country estate, where he met such influential literary figures as Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, H.G. Wells, and D.H. Lawrence—with whom he would later forge a great friendship.

Huxley's eye problems disqualified him for military service in World War I, a brutal conflict in which many of Huxley's contemporaries died. In fact, Huxley's generation was decimated by the war: nearly 900,000 British soldiers lost their lives between 1914 and 1918, and nearly twice that many were wounded. After World War I Huxley engaged in literary journalism and was on the staff of the *Athenaeum*, edited by John Middleton Murry. For the greater part of 1923–1930 he lived in Italy; after 1926 he spent much time there with D.H. and Frieda Lawrence. Lawrence was a strong influence on Huxley, particularly in his mistrust of intellect and trust in physical instincts.

Social Critiques Huxley's early period was characterized by skeptical, brilliant portraits of the decadence of post-World War I upper-class British society, particularly its younger members. Many young people in the 1920s felt moved to "live it up"—partly as a way of forgetting the war, partly because the war taught them that life is short. The decade was marked in the United States and Europe by frivolity and sensual excess. The nonstop partying was labeled liberating by some writers and artists, but others saw it as empty and shallow. Huxley, like fellow English writer Evelyn Waugh, used his consider-

able satiric wit to skewer the rich, vapid revelers of the 1920s. This was the period of the novels *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Point Counter Point* (1928). Huxley's growing disgust with the modern world was not limited to the younger generation. His disdain for the twentieth-century obsession with science, technological development, and commercial and industrial advancement would become explicit in *Brave New World* (1932), his best-known work.

The Search for Meaning After *Brave New World*, Huxley's fiction and nonfiction both became increasingly concerned with his interest in religious mysticism. Huxley left England and settled in Southern California, where he became interested in the work of Gerald Heard, who had become interested in the Hindu tradition of Vedanta, a seeking of self-realization. Although *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) and *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944) are both concerned with religious quests, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939), which satirizes the popular culture of Southern California, displays some of the comic irony for which Huxley became famous in the 1920s.

Much of Huxley's later energy was devoted primarily to nonfiction, both in essays presenting social criticism, and in works like *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), which collects and comments on the texts that Huxley considered the vital essence of the world's mystical writings. Indeed, Huxley's career and personal life turned more and more toward mysticism as he aged, which is one of the points of contention his critics had with him.

During the last ten years of his life, Huxley engaged in experiments with the hallucinogenic drugs mescaline and LSD, under the supervision of a physician friend. In *The Doors of Perception* (1954), he wrote about his experience with these drugs. The books later became popular with members of the countercultural movement in the United States in the 1960s. In fact, the influential rock band the Doors took its name from Huxley's book and the band's enigmatic singer and songwriter, Jim Morrison, quoted Huxley often.

Huxley's health, which was never robust, took several turns for the worse in the early 1960s. As he continued to work on a variety of projects, his strength continued to slip away. He died in his Los Angeles home on November 22, 1963, the same day fellow British writer C.S. Lewis died and President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Works in Literary Context

Huxley was connected to many of the leading literary figures of his time. These artists influenced his work and thinking, especially D.H. Lawrence, who was a great friend and mentor. Nonetheless, Huxley was able to carve a niche for himself in speculative fiction in the form of science fiction, drawing on the traditions of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne and influencing later science fiction

novelists like George Orwell and even more recently David Mitchell.

Satirical Science Fiction *Brave New World* is certainly Huxley's most famous novel. It has been in print ever since its publication, is taught widely, and remains a point of reference for political scientists, editorialists, newscasters, and freelance pundits. The book has many passages of intellectual interest; however, its enduring success is probably best explained by Huxley's mastery of the form. Economical in structure and sure-handed in its treatment of scene and character, the novel is moralistic without being essayistic. Perhaps only George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) rivals *Brave New World* in rendering as a story for millions of readers the enduring perplexities of technology, social development, and political enfranchisement.

Influence Huxley was connected to many of the leading literary figures of his time. These artists influenced his work and thinking, especially D.H. Lawrence, who was a great friend and mentor. In *Brave New World*, Huxley produced an enduring novel in the science fiction genre, and one of the most brilliant satires in English literature. Although other intellectuals before Huxley—H.G. Wells, E.M. Forster, Yevgeny Zamyatin, and Karel Capek—had experimented with science fiction romances as a method of social criticism, Huxley's novel remains a seminal work and a remarkable achievement, which influenced many later writers from George Orwell to Robert Silverberg.

Works in Critical Context

Although Huxley wanted to be remembered as a social novelist and essayist, he was aware that his extraordinary emotional detachment limited his ability to create sympathetic characters. In addition to noting his limitations as a fiction writer, many critics who admired his satire deplored his rejection of rationalism and his long devotion to the cause of mysticism. Yet Huxley's later work testifies to the seriousness of his religious quest. However, Huxley will probably owe his enduring reputation not to the writing describing his spiritual search but to his efforts as a satirist, and ultimately, perhaps, to the brilliant, imaginative satire in *Brave New World*.

Brave New World The numerous concepts suggested by *Brave New World* have made the novel a study centerpiece for social scientists, teachers, and technology mavens, and a favorite among readers for several generations.

While critic Edward Cushing found Huxley's narrative technique of average strength, he did admire the author's intent and the novel's moral. Cushing wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that "Mr. Huxley is eloquent in his declaration of an artist's faith in man, and it is his eloquence, bitter in attack, noble in defense, that, when one has closed his book, one remembers." *New York Times Book Review* contributor John Chamberlain found Huxley's novel a humorous attack on progressive global thought. In his

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Huxley was deeply interested in exploring unconventional paths to understanding life and the world. His works show his interest in mysticism and drug-induced altered states of consciousness. Other works that explore unconventional views of reality include:

The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge (1968), an anthropological work by Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda's hugely popular, but controversial, book deals with his research into the practices of a Mexican shaman named Juan Matus.

The Razor's Edge (1944), a novel by Somerset Maugham. Disillusioned after his experiences in World War I, the protagonist of this novel seeks transcendence in India.

The Dharma Bums (1958), a novel by Jack Kerouac. Beat novelist Kerouac blends Buddhism and an American faith in the power of landscape in this novel about hitchhiking and roaming through the West.

review he contended that *Brave New World* satirizes "the imminent spiritual trustification of mankind, and has made rowdy and impertinent sport of the World State whose motto shall be Community, Identity, Stability."

Brave New World Revisited In 1958, twenty-six years after the appearance of *Brave New World*, Huxley published *Brave New World Revisited*, a book that examines Western life in the prosperous era following World War II. Contending that the society depicted in *Brave New World* will eventually come to be, Huxley calls for the human race to take note of, and reverse, its course. *Brave New World Revisited* received a substantial amount of attention upon its publication, partly due to the book's relation to Huxley's most famous novel. Many critics, however, felt that the book was an important work in its own right, one that related significant detail on modern society. "*Brave New World Revisited* is of the utmost importance for the knowledge of growing psychic pressures in a world in transition," appraised *New York Times Book Review* contributor Joost A.M. Meerloos. While viewing the book as a departure from Huxley's fiction, *Saturday Review* critic Granville Hicks commented that "if we have lost something in the way of entertainment, what we have gained is more important." Commenting on the author's talent for presenting invigorating arguments, Christopher Sykes wrote in the *Spectator* that "Mr. Huxley's writing remains as compelling and as brilliant as ever."

Huxley also used *Brave New World Revisited* to clarify the intentions of his 1932 novel. Whereas critics such as the *New York Times Book Review*'s Chamberlain saw *Brave New*

World as a satirical take on complacency and conformity, the book's author clearly felt otherwise. As Huxley states in *Brave New World Revisited*: "Any culture which, in the interests of efficiency or in the name of some political or religious dogma, seeks to standardize the human individual, commits an outrage against man's biological nature."

Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet and the library, research some of the controversies involved in the debate over whether cloning should be legal. In a short essay, reflect on these issues as they relate to *Brave New World*. Consider, for example, whether you think cloning is a step toward the dystopia described in the novel.
2. Read Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and compare it in tone, content, and message to *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. Both Gibran and Huxley have been described as mystics or as being highly concerned with mysticism. Based on these readings, try to analyze what it means to be a "mystic"—is it a philosophy, a way of reasoning, or a state of mind?
3. Read *Doors of Perception*. Given what is now known about the harmful effects of the drugs Huxley took in order to write this text, how do you think this text would be received if it were written today?
4. Read both *Brave New World* and Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." In some way, each of these texts is a work of satire. In a short essay, compare the tones of these texts.

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■ Henrik Ibsen

BORN: 1828, Skien, Norway

DIED: 1906, Oslo, Norway

NATIONALITY: Norwegian

GENRE: Drama, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Brand (1866)

Peer Gynt (1867)

A Doll's House (1879)

Ghosts (1881)

The Wild Duck (1884)

Hedda Gabler (1890)



Henrik Ibsen Ibsen, Henrik, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

In the English-speaking world today, Henrik Ibsen has become one of three playwrights widely recognized as preeminent. Alongside William Shakespeare and Anton Chekhov, he stands at the very center of the standard dramatic repertoire, and no actor can aspire to the highest rank unless he has played some of the leading roles in the works of these three giants. In this triad, Ibsen occupies a central position, marking the transition from a traditional to a modern theater. While Ibsen, like all great dramatists who came after him, owed an immense debt to Shakespeare, Chekhov (who regarded Ibsen as his “favorite writer”) was already writing under Ibsen’s influence. Ibsen can thus be seen as one of the principal creators and wellsprings of the modern movement in drama, having contributed to the development of all its diverse manifestations: the ideological and political theater, as well as the introspective trends that focus on the representation of inner realities and dreams.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Poverty in Norway and the Beginnings of Poetry

Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, to wealthy parents in Skien, Norway, a lumber town south of Christiania (now Oslo). The family was reduced to poverty when Ibsen’s father’s business failed in 1834. After leaving school at the age of fifteen and working for six years as a pharmacist’s assistant, Ibsen went to Christiania hoping to continue his studies at Christiania University. He failed the Greek and mathematics portions of the entrance examinations, however, and was not admitted. During this time, he read and wrote poetry, which he would later say came more easily to him than prose. He wrote his first drama, *Catiline*, in 1850 and although this work generated little interest and was not produced until several years later, it evidenced Ibsen’s emerging concerns with the conflict between guilt and desire. While *Catiline* is a traditional romance written in verse, Ibsen’s merging of two female prototypes—one conservative and domestic, the other adventurous and dangerous—foreshadowed the psychological intricacies of his later plays.

From an Original Drama per Year to Life on Scholarships

Shortly after writing *Catiline*, Ibsen became assistant stage manager at the Norwegian Theater in Bergen. His duties included composing and producing an original drama each year. Ibsen was expected to write about Norway’s glorious past, but because Norway had just recently acquired its independence from Denmark after five hundred years, medieval folklore and Viking sagas were his only sources of inspiration. Although these early plays were coldly received and are often considered insignificant, they further indicated the direction Ibsen’s drama was to take, especially in their presentation of strong individuals who come in conflict

with the oppressive social mores of nineteenth-century Norwegian society. In 1862, verging on a nervous breakdown from overwork, Ibsen began to petition the government for a grant to travel and write. He was given a stipend in 1864, and various scholarships and pensions subsequently followed. For the next twenty-seven years he lived in Italy and Germany, returning to Norway only twice. While critics often cite Ibsen’s bitter memories of his father’s financial failure and his own lack of success as a theater manager as the causes for his long absence, it is also noted that Ibsen believed that only by distancing himself from his homeland could he obtain the perspective necessary to write truly Norwegian drama. Ibsen explained: “I could never lead a consistent life [in Norway]. I was one man in my work and another outside—and for that reason my work failed in consistency too.”

Phase One: Verse and the Stage, a Transition from Poetry

Critics generally divide Ibsen’s work into three phases. The first consists of his early dramas written in verse and modeled after romantic historical tragedy and Norse sagas. These plays are noted primarily for their idiosyncratic Norwegian characters and for their emerging elements of satire and social criticism. In *Love’s Comedy*, for example, Ibsen attacked conventional concepts of love and explored the conflict between the artist’s mission and his responsibility to others. *Brand* (1866), an epic verse drama, was the first play Ibsen wrote after leaving Norway and was the first of his works to earn both popular and critical attention. The story of a clergyman who makes impossible demands on his congregation, his family, and himself, *Brand* reveals the fanaticism and inhumanity of uncompromising idealism. While commentators suggest that *Brand* is a harsh and emotionally inaccessible character, they also recognized that this play reflects Ibsen’s doubts and personal anguish over his poverty and lack of success. More significant still was Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, written while Ibsen was traveling in Italy and published in Denmark in 1867. Written in verse, *Peer Gynt* was not originally intended for stage performance, but has gone on to become a significant piece in Ibsen’s oeuvre, in good part because of the score written for it by composer Edvard Grieg.

Phase Two: Social Realism and the Prose Drama

Ibsen wrote prose dramas concerned with social realism during the second phase of his career. During his stay in Munich, when he was becoming increasingly attuned to social injustice, Ibsen wrote *The Pillars of Society* (1877). A harsh indictment of the moral corruption and crime resulting from the quest for money and power, this drama provided what Ibsen called a “contrast between ability and desire, between will and possibility.” Writing as the Industrial Revolution was making new labor relations possible throughout much of Western Europe, and writing from a Germany newly united as one nation (in 1871)—under the firm, if less than universally beloved hand of Kaiser Wilhelm I of Prussia—Ibsen was in an excellent position to bear witness to both the power

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ibsen's famous contemporaries include:

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904): Along with Ibsen and August Strindberg, Chekhov is considered one of the three most important early-modern playwrights; his works deliberately challenged traditional dramatic structure.

Elizabeth Cary Agassiz (1822–1907): An American educator, Agassiz cofounded Radcliffe College and served as its first president. The college was founded in order to give women access to the high educational standards offered by neighboring Harvard, which at the time was open only to men.

Thomas Edison (1847–1931): Perhaps the best-known inventor of all time, Edison pioneered several devices that are today considered indispensable to modern life as well as a new, industrial approach to scientific research.

Leopold II (1835–1909): King of the Belgians, Leopold became infamous in his own time for his ruthless exploitation of the Congo region of Africa, which he claimed as his own personal domain. His colonialism was too much to stomach for many of his fellow Europeans, and a campaign eventually forced him to relinquish his personal control of the region.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): The English naturalist famous for his theory of evolution and natural selection. His *Origin of Species* caused a sensation upon its publication and stirred a fierce public debate that reverberates to this day.

and the limitations of the human will. His protagonist here, Consul Bernick, while first urging his son to abide by conventional morality and become a “pillar of society,” eventually experiences an inner transformation and asserts instead: “You shall be yourself, Olaf, and then the rest will have to take care of itself.”

Ibsen's next drama, *A Doll's House* (1879), is often considered a masterpiece of realist theater. The account of the collapse of a middle-class marriage, this work, in addition to sparking debate about women's rights and divorce, is also regarded as innovative and daring because of its emphasis on psychological tension rather than external action. This technique required that emotion be conveyed through small, controlled gestures, shifts in inflection, and pauses, and therefore instituted a new style of acting.

Ghosts (1881) and *An Enemy of Society* (1882) are the last plays included in Ibsen's realist period. In *Ghosts* Ibsen uses a character infected with syphilis to symbolize how stale habits and prejudices can be passed down from generation to generation. Written as much of Europe—though not Norway—was engaged in what has come to be called the European “scramble for Africa,” the effort to

control colonies in areas newly desirable as sources of raw material and markets for consumer goods, *An Enemy of Society* demonstrates Ibsen's contempt for what he considered stagnant political rhetoric. Audiences accustomed to the Romantic sentimentality of the “well-made play” were initially taken aback by such controversial subjects. However, when dramatists George Bernard Shaw and George Brandes, among others, defended Ibsen's works, the theater-going public began to accept drama as social commentary and not merely as entertainment.

Phase Three: Negotiating the Symbolic With *The Wild Duck* (1884) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Ibsen entered a period of transition during which he continued to deal with modern, realistic themes, but made increasing use of symbolism and metaphor. *The Wild Duck*, regarded as one of Ibsen's greatest tragicomic works, explores the role of illusion and self-deception in everyday life. In this play, Gregers Werle, vehemently believing that everyone must be painstakingly honest, inadvertently causes great harm by meddling in other people's affairs. At the end of *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen's implication that humankind is unable to bear absolute truth is reflected in the words of the character named Relling: “If you rob the average man of his illusion, you are almost certain to rob him of his happiness.” *Hedda Gabler* concerns a frustrated aristocratic woman and the vengeance she inflicts on herself and those around her. Taking place entirely in Hedda's sitting room shortly after her marriage, this play has been praised for its subtle investigation into the psyche of a woman who is unable to love others or confront her sexuality.

Ibsen himself returned to Norway in 1891 and there entered his third and final period with the dramas *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). In these final works, Ibsen dealt with the conflict between art and life and shifted his focus from the individual in society to the individual alone and isolated. It is speculated that *The Master Builder* was written in response to Norwegian writer Knut Hamson's proclamation that Ibsen should relinquish his influence in the Norwegian theater to the younger generation. Described as a “poetic confession,” *The Master Builder* centers around an elderly writer, Solness, who believes he has misused and compromised his art. *Little Eyolf*, the account of a crippled boy who compensates for his handicap through a variety of other accomplishments, explores how self-deception can lead to an empty, meaningless life. The search for personal contentment and self-knowledge is also a primary theme in *John Gabriel Borkman*, a play about a banker whose quest for greatness isolates him from those who love him. And in his final play, *When We Dead Awaken*, subtitled “A Dramatic Monologue,” Ibsen appears once more to pass judgment on himself as an artist. Deliberating over such questions as whether his writing would have been more truthful if he had lived a more active life, *When We Dead Awaken* is considered one of Ibsen's most personal and autobiographical works.

After completing *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen suffered a series of strokes that left him an invalid for five years until his death in 1906.

Works in Literary Context

Ibsen's first and most obvious impact was social and political. His efforts to make drama and the theater a means to bring into the open the main social and political issues of the age shocked and scandalized a society that regarded the theater as a place of shallow amusement. And Ibsen, too, seems to have been the only playwright to, in his lifetime, become the center of what almost amounted to a political party—the Ibsenites, who in Germany, England, and elsewhere appear in the contemporary literature as a faction of weirdly dressed social and political reformers, advocates of socialism, women's rights, and a new sexual morality (as in the Ibsen Club, in Shaw's *The Philanderer*). The fact that Ibsen was equated with what amounted to a counterculture has had a considerable influence on the subsequent fluctuations of his fame and the appreciation of his plays by both the critics and the public.

The Birth of Modern Theater It is usually assumed that the shock caused by Ibsen, and the furiously hostile reaction his early plays provoked, were due to this political and social subversiveness. But that is only part of the truth. Another important cause of the violent reaction by audiences and critics alike lay in the revolutionary nature of Ibsen's dramatic method and technique. This is an aspect which is far more difficult for us to comprehend today as we have become completely conditioned to what were then "revolutionary" conventions. Much of the fury directed at the time against Ibsen had nothing to do with his supposed obscenity, blasphemous views, or social destructiveness. What was criticized above all was his obscurity and incomprehensibility. Ibsen, it was said again and again, was a troublemaker who was obscure on purpose in order to mask the shallowness of his thinking, and whose dark hints and mysterious allusions were never cleared up in his plays.

Against Repression: A Precursor to Freud Sexuality, and especially female sensuality, which did not officially exist at all for the Victorians, was seen by Ibsen as one of the "dangerous instincts" in the sense that when it is suppressed by societal demands it forces the individual to live an inauthentic life, creating feelings of inadequacy and conflict. Mrs. Alving's failure to break out of her marriage in *Ghosts* foreshadows Hedda Gabler's inability to give herself to Lovborg, and is shown by Ibsen to bring about similarly tragic results. In *Little Eyolf* the conflict is between motherhood and uninhibited female sensuality. Rita Allmers is the most openly sexually voracious character in Ibsen's plays: here the rejection of motherhood derives from an obsession with the sensual aspect of sex. Rita's exaggerated sexual drive may well spring from her husband's equally disproportionate com-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ibsen's plays derive much of their intensity from the relationships between the male and female characters, and the conflict of love versus honor that those relationships embody. Here are some other plays that have explored similar themes:

Hamlet (c. 1601), a tragedy by William Shakespeare.

Arguably Shakespeare's greatest play, this tragedy—based on a twelfth-century account of Danish history, the *Gesta Danorum* ("Deeds of the Danes")—revolves around a son honor-bound to avenge his father's death at the hands of his uncle, and the doubt and soul-searching this obligation inspires.

Trifles (1916), a play by Susan Glaspell. Written forty years after *A Doll's House*, this play examines similar themes of male-female relationships, but played out against a background of grinding poverty. The social and emotional differences between the sexes form the crux of the action, painting both men and women in rather broad strokes.

Miss Julie (1888), a play by August Strindberg. A Swedish contemporary of Ibsen and often compared with him, Strindberg in this play touches on class issues in addition to the contrast between love and lust and conflicts between men and women.

The Seagull (1895), a play by Anton Chekhov. Deeply influenced by Ibsen, this celebrated Russian playwright in this his first play adds a diverse cast to the standard Ibsenesque themes of love versus honor, strongly evoking *Hamlet* in the process.

mitment to his work as a philosopher, which has led him to neglect both her sexual needs and their child's emotional and educational demands. In his attention to these issues, Ibsen presaged the work of famous Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who developed a human science around the idea and the treatment of repressed sexuality.

Works in Critical Context

Although audiences considered Ibsen's dramas highly controversial during his lifetime because of his frank treatment of social problems, today's scholars focus on the philosophical and psychological elements of his plays and the ideological debates they have generated. Ibsen's occasional use of theatrical conventions and outmoded subject matter has caused some critics to dismiss his work as obsolete and irrelevant to contemporary society, but others recognize his profound influence on the development of modern drama. Haskell M. Block has asserted: "In its seemingly limitless capacity to respond to the changing need and desires of successive generations of

audiences, [Ibsen's] work is truly classic, universal in implication and yet capable of endless transformation."

Peer Gynt The protagonist of Ibsen's drama *Peer Gynt* (1867), while witty, imaginative, and vigorous, is incapable of self-analysis. Although this play takes on universal significance due to Ibsen's use of fantasy, parable, and symbolism, it is often described as a sociological analysis of the Norwegian people. Harold Beyer explains: "[*Peer Gynt*] is a central work in Norwegian literature, comprising elements from the nationalistic and romantic atmosphere of the preceding period and yet satirizing these elements in a spirit of realism akin to the period that was coming. It has been said that if a Norwegian were to leave his country and could take only one book to express his national culture, [*Peer Gynt*] is the one he would choose."

A Doll's House For those who have seen performances of *A Doll's House* by Claire Bloom or Jane Fonda on stage, screen, or television in the last decade, there is little difficulty in understanding Ibsen's reputation as a writer of social-problem plays. Most people still see the play as one about a heroic young woman's victorious struggle for freedom from repressive social conventions. Some, however, like critic Hermann Weigand (writing as early as the 1920s), see Nora as a deceptive, selfish, intriguing young woman bent only on having her own way. These critics believe Ibsen is satirizing and debunking her rather than, as others believe, holding her up as virtue incarnate.

Most of the characters in the play are conceived of as playing roles drawn from the kinds of Danish and French romantic melodramas from which Ibsen learned his craft. As famed Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams points out, there is "the innocent child-like woman, involved in a desperate deception, the heavy insensitive husband; the faithful friend." "Similarly," Williams continues, "the main situations of the play are typical of the intrigue drama: the guilty secret, sealed lips, the complication of situations around Krogstad's letter... Krogstad at the children's party... the villain against a background of tranquility..." For Williams all of this is an indication of the play's weaknesses: "None of this is at all new," he says, "and it is the major part of the play."

Responses to Literature

1. The concept of integrity was a recurring theme in Ibsen's plays. Select two of his plays in which integrity plays a central role and analyze them. Are characters with integrity rewarded or punished? What vision does Ibsen present of the value, or lack thereof, of integrity in a modern world?
2. In Ibsen's works, how does the dialogue between closely related characters differ from the dialogue between strangers? What purpose does this difference serve?

3. Ibsen was forced to write a second ending to *A Doll's House*, in which Nora decides to remain in her marriage for the sake of her children. Research which ending best reflects the cultural reality of the nineteenth-century Europe in which the play was written? Explain your choice.
4. Discuss the use of Christian allegory in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.
5. Ibsen was just one of millions of Norwegians who emigrated during the nineteenth century. Research the motivations behind this mass exodus. How do Ibsen's reasons for leaving match up with the average Norwegian's?

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☒ Eugene Ionesco

BORN: 1909, Slatina, Romania

DIED: 1994, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Romanian, French

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bald Soprano (1950)

The Chairs (1952)

Rhinoceros (1960)

Overview

Eugene Ionesco was one of the founders of a style of drama called the Theater of the Absurd. He revolutionized drama with his radical new perspective on language, demonstrating its subversion, ordinariness, and humorous explosiveness, as well as its domineering power. His works feature nightmarish scenes with sometimes tragic, sometimes ludicrous characters whose surrealistic and grotesque attempts to deal with the absurdity of life fail.



Eugene Ionesco Ionesco, Eugene, photograph. The Library of Congress.

His plays have been translated into most European languages, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew, and have been performed all over the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up Amidst Familial Instability Eugene Ionesco was born Eugen Ionescu in Slatina, Romania, on November 13, 1909. He was the second of Eugen and Marie-Therese Ionescu's three children. His father, a lawyer, moved his family to France in 1910 to complete his law degree in Paris, but he returned to Romania in 1916 to fight in World War I. Initially, when the war first broke out in 1914, Romania had declared neutrality. However, in 1916, under pressure from France and other Allied countries, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary. The elder Ionescu left his wife in Paris to care for their children, eventually divorcing her. When Ionesco was thirteen, his mother, unable to provide for her children, returned to Romania and transferred them to their father's custody.

Provoking Controversy From 1929 to 1933, Ionesco attended the University of Bucharest, where he completed

a degree in French language and literature. During these years, he became famous for his public literary debates with his professor of aesthetics, Mihail Dragomirescu. Ionesco's first publication was a volume of poetry, *Elegii pentru fiinte mici* (Elegies for Minuscule Creatures), published in Romania in 1931. Ionesco's first volume of essays, *Nu* (No; translated into French as *Non*, 1986), was published in 1934 and sparked debate in Romanian literary circles. Ionesco attacked revered Romanian writers of the time—most prominent among them the novelist Camil Petrescu and the poets Tudor Arghezi and Ion Barbu.

Marriage, Emigration, and Diplomacy After graduating from the University of Bucharest, Ionesco worked as a high school teacher in the Romanian provinces and in Bucharest. In 1936, he married Rodica Burileanu, a philosophy student. In 1938, Ionesco moved to Paris to work on his dissertation, which he never finished. He and his wife returned to Romania in 1940, but he clung to the hope of leaving the country. In 1941, Romania entered World War II as part of the Axis powers, allied with Germany, Italy, and Japan. When offered a diplomatic appointment in 1942, Ionesco accepted and relocated with his wife to France, never returning to Romania. He arrived in German-occupied France as a representative of the pro-Nazi Romanian government. In 1944, Ionesco's wife Rodica gave birth to their only child, Marie-France.

Introducing the Theater of the Absurd In 1949 Ionesco translated into French a play he had originally written in Romanian, *Englezeste fara profesor* (English without a Professor). A friend, Monica Lovinescu, introduced him to Nicolas Bataille, a young director, who produced the play in Paris in 1950 under the title *La Cantatrice chauve* (The Bald Soprano). The play failed miserably at its premiere, although it was enthusiastically received by prominent surrealists such as André Breton and Philippe Soupault. *La Cantatrice chauve* is an attack on bourgeois conformism and a reflection on the impossibility of communication. It remains a superb example of the Theater of the Absurd.

Absurd Multiplicity The problematic nature of language and communication is a dominant theme in Ionesco's early works, including his first two plays, *La Cantatrice chauve* (1950; The Bald Soprano) and *La Leçon* (1951; The Lesson). As his career progressed, Ionesco began to use multiplying objects as a metaphor for the absurdity of life. In one of his most acclaimed works, *Les Chaises* (1952; The Chairs), an elderly couple serves as hosts for an audience who assemble to hear a speaker deliver a message that will save the world. As the couple arranges seating for their guests, the stage becomes crowded with chairs. This image is symbolic of the irrational, foolish, or nonsensical.

The Bèrenger Plays Beginning in the late 1950s, Ionesco wrote a number of plays that center on Bèrenger, a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ionesco's famous contemporaries include:

- Nicolae Ceaușescu** (1918–1989): Leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989 who was widely considered a dictator. He was executed, along with his wife, after the revolution overthrew him.
- Mikhail Gorbachev** (1931–): The last Communist leader of the Soviet Union, who helped end the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. He was removed from office in a coup.
- Kim Philby** (1912–1988): British intelligence officer who was secretly a Communist and a spy for the Soviet Union. Classified information Philby passed along may have led to the deaths of many British and American intelligence agents.
- Odette Sansom** (1912–1995): French civilian who worked for the underground resistance movement during World War II. Captured and tortured by the Nazis, she refused to confess and was sent to a concentration camp, which she survived.
- Tristan Tzara** (1896–1963): Romanian playwright, artist, and poet. Cofounder of the Dada movement, Tzara rejected common standards of art and influenced the surrealist movement.

modern-day Everyman. The best known of these works is *Rhinocéros* (1959), which is considered one of Ionesco's most accessible plays. During the course of the play everyone except Bérenger is transformed into a rhinoceros. While the inspiration for this work came from Ionesco's reaction to a friend who joined the Nazi Party, the play's significance extends beyond the confines of any single ideology to denounce mindless conformity and mob mentality.

Other Bérenger plays include *Tueur sans gages* (1958; *The Killer*), in which Bérenger searches for a nameless killer to whom he falls prey, and *Le Roi se meurt* (1962; *Exit the King*), in which Bérenger is a king who is told he will soon die.

Death and the Fantastic The subject of death becomes an overriding concern in many of Ionesco's later plays; for example, in *La Soif et la faim* (1964; *Hunger and Thirst*). The dreamlike images that pervade Ionesco's drama also become more prominent in his later works. In *L'Homme aux valises* (1975; *The Man with the Suitcases*) and *Voyages chez les morts* (1980; *Journeys among the Dead*), the protagonists engage in conversations with the dead. The episodic nature of these plays, coupled with their fantastic elements, creates the impression of a dream.

Best known as a dramatist, Ionesco has also written a novel, *Le Solitaire* (1972; *The Hermit*), and several vol-

umes of essays and criticism. These works, like his drama, are marked by a sense of anguish and a vehement opposition to totalitarianism and oppression.

Ionesco actively participated in conferences in support of human rights, wrote harsh indictments against the Romanian government as well as against other totalitarian regimes, and helped dissidents of such countries. Ionesco signed many petitions for freedom of speech and wrote articles against anti-Semitism and in support of the right to existence of the state of Israel. His ties to Romania became stronger after the 1989 revolution that brought down Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship, at which time he acknowledged in interviews that he felt Romanian again. In the last decade of his life, he gave up writing and devoted himself to painting and exhibiting his works. He died in Paris on March 28, 1994.

Works in Literary Context

With Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco is widely recognized as a defining playwright of the Theater of the Absurd. Ionesco's originality largely consisted of his revolutionary rediscovery of language, which was influenced by his own rediscovery of language during his attempts to learn the English language. While studying, Ionesco came to view modern perspectives on language as absurd, and his ridicule of this "language worship" would later become a common theme in his works. It is notable that one of Ionesco's favorite authors was William Shakespeare, whom he considered to have been a precursor of the Theater of the Absurd.

Thematic Evolution Ionesco's theater evolved during his career. His first plays focus more on language as a means of non-communication, as an expression of automatism and banality, and as a barrier to knowledge of the self and of others. Later, Ionesco became interested in the psychoanalytical aspect of memory and in revealing characters' inner worlds on stage, especially their deep anxieties and obsessions with death. His allusions to politics in the early plays turn into political statements in the later plays. Then, at the very end of his career, Ionesco's plays became highly autobiographical and oneiric.

Ridicule of Language Worship and Conformity Ionesco was appalled by the hateful and violent anti-Semitic outbursts he had witnessed in Romania. He also was disturbed and mystified by the large number of intellectuals who fell prey to fascist ideologies and mass hysteria. *Rhinocéros*, his most successful play was inspired in part by the mass hysteria described by Denis de Rougemont in his report on a Nazi rally he attended in 1938 in Nuremberg. In his play, Ionesco seeks to represent the process by which human individuals are drawn into collectivities, appearing to undergo transformations so substantial as to strip them of their humanity. The deafening roar of the rhinoceroses in the play represents the overwhelming clamor characteristic of rallies such as the one in Nuremberg. The comical parallel dialogues in the first

scene underline the power of rhetoric more than the power of logic. Ultimately, however, Béranger—the protagonist, an ordinary man—refuses to conform, suggesting the possibility of individual choice despite social pressure.

The features of his drama directly and indirectly influenced contemporaries such as French playwright Jean Tardieu and Lebanese playwright Georges Schéhadé, as well as many of the innovative playwrights that emerged in his wake, including Spanish playwright Fernando Arrabal, French playwrights René de Obaldia and Rolland Dubillard, English playwright Harold Pinter, and American playwright Sam Shepard.

Works in Critical Context

Faulted as obscure by many critics at the beginning of his career, Ionesco's innovative drama has gained international acclaim, and a number of his works are now considered founding pieces of the Theater of the Absurd. His numerous accolades speak to the nature of this acclaim. Internationally, Ionesco was the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Jerusalem Prize (1973), the Max Rheinhard Medal (1976), Germany's Order of Merit (1982), the University of Chicago's T. S. Eliot-Ingersoll Prize (1985), the Medal of the City of Paris (1987), and the Molière Prize (1989). In 1970 he was elected to the Académie française; he received the great Austrian Award for European Literature, and he was presented an honorary doctorate by the University of Tel-Aviv. In 1991 he became the first author whose work was published in the prestigious Editions Pléiade while still alive.

Rhinocéros Ionesco's three-act play *Rhinocéros* (produced and published 1959; translated as *Rhinoceros*, 1960), generally considered to be his masterpiece, has been performed to acclaim throughout the world. Adapted for the stage from his 1957 short story of the same title, it premiered in Paris at the state-subsidized Odéon-Théâtre de France under the direction of Jean-Louis Barrault, and "put the playwright on the international theatrical map," according to American critic Mel Gussow. The English version of the play was directed by Orson Welles and starred Laurence Olivier. Dramas like this were "called anti-theatre by many critics, despite the fact that all the theatrical elements are included," according to reviewers Jacques Guicharnaud and June Beckelman. However, as Guicharnaud and Beckelman go on to say, "such farce might be better termed *Théâtre en liberté* or liberated theatre, the mirror of the world as a non-sensical mechanism, mad in its ways, and thus giving the playwright complete freedom to indulge his fantasies."

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the way language is portrayed in the Theater of the Absurd. Do you find that language is inherently "problematic"? Explain your views citing specific examples from one of Ionesco's plays.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dramatists in the Theater of the Absurd shared a vision of a hopeless, bewildered, and anxious humanity struggling vainly to find a purpose and to control its fate. Absurdist playwrights ignored most of the logical structures of traditional theater. Dramatic action is minimal; what action occurs only serves to underscore the absence of meaning in the characters' existence. Here are some works that take a similar approach to the stage:

The Caretaker (1959), a play by Harold Pinter. In this work, held together without any solid structure and filled with random dialogue and surrealism, a manipulative tramp disturbs the relationship between two brothers in this three-character play.

The Maids (1947), a play by Jean Genet. In this work, loosely based on a true story, two sisters play fantasy roles of mistress and maid and attempt to kill their real mistress.

Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921), a play by Luigi Pirandello. In this play, a group of actors are about to rehearse when six strangers walk in, explaining that they are unfinished fictional characters.

Waiting for Godot (1952), a play by Samuel Beckett. In this work, two characters wait in vain for a third, Godot, who never arrives.

2. In *Rhinocéros*, Ionesco explores the theme of how conformity can be dangerous. Drawing from the play, discuss your views about conforming. Do you think conforming can be a good thing? Is there such a thing as being too individualistic?
3. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the beliefs behind the Theater of the Absurd. Write an essay that defines those principles and explains how you feel about them and the art they create.
4. The Theater of the Absurd developed starting in the late 1940s. What was going on in the world at that time that might lead to this view of life? Write an essay analyzing world events and how they might have influenced this movement.

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❑ Christopher Isherwood

BORN: 1904, Cheshire, England

DIED: 1986, Santa Monica, California

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Mr. Norris Changes Trains (1935)

Goodbye to Berlin (1939)

The Condor and the Cows (1949)

A Single Man (1964)

Overview

Perhaps best known for his stories of Weimar, Germany, collected in *The Berlin Stories* (1946), which were later adapted for the play *I Am a Camera* (1951) and the stage musical and film *Cabaret* (1966 and 1972), Isherwood also made important headway in the portrayal of gay men both in his fiction and numerous volumes of memoirs. In addition, he had a lengthy career as a Hollywood screenwriter, and wrote and edited a number of books about his religious faith, Vedantism, aimed at western readers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cambridge and Auden The son of a career military officer, Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood was born in High Lane, Cheshire, England, on August 26, 1904. He attended the Repton School from 1919 to 1922 and Cambridge University from 1924 to 1925. He left in 1925 without earning a degree, his undistinguished academic career ending when he gave mischievous and wrong answers to the questions on his final exams. His university year was significant because it was at Cambridge that he met Wystan Hugh Auden, with whom he later collaborated on several literary projects, and because it was there that he became a practicing homosexual, an orientation that played an important role in his personal and artistic life.

Auden, who quickly emerged as his generation's greatest poet, cast Isherwood in the role of literary men-



Christopher Isherwood Isherwood, Christopher, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

tor and soon introduced him to a fellow Oxford undergraduate, Stephen Spender. The trio formed the nucleus of the "Auden Gang," young poets and novelists who dominated the English literary scene of the 1930s.

Isherwood worked for a year as the secretary to French violinist Andre Mangeot and as a private tutor in London. In his spare hours he worked on his first novel, *All the Conspirators*, published in 1928. The novel was poorly received.

Berlin Period In the period following World War I, Germany became a democratic nation known as the Weimar Republic. Since Germany was viewed as a primary cause behind the war, the new Weimar Republic was held responsible for repaying many of the costs of war to other countries, also known as war reparations. This, along with massive unemployment and other economic problems, led to runaway inflation that crippled the fledgling country and bred discontent among Germans. The situation worsened in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression; in these dire circumstances, many German people gave their support to the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler, who promised to restore Germany to its former glory.

In 1929 Isherwood followed Auden to Germany and was attracted to life in the crumbling Weimar Republic and particularly to the sexual freedom that existed there. As he so succinctly put it in his 1976 book *Christopher and His Kind 1929–1939*, “Berlin meant Boys.” He soon established a liaison with Berthold “Bubi” Szczesny, a bisexual ex-boxer, that lasted until Szczesny was forced to leave the country. Among the young men he met subsequently was one from the working-class section of Berlin. He took a room with this man’s family for a time and so became familiar with day-to-day living among the urban proletariat.

At first his stay in Germany was financed through an allowance provided by his only wealthy relative, his uncle Henry Isherwood. His uncle was also homosexual and seemed happy to assist his nephew in the quest for companions. Eventually, however, Uncle Henry stopped funding his nephew, and Isherwood began earning money tutoring in English. In this way he met Berliners from the upper classes.

Isherwood became fluent in German and got acquainted, as did Auden, with the expressionist drama of Ernst Toller, Georg Kaiser, and Bertolt Brecht. This led the two British artists to collaborate on three expressionist plays: *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1937), and *A Melodrama in Three Acts: On the Frontier* (1938), of which the first two are considered more successful.

Meanwhile, Isherwood was working on two stories that would later become his most successful book, *The Berlin Stories* (1946). The book, comprised of the two short novels, *The Last of Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin* presents an in-depth portrait of life in Germany’s capital as that republican center collapsed. The two novels set in Berlin are quite distinct, but in each Isherwood masters a unique voice, creates some of the most memorable characters in modern fiction, and movingly depicts a city in the process of internal decay. As explorations of the ways in which public and private concerns intersect, they are passionately engaged, haunted by the brooding specter of Nazism. Playwright John van Druten adapted *The Berlin Stories* for the stage in a play called *I Am a Camera* (1955), which was later adapted into the musical *Cabaret* (1967).

Relocation Isherwood and Auden traveled to China in 1938 and 1939 and published the part travel diary, part war chronicle *Journey to a War*, which describes the Sino-Japanese War. That conflict erupted in August 1937 and was a grim foreshadowing of World War II.

When World War II broke out in Europe, Isherwood and Auden came to America. The move made them enemies to many Britons, who saw them as fleeing the country in the face of oncoming war. Indeed, even three years later, in *Put Out More Flags*, novelist Evelyn Waugh, christening them Parsnip and Pimpernell, commented, “What I don’t see is how these two can claim to be contemporary if they run away from the biggest event in contemporary history.”

Isherwood was a conscientious objector during World War II and became a U.S. citizen in 1946. During World War II he wrote scripts for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, and 20th Century Fox film studios. He also worked for a year in a refugee center in Haverford, Pennsylvania.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Isherwood’s famous contemporaries include:

W. H. Auden (1907–1973): An English poet known for his mastery of tone, form, and content, his poetry touched on such subjects as love, citizenship, morality, and nature.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Widely considered to be the most influential composer of twentieth-century music. A quintessentially cosmopolitan Russian, Stravinsky was named by *Time* magazine as one of the one hundred most influential people of the twentieth century.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): An American writer and poet best known for her wisecracks, caustic wit, and sharp eye for twentieth-century urban problems.

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963): An English author best known for his dystopian novels, he also published a wide range of essays, short stories, poetry, travel writings, and scripts.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986): An Indian public speaker and author who focused most often on such topics as enacting positive change, meditation, and human relationships.

In 1953, he fell in love with eighteen-year-old college student, Don Bachardy, who was to achieve independent success as a portrait artist. The relationship was to last the rest of Isherwood’s life. At the conclusion of his 1976 biography, *Christopher and His Kind*, he described Bachardy as “the ideal companion to whom you can reveal yourself totally and yet be loved for what you are, not what you pretend to be.” During the 1970s and 1980s Isherwood and Bachardy were active participants in the burgeoning American Gay Liberation movement, a movement that Isherwood’s work of the 1950s and 1960s had anticipated and inspired.

Hindu Spirituality Isherwood became increasingly involved in the Vedantist religion, a branch of Hinduism focusing on the true nature of reality. He edited and wrote several volumes about the religion between 1945 and 1969. He explained the religion’s basic tenets as follows: “We have two selves—an apparent, outer self and an invisible, inner self. The apparent self claims to be an individual and as such, other than all other individuals. . . . The real self is unchanging and immortal.”

Isherwood did not confine himself solely to religious writings, however. He authored such novels as *Prater Violet* (1945), *The World in the Evening* (1954), and *A Single Man* (1964), the novel in which he most successfully combines the themes that preoccupied him during the second half of his career: religion and homosexuality. *A Meeting by the River* (1967), his last novel, deals with his religion. He also wrote the travel book *The Condor*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Christopher Isherwood was a pioneer of gay literature. Here are some authors who have tread similar ground:

Tales of the City (1978), a collection of fiction by Armistead Maupin. This work is actually the first in a series of novels that started out as serialized stories in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The stories paint a vivid description of San Francisco life in the 1970s and 1980s, often with a comedic touch.

Giovanni's Room (1956), a novel by James Baldwin. Controversial upon its initial release for its explicit homosexual content, this novel by African American novelist Baldwin examines a single night in the life of a white American contemplating his lover's death.

Father of Frankenstein (1995), a novel by Christopher Bram. Made into the award-winning film *Gods and Monsters*, this poignant novel tells the story of Frankenstein director James Whale and his life as a closeted homosexual in the Golden Age of Hollywood.

and the Cows (1949), which provides a memorable summation of his attitude toward travel.

In addition to his novels and travel writing, Isherwood also published autobiographical volumes and the collection of stories, articles, and poems titled *Exhumations* (1966). He also wrote film scripts and taught at California State University, Los Angeles, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

During the 1970s and 1980s Isherwood concentrated on writing nonfiction, including *Kathleen and Frank* (1971), a biography of his parents, and *Christopher and His Kind* (1976), a memoir of the years in Berlin that inspired *The Berlin Stories*. He also continued to write about his religious experiences, as in *My Guru and His Disciple* (1980).

Isherwood lived and worked in Southern California until his death from cancer on January 4, 1986.

Works in Literary Context

Most of Isherwood's fiction was based upon diaries, and it is consequently imbued with what David Thomas describes as "the verité of actual events with an acute sense of specific place and time." Some key themes that run through Isherwood's work, not surprisingly, tend to center on his sexuality. His autobiographical works attempt to explain the personal myths he created for himself and the artistic, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual values that those works embody. His commitment to gay liberation, then, appears in both his nonfiction and fiction works.

Homosexuality and Alienation Christopher Isherwood was one of the first authors to treat homosexuality in a nonsensationalist vein. The impact of Isherwood's

homosexuality on his writing is pervasive and incalculable, felt both directly and indirectly. His interest lay in certain psychological predicaments and in recurring character types and themes. He was also fascinated by the antiheroic hero, rebellion against middle-class respectability, and "The Lost" (his code name for the alienated and the excluded). All are related to his awareness of himself as a homosexual. Even when represented as suppressed or disguised for legal or artistic reasons, homosexuality is a felt presence in Isherwood's novels. It is a crucial component of the myth of the outsider that he developed so painstakingly. It is a symbol not merely of alienation and isolation, but also of individuality.

In his early works, Isherwood presents homosexuality unapologetically. He domesticates aspects of gay life that other writers sensationalized, and he reveals considerable insight into the dynamics of gay relationships. His first novel, *All the Conspirators*, indicts the repression of homosexual feelings, a motif that will recur throughout his career. His second novel, *The Memorial* (1932), portrays a homosexual's grief at the loss of his best friend in World War I. *The Berlin Stories* depicts a wide range of homosexual characters, from Baron Kuno von Pregnitz, whose secret fantasies revolve around English schoolboy adventure stories, to Peter Wilkinson and Otto Nowak, who share a spoiled homosexual idyll on Reugen Island. In this work the unhappiness that plagues the gay characters is attributed not to their homosexuality but to their infection with the soul sickness that denies life and distorts reality, an infection they share with everyone else in the doomed city. In the early works, homosexual characters are juxtaposed with heterosexual ones to reveal beneath their apparent polarities a shared reality of a deadened spirit.

Sexual Minorities as a Political Force Isherwood's American novels, beginning with *The World in the Evening*, focus more directly on the political aspects of being homosexual in a homophobic society. In these novels, Isherwood anticipates the concerns of the nascent gay liberation movement, as he presents homosexuals as a legitimate minority in a sea of minorities that constitute Western democracies. By conceiving of homosexuals as an aggrieved minority, Isherwood both softens the social and religious stigma linked to them and encourages solidarity among their ranks. He also implies the possibility of a political backlash to injustice by forming alliances with other disadvantaged minorities. The dilemma faced by the homosexual characters in Isherwood's later novels is crystallized in their apparently irreconcilable needs to assert their individuality and to feel a sense of community.

The Need for Community In Isherwood's *A Single Man*, the need for community is also an issue. The novel more fully develops the context of gay oppression and places it within a still larger context of spiritual transcendence. *A Single Man* regards the assertions of individual uniqueness and minority consciousness as necessary

worldly and political goals, but it finally subsumes them in the Vedantic idea of the universal consciousness.

Works in Critical Context

Isherwood's problematic status in modern literature comes from a history of sharply divided critical opinion best summarized by author G. K. Hall: "Christopher Isherwood has always been a problem for the critics. An obviously talented writer, he has refused to exploit his artistry for either commercial success or literary status. . . . Isherwood was adjudged a 'promising writer'—a designation that he has not been able to outrun even to this day." As if to underscore this point, author Gore Vidal has called Isherwood "the best prose writer in English."

Journey to a War Isherwood's nonfiction writings earned ambivalent reviews. Reviews of *Journey to a War* tended to be essentially positive, but Mildred Boie of *The Atlantic* took issue because the book was not "original and profound." Another critic accused Isherwood and Auden of being tourists at a war, a curious criticism given Isherwood and Auden's great sympathy for the suffering around them. In his 1939 *The Nation* review, Lincoln Kirsten offered possibly the most accurate summation of what Isherwood and Auden achieved when he called the book "perhaps the most intense record of China at war yet written in English."

Responses to Literature

1. Compare Christopher Isherwood's treatment of homosexuality in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s to its treatment in the movie adaptation of his work, *Cabaret*. How do the treatments differ? How are they the same?
2. In *Journey to a War*, how does Isherwood go about reporting and analyzing what he sees in China? Is he simply a "tourist" as some critics suggested?
3. Bob Wood, the main character in *The World in the Evening*, fantasizes about marching "down the street with a banner saying, 'We're queer because we're queer because we're queer.'" Why would this have been a virtual impossibility in the 1940s, the time in which the novel was set? Using your library and the Internet, find out what restrictions, legal and social, were placed on homosexuals at the time.
4. Using your library and the Internet, research the early gay civil rights movement—particularly the Mattachine Society and the Stonewall Riots. Write a short essay summarizing your findings.

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❑ Kazuo Ishiguro

BORN: 1954, Nagasaki, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese, English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

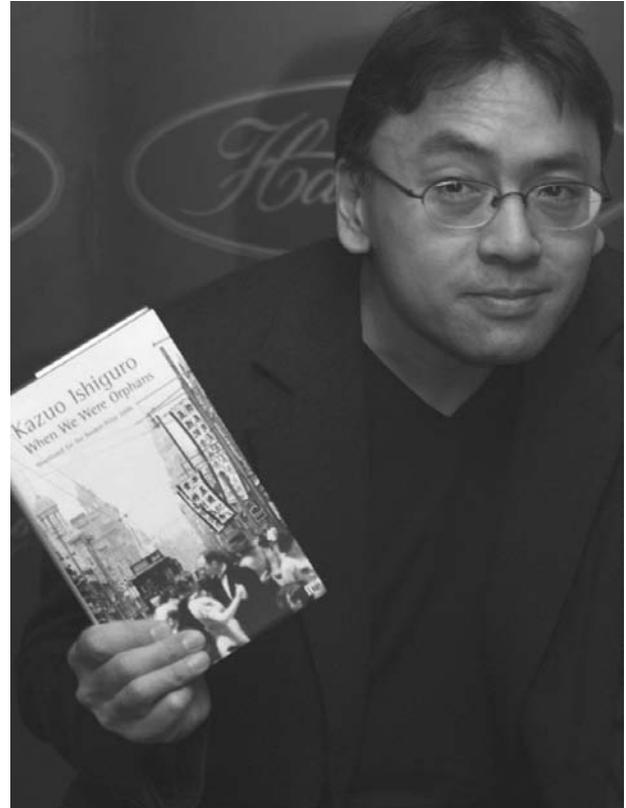
A Pale View of Hills (1982)

An Artist of the Floating World (1986)

The Remains of the Day (1989)

The Unconsoled (1995)

Never Let Me Go (2005)



Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro, Kazuo, photograph. AP Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ishiguro's famous contemporaries include:

- Mo Yan** (1955–): Chinese novelist whose work is often banned by the Chinese government.
- Tobias Wolff** (1945–): American memoirist and novelist, most famous for the book *This Boy's Life*.
- J. M. Coetzee** (1940–): South African novelist whose works often address the serious problems facing South Africa in the postapartheid era.
- Tony Blair** (1953–): Former prime minister of the United Kingdom and an important ally of the United States in the years following the September 11, 2001, attack.
- Hayao Miyazaki** (1941–): Japanese animator and director responsible for many popular animated films, including *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*.

Overview

Kazuo Ishiguro is best known for his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which won the Booker Prize, one of England's most prestigious literary awards. The language and tone of Ishiguro's novels are controlled, delicate, and formal. His protagonists often deceive themselves about the lives they have lived and the choices they have made. Ishiguro's novels are emotional journeys whereby these characters search for the truth and meaning of their lives. In the end, some characters continue to exist with their delusions, while others feel the pain of understanding that they have lived their lives poorly.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Leaving Japan Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on November 8, 1954. Just over a decade earlier, in 1945, Nagasaki was one of two cities nearly destroyed by U.S. atomic bomb attacks during World War II; it is estimated that upwards of eighty thousand people were killed as a result of the attack on Nagasaki. Ishiguro would consider the aftermath of this attack in his novel *An Artist of the Floating World*. Ishiguro moved with his parents to Guilford, Surrey, England, in 1960, where his father, an oceanographer, was to be temporarily employed by the British government. Though the family left with the expectation of returning to Japan after a year or two, the assignment was repeatedly renewed, until they found themselves settled in England permanently.

"Services to Literature" Ishiguro was educated at the Woking County Grammar School for Boys in Surrey, then studied American literature at the University of Kent, earning an honors degree in English and philosophy in 1978. He found employment as a social worker, first in Glasgow, Scotland, and, after graduating from Kent, in London. While working in London, Ishiguro pursued an interest in fiction by enrolling in the creative writing program at the University of East Anglia, where he received a master of arts degree in 1980.

A Fading Memory Ishiguro has said that his initial interest in writing fiction was as a way of preserving memories of Japan that were beginning to fade, and he attributes his meteoric rise, in part, to his Japanese name and the Japanese subject matter in his first two novels: *A Pale View of the Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*. His first novel was published a year after Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* won the 1981 Booker Prize, and, as Ishiguro recalled in a 1991 *Mississippi Review* interview, "everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies." Ishiguro later took pains to battle the assumption that he only had interest in Japan-related fiction.

International Success Ishiguro's greatest success came with a novel about distinctly British characters. *The Remains of the Day* centers on the life of a loyal English butler who recalls his years of service in diary form. The novel was adapted for screen in an acclaimed 1993 film of the same name.

Ishiguro followed up his success with *When We Were Orphans*, which was short-listed for the Booker Prize. His 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*, a dystopia novel with science fiction elements, also captured wide critical acclaim. He lives and works in London.

Works in Literary Context

The Unreliable Narrator A consistent element in Ishiguro's first four novels is his fascination with narrative unreliability, which he takes considerably beyond the familiar techniques of writers such as Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, where the narrators' account of events can be trusted, if not their interpretations or explanations of those events. In his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, for example, Ishiguro's narrator fabricates not only motives but also actions and even characters.

In his later fiction, Ishiguro's challenge is to surprise the reader with some unanticipated permutation of unreliability, which he achieves through multiple levels of complexity. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator's unreliability seems to involve his initial denial of wrongdoing in prewar Japan, and only after he has recalled and accepted responsibility for those increasingly reprehensible activities does the reader grasp that the activities themselves never took place. In *The Remains of the Day*, this greater level of complication

is achieved through the narrator's memories of two involvements, one a reluctantly revealed romantic relationship and the other an even more guarded political venture, which both transpired at Darlington Hall over the same fourteen-year period. And in *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro subverts even physical laws by expanding the realm of unreliability from the past to the present in order to make the external world a projection of the narrator's contorted psychology.

Works in Critical Context

Each of Ishiguro's novels has met with critical acclaim, and several have won prestigious awards: *A Pale View of Hills* won the Winifred Holtby Award from the Royal Society of Literature in 1983; *An Artist of the Floating World* won the Whitbread Literary Award in 1986; and *The Remains of the Day* won the Booker Prize. Critics have praised Ishiguro's elegant and precise use of language and his controlled style of storytelling.

A Pale View of Hills Reviewing *A Pale View of Hills* in the *Spectator*, Francis King found the novel "typically Japanese in its compression, its reticence and in its exclusion of all details not absolutely essential to its theme." While some reviewers agreed with *Times Literary Supplement* writer Paul Bailey—who stated "that at certain points I could have done with something as crude as a fact"—many felt that Ishiguro's delicate layering of themes and images grants the narrative great evocative power. "[It] is a beautiful and dense novel, gliding from level to level of consciousness," remarked Jonathan Spence, in *New Society*. "Ishiguro develops [his themes] with remarkable insight and skill," concurred Rosemary Roberts in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. "They are described in controlled prose that more often hints than explains or tells. The effect evokes mystery and an aura of menace." And King deemed the novel "a memorable and moving work, its elements of past and present, of Japan and England held together by a shimmering, all but invisible net of images linked to each other by filaments at once tenuous and immensely strong." Roberts also complimented the author's optimistic approach to the material: "There is nobility in determination to press on with life even against daunting odds. Ishiguro has brilliantly captured this phoenixlike spirit; high praise to him."

The Remains of the Day *The Remains of the Day* met with highly favorable critical response. Galen Strawson, for example, praised the novel in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "*The Remains of the Day* is as strong as it is delicate, a very finely nuanced and at times humorous study of repression." Strawson also states, "It is a strikingly original book, and beautifully made... Stevens'... language creates a context which allows Kazuo Ishiguro to put a massive charge of pathos into a single unremarkable phrase." In the *Chicago Tribune*, Joseph Coates described the novel as "an ineffably sad and beautiful piece of work—a tragedy in the form of a comedy of manners." He continued: "Rarely has the device of an unreliable narrator worked such char-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ishiguro is one of many authors who have employed unreliable narrators to great effect. Here are a few examples of texts written with unreliable narrators:

House of Leaves (2000), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski.

This novel contains a number of narrators, including a blind man who describes the visual details of a film, thereby undercutting any authority he otherwise would have had as a narrator.

Rashômon (1950), a film directed by Akira Kurosawa. In this film, four different characters all relate their versions of a tragic meeting in a grove between a bandit and a samurai and his wife. The samurai's testimony is offered through a medium, since he was killed, and the fourth witness—a woodcutter—openly admits to being untruthful in his first account.

Lolita (1955), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. This story is told from the point of view of a pedophile, who claims that his victim seduced him.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. This tale of a family in crisis is told from the point of view of a mentally disabled person, allowing all sorts of convolutions of the truth that require the reader to work harder to discover what actually happened to the family in question.

acter revelation as it does here." Mark Kamine cited Ishiguro's technique in the *New Leader*: "Usually the butler's feelings are hidden in painfully correct periphrasis, or refracted in dialogue spoken by other characters... Few writers dare to say so little of what they mean as Ishiguro."

While many reviews of *The Remains of the Day* were favorable, this was not universally so. Writing for the *New Statesman*, Geoff Dyer wondered "if the whole idea of irony as a *narrative strategy* hasn't lost its usefulness." Dyer worried that Stevens' voice had been "*coaxed* in the interests of the larger ironic scheme of the novel." Comparing the novelist to Henry James, however, Hermione Lee defended Ishiguro's style in *New Republic*: "To accuse Ishiguro of costive, elegant minimalism is to miss the deep sadness, the boundless melancholy that opens out, like the 'deserts of vast eternity' his characters are reluctantly contemplating, under the immaculate surface."

Responses to Literature

1. Read Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Each text uses an unreliable narrator but in very different ways. In a short essay, describe how each narrator is unreliable and evaluate the purpose of this unreliability for each novel. Then briefly evaluate the effectiveness of each text.

2. Read *A Pale View of Hills*, which concerns the aftermath of the bombing of Nagasaki. Then, using the Internet and the library, research the historical events surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan. Based on your research, how well do you think Ishiguro portrays the aftermath of this important historical event?
3. Much of what Ishiguro does in his writing is try to reconstruct Japan based on his memories of it from when he was no older than six. Try to reconstruct some place you visited as a child, providing as many descriptive details as you can.
4. Ishiguro describes how he thinks his works are viewed differently because he has a “Japanese name” and a “Japanese face.” Read *A Pale View of Hills*. How do you think your response would be different to this text if Ishiguro did not have a Japanese name or a Japanese face? Do you think any novel depicting a culture is inherently less genuine if it is created by someone from outside the culture? Why or why not?

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Kobayashi Issa

BORN: 1763, Kashiwabara, Japan

DIED: 1827, Kashiwabara, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Tabishui (1795)

Chichi no shuen nikki (1801)

The Year of My Life (1819)

Overview

Kobayashi Issa was a Japanese poet whose verse used unadorned language to express the concerns of the common man. He is one of the best-known and most widely read of all haiku poets and perhaps the most popular among present-day readers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Student of Haiku Kobayashi Issa, the son of a farmer, was born in Kashiwabara, Shinano province (now part of Shinano Town, Nagano Prefecture), Japan. His father was widowed a few years after Issa was born. Issa was raised by his grandmother until his father remarried. During this period, he started to study haiku under a local poet, Shimpō.

At the age of fourteen, his father sent him to Edo (present-day Tokyo) to study haiku under the poets Mizoguchi Sogan and Norokuan Chikua. Issa’s poetry caught the attention of Seibi Natsume, who later became his patron. Although Issa’s poems became more and more known, he remained extremely poor and was forced to travel frequently and work hard to survive.

Struggles and Sorrows Issa faced personal and financial troubles for much of his life. His difficulties with his stepmother began when she gave birth to a son and jealously desired that her own child should receive more attention than her stepson. Issa complained that he was beaten “a hundred times a day” as a young child. When his father died, Issa faced further difficulties with his stepmother, who blocked him from inheriting his father’s property.

At the age of fifty, after over a decade of disputes with his stepmother and stepbrother, Issa finally inherited the property of his father. This allowed him to return to Kashiwabara and settle. He married a young woman and started a family.

In Issa’s later years, his sorrows returned. His children and then his wife died, and his property was destroyed by fire. His new wife, who came from a local samurai family, left him after a few weeks of marriage. He married again for a third time but died only a year later.

Works in Literary Context

The Haiku Form Issa was a prolific writer who produced over twenty thousand haiku along with hundreds of tanka. Haiku is a poetic form that consists of three lines, the first and last containing five syllables (or similar sound units known in Japanese as *on*), and the second containing seven. Tanka are similar to haiku, but contain two additional lines of seven *on* each. Issa is probably the best-loved of the Japanese haiku masters. His poetry’s style is more robust and subjective than the austere, priestly style of Bashō (1644–1694) or the worldly, sophisticated style of Buson (1716–1783).

Joy amid Sorrow Although Issa faced many struggles during his lifetime, his poetry celebrated life’s serene moments and extolled the joys of simplicity. His poems have given consolation to generations of readers due to the confessions

of doubts and loneliness found in his highly personal haiku. He also brought humor to the treatment of his subjects, and he excelled at giving affectionate portrayals of such creatures as fleas, frogs, and sparrows. Issa's poems about animals and insects are studied by Japanese schoolchildren to this day.

Works in Critical Context

Issa gained notoriety for his poems at an early age, and he continued to enjoy a good reputation throughout his life. He was considered one of the living masters of haiku. He continues to enjoy a highly favorable reputation and is considered, along with Bashō and Buson, one of the three great haiku masters of all time.

Issa was seen as having a rejuvenating effect on the haiku form, and his legacy continues to the present. His poems are still translated, collected, and widely read nearly two centuries after their original composition.

Responses to Literature

1. Critics have noted that Issa's poetry is a celebration of life's joys despite the fact that he faced a lifetime of struggles and sorrow. Can you detect any of his sorrows in his poetry? In what ways can his poems be seen as relating to his struggle-filled life?
2. Issa wrote two centuries ago, but present-day readers often draw consolation from his poetry. What aspects of the universal human condition does Issa touch on that make his poetry continue to have relevance and resonance with contemporary readers? What in his style enables his poetry to continue to speak to readers through the centuries?
3. Issa wrote over twenty thousand haiku in his lifetime, but critics and readers have noted central themes running throughout much of his verse. Write an essay that identifies and discusses one or two of Issa's recurring themes. Be sure to use examples from his poetry to illustrate and support your claims.
4. Using Issa as a model, write a haiku about a simple, joyful moment in your life.

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LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Issa's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Burns (1759–1796): Burns was a Scottish Romantic poet widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland.

Eli Whitney (1765–1825): Whitney was an American inventor best known for creating the cotton gin.

François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848): Chateaubriand was a French writer and politician widely considered the founder of French Romanticism.

Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821): Bonaparte was a French general and politician who led the French Empire after the French Revolution.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): Beethoven was a German composer widely considered to be one of the greatest musical talents of all time.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): Wordsworth was an English poet who helped launch the Romantic age in English literature.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Issa's affectionate portrayals of animals and insects were intended to convey the simple joys of life. Here are some other works with a similar approach:

Winnie-the-Pooh (1926), a children's book by A. A. Milne. This popular children's book shows the simple joys of childhood through depictions of the lighthearted adventures of a stuffed bear and his friends.

Ogden Nash's Zoo (1986), a poetry collection by Ogden Nash. This collection of humorous poems about animals presents a whimsical, often nonsensical view on life.

Black Swan/White Crow (1995), poems by J. Patrick Lewis. This collection of thirteen haiku-inspired poems conjures unforgettable images with delicate, simple verse.

Alfred Jarry

BORN: 1873, Laval, France

DIED: 1907, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

King Ubu (1896)



Alfred Jarry Jarry, Alfred, photograph.

Overview

Often considered a major influence on the theater of the twentieth century, Alfred Jarry's plays are forerunners of the theater of the absurd of Samuel Beckett, Antonin Artaud, and Eugène Ionesco and influenced the Dadaists and surrealists as well. *Ubu Roi* (translated as either *King Ubu* or *King Turd*) is Jarry's most famous and influential work. Regarded by some critics as combining elements from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, *Ubu Roi* essentially eliminates all of Shakespeare's dramatic action and interjects scatological humor and farcical situations to comment on art, literature, politics, and current events.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Rebellious Youth Alfred Jarry, born on September 8, 1873, was the son of a traveling salesman and a mother who was a member of a fallen aristocratic family with a long history of mental illness. When Jarry was a small child, his mother divorced his father and moved her son and daughter to the rugged, isolated coast of Brittany in northern France. Here Jarry—a precocious child—began writing poetry and developed his taste for the macabre, especially as his own mother began exhibiting eccentric-

ities and signs of mental illness. In 1888 Jarry entered school in Rennes. A brilliant student, Jarry won prizes in foreign languages and science as a youth. Even at this early age, however, the rebelliousness and caustic wit that would mark his life and career were already apparent. With his schoolmates, Jarry staged bawdy lampoons of Felix Hebert, his physics teacher, whom he regarded as incompetent and physically repulsive. Jarry remained obsessed with the figure of Hebert for the rest of his life, using him as the model for the title character of *Ubu Roi*.

Becoming Ubu: Bizarre Behavior and Ill Health in Late Life

After failing a series of exams, Jarry moved to Paris and quickly became associated with the French symbolist movement spearheaded by Stéphane Mallarmé and André Gide. Jarry wrote prolifically and finally met with crowning success with the first production of *Ubu Roi* in 1896. Afterward, however, Jarry fell into a decline during which he exhibited many of the traits of mental illness suffered by his mother. During his later years, which were marked by bizarre behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and ill health, Jarry began to affect the mannerisms of Ubu, speaking in a droning monotone and walking in a jerky, robot-like fashion. By the time of his death in 1907, at the age of thirty-four, he was known less as a writer than as an often-homeless, eccentric denizen of the bohemian Parisian neighborhood of Montparnasse. He died from health problems relating to his continued alcoholism and use of ether.

Works in Literary Context

Against Realism Inspired by Mallarmé's challenge that realism was "a banal sacrilege of the true meaning of art" the symbolists during the turn of the century in France organized a reaction against realistic art and theater. Although he was not a symbolist in the orthodox sense, Alfred Jarry became a participant in this campaign. Jarry devoted much of his energy to a critique of realistic theater that reached a climax: a defiant gesture with the release of *Ubu Roi* upon the Paris stage.

Jarry's attack against realistic theater warrants study not just for its vehemence, but for its significance in the evolution of the modern theater. Out of his reaction against realism and his search for a more viable alternative, Jarry developed the ideas and engaged in the experiments that made him a forerunner of both the theater of cruelty and the theater of the absurd.

Proposal for a New Theater Jarry's proposals for a new theater centered on two conditions, both of which appear to have developed out of his critique of the realistic theater: 1) the need to "create new life" in the theater by creating a new type of character, and 2) the need to transcend the "things that happen all the time to the common man." He fulfilled these conditions by creating Pere Ubu, a creature whose actions are irrefutably logical, but whose *raison d'être* is "to kill everyone."

The plot of *Ubu Roi* is driven by Ma Ubu, whose husband, Pa Ubu, is the former king of Aragon and the current aide to the king of Poland. Ma Ubu pressures her husband to kill the king, which he does with the help of Captain Macnure. As the new king of Poland, Pa Ubu eliminates the nobility, the judiciary, and the bankers. He then sets out to collect his own taxes, harshly punishing those who object to the exorbitant amounts of money he demands. In the end, the Ubuses are driven out of Poland to exile in France. Claude Schumacher of *International Dictionary of Theatre* wrote, "In *Ubu Roi* all the basic dramaturgical conventions are deliberately subverted and it is the iconoclastic nature of the play that makes it such an important landmark in contemporary world drama."

Forerunner of the Theater of the Absurd Jarry's plays are forerunners of the theater of the absurd of Beckett, Artaud, and Ionesco and influenced the Dadaists and surrealists as well. *Ubu Roi* is clearly Jarry's most successful and influential work, but in many ways it is little different from the rest of his oeuvre. *Ubu enchaîné* and *Ubu cocu* offer further variations on the same crude protagonist. Even in such essays as "De l'inutilité de theatre au theatre" and "Questions de theatre," Jarry attempted to explain the theoretical framework and rationale for the farcical tone and techniques of his plays. Similarly, *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (*Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*) is a work of fiction that presents the tenets of pataphysics—the science of absurd creations. Although Jarry's plays have had the greatest impact, his prose has also been praised. Roger Shattuck commented, "Jarry writes in a highly compressed, poetic, often mock-heroic prose that requires careful reading. Yet the sentences move at headlong speed and draw the reader unexpectedly into the action."

Works in Critical Context

The Riots Jarry did not have to wait long for critical recognition. On the night of *Ubu Roi*'s first performance, riots broke out in the theater. Among those sitting in the audience for the opening night were Arthur Symons, William Butler Yeats, and Stéphane Mallarmé. Martin Esslin wrote, "Yeats rightly sensed that the scandalous performance marked the end of an era in art." While Yeats wrote of being stunned and saddened by the play, Mallarmé was much more enthusiastic: "You have put before us, with a rare and enduring glaze at your fingertips, a prodigious personage and his crew, and this is a sober and sure dramatic sculptor. He enters into a repertoire of high taste and haunts me."

Later Recognition and Influence Contemporary critics now recognize Jarry's contribution to literature as a forerunner of the theater of the absurd. Jarry's rejection of realism and general principles were later taken up and more fully developed by Antonin Artaud, who saw the-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jarry's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Conrad (1866–1953): This Polish author is considered by many to be one of the most remarkable novelists to write in the English language, his most studied work being *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Often credited with driving the Irish Literary Revival, this poet and dramatist is regarded as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): This Spanish artist is often credited with founding the cubist movement.

André Breton (1896–1966): Author and theorist, this Frenchman studied medicine and psychiatry but is most remembered as the founder of surrealism.

ater as a medium for symbolic suggestion. Through Artaud and through Albert Camus, Jarry's ideas have continued to live and to produce a new and entirely different drama in the works of the current school of avant-garde writers.

Responses to Literature

1. Describe the character Pa Ubu. Choosing specific examples from Jarry's play, explain your emotional reaction to both his personality and his actions.
2. Discuss the motivation for the two sequels to *Ubu Roi*.
3. Jarry's plays are often considered forerunners to later existential, absurdist, Dadaist, and surrealist works. Choose three of these four movements and identify several elements of each in Jarry's most famous play, *Ubu Roi*.
4. Describe Jarry's contributions to theater of the absurd.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Jarry's protagonists are crude, insignificant nobodies. For example, Pa Ubu is fat, ugly, and extremely unpleasant. This focus on characters that lack control over various aspects of their being in the world raises questions about the relative insignificance of humanity as a whole and the absurdity of the human condition. Other works that explore these themes include:

The Metamorphosis (1915), a novella by Franz Kafka. In this tale, Gregor Samsa, an ordinary traveling salesman, wakes up only to find that his body has been transformed into an enormous bug.

Nausea (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this existential novel, a historian is overtaken by a sense of nausea as he becomes increasingly convinced that his freedom and ability to discern his being in the world is inhibited by objects and situations.

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. In this absurdist tragicomedy, the characters wait for someone named Godot, who fails to arrive.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. This play follows the travels of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

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Elfriede Jelinek

BORN: 1946, Mürzzuschlag, Styria, Austria

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Women as Lovers (1975)

Wonderful, Wonderful Times (1980)

The Piano Teacher (1983)

Lust (1989)

Overview

Austrian novelist Elfriede Jelinek was the surprise choice for the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature. Jelinek's fiction, relatively unknown outside of the German-speaking world, is rife with passages of psychological and physical

cruelty, reflecting its author's belief that all humans carry an overpowering degree of inner turmoil and that the world is a tremendously unjust place, especially for women.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Writing Through the Dark Jelinek was born on October 20, 1946, as her native Austria was still struggling from the aftereffects of World War II and the country's 1938 annexation by Nazi Germany. Although born in a town in the state of Styria, she grew up in Vienna. Her mother was a Roman Catholic of mixed Romanian and German heritage, while Jelinek's surname reflects her father's origins in Czechoslovakia. He was Jewish and had escaped deportation to the Nazi extermination camps because he was a chemist working in a highly sensitive field. Jelinek was the couple's only child and emerged as a musical prodigy at a young age. Her childhood years were filled with after-school lessons in organ, violin, and flute, as well as ballet classes, and she entered the esteemed Vienna Conservatory of Music when she was still in her teens.

By 1964 an eighteen-year-old Jelinek had completed her conservatory courses but suffered a nervous breakdown before her exam date. She later said that writing helped her out of this dark period in her life and she turned toward a new direction in her studies when she began taking courses in theater and art history at the University of Vienna. She also began to gain a measure of renown for her poetry in Austria, and her first book, a collection of poems titled *Lisa's Shadow* appeared in 1967 and marked her as a rising young literary star.

Successful Novels and Controversial Plays Jelinek eventually completed her Vienna Conservatory of Music exam in the organ; afterward, she began traveling throughout Europe. She spent time in Berlin and Rome and worked on her debut novel, *Wir sind Lockvögel, Baby!* (We're Decoys, Baby!), published in 1970. She garnered impressive reviews for her 1975 novel, *Die Liebhaberinnen*, which would later be translated into English as *Women as Lovers*. Strongly feminist and even Marxist sentiments about women's roles in contemporary society ran through the novel's subtext. One of Jelinek's next novels, *Die Ausgesperrten*, published in 1980 and translated as *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*, was also hailed as a literary tour-de-force.

In the 1980s, Jelinek wrote a number of plays that were performed in Vienna, Germany, and Switzerland. In Austria, they drew a large amount of criticism for their incendiary themes. In some stagings of Jelinek's plays, boos erupted from the audience, and the merits of her work were usually the subject of ardent debate in the press. Jelinek's plays eventually drew the ire of Austrian cultural authorities, who in 1998 briefly banned their



Elfriede Jelinek *Jelinek, Elfriede, photograph. Roland Schlager / EPA / Landov.*

production because of their intense fixation on Austria's Nazi past. Her response was to sharpen her pen even more. The rise of right-wing politician Jörg Haider and his Freedom Party in 2000 elections prompted Jelinek to declare that she would refuse to let any of her plays be performed in Austria as long as he remained in office. Haider had been a staunch critic of her work and even termed it "degenerate," the term the Nazi regime had attached to modern art in the 1930s.

International Recognition Jelinek came to greater attention outside of the German-speaking world due to the popularity of her 1983 novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, which appeared in English translation as *The Piano Teacher* five years later and in 2001 was made into a French-language film by Austrian director Michael Haneke. The adaptation took several prizes at the Cannes Film Festival.

Jelinek was awarded a top German literary honor, the Heinrich Heine Prize, in 2002, before her Nobel Prize win was announced in October of 2004. She was only the tenth woman in 103 years of Nobel history to win in the literature category.

Works in Literary Context

The satirical-critical Eastern European-Jewish strand in Austrian literature represented by Joseph Roth, Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, and Ödön von Horváth persists in the work of Elfriede Jelinek. She shares with these authors mixed ethnic and cultural roots, a profound respect for language, and a commitment to using language to expose abuses of power. Because of the nontraditional aesthetic method she employs—her refusal to project herself into her characters' minds and her portrayal of the destructive impact of individualism on popular culture—her work remains the subject of intense controversy in the German-language press and is only gradually finding acceptance within the academic literary establishment.

Jelinek is a unique stylist, combining verbal components culled from cartoons, comic strips, Beatles songs, and science fiction films to shock readers out of their cultural complacency. Literary critics have praised the author's keen powers of observation and brilliant command of language but often object to her acerbic, reductive, arbitrary treatment of her characters and the vulgarity and artificiality of the world she created. *Lust*, for example, was condemned as pornography by some critics after its publication in 1989.

Jelinek has often spoken of her writing as an attempt to make apparent the economic and political structures that motivate people's values, attitudes, and behaviors. Socialization of youth to dependency, manipulation of popular tastes, and violence against women and children are dominant themes in her work. With few exceptions the settings and characters are unmistakably Austrian; the problems, however, are common to all industrialized societies.

Marxist-Feminist Themes Jelinek builds each of her fictions on a strong Marxist-feminist foundation. In novels such as *Women as Lovers*, *The Piano Teacher*, and *Lust*, her central themes involve female protagonists treated as commodities; usually they are victims of male-perpetrated crimes that include domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and human alienation. Accused by male critics for her coarse depiction of such acts, Jelinek has also received disapprobation from other feminists who condemn her depiction of female sexuality and masochistic behavior.

In addition to her characteristic graphic portrayal of brutality toward women, Jelinek is not hesitant about displaying her Marxist leanings. Her concern for the welfare of the working class within capitalist Europe is encoded within all her fiction. Both in her highly praised 1983 work *The Piano Teacher* and in *Women as Lovers*, Jelinek portrays human relationships as shaped by a dehumanizing economic system.

Works in Critical Context

Jelinek's unique narrative style has been the subject of much critical attention. Feminist critics have praised her examinations of the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies and her commitment to exposing the violence

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jelinek's famous contemporaries include:

Peter Handke (1942–): Austrian novelist and playwright whose works are considered avant-garde and controversial.

Dean Koontz (1945–): Best-selling American writer known for his suspense-thrillers.

David Lynch (1946–): American screenwriter and film director whose films are noted for their disturbing themes and surreal, nightmarish quality.

Julian Barnes (1946–): English novelist whose works touch on a broad range of contemporary concerns.

Kathy Acker (1947–1997): American novelist known for her experimental prose style and feminist writings.

Salman Rushdie (1947–): Indian-British novelist who is well known for *Satanic Verses*, which led to protests from many Muslims.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jelinek's works feature women who are the victims of crimes by men and who struggle to overcome the obstacles faced in a male-dominated world. Here are some other works with similar portrayals:

The Color Purple (1983), a novel by Alice Walker. This novel, set in the 1930s, explores the struggles of African American women in the southern United States, with graphic portrayals of the violence and exploitation faced by these women.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this novel about a dark future, women are subjected to the repressive practices of a male-dominated religious government.

The Passion of Artemisia (2002), a novel by Susan Vreeland. This novel tells the story of a woman overcoming a rape by her painting teacher and her subsequent struggles to forge a successful art career of her own.

perpetrated against women. Nevertheless, some female scholars have argued that Jelinek's plays and novels work against feminist causes because of their brutal depictions of female sexuality, masochism, and self-mutilation. Several male critics have concurred with this assessment, citing the cold and overly analytical nature of Jelinek's prose. Her 1989 novel, *Lust*, attracted a great deal of

critical controversy, with many reviewers arguing that the novel is a work of pornography.

Such criticism has caused the Austrian media to frequently refer to Jelinek as the nation's "best-hated author." Still, Jelinek has been consistently praised throughout her career for her skill with satire and political commentary, earning comparisons to such authors as Johann Nestroy, Karl Kraus, and Elias Canetti.

Surprise Over the Nobel Prize When Jelinek was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2004, there was some surprise in literary circles that a writer whose work was largely unknown outside of the German-speaking world was so honored. Others remarked upon the darkly violent themes in her works, with their sometimes strident strain of feminism. *Progressive* reviewer Nina Siegal observed that Jelinek "wasn't an obvious choice" for the prestigious and lucrative prize. "Her dense, strident political satires exploring sexual perversion and social decadence aren't exactly mass-market fare. And because only a few of her novels have been translated, her work is largely unknown outside the German-speaking world," Siegal commented.

The announcement of the award was greeted by reactions ranging from confusion from those who were not familiar with Jelinek and her work, to either outrage or unqualified approval from those who knew her work well. The controversy included harsh criticism from publications such as the *Weekly Standard* and others who "claimed that her books contain more hateful fury than artistic virtuosity," observed a *New Yorker* reviewer. Others ridiculed the relative obscurity of her works. One of the Nobel panel's eighteen lifetime members resigned in protest.

Despite the outcry, Jelinek received the award based on what the Swedish Academy described as "her musical flow of voices and countervoices in novels and plays that with extraordinary linguistic zeal reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power."

The Piano Teacher *The Piano Teacher*, first published in 1983, was viewed upon its publication as one of the author's best works, and that assessment still held true when an English translation of the novel was finally published in 1988. Carole Morin, in a review for *New Statesman and Society*, called the book "a reckless recital that is difficult to read and difficult to stop reading. The racy, relentless, consuming style is a metaphor for passion: impossible to ignore." Charlotte Innes termed the novel "a brilliant if grim exploration of fascism" in her *New York Times Book Review* assessment of a later Jelinek book. The general critical consensus is that the books that followed—especially the controversial *Lust* (1989; first published in English in 1992)—have failed to deliver on the artistic promise of *The Piano Teacher* and her earlier works. Like the novel, the film adaptation of *The Piano Teacher* written and directed by Michael Haneke was a critical success, winning the 2001 Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival.

Responses to Literature

1. Before turning to writing, Jelinek trained as a musician. In what ways is her musical education evident in her writing?
2. Critics have noted that Jelinek's writings are based on her Marxist-feminist ideas. What types of Marxist and feminist ideas can you detect in her works? In what ways does she put these ideas forward? Are her works able to convince you that her ideas are correct?
3. The choice of Jelinek as a Nobel Prize winner caused quite a bit of controversy in the literary world. Some critics have claimed that Peter Handke would have been a better choice for an Austrian writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Write an essay either supporting or opposing this claim.
4. Jelinek's writings have been labeled abrasive and even pornographic, and she has been noted for her graphic portrayal of brutality toward women. Jelinek also professes to be serving feminist goals with her writing. Write an essay identifying one or more of her feminist goals and analyzing how her writing style is either well suited or poorly suited for forwarding these goals.

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☒ Juan Ramón Jiménez

BORN: 1881, Moguer, Andalusia, Spain

DIED: 1958, Santurce, Puerto Rico

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Sad Airs (1903)

Platero and I (1914)

Spiritual Sonnets (1916)

Summer (1916)

Diary of a Newlywed Poet (1917)

Overview

Juan Ramón Jiménez dominated Spanish poetry for the first three decades of the twentieth century. At the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in 1936 he was still a figure of influence and importance. Later, in exile in the United States and Puerto Rico, he expanded his already considerable influence, making the acquaintance of such esteemed fellow poets as Robert Frost and Ezra Pound.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Privilege Juan Ramón Jiménez Mantecón was born on December 24, 1881, to Victor Jiménez and Purificación Mantecón y Lopez Parejo. The Jiménez family operated a comfortable business as wine and tobacco merchants, with their own vineyards, ships, and warehouses, and a tobacco monopoly granted by the state. Such commerce enabled the young Juan Ramón to enjoy the upbringing of a typical Andalusian *señorito* (well-to-do young man).

Unhappy School Years In October 1893, after finishing primary school in Huelva, Jiménez entered the



Juan Ramón Jiménez *Jimenez, Juan Ramon, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Jesuit Colegio de San Luis Gonzaga in Puerto de Santa María. The young poet found school gloomy and disturbing and filled the margins and blank pages of his textbooks with drawings and scribbled sentences. He studied his favorite subject, French, and read influential works such as Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, in which Jiménez underlined passages that confirmed a penchant for solitude.

Artistic Aspirations In 1896 the teenage Jiménez fell in love with Blanca Hernández-Pinzón, the daughter of Moguer's judge. But Blanca's family, fearful of the impetuous youth who had a tyrannical temper and a penchant for playing with guns, discouraged the association. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, but the young Jiménez believed he had talent as an artist and wanted to be a painter. It was finally decided that he would begin the course of studies for prelaw at the University of Seville and at the same time take instruction in studio art. In autumn 1896 he enrolled in the university and began his art apprenticeship in the studio of Salvador Clemente, a genre painter from Cádiz. Jiménez showed himself an apt pupil in the impressionist style, with its blends of subdued blues, grays, whites, and greens. He continued to paint busily until 1900.

Jiménez once remarked that of the three great loves of his life—painting, poetry, and music—painting beckoned first when he was fifteen and then gave way a year or two later to poetry. His ambition to be a poet crystallized, and he immersed himself in lyrical verse. Early in 1897 the *Programa*, a Seville newspaper, accepted one of Jiménez's poems, and, thus encouraged, he joined a literary group in Seville called the Ateneo and began to send more poems to provincial magazines and newspapers.

Early Poetry and the Modern Movement Soon he enjoyed a good reputation in the city and started work on a book of poetry to be called "Clouds." The demands of poetry and painting left him no time for studies, and, upon failing Spanish history, he withdrew from the university at the end of the spring term to devote himself full-time, with the blessing of an indulgent family, to painting and writing. He collaborated on the reviews *Hojas Sueltas* and *Quincena*, and in 1899 *Vida Nueva*, a Madrid review, accepted his poem "The Beggar's Lovers" for publication. *Vida Nueva* also sent him, on the basis of his apparent concern with social problems, five pieces by Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, already translated into Spanish, which Jiménez polished into poetic prose. Thus began a lifelong interest in the art of translation. *Vida Nueva* published his Ibsen translations in January 1900, and the stage was set for Jiménez to go to Madrid. A postcard signed by poets Rubén Darío and Francisco Villaespesa was Jiménez's invitation to come to Madrid and assist in the task of revitalizing Spanish poetry. Needing no urging, he arrived in Madrid on Good Friday of

1900, to be swept up into the bohemian life of the *modernistas*.

Colorful Versions and Revisions His companions pointed out that the large amount of material in "Clouds" could easily be divided into two books, and he set about to follow their advice. The bohemian life did not suit Jiménez, and six weeks after his arrival in Madrid he was back in Moguer, busy separating and regrouping the poetry of "Clouds" into *Violet Souls* and *Water Lilies*. These, printed respectively in violet and green ink, were published in September 1900. Jiménez's father intensely disliked the effusive poetry and destroyed every copy he could get his hands on. The critical reception was almost equally negative.

Phobic Years Jiménez had been back in Moguer six weeks when, on July 3, 1900, his father died suddenly. The shock caused him to develop an abnormal fear of death. He believed that he, too, would die suddenly like his father, and, in order to prevent this occurrence, he insisted on always being near a doctor, or knowing where one was immediately available. This compelling need ordered all living arrangements for the rest of his life.

During the year following his father's death, Jiménez's symptoms of hypochondria mounted, and his family sent him to the sanatorium of Castel d'Andorte, near Bordeaux, to be placed under the care of Jean Gaston Lalanne, a noted authority on persecution complexes. The poet arrived at the sanatorium in the first part of May 1901. By the end of August he had left France and soon he settled down in Sanatorio del Rosario, a rest home in Madrid, where he formed a lasting friendship with the neurologist Luis Simarro.

In 1902, his next work, *Shadow Rhymes*, appeared. The collection was an improvement over Jiménez's first two books and met with critical success. For the next two years, Jiménez was happy; close to doctors and cared for by the sisters of the Sanatorio, he felt protected and cared for and was able to give full vent to his creative interests. Several fellow writers visited him, turning his rooms into a kind of literary salon, coming to talk literature and *modernismo*, the movement that had taken hold in Spain. They had also come to hatch the plans for a *modernista* review—to be called *Helios*, one of the most coherent and successful platforms for Spanish modernism. *Helios* (April 1903–May 1904) was carefully edited by Jiménez, who contributed translations as well as many unsigned pieces. In 1903 he also saw the publication of *Sad Airs*, which includes the poetry he wrote at the Sanatorio. Critics from José Ortega y Gasset to Darío praised it, and its success established Jiménez as a poet of undeniable talent.

The Institución Libre de Enseñanza Simarro, the neurologist Jiménez had met on the way to Bordeaux, began taking on boarders after the death of his wife in 1903. Jiménez delightedly signed on to stay with him.

Through Simarro, Jiménez came to know the work of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. Founded in 1876 by Francisco Giner de los Ríos as a lay school at a time when all education was under the aegis of the Catholic Church, the Institución deeply affected the life of a liberal intellectual minority. Jiménez accompanied Simarro to its lectures and noted that they always came away with many new ideas. Through such contacts he gradually broadened his outlook and increased his intellectual concerns. In February 1904, Jiménez published *Faraway Gardens*, the last part of a trilogy that begins with *Shadow Rhymes* and includes *Sad Airs*.

Productive Years of Personal Exile When Simarro fell ill in the fall of 1905, Jiménez decided to return to Moguer. There he stayed for nearly seven years, living with his family in the semi-seclusion of their Andalusian village. Provincial exile in Moguer turned out to be, except for bouts of depression, incredibly productive for the poet. Jiménez wrote enough to fill several collections of poetry and one book of prose that were published beginning in 1908, and sufficient material remained to fill seven posthumous volumes. The work included *Platero and I*, which he began writing in 1906 and which was published in 1914.

In 1911 the Banco de España impounded the vineyards of the financially struggling Jiménez family. Jiménez took this situation as a warning that he might need to earn money, and since there were more economic opportunities in Madrid than in Moguer, he returned to the Spanish capital. Given his innate liberalism and his contact with Simarro and the Institución in 1903, Jiménez found himself quickly attracted to an offshoot of the Institución—the Residencia de Estudiantes, a dormitory set up in 1910 along the lines of a university college at Oxford or Cambridge. By 1912 it had been enlarged by three new buildings and was well on its way to becoming an important intellectual center in Spain and, to a certain extent, a cultural haven in Europe during World War I. Jiménez attended a lecture at the Residencia in the summer of 1913. In the audience was a twenty-six-year-old named Zenobia Camprubí Aymar. Jiménez fell in love at once, and a long courtship ensued. When Camprubí Aymar stipulated that their marriage take place in New York City, she unwittingly supplied the context for one of the most unusual books in modern Spanish poetry. *Diary of a Newlywed Poet* (1917) is a record in poetry of Jiménez's feelings and thoughts about his journey from Cádiz to New York and his stay in the United States. *Diary* had considerable influence on the poetry written in Spain during the next decade.

Move to America Jiménez and his wife lived in Spain after their marriage, but they had often talked of returning to America. The outbreak of the Spanish civil war gave them the motive to do so, and in August 1936 they sailed from Cherbourg to New York. After several teaching stints and moves, the Jiménezes moved to Puerto

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jiménez's famous contemporaries include:

Béla Bartók (1881–1945): Hungarian pianist and composer who is recognized as one of the most significant musicians of the twentieth century and remembered for cofounding the field of ethnomusicology.

Alexander Fleming (1881–1955): Scottish biologist who shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for his discovery of penicillin as an antibiotic.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Irish expatriate author who is considered to be one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

Helen Keller (1880–1968): American author and activist who was the first deaf-blind person to graduate from college and who led an involved life as a champion for women's and workers' rights.

Rico in 1951 and remained there until their deaths. The return to a Spanish-speaking environment influenced the poet in the last few active years of his life. He donated his papers and books to the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, taught a course on modernism there in 1953, and continued to write and publish poetry.

Losing Camprubí Aymar Camprubí Aymar, who had undergone an operation for cancer in 1951, worsened after a period of remission. She died on October 28, 1956, just three days after the Swedish Academy voted to award Jiménez the Nobel Prize in Literature. Jiménez became increasingly withdrawn and more or less ceased to write. He died on May 29, 1958.

Works in Literary Context

Enduring Life and Literary Influences Early in his life, Jiménez had come across the verses of Rubén Darío, the influential poet from Nicaragua who had managed to inject new life into Spanish language poetry at the turn of the century. Jiménez formed a lasting friendship with Darío. He saw Valle-Inclán often, met Azorín and the playwright Jacinto Benavente (who, like Jiménez, went on to win a Nobel Prize), and became good friends with Gregorio Martínez Sierra, a dramatist who was later an influence on him. *Shadow Rhymes* (1902) reflects the influences of these *modernistas*.

Camprubí Aymar also had a large impact on the poet's life. Bilingual in Spanish and English, she was a cultivated woman who further acquainted him with the world of Anglo-American poetry, which after 1916 replaced French verse as the chief influence on his work. The poet's birthplace, Moguer, also inspired him: *Platero*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jiménez often featured death-related themes in his work. Here are some other works that center around the dead or death:

“Annabel Lee” (1849), a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe’s famous poem features a young man mourning his dead love who lies “in her tomb by the sounding sea.”

As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. This masterful novel features intertwining narration by various characters involved in transporting the body of Addie Bundren to her burial site.

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936), a short story by Ernest Hemingway. A writer and adventurer lies dying of a gangrenous leg wound while bickering with his girlfriend and pondering the past in this classic Hemingway tale.

and I (1914) is a series of vignettes of small-town life and rural scenes in and around Moguer. Jiménez’s Andalusian roots were, like William Butler Yeats’s Irishness, a source of inspiration and pride.

Evolving Style In the years 1913 to 1916, Jiménez was making a transition in his poetic style. The sentimental and mournful voice of his traditional sonnets began to give way to brief, compressed poems in the manner of Emily Dickinson, whom he read for the first time in 1916. At the same time, under the influence of Shakespeare’s sonnets, which he had undertaken to translate with his wife, he tackled a classical meter.

Jiménez then developed what he came to call “*poesía pura*” (pure poetry), or “*poesía desnuda*” (naked poetry). The style hinted at in *Summer* attained full development in *Diary* and offered the most important contribution of short lines, free verse, suppression of anecdote, and recurring nouns charged with multiple meanings (*rose, tree, woman*).

Death Obsessions In works such as *Eternities* (1918), Jiménez explores traditional themes of the poet to poetry; of poetry to the world; and of love, memory, and death. One aspect of Jiménez’s abiding neurosis was his abnormal fear of death. In *Violet Souls* (1900) at times he leans dangerously toward an unhealthy attraction to a dead little body: “Elegiac,” for instance, focuses on the work of worms as they eat away the small white face and burrow into the heart once inflamed by passion. One of his greatest triumphs, however, was to broach the ultimate theme of death and, in spite of his pathological morbidity, present it in humanistic and noble terms. He believed that life could not be meaningfully lived without the persistent awareness of death. As he says in *Poetry*

(1923), the cord that links one’s life to life in general should bind one to death.

Works in Critical Context

In his introductory speech awarding Jiménez the Nobel prize, Royal Academy member R. Granit asserted, “If ever there has been inspired use of words, it is in Juan Ramón Jiménez’s poetry, and in this sense he is a poet for poets. This is probably also the reason why, within the whole Spanish-speaking world, he is regarded as the teacher and master.”

Platero and I (1914) *Platero and I*, Jiménez’s most universally acclaimed book, describes life in a small Andalusian town, as seen through the sensitive eyes of the poet/narrator and his inseparable companion, the woolly white donkey Platero. The book has been read with pleasure by schoolchildren, adults, and critics. Graciela P. Nemes, writing in 1961 essay, wrote that the book “enhance[s] the lesser people and the commonplace through an attitude toward nature and people, which speaks with the greatest tenderness that exists in the hearts of men.” Michael P. Predmore, in a 1970 essay, calls it “one of the most famous prose poems in twentieth-century Spanish literature,” and an “early masterpiece” of the author. He continues, “It has always been popular, even and especially among its critics, who unite unanimously in praising the artistic qualities of the work.” The book has reached, after Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), perhaps the widest audience of any work in Spanish literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Jiménez sometimes allowed his preoccupations, phobias, delusions, and apprehensions of a dual personality to enter into his poetry. Study one poem where you find this to be the case and discuss what important questions about identity are raised in his work.
2. In *Spaniards of Three Worlds* (1942), Jiménez offers a balance of sarcasm and lyricism. He does so in caricatures, or portrait poems. Try your hand at a portrait poem: Choose a person to write about, someone you know personally who inspires you, or someone from the media who inspires your sarcasm. Write a portrait poem by including physical characteristics of the person, special features, bits of dialogue, or actions of the person to show your readers the person’s character.
3. In his “pure poetry,” Jiménez aimed for a stark style by stripping anecdote and obvious sentiment from his lines, and by making instead a heavy use of symbols. Before researching further, consider one most important object in your life. Why did you choose this object or image? What did it make you think of? What feelings come from the object/image for you?

What does your choice say about who you are? That is, how does your choice represent your personality? After deciding on your image, reconsider a Jiménez poem, paying close attention to one symbol. What do you think the item represents?

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Samuel Johnson

BORN: 1709, Lichfield, Staffordshire, England

DIED: 1784, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama, nonfiction, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language
(1747)

The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749)

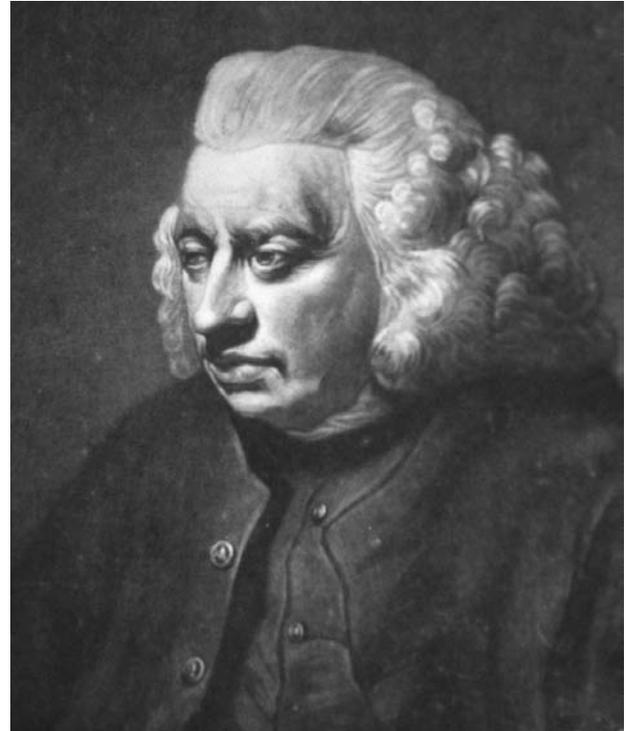
Preface to a Dictionary of the English Language
(1755)

The Idler (1758–1760)

The Patriot (1774)

Overview

Perhaps the best-known and most often-quoted English writer after William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson ranks as England's major literary figure of the second half of the eighteenth century. He is remembered as a witty conversationalist who dominated the literary scene of London and the man immortalized by James Boswell in *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Known in his day as the "Great Cham (sovereign or monarch) of Literature,"



Samuel Johnson *Johnson, Samuel, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Johnson displayed a vigorous reasoning intelligence, a keen understanding of human frailty, and a deep Christian morality.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Access to Books Born in Lichfield in 1709, Johnson was the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller, and his wife, Sarah Ford. The family lived above the bookstore, and Johnson literally grew up among books. He loved to read from an early age and often neglected to help with the shop so he could read. Thus, Johnson grew up with an access to books greater than nearly anyone else at his time in Great Britain, as there were no public libraries in the modern, open, free sense of the word, and book collecting was the milieu of the wealthy.

Published First Translation As a child, Johnson suffered from scrofula (a skin disease which is often a symptom of tuberculosis, a contagious bacterial infection of the lungs). The condition seriously affected his eyesight and disfigured his face for life. Despite the scrofula, he was educated at Lichfield Grammar School and later at Pembroke College, Oxford, but a shortage of funding forced him to leave the latter institution without a degree in 1729, after a residence of only thirteen months. After his father's death in 1731, Johnson lived in Birmingham, where he translated into French *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, by

Father Jerome Lobo, which he published anonymously in 1735.

In that same year, Johnson married Elizabeth Porter, a widow twenty years his senior. After a failed attempt at running a boarding school, Johnson went to London to make a career as a man of letters. Once in London, he performed editorial work for Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, to which he submitted essays, poems, reviews, and a series of brief biographies. His most notable contributions appeared between 1740 and 1743 and were titled "Debates in Magna Lilliputia." These essays eloquently—perhaps too eloquently—re-created parliamentary proceedings and were widely accepted as authentic speeches of the great politicians of the day. At the time, Britain was ruled by the Germanic House of Hanover, whose kings left much of the governing to their ministers. Britain was in the midst of a time of rapid colonial and mercantile expansion abroad, and internal stability and literary and artistic achievement at home.

Successful Poet and Prose Writer In 1738, Johnson anonymously published his immediately successful *London: A Poem, in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal*, which contains protests against political corruption and the dangers of the London streets and describes the miseries of the unknown and impoverished author. His *Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, published anonymously in 1744, was the first of his prose works to captivate the public. Today, it is admired for its lively depiction of Grub Street life and is considered a milestone in the art of biography.

Shakespeare and the Dictionary Johnson next turned to Shakespeare's work, publishing his *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* in 1745. *Miscellaneous Observations* also contains a preliminary proposal for a new edition of Shakespeare's plays, but Johnson laid the project aside after it was suggested that he compile a dictionary of the English language.

In 1747, he published his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language*, dedicating the work to Lord Chesterfield—who, in fact, cared little about the project. In 1749, Johnson published his second Juvenalian imitation, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," in which the personal vicissitudes of scholars, philosophers, and legislators from the modern and ancient worlds are used to illustrate the pitfalls of political ambition, the uselessness of military conquest, and the anguish that accompanies literary production.

Launched Rambler Beginning in 1750, Johnson published a semiweekly periodical, the *Rambler*, each issue of which comprised a single anonymous essay on contemporary literary and social conditions. Fervently believing that it is the writer's duty to make the world a better place, and to "redeem the time," Johnson crafted these essays in various forms: allegories, sketches of archetypal humans, literary criticism, and lay sermons. A few

days after the last issue of the *Rambler* appeared in 1752, Johnson's wife died.

Dictionary Acclaimed During the next few years Johnson confined his literary efforts to work on the dictionary and irregularly contributed to another weekly periodical, the *Adventurer*, published by John Hawkesworth. In 1755, Johnson and his secretaries finally finished the forty-thousand-word dictionary, which surpassed earlier dictionaries of its kind, primarily in precision of definition. The dictionary firmly established Johnson's literary reputation and led to his receiving an honorary MA degree from Oxford University. Lord Chesterfield, striving to make amends for his previous lack of regard, hailed Johnson as the supreme dictator of the English language. This action only provoked what is perhaps the most famous of Johnson's letters: a scornful rebuke of Chesterfield's self-serving praise and a defense of his own initiative and industry without the assistance of a patron.

Soon thereafter, Johnson once again focused his attention on Shakespeare, formally issuing his *Proposals for Printing the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare* in 1756. Despite the commercial success of his dictionary, which nevertheless failed to relieve his money problems, Johnson continued to write essays, reviews, and political articles for various periodicals.

Launched Universal Chronicle From 1758 to 1760, Johnson contributed a regular weekly essay to the *Universal Chronicle*. These essays, appearing under the heading "The Idler," exhibit the moralist and social reformist perspectives of the *Rambler* pieces but also treat the lighter side of the human condition through comical character sketches. In 1759, informing his printer that he had "a thing he was preparing for the press" to defray the expense of his mother's impending funeral, Johnson wrote *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759) in the evenings of one week.

The Literary Club In 1762, King George III conferred upon Johnson a pension of three hundred pounds Sterling a year, thereby relieving him of the drudgery of hackwork. The next year, his accidental meeting with Boswell in Thomas Davies's bookshop in Covent Garden inaugurated one of the most famous literary companionships in history. Boswell's diary entry recording the event noted that Johnson's "conversation is as great as his writing." In 1764, Johnson gladly concurred with Joshua Reynolds's proposal for the founding of what still ranks as the most famous London dining club of all time. Simply called The Club, it was later known as the Literary Club.

Besides Johnson and Reynolds, the original members were Edmund Burke, Topham Beauclerk, Bennet Langton, and Oliver Goldsmith. Eventually Boswell, Edward Gibbon, Charles James Fox, and several others were admitted as members. At meetings of the Club, Johnson uttered many of his renowned epigrams and opinions.

Indeed, Reynolds once admitted that the Club was formed primarily to give Johnson a forum to express himself verbally and in company.

The following year, Johnson's *Plays of William Shakespeare* appeared in eight volumes—eleven years after being proposed. A lifelong student of Shakespeare, Johnson corrected textual corruptions, elucidated obscurities of language, and examined Shakespeare's textual sources.

Beyond Literature Although he continued writing prologues and dedications for friends, Johnson no longer devoted his work exclusively to problems of literature and ethics. Instead, he expounded his essentially pragmatic political philosophy in a series of pamphlets on the power politics of English and French colonialism, most notably in *The False Alarm* (1770), *The Patriot* (1774), and *Taxation No Tyranny; an Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress* (1775). The last-named polemic, perhaps his most vociferous outburst against colonial American claims, was written in reply to the resolutions passed by the American Continental Congress of 1774. In 1775, the American colonies official began revolting, marking the beginning of the American Revolution and the eventual loss of the North American colonies that would soon make up the United States of America.

Enjoying unprecedented leisure in the mid-1770s, Johnson extensively toured Great Britain and visited the Continent. Having traveled to Scotland and the Hebrides with Boswell in 1773, Johnson published his impressions two years later in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), which describes the customs, religion, education, commerce, and agriculture of eighteenth-century Highland society. Johnson also traveled with his good friends Henry and Hester Thrale to North Wales in 1774 and to France in 1775.

Poet Biographies In 1777 Johnson agreed to write biographical prefaces for an “elegant and accurate” edition of the works of English poets, ranging from the time of John Milton onwards. Instead, his prefaces were separately issued as *The Lives of the English Poets* (1781). This ten-volume work contains fifty-two essays and a wealth of biographical material.

In 1783, Johnson had a paralytic stroke that left him seriously debilitated until the spring of the following year. After visiting his native Lichfield for the last time in the summer of 1784, he returned to London in November, and although his physical condition had considerably worsened, his mind remained alert. Johnson died on December 13, 1784.

Works in Literary Context

Johnson—poet, dramatist, journalist, satirist, biographer, essayist, lexicographer, editor, translator, critic, parliamentary reporter, political writer, story writer, sermon writer, travel writer, social anthropologist, prose stylist, conversationalist, Christian—dominates the eighteenth-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Johnson's famous contemporaries include:

Voltaire (1694–1778): Voltaire was a French Enlightenment writer and philosopher known for his wit and outspoken support of social reform. His works include the satire *Candide* (1759).

Edmund Burke (1729–1797): Burke was an Anglo-Irish author, philosopher, and statesman who contributed to the development of conservative political thought. His works include *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770).

David Hume (1711–1776): Hume was a Scottish philosopher and economist considered to be one of the most influential thinkers in Western philosophy. His books include *Essays Moral and Political* (1744).

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Franklin was a multi-talented American who contributed to science, politics, and publishing. He began publishing his annual *Poor Richard's Almanack* in 1733.

Henry Fielding (1707–1754): Fielding was an English author who wrote humorous and satirical novels. His novels include *Joseph Andrews* (1742).

Edward Gibbon (1737–1794): Gibbon was an English historian best known for his monumental work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766–1788).

James Boswell (1740–1795): Boswell was a Scottish author best known as Johnson's companion and biographer. Boswell published his *Life of Samuel Johnson* in 1791.

century English literary scene as his contemporary, the equally versatile and prolific Voltaire, dominates that of France. When Johnson's name began to be known, not long after the deaths of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, no challenger arose during the next forty years for the title of preeminent English man of letters. His work encompassed many ideas and themes, including the choice of life.

Choice of Life One theme that emerges in some of Johnson's early work is the inevitable unhappiness of human existence whatever choice in life is made. In “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” a verse satire based on the Roman poet Juvenal's tenth satire, Johnson considers mankind's yearnings for the various gifts of power, learning, military fame, long life, beauty, even virtue, and gives a melancholy account, with individual examples, of the misfortunes attendant upon each. The themes of the prose narrative *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, a moral tale set in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Johnson often used satire to critique modern social and political conditions and to point out the weaknesses in human nature. Here are some other well-known satirical works:

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. This novel satirizes the foibles of the human condition through a parody of travel writing.

The Devil's Dictionary (1911), a nonfiction work by Ambrose Bierce. This book gives reinterpretations of English words and terms that are meant to satirize political doubletalk.

The Simpsons (1989–), an animated television series created by Matt Groening. This television show satirizes American culture and society through a parody of middle-class family life.

Egypt, focused on a princely young hero escaping with his sister and the poet Imlac from the secluded innocence of the Happy Valley and tries out various schemes of life.

Age of Johnson The eighteenth century has often been called “the Age of Johnson.” To be sure, he had notable contemporaries—Edmund Burke, David Hume, Edward Gibbon—but their literary abilities, formidable as they were, moved in a narrower circle of concerns. Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Laurence Sterne received and deserve great acclaim as the founding fathers of the English novel, but their contributions to other areas of writing are less noteworthy.

Almost as prolific as Johnson and as varied in his interests was Horace Walpole, who sometimes expressed aristocratic disdain for the lowborn Johnson, though he never seems to have impinged greatly on Johnson's consciousness. Walpole might be argued to have made a greater impact than Johnson on the following century, in the legacy of the “Gothic” romance and Victorian pseudo-Gothic architecture. But no one has ever suggested calling the later eighteenth century “the Age of Horace Walpole.” It is not surprising that the standard bibliographies of studies in eighteenth-century English literature show Johnson to have been their most popular subject, followed at some distance by Swift and Pope, and at a longer one by Fielding, Daniel Defoe, John Dryden, and William Blake.

Though the phrase “the Age of Johnson” is less used than it once was, Samuel Johnson, whose life spanned most of the eighteenth century and whose writings embraced an astounding variety of genres, remains a central figure in the literary history of the time.

Works in Critical Context

Johnson's reputation as a man of letters rests as much on his life and personality as it does on his writings. This is evidenced by the scope, depth, and sheer bulk of the corpus of Johnsonian criticism, much of which is pure character analysis. Boswell's account of his life, particularly from the time of their meeting onwards, was perhaps most responsible for “Johnsonizing” England, and it fostered an image of Johnson as a gifted and original writer and masterly conversationalist.

Contemporary Criticism Johnson was revered by his contemporaries as a skilled poet, brilliant lexicographer, and sensitive moralist. Critics hailed him as the “new” Alexander Pope upon publication of “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” and Johnson's dictionary, initially well received, remained a standard until the appearance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* well over a century later. Equally, *Rasselas* supplemented the popular moral themes of Johnson's earlier *Rambler* and “Idler” essays while satisfying the tastes of eighteenth-century readers for what Pope termed “impressive truth in fashion drest.”

Critics continued to admire most of Johnson's works in the decade following his death, but in time commentators began to fault Johnson for what they considered his highly Latinate, formal, and overly balanced prose style, as well as for his wordiness and narrow critical method. Some critics singled out *Lives of the Poets*, chastising Johnson for his harsh appraisal of John Milton and his prejudicial assessments of other works and authors, notably Thomas Gray and his *Odes*.

Changing Reputation in the Nineteenth Century

By the early nineteenth century, Johnson's folk image—the man of Boswell's *Life*—had come to dominate critical thinking, leaving little room for studies of the works themselves. William Hazlitt evidenced this approach when he wrote in 1818, “His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. . . . All these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour.” Indeed, this sort of assessment was typical until the last years of the nineteenth century.

When critics did focus on Johnson's works, they generally turned to his dictionary and *Lives of the Poets*. Leslie Stephen favorably remarked that the dictionary “was a surprising achievement, and made an epoch in the study of language,” while Thomas Babington Macaulay mirrored the views of his contemporaries when he appraised *Lives of the Poets*: “They are the judgments of a mind trammelled by prejudice and deficient in sensibility, but vigorous and acute.” Similarly, the *Rambler* essays were dismissed as didactic lay sermons, and other prose works were labeled “unreadable.” Thus, by the turn of the century, interest in Johnson's literary works was at a low point, but the man himself continued to loom large in the minds of readers.

Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Assessment

The bicentenary of Johnson's birth in 1909 sparked a

major reevaluation of the Johnson canon. Throughout the twentieth century, critical emphasis shifted from the amusing idiosyncrasies and the pointed commentaries of the man to his ethical and moral standards, his appraisals of the human condition, and the breadth, strength, and method of his reasoning. Some scholars noted that Johnson's writings on morals closely anticipated the theories, if not the language, of Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, while others ranked Johnson just below Alexander Pope and John Dryden as masters of heroic-couplet verse. Even *Lives of the Poets*, the most favorably received of Johnson's works, was reconsidered. No longer perceiving Johnson as a strictly neoclassical critic, scholars contended that he employed an empirical approach in his criticism; some critics have even cited Johnson as the father of New Criticism.

Recently, commentators have turned to Johnson's Shakespearean work, countering a common nineteenth-century claim that, in the words of Heinrich Heine, "Garrick got a better hold of Shakespeare's thought than Dr. Johnson." Likewise, Johnson's political tracts, long viewed as abusive expressions of his conservative prejudice against the rights of the people, are seen today as an extension of his lifelong concern with political morality and order.

Today, after a long eclipse, Johnson is once again preeminent in the history of English letters, and mention of his name commands reverence in the English-speaking world. According to Malcolm Muggeridge, "Dr. Johnson will go on being remembered, not so much for his achievements as a writer as for the mysterious quality of greatness that he exudes."

Responses to Literature

1. At one point in his career, Johnson was granted a pension by the king of England. How did this work-free source of income change Johnson's approach to writing? Does a writer like Johnson benefit from a pension or does it have a negative effect on his work? Write a paper that outlines your findings and conclusions.
2. Johnson wrote in many different genres and had an extremely diverse literary output. Is it better for a writer to focus on only one or two types of writing, or does a more diverse career such as Johnson's produce better writing all around? If you were a writer, would you focus on one form or cast a wide net? Create a presentation that outlines your theories.
3. Choose a favorite author and write a short literary and critical biography modeled after Johnson's style in *Lives of the Poets*.
4. Write a story about a modern celebrity that uses satire to make a political or moral point.

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Ben Jonson

BORN: c. 1572, London, England

DIED: 1637, Westminster, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Poetaster (1601)

The Alchemist (1610)

Workes (1616)

Timber; or, Discoveries (1641)

Overview

Ben Jonson was a prolific Elizabethan dramatist and a man of letters who profoundly influenced the coming Augustan age through his emphasis on the principles of Horace, Aristotle, and other classical thinkers. While he is now remembered primarily for his satirical comedies, he also distinguished himself as a poet, a preeminent writer of masques, a careful defender of his work, and the originator of English literary criticism. Jonson's professional reputation is often obscured by his personal notoriety; a bold, independent, and aggressive man, he fashioned for himself an image as the sole arbiter of taste,



Ben Jonson Jonson, Benjamin, photograph. Public Domain.

standing for erudition and the supremacy of classical models against what he perceived as the general populace's ignorant preference for the sensational. While he influenced later writers in each genre that he undertook, his ultimate influence is considered to be a legacy of literary craftsmanship, a strong sense of artistic form and control, and his role in bringing, as poet Alexander Pope noted, "critical learning into vogue."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Anachronistic War Hero Finds Trouble with the Law Jonson was born in London shortly after the death of his father, a minister who claimed descent from Scottish gentry. Although his family was poor, he was educated at Westminster School under the renowned antiquary William Camden. He apparently left school unwillingly when called to work with his stepfather as a bricklayer. He then served as a volunteer in the Low Countries in the Dutch war against Spain; reportedly, he defeated a challenger in single combat, stripping his vanquished opponent of his arms in the classical (and by that point quite anachronistic) fashion. The war Jonson fought in was a part of the bloody European wars of religion, in particular, the Eighty Years' War (1560s–1648)—in which the increasingly Calvinist (a particularly stern version of Protestantism) Netherlands fought to throw off the yoke of Catholic Spanish rule. Jonson's

participation reflected the strong anti-Catholic sentiment that had prevailed in England since King Henry VIII's break with the Vatican in 1533, with the notable exception of the reign of Queen Mary I from 1553 to 1558.

Jonson returned to England by 1592 and married about three years later. It seems that the union was unhappy and produced several children, all of whom Jonson outlived. In the years following his marriage, he became an actor and also wrote numerous "get-penny entertainments" (financially motivated and quickly composed plays), as well as working on emendations and additions to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592). By 1597 he was writing for Philip Henslowe's theatrical company. That year, Henslowe employed Jonson to finish Thomas Nashe's satire *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost), but the play was suppressed for alleged seditious content and Jonson was jailed for a short time. In 1598 the earliest of his extant works, *Every Man in His Humour*, was produced by the Lord Chamberlain's Men with William Shakespeare—who became Jonson's close friend—in the cast. That same year, Jonson fell into further trouble after killing actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel, narrowly escaping the gallows by claiming benefit of clergy (meaning he was shown leniency for proving that he was literate and educated).

"War of the Theaters" Shortly thereafter, writing for the Children of Queen's Chapel, Jonson became embroiled in a public feud with playwrights John Marston and Thomas Dekker. In *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) and *Poetaster* (1601), Jonson portrayed himself as the impartial, well-informed judge of art and society and wrote unflattering portraits of these men, who counterattacked with a satiric portrayal of Jonson in the play *Satiromastix; or, The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet* (1602). This brief dispute became known as the "War of the Theaters"; interestingly, scholars speculate that the dispute was mutually contrived in order to further the respective authors' careers. In any event, Jonson later reconciled with Marston and collaborated with him and George Chapman in writing *Eastward Ho!* (1605). A joke at the king's expense in this play landed him once again, along with his coauthors, in prison. Once freed, however, Jonson entered a period of good fortune and productivity. He had many friends at court, and James I valued learning highly—in a society where most art depended heavily on the patronage of the wealthy and powerful, this meant quite a bit. Jonson was frequently called upon to write his popular, elegant masques, such as the *Masque of Blacknesse* (1605). During this period, he also produced his most successful comedies, including *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fayre* (1614).

Self-Proclaimed Poet Laureate In 1616 Jonson published his *Workes*, becoming the first English writer to dignify his dramas by terming them "works," and for this perceived presumption he was widely ridiculed. In that year, Jonson assumed the responsibilities and

privileges of Poet Laureate, though without formal appointment. From 1616 to 1625 he primarily wrote masques for presentation at court, collaborating frequently with famed poet, architect, and stage designer Inigo Jones.

Misfortune, however, marked Jonson's later years. A fire destroyed his library in 1623, and when James I died in 1625, Jonson lost much of his influence at court, though he was named city chronologist of London in 1628. Later that year, he suffered the first of several strokes that left him bedridden. Meanwhile, Jonson's collaborative relationship with Jones grew strained as the latter's elaborate theatrical spectacles increasingly overshadowed Jonson's dialogue and songs, and in 1631 the two parted ways. Jonson produced four plays during the reign of Charles I, but none of these was successful. The rest of his life, spent in retirement, he filled primarily with study and writing; at his death, two unfinished plays were discovered among his mass of papers and manuscripts. Though Jonson left behind a financially depleted estate, he was nevertheless buried with honor in Westminster Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Although later writers like John Dryden are often credited with innovating what we now call "literary criticism"—a critical analysis of the merits, demerits, and meanings of any piece of literature—Jonson is now seen as the first major figure to work in the genre. Indeed, in both his published works and private conversations, Jonson was willing to criticize both the poetic style and the personal lives of contemporary poets and dramatists. However, Jonson is notable because he attempted to hold himself to his own high standards, and in so doing, wrote poetry that utilized what has become known as a "plain style" of poetry. This style of poetry demonstrates Jonson's artistic control and continued to be influential on poets for several hundred years.

Jonson's Criticism Poet William Drummond became acquainted with Ben Jonson and recorded a number of Jonson's observations regarding poetry and poets of his day in his text *Conversations*. Drummond's notes offer many insights into Jonson's views of poetry and other poets. In one moment, Jonson memorably remarked "That Shaksper wanted [i.e., lacked] Arte"—one of several assessments of others that helped define his own ideals. He also said that some of Drummond's poems "smelled too much of schooles"—a statement balancing the one on Shakespeare by indicating that the art Jonson prized required skill but should also seem natural and unstrained.

Timber; or, Discoveries (1641), one of Jonson's most original works, in fact, represents the first English formulation of literary principles as applied through practical critical observation. In this he directly anticipated and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jonson's famous contemporaries include:

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English dramatist often credited as the most important writer in the history of the English language.

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616): A Spanish author often credited with having written the first novel, *Don Quixote*.

Robert Ayton (1570–1638): A Scottish poet notable because he was one of the first Scottish authors to write in the English language.

Guy Fawkes (1570–1606): The English would-be assassin of King James I, Fawkes has become a symbol for anarchy, notably in the graphic novel (later adapted into a film) *V for Vendetta*.

John Carver (1576–1621): This Pilgrim leader was also the first governor of the Plymouth Colony, which is now mostly Massachusetts.

influenced Dryden, commonly held to be the father of English criticism.

Poetry as the Application of Principles Ben Jonson's significance as a poet is hard to overestimate. His influence helped transform English verse. His "plain style" made him a crucial figure in a central tradition, but his deceptively complex works reward close reading. Sophisticated, self-conscious, and strongly influenced by the Greek and Roman classics, his writing nonetheless rarely seems foreign or artificial. His vigorous and colloquial style exemplifies both wide reading and a deep interest in reality.

Jonson's "plain style" was neither artless nor utterly clear; instead, it avoids both sublimity and vulgarity. It was meant to communicate, to have an effect, and it gives his poetry a directness, practicality, seriousness, and force that loftier, lower, or more complicated phrasing would obscure. Its tone is often forthright, its emphasis ethical, although Jonson generally rejects priggish preaching. He mocked cant and jargon and usually avoids them himself. His poems—whether elegies, songs, celebrative verse, or short love lyrics—reflect a style of plainness and simplicity that he argued for in his criticism. Skillfully polished, such poems as "To Penshurst," "Come, My Celia," and "To the Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare" exemplify the artistic control he valued so highly.

Works in Critical Context

Jonson was recognized as one of the foremost men of letters in his own time and at his creative height rivaled

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

During the “War of the Theaters,” Jonson used his drama to take digs at opposing dramatists and to characterize himself as a fantastic judge of character and art. These kinds of jabs in literature are common. Here are a few works of art that contain sharp criticism of other artists and men of letters:

Candide (1759), a novel by Voltaire. In his most famous book, Voltaire does not attack one writer specifically but an entire era of writers—writers from the Enlightenment, perhaps mostly Gottfried Leibniz—who argue that all that happens in the world will ultimately be for the best for all. Essentially, Voltaire rebukes this idea by putting his main character, Candide, through a number of trials, none of which turn out well in the end.

Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses (1895), an essay by Mark Twain. Twain argues in his characteristically wry manner that James Fenimore Cooper, in a single page of his novel *Deerslayer*, committed 114 of the possible 115 literary errors a writer can make. The rest of the essay is equally biting.

The Battle of the Books, and Other Short Pieces (1704), essays by Jonathan Swift. In this text, Swift pits ancient writers against contemporary writers and targets specifically a contemporary almanac writer, Partridge, and, in the process, the art of almanac writing itself for its ineffective methods of predicting, for instance, whether any given day will be rainy.

Shakespeare in popularity. Yet, his reputation soon declined; his plays in particular, though judged undeniably literate, were considered obsolete not long after their era, more exercises in scholarship than inventive entertainment. Modern-day appraisals of Jonson, however, have provoked a considerable resurgence of interest in his work.

Dismissed as “No Shakespeare” His earliest comedies derive from Roman comedy in form and structure and are noteworthy as models of the comedy of humors, in which each character represents a type dominated by some ruling obsession. Jonson’s later dramas, however, were dismissed fairly early on—most famously by John Dryden, who called them mere “dotages.” It was Dryden who first undertook an extensive analysis of Jonson. While generously likening him to Virgil and calling him “the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had,” Dryden’s comments also signaled the start of a decline in Jonson’s reputation, for Dryden’s observations included a comparison of Jonson and Shakespeare—one that nodded admiringly toward Jonson, but bowed adoringly before Shakespeare. This compar-

ison colored Jonson’s reputation for more than two hundred years, fueled by nineteenth-century Romantic critics, who found Jonson lacking in imagination, delicacy, and passion.

A Resurgence among the Modernists T. S. Eliot, writing in 1919, praised Jonson’s artistry, arguing that Jonson’s reputation had been unfairly damaged by critics who, while acknowledging his erudition, ignored the power of his work. He wrote: “To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries—this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval.” With Eliot and the other proponents of literary modernism began a reevaluation of Jonson, who benefited from modernist reaction against Romantic sensibility, and who began to be appreciated on his own terms.

Workes in Contemporary Criticism The late twentieth century has seen a renewal of critical appreciation of Jonson. Approaches to his work have come from a variety of directions and have taken many different forms, with many of them focusing on the *Workes*. For instance, literary critic Thomas Greene suggests that “in a sense, almost everything Jonson wrote attempts in one way or another to complete the broken circle, or expose the ugliness of its incompleteness.” In contradistinction, scholar Mark Bland argues that “the idea of the *Workes* as a self-portrait, for all its immediate appeal, is not one that ought to be imposed upon that volume. No one would wish to deny Jonson his sense of identity or his voice; the *Workes*, however, has an ideal ethical form (like a masque), that seeks to engage and elevate the moral consciousness of the reader through its evolving structure—a process that is separate from the character of the author or the contents of the texts as such.” Whether we take the *Workes* as a self-portrait pointing to its own partialness or as a programme of moral edification, we are at the very least fortunate that contemporary literary criticism has again discovered the value of all Jonson’s works, collected or otherwise.

Responses to Literature

1. Read Jonson’s poem “Still to Be Neat.” The ideas in this poem are very similar to those in Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder.” Read Herrick’s text. Which author do you think handles this subject more efficiently? Point out specific techniques that each author used that affected your judgment of the texts.
2. Read Jonson’s poem “On My First Son.” Jonson calls his son his “best piece of poetry.” Everybody has something that they consider their best work, and few consider their “best piece of poetry” to be an actual poem. Write a poem describing your finest

achievement, following the structure of rhyming couplets that Jonson uses.

3. Read Jonson's *Poetaster* and Mark Twain's *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*. Each of these satirizes authors who were alive and thriving when the pieces were written. In a short essay, analyze the kinds of criticism each author makes of his contemporaries. Would you say one picks on the author's personal life more than his work? How would you say these differences change the overall effect of the pieces?
4. Read Jonson's "To Penshurst." This poem exemplifies Jonson's "plain style" of writing and recalls classic literature with its epic themes combined with its earthy beauty. Choose a place you love—your house, a park, a zoo, a mall—and attempt to imitate Jonson's plain style and the progression of descriptions in a poem in which you describe this place that is so important to you.

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James Joyce

BORN: 1882, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1941, Zurich, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Dubliners (1914)

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)

Ulysses (1922)

Finnegans Wake (1939)

Overview

James Joyce is considered the most prominent English-speaking literary figure of the first half of the twentieth century. His short-story collection and three novels redefined the form of modern fiction and have inspired countless writers in his wake.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

One Child among Many in Dublin, an Irish Exile in Paris James Augustus Aloysius Joyce was born on February 2, 1882, in Dublin, Ireland, to John Stanislaus



James Joyce Joyce, James, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Joyce and Mary Jane Murray Joyce. He was the eldest of what his father estimated as “sixteen or seventeen children,” only ten of whom survived infancy.

After graduating from University College Dublin in 1902, Joyce left Ireland for medical school in Paris. He viewed the flourishing Irish literary revival with a mixture of anxiety and indifference. Both the strong nationalism, with its emphasis on the revived Gaelic language, and the accompanying mysticism were unacceptable to him. Unlike many Irish writers of the period, who rejected the literature of England, Joyce was sensitive to the major achievement of the English literary tradition that spanned the eight centuries in which Ireland was under English rule and the accomplishment of William Shakespeare within that tradition. He also cautiously accepted the necessity of writing in the tongue of the conquerors in order to broaden his intellectual perspectives. In his home country, the Irish, persecuted for centuries by the British, were pushing aggressively for independence from British rule. Many fellow Irish writers chose to dramatize this quest for freedom in their work. Joyce, however, was determined to establish himself in the European mainstream, believing that he could not function as an artist in Ireland and that the only suitable response he could make was to be an exile.

Teaching English in Italy His mother’s serious illness caused his return home in 1903. When he left Ireland permanently in 1904 for Italy, Joyce took with him a young woman, Nora Barnacle. She would remain his companion for the rest of his life on the Continent and they would have two children together, although he refused to marry in a religious ceremony. (They eventually legalized their marriage in a civil ceremony in 1931.) In the decade between 1904 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Joyce and Nora lived principally in Trieste, Italy, where he taught English.

Success in a Shattered World For James Joyce, the year the world was thrown into turmoil was also the beginning of his success as a writer, with the publication of his short-story collection *Dubliners*—which examines the middle-class Irish Catholics known to himself and his family—and the completion of his first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), as well as his beginning to work on *Ulysses*. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is at once a portrayal of the maturation of the artist, a study of the vanity of rebelliousness, and an examination of the self-deception of adolescent ego. It is often considered a study of the author’s early life. As Joyce was writing and finding some appreciative readers, the world around him was falling apart. The Great War, as World War I was initially known, meant that he and his family were now enemy aliens in Italy.

At Work on a Masterpiece In 1915 the Joyces were granted permission to leave Trieste for neutral Zurich,

Switzerland. Soon thereafter, back in Ireland, the Irish Republican Brotherhood staged what became known as the Easter Rising during Easter week of 1916. They seized key Dublin facilities and declared an independent Irish republic, but were put down by British forces after six days of fighting. Three years later, a full-scale guerilla war, known as the Irish War of Independence, broke out, which eventually compelled the British to make some concessions to the Irish and led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

Most of *Ulysses* (1922), the novel for which Joyce is most enduringly remembered, was written during the war years in Zurich. In 1920, Joyce and his family moved to Paris. Among the expatriate Americans living there between the wars was Sylvia Beach, who published *Ulysses* under the imprint of her bookstore, Shakespeare and Co. Using Homer’s *Odyssey* as a framework, Joyce depicts in *Ulysses* the events of a single day in Dublin—June 16, 1904. Seedy details of urban life caused the novel to be banned from the United States until December 1933, when Judge John M. Woolsey delivered the legal verdict that *Ulysses* was not obscene; it was published in the United States in early 1934, twelve years after Sylvia Beach’s Paris edition had appeared.

Finnegans Wake and the Dark Years Following

Following the international praise heaped on *Ulysses*, Joyce gained the financial patronage of heiress-activist-editor Harriet Shaw Weaver and afterward was able to devote himself exclusively to writing. He spent nearly all of his remaining years composing his final work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Meant to be the subconscious flow of thought of H. C. Earwicker, a character both real and allegorical, *Finnegans Wake* is literally a re-creation of the English language. In this masterpiece of allusions, puns, foreign languages, and word combinations, Joyce attempted to compress all of Western culture into one night’s dream.

Though free from poverty, these years were darkened by the worsening insanity of Joyce’s daughter Lucia and by several surgical attempts to save his own failing eyesight. After the publication of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, the year war once more broke out in Europe, Joyce fled Paris and the approaching turmoil of World War II. A stay in the south of France eventually led to the Joyces being admitted into Switzerland again, once Lucia was hospitalized and the rumor that Joyce was a Jew was dismissed. Three weeks after arriving in Zurich in 1941, however, Joyce died on the operating table during surgery on a perforated ulcer.

Works in Literary Context

The Quintessential Modernist Critics have come to see the year 1922, with the appearance of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, as the

culminating moment of modernism. Although James Joyce avoided association with artistic groups or literary movements, the characteristics distinguishing his works—dislike of institutions devoted to preserving the status quo, faith in the humanity of individuals, and a deep interest in stylistic experimentation—reflect the concerns animating the works of all the major artists of the period. He is, and was even for many readers of his own moment, the quintessential modernist.

An Irish Home Seen from—and as—“Away” A striking characteristic of Joyce’s different novels and short stories is their near-obsession with Dublin, perhaps the more striking given Joyce’s own long expatriation. In dealing with a world fractured by WWI and then the onset of the WWII, Joyce certainly could have been forgiven for seeking comfort in memories of childhood and home—if that were what he had done. Instead, Joyce’s returns to Dublin are famously unsentimental, even mocking, and his depictions of his own family are outright cruel at times. In a sense, he looks back to Dublin and a home life there not as “home,” a place of familiarity and comfort, but as “away,” a place that may be clearly, even coldly, seen in a more or less objective light. Perhaps, though, it is Irish culture that has the last laugh here, since the ironic portrayals of Dublin and of family life that strike some readers as cold or cruel are, after all, representatives of a grand Irish tradition of sharp-tongued, even ferocious self-mockery.

Joyce’s influence has been immense. Elements within the styles of authors as different from one another as Irish novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett, modern American novelist William Faulkner, English fiction writers Malcolm Lowry and John Fowles, and contemporary American novelists Thomas Pynchon and John Irving identify them as some of those most overtly shaped by Joyce’s works. But no author today can begin to compose without confronting in some way the impact on modern literature exerted by Joyce’s new methods of composition, and, consequently, no reader today can take up a work of modern fiction without feeling the effects and echoes of Joyce’s influence.

Works in Critical Context

Few writers have as secure a claim to be the major figure of the modernist period in literary history as James Joyce does. Richard Ellmann summarizes the author’s impact on twentieth-century letters: “We are still learning to be James Joyce’s contemporaries, to understand our interpreter.” Critics are unanimous in their praise for Joyce’s artistry while acknowledging the difficulty of his works. Eloise Knowlton comments about *Dubliners*: “The stories . . . take a coldly objective, scrupulously true view of their objects, accomplish a vivid and swift capturing of a single, seemingly accidental moment, and lack an explanatory authorial voice (a caption) that might pin down a specific meaning: a lack that perpetually frustrates students who expect a definite, readable meaning to a tale.”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Joyce’s famous contemporaries include:

Georges Braque (1882–1963): Braque was a French artist and cofounder with Pablo Picasso of the cubist movement in painting.

Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916): Boccioni was an Italian artist, who was influential in the futurist artistic movement, which rejected the past and focused on speed and technology.

Mina Loy (1882–1966): Loy was a British artist and writer, as well as a creator of three-dimensional collages. She turned away from futurism toward modernism.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Stravinsky was a Russian composer who collaborated with ballet choreographers, including Sergei Diaghilev and George Balanchine. He is well-known for his works *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): Woolf was an English author well-known for her modernist novels and a member of the influential Bloomsbury literary group in London.

Similarly, Keith Cushman writes about *Ulysses*: “It is odd that a novel with such a reputation for consummate artistic design should also be universally recognized to be formally problematic. Every serious reader of *Ulysses* must grapple with the apparent divergence of matter and manner, of surface and symbol. . . . Our image of Joyce almost requires that we equip *Ulysses* with a grand design, but any such design is apt to leave out the sheer exuberant messiness of the novel.”

Ulysses Responses to *Ulysses* have been as varied as the different facets of the novel itself, although the antihero figure of Leopold Bloom is so universally beloved that a day named for him (June 16) is celebrated by Joyce enthusiasts around the world (and especially in Dublin, Ireland, where the novel takes place): Bloomsday. Attempting to trace Joyce’s effects on the development of a “world modernism,” literary critic César Augusto Salgado notes several “central Joycean themes—the interplay between the Homeric and the Orphic, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, death and resurrection.” Salgado also describes *Ulysses* as “an anarchical avant-garde work” driven by a “realist imperative to represent a plurality of characters with technical conciseness by filtering their representation and characterization through their own language.”

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man David Daiches argues that in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* “Joyce . . . has given us one of the few examples in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

According to Marvin Magaliner's *Time of Apprenticeship*, James Joyce explained his choice of setting to his friend, Arthur Power: "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." Here are some other works in which a specific city plays an important, universally revealing, role.

City of God (2002), a film directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund. This Academy Award–nominated movie follows a boy growing up in a slum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; it is based on the 1997 novel of the same name by Paolo Lins.

Down and Out in Paris and London (1933), a novel by George Orwell. This debut novel is heavily autobiographical, chronicling an artistic life lived in poverty in two great European cities.

Palace Walk (1988), a novel by Naguib Mahfouz. The first story in the "Cairo Trilogy" by the Nobel Prize–winning novelist, this novel examines the life of a middle-class family in Cairo just after World War I.

A Private Life (2004), a novel by Ran Chen. Written by one of China's leading female authors, this coming-of-age novel traces a girl's maturation in Beijing during the 1980s and 1990s.

Tales of the City (1976), a novel by Armistead Maupin. This novel, originally published as a newspaper serial, tells the story of a group of neighbors in San Francisco, with its thriving alternative culture.

English literature of autobiography successfully employed as a mode of fiction. As autobiography, the work has an almost terrifying honesty; as fiction, it has unity, consistency, probability, and all the other aesthetic qualities we look for in a work of art. . . . *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is perhaps the most flawless of all Joyce's work. The welding of form and content, the choice of detail that seems inevitable once it has been made, the brilliant yet unobtrusive style, these and other qualities give the work a wholeness, a unity, and a completeness possessed by hardly a handful of works in our literature." Looking back at initial responses to the piece, literary scholar Brandon Kershner suggests that in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "Joyce's technique was so convincing that the [early] reviewers had to admit that something beyond conventional realism was at work."

Responses to Literature

1. Joyce wrote about Ireland and the Irish, although he lived abroad for almost all his adult life. What stylistic

features of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* do you think can be attributed to this expatriation? That is, how did being outside of Ireland affect the way Joyce saw and wrote about his native land? Explore a thesis through detailed analysis of concrete passages in Joyce's text.

2. *Ulysses* is famously patterned on Homer's *Odyssey*, replacing the ancient Greek hero of that epic poem with a modern antihero. Research the emergence of the "antihero" in literature, and suggest several reasons why that figure may have emerged and gained popularity when it did. What are some possible cultural impacts of an embrace of the antihero?
3. James Joyce decided to write in English at a time when many Irish writers chose to write in Gaelic instead. Write an essay analyzing his reasons for writing in English, seen by many Irish of the period as the language of the colonizer.
4. Many readers see *Ulysses* as the epitome of modernist style. What ways of seeing the world are reflected in the emergence of this style, and how does this manner of experiencing reality differ from that associated with modernism's literary predecessors? Explore a thesis through detailed analysis of concrete passages in Joyce's text.

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K-L

☒ Franz Kafka

BORN: 1883, Prague, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic)

DIED: 1924, Vienna, Austria

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Fiction, short story

MAJOR WORKS:

The Metamorphosis (1915)

The Country Doctor: A Collection of Fourteen Short Stories (1919)

The Trial (1925)

The Castle: A Novel (1926)

Amerika (1927)

Overview

Czech writer Franz Kafka is one of the founders of modern literature. His most famous works, including “The Metamorphosis,” *The Trial*, and *The Castle* have come to be seen as stories of the struggles of individuals to preserve their dignity and humanity in an increasingly faceless and bureaucratic world. Kafka’s masterful use of the German language and his odd blend of the surreal and the mundane combine to create a unique style of fiction that has proven endlessly fascinating to readers, critics, and other writers for nearly one hundred years.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Kafka was born on July 3, 1883, in Prague, a large provincial capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was home to many Czechs, some Germans, and a lesser number of German-cultured, German-speaking Jews. His father, Hermann Kafka, of humble rural origin, was a hardworking, hard-driving, successful merchant. His mother tongue was Czech, but he spoke German, correctly seeing the language’s importance in the struggle for social and economic mobility and security. Kafka’s mother,

Julie Lowy Kafka, came from a family with older Prague roots and some degree of wealth. She would ultimately prove unable to defuse the tensions between her brusque, domineering husband and her quiet, very sensitive son.

The Father-God Kafka’s father was a powerful, robust, imposing man, successful in his business, who considered his son a weakling unfit for life. Franz’s childhood and youth were overshadowed by constant conflict with his father, whom he respected, even admired, and at the same time feared and subconsciously hated. Kafka later transformed the total lack of communication between them into a recurring relationship in his stories between a God/Father figure and mankind.

Franz Kafka attended only German schools: from 1893 to 1901 the most authoritarian grammar school, the Deutsches Staatsgymnasium in the Old Town Square, and from 1901 to 1906 the Karl Ferdinand University of Prague. In college he initially majored in German literature, but changed in his second semester to the study of law. In June 1906 he graduated with a degree of doctor of jurisprudence.

Civil Service During World War I In October 1906 Kafka started to practice law at the criminal court and later at the civil court in Prague, meanwhile gaining practical experience as an intern in the office of an attorney. In early 1908 he joined the staff of the Workmen’s Compensation Division of the Austrian government. Apparently, he did his job admirably well—so well in fact that his supervisors arranged for him to be excused from military service during World War I. Kafka’s generation of young men was decimated by the brutal European war. Between 1914 and 1918, more than one million Austro-Hungarian soldiers were killed, and more than three and a half million were wounded.

Early Work and Engagement to Felice Bauer Kafka’s first collection of stories was published in 1913 under the title *Contemplation*. These sketches are



Franz Kafka Kafka, Franz, photograph. AP Images.

polished, light impressions based on observations of life in and around Prague. Preoccupied with problems of reality and appearance, they reveal his objective realism based on urban middle-class life. The book is dedicated to “M. B.,” that is, Max Brod, who had been Kafka’s closest friend since their first meeting as university students in 1902.

In September 1912 Kafka met a young Jewish girl from Berlin, Felice Bauer, with whom he fell in love—an affair that was to have far-reaching consequences for all his future work. The immediate result was an artistic breakthrough: He composed in a single sitting, on the night of September 22–23, the story “The Sentence” (also translated as “The Verdict”), dedicated to his future fiancée, Felice, and published the following year in Brod’s annual, *Arcadia*. The story blends fantasy, realism, speculation, and psychological insight and contains all the elements normally associated with Kafka’s disorderly world. In the story, judgment is passed by a bedridden, authoritarian father on his conscientious but guilt-haunted son, who obediently commits suicide.

Kafka’s next work, completed in May 1913, was the story “The Stoker,” later incorporated in his fragmentary

novel *Amerika* and awarded the Fontane Prize in 1915, his first public recognition.

Early in 1913 Kafka became unofficially engaged to Felice in Berlin, but by the end of the summer he had broken all ties, sending a long letter to her father with the explanation that his daughter could never find happiness in marriage to a man whose sole interest in life was literature. The engagement, nevertheless, was officially announced in June 1914, only to be dissolved six weeks later. The two maintained a relationship for some time thereafter.

“The Metamorphosis” The year 1913 saw the publication of Kafka’s best-known story, “The Metamorphosis,” about a man who is transformed into an insect. Shortly thereafter, Kafka created one of the most frightening stories in the novella *In the Penal Colony*, written in 1914. Though he had escaped the horrors of battle during the World War I years, the privations of life in Prague during the war weakened his health. In 1917, he learned he had tuberculosis; around the same time, he broke off his relationship with Felice. In 1919, he developed a serious case of influenza. Kafka’s illnesses did not halt his literary output. The stories Kafka wrote during the war years, were published in 1919 in a collection dedicated to his father and entitled “The Country Doctor.” In 1922, he published the story “The Hunger Artist.” “The Hunger Artist” became the title story for the last book published during the author’s lifetime, a collection of four stories that appeared in 1923.

Unfinished Novels Kafka’s three great novel fragments, *Amerika*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*, might have been lost to the world had it not been for the dedication of Max Brod, who edited them posthumously, ignoring his friend’s request to destroy all of his unpublished manuscripts.

The first of them, begun in 1912 and originally referred to by Kafka as *The Man Who Disappeared*, was published in 1927 under the title *Amerika*. The book, which may be considered a *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education (in the tradition of nineteenth-century German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*), recounts the adventures of Karl Rossmann, who, banished by his father because he was seduced by a servant girl, emigrates to America.

Kafka’s next novel fragment, *The Trial*, which was begun in 1914 and published in 1925, finds the hero, Josef K., suddenly arrested and accused of a crime, the nature of which is never explained. The novel is open to multiple interpretations. Critics such as French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre have speculated that the novel was Kafka’s rendering of Jewish life in an anti-Semitic world. Indeed, though Kafka would not live to see it, anti-Semitism led to the arrest and murder of millions of Jews under the Nazi regime. All three of Kafka’s sisters died in Nazi death camps.

The third and longest of Kafka's novel fragments is *The Castle*, begun in 1918 and published in 1926. The anonymous hero tries in vain to gain access to a castle that somehow symbolizes security and in which a supreme master dwells. Again and again he seeks to settle in the village where the castle is located, but his every attempt to be accepted as a recognized citizen of the community is thwarted.

Ill Health and a Love Affair During the years 1920 to 1922, when he was working on *The Castle*, Kafka's health deteriorated and he was forced to take extensive sick leave. After June 1922 there were no more renewals of Kafka's sick leaves from the insurance company where he worked, and in July he retired on a pension. He left Prague to live with his sister Ottilia in southern Bohemia for several months and then returned to Prague where he continued work on *The Castle*. In the summer of 1923 he vacationed on the Baltic coast with his sister Elli and her family. There he met Dora Diamant, a young girl of Hasidic roots. Her family background and her competence in Hebrew appealed to Kafka equally with her personal attractiveness. He fell deeply in love with her. She remained with him until the end, and under her influence he finally cut all ties with his family and managed to live with her in Berlin. For the first time he was happy, free at last from his father's influence.

He lived with Dora in Berlin until the spring of 1924, when she accompanied him to Austria. There he entered Kierling sanatorium near Klosterneuburg. In 1923 and 1924, when able, Kafka worked on three stories that were published posthumously: "A Little Woman," "The Burrow," and "Josephine, the Songstress; or, The Mice Nation." He died on June 3, 1924, of tuberculosis of the larynx.

Works in Literary Context

Even as a youngster, Kafka wanted to write. For his parents' birthdays he would compose little plays, which were performed at home by his three younger sisters, while he himself acted as stage manager. The lonely boy was an avid reader and became deeply influenced by the works of Goethe, Pascal, Flaubert, and Kierkegaard.

Kafka-esque Qualities The narrative features that are typical of Kafka are a first-person narrator who serves as a persona of the author, an episodic structure, an ambivalent quester on an ambiguous mission, and pervasive irony. He developed and strengthened these themes largely on his own over the course of his writing career, but they are present almost from his earliest stories. Other interpretations of his works that cast them in larger movements or philosophies are varied and still the subject of much debate.

Kafka's works anticipate the appearance of the literary movement of magical realism during the 1940s and 1950s. Writers in this circle, such as Italo Calvino, Isabel Allende, Günter Grass, and Jorge Luis Borges, attempted

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kafka's famous contemporaries include:

Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945): American realist writer of the naturalist school.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Influential artist, codeveloper of the movement known as cubism, which helped usher in a new Modernist period in art.

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): Spanish poet and dramatist killed by the Nationalists at the start of the Spanish Civil War.

Maxim Gorky (1868–1936): Russian writer and political activist who was one of the creators of the literary school of socialist realism.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924): President of the United States from 1913 to 1921, chiefly remembered today for his foreign policy following the end of World War I.

H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937): American writer of horror, fantasy, and science fiction tales, he imagined an entire "mythos" filled with uncaring cosmic beings and wholly alien supernatural entities.

Nikola Tesla (1856–1943): Serbian physicist, engineer, and inventor who discovered AC (alternating current), invented the radio, and laid the groundwork for radar, robotics, and remote control.

to encompass objective reality as well as psychological processes. The text itself constructs its own reality, to which the reader must adapt or else be left feeling like an outsider.

Existentialism Perhaps Kafka's early reading of the philosopher Kierkegaard imbued his stories and his protagonists with ideas that would later be called existentialism, a family of philosophies that interpret human existence in its concreteness and problematic character. An important tenet of existentialism is that the individual is not a detached observer of the world, which is essentially chaotic and indifferent to humans. Humans make themselves what they are by choosing a way of life. Kafka's alienated protagonists often choose to accept the absurdity of their situation, which leads to their demise.

Influence Kafka's blend of surreal confusion and dark humor have influenced many artists in the decades following his death. Italian film director Federico Fellini is perhaps the most visibly "Kafka-esque" cinematic storyteller, rivaled only by David Lynch. Among the authors who owe a debt to Kafka's work are Vladimir Nabokov, Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, Albert Camus, and Salman Rushdie.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many other writers have explored themes of alienation and transformation and their often tragic outcomes, both before and after Kafka.

“The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” (1886), by Robert Louis Stevenson. In this, one of Stevenson’s early stories, a physician uses a potion to change himself into an evil, repulsive man, an intentional transformation with results every bit as dire as those in Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.”

Frankenstein (1818), by Mary Shelley. A classic novel about a monster who is frustrated in his attempts to connect with human beings. The monster is a rational, thinking creature that finds himself utterly rejected by those around him. His relationship with the scientist who creates him echoes the recurring Father/God theme in Kafka’s writing.

“The Fly” (1957), by George Langelaan, is a story that focuses on a scientist who transforms himself into a fly. The story was reprinted in *Wolf’s Complete Book of Terror*, edited by Leonard Wolf (Potter, 1979), and was made into movies under the same name in 1958 and 1986.

The Stranger (1942), by Albert Camus. Also translated as *The Outsider*, this is a novel concerning an alienated outsider who inexplicably commits a murder.

Notes from Underground (1864), by Fyodor Dostoevsky. A novel-length monologue by an alienated antihero who stays indoors and denounces the world outside.

Works in Critical Context

The body of critical commentary on the works of Franz Kafka is massive enough to have warranted the description “fortress Kafka.” Here two of the author’s most well-known works will be examined by way of demonstrating the great depth and variety of interpretations that arise from Kafka’s works.

The Trial Critics have approached *The Trial* from multiple directions. Some have taken a biographical approach, reading the novel through the lens of Kafka’s own diary and seeing his book as a reflection of his anxiety over his engagement to Felice Bauer. In his *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, Jean-Paul Sartre interpreted the novel as Kafka’s reaction to being a Jew in an anti-Jewish society. Others have sought literary inspirations for *The Trial*: critic Guillermo Sánchez Trujillo devoted twenty years of his academic career to examining connections between Kafka’s book and the works of nineteenth-century Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky. No interpretation is considered

definitive, and the novel continues to spark critical interest.

“*The Metamorphosis*” Gabriel García Márquez has said that it was upon reading “The Metamorphosis” that he realized “that it was possible to write in a different way.” By 1973, Stanley Corngold was able to publish a collection of essays on “The Metamorphosis” containing summaries of well over a hundred articles, written as early as 1916, when Robert Miller described the story as ingenious but implausible. In subsequent years, commentators have generally taken for granted the quality and importance of the story and have focused on trying to interpret it.

There have been many different and contradictory interpretations. Freudian critics have seen in it a working out of the Oedipal struggle between a father and a son who are rivals for Gregor’s mother. Marxist critics have seen the story as depicting the exploitation of the working class. Gregor Samsa has also been seen as a Christ figure who dies so that his family can live.

Critics interested in language and form have seen the story as the working out of a metaphor, an elaboration on the common comparison of a man to an insect. Some critics have emphasized the autobiographical elements in the story, pointing out the similarities between the Samsas’ household and the Kafkas’ while also noting the similarity of the names “Samsa” and “Kafka,” a similarity that Kafka himself was aware of, though he said—in a conversation cited in Nahum Glatzer’s edition of his stories—that Samsa was not merely Kafka and nothing else.

Responses to Literature

1. Father-son relationships play a major role in Kafka’s work. The interactions have reminded many of psychologist Sigmund Freud’s description of the so-called Oedipus complex. Using your library and the Internet, research the Oedipus complex. Do you think it provides a useful framework for discussing Kafka’s work?
2. Whether in literary forms, science fiction, movies, or television shows, Kafka has proved to be a major source of inspiration. Select a work that you feel is Kafka-esque and write an essay in which you defend your choice by comparing it to one of Kafka’s stories.
3. What would you do if you awoke one morning to find, like Gregor Samsa, that you had the body of a giant insect? Describe how you would feel, how you think your family and friends would react, and how you might try to adjust to your new form and appearance.
4. Kafka’s novel *The Trial* has often been interpreted as a religious commentary. How much do you think such a critique is supported by the text? Pick a religion, such as Calvinism, Catholicism, or Judaism, and discuss the possible textual evidence for its influence.

5. One interpretation of Kafka's story "A Hunger Artist" suggests that this depiction of an artist who creates his work through periods of voluntary starvation is an allegory of the role of the artist in the modern world. Write an essay in which you analyze the story and support this interpretation. Apply the interpretation to writers and artists with whom you are familiar.

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☒ Yasunari Kawabata

BORN: 1899, Osaka, Japan

DIED: 1972, Zushi, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Dancing Girl of Izu (1926)

Snow Country (1947)

Thousand Cranes (1952)

House of the Sleeping Beauties, and Other Stories (1961)

Overview

Yasunari Kawabata is an internationally acclaimed fiction writer and the first author from Japan to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. His works are noted for their blending of a modern sensibility with an allusive, highly



Yasunari Kawabata *Kawabata, Yasunari, photograph. AP Images.*

nuanced style derived from traditional literature. Kawabata strove, in both his short and long fiction, to create exquisitely detailed images that resonate with meanings that remain unexpressed.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Tragedies Kawabata was born on June 14, 1899, in Osaka, Japan. He was orphaned at an early age. His father died when he was two, and his mother died the following year. Biographers point out that the young Kawabata suffered several other losses and earned the nickname Master of Funerals for the number of ceremonies he attended in his youth, including those of his grandparents, with whom he lived after his parents died, and that of his only sister.

Kawabata began his literary activities while still in his teens. His earliest known story was "Diary of a Sixteen-Year-Old," written in 1914 and recording his impressions at the time of his grandfather's death. He attended Tokyo Imperial University and obtained a degree in Japanese literature in 1924. As a young man, Kawabata was interested in Western literature and artistic movements. While he had these interests, Japan was being recognized as the third leading naval power in the world, and saw its domestic economy rapidly expanding. Japan was being

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kawabata's famous contemporaries include:

Erich Fromm (1900–1980): The German American philosopher, psychologist, and psychoanalyst who was associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. His books include *Escape from Freedom* (1941).

Roberto Arlt (1900–1942): An Argentinian author whose novels utilized slang, including copious amounts of vulgarity, which was unusual for Argentinian literature of the time. His novels include *Seven Madmen* (1929).

Hirohoito (1901–1989): Emperor of Japan during World War II and beyond.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): An American novelist and short-story writer. Like Kawabata, Hemingway sometimes wrote very short stories (often called vignettes), most of them included in his collection *In Our Time* (1925). Hemingway committed suicide in 1961.

Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967): American physicist who directed the U.S. government's Manhattan Project, which was responsible for developing the world's first nuclear weapon.

transformed from an agricultural to an industrial nation, and universal manhood suffrage was enacted in 1925.

James Joyce and Kawabata's Entrance into the Literary Scene Proficient in English, Kawabata read James Joyce's *Ulysses* in its original language and was strongly influenced for a time by stream-of-consciousness techniques. Joyce was going through a long struggle to overturn a ban imposed on his novel in a number of countries. The controversy over Joyce's novel is indicative of the times, for the perceived problem with the text is a scene in which Joyce depicts one of his characters masturbating. Kawabata was not alienated by the text and its supposed immoral content. In fact, after reading the text, Kawabata joined a number of other writers to form the literary journal the *Age of Literary Arts*, which favored Shinkankaku-ha (The Neosensualist or New Perceptionist) movement in literature. Although Kawabata's active participation in such movements is generally regarded as exploratory and temporary, he maintained an interest in modern literary currents throughout his life. His only career was as a writer, besides brief teaching stints at American universities in the 1960s.

Illustrious Career, Tragic Suicide Best known as a novelist, Kawabata nevertheless wrote short stories throughout his career, and he himself suggested that the essence of his art lay in his short pieces. In English, his short fiction is principally represented by two collec-

tions: *House of the Sleeping Beauties, and Other Stories* (1961) and *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* (1988).

The former contains, in addition to the title work, "Nemureru Bijo," the stories "One Arm" and "Of Birds and Beasts." The latter features just over half of the estimated 146 very brief pieces that Kawabata called *tanagokoro no shosetsu* ("stories that fit into the palm of the hand"). Sometimes little more than a page in length, these highly condensed, allusive stories range in tone and form from the humorous to the poignant evocation of a single image or mood. His last, "Gleanings from Snow Mountain," written just prior to his death, distills his full-length novel *Snow Country* (1937) into a story of some nine pages. "The Izu Dancer," one of Kawabata's first literary successes, was also published in an English translation in the anthology of Japanese fiction *The Izu Dancer, and Other Stories* (1964).

Committed Suicide During his career, Kawabata won a number of Japanese literary awards and honors, as well as the German Goethe Medal (1959), the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger (1961), and the Nobel Prize (1968). Kawabata took his own life in 1972; he left no note, and the reasons for his suicide are unknown.

Works in Literary Context

Kawabata was an avid reader of both English and Japanese literature. As a teenager, he was enamored with the work of James Joyce, and this interest led him into multiple experimentations with form and narrative technique, including the use of stream of consciousness. As Kawabata continued to mature as an author, however, he moved into a less easily labeled form of writing, based in part on the elusiveness of haiku. Finally, Kawabata fully realized his literary style in the creation of what he called "palm-of-the-hand stories," in which small incidents and stories stand for much more than they appear to.

Experimentation Kawabata's literary prominence began early when as a student in 1924 he joined with Riichi Yokomitsu and other young writers to found the literary journal the *Age of Literary Arts*, the mouthpiece of the Shinkankaku-ha, or Neosensualist movement. Members of this short-lived but important avant-garde literary movement experimented with cubism (an art style that breaks down the natural forms of subjects into geometric shapes), Dadaism (a style that ridiculed contemporary culture and art forms), futurism (a movement that opposed traditionalism and stressed the ideals and dynamic movements of the machine age), and surrealism (an art and literary style that drew on the subconscious for inspiration and often used fantastic imagery) in an effort to capture the pure feelings and sensations of life. For a time, Kawabata was also influenced by stream-of-consciousness techniques but later returned to a more traditional style that critics have had difficulty categorizing because of its uniqueness.

Kawabata's distinctively Japanese writings are characterized by nostalgia, eroticism, and melancholy. He presents these elements with a poetic style sometimes described as a series of linked haiku, thus making his work "most resistant to translation," noted Ivan Morris. Lance Morrow agreed that Kawabata's "fiction seems to be most valued in Japanese for those qualities that are most difficult to render in translation: precision and delicacy of image, the shimmer of haiku, an allusive sadness and minute sense of the impermanence of things."

"Palm-of-the-Hand Stories" Many of Kawabata's short stories are in the form of what he called *tanagokoro no shosetsu* ("palm-of-the-hand stories"), a selection of which has appeared in English under the same title. He said he wrote them in the same way that others wrote poetry. However, the implications of a "palm" story, sometimes only a few paragraphs long, reach beyond the obvious reference to the scale. In Japan, as in the West, there are many people who profess to read fortunes from the pattern of lines on the hand, and with all such magical systems there are elements of synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part) and metaphor—the hand representing the circumstances of the entire body and one small line standing for a whole complex of events.

Many of Kawabata's short short stories work in precisely this way, an apparently casual remark or trivial circumstance alluding to a crucial event in a person's past, or else predicting one in the future. For example, in "The Sparrow's Matchmaking," a man is trying to decide if he wants to marry a woman whose photograph he has been shown, when he suddenly sees the image of a sparrow reflected in the garden pond. Somehow sure that this sparrow will be his wife in the next life, he feels that it will be right to accept the woman in the photograph as his bride in this life. A Christian reference to the sparrow is almost certainly intended, since Kawabata read the Bible carefully and often alluded to it in his stories. In the Bible, Jesus says that since God guides the lives of creatures as insignificant as sparrows, surely he guides and protects humans.

Influence Kawabata carved a unique niche in world literature, and while many have praised his writing, none has really been able to follow his lead. American author Steven Millhauser has approximated the suggestiveness of Kawabata's stories, but Millhauser's work belongs to another tradition altogether—surrealism—and is easily yoked to the conventions of that school of writing.

Works in Critical Context

While recognizing the difficulty of reading Kawabata's works—indeed, they often concede that much of what makes the work worth reading is difficult if not impossible for Western readers to fully grasp—few critics say that the struggle is unwarranted. Critics, in fact, struggle for the words to describe the subjective, intuitive nature

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Kawabata's work has been described as being influenced by poetry. Specifically, his fiction bears the mark of the haiku in its use of allusive, suggestive transitions from one moment to the next. Here are a few more works of art that utilize other art forms to achieve desired effects:

Crank (2004), a novel by Ellen Hopkins. This novel about teenage drug addiction is written entirely in poems—poems intended to capture the intense feelings experienced by the addicts themselves.

Iron and Men (1915), a play by Paer Lagerkvist. Lagerkvist, when he wrote this play, believed that literature needed a shot in the arm in the form of expressionism and cubism, the ideals of which he attempted to exemplify in the play.

of the writer's work, suggesting that while one often has a powerful experience while reading Kawabata, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint the origin and exact nature of this experience, let alone how the text provoked it. It is this elusive nature of Kawabata's work that intrigues critics most and is the subject of much of their appraisal of his work.

Novels Western readers often find Kawabata's novels to be troublesome because of the unusual writing style and also because "some of the nuances may well be lost on people who do not know the Japanese scene and do not fully understand the nature of Japanese social and family relationships," observed a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer. D. J. Enright claimed that even "the most attentive reader, and the most prurient, will be hard put to know what exactly is going on at times" in some of Kawabata's books. Nevertheless, Gwenn R. Boardman promised that a "careful reading of his work offers an aesthetic experience not to be found in the west."

Snow Country and *Thousand Cranes* were the first of Kawabata's novels to be translated into English. Although eroticism and cosmopolitan settings made the books accessible to Westerners, they attracted only a small readership. Comparing the two novels, Enright declared that *Snow Country* "is distinctly superior to *Thousand Cranes*." In the latter, Enright explained, "the characters are so faintly drawn as to seem hardly two-dimensional" and the end of the story is so cryptic that the reader is unable to discern "what is being done and who is doing it to whom." Enright praised *Snow Country*, which Kawabata spent over fourteen years perfecting, for its sensitive and adroit portrayal of the relationship of man and nature. Boardman also extolled the book, saying that "Kawabata's characterization is such a subtle web of

allusion and suggestion, that [any] summary cannot do justice to *Snow Country*.”

Short Stories Although novels make up the largest part of Kawabata’s output, critics generally consider the economy and precision of his short fiction more reflective of his artistry. Many have pointed out that Kawabata’s longer works are often structured as a series of brief suggestive scenes of the sort that typically constitute his short stories. As Holman observed in his introduction to *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*, the very short story “appears to have been Kawabata’s basic unit of composition from which his longer works were built, after the manner of linked-verse poetry, in which discrete verses are joined to form a longer poem.” Masao Miyoshi also detected a similarity between Kawabata’s method and the writing of poetry when he compared the author’s technique in “The Izu Dancer” to that of haiku poems: Kawabata, he noted, “instead of explaining the characters’ thoughts and feelings, merely suggests them by mentioning objects which . . . are certain to reverberate with tangible, if not identifiable emotions.”

Critics commonly praise the vivid clarity of Kawabata’s images and their power to evoke universal human fears of loneliness, loss of love, and death. Yukio Mishima, for example, likened the intensity Kawabata creates in “House of the Sleeping Beauties” to being trapped on an airless submarine. “While in the grip of this story,” he stated, “the reader sweats and grows dizzy, and knows with the greatest immediacy the terror of lust urged on by the approach of death.” Gwenn Boardman Petersen found sadness and longing recurring concerns for the author, and Arthur G. Kimball judged Kawabata’s treatment of such themes the source of the timeless quality of his works.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Thousand Cranes*. Enright, the critic, says of this text that when you finish it, you barely understand what happens, who does it, and to whom it is done. Respond to this critic’s assessment, citing specific passages from the text. Do you feel satisfied with the way the text ends? Why or why not? Write a paper in which you explain your conclusions.
2. Read Ellen Hopkins’s novel *Crank* and Kawabata’s *Snow Country*. In the first, Hopkins uses poems to tell a story, while in the second, Kawabata’s narrative feels something like the experience of reading a group of haikus. Reflect on the effects obtained in each text by using poetry—either explicitly or implicitly. How do you think the texts would be changed if they followed more traditional standards for novels? Cite specific passages from the text in your written response, but remember that these are your subjective opinions. Explore them freely.
3. Do you believe your ability to understand fully Kawabata’s writing is, as one reviewer has suggested, hindered by the fact that you are not immersed in Japanese tradition and culture? Can you pick out a few passages from one of Kawabata’s texts that seem especially difficult to understand because you do not know the Japanese traditions and culture as well as Kawabata? Create a presentation in which you outline your findings.
4. Read a few of Kawabata’s palm-of-the-hand stories. What makes these stories work? How could you employ the devices Kawabata uses in them in a story of your own? Now, take a short story you’ve already written or that you enjoy that someone else has written and attempt to rewrite it as a palm-of-the-hand story.

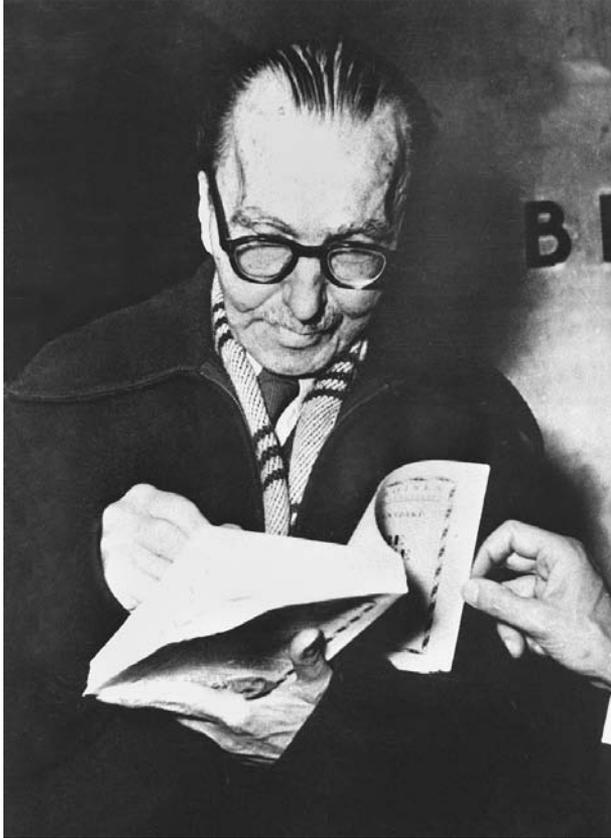
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Nikos Kazantzakis

BORN: 1883, Heraklion, Crete
DIED: 1957, Freiburg, West Germany
NATIONALITY: Greek
GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry
MAJOR WORKS:
Zorba the Greek (1946)
The Greek Passion (1948)
Captain Michalis (1950)
The Last Temptation of Christ (1951)



Nikos Kazantzakis © Roger-Viollet / The Image Works

Overview

Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis is best remembered as the author of *Zorba the Greek* (1946), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1951), and other philosophical novels in which he explored the spiritual and intellectual anguish of modern humanity. Throughout his life, he espoused then rejected many beliefs, and he ultimately developed a personal philosophy that drew heavily on the ideas of philosophers Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, viewing existence as a constant struggle of opposing forces while affirming the progressive nature of human development. Kazantzakis's philosophy also included elements of Christianity tempered in later years by the skepticism characteristic of modern thought, and his unorthodox treatment of religious subjects and themes has often evoked censure from representatives of established religions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Turbulent Homeland Born in Heraklion, a port city on the northern coast of the island of Crete, Kazantzakis grew up during a particularly turbulent period in Cretan history, when nationalist rebels were struggling

to overthrow their Turkish rulers and return the island to Greek control. In 1897, rebel insurrections led to open warfare between Greece and the Ottoman Empire (which included Turkey), forcing the Kazantzakis family to seek refuge on Naxos, a small Greek island that was unaffected by the fighting. Crete became an autonomous state under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire in 1898, and the family returned to Crete in 1899.

After completing his secondary education in Heraklion, Kazantzakis enrolled in the school of law at the University of Athens. He began to write fiction and dramas during this period, and he published his first work, the romantic novella *Serpent and Lily* (1906), shortly after receiving his law degree. The following year, Kazantzakis went to Paris to study law at the Sorbonne and to work on his doctoral thesis, in which he examined the influence of Nietzsche on the philosophy of law. While in Paris, he attended Henri Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France; greatly impressed with the French philosopher's ideas, he thereafter considered himself a disciple of Bergson.

Fully Launched Literary Career Returning to Greece in 1909, Kazantzakis began to write verse dramas and to translate works by Bergson, Nietzsche, William James, and Charles Darwin, among others. Three years later, he was appointed to the cabinet of the future King George II of Greece, and he subsequently served the Greek government in a variety of official and semiofficial capacities. However, he spent most of the next three decades traveling in Europe, Asia, and Africa and writing articles about his excursions.

During a 1922 sojourn in Berlin, Kazantzakis became interested in the political philosophy of Karl Marx and participated in leftist discussion groups. (Marx promoted the idea of a social system where everyone would be equal and no one would be poor. Though his views were banned from many countries, Marxism inspired the 1917 Russian Revolution and is the basis of many socialist and communist governments.) Soon afterward, Kazantzakis began promoting Marxism in his travels throughout Europe, chronicling his activities in the autobiographical novel *Toda-Raba* (1934).

Disillusioned with Marxism In 1925, Kazantzakis visited the Soviet Union to witness firsthand the benefits of Marxism, and two years later he returned to Moscow to participate in the celebration marking the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. (The October Revolution is another name for part of the greater Russian Revolution, referring to the time in October 1917 when Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik followers wrested control of the nation away from the provisional government of Aleksandr Kerensky.) However, Kazantzakis became disenchanted with Marxism, and in fact with all existing ideological systems, in light of the worsening political and economic situation of Europe in the 1930s. During the 1930s, leaders like Germany's Adolf Hitler came to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kazantzakis's famous contemporaries include:

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Called “Mahatma,” meaning “great soul,” Gandhi was the central political and spiritual leader of the Indian Independence Movement in the twentieth century. His policies of nonviolent resistance were both effective in his homeland and an inspiration for other movements around the world.

Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964): One of the greatest and most controversial generals in American history, MacArthur made a name for himself as an officer in World War I, then became a national hero for his leadership in the Pacific during World War II. In 1951, President Truman removed MacArthur from command of the United Nations forces fighting in Korea after MacArthur publicly criticized Truman's policies.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and Nobel laureate, Neruda was a committed communist and one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century.

Rachel Carson (1907–1964): An American marine biologist whose book *Silent Spring* (1962) is credited with sparking the environmentalist movement.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Novelist, poet, and playwright, Albert Camus was a well-known and widely read French existentialist. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, and his books include *The Rebel* (1951).

power. The fascist leader of Nazi Germany, Hitler imbued his country with territorial ambitions and greatly expanded its military. Such tensions eventually led to World War II.

As the decade progressed, Kazantzakis began to concentrate his energies on the completion of his most ambitious work, the massive verse epic *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1938). Having created the first version of the poem between 1924 and 1927, he completely rewrote it four times in the next eleven years, altering the content to reflect his own disillusionment with political solutions as well as his increasing concern for the spiritual well-being of modern humanity.

Popular Success *The Odyssey* drew little attention upon its publication, and it was not until the final decade of his life that Kazantzakis published the novels for which he is remembered today. Already well known as a political activist, cultural ambassador, and translator, Kazantzakis gained popular success as a novelist with the publication of *Zorba the Greek* in 1946. Kazantzakis wrote the autobiographical work during the early part of the decade as a tribute to his close friend George Zorba, with whom he had undertaken a mining venture in Crete in 1917. The

author, as quoted by George T. Karnezis in the *Carnegie Series in English: A Modern Miscellany*, professed a deep admiration for Zorba, whom he felt “possessed ‘the broadest soul, the soundest body, and the freest cry I have known in my life.’” The novel's narrator is accepted by critics as Kazantzakis's self-portrait as an artist and philosopher.

Religious Themes The controversy regarding Kazantzakis's heterodox Christianity began with the publication of his next novel, *The Greek Passion* (1954), in which the modern Christian church is depicted as an ossified institution that has ceased to embody the teachings of Christ. Kazantzakis further developed this theme with *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1955), a psychological study of Jesus. A surrealist fictional biography of Christ, whom Kazantzakis considered to be the supreme embodiment of man's battle to overcome his sensual desires in pursuit of a spiritual existence, the novel focuses on what Kazantzakis imagines as the psychological aspects of Jesus's character and how Christ overcomes his human limitations to unite with God.

Despite harsh criticism of his theological viewpoint, Kazantzakis enjoyed popular and critical acclaim throughout this latter portion of his career, and in 1957, the year of his death from complications of lymphoma, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Works in Literary Context

Kazantzakis's writing is often appraised as a single body that reveals the author's philosophical and spiritual values. Most critics agree that his writings are at least partially autobiographical. But although Kazantzakis's works seek to reconcile the dualities of human nature—mind and body, affirmation and despair, even life and death—some critics have suggested that the author's ultimate concern lies more in striving to overcome inherent human conflicts than in resolving them.

Nietzsche and Bergson Critics suggest that philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson strongly influenced Kazantzakis's thought. The author was especially interested in the concepts Nietzsche outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), wherein Nietzsche postulated that the primary tension in human nature exists between man's physical drives and his intellectual and spiritual impulses; this idea is central to Kazantzakis's themes. The author was also profoundly interested in Bergson's concept of progressive spiritual development as man's attempt to escape the constraints of his physical and social existence and unite with what Bergson termed the *élan vital*, the universal creative force. Both *Serpent and Lily*, which focused on a young man's struggle to balance the physical and spiritual elements of his love for a woman, and *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises* (1927), an essay in which the author explains his early philosophical

concerns, display these influences, as do many of Kazantzakis's subsequent works.

Spiritual Plight of Mankind Late in his career, Kazantzakis explored the spiritual plight of mankind. This concern is most explicitly manifested in *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In the former, Kazantzakis presented two characters who exemplify the poles of the conflict, Zorba representing a sensual figure, while the man known as “the boss” embodies more high-minded traits. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the conflict is portrayed as the essential dilemma of Christ, who is torn between his wish to serve God and his physical appetites. Characteristically, Kazantzakis does not attempt to present a resolution to the sensual-spiritual conflict in these novels. Zorba and his boss learn from their exchange of ideas but part essentially unchanged, while Christ, even as he is sacrificing himself on the cross, dreams of leading the sensually satisfying life of an ordinary man.

Works in Critical Context

While Kazantzakis's stature as a unique voice in modern literature is uncontested, critical opinion about the literary quality of his individual works is frequently divided. Many hold the view that Kazantzakis subordinated his artistic concerns to the philosophical ideas he wanted to express. While some critics admire what they consider the passionate poetic voice with which the author communicates with his readers, others appreciate the realistic descriptions, metaphors, and profuse imagery that comprise Kazantzakis's writing style.

Importance of Later Novels Although Kazantzakis regarded *The Odyssey* as his masterpiece, critics generally consider Kazantzakis's later novels more significant as illustrations of both his literary aims and his philosophy, praising the profound understanding of the human condition displayed in these works and commending Kazantzakis's affirmations of the value of human existence. In addition, many suggest that Kazantzakis's use of modern demotic Greek, rather than the accepted literary language, represents a significant advancement in the development of Greek literature. Long popular in his native country, his novels have been widely translated, and three of them—*Zorba the Greek*, *The Greek Passion*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*—have served as the basis for films. As a result, Kazantzakis remains an important and much-discussed figure in world literature, reflecting the traditional culture of his native Crete while exemplifying the philosophical concerns of the modern European intellectual community.

The Odyssey Critics assert that *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* functions at an allegorical as well as autobiographical level. As explained by John Ciardi in the *Saturday Review*, each episode in the poem is “an allegory of a stage of the soul, and all are threaded together on a series of mythic

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works that attempt to address the dualities of life, as Kazantzakis's so often did, include:

Full Metal Jacket (1987), a film directed by Stanley Kubrick. Ostensibly about the Vietnam War, *Full Metal Jacket* focuses on the polar extremes of human existence: the warmth of humanity and the cold brutality of war.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), a novella by Robert Louis Stevenson. One of Stevenson's best-known works, this novella examines how one man can encompass both good and evil within the same personality.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. One of the central themes of Dostoyevsky's masterpiece is that humans possess a duality that manifests as both external and internal conflicts. The inner conflict between the two sides of central character Raskolnikov's dual nature drives most of the novel.

themes.” Odysseus progresses, according to the reviewer, through seven stages of “Bestiality, Battle-Hunger, Lust, Pure Intellect, Despair, Detachment, and, finally, Pure Soul.” Critics disagree, however, in their interpretations of the poem's ending. Some regard Odysseus's solitary death as Kazantzakis's comment on life's ultimate meaninglessness, while others construe Odysseus's withdrawal as the triumph of man's soul over both his physical existence and the random disasters that endanger it.

Although critics in Greece reportedly reacted negatively to Kazantzakis's use of demotic language, reception of the work in English translation was generally favorable, with some reviewers admiring the quality of the poetry itself. “The literary achievement of Kazantzakis's *Odyssey* lies in his rich and sonorous language and vivid and original imagery,” asserted C. A. Trypanis, for example, in the *Manchester Guardian*. But some critics found the poem outdated and unoriginal. “There is something oddly old-fashioned about this poem. . . . Not a new departure nor a daring experiment, but simply a kind of nostalgia for the days of the grand style and the picaresque epic,” noted *Poetry* contributor L. O. Coxe. Still other reviewers were highly enthusiastic in their praise, hailing the epic as a masterpiece. Adonis Decavalles, for instance, in another *Poetry* review, lauded *The Odyssey* as “undoubtedly the greatest long poem of our time, a colossal achievement in art and substance. It is the mature product of Kazantzakis's deep familiarity with the best in world literature and thought, of intense living, traveling, and thinking.”

The Last Temptation of Christ Angered by *The Last Temptation of Christ's* presentation of Christ's humanity, the Greek Orthodox Church branded Kazantzakis a heretic and threatened to excommunicate him. The book was also placed on the Roman Catholic Index of Forbidden Books, most probably because of its depiction of Jesus's desire to marry and beget children. Criticism of the English translation ranged from the disapproving to the highly laudatory. The *Christian Century's* Kyle Haselden expressed disappointment with Christ's characterization, maintaining that Kazantzakis "writes divinely of that which is human. . . . But in depicting that which is divine the novelist is reduced to the human touch."

Atlantic contributor Phoebe Adams assessed *The Last Temptation's* Jesus as a literary figure, noting that "this Jesus is not the assured son of God following a preaccepted path, but a man who, in God's service, . . . assumes something of the character of those epic heroes who choose their deaths—Achilles sailing for Troy under the shadow of the prophecy, or Cuchulainn riding on to battle when he knows his magical luck has left him." More impressed was Nancie Matthews in the *New York Times Book Review*, who described *The Last Temptation of Christ* as a "mosaic of all the highlights of the Gospel story, vividly colored by . . . extravagant imagery, which is always richly overflowing but at times is distasteful, too." She concluded, "If the book can be read without prejudice, this will be found a powerfully moving story of a great spiritual victory."

Responses to Literature

1. The theme of the struggle between spirit and flesh predominates in Kazantzakis's writings. Read at least one work by the author and write a paper in which you explain how this theme affects the work you have chosen.
2. There is a marked contrast between Zorba and the narrator in *Zorba the Greek*. Create a presentation in which you display these differences for the class.
3. How does Kazantzakis portray Jesus Christ's psychological struggles in *The Last Temptation of Christ*? What are some of the criticisms that have been leveled against this portrayal? Write a paper in which you outline your opinions on the matter.
4. How does Kazantzakis relate New Testament events to the modern political conflict between Greece and Turkey in *The Greek Passion*? With a partner, create a visual presentation of your findings.
5. Critics have claimed that Odysseus in Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* is an autobiographical figure. Why did Kazantzakis cast himself as a wanderer? Discuss the significance of travel in Kazantzakis's life in a paper.

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John Keats

BORN: 1795, London

DIED: 1821, Rome

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, letters, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems (1817)

Endymion (1818)

Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems (1820)

The Letters of John Keats (1958)

Overview

John Keats is recognized as a key figure in the English Romantic movement, a period in which writers placed the individual at the core of all experience, valued imagination and beauty, and looked to nature for revelation of truth. Although his literary career spanned only four years and consisted of a mere fifty-four poems, Keats demonstrated remarkable intellectual and artistic development.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood and Family Tragedies Scholars often note that Keats's childhood provides no hint of the genius to emerge. Born October 31, 1795, the oldest of four children of a stable-keeper, Keats was raised in Moorfields, London. His father died from injuries sustained in a fall from a horse when Keats was seven. This accident



John Keats *Keats, John, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

proved to be the first in a series of losses and dislocations that would pursue Keats throughout his brief life and convince him of art's power to bring solace and meaning to human suffering. In 1803, Keats enrolled at the Clarke School in nearby Enfield, where he was distinguished only by his small stature (he was barely over five feet tall as an adult) and somewhat confrontational disposition. At the Clarke school, Keats first encountered the works that influenced his early poetry, including Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and John Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, on which he based his knowledge of Greek mythology.

Keats's mother died of tuberculosis in 1810, and the Keats children were placed in the care of a guardian, Richard Abbey. At the time, tuberculosis was a pandemic in Europe. About 25 percent of all deaths in the early nineteenth century in Europe were attributable to tuberculosis. Doctors did not yet understand how the disease was spread, and accepted treatment for the disease often made the condition worse.

Writing in Secret While Pursuing a Medical Career At fifteen, Keats was apprenticed to an apothecary. Four years later, he entered Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals in London, where he completed medical courses and in 1816 passed the examinations to become an apothecary. Keats had begun to compose poetry as early as 1812, however, and secretly decided to support himself on his small inheritance after graduation and

devote himself to writing. To avoid a confrontation with his guardian, Keats continued his studies to become a surgeon, carefully concealing his decision from Abbey until he had reached the age of majority and was free of his guardian's jurisdiction.

An Influential Circle of Friends Keats's meeting in 1816 with Leigh Hunt influenced his decision to pursue a career as a poet, and Hunt published Keats's early poems in his liberal journal, the *Examiner*. Keats was drawn readily into Hunt's circle, which included the poet John Hamilton Reynolds, the critic William Hazlitt, and the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon. *Poems*, an early collection, was published in 1817 but received little attention. His next work, *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*, a full-length allegory based on Greek mythology, was published the following year to mixed reviews. Soon after the appearance of *Endymion*, Keats began to experience the first symptoms of tuberculosis, the disease that had killed his mother and in 1818 his brother, Tom. Following Tom's death, Keats lived with his close friend Charles Armitage Brown in Hampstead.

"Half in love with easeful Death..." It was around this time that he composed his famous "Ode to a Nightingale," a moody, sumptuous poem in which the speaker lauds the beautiful sound of the nightingale and fantasizes about dying—"to cease upon the midnight with no pain"—and forgetting all "the weariness, the fever, and the fret." The poem seems to be a clear reaction to Tom's death and his own infirmity, as Keats laments that he lives in a world where "youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies." At the same time, the poem calls the bird "immortal" and timeless. The bird represents Keats the poet, capable of producing a beautiful "song" that will live after he is gone.

Keats continued writing and spent a considerable amount of time reading the works of William Wordsworth, John Milton, and Shakespeare. Here Keats also fell in love with Fanny Brawne, a neighbor's daughter. The rigors of work, poor health, and constant financial difficulties prevented the two from fulfilling their desire to be married.

In a final effort to regain his health, Keats sailed to Italy in September 1820; he died in Rome in February of the following year. He is buried there beneath a gravestone that bears an epitaph he himself composed: "Here lies one whose name was writ on water."

Works in Literary Context

Keats's poems, especially the later works published in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), are praised not only for their sensuous imagery and passionate tone but also for the insight they provide into aesthetic and human concerns, particularly the transience of beauty and happiness. The artistic philosophy described in the famous quote from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—"beauty is truth, truth beauty"—is clarified in his correspondence with his family and friends. In

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Keat's famous contemporaries include:

- Napoléon Bonaparte** (1769–1821): General of the French Revolution and, later, emperor of France.
- William Wordsworth** (1770–1850): Wordsworth was the most influential of the Romantic poets and the one who most emphasized the importance of nature.
- Simón Bolívar** (1783–1830): This South American liberator eventually died of tuberculosis.
- George Gordon, Lord Byron** (1788–1824): This notorious and melancholy Romantic poet was known for his dark moods and stormy lines.
- Walt Whitman** (1819–1892): Although American, Whitman wrote poems on some of the same themes as his fellow Romantics across the ocean; namely, a celebration of nature and an appreciation of artistic passion.
- Matthew Arnold** (1822–1888): A great poet of the late Victorian era, Arnold cited Keats as a major influence.

these letters, which some readers value as much as his poems, it is possible to trace the evolution of Keats's poetic thought and technique as he matured.

Romantic Movement Keats was a quintessential Romantic poet. The Romantic Movement in literature, which began in the late eighteenth century, was a reaction against what was seen as the cold rationality of the Enlightenment period. During the Enlightenment, developments in science and technology ushered in the massive social changes in western society. The Industrial Revolution brought about population explosions in European cities while the works of political scientists and philosophers laid the groundwork for the American and French Revolutions. The Romantics viewed science and technology skeptically, and stressed the beauty of nature and individual emotion in their work.

Transience of Life Perhaps because of the widespread presence of tuberculosis among those he loved and in Europe in general, Keats seemed to recognize that time moved swiftly and that life was fleeting. "I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered," Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne in February 1820, just after he became ill. In Keats's work, the struggle with aesthetic form becomes an image of a struggle for meaning against the limits of experience. The very form of his art seems to embody and interpret the conflicts of mortality and desire. The urgency of this poetry has always appeared greater to his readers for his intense love of beauty and his tragically short life. Keats approached the relations among

experience, imagination, art, and illusion with penetrating thoughtfulness, with neither sentimentality nor cynicism but with a delight in the ways in which beauty, in its own subtle and often surprising ways, reveals the truth.

Negative Capability Two prevalent themes in Keats's poetry are the power of imaginative perception and the capacity of a truly creative nature to go beyond the self. In a letter written to his brothers, Keats mentions having seen a painting by Benjamin West and finding it lacking: "It is a wonderful picture . . . ; But there is nothing to be intense upon; no woman one feels mad to kiss. . . . the excellence of every Art is its intensity." Keats then coined a term that is one of his most distinctive contributions to aesthetic discourse: *negative capability*, which is present, Keats explains, "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Perhaps Keats himself provided the best gloss on this term when he wrote, in a marginal jotting on a passage in John Milton's masterwork *Paradise Lost*, of "the intense pleasure of not knowing[,] a sense of independence, of power, from the fancy's creating a world of its own by the sense of probabilities."

Works in Critical Context

The history of Keats's early reputation is dominated by two hostile, unsigned reviews of *Endymion*, one credited to John Gibson Lockhart in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the other to John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review*. Lockhart, a vociferous critic of what he termed "The Cockney School," named for its members' ties to London and their alleged lack of refinement, attacked not only Keats's poem, which he denigrated on artistic and moral grounds, but on what he perceived as the poet's lack of taste, education, and upbringing. While Croker was neither so vitriolic nor personally degrading as Lockhart—critics acknowledge, in fact, the legitimacy of several of his complaints—his essay was singled out as damaging and unjust by Keats's supporters, who rushed to the poet's defense. While Keats was apparently disturbed only temporarily by these attacks, they gave rise to the legend that his death had been caused, or at least hastened, by these two reviews. A chief perpetrator of this notion was Percy Bysshe Shelley, who composed and published his famous *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of the Poet John Keats* shortly after Keats's death. The preface to this work implicated Croker as Keats's murderer. In conjunction with the writings of Keats's well-meaning friends, Shelley's work effectively created an image of Keats as a sickly and unnaturally delicate man, so fragile that a magazine article was capable of killing him. Lord Byron commented wryly on this idea in a famous couplet in his poem *Don Juan*: "'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle / Should let itself be snuffed out by an article."

Legacy Keats's dying fears of eternal obscurity were proved wrong in the generations after his death. Even as early as 1820, people were beginning to write of Keats's

legacy. The influential Francis Jeffrey wrote an approving, if belated, essay in *The Edinburgh Review*, and the obituary in *The London Magazine* (April 1921), noted, "There is but a small portion of the public acquainted with the writings of this young man, yet they were full of high imagination and delicate fancy." By 1853 Matthew Arnold could speak of Keats as "in the school of Shakespeare," and, despite his weak sense of dramatic action and his overly lush imagery was "one whose exquisite genius and pathetic death render him forever interesting." Yet it was just this quality of lush, "pictorial" imagery that Victorians admired in Keats, as reflected in popular paintings related to his works by Pre-Raphaelites such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and poets such as Alfred Tennyson and Algernon Charles Swinburne, who wrote of "mastery of visual detail, his instinct for the absolute expression of absolute natural beauty." In 1857, Alexander Smith, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (eighth edition) entry on Keats, could proclaim, with some exaggeration, that "With but one or two exceptions, no poet of the last generation stands at this moment higher in the popular estimation, and certainly no one has in a greater degree influenced the poetic development of the last thirty years."

Responses to Literature

1. If you are interested in the impact of tuberculosis on nineteenth-century European culture, *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man, and Society* (1952), by René DuBos, provides an excellent introduction. In this landmark study of the social meaning of tuberculosis, DuBos prominently features Keats and the myths surrounding his illness.
2. Research the myth of *Endymion*, and then read Keats's poem. What do you think attracted Keats to the myth? What changes did he make to it?
3. Do you also see Keats as a tragic and sympathetic personality? What advice would you give him if you could?
4. Keats and many other Romantics were preoccupied with perception and how an individual's view of the world alters what is seen and experienced. Look up the definition of *solipsism* and argue whether Keats is a solipsist at heart.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Issues of immortality and human transience have preoccupied thinkers for millennia. Rulers, philosophers, and poets have pondered whether human accomplishments will be remembered or make a lasting impact. Keats was extremely interested in his own literary legacy. Here are some other works that examine the idea of the transience or permanence of man's efforts:

The Iliad (7th–8th century B.C.E.), by Homer. The famous hero of this epic, Achilles, chooses death in battle over a long, peaceful life because attaining glory in battle means his name will be immortalized.

The Stranger (1942), by Albert Camus. This novel's protagonist is convinced that the universe is indifferent to the desires and actions of humans.

"Annabel Lee" (1849), by Edgar Allan Poe. This long poem commemorates, rather morbidly, the death of a young girl and her influence on the speaker.

The Diary of a Young Girl (1942), by Anne Frank. Written while hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam, this diary details the trials Frank's family went through before they were sent to a concentration camp.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1982), by Milan Kundera. Set in springtime in a politically unbalanced Prague, the characters, most of them artists, feel that their lives are fleeting; thus, although they create with purpose, they also hesitate and often choose badly when it comes to their personal lives.

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Thomas Keneally

BORN: 1935, Sydney, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Place at Whitton (1964)

Blood Red, Sister Rose (1974)

Schindler's List (1982)

A River Town (1995)



Thomas Keneally Keneally, Thomas, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Thomas Keneally (also known as William Coyle and Thomas Michael Keneally) has evolved from one of Australia's best-known and most prolific writers to a novelist with a worldwide following. Even before *The Great Shame*, his recent historical work, Keneally had worked extensively with material from Australia's past. But, his body of work is noteworthy for its range of material. He has written on subjects as varied as Joan of Arc, the American Civil War, the Holocaust, and contemporary Africa. However diverse the material, Keneally brings to it a consistently humanistic point of view, an eye for accuracy, and a knack for engaging storytelling, all of which account both for his wide readership and critical acclaim.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Preparing for Priesthood Keneally was born on October 7, 1935, in Sydney, Australia, to Edmund Thomas and Elsie Coyle Keneally. The son of Roman Catholic parents of Irish descent, he was educated at St. Patrick's College in Strathfield, New South Wales, and later studied for the priesthood from 1953 to 1960. Although Keneally left the seminary before being ordained, he later drew on his experiences as a seminarian in his early novels *The Place at Whitton* (1964) and *Three Cheers for the Paraclete* (1968). He taught high school in Sydney during the early 1960s, and from 1968 to 1970 he served as a lecturer in drama at the University of New England in New South Wales. During this time, Keneally gained recognition as a historical novelist with the publication of *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967), a consideration of Australia's early history as an English penal colony.

Early Career While he began to write, Keneally supported himself in various jobs as a builder's laborer, clerk, and schoolteacher. Keneally's first published work, the story "The Sky Burning Up Above the Man," appeared pseudonymously in the *Bulletin* magazine on June 23, 1962 under the name "Bernard Coyle" (the surname was his mother's maiden name). Two years later, his first novel, *The Place at Whitton* (1964), was published.

In 1966 Keneally was awarded a Commonwealth Literary Fund grant of four thousand dollars that freed him temporarily to write full-time. On November 15 of that year, his first play, *Halloran's Little Boat*, was performed (published in 1968). Commissioned by the National Institute of Dramatic Art, the play was an initial working of the material given fuller and richer shape in Keneally's third novel, *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967). Set in a penal colony at the "world's worse end" at the close of the eighteenth century, the book was Keneally's first popular and critical success, not least in securing the first of successive Miles Franklin Awards for the best Australian novel of the year. He crafted a complex tale of the origins of his country, one that involved the British or Irish ancestry of the characters, the transplanting of their traditional antagonisms, religions, class divisions, and tribal memories. Now, for the first time in the southern continent, voice was given to ancestral European oaths, creeds, and betrayals.

Keneally's next novel, *Three Cheers for the Paraclete* (1968), also won the Miles Franklin Award. This work, his second fictional account of Catholic religious life in Australia, tells of a priest—Father Maitland—who has pseudonymously written a revisionist view of the historical and political appropriations of God that his church has countenanced. When discovered, his punishment is to be placed by his bishop under an interdiction to publish no more. The terror of such a sentence for the fertile Keneally can readily be imagined.

Between 1968 and 1970, Keneally lectured in drama at the University of New England. He also continued to write plays—*Childermas* (1968), *An Awful Rose* (1972), *Bullie's House* (1980, published the following year)—in addition to writing a section of the motion picture *Libido* (1973). His time at the university furnished the "campus novel" parts of his next book, *The Survivor*, which has for its other main setting Antarctica, which Keneally had visited as a guest of the U.S. Navy in 1968. This novel won the Captain Cook Bicentenary Award in 1970 and was made into a television movie the following year. Keneally found the frozen continent so congenial to his imagination that he used the setting for another novel, *A Victim of the Aurora*. While the latter is historical fiction, set at the beginning of the twentieth century, each interrogates the heroic elements of classic Antarctic narratives of exploration and survival; each transposes the search for the nature and identity of Australians from their country to Antarctica; and each is a deft and satisfying murder

mystery, which reflects Keneally's extension of talents into yet another genre.

After a time living in London in the early 1970s, Keneally returned to Australia. In 1972, one of his most popular and best-selling novels was published. Based on the true story of killings committed by the part-Aboriginal Governor brothers in New South Wales at the end of the nineteenth century, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is the novel in which Keneally deals most angrily with the white settlers' treatment of the Australian Aborigines. He has argued that "the snake in the garden is that we have not recognised the prior sovereignty of the Aborigines." Keneally has been neither blundering, sentimental, nor too credulous in his engagement with relations between black and white Australians. Nevertheless, he became the subject of virulent, often self-interested criticism from experts in fields other than literature. For Keneally, however, the story allowed another unfettered review of matters of conscience in an Australian historical setting that still speaks urgently to the present. Nearly two decades later, he returned to Aboriginal affairs.

War Two novels dealing with twentieth-century world wars, on the other hand, display considerable insight and power. The diplomats in *Gossip from the Forest*, gathered at Compiègne in the fall of 1918 to negotiate an armistice, are compelling characters. The cultured German delegate, Matthias Erzbergen, finds himself in an impossible political bind as he tries to deal with the imperious Marshall Foch, who takes full advantage of his superior position. The tenuous political alliances of the period are reflected in the negotiations at Compiègne, with the tragic realization that an opportunity for lasting peace is lost and another war becomes inevitable. Of greater scope is *Schindler's List*, the true story of a Catholic industrialist who ran an arms factory using Jewish workers from concentration camps.

Honors In the decade from 1972 to 1982, from *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* to *Schindler's List*, Keneally concentrated on historical fiction, and especially on war. He spent the years from 1975 through 1977 living in the United States, lecturing for a time in Connecticut. The American connection was strengthened in the mid-1980s when he became writer-in-residence at the University of California, Irvine. Later, he became a Distinguished Professor for Life in the University of California system.

Works in Literary Context

Historical Fiction Keneally's work can best be understood as historical fiction. In this genre of writing, historical events are reimagined with artistic liberty in order to breathe life into the events of the past. However, it is important to note that although usually considered fiction, works like *Schindler's List* are painstakingly researched and include only events the author established as factual, though small details such as specific

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Keneally's famous contemporaries include:

- Peter Hoeg** (1957–): Danish novelist who has received international acclaim for his works of magic realism.
- Ted Koppel** (1940–): American journalist and novelist who was a prominent figure in the media until his departure from the news program "Nightline" in 2005.
- Roald Dahl** (1916–1990): English novelist famous for his children's stories, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG*.
- J. M. Coetzee** (1940–): South African novelist and winner the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Tony Blair** (1953–): English politician who held the office of prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1997 until 2007.

conversations may have been created by Keneally. In this way, they blur the line between fiction and nonfiction. *Schindler's List* is a good example of such writing, but in many ways Keneally's entire oeuvre seeks to find connections between the past and the present both to enlighten and to entertain.

In some ways, one can link Keneally's historical fiction with writers like William Shakespeare, who spun the five-act play *Julius Caesar* out of the actual death of Julius Caesar at the hands of Brutus. The form has become increasingly important in recent years, and its popularity can be seen in both film and literature. One example is the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which is an adaptation of the Arthur Golden novel of the same name.

War Novels In addition to the balanced portrait of Joan of Arc, *Blood Red*, *Sister Rose* drew critical praise for its realistic depiction of the brutality of medieval warfare. In a number of subsequent works, Keneally approached the subject of war from varying perspectives, including the thoughts of a World War I peace negotiator in *Gossip from the Forest* (1975), the activities of a doctor involved with partisans during World War II in *Season in Purgatory* (1977), and the preparations of American Civil War soldiers for battle in *Confederates* (1979). *The Cut-Rate Kingdom* (1980), set in Canberra in 1942, considers the moral character of military and political leaders in wartime Australia.

In *Gossip from the Forest*, Keneally offered a concentrated fictional presentation of the peace talks that took place in the forest of Compiègne in November 1918, focusing on the highest-ranking German negotiator, Mattias Erzberger, a liberal pacifist. According to the *New York Times Book Review's* Paul Fussell, *Gossip from the Forest* "is a study of the profoundly civilian and pacific

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The mass murder of millions of Jews and other civilians by the Nazi regime, a horror known as the Holocaust, is a frequent topic for novelists and authors of all types. Here are some works that focus on this tragedy:

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl (1952), a diary by Anne Frank. This book recounts the life of a girl and her family hiding from the Nazis.

Night (1955), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. The author was sixteen when World War II ended and he was released from a concentration camp. *Night* recounts the horrors he experienced during the Holocaust.

Apt Pupil (1982), a novella by Stephen King. Later adapted into a film, this novella analyzes the long-term effects of having participated in World War II as a Nazi.

sensibility beleaguered by crude power . . . it is absorbing, and as history it achieves the kind of significance earned only by sympathy acting on deep knowledge.” Robert E. McDowell of *World Literature Today* concluded that “with *Gossip from the Forest* Keneally has succeeded better than in any of his previous books in lighting the lives of historical figures and in convincing us that people are really the events of history.”

Confederates is counted among Keneally’s most ambitious historical undertakings with its faithful representation of the military life of a band of Southern soldiers preparing for the Second Battle of Antietam in the summer of 1862. Covering a range of characters, including slaves, farmers, and aristocrats, the novel, in the opinion of Jeffrey Burke of the *New York Times Book Review*, “reaffirms Mr. Keneally’s mastery of narrative voice.”

Works in Critical Context

Although Keneally has received a fair amount of both critical and popular acclaim, he has also been involved in a number of controversies. At one point, for example, Keneally was accused of plagiarism in his novel *Season in Purgatory*. Indeed, controversy even surrounded his astoundingly popular *Schindler’s List*.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith Racism and violence, two social issues that figure prominently in many of Keneally’s works, are closely examined in his acclaimed early work *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972). In the novel, Keneally depicts an incident that occurred in New South Wales in 1900 in which a mixed-race Aborigine exploded into a murderous rage following persistent racist treatment by white settlers. Reviewer Anthony Thwaite wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that the novel blends “history, psychological insight, and an

epic adventure with great skill. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* echoes in the head long after it has been put down.” The novel, which is based on contemporary newspaper accounts of the tragedy, is also considered an early expression of Keneally’s antiassimilationist views of race relations. It won the Heinemann Award of the Royal Society of Literature in 1973.

Blood Red, Sister Rose: A Novel of the Maid of Orléans With Keneally’s *Blood Red, Sister Rose: A Novel of the Maid of Orléans* (1974), he turned from writing local history to world history and introduced a recurring interest in warfare into his oeuvre. Critics noted the novel emphasized Joan’s everyday qualities within the uncommon context of fifteenth-century warfare. A. G. Mojtabai, in the *New York Times Book Review*, commented on Keneally’s unusual choice in retelling such a well-known story. According to Mojtabai, “We all know the story, the big scenes: the Voices, the Dauphin’s court, Orleans, Rheims, Rouen, the pyre. . . . It would seem foolhardy to attempt to revive these worn tales again. Yet Australian novelist Thomas Keneally has done it and carried it off with aplomb. St. Joan lives again, robustly, in a way we have not known her before.” Comparing Keneally’s portrait of Joan with the religious presentation of her as saintly and with Bernard Shaw’s dramatic rendering as earthy and pragmatic, Melvin Maddocks noted in *Time* that Keneally “thoughtfully reconstructs a whole Joan, less spectacular than the first two but decidedly more convincing and perhaps, at last, more moving.”

Schindler’s List Booker Prize judges wondered whether *Schindler’s List* was a novel at all. Only a few years before, Keneally had been embroiled in accusations of plagiarism concerning *Season in Purgatory*. Now he was the subject of speculation as to whether he had written a work of nonfiction that was by definition ineligible for the prize. In the end, the judges decided that Keneally had deployed the skills of his fictive craft in the interest of a work at once compassionate, astonishing, and surprising in its contents and compass. More strife arose when director Steven Spielberg’s version of the novel, the Academy Award-winning motion picture *Schindler’s List*, was released in 1994. In *Le Monde*, for instance, the self-interested Claude Lanzmann (director of the Holocaust movie *Shoah*) called Spielberg’s effort “kitsch melodrama.” For his part, Keneally could take pleasure in the fact that no other Booker Prize-winning novel had sold so many copies as his. In 1994—the year the movie was released—the novel sold 873,716 copies in Britain and the Commonwealth alone.

Responses to Literature

1. Do you feel that director Steven Spielberg’s representation of Keneally’s *Schindler’s List* in his film of the same name is “melodramatic” compared to the

original work? Use examples from the book and movie to support your position.

2. Keneally was criticized for seemingly taking facts about Oskar Schindler and presenting them as fiction. Recently, other authors (mostly writers of memoirs) have been humiliated for presenting fictional events as fact (James Frey, author of *A Million Little Pieces*, is one example). Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the controversies surrounding recent memoirs that were later shown to be partially or substantially fictional. Also find out more about what writer Truman Capote called “faction”—a literary blend of novelistic elements and facts. Why do you think critics and readers react negatively to books that seem to blend fact and fiction? Do you think writers should have the freedom to create the texts they want to create, or should they stick to one genre or another?
3. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is written from the point of view of an exploited Aborigine. Keneally has since remarked that he would no longer choose to write from the point of view of his Aborigine protagonist, as it would be “insensitive” of him. Do you think writers should be discouraged from creating characters of a race or gender different from their own? Why or why not?

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🎨 Kenzaburo Oe

BORN: 1935, Ehime, Shikoku, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Prize Stock (1958)

A Personal Matter (1964)

The Silent Cry (1967)

An Echo of Heaven (1989)

Somersault (1999)

Overview

One of the foremost figures in contemporary Japanese literature, Oe is highly regarded for intensely imagined and formally innovative novels examining the sense of alienation and anxiety among members of the post-



Kenzaburo Oe Kenzaburo Oe, 1999, photograph. AP Images.

World War II generation in Japan. Oe's fiction is both profoundly intellectual and emotionally raw.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Traditional Japanese Upbringing Born in 1935 in a small village on the western Japanese island of Shikoku, Oe was raised in a prominent samurai family in accordance with traditional Japanese beliefs. Like most Japanese children of his generation, Oe was taught to believe that the emperor was a living god. When Emperor Hirohito personally announced in a radio broadcast Japan's surrender to the Allied military forces, thus marking the conclusion of World War II, Oe and his schoolmates experienced a sense of devastation and disorientation that forever changed their perception of the world.

Embracing the “Antihero” While Oe lamented the sense of humiliation and guilt that Japan's defeat and occupation by American troops imposed on his generation, he also embraced the values of democracy that were instilled through the educational system of the occupation forces. While a student at Tokyo University, Oe read widely in traditional Japanese, French, and modern

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Oe's famous contemporaries include:

Harlan Ellison (1934–): Ellison is an American fiction and television writer best known for his work on *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–1969) and *Outer Limits* (1963–1965).

Wole Soyinka (1934–): Soyinka is a Nigerian writer considered by many to be Africa's best playwright. In 1986 he became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Elvis Presley (1935–1977): Presley was an American musician and actor who has been a major cultural icon since his early career.

Václav Havel (1936–): Havel is a Czech writer and politician who served as the last president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and the first president of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

Don DeLillo (1936–): DeLillo is an American novelist considered one of the pioneers of postmodern fiction.

Ryoji Noyori (1938–): Noyori is a Japanese chemist who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2001.

Western literature. Reflecting his ambitious and erudite reading habits, Oe's early stories were awarded a number of prestigious literary prizes.

From Student to Professional Writer While still a university student, Oe established his literary reputation with his first novella, *The Catch* (1958), which tells the story of a Japanese boy and a black American prisoner of war whose friendship is destroyed by the brutality of war. *The Catch* won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, and from this success, Oe moved directly from student to professional writer. Also written in 1958, Oe's first novel, *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, explored the impact and influence of World War II on Japanese youth.

Political Protest In 1960 Oe married Yukari Ikeuchi, daughter of movie director and essayist Mansaku Itami (pseudonym of Yoshitoyo Ikeuchi). That same year, he became an active participant in the movement protesting revision and renewal of the United States–Japan Security Treaty. On his first foreign excursion as part of a group of Japanese writers, he traveled to China, where he had an audience with Mao Tse-tung. In October, the chairman of the Japan Socialist Party, which was opposed to the Security Treaty, was in the middle of a public speech when he was stabbed to death by a young right-wing radical. Oe was shocked to discover that a member of the postwar generation, born even later than he, could be transformed into an ardent right-wing imperialist.

Personal Transformation In 1963 Oe's eldest son, Hikari, was born handicapped with a brain hernia as a result of an abnormality in his skull. This incident came as a shock to Oe both in his personal and literary life. In 1964 he published *Kojinteki na taiken* (translated as *A Personal Matter* in 1968), one of the most important monuments of his literary career, in which a young schoolteacher called Bird dreams of escaping to Africa, but a handicapped child is born to his wife.

In 1994, after his son Hikari had made a name for himself as a composer, Oe stirred up controversy by announcing that, since his son had come to express himself better through his music than he could through writing about him, once he finished the novel he was currently writing, he would abandon the writing of novels. In October of that same year he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

When Oe declared that he was finished with the novel form, he had just passed the age of sixty, which in Japan is customarily viewed as the time for a new departure in one's life. He turned primarily to writing essays. When Oe's close friend Tôru Takemitsu, a famous composer, died of cancer in 1996, Oe mourned and decided to resume his creation in the novel form in memory of Takemitsu. In 1997 Juzô Itami (pseudonym of Yoshiharu Ikeuchi)—a distinguished movie director, Oe's close friend since boyhood, and the brother of Oe's wife—committed suicide by jumping off a building. This incident caused Oe great personal sorrow, and he sought to illuminate the truth of what happened through exploring facts and visionary fictions.

Since the 1990s Oe's name has appeared in the media outside of the literary realm. In 2004, he was cited as opposing controversial changes to the postwar Japanese constitution of 1947. In 2005, he was sued for libel by two military officers in the Japanese army. The controversy centered around his statements that the Japanese army ordered civilians to commit mass suicide during the Okinawa campaign by U.S. military forces rather than be taken as prisoners of war by the U.S. Army. While involved in the case, Oe did not write or publish much. He emerged from silence when the charges against him were dismissed in 2008. Recently, the *New York Times* reported that he has started a new novel that features a character based on his father, who drowned during World War II. At present, Oe lives in Tokyo with his three children.

Works in Literary Context

Oe is one of the outstanding representatives of contemporary Japanese literature. In a literary career extending over several decades, he has produced a large volume of works, and in Japan he has received several prestigious literary awards, including the Akutagawa Prize (1958), the Tanizaki Jun'ichirô Prize (1967), and the Noma Literary Prize (1973). He has also been highly praised

overseas, receiving the Europelia Award from the European Community (1989), the Italian Mondello Prize (1993), and the Nobel Prize in Literature (1994). These works were influenced, in part, by such existentialist philosophers as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and by the American tradition of the “antihero,” as represented in the works of such authors as Mark Twain, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, and Norman Mailer. Oe’s critical essays have incorporated a variety of writers from the East and the West: Sartre, Mailer, Faulkner, Melville, William Blake, William Butler Yeats, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Miguel de Cervantes, Dante, and Chi-ha. Oe does not imitate these writers; rather he employs what he has learned from them in his own acts of literary creation.

The citation for the Nobel Prize noted that through his “poetic force” Oe “creates an imagined world where life and myth condense to form a disconcerting picture of the human predicament today.” He was likewise hailed for his relentless search for ways in which mankind can survive together beneath the threat of nuclear annihilation, and for his writing about his symbiotic relationship with his handicapped son. His works have been translated into many languages, including English, German, and French.

Oe’s Structuralism In 1976, when Oe was forty-one, he spent a brief period lecturing in English at the Colegio de México on postwar Japanese intellectual history. His decision to reside for a time in Mexico served as an opportunity for him to reconsider in clear terms the issue of marginality that had been at the forefront of his consciousness since he first left his village home and to consider it a topic in world history. In the theoretical work he published after his return to Japan, *Shosetsu no hoho* (1978, *Methodology of the Novel*), he conclusively declares, “One must stand on the side of marginality in order to be able to grasp the essence of the dangers attending our contemporary age.”

During this visit, Oe read a book published the previous year by the cultural anthropologist Masao Yamaguchi that enabled him to deepen his consciousness and solidify the methodology behind his structuralist theories while in Mexico. Some deride Oe as a “structuralist-come-lately,” but it is safe to say that for many years he had been an unconscious structuralist, interested in the relationships among various cultural practices as well as in the linguistic connections among the myriad of elements that make up language. Oe’s conscious use of structuralist methodology begins with *Dôjidai gemu*, a work that takes the form of a letter written from a teacher living in Mexico to his twin sister. Oe’s adoption of structuralism in the late 1970s began with the concept of “defamiliarization” in the Russian formalist linguistic theories of Viktor Shklovsky and with the “grotesque realism” of Mikhail Bakhtin. From there, he proceeded to study the structuralist-oriented cultural anthropology of Claude

Lévi-Strauss and the comparative religion theories of Mircea Eliade. His approach to structuralism inspired him to focus his attentions on Europe, where these theories originated. At the same time, as a citizen of Asia, he had a deep-seated interest in the anti-dictatorial poetry of South Korea’s Kim Chi-ha, a body of work which merges art with the fight against political repression and relies on a four-hundred-year-old traditional narrative structure called Pansori to frame its stories.

Fusing Japanese and Western Culture Another striking feature of Oe’s writing since the 1980s has been his bold adoption of a literary technique that seems at first glance a return to the traditions of Japanese autobiographical fiction in the *shishô setsu* (I-novel) form. Deeply interlaced with this tradition of autobiographical fiction is another significant thread in Oe’s writing, which involves the simultaneous attempts both to confront and fuse with Western culture.

Oe has produced many works of fiction but has also written essays and critical pieces. In these works Oe appears as a “product of postwar democracy,” as a parent with a handicapped child, and as a supporter of the weaklings who have been oppressed and shunned by harsh reality. He examines the victims of the atomic bombing and discusses the struggles of the people of Okinawa, who continued to suffer under the twenty-seven-year-long American occupation, after the end of World War II. These problems do not represent passing interests for Oe but are, in fact, as the title of one of his essay collections suggests, *Jizoku suru kokorozashi* (1968, *Continuing Hopes*).

Born in the margins of Japan, Kenzaburo Oe has for many years made use of unremitting self-examination as a means of pursuing questions of the periphery and the center as well as the ways in which mankind can live together beneath the nuclear menace. By groping for a pathway to hope in the future, he has never averted his eyes from the despair of the present as he has persistently asked how man should live in the present age. His work has thus contributed significantly not merely to Japanese literature but to the literature of the entire world.

Works in Critical Context

With the exception of politically and legally motivated criticisms, like the libel lawsuit brought against Oe by two military officers in 2005, critical reaction to Oe’s works has been predominantly adulatory. Despite the minor reservations of some critics with regard to its “happy” ending, *A Personal Matter* was internationally recognized as a masterpiece and a triumph of personal expression—a novel clearly autobiographical in content, but which transcends its literal narrative to symbolize the entire postwar spirit of malaise among Japanese intellectuals. Critic Stephen Iwamoto writes, “The relationship between Kenzaburo Oe and his mentally and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Characterizing life as profoundly absurd, Oe portrays the unique agonies and dilemmas of his characters with concrete precision in ways that point to the more universal significance of their suffering. Here are some other works with a similar theme:

The Age of Reason (1945), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre.

This novel is concerned with the conception of freedom as the ultimate aim of human existence.

The Plague (1947), a novel by Albert Camus. This novel faces questions about the human condition through the story of medical workers laboring in a plague-swept city in Algeria.

Lord of the Flies (1954), a novel by William Golding. This novel analyzes the unraveling of human culture by following a group of boys stuck on a deserted island as they attempt to govern themselves.

physically handicapped son Hikari has furnished the author with the materials and inspiration for countless works—short stories, novels, lectures, commentaries, and essays.”

Oe’s most universally acclaimed novel, *The Silent Cry* (1967), is a formally innovative and densely poetic portrayal of Takashi and Mitsusaburo, two brothers who clash over their differing interpretations of their tumultuous family history. Utilizing a method of temporal displacement and unity, Oe constructs the narrative as the surreal juxtaposition of a political uprising in 1860 (the year Japan was forced to ratify a treaty opening up commerce with the United States) and the brothers’s struggle a hundred years later. In addition to its complex narrative structure, *The Silent Cry* exhibits a preoccupation with violence and physical deformity that some critics have linked with the methods of “grotesque realism,” a brand of exaggerated satire which was pioneered by the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais. Similarly, it was lauded by the Nobel committee as “Oe’s major mature work,” and its complex narrative framework has been compared with the magic realism of Colombian novelist and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez.

Many critics argue that Oe’s deliberate coalescence of modern Western and traditional Japanese forms has made him difficult to interpret and translate in either Japanese or English, and the fact that few of his works have been translated into English has limited the amount of criticism devoted to him outside of Japan. However, because Oe was awarded the Nobel Prize, scholars foresee an influx of academic interest, English translations, and criticism in years to come.

Responses to Literature

1. Oe has acknowledged that the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre has influenced his own philosophy and literary style. Do the concerns of existentialist philosophy, drawn from a European intellectual movement, strengthen Oe’s novels or distract from their ability to analyze Japanese culture?
2. In his introduction to *The Crazy Iris*, Oe writes that his “anthology of A-bomb short stories is an effort to make the original A-Bomb experiences a part of the shared experiences of peoples throughout the world.” What hurdles do you think a Western reader must overcome to make the atomic bomb truly a “shared experience”? Is it possible for readers from outside Japan to partake in this shared experience? Why or why not?
3. Critics note that Oe combines Western and non-Western perspectives, styles, and concerns in his novels. Brainstorm some particular scenes in Oe’s texts where these Western and non-Western perspectives and styles clash or merge. Then, write an essay describing what effect you think this has on his writing.
4. In his essays, Oe asserts a particular kind of political responsibility shared by authors and activists throughout the world. Write a personal statement about the kinds of political responsibilities you think global citizens share. Are there any responsibilities unique to authors?

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Imre Kertész

BORN: 1929, Budapest, Hungary

NATIONALITY: Hungarian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Fateless (1975)

Failure (1988)

Kaddish for a Child Not Born (1990)

Overview

Imre Kertész, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002, is a strong, independent voice in contemporary Hungarian literature. He is also a witness to the Holocaust, having survived the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. His novels and essays, written in dry and unsentimental prose, examine the Holocaust as an outgrowth of European cultural traditions. Kertész views the Nazi terror not as an accident or an anomaly in European history but as a link in the chain of totalitarianism (a government that has total control over all aspects of its citizens' lives), a chain that includes the Cold War communism of eastern Europe. His writing is charged with a relentless inquiry into human nature and the lessons of the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Sent to a Nazi Death Camp Imre Kertész was born on November 9, 1929, in Budapest, in an assimilated, middle-class Jewish family. His father was a timber merchant, and his mother worked as a clerk. His parents divorced around the time of his birth and sent him to a boarding school. World War II broke out as he approached his tenth birthday. A promising student, Kertész enrolled in the newly formed “Jewish class” of the Madach Gymnasium in Budapest in 1940. In the summer of 1944, while he was working as a laborer, he was arrested by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp. Millions of detainees died in these camps, but Kertész survived the camp, and upon his liberation in 1945, he had the option to start a new life in another country, but chose to return to Hungary.

A Career as a Writer Back in Budapest, still in his teens, Kertész became a journalist. He graduated from high school in 1948 and started to work for the Social Democrat journal *Világosság* (*Illumination*), but after the communist party took power in Hungary, it turned the paper into a propaganda organ, and Kertész was fired. He became a factory worker, then was drafted and served in the military until 1953. When discharged, he got married, and determined to live off his writing. The musical comedies on which he collaborated for Budapest theaters paid well enough to give him some financial



Imre Kertész Pascal Le Segretain / Getty Images

independence. Later, he supported himself by translating literature into Hungarian, including philosophical works by Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Kertész read much literature on the Holocaust and studied documents, maps, and photographs. He wanted to comprehend the circumstances that made such a catastrophe possible in European civilization. He resolved to write about his concentration camp experience, but not in the form of a memoir. His first novel, *Fateless* (1975), is a stark portrait of the totalitarian machinery and the methods by which it reduced the individual to a mere functioning unit.

Although Kertész wrote *Fateless* in 1965, it went unpublished for ten years. In communist Hungary, the Holocaust was still a taboo subject. Hungarian publishers and book censors demanded that writers treat the Holocaust as a closed chapter of history, hermetically sealed from the present, and discuss it within the ideological confines of Socialist realism. A viewpoint that depicted the concentration camps as the epitome of the totalitarian system was not welcome in a Soviet-dominated state. Kertész doubted he could find a forum to get his book out, but eventually a leading publishing house released it.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kertész's famous contemporaries include:

Primo Levi (1919–1987): Italian writer, chemist, and Holocaust survivor.

Günter Grass (1927–): German novelist and playwright; Nobel Prize winner (1999).

Elie Wiesel (1928–): Jewish-American writer and concentration camp survivor; Nobel Prize winner (1986).

Vaclav Havel (1936–): Czech playwright, essayist, and politician; last President of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and first President of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968): An American Civil Rights leader who led the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) and the 1963 March on Washington, where he gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

The novel was published without censorship. It received critical praise upon its release but was not a commercial success. Kertész's standing in the literary community was compromised by his refusal to join the official writers' union of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, throughout the late 1970s he slowly established himself as a writer while supporting himself with translations. He published a volume of short stories, *The Path Finder*, in 1977. In the title story, a concentration camp survivor revisits the camps and encounters a mysterious veiled widow who later takes her own life. This book also includes a novella called *Mystery Story*. Its setting, in a repressive South American country, allows Kertész another vantage point to explore the murderous machineries of totalitarian regimes, in which nobody escapes suspicion and surveillance.

Kertész's second novel, *Failure* (1988), vividly depicts the grimness of life in Budapest under totalitarian rule in the 1950s, just before the 1956 uprising. Its publication reflects the increasing freedom Hungary experienced in the late 1980s. A year after its release, Hungary's ruling party abandoned communism, and the nation became a democratic republic.

Post-Communist Years Kertész's first post-Communist novel, *Kaddish for a Child Not Born* (1990), tells the story of its narrator's marriage, which fails because the narrator (known only as “B”), who had been in Auschwitz (a notorious Nazi concentration camp), is marked for life by that experience. His young wife wants to raise a family, but the narrator, despite his love for her, is too haunted by his past to participate in the future she desires. The title invokes the Jewish prayer for the dead, which the narrator says for the children he cannot bring himself to sire. *Fateless*, *Failure*, and *Kaddish* are considered a

trilogy, especially in the German literary press; they are connected by the semi-autobiographical details, the description of Hungary in the 1950s, and the concentration camp experience.

Kertész went on to publish fiction, along with diary excerpts and essays. *Holocaust As Culture* (1993) compiles lectures Kertész delivered at international conferences on the Holocaust. In the title essay, he defines the Holocaust as an event in European civilization ranking with the crucifixion. The great European culture, he points out, was of no help to the camp inmates, nor did it inhibit the perpetrators and murderers. The short novel *Liquidation* (2003), originally intended as a drama, turns Kertész's trilogy into a tetralogy. It continues the story of “B” to his final years and suicide. Kertész has said this will be his last work about the Holocaust.

Imre Kertész became more widely recognized and appreciated in Hungary after the demise of socialism. His books were published, some of them in several editions, and translated into numerous languages. He was awarded numerous prizes, culminating with the Nobel Prize in 2002, which brought attention in Hungary not only to his work but to the legacy of the Holocaust. Kertész continues to work and live in Budapest and Berlin.

Works in Literary Context

Imre Kertész lived isolated from the literary community, teaching himself how to write a novel and discovering the writers who had a great impact on his thinking and writing. He singled out Albert Camus and Franz Kafka as profound influences. He admired Camus's succinct, precise prose, particularly in *The Stranger* (1942). He read philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and was much influenced by German writers, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Thomas Mann. Within the genre of Holocaust literature, he is especially fascinated by those writers who, having survived the catastrophe, later took their own lives: Paul Celan, Jean Amery, Tadeusz Borowski, and Primo Levi. Kertész's *Fateless* is often compared to Levi's *If This Is a Man* because of the dry, precise quality of their observations.

Totalitarianism and the Individual Kertész broke a societal taboo in Hungary not only by writing about the Holocaust but also by writing from a perspective that sharply differed from convention. He regards the Holocaust as the failure of European culture rather than a particularly Jewish catastrophe. For Kertész, the rationalist organization of state power, supported by generations of educated and erudite Europeans, reaches its logical conclusion in the “world experience,” of Auschwitz. The concentration camps represent the rule, not the exception, in European civilization.

Thus, Kertész aims to delineate the precise methods by which the machinery of power transforms the

individual into a mere functional entity. His Nobel Prize citation praises him for “writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history.” This theme is evident in the short work *Sworn Statement* (1993), which describes a humiliating experience the author had while detained at the Austrian border. His bitter description of the mindless, rigid bureaucratic obedience to rules, and the total disregard of the individual, recalls the spirit of the camps. A faceless, blind mechanism is at work, one that reduces personalities to cases, files, and, according to the logic of the system, inevitably, corpses.

Atonal Language To express the disintegration of the human being in the totalitarian system, Kertész had to find a language that could accurately convey the horror of what had happened. To this end, he invented a dispassionate language that captures the utterly indifferent universe of a totalitarian state. His prose completely avoids sentimental appeals or expressions of moral outrage; furthermore, it eschews action, character, and expressive language. Alluding to modernist musical composition, Kertész has said his aim was to create an “atonal” literary style.

Works in Critical Context

At the time he received the Nobel Prize, Imre Kertész was almost completely unknown in the United States. Very little of his work had been translated into English. Even in his home country, his works were not widely read. He has remained an outsider to the Hungarian cultural scene. *Fateless* received limited attention in literary circles at the time of its publication, although it was eventually recognized as an important novel, and won several overseas prizes. Kertész gained a larger public profile after the fall of communism, and became recognized as one of the most important writers in his own country, if not one of the most popular. In 1998, he was awarded the Kossuth Díj, Hungary’s highest cultural prize. He has gained a loyal audience in Germany and Sweden; a German publisher released the complete edition of his body of work in 1999. Very little has been written about his work by scholars in the English-speaking world.

The news that Kertész had been awarded the Nobel Prize elicited a mixed response in Hungary. There was official jubilation and pride, but also some expression of disappointment that the honor had gone to a relatively obscure writer, and a Jew—whom right-wing nationalists therefore did not accept as “truly” Hungarian. Kertész himself believes that the Hungarian people have never come to terms with their own participation in the Holocaust and thus continue to shun any public discussion of its historical importance.

Responses to Literature

1. Research the history of Communism in Hungary. Choose a few salient features of Hungarian life in the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The work of Imre Kertész incisively skewers the psychological dimensions of totalitarianism, honing in on the human qualities that allow catastrophes like the Holocaust, and power structures like the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, to occur. This potent theme of twentieth-century literature is explored in fiction and nonfiction works, such as the following:

The Trial (1925), a novel by Franz Kafka. This novel of bureaucratic horror is a Kafka classic.

The Man Without Qualities (1943), a novel by Robert Musil. This masterpiece, a novel in three volumes, has a protagonist, Ulrich, who is characterized by indifference and passivity.

The Technological Society (1954), a nonfiction work by Jacques Ellul. This far-reaching social critique argues that a high-tech society stresses efficiency above all other values, including moral values.

Crowds and Power (1960), a nonfiction work by Elias Canetti. This work of mass psychology studies how crowds behave and why they follow leaders, including demagogues like Hitler.

Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963), a nonfiction work by Hannah Arendt. This book introduces the phrase “the banality of evil” to argue that evil can result from mass conformity and passive obedience to authority.

writings of Kertész that you have read and share them in a brief report to the class.

2. In an essay, compare Kertész’s *Fateless* to other works depicting the camps, such as the writings of Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel. Use examples from the texts to support your ideas.
3. With a classmate, define the term “atonal.” Then, identify the qualities of “atonal” language in *Fateless* or other works by Kertész that you have read.
4. Even though Kertész is the first Hungarian writer to win the Nobel Prize, not all Hungarians consider him a national hero. Research Kertész on the Internet or using your library and write a report about why you think he is a controversial figure in his home country.
5. Kertész writes about the ways that Holocaust survivors are forever haunted by their experiences in the camps. Write an informal essay describing what new insights you have about living through trauma.

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Omar Khayyám © Bettmann / CORBIS

❏ Omar Khayyám

BORN: 1048, Neyshabur, Persia

DIED: 1131, Neyshabur, Persia

NATIONALITY: Persian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Rubáiyát (1859)

Overview

During his lifetime as a mathematician and astronomer in Persia, Omar Khayyám was renowned for his scientific achievements, but he was not recognized as a poet. Not until scholar and poet Edward FitzGerald translated the Persian manuscript of Khayyám's verse into English in 1859 did the Western world discover Khayyám's lyrics. Today, Khayyám's *Rubáiyát*, a collection of quatrains composed in the traditional Persian *rubai* style, is recognized throughout the West. Both sensual and spiritual, the *Rubáiyát* has remained powerfully poignant because it appeals to humankind's deepest passions and most profound philosophical concerns.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Obscure Early Life Khayyám was born in 1048 in Neyshabur, Persia, what is now northeastern Iran. At the time, Neyshabur was a commercially wealthy province, as well as an important intellectual, political, and religious center. At the time, Persia was ruled by the Turks who had conquered the territory in 1037 bringing with them their Islamic faith. They remained in control of the region until the early 1200s. While little is known of Khayyám's early life, it is believed that he received an education emphasizing science, mathematics, and philosophy from the celebrated teacher Iman Mowaffak in Neyshabur.

In his early twenties, Khayyám traveled to Samarkand, where he completed his famous treatise on algebra, a work that is considered one of the most outstanding mathematical achievements of the medieval period. His mathematical writings include a study titled *The Difficulties of Euclid's Definitions* (1077). In these works, Khayyám attempts to classify equations, particularly quadratic and cubic equations.

Royal Assignments In 1074, Khayyám returned to Neyshabur and was invited by the Sultan Malik-Shah, the Seljuk Turkish ruler, to join a group of eight scholars assigned to reform the Muslim calendar. The result, the Jalai solar calendar, is noteworthy because it is more accurate than the Julian calendar and almost as precise as Pope Gregory XIII's revision of the Julian calendar. During this time, Khayyám was also commissioned, along with other astronomers, to collaborate on a plan for an observatory in the capital city of Isfahnan. At this time, the city was one of the most important in the world.

Death of Malik-Shah Records indicate that after the death of Malik-Shah in 1092, Khayyám, deeply mourning the loss, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Translated by Edward FitzGerald, one poem that appears to have been written at this time reads: "Khayyám, who stitched the tents of science / Has fallen in grief's furnace and been sudden burned." Until his death on December 4, 1131, Khayyám spent the rest of his life in the key city of Neyshabur, where he taught astrology and mathematics and predicted future events for the royal court when called upon to do so.

Poet? No record exists to indicate that Khayyám ever wrote poetry. Certainly his achievements in mathematics and astronomy eclipsed any in poetry during his own lifetime. Because manuscripts of his quatrains did not appear until two hundred years after his death and because of the differences among the various versions, some scholars doubt that he is the author of the *Rubáiyát*. This argument is strengthened by the fact that the content of the *Rubáiyát* is inconsistent, as some poems are mystical and philosophical, while others are amoral and hedonistic. Having exhaustively studied the work in an effort to determine which of the nearly one thousand quatrains were written by Khayyám, some Persian academics have claimed that only around two hundred and fifty stanzas could be those of Khayyám. Nevertheless, Khayyám's credibility as a poet appears strong, as numerous translations of the *Rubáiyát* have been published throughout the years.

Discovery and Dissemination Discovered by English Persian scholar E. B. Cowell at Oxford's Bodleian Library, a fifteenth-century manuscript of Khayyám's verse was passed to Edward FitzGerald, who translated 75 of the 158 quatrains into English. Concerned that the sensual and atheistic aspects of several of the stanzas would offend readers, FitzGerald included those pieces in their original Persian language. When FitzGerald anonymously published his 1859 translation at his own expense, not even a single copy of the book sold.

Only when a bookseller demoted the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám to his store's penny box on the street did the collection gain any attention. In 1861, Whitley Stokes, an editor of the *Saturday Review*, purchased several copies of the *Rubáiyát*, and, impressed by the work, passed a copy along to pre-Raphaelite painter and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Khayyám's famous contemporaries include:

Saint Anselm (1033–1109): Besides being one of the fathers of scholastic theology, Anselm originated the ontological argument for the existence of God. His works include *Monologion* (1075–1076).

Henry IV (1050–1106): German king and Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV was beloved by his subjects because of his concern for the peace of the empire and his care for the welfare of the common people.

Lanfranc (1015–1089): A Lombard who became archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc played an important role in persuading Pope Alexander II to support the Norman invasion of England in 1066.

Ernulf (1040–1124): The bishop of Rochester, Ernulf is credited with compiling laws, papal decrees, and documents relating to the church of Rochester in a collection titled *Textus Roffensis*.

Malik-Shah (1055–1092): Malik-Shah was the third and most famous of the Seljuk Turkish sultans, a ruling military family that founded an empire that included Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and most of Iran.

Rodrigo Diaz (1040–1099): Known as El Cid, or "the chief," Diaz was a national hero of Spain and a central military figure in the fight against the Moors.

Constantine the African (1020–1087): This Carthaginian was a translator of the Greek and Islamic medical texts that contributed to the twelfth-century establishment of the first medical university, located in Salerno, part of the Kingdom of Sicily. His translations include *Kitab* (1087), also known as *The Complete Book of the Medical Art*.

poet, Dante Rossetti. Rossetti, in turn, gave a copy to poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, who then shared it with writer George Meredith.

Unknown in the Western world before its pre-Raphaelite readership, the *Rubáiyát* became an enormous success in English and American literary circles. Shortly afterwards, the FitzGerald translation created a sensation when it reached the general public. As a result, scholars began searching for additional manuscripts of Khayyám's work, and countless translations followed, each of them different in content, form, and the number of quatrains.

Works in Literary Context

As a literary genre, *rubái*—the poetic form of the *Rubáiyát*—was highly popular during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Persia, inspiring such poets as Rumi,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Khayyám's *Rubáiyát*, a collection of quatrains composed in the traditional Persian rubái style, gave life to a genre that has inspired poets throughout the centuries. Listed below are works in which the use of quatrains can be observed as a literary device:

Centuries (1555), a collection of prophecies by Nostradamus. Composed of 353 quatrains written in a mixture of French, Latin, and Greek, *Centuries* describes events from the mid-1500s to 3797, Nostradamus's predicted year for the end of the world.

The Essential Rumi (1995), a book of poetry by Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks. Rumi was a thirteenth-century Persian poet. In this collection, Barks translates Rumi's sixteen hundred rubáiyát, quatrains conveying Rumi's mysticism and spirituality.

Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson (published in 1988, written in the 1850s and 1860s), a collection of poems by Emily Dickinson, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson. Dickinson most often created stanzas of quatrains characterized by a unique emphasis on words established through their line position or capitalization. Most of her poems were published posthumously.

who has earned the reputation of being a great spiritual poet.

Rubái Stanzas The rubái is a poetic form originating from the Urdu-Persian language. Typically, each rubái stanza consists of four rhyming lines, sometimes referred to as *interlocking Rubáiyát*. However, in Khayyám's poetry, the third line does not rhyme with lines one, two, and four, thus forming an AABA rhyme scheme. Each quatrain of the *Rubáiyát* forms a complete thought. In general, the first two lines pose a situation or problem, usually presented through metaphor or simile. The third line creates suspense, followed by the fourth, which offers some kind of resolution.

The quatrains typically credited to Khayyám share stylistic simplicity and conciseness. Thematically, the *Rubáiyát* is complex and meditative, revealing despair over the brevity of life, impatience with the ignorance of man, and doubt in the existence of a benevolent God. Such pessimism, however, is tempered by a sensual, self-gratifying approach to life, acting as if every day could be one's last. Without a doubt, the *Rubáiyát* demonstrates the inherent contradiction between the sadness and joy of life.

Affront to Islam The *Rubáiyát* is considered to be a meditation on the meaning of life, as Khayyám addressed the eternal questions of life, death, religion, and the

puzzles of the universe. Because Khayyám's work was often viewed as heretical by orthodox Muslims for its hedonism, including its praise of wine, the *Rubáiyát* was most likely circulated anonymously, probably memorized and passed along more frequently than it was written down. Evidence indicates that the *Rubáiyát* were almost certainly sung at mystical gatherings.

Influence The best-known Persian poet in the West, Khayyám has significantly influenced the style and themes of many poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Praised for its lyrical form and moving insight, the *Rubáiyát* was imitated by such poets as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Works in Critical Context

Little is known about the reception of Khayyám's poetry prior to the nineteenth century. It was the commercial success of FitzGerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát* that gave rise to a critical reaction rivaling that given to major classical poets. In the beginning, academics were basically attracted to the lyricism of the *Rubáiyát*. However, attention shifted to Khayyám's themes of fatalism and escapism toward the end of the nineteenth century. In a piece appearing in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, volume 1: *From Zoroaster to Omar Khayyám*, nineteenth-century critic A. B. Houghton explained the contemporary world's attraction to Khayyám: "He lost all hope just as our hearts are losing hope also. He found behind the phenomenal world a mere nothing at all just as modern scholars have also found. In a word, Omar appeals to our despair."

FitzGerald's Version Twentieth-century critics have increasingly studied Khayyám's *Rubáiyát* and FitzGerald's translation as two separate works. Intellectuals differ in their judgment of how FitzGerald distorts Khayyám's original manuscript, some believing that the result of FitzGerald's version is simply an English poem with Persian allusions. Besides including several poems written by other Persian poets, FitzGerald's translation adapts many of the quatrains to suit Victorian tastes. In addition, FitzGerald reorganized the structure of the *Rubáiyát*, fusing Khayyám's conceptually independent verses into one long stanza. Charles Eliot Norton determines that FitzGerald "is to be called 'translator' only in default of a better word, one which should express the poetic transference of a poetic spirit from one language to another, and the re-presentation of the ideas and images of the original in a form not altogether diverse from their own, but perfectly adapted to the new conditions of time, place, custom and habit of mind in which they appear."

Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think the *Rubáiyát* has been translated so many different times? How do recent translations compare with that of FitzGerald? What criteria

- would you establish to evaluate whether one translation is better than another? Write a paper explaining your conclusions.
2. What connection exists between poet and translator? Besides the *Rubáiyát* itself, what do you believe connects FitzGerald and Khayyám? To translate a poet, do you think the translator must be a poet? Must a translator share the same view of the world and sense of language of the author in order to translate that writer's work? Create a presentation which outlines your beliefs on the questions raised.
 3. Examine FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, analyzing the volume's illustrations. Pretend you are an art critic for the *New York Times* and write a review appraising the visual art in FitzGerald's work.
 4. Some scholars argue that Khayyám followed Sufism, a Muslim form of religious mysticism. Research Sufism, noting its humanistic message. Are you surprised to find an element of mysticism embedded in Islam? To what extent do Khayyám's quatrains illustrate principles of Sufism? Write a paper that offers your conclusions.

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 **Thomas Kinsella**

BORN: 1928, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Another September (1958)

Downstream (1962)

Nightwalker and Other Poems (1968)

Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems (1973)

Peppercanister Poems 1972–1978 (1979)

Overview

One of a number of young Irishmen who began to write in the years following World War II, Thomas Kinsella has played a major role in invigorating the world of contemporary Irish verse. His technical skill and the originality of his subject matter set him apart from his contemporaries.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Son of a Dublin Socialist, a Civil Servant Turns to Poetry Born in Dublin to John Paul and Agnes Casserley Kinsella, Thomas Kinsella is the son of what he considered a typical Dublin family. His father, a Dublin man, was a lifelong socialist, a member of the Labour party and the Left Book Club. A series of grants and scholarships enabled Thomas to attend University College, Dublin. In 1946 he joined the civil service of Ireland. Two important relationships were formed during his post-university years—his friendship with Sean Oriada, who became Ireland's leading musician and composer and was a much-loved participant in the poet's growing intellectual life, and his relationship with Eleanor Walsh, whom Kinsella married on December 28, 1955. Kinsella had been writing in private for some time when in 1952 he met Liam Miller, founder of the Dolmen Press; between 1952 and 1956 Miller published several pieces of Kinsella's work, and Kinsella became a director of the press.

Early Success and Residence in America In 1958 Dolmen Press published *Another September*, Kinsella's first major collection, which in addition to being awarded the Guinness Poetry Prize for the year was made a Poetry Book Society selection. For the next few years, Kinsella pursued his duties in the finance department of the Irish civil service and had his verse published in periodicals in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kinsella's famous contemporaries include:

Ian Paisley (1926–): Religious and political leader in Northern Ireland, Paisley was a staunch Unionist, a defender of the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He served as first minister of Northern Ireland from May 2007 to May 2008.

Seamus Heaney (1939–): Irish poet and winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Edward Heath (1916–2005): Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1970 to 1974, a period of escalation of violence between political factions in Northern Ireland.

Nuala O'Faolain (1940–2008): Irish writer renowned for her memoirs *Are You Somebody?* (1996) and *Almost There* (2003).

Ireland and abroad. By 1962, though, he had already produced enough significant new work for another collection, *Downstream*.

The year after *Downstream* appeared, Kinsella was able to take a leave of absence from the finance department, where he was by then assistant principal officer. Though he had not initially planned on staying away permanently, in 1965 the poet—by then a member of the Irish Academy of Letters—made a major change in his life, accepting an invitation from Southern Illinois University to join its faculty as poet in residence. Being Ireland's leading young poet was no longer a part-time job.

He was awarded the Denis Devlin Memorial for his 1966 volume *Wormwood* and became professor of English at Southern Illinois shortly thereafter, subsequently publishing another new volume, *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (1968).

Reaction to "Bloody Sunday" *Nightwalker and Other Poems* was published while the poet was on a Guggenheim Fellowship, granted for the pursuit of his translation of *Táin Bo Cualinghe*, the Old Irish saga, on which he had been working more or less casually for some time. He continued his own writing as well, and the years following *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, Kinsella produced a steady stream of significant poems. The *Táin* was published in 1969; several major poems appeared in periodicals that year and the next, and in 1971 the Kinsellas left Carbondale, Illinois, to take up residence near Philadelphia, where the poet was named professor of English at Temple University. He had by now won the Devlin Award for the second time (1971). The following year saw the completion of several key poems: One of these, "Butcher's Dozen," was written

in the white heat of rage after the shooting of thirteen Irish civil rights marchers by British paratroopers in 1972—a moment in Northern Ireland's struggle for liberation from British colonialism known as "Bloody Sunday." Bloody Sunday was a particularly significant day in the troubles in Northern Ireland, where the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) waged an armed struggle against British control of the region. To many Irish the prospect of British soldiers firing on and killing unarmed youths motivated them to support and even join in the efforts of the IRA. In this same year, Kinsella set up the Peppercanister Press, a small publishing program operating out of his home in Dublin, where he lived when not teaching at Temple University. Its main function was to provide for limited printings of his works in progress. The first fruit along these lines was the collection *Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems*, published in 1973.

Thematic Evolution *Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems* is markedly different from Kinsella's earlier books. The poems are a species of mythmaking wherein the poet reaches back into his psychic and familial past to find his fuller self. Kinsella's preoccupation with Ireland and its past had been growing for some time, and would culminate in his 1976 founding of Temple University's School of Irish Tradition in Dublin. In this, Kinsella was part of a movement within Ireland to protect and cherish a heritage that had been systematically neglected and even to an extent considered destroyed by the British. Taking the directorship of the program also enabled Kinsella to continue dividing the academic year between Philadelphia and his native city, and the succeeding years have seen no decrease in his interest in the affairs of Ireland. In addition to publishing numerous collections of poems, Kinsella had the honor of receiving the keys to the city of Dublin in 2007.

Works in Literary Context

According to Thomas H. Jackson in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Kinsella "has explored Irish themes more and more in his later verse, but primarily in terms of exploring his own consciousness and consciousness in general." His poems since 1956, Jackson writes, have been "almost entirely lyrical—have dealt with love, death and the artistic act; with persons and relationships, places and objects, seen against the world's processes of growth, maturing and extinction." That is, Kinsella's career has traced an arc that moves from the personal, through the political, and back to the personal in its deepest sense—the personal as an expression of and engagement with universal themes and difficulties. Fittingly, the major influences on his work moved from W. H. Auden to William Carlos Williams, before—in later years—he began developing something visibly his own.

Death and Loss Kinsella is a poet of absences. Death and other departures are central to his bleak vision. In the

fractured lyrics of his earlier books, doomed love looms large, creating a persona in the poetry that is appalled but passive. As Kinsella's work develops, however, the persona becomes more active, enabling the losses to be presented more dramatically, creating tension. The isolated figure in poems such as "Baggot Street Deserta," "Dick King," and "A Country Walk" becomes progressively more involved with loss and its consequences. And the losses themselves are embodied in a more far-reaching model of human attachment, namely death. In addition to personal losses through death, the death of culture and the death of the past also become more insistent motifs as Kinsella's output broadens and deepens. In particular, the death of the past has been a matter of special emphasis for Kinsella, as is confirmed by his sustained attempt to recover and make available through translation the tradition of poetry in the Irish language.

Order from Ordeal Alongside Kinsella's confession that his vision of human existence is that it is "an ordeal," stands the poet's equally honest desire to believe in what he has called "the eliciting of order from experience." Kinsella's verse is a continuing appeal to the strength and justification of such a belief. His poetry is a commitment to make the leap of artistic faith that alone can overcome the abyss of unknowing that is mortality and death. The human potential to achieve that act of composed and graceful suspension is what gives Kinsella's poetry its vitality. His antiromantic conception of poetry, which entails darkness rather than fire, identifies Kinsella as a crucial reviser of the Irish poetic tradition.

Works in Critical Context

Calvin Bedient maintains in the *New York Times Book Review* that Thomas Kinsella "can hardly write a worthless poem." And he is "probably the most accomplished, fluent, and ambitious Irish poet of the younger generation," according to *New York Times Book Review* critic John Montague. Kinsella, writes M. L. Rosenthal in *The New Poets: American and British Poetry since World War II*, "seems to me to have the most distinctive voice of his generation in Ireland, though it is also the most versatile and the most sensitive to 'outside' influences."

Nightwalker and Other Poems Upon its publication in 1968, *Nightwalker and Other Poems* was most enthusiastically received. Ralph Mills observes in *Poetry*, "By tremendous strength of word and image [Kinsella] has succeeded magnificently in transmuting personal bitterness and despair into durable poems." Martin Dods-worth, for the *Listener*, was equally approving: "All through *Nightwalker* the qualifications one might make melt away before the superior force with which the poems are shaped as a whole. The faults arise from excess of talent, not from the opposite." If this comment faintly echoes earlier critics' concerns about Kinsella's facility of expression, Marius Bewley's praise in *Hudson Review* for one of the poems in the *Wormwood* group clearly does

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Kinsella's poetry often touches on themes of loss. Other works in a similar vein include:

Moon Crossing Bridge (1992), a collection of poetry by Tess Gallagher. Gallagher wrote the poems in this collection after the death of her husband, writer Raymond Carver, both celebrating their life together and offering a profound reflection on his passing and the feelings of loss and emptiness with which she was left.

"Annabel Lee" (1849), a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. One of Poe's best-known poems—second only perhaps to "The Raven," which deals with similar themes—this work focuses on one of Poe's favorite subjects: the death of a beautiful young woman and the emptiness and despair felt by her lover afterward. Unlike in "The Raven," however, the poem sounds a hopeful—if also macabre—note: One day, the narrator will be reunited with his lost love.

"Funeral Blues" (1936), a poem by W. H. Auden. Auden had a tremendous influence on Kinsella's early poetry. This poem, with its famous first line ("Stop all the clocks"), is a meditation on death and loss, often read during times of mourning.

Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair (1924), a collection of poems by Pablo Neruda. The collection that made Neruda famous at the young age of 19, it contains his heartrending reflections on the passing of love, "Tonight I Can Write."

not. "I cannot think of a short passage of poetry," Bewley writes, "in which so many complex and tangled emotions find such concentrated expression . . . all resolved at last through an acceptance in love." Montague was one of the few critics unimpressed with the collection, feeling that Kinsella had not developed any new strategy for dealing with the "cliché" of "urban discontent," and complaining that the persona of "Nightwalker" was "depressingly close to early [T. S.] Eliot."

Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems With the release of *Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems*, critical reception was almost as complicated as the poetry; the book called forth some of the most laudatory and most scathing criticism Kinsella had so far attracted. The difficulty of the verse left some critics non-plussed or unhappy. *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer Christopher Wright complained of the poems' opacity, charging that Kinsella's "images fail to construct a consistent and coherent para-reality." One academic critic, writing in *Poetry*, dismissed the whole book out of hand, irritated by what he felt to be its unfinished obscurity.

Conversely, an anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* offered the thought that “beset by this central blankness, several of the poems stagger to a halt, lapse into broken phrases or totter finally into silence; but there is no doubting the control with which these effects are brought off.” The book also called forth one of the best pieces of Kinsella criticism to date, a long review by Vernon Young in *Parnassus* that is perhaps still the fullest and most knowing individual treatment of Kinsella’s work.

Responses to Literature

1. Kinsella was influenced by the writings of psychologist Carl Jung, particularly what he had to say about universal archetypes. Research Jungian archetypes and explore their role in Kinsella’s poetry. How is Kinsella relying on this concept? In what ways might his poetry challenge the idea? Support your thesis with detailed analysis of segments from the poems themselves.
2. Both Kinsella’s poem “Butcher’s Dozen” and the Irish band U2’s song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” discuss the 1972 shooting of Irish marchers by British soldiers. How do the two works differ in their discussion of the event? How are they similar? Research the actual historical event and then discuss how the lyric descriptions reflect and/or distort the differing accounts of it.
3. Kinsella’s translation of the *Táin* remains the standard today. Select a passage from Kinsella’s translation and compare it to the same passages in other translations of the *Táin*. How do the translations differ? Which do you prefer and why?
4. It has been said that Kinsella was not able to write about Ireland until he left it. This phenomenon has been observed in other Irish writers as well. Research some of these other Irish expatriates and their experiences. Why do you think so many Irish artists require distance from their homeland before they can describe it? Is there something specifically Irish about this, or is it reflective of a phenomenon that would be true for many cultures?

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▣ Rudyard Kipling

BORN: 1865, Bombay (now Mumbai), India

DIED: 1936, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, short stories, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

“Gunga Din” (1892)

The Jungle Book (1894)

Captains Courageous (1897)

Kim (1901)

Just So Stories for Little Children (1902)

Overview

It is easy to underestimate the variety, complexity, and subtlety of British author Rudyard Kipling’s writing. He became an extraordinarily popular writer in the 1890s with short stories and poems enlivened by strange and interesting settings, a brisk narrative, and the fresh energy of the voices that told his tales. Credited with popularizing the short-fiction genre in England, Kipling is perhaps most famous for his insightful stories of Indian culture and Anglo-Indian society and for his masterly, widely read stories for children.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born in British Colony Kipling was born on December 30, 1865, in Bombay, India, where his father was professor of architectural sculpture in the School of Art. At the time, India was a colony of Great Britain, as at least parts of it had been since the early seventeenth century when the British East India Company gained control of some of its territory. Resentment of British authority and British disregard for Indian religious law led to the first open demonstration for independence in 1857. Though the rebellion was suppressed, the Government of India Act of 1858 gave India some rights, improved the country’s administration, and gave Indians the right to serve as counselors to the viceroy (the person appointed by the British monarch to govern India). Despite these small measures, India remained firmly in



Rudyard Kipling Kipling, Rudyard, photograph. Source unknown.

British control and economic exploitation had only increased by the time Kipling was born.

Educated in England In 1871, Kipling was sent to England for his education. He entered the United Services College at Westward Ho!—a boarding school in Devon—in 1878. There, young “Gigger” endured bullying and harsh discipline but also enjoyed the close friendships, practical jokes, and merry pranks he later recorded in *Stalky & Co.* (1899). Headmaster Price encouraged Kipling’s literary ambitions by having him edit the school paper and praising the poems Kipling wrote for it. When Kipling sent some of these to India, his father had them privately printed as *Schoolboy Lyrics* (1881), Kipling’s first published work.

In 1882, Kipling rejoined his parents in Lahore, a Muslim city in what would later become Pakistan, and became a subeditor for the *Civil and Military Gazette*. In 1887, he moved to the *Allahabad Pioneer*, a better paper that gave him greater liberty in his writing. The result was a flood of satirical verses, published as *Departmental Ditties* in 1886, and over seventy short stories published in 1888 in seven paperback volumes. In style, the stories showed the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, Bret Harte, and Guy de

Maupassant, but the subjects were Kipling’s own. His stories focused on Anglo-Indian society, which he readily criticized with an acid pen, and the life of the common British soldier and the Indian native, which he portrayed accurately and sympathetically.

In the 1880s, there was an increased call for Indian independence. Because the colonial overlords turned over large areas of India from rice cultivation to cotton farming in this period, the Indian food supply was endangered, but British factories had more raw materials for their textile factories. The British further impoverished India by destroying its native textile industry by flooding the market with cheaper, tariff-free British products. Because of such situations, Indians founded the Indian National Congress in 1885 to express their desires and to make plans for achieving independence.

Fame in England and America In 1889, Kipling took a long voyage through China, Japan, and the United States. When he reached London, he found that his stories had preceded him and established him as a brilliant new author. He was readily accepted into the circle of leading writers, including William Ernest Henley, Thomas Hardy, George Saintsbury, and Andrew Lang. For Henley’s *Scots Observer*, he wrote a number of stories and some of his best-remembered poems: “A Ballad of East and West,” “Mandalay,” and “The English Flag.” He also introduced English readers to a “new genre” of serious poems in Cockney dialect: “Danny Deever,” “Tommy,” “Fuzzy-Wuzzy,” and “Gunga Din.” Kipling’s first novel, *The Light That Failed* (1891), was unsuccessful. But when his stories were collected as *Life’s Handicap* (1891) and poems as *Barrackroom Ballads* (1892), Kipling replaced Lord Tennyson as the most popular English author.

In 1892, Kipling married Caroline Balestier, an American. They settled on the Balestier estate near Brattleboro, Vermont, and began four of the happiest years of Kipling’s life, during which he wrote some of his best work, including *Many Inventions* (1893), perhaps his best volume of short stories; *The Jungle Book* (1894), and *The Second Jungle Book* (1895). These works not only assured Kipling’s lasting fame as a serious writer but also made him a rich man.

His Imperialism In 1897 the Kiplings settled in Rottingdean, a village on the English coast near Brighton. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War (fought to free Cuba from Spanish colonial rule as well as to assert the growing power of the United States) in 1898 and the Boer War (a conflict in South Africa between British colonial rule and Dutch settlers for control of the country) in 1899 turned Kipling’s attention to colonial affairs. He began to publish a number of solemn poems in the *London Times*. The most famous of these, “Recessional” (1897), issued a warning to Englishmen to consider their accomplishments in the Diamond Jubilee year of Queen

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kipling's famous contemporaries include:

Edward VII (1841–1910): The British monarch who gave his name to the brief Edwardian period, at the turn of the twentieth century.

Lillie Langtry (1853–1929): A successful British actress (a sometime mistress to the future King Edward VII), Langtry made a wildly successful dramatic tour of America in 1882.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919): Naturalist, explorer, hunter, governor of New York, and twenty-sixth president of the United States, Roosevelt was a firm believer in “gunboat diplomacy” and overseas adventures. He and Kipling met at the White House on several occasions.

W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963): An African-American civil rights activist, author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Victoria's reign with humility and awe rather than pride and arrogance.

The equally well-known “White Man's Burden” (1899) clearly expressed the attitudes toward empire implicit in the stories in *The Day's Work* (1898) and *A Fleet in Being* (1898). He referred to less highly developed peoples as “lesser breeds” and considered order, discipline, sacrifice, and humility to be the essential qualities of colonial rulers. These views have been denounced as racist, elitist, and jingoistic. For Kipling, the term “white man” indicated citizens of the more highly developed nations, whose duty it was to spread law, literacy, and morality throughout the world.

Commented on Spanish-American War The Spanish-American War provoked Kipling to write for vice president Theodore Roosevelt a poem with the now offensive title “The White Man's Burden.” Its message was typical for Kipling. Seeing that America suddenly had acquired vast new colonial possessions from its defeat of Spain, thus joining the European powers in their race to colonize the rest of the world, Kipling argued that it was the responsibility of the United States to care for its new subjects liberally and humanely, if also as effective owners or wardens. Roosevelt reportedly responded, though not to Kipling, “Rather poor poetry, but good sense from the expansionist viewpoint.”

During the Boer War, Kipling spent several months in South Africa, where he raised funds for soldiers' relief and worked on an army newspaper, the *Friend*. In 1901, Kipling published *Kim*, the last and most charming of his

portrayals of Indian life. But anti-imperialist reaction following the end of the Boer War caused a decline in Kipling's popularity. When he published *The Five Nations*, a book of South African verse, in 1903, he was attacked in parodies, caricatures, and serious protests as the opponent of a growing spirit of peace and democratic equality. Kipling then retired to “Bateman's,” a house near Burwash, a secluded village in Essex, England.

Later Works Kipling now turned from the wide empire as subject to England itself. In 1902, he published *Just So Stories for Little Children*. He also issued two books of stories of England's past, intended, like the *Jungle Books*, for young readers but suitable for adults as well: *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910).

His most significant work was a number of volumes of short stories written in a new style: *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), *Actions and Reactions* (1904), *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917), *Debits and Credits* (1926), and *Limits and Renewals* (1932). These later stories treat more complex, subtle, and somber subjects in a style more compressed, allusive, and elliptical. Consequently, these stories have never been as popular as his earlier work. But modern critics, in reevaluating Kipling, have found a greater power and depth that make them his best work.

In 1907, Kipling became the first English writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died on January 18, 1936, and is buried in Westminster Abbey. His autobiography, *Something of Myself*, was published posthumously in 1937.

Works in Literary Context

Primarily influenced by his life experiences in India and England, Kipling also wrote about what he observed about conflicts such as the Boer War and the Spanish-American War. His experiences as a newspaperman greatly affected his style and interests. Spending many years in the British colony of India, Kipling experienced and expressed firsthand knowledge of the Indian people, Anglo-Indian culture, and the effects of colonial rule. His belief in the superiority of white people and colonial overlords is generally not embraced by early twenty-first century readers, but is reflective of attitudes of the time.

Modernism The years 1890–1932, during which Kipling's books were published in London and New York, coincided with the development of modernism and its establishment as the dominant literary style of the twentieth century. Modernism was a movement in twentieth-century literature that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter while searching for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression. Kipling's immense body of writing—five novels, approximately 250 short stories, more than eight hundred pages of verse, and a number of books of nonfiction prose—seems to have little obvious relationship to

modernism. Yet his books were extremely popular; 15 million volumes of his collected stories alone were sold.

Kipling's work, particularly his poetry, has received far less scholarly and critical attention than the efforts of major modernist writers, and he has not had as great an influence as such writers as William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, or Wallace Stevens on generations of successive writers. Both Kipling's inability to inspire the most intense kinds of critical interest and literary imitation seem due equally to his literary style and his subject matter.

Nevertheless, such a characterization of Kipling's poetry, although justified and clearly recognized by most of its admirers, is superficial. In his verse one can also find many of the great qualities of the best modernist poetry: plainness, conciseness, passionate utterance instead of worn-out poetic diction, conviction, sharp images, a revitalized sense of history, great artistic craft, and originality.

Imperialist Poetry Upon returning to England in 1896, Kipling became an "unofficial laureate" of the British Empire and its people. From a not-at-all high-minded viewpoint, he wrote in verse of imperialist triumphs and defeats, illusions of peace, realities of war (particularly the conflict with the Boers of South Africa), local yet ancient history, and finally of World War I and its legacy.

Also contrary to most twentieth-century taste—which has been primarily formed by modernism—are Kipling's characteristically rhyming, rhythmically regular, formal stanzas. He was also intent on writing clear, matter-of-fact statements expressed by a voice certain about a particular point of view: again, rather the antithesis of a modernist persona.

Use of Rhythm One of the key elements of Kipling's poetry is its sound. He wrote many of his poems to be read aloud. For Kipling, this criterion required consistent use of regular rhythm, rhymes of all kinds, formal stanzas, the ballad, and forms of popular song. By the same measure, Kipling would avoid using free verse, which he likened to "fishing with barbless hooks." In his autobiography, Kipling remembers how, when writing his poems in India, "I made my own experiments in the weights, colours, perfumes, and attributes of words in relation to other words, either as read aloud so that they may hold the ear or, scattered over the page, draw the eye. There is no line of my verse or prose which has not been mouthed till the tongue has made all smooth, and memory, after many recitals, has mechanically skipped the grosser superfluities."

Works in Critical Context

From the 1890s to the 1920s, the most popular writer in the English-speaking world was Rudyard Kipling. He won at the outset of his career the favorable attention of writers and critics, and in 1907, he received the first Nobel Prize for Literature given to an author writing in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Kipling wrote during a time when the powers of Europe were establishing vast colonial possessions in Africa and Asia, and he often wrote about colonialism. Other writers touched on this theme as well, especially once those colonies began moving toward independence in the twentieth century. Here are some books that deal with this topic:

Heart of Darkness (1902), a novel by Joseph Conrad. This tale of an ivory dealer in the Congo and his pursuit of the madman Kurtz paints a dark picture of European colonialism and would inspire the movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

A Passage to India (1924), a novel by E. M. Forster. Like several of Kipling's works, this book deals with the British presence in India, albeit at a later date: the 1920s, when the Indian independence movement was heating up.

Midnight's Children (1981), a novel by Salman Rushdie. An Indian Muslim, Rushdie secured his literary reputation with this tale of postcolonial India. The main character, born at the moment of India's partition (midnight on August 15, 1947), serves as an embodiment of Indian history since independence.

Orientalism (1978), a nonfiction work by Edward Said. This book is a milestone in postcolonial studies, the discipline of examining the impact of European colonialism on those regions that suffered under it, and how they are moving into their own identities, as well as the lingering prejudices that persist both in the former colonies and in Europe and America.

the English language. He published hundreds of short stories and poems, four novels, and volumes of pamphlets, speeches, and journalistic pieces. Yet, of his vast body of work, only his novel *Kim* and his other writing for children have kept Kipling popular. His children's books have remained in print while his tales for adults of ethics, aesthetics, and empire have gone out of fashion—though they are receiving renewed attention in the wake of recent critical interest in imperialism.

The Novels Of Kipling's four novel-length works, only *Kim* was critically well-received. Critics attributed the poor plotting and weak characterization of his first novel, *The Light That Failed*, to his youth and inexperience. His second novel, *The Naulahka*, exhibits the same shortcomings. In his last two novels, *Captains Courageous* (1897) and *Kim*, these weaknesses were turned to Kipling's advantage, for both share an essentially plotless, wandering structure that contributed to their effect. While some critics contend that a lack of introspection

on the part of the protagonist of *Kim* forms the primary fault in a potentially great work, others hold that Kipling's penetrating scrutiny of his dual attachments, as well as his sympathetic depiction of the Indian people, place this novel among the masterpieces of English literature.

Poetry Ann Parry writes in *The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling* that the question of whether Kipling was truly a poet has been "perpetually debated." She quotes writer T. R. Henn's answer to this question: "When his technical mastery, variety and craftsmanship have all been recognized, it has to be said that 'Kipling, nearly, but never wholly achieved greatness . . . the ultimate depth was lacking.'" An increasing number of readers since World War I have neither enjoyed nor felt instructed by poetry which often is, quite blatantly, politically imperialist and socially reactionary—sounding like and appealing to, in George Orwell's words, a "gutter patriot."

Responses to Literature

1. Look at several of Kipling's poems of your choosing, and discuss the following in an essay: Do you agree that Kipling's work shows "technical mastery"? Why or why not? Do you agree with the assessment that Kipling's work lacks "ultimate depth"? Why or why not? Use examples to support your opinions.
2. The poem "If—" was originally published in Kipling's collection of children's stories, *Rewards and Fairies*, as a companion piece to the story "Brother Square-Toes," which features George Washington as a character. Read "Brother Square-Toes." Write a brief essay showing how "If—" serves to complement the short story.
3. In the late nineteenth century, Britain was a major empire, with colonies all over the world. Research the Boer War (1899–1902) using history textbooks or historical accounts in your library. In what ways did that war affect the British Empire? Create a presentation with your findings.
4. The characters of Nag and Nagaina are portrayed as villains in the story "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi." The use of snakes as a symbol of evil is common in Western civilization. Can you think of other stories, myths, or folktales that use this motif? Research the folktales and mythologies of another, non-Western culture, such as the Chinese culture or the Hindu culture. Are snakes used as symbols in these cultures and, if so, what do they represent? Write a paper that outlines your conclusions.
5. Much of *Kim* is set along the Grand Trunk Road, which was a main highway that crossed the Indian subcontinent. This highway has played a major role in the history of India. Research the history of the Grand Trunk Road. Where did it come from? What importance has it played over the centuries? Create a

presentation for the class that displays your findings and conclusions.

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A. M. Klein

BORN: 1909, Ratno, Ukraine

DIED: 1972, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Hath Not a Jew... (1940)

Poems (1944)

The Hitleriad (1944)

The Rocking Chair, and Other Poems (1948)

The Second Scroll (1951)

Overview

Regarded as one of Canada's foremost literary figures of the first half of the twentieth century, Klein is primarily known as a poet of the Jewish experience. While capturing the unique flavor of Jewish life in Montreal, Klein's poetry also illuminates the catastrophic history of the Jews. In addition to poetry celebrating his heritage, exemplified by the collection *Hath Not a Jew...* (1940), Klein addressed the various fundamental questions related to human existence in his collection *The Rocking Chair, and Other Poems* (1948). He also depicted humankind's universal quest for freedom in his acclaimed novel *The Second Scroll* (1951).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jewish Life and Commitment Abraham Moses Klein was born in Ratno, Ukraine, on February 14, 1909, to Colman and Yetta Morantz Klein. The family immigrated soon thereafter to Canada. Klein was



A. M. Klein Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced by permission.

brought up in Montreal and lived his life there. His formative years were spent in the self-contained Jewish community of the Montreal ghetto, centered around St. Lawrence Boulevard. The first Jews came to Montreal in the 1760s, and the Jewish community in Montreal was founded shortly thereafter. It is one of the oldest Jewish communities in North America. By the early 1900s, at least seven thousand Jews lived in the city, with the population expanding due to immigrants from eastern and central Europe.

On completing his elementary Jewish education at the Talmud Torah, Klein studied for several years with private tutors, and as an adolescent his commitment to Judaism was so strong that he considered going to a yeshiva for rabbinic training. Instead, he embarked upon a secular career. After graduating from Baron Byng High School, he entered McGill University in the fall of 1926.

Jewish Leader at University While at McGill, Klein was a leading figure in Canadian Young Judaea, the Zionist youth movement. (Zionists supported a homeland for the Jewish people in Israel. The movement achieved its goal in 1948 with the founding of modern Israel.) In 1928, he became editor of its national periodical, the *Judaeon*, and a year later he was appointed educational director of Young Judaea, a position he held until June 1932. From the early 1930s on he contributed articles and reviews to the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, and he prepared outlines for study groups in Young Judaea on

such topics as the history of the Jews in Poland and the treatment of the Jew in English literature.

Jewish Fiction and Nonfiction Many of Klein's early published poems and nearly all his early short stories appeared first in the *Judaeon*. Klein's fiction, like his poetry, was an important part of his activity during his university years in the late 1920s and early 1930s. From 1929 to 1933, he published fourteen short stories, nearly all in Jewish publications. He contributed articles to the *McGill Daily*, and he founded a university literary magazine, the *McGilliad*.

Continued Jewish Activities Klein graduated with his BA in 1930 and proceeded to take his law degree at the University of Montreal in 1933. Upon graduating from law school, he practice law with Samuel Chait, a friend from his Young Judaea days, but a year later, he entered partnership with Max Garmaise, a former fellow student at law school with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship. Klein was bored, however, and found the efforts to practice law in Montreal during the Depression years futile. The Great Depression had been caused by the Stock Market Crash of 1929 in the United States as well as economic crises worldwide in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During much of the 1930s, much of the world was mired in a financial slump.

Klein's short story "Whom God Hath Joined," written during this period, reflects his frustrations. After his father's death in 1934, Klein took on the financial burden of his family and added to his responsibility when he married his childhood sweetheart, Bessie Kozlov, in 1935.

In November 1938, Klein assumed the editorship of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, the leading Anglo-Jewish weekly in Canada. For the next seventeen years, his was an important voice in the Jewish community as a lecturer on Zionism, in his poetry and fiction, and in hundreds of articles and editorials, published chiefly in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.

A Shift in Focus Klein initially wrote to educate and empower the Jewish community, but the mid-1930s saw a shift in emphasis in his short stories. His widening range of activities, both in literary circles and in the legal profession, brought him in touch with a larger world of experience, one reflected in unpublished stories such as "Whom God Hath Joined" and "Portrait of an Executioner." The Great Depression, the problem of increasing financial responsibility after the death of his father, the growing threat of fascism, and the intensifying Nazi menace became greater subjects of concern for Klein.

The Nazi Party had gained power in Germany in the early 1930s. Led by Adolf Hitler, who soon became Germany's dictator, Nazi Germany had territorial ambitions backed by an expanded military. The Nazis gave

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Klein's famous contemporaries include:

- Golda Meir** (1898–1978): One of the founders of the modern state of Israel and its fourth prime minister.
- Henry Roth** (1906–1995): Author of *Call It Sleep* (1934), considered a masterwork of Jewish American literature. The novel focuses on the life of a young boy growing up in a Jewish slum in New York City.
- Leon Uris** (1924–2003): American author famous for his well-researched historical novels, including *Exodus* (1958), which focuses on the founding of the modern state of Israel.
- Elia Kazan** (1909–2003): The Greek-American film and stage director also widely known for his cofounding of the New York City Actors Studio.
- Eudora Welty** (1909–2001): An American fiction writer who was widely known for her writings about the American South. Her novels include *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973.

Germans a sense of pride after their bitter defeat in World War I and the humiliating peace terms that deeply dampened the German economy. While Hitler and the Nazis longed to control Europe—a primary cause of the beginning of World War II in 1939—they also began taking away the civil rights of Jews as early as 1935. Part of their agenda became the extermination of Jews in what came to be known as the Holocaust.

Dark Subjects In 1932, Klein assembled most of his completed poems into two collections, *Gestures Hebraic* and *Poems*, neither of which has been published. The former contains his “Jewish” poems, and the latter, with some notable exceptions, such as “The Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet” and “The Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger,” includes poems not specifically Jewish in content. Most of Klein’s best-known early poems, such as “Greeting on This Day” and “Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens,” and his first published volume of poetry, *Hath Not a Jew...* (1940), present poetry exclusively from the world of Jewish experience.

In the mid-1940s, after a lapse of a few years, Klein returned to the short-story genre and continued on his most familiar subjects. His dark view of the world, however, provoked by the Depression and Nazism, was worsened by the horror of the Holocaust and his perception of the cynical and immoral indifference of the democratic world. In three stories written between 1943 and 1945, “Detective Story,” “We Who Are About to Be Born,” and “One More Utopia,” Klein expresses a very negative attitude toward life.

Postwar Concerns Toward the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s, Klein’s stories reflected more of the contemporary political concerns, including growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, which soon hardened into the Cold War. Also political, and revealing, Klein’s doubts about man’s ability to govern rationally and perhaps even to survive are featured in two of his best short stories: “Letter from Afar” and “The Bells of Sobor Spasitula.”

Depression and Collapse Until he suffered a nervous breakdown in the mid-1950s, Klein continued as editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. He lectured frequently to Jewish audiences in Canada and the United States on the Holocaust and on the newly emergent state of Israel, and occasionally addressed groups on English writers, specifically James Joyce and Gerard Manley Hopkins. His breakdown, when it occurred, came as a shock.

After a short period spent in a hospital in late summer 1954, he attempted to return to his normal routine, but by the end of 1956, Klein withdrew from most of his activities and from virtually all contact with friends and family. His deep depression lasted until his death on August 20, 1972.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Klein’s creative work was shaped by his Jewish background, home and education, among other influences. Klein’s early verse was also markedly influenced by the sensuous language and imagery of the poetry of Keats. While this influence remained because it was well suited to Klein’s temperament and taste, Klein also responded to the metaphysical qualities of John Donne and to the more modern verse of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. With Klein’s early stories he followed the tradition of the great Jewish short-story writers, such as I. L. Peretz, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Sholom Aleichem, and S. J. Agnon.

Jewish Concerns as Themes Much of Klein’s early creative writing reflects his interests and involvement in activities of Jewish and Zionist concern. Because Klein grew up in a religious home where Judaism was daily expressed, much of his work is reflective of the Jewish experience. His awareness of his place in a continuing tradition enabled him to achieve even in his most personal poems a transcendence of self and an enlargement of the meaning and significance of his experience. This awareness is made clear in such poems as “Psalm XXXVI—a Psalm Touching Genealogy,” in *Poems* (1944), and is demonstrated more thoroughly in *Hath Not a Jew...*

The central theme in *Hath Not a Jew...*, however, is anti-Semitism, a topic given terrible immediacy in the 1930s by the Nazis. Klein gives this subject perspective in “Sonnet in Time of Affliction” and “Design for Mediaeval Tapestry,” for instance, by referring directly or

through image and allusion to instances of anti-Semitism in biblical and postbiblical times and in various regions. In “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” he depicts the callous indifference of the Western world to the brutal, genocidal policies of the pro-Nazi regimes, while in many other poems he examines the wide range of Jewish responses to this recurring tragedy, from pious or passive acquiescence to active resistance.

In all that he describes, whether through symbol, allusion, or precise and minute detail, Klein is essentially romantic, revealing the capacity to perceive freshly the wonder of life with a hint of whimsy. The subject matter of Klein’s fiction, like that of many of his poems, centers on Jewish holidays and ceremonies, such as the Sabbath, Hanukkah, and Passover, and involves animals and demons, mystical visitants, and a wide range of characters familiar to the Jewish scene—the scribe or scholar, the *shlimazl*, or community functionary. The tone of these stories is comparable to that of the early poems—a blending of wit and whimsy, of sentimentality and wry humor, a respect for simple human dignity, and an acceptance of the weaknesses that seem, perhaps fortunately, an inevitable component in the human comedy.

Works in Critical Context

Klein had always been esteemed by those writers and critics whose opinions he respected—writers E. J. Pratt, A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, Irving Layton, and Louis Dudek, and critics W. E. Collin, Leon Edel, E. K. Brown, Northrop Frye, and Desmond Pacey, among others. Smith, for example, praised early poems like “Snowshoers” and said of Klein’s later French-Canadian poems that “in the patriarchal, traditional and ecclesiastic entity that is French Canada, Klein found a universe that his Jewish sensibility permitted him to understand and love.”

Yet Klein felt neglected by the general reading public and by the Jewish community. In some instances his perception may have been accurate. With his satire on Hitler, *Hitleriad*, for example, there was a certain amount of critical disapproval and his audience was limited. In other instances, however, Klein underestimated his work and audience. This is demonstrated with such works as *Hath Not a Jew* . . .

***Hath Not a Jew* . . .** The poems found in this collection explore history, past and current, and present dramatic incidents in the Holy Land and of the Diaspora (the Jewish community outside of Palestine) such as the massacre at Hebron and the pogroms in Europe. Some movingly describe famed characters such as Reb Levi Yitschok, philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and the Baal Shem Tov. Critics note that his irony at times suggests a critical awareness of shortcomings, but on the whole the tone is genial and tolerant. In general, critics believe, Klein creates for his people a dignified counterportrait to the degrading stereotyped image circulated by anti-Semites.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Klein focused much literary attention on the horrors of the Holocaust. Other Holocaust-related works include:

Collected Later Poems (2003), poems by Anthony Hecht.

In this collection of three volumes of poetry, the expressions of Hecht’s experiences as a World War II liberator who witnessed the atrocities firsthand take on intense focus and profound sentiment.

Night (1955), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. In this brief but powerful autobiography, the author recounts his experiences as a young Orthodox Jew imprisoned at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

The Shawl (1990), a collection of short fiction by Cynthia Ozick. In these the novella and short story contained in this publication, the author tells the intimate story of Holocaust survivor Rosa Lublin, who loses her children and her soul.

Man’s Search for Meaning (1945), a nonfiction book by Viktor Frankl. In this work, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist retells his experiences as a Holocaust victim and puts forth a philosophy and a therapy of existential healing.

Critics believe that Klein’s poetic craftsmanship is clearly evidenced in this volume, in which he used almost every poetic form and device, often quite experimentally, with success. The book may have confirmed Klein’s frustrations—as it sold poorly at the time—but many of the poems of *Hath Not a Jew* . . . have since become common selections in anthologies of Canadian literature. Along similar lines, critic Leon Edel wrote in *Poetry* of the book, “The collection does Klein a distinct disservice in that it is not sufficiently representative of his remarkable gifts, the gift above all of eloquent rebellion.” Edel concludes, however, that “despite their flaws, these poems are a key to an ancient, deep-rooted, emotional and intellectual tradition. As such, they can lay claim to vitality and importance.”

Responses to Literature

1. The pattern of life in Klein’s community was uniquely Jewish. Festive and solemn religious holidays were key annual events, and the code of religious observances was the norm of accepted behavior. In a group, take responsibility for investigating one Jewish holiday, discovering its origin, its importance today, and how it is celebrated. Prepare a presentation to the class demonstrating what you learn.

2. Klein presents to his reader a broad cross section of French Canadians, ranging from ordinary folk with simple faith and large families to industrial and financial barons, from rowdy students and sedate scholars to gangsters and demagogic politicians, and from pompous functionaries to humbly devout and devoted Sisters of Mercy. Consider the characteristics of one of these persons. Make a list of the qualities in that character that you find striking. Then write a portrait poem to depict that person/character.
3. Klein planned a major historical novel on the golem legend, a topic that fascinated him. Research the golem legend. Find out what a golem is, what the background is for the legend, and what different versions of the folklore exist. Then read Michael Chabon's 2000 novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, which makes prominent use of a golem. How might Klein's use of the legend have differed from Chabon's?
4. Students interested in finding out more about the Jewish community in Canada should read *A Coat of Many Colors: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* (1990) by Irving Abella. The book contains hundreds of photographs and traces the impact of Jewish immigration to Canada starting in 1738.

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Heinrich von Kleist

BORN: 1777, *Frankfurt an der Oder, Prussia*

DIED: 1811, *Wannsee bei Potsdam, Prussia*

NATIONALITY: *German*

GENRE: *Drama, fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Feud of the Schroffensteins (1803)

The Broken Jug (1803–1805)

Penthesilea (1808)

Herman's Battle (1809)

Prince Friedrich von Homburg (1811)

Overview

Unappreciated in his own time, Heinrich von Kleist is now considered one of the greatest German dramatists, and his work is favorably compared with that of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Kleist's short life is almost as much a puzzle as his works: His



Heinrich von Kleist Kleist, Heinrich Von, photograph. The Library of Congress.

death came just a month after his thirty-fourth birthday, and he never married.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Military Background and a Military Life

Heinrich von Kleist was born in Frankfurt an der Oder on October 18, 1777, to a military family that had provided Prussia with eighteen generals. Kleist was educated privately until the age of eleven, when he went to the French Gymnasium in Berlin. Kleist joined the army at the age of fifteen and participated in the 1793 Rhine campaign against the French, but, to the disappointment of his family, he left the army in 1799 with no definite plans.

A Planned Marriage and Mysterious Travels

Kleist attended the university in his native city for one year, while also working as a tutor to Wilhelmine von Zenge, the daughter of a family friend. Kleist and Zenge fell in love, and their subsequent betrothal necessitated that he secure a financially stable position. He found employment in the civil service but soon left on a long journey through Europe, the true purpose of which has never been discovered. In his letters to Zenge, he refers vaguely to a medical condition for which he is seeking treatment and to a secret mission investigating industries outside Prussia. Scholars note the importance of this trip in Kleist's development; it was in his letters to Zenge that he first expressed his desire to pursue a literary career.

Another key event in Kleist's intellectual development was his reading in 1801 of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788). Kleist's reading of Kant challenged his rational ideas about human perfectibility and immortality. Kant maintained that reason was not able to discern the truth behind appearances; this sent Kleist into a period of despair that scholars commonly call his "Kant crisis." Scholars and critics also suggest that Kleist's reaction to Kant set the tone for his creative work to come—in which he despaired over the impossibility of anything being absolutely certain.

A Reluctant Civil Servant Turns to Literature

Financial constraints eventually required Kleist to return to the civil service, but in 1801 he again gave up his position and moved to Paris with his half-sister Ulrike. Life in France did not please Kleist. Reading the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he became determined to lead a simple, natural life: Later that year he retreated to Switzerland and asked Zenge to join him there in an idyllic retreat. She refused but explained in a letter that she understood his need to satisfy his literary ambitions before returning to Germany. Kleist did return to Prussia in 1804 to assume another minor civil service post in Potsdam, but his betrothal to Zenge never proceeded to marriage.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kleist's famous contemporaries include:

Jane Austen (1775–1817): A British novelist famous for her works *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, widely considered classics of English literature.

Simón Bolívar (1783–1830): A Venezuela-born resistance leader who was instrumental in Hispanic America's liberation from Spain and in founding the Spanish colonies of Gran Columbia.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834): A British poet, philosopher, and critic who is widely known as one of the founders of the Romantic movement.

Francis Scott Key (1779–1843): The American lawyer and author who wrote the United States' national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): A German Romantic poet, playwright, and novelist, most famous for his drama *Faust*.

Kleist wrote all of his major works between 1804 and 1810, during which time he was sometimes a civil servant and sometimes not. He also, with the German economist Adam Müller, started the literary journal *Phöbus* as a vehicle for his stories. Lack of financial support caused the journal's early demise; this disappointment was compounded by the failure of Goethe's 1808 production of Kleist's play *The Broken Jug*. In 1810 the first volume of Kleist's *Erzählungen*, a collection of stories and novellas, was published. At this time he also started a political periodical, *Die Berliner Abendblätter*, in which he published anti-Napoleonic articles, but lack of popular support resulted in the closure of the paper after six months. In 1799, Napoléon Bonaparte had led a coup d'état that effectively ended the French Revolution that had been in effect since 1789, and in 1804 he installed himself as emperor of France and began military campaigns designed to bring all of Europe under his thrall. His victories over Prussia and other German states were greeted by some with equanimity, since he was seen as a tonic against the revolutionary forces stewing all across Europe, but were intensely galling for nationalists like Kleist.

A Sensational Suicide Throughout his life, Kleist had expressed a wish to die and had frequently asked friends to commit suicide with him. In 1811 he befriended Henriette Vogel, a well-known actress who was dying of cancer; she agreed to a suicide pact. The two traveled together to an inn near Potsdam, and on November 21, Kleist shot Vogel and then himself. The double suicide was reported throughout Europe and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Because of the scandal and controversy surrounding his death, Kleist has come to represent the idea of the “tragic artist” driven to extremity by the constraints of society. Here are some other works either by or about “tragic artists”:

Lust for Life (1934), a novel by Irving Stone. This biography of Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh was the first of many successful biographies written by Stone. Van Gogh suffered bouts of mental illness.

A Season in Hell (1873), a poem by Arthur Rimbaud. This extended poem was enormously influential on later European writers. Rimbaud himself led a troubled and troubling life full of excesses of all kinds, and details of his personal life have given his work added mystique.

Waiting on God (1950), a collection of essays, letters, and other writings by Simone Weil. Weil was a French social activist and mystic whose devotion to her causes was deemed by those around her to be extreme at the very least, and possibly insane. She starved herself to death in 1943 out of sympathy for those suffering under the German occupation of France during World War II.

attracted much attention and debate, thereby helping to keep Kleist’s memory alive and ultimately—albeit rather morbidly—stimulating critical interest in his works.

Works in Literary Context

Philosophical and Literary Precedents Kleist’s life and work were influenced by his study of the works of Rousseau and by his close reading of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788). Kleist also took cues from literature; for example, *The Feud of the Schroffensteins* (1916) borrows from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* with its story of family hostility standing in the way of young love. Likewise, his play *Penthesilea* (1808) was inspired by a Greek myth about an Amazon queen.

Kleist’s dramas are written in blank verse rather than the smooth, classical verse used by Schiller and Goethe, the authors with whom he has been most often compared. Kleist’s style is characterized by frequent enjambements, caesuras, and abrupt changes of speaker; for instance, although only the first ten scenes of *Robert Guiskard* have survived, the existing fragment suffices to demonstrate how powerful a drama it might have become had Kleist been able to finish it. A play about the Norman leader’s plan to conquer Constantinople, *Robert Guiskard* reveals how Kleist used dramatic gesture, the similes of Homer, exaggerated metaphor, and disrupted word order and unfinished utterance to indi-

cate the emotional conflicts and secret thoughts and feelings of the characters.

Human Frailty and the Existential Vision Scholars note that Kleist’s work is informed with an existential vision—one that emphasizes human frailty. *Robert Guiskard*, for example, examines the plight of a dying army commander, an ambitious man who ultimately comes to despair over his inability to realize his goals. Kleist’s plays and stories often depict uncontrolled erotic passion, mental confusion, and violent emotional outbursts that in his time offended common notions of propriety and good taste. This concern with uncontrolled passion and violence is evident in his first play, *The Feud of the Schroffensteins* (1803; published 1916), for instance, a tragedy incorporating a plot similar to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, except that the feuding fathers kill their own children to prevent their love affair.

Works in Critical Context

One of the most enigmatic of German writers, Heinrich von Kleist has been the object of critical debate and controversy from his appearance on the literary scene in the first decade of the nineteenth century to the present day. That his creative genius was of an exceptionally high order has not been disputed. It was rather the extreme stylization and frank sexuality of his depictions that shocked his contemporaries, denying him the public and critical acclaim he craved and believed he deserved. In his plays and stories, raging passions result in shattered skulls and suitors slain and devoured in the name of love; however, these tendencies have ensured continuing interest in his work during the twentieth century, and he is now read with a keen eye to his acute psychological insight and honest depiction of sexuality. Equally, readers over the years have been all but obsessed with assigning meaning to Kleist’s death by suicide.

Nineteenth-century critics searched Kleist’s works for evidence of mental illness, focusing on the extreme and eccentric nature of his characters. In the early twentieth century, scholars influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche focused on Kleist’s suicide as part of his literary makeup and read Kleist as an example of Nietzsche’s tragic artist. Others saw Kleist, in the words of Julius Petersen, as the “classic of Expressionism,” interpreting his works as a quest for philosophical certainty. German nationalist critics in the period of Adolf Hitler’s rule cited Kleist’s suicide as the ultimate sacrifice of an individual for his country and praised his works, especially *Prince Friedrich von Homburg* and *Herman’s Battle*, for their glorification of individual commitment to the German nation.

Twentieth-Century Approaches to Kleist’s Death and Works Kleist criticism after World War II took an existentialist turn, with readers seeing Kleist’s suicide as the normal response to the tragic nature of human existence. For example, Swana L. Hardy, who interprets

Kleist's work as the "allegory" of his life, suggests in her essay "Heinrich von Kleist: Portrait of a Mannerist" that one can "perceive in Kleist and his work a paradigm [a model] of the existentialist interpretation of man." Since the 1960s there has also been increasing emphasis on studying the social, political, and historical aspects of Kleist's works. Many Marxist scholars believe that Kleist's primary concern was the relation of man to society under capitalism—though they debate as to whether Kleist condoned middle-class values or supported a rebellion against authority.

More recent responses to Kleist have focused on his short stories, as collected in the *Erzählungen*, with an eye to understanding these stories' relationship to other writers and thinkers. Anthony Stephens, for instance, suggests that Kleist's "practice as a literary writer is invariably to *quote*, with varying degrees of scepticism or irony, convictions he had once uncritically espoused." Coming from another angle, Seán Allan observes with some satisfaction that "literary critics are no longer predisposed to see the works as ending on a note of reconciliation but rather as riddled with elements of ambiguity and irony to the extent that they negate any prospect of establishing a habitable order in which human progress might be possible."

Responses to Literature

- In his analysis of Kleist's short fiction, Denys Dyer suggests that the chaos depicted in the stories mirrors the upheaval in Europe caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. To consider Kleist's writing in this context, research an event related to the period of Napoleonic rule and find evidence of the event as it informs one of Kleist's works, such as *Herman's Battle* (1809) or *Prince Friedrich von Homburg* (1821). Analyze examples from the work that show Kleist's attitude toward Napoléon.
- Many Marxist scholars believe that Kleist's primary concern was the relation of man to society under capitalism. In a group effort, find evidence that would support this critical interpretation and evidence that would argue against it. Hold a debate where both sides are expressed. In a Kleist work, for example, where does the author show he condones middle-class values? In contrast, where does he seem to favor a rebellion against authority? Offer a detailed analysis of examples to defend a pro or con position.
- In an introduction to Kleist's short story "On the Marionette Theatre" Idris Parry writes, "On the centenary of his death, the critics agreed he was a hundred years ahead of his time. In 1977 they said he'd come into the world (on 18 October 1777) two hundred years too early." Read a Kleist story and consider what would appeal to readers today. Do you agree that Kleist was ahead of his time? Why or why not?
- As a proto-existentialist thinker and writer, Kleist often showed opposition to theories of human perfection. Consider what it means to be perfect: make a list of human goals that strive toward perfection (in sports, in academics, in the workplace, in relationships). What characteristics in our lives make us, however, less than perfect? How does Kleist show human fallibility? How does this play out in the lives of his characters? What does Kleist's own attitude toward the fragile human condition seem to be?

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Ivan Klíma

BORN: 1931, Prague, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Within Three Frontiers (1960)

My First Loves (1988)

Love and Garbage (1990)



Ivan Klíma *Klíma, Ivan*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Ivan Klíma belongs to the generation of Czech writers who lived through two totalitarian regimes—Nazism and communism. Outspoken in his criticism of the communist regime, Klíma was expelled from the Communist Party, and his works were banned from publication, following the suppression in 1968 of the Prague Spring reform movement. As a result, many of his works first appeared in German translation or by Czech-language publishing houses abroad.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in a Concentration Camp Klíma was born in Prague on September 14, 1931, to Ing Vilém Klíma, an electronics engineer, and Marta Klíma, née Synková. Since he was part Jewish, he was sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Bohemia in December of 1941 and spent three and a half years there. Millions of Jewish people died from starvation, disease, abuse, and systematic execution while being held captive in such camps. Few prisoners survived and many were sent to extermination camps, like Auschwitz. Klíma was one of only 17,247 (of approximately 144,000

imprisoned Jews) survivors of the Theresienstadt camp. After World War II Klíma went to secondary school in Prague and then studied Czech language and literature at Charles University. He submitted his thesis on Karel Čapek in 1956; it was revised and published in book form in 1962. Klíma worked as an editor from 1956 to 1963. On September 24, 1958, he married Helena Malá, a sociologist, with whom he had two children.

A Change of Heart As a young man, Klíma, like many of his contemporaries, believed that communism was the fairest political and economic system, but his father's arrest and other experiences after the communists came to power in February of 1948 led him to abandon the ideology. His literary debut in the young writers' journal *May* and his first books, the story collections *A Perfect Day* and *Within Three Frontiers*, bear witness to this change of heart. Instead of the oversimplified, idealized picture of the world current in Czech literature in the 1950s, in these works the characters are not merely representatives of an ideology or a social group but individuals with vivid inner lives.

A Platform for Political and Cultural Reform

Klíma worked as deputy editor of the weekly *Literary Newspaper* from 1963 until it was suppressed in 1967; he continued in the same position with its successors, the *Literary Gazette* from March to August of 1968 and the *Gazette* from autumn of 1968 until spring of 1969. Far from being purely literary journals, these cultural and political papers were in the forefront of the efforts of Czech writers, artists, and intellectuals to liberalize the communist regime; they were also quite popular—their circulation never fell below a hundred thousand in a nation of ten million. Thus, they were the chief platform for the political and cultural reform movement that led to the Prague Spring.

Banned in Czechoslovakia In 1969–1970 Klíma was a guest lecturer at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. When he returned to Czechoslovakia, he found himself one of some four hundred writers who were banned from publishing their works and appearing in the media. His earlier works had been removed from the libraries, and his new books were distributed illegally in samizdat (secretly published) editions; they were also published abroad by Czech exiles and in translations, mainly in German. This situation lasted until the fall of communism at the end of 1989, although in the final months of the communist regime, negotiations were under way to allow Klíma's *My Merry Mornings*, which had appeared in samizdat in 1978 and had been published in Canada in 1979, to be published officially in Czechoslovakia. During the 1970s and 1980s, Klíma held jobs as a hospital porter, postman, seasonal seller of carp (a Czech Christmas dish), and assistant surveyor.

The Fall of Communism Klíma's works could not be published by Czech publishing houses until after the

fall of communism in 1989, and only then was he again able to take part in public life and to travel abroad. In December of 1989 he became one of the founders of *Obec spisovatelů* (Association of Writers), and from 1990 to 1993 he was chairman of the Czech PEN club. He also began writing on current affairs for Prague newspapers, especially for the *Literary Newspaper*. Since 1991 he has been writing a regular column, “Letters from Prague,” for *New York Newsday* and the Swedish *Svenska Dagbladet*. He also writes articles for the German daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

Works in Literary Context

The work of Klíma is heavily influenced by his experiences of abuse and oppression. Within the confines of the concentration camp where he spent a number of years, Klíma was exposed to the storytelling of Jewish women, including his mother, who were housed with their children. In his fiction and drama, Klíma documents everyday life in a totalitarian society. He is praised for his use of satire and black humor to examine the effects of political and economic repression upon ordinary individuals. Within this framework, it is easy to see the influence of existentialism—which emphasizes the absolute necessity of experiencing life in light of the fact that there is no guarantee of an afterlife—and particularly absurdist drama and fiction on Klíma’s work. But since Klíma was himself a person living in a totalitarian state, he also relies on his own life experiences to inform his fiction and drama. In this way, the absurdist images and situations in Klíma’s work become metaphors for the actual condition of life Klíma himself experienced in Czechoslovakia during the Nazi regime and, later, the communist regime.

Existentialism Existentialist and satirical motifs appear in much of Klíma’s fiction. In the trio of stories collected as *Lovers for a Single Night*, he criticizes modern life as stereotyped and routine. The stories are primarily monologues by young people who are trying to escape the monotony of their lives by searching for an intense emotional bond to a partner of the opposite sex. Klíma added to his critique of life in contemporary society in *Lovers for a Day*. In these texts, for the first time in Czech literature, eroticism and sex emerge as the individual’s way of achieving self-realization, counterbalancing a rigidly conventional and outwardly circumscribed life. The story “Klara and the Two Gentlemen” in *Lovers for a Day* is strongly influenced by absurdist drama: It includes circular, almost meaningless dialogues and horrifying props and effects such as cages and barbed wire in a wardrobe and a telephone that rings at night but is silent when answered—a terrifying occurrence in a police state. The drama *The Castle* aroused interest as an indirect reference to the castle at Dobříš, where the state-sponsored Czech writers lived in luxury, and as a parable of relentless power, especially during the Stalinist years.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Klíma’s famous contemporaries include:

Philip Roth (1933–): American author who received the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *American Pastoral*.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic, best known for his novel *Things Fall Apart*.

J. M. Coetzee (1940–): South African novelist whose works often address the serious problems facing South Africa in the postapartheid era.

Milan Kundera (1929–): Exiled Czech-born novelist most famous for his book *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Neil Armstrong (1930–): American astronaut and the first man to walk on the moon.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): This former president of South Africa was the first to be elected in a completely democratic election.

Autobiographical Elements *Love and Garbage* is set in Prague at the beginning of the 1970s, but the reminiscences of the hero take the reader back to the German occupation during World War II and to the Stalinist 1950s. Judge Adam Kindl is faced with the dilemma of whether to join the powers that be or to adhere to his moral principles. There are clearly autobiographical elements in the character, including his confinement in a concentration camp, his joining the Communist Party, his disillusionment with communism, and his work in the reform movement of 1968. In the end, Kindl decides not to cooperate with the political establishment, refusing to send an innocent man to the gallows as demanded by his superior, and gives up his post. In so doing, in spite of his subsequent difficulty in earning a living, he becomes a free man. *Love and Garbage*, like novels by such authors as Alexander Kliment, Ludvík Vaculík, and Karel Pecka, describes the lot of Czech intellectuals who refused to submit during the neo-Stalinism of the 1970s and 1980s.

Although he remains less known than some of his contemporaries, like Milan Kundera, Klíma’s writings continue to influence readers by reminding them of the horrors that exist within totalitarian regimes.

Works in Critical Context

When discussing the works of Klíma, one must always remember that he spent a good portion of his career working in a country that banned his writing. Indeed, some critics have focused their analytical powers on defining in what ways and to what extent this ban affected the work of Klíma. Other critics focus on the author’s

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Artists in totalitarian regimes often try to express the human face of the suffering endured by the restrictive practices and laws of the government under which they live. Here are a few works that deal with the emotional and intellectual response to these kinds of governments:

1984 (1949), a novel by George Orwell. Written just after the end of World War II (consequently the end of Nazi rule in Europe), this novel envisions a world in which a dictatorship has taken so much control over the lives of its subjects that every citizen has lost all sense of privacy and freedom. The novel continues to serve as a warning against excessive, invasive governmental meddling in the lives of its citizenry.

The Telling (2000), a novel by Ursula K. Le Guin. In this science fiction tale, Le Guin examines the conflict between a totalitarian government and a religious sect that attempts to oppose it.

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl (1947), a memoir by Anne Frank. Perhaps the most recognizable account of living in fear under a totalitarian government, Frank wrote the contents of this memoir while in hiding from the Nazis.

Jakob the Liar (1999), a film directed by Peter Kassovitz. This movie depicts life in a ghetto in Poland during the Holocaust. The protagonist, in order to give hope to his neighbors, tells them that he has a radio and is receiving messages about the prospect that they will soon be saved.

combination of autobiography and fiction in his work. Overwhelmingly, though, most critics praise not only the daring evident in Klíma's life, as displayed in his willingness to continue to write despite governmental resistance, but also the power of the writing itself.

The Samizdat Works The critics Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* and reviewer Richard Eder of the *Los Angeles Times* have discussed the effects that government bans can have on writing style. Eder observed that "writing accomplished through censorship and the prospect of punishment can take on a primal urgency. There is a nerviness to it. It comes partly from the act of defiance, and partly from the hunger of readers to hear voices and messages denied them by the official monopoly." As an example, Eder pointed to Klíma's short-story collection *My Merry Mornings*, which he called "a work of jittery truth . . . gritty, passionate and starved."

The plot of Klíma's *A Summer Affair* involves a research scientist who, in the words of *Times Literary*

Supplement's Lesley Chamberlain, "shamelessly and unreasonably . . . abandons his family and his work for a humiliating and temperamental sexual arrangement." Summing up the author's treatment of his protagonist's behavior, Chamberlain states: "Though Ivan Klíma does not quite condone, these are facts, not matters inviting judgment. Love is a condition, not a controllable sin, and Klíma writes about it with disconcerting Flaubertian wisdom."

My First Loves *My First Loves*, a collection of four stories, was published in the United States in 1988. "At first glance," Eder remarks, "the tone is delicately nostalgic, even pastoral. . . . The longings, delusions and losses of young love become a code language for an alien and crimped reality." According to Eder, the author is not always successful in this regard, and "the result is writing that is haunting at times, but that can be cloudy and bland." Jack Sullivan, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, comments that "Klíma is most compelling when he is willing to trust the power and odd lucidity of his hero's adolescent musing. He is least so when he occasionally . . . explains the work's symbolism and significance. No explanations are necessary, for these stories carry the burning authority and desperate eloquence of a survivor."

Love and Garbage Klíma's novel *Love and Garbage* focuses on a middle-aged dissident writer in Prague who had lived in the Theresienstadt camp as a child. Unable to make a living at his profession because his work is banned, he becomes a street sweeper. The tales of his fellow laborers become part of the material for his fiction, along with memories of people who were close to him and an account of his present struggle to choose between his wife and his mistress. The book turns on many allegories, most of which are centered around the question of what is trash. In the *London Times*, Barbara Day explains that "Klíma was writing before the 'gentle revolution' which swept away the tainted ideals of his country's old government, and brought in a new one. Now he is amongst those who are working—a little less gently—to clear up the rubbish of the past." In the opinion of Alberto Manguel in the *Washington Post Book World*, "*Love and Garbage* announces [the] world's essential dichotomy: We create in order to destroy, and then build from the destruction. Our emblem is the phoenix."

In the *New Republic*, Stanislaw Baranczak criticizes the author's style, noting that "Klíma does his thing with utmost seriousness, with heavy-handed directness; even his symbols seem to have a sign that reads ATTENTION: SYMBOL attached to them, lest we overlook their exfoliating, larger-than-life implications." Eva Hoffman, in the *New York Times*, finds that the author's "sincerity sometimes slides toward banality. The novel's fragmentary method makes for a certain stasis." She concludes, however, that these defects "do not substantially affect the

import or the impact of Mr. Klíma's work," which "affords the experience, rare in today's fiction, of being in the presence of a seasoned, measured perspective, and a mind that strives honestly to arrive at a wisdom sufficient to our common condition."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Love and Garbage*. Can you tell which elements of the book were taken directly from Klíma's life experiences? In your opinion, is it "cheating" when fiction writers use events and characters directly from their own lives? Why or why not? What difficulties might this cause for the writer?
2. Read *The Castle* and Frank's *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. How do these authors represent in their respective texts the totalitarian governments under which they lived? What aspects of the regime concern them? How do they convey this concern? Which text is more moving? Why? In your response, make sure to cite specific examples and passages from each text.
3. In *Love and Garbage*, a banned Czech writer must take a job as a street sweeper in order to make ends meet. In your opinion, which is the more important job—writing works that cannot be published or sweeping the streets? Why? Imagine an unemployed, unpublished writer living in New York and compare this to a sanitation worker in the same city; does your view on the subject change? Explain your opinion.
4. During the 1960s, many writers in Czechoslovakia were banned from publishing in their own country. Using the Internet and the library, research the government's rationale for banning these authors, paying special attention to Klíma's case. Then, in a short essay, describe the circumstances that led to the practice and express your opinion on the subject.

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Joy Kogawa

BORN: 1935, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Splintered Moon (1968)

Obasan (1981)

Woman in the Woods (1985)

Itsuka (1992)

The Rain Ascends (1995)

Overview

Joy Kogawa is an award-winning author who became a member of the Order of Canada in 1986 and of the Order of British Columbia in 2006. She is recognized for her novels, poetry, essays, children's stories, and social activism; she is best known for *Obasan* (1981), a semi-autobiographical novel about the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Internment Joy Nozomi Nakayama was born on June 6, 1935, in Vancouver to Gordon Goichi Nakayama, an Anglican clergyman, and Lois Masui Yao Nakayama, a kindergarten teacher. In 1942, the year following the attack on Pearl Harbor and Canada's declaration of war on Japan, some twenty-one thousand



Joy Kogawa Kogawa, Joy, photograph. AP Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kogawa's famous contemporaries include:

Dame Julie Andrews (1935–): English performer of several decades, she has won multiple awards for her work in popular musicals and is loved on both sides of the world.

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech writer and dramatist, he was the ninth and final president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic.

Elgar Howarth (1935–): English conductor and composer, this former trumpet player has contributed his talents the world over.

Joe Orton (1933–1967): English satirical playwright who wrote risqué black comedies that shocked and amused his audiences.

John Updike (1932–): Award-winning novelist, essayist, and literary critic who is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

residents of Japanese ancestry living within one hundred miles of the Pacific Coast were moved to labor and detention camps in the interior of British Columbia. Except for personal belongings, all of their property was confiscated. The Nakayama family was sent to Slocan and, like the protagonist of *Obasan* (1981), underwent their internment in the Canadian interior.

Postwar Exile and Early Career After the end of the war in 1945, Japanese Canadians were given the choice of returning to Japan or going into internal exile east of British Columbia. The Nakayamas, who identified themselves as Canadians, were relocated to Coaldale, Alberta.

In 1954, Joy completed a year of study at the University of Alberta and took a teaching post at an elementary school in Coaldale. In 1955, she enrolled at the Anglican Women's Training College and Conservatory of Music in Toronto; the following year she transferred to a music school in Vancouver. Joy married David Kogawa in 1957, and the couple lived in several places throughout Canada before divorcing in 1968.

In 1968, Kogawa published her first poetry collection, *The Splintered Moon*. The next year she traveled to Japan, remaining there for three months. Her second poetry collection, *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), resulted, in part, from that visit. This collection was to begin her use of silence as a means of finding and expressing issues of identity, which anticipated her works to follow. From 1974 to 1976, Kogawa worked as a staff writer in the office of the prime minister, and a year later her next

poetry collection, *Jericho Road*, appeared. In several poems in the book the notion of silence generating meaning reappears.

Garnering Widespread Critical Acclaim In 1978, the same year she was a writer in residence at the University of Ottawa, Kogawa published *Six Poems*. Kogawa moved to Toronto in 1979. In 1981, she published *Obasan*—the first novel in the history of Canadian fiction to deal with the internment of Japanese Canadians. Kogawa garnered widespread critical attention, receiving the *Books in Canada* First Novel Award, the Canadian Authors' Association Book of the Year Award, the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, and the American Library Association Notable Book Award in 1982. *Obasan* also brought Kogawa international recognition.

In 1984, Kogawa visited Japan for the second time. The following year, she published *Woman in the Woods*, which introduced a more pronounced feminist voice than her previous poetry collections. In 1992, *Itsuka*, a sequel to *Obasan*, appeared. In 1995 Kogawa published *The Rain Ascends*, a fictional account of sexual abuse by an Anglican priest. In 1998, Knox received a request from Kristine Bogyo, a classical-music performer, to write a narrative on the Lilith myth for a multimedia performance that would include narrated text, artwork, and music. Kogawa's first impulse had been to decline: Community work was consuming most of her time, and she was not familiar with the Lilith material. But, she says in the author's preface to the published text of the work, when she received the artwork of Lilian Broca that was to be used in the project, she felt "deluged" with the "rich, powerful images." Broca also sent Kogawa an outline of her research on Lilith, and Kogawa was captivated by the beauty of the legend and the strong character of Lilith. The published version of the collaboration appeared in 2000 as *A Song of Lilith*.

Kogawa Namesakes In 2001, Kogawa received a lifetime achievement award from the Association of Asian American Studies and honorary doctorates from the University of British Columbia in 2001 and Queen's University and the University of Windsor in 2003. In 2006, Kogawa was made a member of the Order of British Columbia, and a campaign was launched to make Kogawa's childhood home a venue for the Writers in Residence program and a historic literary landmark for Vancouver and all of Canada.

Works in Literary Context

Spare, Minimalist Style Kogawa writes much of her poetry in a bold style that is close to journalism. Characteristic of what is considered "minimalist," for example, is *The Splintered Moon* (1968). The twenty-one poems offer a glimpse into a world of emotional intensity and spiritual longing underscored by Kogawa's spare, stark, style.

Kogawa's experiences living in exile in Japanese internment camps with her family during World War II provide the inspiration for her writing and continue to influence the trajectory of her career as an author and advocate of human rights.

Themes of Memory and Identity Kogawa's minimalist world nonetheless presents a complex interweaving of the particular and universal, the private and social. In both her fiction and her poetry she addresses issues of racial and cultural diversity, persecution, and self-identity. What is central to most of her work is a theme of racial memory and history that helps address such issues. This is addressed for the first time in "We Had Not Seen It," the only prose poem in *The Splintered Moon*. Exploration of memory takes on a personal tone in her love lyric "In Memory," and the creation of reality and identity through words is the theme of "As Though It Were the Earth." *Six Poems* displays a continuity with previous collections through the exploration of the significance of collective memory.

Six Poems also continues the emphasis on the dual construction of silence and speech that runs through her work with the themes of memory and identity and symbolic stone imagery that all lend themselves to and anticipate the highly acclaimed *Obasan* (1981)—wherein memory is holistic and healing and the only truth that is given to the narrator. "There is a silence that cannot speak. There is a silence that will not speak. . . . The word is stone." The opening words of the novel define the spiritual quest for the articulation of memory for an author and poet who has become a voice of the three generations of Japanese Canadians who suffered internment and persecution during World War II.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have praised Kogawa's poetry for its concise, poetic language. As Edward M. White noted the poet has a "magical ability to convey suffering and privation, inhumanity and racial prejudice, without losing in any way joy in life and in the poetic imagination." Gary Willis observed that Kogawa's first three volumes of poetry are filled with "lyric verse" and poems that often "express feelings that emerge from a narrative context that is only partly defined."

Although Kogawa's poetry has received favorable reviews, most critics have focused on her novel, *Obasan*, which concerns the development of a third-generation Japanese Canadian named Naomi Nakane.

***Obasan* (1981)** The novel, which includes many autobiographical details, is narrated by Naomi Nakane, a thirty-six-year-old schoolteacher. In addition to winning a great number of awards, *Obasan* was highly acclaimed by critics. Speaking for the general reception of the novel of "expressive realism," Cynthia Wong bestowed praise on the author for making efforts to address those social injustices left out of "official" histor-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the more important aspects of Kogawa's work is her concern with giving a hearing to marginalized voices and rethinking the processes of Canadian history, identity, truth, and memory. Here are a few works by writers who also made efforts to give voices to the marginalized by writing on similar themes:

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe.

Renowned as the most widely read piece of African literature, the work tells the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this work, Heaney depicts childhood, reflects on identity, and concerns the settings of rural Ireland.

Catfish and Mandala (2000), a novel by Andrew Pham. In this work, the author visits his native Vietnam to find his true self and his place in two cultures.

Sovereign Bones (2007), stories and essay collected by Eric Gansworth. In this book, Native American authors write on the imperative of keeping a collective identity.

ies; Wong also praises the "skeletal story conveyed with all the cadence and intonation of poetry; the powerful evocation of imposed silence . . . rendered with aching beauty in the prose." In his essay *Speaking the Silence: Joy Kogawa's 'Obasan'*, Willis examines Kogawa's use of silence, speech, and insight in *Obasan*, arguing that in this work Kogawa "wishes to define, in relation to each other, Japanese and Canadian ways of seeing, and even to combine these divergent perceptions in an integrated and distinctive vision . . . the book is an imaginative triumph over the forces that militate against expression of our inmost feelings." Likewise, Edward M. White praises the book in his review *The Silences That Speak from Stone* and calls attention to the significance of its voice, "Kogawa's novel must be heard and admired; the art itself can claim the real last word, exposing the viciousness of the racist horror, embodying the beauty that somehow, wonderfully, survives."

Responses to Literature

- Several of Kogawa's works are meditations on the lessons of history. In a group effort, research significant events reflected on in her writings—such as the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan and the subsequent nuclear attack on Hiroshima by the United States. What "lessons" appear to be learned?
- In *Obasan* Kogawa's narrator notes, "All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by

the present as the present is shaped by the past. Potent and pervasive as a prairie dust storm, memories and dreams seep and mingle through cracks, settling on furniture and into upholstery.” Discuss several ways in which Kogawa uses memory to find, define, and/or establish identity—her own or that of her culture. Provide examples from the texts. For instance, in *Obasan*, Naomi’s earliest memories of being one with her mother in womb-like comfort and belonging are thoroughly described.

3. With *Obasan*, writes Gurleen Grewal, “Kogawa proved herself to be among the finest of feminist-humanist writers.” Kogawa’s feminism is also evident in her poetry, starting with her first collection, *The Splintered Moon* (1968). Research feminism in Canada. Consider surveying the sports world, the educational arena, and the work world of Canada. When did people begin to acknowledge women’s equality? How is the movement reflected in Kogawa’s work?
4. Several of Kogawa’s works isolate a trivial activity that the poet makes meaningful as a ritual and as an experience of belonging to and sharing in the Japanese culture. Identify an example of Kogawa’s use of ethnic traditions in her work, and discuss how she depicts a cultural connection through this tradition.

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▣ Milan Kundera

BORN: 1929, Brno, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech, French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama

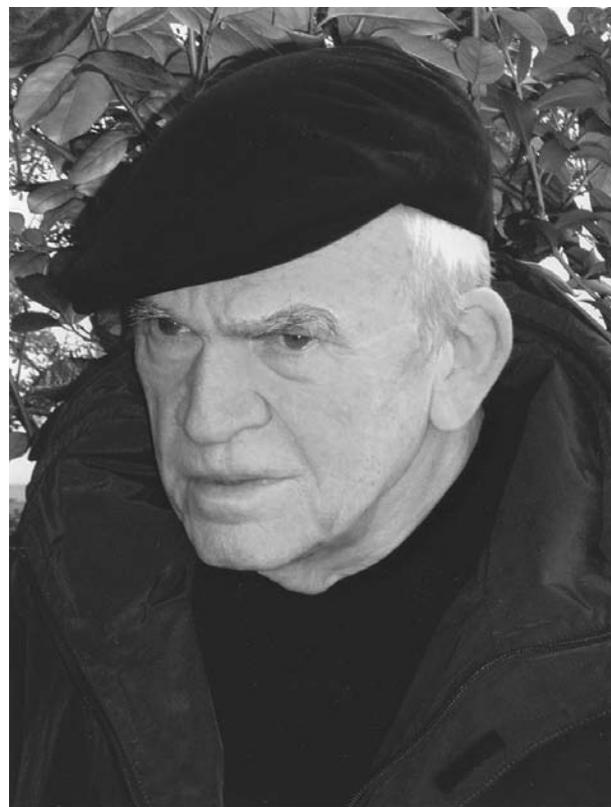
MAJOR WORKS:

The Joke (1967)

Life Is Elsewhere (1974)

The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1984)

The Art of the Novel (1988)



Milan Kundera © epa / Corbis

Overview

Milan Kundera is one of the few Czech writers who has achieved wide international recognition. In his native Czechoslovakia and the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia, Kundera has been regarded as an important author and intellectual since his early twenties. Each of his creative works and contributions to the public political and cultural discourse has provoked a lively debate in the context of its time.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Musical Influence Born on April 1, 1929, in Brno, Czechoslovakia (in what is now the Czech Republic), Kundera was the son of a pianist and musicologist named Ludvik and his wife, Milada (Janiskova). Kundera was educated in music under the direction of Paul Haas and Vaclav Kapral. Later he attended Charles University and, in 1956, studied at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, both of which are in Prague. Kundera decided at age nineteen that music was not his true vocation, yet his love of music would influence the structure of his novels, which he patterned after musical compositions.

Emerging as a Reformer Kundera began his writing career with three volumes of poetry published between 1953 and 1964. Also during this time, he began writing in the form in which he was the most successful: the novel. Kundera's first book, *The Joke*, published in 1967, was inspired by an incident in 1950; he and another Czech writer, Jan Trefulka, had been expelled from the Communist Party for "anti-party activities." The novel exposes the dangers of living in a humorless world and is the work most responsible for Kundera's emergence as a leader in the reform movement that led to the Czech Republic's 1968 "Prague Spring," a period of attempted reforms and relaxation of authority.

Censored and Informally Exiled From the end of World War II until the late 1980s, Eastern Europe was under the firm control of the Soviet Union. Any attempts by Eastern European countries to reject Soviet control were violently squashed. During the so-called Prague Spring, the Czechoslovakian government allowed writers and other artists a level of freedom of expression that the communist country had previously not permitted. However, the reprieve from oppression was short-lived. Soviet tanks rolled into the city and the old "order" was restored. Kundera found himself in the same position as many of the other leaders of the reform movement. His books disappeared from libraries and bookstores; he lost his job at the academy and his right to continue writing and publishing in his native country. His first two novels were published in translation abroad for a foreign audience. Although not initially allowed to travel to the West, Kundera finally was allowed to accept a teaching position in France.

At the Université de Rennes he served as an invited professor of comparative literature from 1975 through 1979. In 1980, he took a professorship at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. The following year, he became a naturalized citizen of France.

Making an Impact in the United States *Life Is Elsewhere* (1974), his first major work after his exile, was published in the United States. It deals with revolutionary romanticism and with lyrical poetry as a whole, exploring, among other things, the volatility of the marriage of the two. His next book, *The Farewell Party*, was also published in the United States. This 1976 release satirizes a government-run health spa for women with fertility problems while simultaneously addressing serious ethical questions. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980) was republished a year later with an interview the author gave to American novelist Philip Roth. This book illustrates the need for memory to overcome forgetting in order for an individual to achieve self-preservation.

Success of Unbearable Lightness In 1984, Milan Kundera's most famous novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, was published. Kundera touched upon his experiences after the Prague Spring in the novel, although some Czech critics complained that certain elements of the story do not ring true: For example, although many professionals were forced to abandon their work and support themselves in menial jobs in the post-1968 clampdown, as happens in the book, the main character of the book, a doctor, would not have been forced to abandon his profession.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being delves into the greatest existential problems that people are faced with: love, death, transcendence, the sense of continuity or "heaviness" that is provided by memory, and the contrasting sense of "lightness" that is brought about by forgetting. The book was adapted as a movie in 1988. Kundera's successful works of the 1970s and 1980s are marked by his own feelings of estrangement and exile, and his homesickness for Prague. In 1989, however, the Soviet Union collapsed and soon thereafter the Eastern European countries that had been its satellites were free to pursue democratic reforms and reopen their societies to the West. Kundera, a French citizen since 1981, remained in Paris.

Novel Ideas About Fiction Kundera's most important work outside of his novels is his nonfiction work, *The Art of the Novel*. Published in 1988, the book outlines his theories of the novel, both personal and European. True to the nature of his own novels, this book does not consist of one long essay but of three short essays, two interviews, a list of sixty-three words and their definitions, and the text of a speech.

In *The Art of the Novel* Kundera explains how the history of the novel and the history of European culture are inextricably bound together. Starting with Miguel de

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kundera's famous contemporaries include:

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech writer and playwright.

Havel was both the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the new Czech Republic, a capacity he served in for ten years. Starting in the late 1960s, Havel used his writing as a weapon to speak out against his government's authoritarian rule, resulting in multiple arrests and a prison term.

Miroslav Holub (1923–1998): Czech poet who worked in unrhymed free verse, almost prose-like. His subjects frequently included doctors and medical researchers, as Holub was himself a practicing immunologist.

Alexander Dubček (1921–1992): Czechoslovakian politician who, in the spring of 1968, attempted to reform his country's Communist government, allowing more freedom of expression and open political discourse—"socialism with a human face." The attempt was doomed to be short-lived, and ended in August of that year when Czechoslovakia was occupied by forces from the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): Political leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, the second-longest term after Joseph Stalin's. His regime saw an era of severe economic stagnation and further tightening and deterioration of the Soviet authoritarian regime.

Cervantes and passing through the works of authors such as Samuel Richardson, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, and Franz Kafka, he traces the route of the experience of existence. This route starts from a world of unlimited potential, moves to the beginning of history, the shrinking of possibilities in the outside world, the search for infinity in the human soul, the futility of this search, and into the realm where history is seen as a monster that can offer nothing helpful.

Lit-Crit and Writers' Rights In 1995, Kundera published a book-length essay of literary criticism, *Testaments Betrayed*, which is organized after Friedrich Nietzsche's books, with each of its nine parts divided into small sections. Its main, recurring theme focuses on Kundera's firm belief that writers and other artists' prerogatives should be defended and their intentions respected by editors, publicists, and executors.

Books in French Kundera began writing novels in French, beginning with 1993's *Slowness*. *Identity* and *Ignorance* followed in 1998 and 2000, respectively. Kundera continues to live and work in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

Musical Form Novelistic unity for Kundera does not exist in a predetermined set of rules. He uses a common theme and a structure based on musical polyphony—the use of many notes playing at the same time, usually in harmony—to tie the sections of his novels together. The lengths and arrangements of chapters, subchapters, and sections are used to create mood and a sense of time, much like in a musical composition. Instead of following the linear story of a character or set of characters, Kundera connects sometimes seemingly unconnectable stories through their related themes and existential situations.

Structuralism and Self-Suppression Kundera is an extremely private person who considers the details of his personal life "nobody's business." This attitude is consistent with the teachings of Czech structuralism, which argues that literary texts should be considered as self-contained structures of signs, without regard to outside reality. In a 1984 interview with the British writer Ian McEwan, Kundera said: "We constantly rewrite our own biographies and continually give matters new meanings. To rewrite history in this sense—indeed, in an Orwellian sense—is not at all inhuman. On the contrary, it is very human."

Kundera also asserts his right as an author to exclude from his body of work "immature" and "unsuccessful" works, as composers do, and he now rejects and suppresses most of his literary output of the 1950s and the 1960s. In his mature fiction, he creates a self-contained world that he constantly analyzes and questions, opening up a multitude of ways of interpreting the incidents he depicts. As Kvetoslav Chvatík points out, Kundera treats the novel as an ambiguous structure of signs; playing with these signs enables him to show human existence as open to countless possibilities, thus freeing human beings from the limitedness of a single unrepeatable life.

Lightness and Kitsch Kundera's theme in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is that life is unrepeatable; thus, one cannot go back and correct one's mistakes. This realization leads to a feeling of vertiginous lightness, a total lack of responsibility. The idea of lightness, which Kundera takes from the Greek philosopher Parmenides, and which originally meant playfulness, here turns into lack of seriousness, or meaningless emptiness. Kundera also takes over the concept of kitsch from the German writer Hermann Broch: Kitsch is a beautiful lie that hides all the negative aspects of life and deliberately ignores the existence of death.

Works in Critical Context

Overall, many critics home in on the political disillusionment of Kundera's work, particularly in the context of his fight against Czechoslovakian social and cultural repression. But some critics go beyond the thematic, focusing

on his disorienting style and marking his fragmented plotting, episodic structure, and authorial intrusions as distracting. Still other critics laud Kundera's approach, appreciating his use of humor, his erotic themes, and his sense of narrative play.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being When *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* appeared in 1984, it immediately became an international best seller, garnering awards throughout the world, including a Los Angeles Times Book Award. Contemporary reviews of the novel were largely positive. Paul Gray, in a *Time* review, calls *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* "a triumph of wisdom over bitterness, hope over despair." Thomas DePietro in *Commonweal* focuses attention on the heart of the book. He observes that it is a work of "burning compassion, extraordinary intelligence, and dazzling artistry." DePietro also notes the book "leaves us with many questions, questions about love and death, about love and transcendence. These are our burdens, the existential questions that never change but need to be asked anew."

Not all reviewers were enchanted with the book, however. Christopher Hawtree, for example, in the *Spectator*, faults Kundera for a "most off-putting" title and finds irksome the "elliptical structure" of the work. With faint praise, however, he acknowledges the novel is "a self-referential whole that manages not to alienate the reader."

Scholarly interest in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* continues unabated. Literary critics have found a variety of ways to read the novel. John O'Brien in his book *Milan Kundera and Feminism* focuses on Kundera's representation of women. In *Terminal Paradox*, scholar Maria Nemcová Banerjee takes another tack, reading the novel as if it were a piece of music. Just as Tereza introduces Tomas to Beethoven's quartets, and thus to the seminal phrase "Es muss sein," Kundera introduces the reader to a quartet of characters: "The four leading characters perform their parts in concert, like instruments in a musical quartet, each playing his or her existential code in strict relation to those of the others, often spatially separated but never imaginatively isolated in the reader's mind."

Responses to Literature

1. Many of Kundera's stories are set in Czechoslovakia in the second half of the twentieth century. Learn more about the political history of Czechoslovakia (part of which is now the Czech Republic) since World War II. What major political and social upheavals has the country experienced? How has the country's political climate affected the life and work of Kundera? Report back to the class with your findings.
2. The government-sanctioned style of literature during much of Kundera's lifetime was "socialist realism." Write a report explaining the basic aesthetic and political principles of the "socialist realist" style in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Kundera was an active participant in political causes, and his political thoughts have often been featured in his novels. Other novels notable for their political themes include:

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Published during a time of increasingly sectional disagreements over the issue of slavery, this novel spread the antislavery message through its dramatic, politicized narrative.

1984 (1949), a novel by George Orwell. Written as a criticism of totalitarian governments, Orwell's novel has continued to serve as a watchword against infringement on personal freedoms—the image of Big Brother is perhaps one of the most recognizable political boogeymen.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953), a novel by Ray Bradbury. Written as a critique of the hysteria in American society during the early years of the Cold War, Bradbury's short novel has since taken on other political overtones, particularly in the debate over banning books.

writing and in other art forms. What is the history of the "socialist realist" style?

3. In part six of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera writes at length about the notion of "kitsch." Define kitsch. Find examples in magazines of kitsch from modern American culture. Create a collage using these images that gives the viewer insight as to the role of kitsch in the United States.
4. Reread the sections of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* that describe Tereza's dreams. Read several entries on dreams from psychology textbooks or reference works. Write an informal essay about what these books reveal about Tereza's dreams. What do the dreams say about her?

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☒ Hari Kunzru

BORN: 1969, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Impressionist (2002)

Transmission (2004)

Noise (2005)

My Revolutions (2007)

Overview

Though Hari Kunzru's career is still relatively short, he has already achieved much acclaim. He is a major figure in England's writing scene, working for various magazines, editorial boards, and publishing a steady stream of critically acclaimed books. In 1999 the *Observer* honored him as their Young Travel Writer of the Year, and in 2003 he was listed as one of *Granta* literary magazine's Best Young British Novelists.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Inspired by Mixed Heritage The son of a man from the Kashmir province in India and a British woman, Hari Kunzru grew up in Essex. He studied English at Oxford, earned a degree in philosophy and literature from the University of Warwick, and went on to work as a journalist for several periodicals. As a travel correspondent, he published essays in the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and *Time Out* magazine, among others.

Kunzru's familial background inspired him to write *The Impressionist* about an Indian-English young man, Pran Nath. Kunzru told Richard Alleyne of the *London Daily Telegraph*, "At Oxford, I noticed how much people play out a comedy of Englishness, which made me very interested in identity role-playing in post-colonial Britain." Kunzru completed the work in a little more than two years, and the novel made headlines in the media even before it was published, due to Kunzru's exceptionally large advance.

Part of what motivates *The Impressionist* is the open-mindedness Kunzru gained from his mixed heritage. In one interview with the *London Independent Sunday*, he stated, "I've always been very scared of people who are certain. . . . Nothing terrifies me more than a religious fundamentalist who really knows what right is and is prepared to do violence to what they consider is wrong. . . . I wanted to write in praise of the unformed and fluid."

A Writer of Tomorrow Exploring his varied cultural past—and once again, the culture of many people around the world—Kunzru published his second novel, *Transmission*, in 2004. The protagonist, a computer programmer who moves to America, was likely influenced



Hari Kunzru David Levenson / Getty Images

by Kunzru's personal experience working for *Wired* magazine, which focuses on new developments in technology. His first book of short stories, *Noise*, was published in 2005.

Kunzru declined the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for *The Impressionist* because it was awarded by the *London Mail on Sunday*, which he felt was a racist publication. He received a *New York Times* notable book of the year distinction for *Transmission*, and in 2007 he published *My Revolutions*, a novel about a former activist from the 1960s who has since gone underground. His work has been translated into at least eighteen languages. Kunzru has been called one of the world's "fifty writers of tomorrow."

Works in Literary Context

Travels in Search of Identity Kunzru's *The Impressionist* revolves around the efforts of a young man of mixed heritage to make a place for himself in the world. Travel as a theme becomes apparent as the protagonist sheds his identity and his belongings in each country. This same theme runs through Kunzru's other works. In fact, on Kunzru's personal Web site, he includes excerpts from his published travel essays, which span the years from 1998 to 2003, taking the reader from New Zealand and Azerbaijan to Benin and Finland. Kunzru

seems to lose himself in the culture and custom of each place, as this excerpt from his visit to Jordan illustrates:

Though I know (or at least believe) that I am alone—except for my guide Atiq and his placid camel—I have a peculiar feeling that the land itself is watching me. This is confirmed when a quivering forty-foot column of sand forms out of nothing and starts making its way towards me. I come to the conclusion that this would be an opportune moment to abandon my atheistical city ways and start grovelling to whatever desert spirit I have just disturbed.

The Unpredictable Pace of Technology Kunzru's experience as a techno-journalist resonates thematically through his work. In *Transmission*, brilliant computer programmer Arjun Mehta is lured, under false pretenses, to a fictitious job in the United States. He is hired at an antivirus company but writes and releases the Leela virus, an especially pernicious bug that shuts down vital utilities and devastates global business. But even before *Transmission*, in his 1997 essay, "You Are Cyborg," Kunzru addressed important questions about the future of humankind, technology, and society: "When technology works on the body, our horror always mingles with intense fascination. But exactly how does technology do this work? And how far has it penetrated the membrane of our skin?" Kunzru was always interested in the intersection of people and machines, but his interest grew when he returned to school for a master's degree in literature and philosophy. As Kunzru noted in a *Book Page* interview, "I ended up going down the corridor and hanging out with people interested in artificial intelligence and networks. I became fascinated with the way technology has an impact on society."

Works in Critical Context

The award-winning Kunzru appeals to critics and readers alike. *Publishers Weekly* contributor Steven Zeitchik called Kunzru "an eloquent author who combines a precocious sweep of history with a keen eye for the future." Similarly, many critics praise Kunzru's unique blend of technological, racial, and historical issues, like Alden Mudge who, at first, does not see the "connection between an edgy interest in the broad societal impacts of technology and a fascination with the waning days of the British Empire" in *The Impressionist*, but then lauds the author for the way he combines these unlikely subjects.

The Impressionist Kunzru's first book *The Impressionist* marked him as a mature writer with carefully crafted language, setting, and subject. *The Impressionist* "is a picaresque stitch," wrote David Kipen in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "a deadly serious book about race and empire that can still put a reader on the floor with the exquisitely timed comic understatement of its language." Although *London Daily Telegraph* critic David Flusfeder noted that "anachronisms abound," he also commented on "some lovely writing." *New York Times* contributor

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kunzru's famous contemporaries include:

Cate Blanchett (1969–): Born Catherine Élise Blanchett, the Australian actress is known for her award-winning roles in the films *Elizabeth*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Aviator*.

Salman Rushdie (1947–): This Indian-British novelist received death threats from the Ayatollah Khomeini for his book *Satanic Verses*.

David Mitchell (1969–): This British author has won many of the same awards as Kunzru and also writes about the connectivity of people all over the world. His 2004 novel, *Cloud Atlas*, perhaps best demonstrates this inclusiveness.

Zadie Smith (1975–): Most famous for *White Teeth*, this novelist moved to England from Jamaica as a child and continues to write about mixed races coming together.

Janet Maslin concluded, "Nothing about *The Impressionist* flags it as a first effort. Mr. Kunzru writes with wry certitude and cinematic precision about identity, aspiration, and rootlessness, set against the backdrop of a Britannia that is pure mirage."

Transmission Critics have differing opinions on Kunzru's pacing in *Transmission*; however, they all applaud his attention to characterization and story development. "This is not a coming-of-age novel—it is a coming-apart novel," commented Nora Seton about *Transmission* in the *Houston Chronicle*. "Like an old PC, the novel starts slow, but once it finally boots up, the momentum of the interconnected stories is impressive and engaging, bolstered by Kunzru's carefully considered details and his lively portrayal of an increasingly globalized technocracy that blends the world's cultures even as it further isolates its individuals," observed Stephen M. Deusner in a review on the *Book Reporter* Web site. "Kunzru keeps his clever plot's wheels spinning merrily, all the while tracing the social and emotional consequences of Arjun's mingled indignation, guilt and fear," stated Bruce Allen in *Hollywood Reporter*.

Responses to Literature

1. Think about how Kunzru's views on how technology affects society are reflected in his fiction and nonfiction. Write a short story or personal essay that expresses your views on how technology affects society. If you choose to write a personal essay, you may use examples from Kunzru's work to support your opinions.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In both his fiction and nonfiction, Kunzru examines technology and what scientific progress does to interpersonal communication. Here are some other works that talk about computers while exploring human nature and that speculate about the future while investigating the present.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), a film directed by Stanley Kubrick. HAL, a computer, tries to commandeer a spaceship in this groundbreaking film.

Blade Runner (1982), a film directed by Ridley Scott. In this film, nonhuman cyborg "replicants" attempt an uprising.

Neuromancer (1984), a novel by William Gibson. In this novel about a computer hacker, the word *cyberspace* makes its first appearance.

Emergence (2001), a book by Stephen Berlin Johnson. This book explores the habits and patterns of ants and cities, and relates them to the way we use the Internet.

2. Search on the Internet for one of Kunzru's essays that focuses on technology. Write your own essay that describes how the ideas in that essay reflect ideas in Kunzru's novel *Transmission*. Use examples from both texts to support your ideas.
3. Research Bollywood using resources on the Internet or from your library. Create an audio/visual report exploring how Kunzru's protagonist views Bollywood in *Transmission*. Remember to define Bollywood for the class and to use examples from Kunzru's text to support your ideas.
4. With a classmate, discuss whether or not you trust Pran Nath of *The Impressionist*. Does Kunzru want you to like him, or is he more of a symbolic character?
5. Kunzru has said he was influenced by Rudyard Kipling while writing *The Impressionist*. With a classmate, research Rudyard Kipling using resources on the Internet or from your library. Compile your findings and discuss how Kipling may have influenced Kunzru. Use texts from both Kipling and Kunzru to support your opinions.

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Thomas Kyd

BORN: 1558, London, England

DIED: 1594, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Ur-Hamlet (c. 1589)

The Spanish Tragedy (1592)

Cornelia (1594)

The Truth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murdering of John Brewen (1592)

Overview

Although little is documented in the historical record of Thomas Kyd's life and work, it is clear that he was a playwright who made important contributions to the repertoire of the public playhouse during the Elizabethan era and beyond. Kyd is best known for *The Spanish Tragedy*, a great popular success that established the genre of "revenge tragedies" and greatly influenced the course of English drama.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Mysterious Beginnings There exists very little evidence of Kyd's life as context for his influence on Elizabethan drama. Except for one spectacular event—his arrest for libel in 1593—the biographical record is uncertain.

Kyd lived his entire life during the Elizabethan era, the time period during which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England and Ireland. The era lasted from 1558 until her death in 1603, and was most notable for two great accomplishments: The rise of British sea superiority, demonstrated by both the British defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the extensive oceanic explorations of Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh; and the advancement of English theater to a popular and enduring art form, demonstrated by the works of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe.

Historians believe that an infant named Thomas Kyd, baptized on November 6, 1558, is the playwright; if so, then he would be the son of Francis Kyd, a London secretary of some standing, and his wife, Anna. Thomas was enrolled in 1565 at Merchant Taylors' School, and there is no evidence of college attendance. There is also little trace of his name in the theatrical records. There is one notice that associates him with the Queen's Company during the period 1583–1585. *The Spanish Tragedy* was first published in 1592, anonymously. Scholars can trace its authorship only because of three lines quoted and attributed by Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors* (1612). For all its popularity, the play was never printed under Kyd's name until the eighteenth century. Kyd is also often attributed a 1588 translation of Torquato Tasso's *Il Padre di Famiglia*. Scholars are certain, however, that Kyd produced a translation of Robert Garnier's *Cornélie* in 1594.

A Brief Flash of Fame This almost invisible life suddenly flared in May 1593 with Kyd's arrest for the publication of a group of anonymous libels and alleged atheistic statements. Kyd denied the charges and shifted the blame to his one-time housemate, the playwright Christopher Marlowe, claiming that some of their papers got shuffled together. Marlowe was summoned by the law soon after Kyd's arrest, then released on the condition that he report back daily, but soon afterward

Marlowe was killed in an apparent dispute over a tavern bill. Kyd was released, but he never fully recovered his health or his literary reputation. In one of his letters, Kyd refers to his "pains and undeserved tortures," presumably suffered during interrogation. He died one year later at the age of thirty-five, in poverty, leaving no trace of his burial.

The Elizabethan era saw many struggles between the various European powers as they fought over trade routes across the ocean. One notable event was Spain's victory over Portugal in 1592, which is the historical setting for *The Spanish Tragedy*. Using an unusual method for an Elizabethan dramatist, Kyd seems to have worked from no particular source for the play, so he was free to invent his characters and situations. It would probably be misleading, however, to look for too much influence from history or Kyd's personal life in the content of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Neither the main plot nor a somewhat tangential Portuguese subplot is based on any specific event. Some details show a casual acquaintance with military history and Spanish geography, and a few incidents may or may not have been inspired by English politics. For the most part, however, Kyd should be given credit for his originality and invention.

Works in Literary Context

Influence on Hamlet Thomas Kyd's place in the history of English Renaissance drama is secured by one surviving play, *The Spanish Tragedy*. But Kyd's most lasting influence has come from a play that no longer exists—even the title is unknown.

There is evidence that Kyd wrote a play known simply as the *Ur-Hamlet*, which was the immediate source for William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. There is no sign that Kyd's play was ever printed. Reconstructions of the play rely heavily on the strong similarities between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy* and how they each differ from the Danish source material for the original Hamlet story. The device of the play-within-a-play, a key feature of *Hamlet* and many other Elizabethan dramas, probably began with Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. It seems reasonable as well to credit Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet* with introducing the character of Hamlet's father's ghost, and the addition of Hamlet's own death was also probably Kyd's innovation. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has gone on to be the most performed, admired, adapted, and studied play in the history of world drama, and many have claimed it to be one of the greatest—if not the greatest—single pieces of English literature.

The Revenge Tragedy Kyd helped to formulate and popularize revenge tragedies, the dominant mode of drama throughout the Elizabethan period. Loosely inspired by the bloody tragedies of the classical Roman dramatist Seneca (4 BCE–CE 65), revenge tragedies tended

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Kyd's famous contemporaries include:

John Ward (1553–1662): One of the most notorious English pirates, Ward, at the height of his powers, commanded a large fleet of stolen ships and terrorized merchant ships throughout the Mediterranean.

Sigismund III Vasa (1566–1632): King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1587 to 1632, he attempted to bring about a political union between Poland and Sweden. His efforts resulted in decades of warfare between the two states that lasted until the 1660s. This outbreak of violence ended a long period of cultural and economic progress in Poland known as the Polish Golden Age.

Alonso de Guzmán El Bueno (1550–1615): Commander of the Spanish Armada, this relatively inexperienced naval officer took most of the blame for the crushing defeat of the Armada in 1588, an event that elevated Britain's Queen Elizabeth to a position of unprecedented and unchallenged power throughout Europe. In reality, El Bueno fought courageously despite tempestuous weather and poor military strategy devised by the king's advisers.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): English philosopher who argued that information from our senses is the basis of all knowledge, not intuition or spiritual revelation. In his controversial *Leviathan* (1651), human nature is portrayed as essentially selfish.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English poet and dramatist. Jonson, along with Shakespeare and Marlowe, dominated the Elizabethan theater. Jonson's "comedies of humour" were particularly popular with their technique of assigning characters with one dominant personality trait (or "humour"). Jonson also wrote in almost every available verse form of the time and made significant contributions to literary criticism.

to feature a hero driven by vengeance, a ghost of a murdered kinsman who appears and demands justice, characters going mad or feigning madness, at least one scene in a graveyard, plenty of sword fighting and imaginative uses of gore (mutilation, severed limbs, cannibalism, etc.), and scenes of physical or mental torture. Just as horror movies are often blockbusters today, Kyd's formula for revenge tragedy proved to be box office dynamite. The more the Puritans objected to its immorality and bad influence, the more people packed the theaters.

From 1660 into the eighteenth century, fashion championed "heroic tragedies" that showed high-minded heroes choosing between their responsibilities to their loved ones and their duty to their country (the correct

choice for the men was always duty to country; for the women, it was responsibilities to loved ones). Even in their stark differences to the violence and madness of the revenge tragedies, these plays show the influence of *The Spanish Tragedy*—by trying to establish their own originality and cultural relevance for a new "enlightenment" age. These plays self-consciously used Kyd's work as a model for everything they tried not to be. Revenge was often a theme in nineteenth-century drama, although the context was more often domestic and sentimental.

Works in Critical Context

Recent scholarship on Kyd often falls into the categories of either theatrical performance studies or sociopolitical interpretations. *The Spanish Tragedy* is a revealing choice to examine what Elizabethan performance may have looked like. Richard Kohler has found the play's language to give valuable evidence for staging methods, and the popularity of the play and its violent special effects illuminate the experience of play going during the period.

New Historicism and cultural studies have often turned to Renaissance literature in recent years, following the lead of Stephen Greenblatt, a founder of New Historicism and noted Shakespeare scholar. This approach often searches for ways in which literature influences culture as much as culture influences literature, breaking down the barriers between "text" and "context." For example, New Historicists have pointed out a parallel between the violence of *The Spanish Tragedy* and the form of public executions in sixteenth-century London. Greenblatt, along with Molly Smith, demonstrates how power has a distinctly theatrical function during Elizabeth's reign, and Kyd more than any other dramatist set the form for how power relates to vengeance, madness, and personal tragedy. James Shapiro, on the other hand, points out how *The Spanish Tragedy* can also be used to challenge many of those assumed relationships.

Political theorists have often observed the British nationalism of *The Spanish Tragedy* in the form of its Spanish and Catholic prejudices. Scholars such as Eric Griffin and Carla Mazzio and have studied the play for how it reveals the anxiety and ambiguity that goes along with increasing nationalism, as was the case in Elizabeth's England, particularly after her navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588.

While a majority of recent critics focus on the play within its historical moment, critics from earlier in the twentieth century tended to look at *The Spanish Tragedy* as a stand-alone piece of literature. Kyd was claimed as a master of dramatic technique, carefully weaving together plots and subplots to develop dramatic action. Others appreciated his powerful use of rhetoric and blank verse (perhaps influenced by, and influencing, his friend Christopher Marlowe). These views were controversial, however, as critics such as Fredson Bowers have argued just as

persuasively that Kyd's work is technically immature, his characters do not have explainable motivations, and the use of subplots dilutes the impact of the tragedy.

Responses to Literature

1. Evaluate the rhetoric of *The Spanish Tragedy*. What are some of the great speeches and monologues from the characters, particularly Hieronimo? How are they structured, what rhetorical devices do they use, and how exactly do they achieve their effect? If you like, research what an educated Elizabethan would have known and expected about rhetoric in the theater and elsewhere.
2. Evaluate Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* as revenge tragedies in light of their debt to *The Spanish Tragedy*. What do these two Shakespeare plays share, and how are they different? Can the elements of both these similarities and differences be found in *The Spanish Tragedy*?
3. Do you think that *The Spanish Tragedy* endorses or condemns the idea of taking the law into your own hands and finding justice through violent revenge? Why?
4. Do some research on the nature of "special effects" on the Elizabethan stage, and look for the places in *The Spanish Tragedy* where they would have been used. How would Elizabethan actors have handled the appearance of ghosts, severed limbs and heads, bleeding wounds, explosions, and so on?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Psychologists and critics alike often study the question of why audiences often turn to extreme violence for entertainment. Perhaps it is because horror is one of the most intense human emotions, perhaps it is because disgust has its own kind of fascination, or perhaps because there is a kind of dark humor in the originality and creativity of the villains. The following are works that use extreme violence to drive plot and create meaning:

- Titus Andronicus* (1594), a play by William Shakespeare. Considered by some to be Shakespeare's least successful play, *Titus* is filled with overt violence: The hero, insane after the rape and dismemberment of his daughter, decapitates the criminals and bakes their heads in a pie that he feeds to their mother.
- A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), a treatise by Edmund Burke. In this influential work, Burke makes the first cogent argument for the artistic merit of horror in literature.
- The Road* (2006), a novel by Cormac McCarthy. This book, one of the most violent novels ever to win a Pulitzer Prize, is the postapocalyptic survival story of a father and his son traveling across a wasteland populated by desperate marauders. McCarthy uses these vividly described, amoral villains as points of contrast with human instincts for decency and civilization.

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Paer Lagerkvist

BORN: 1891, Vaexjoe, Sweden

DIED: 1974, Stockholm, Sweden

NATIONALITY: Swedish

GENRE: Fiction, drama, poetry

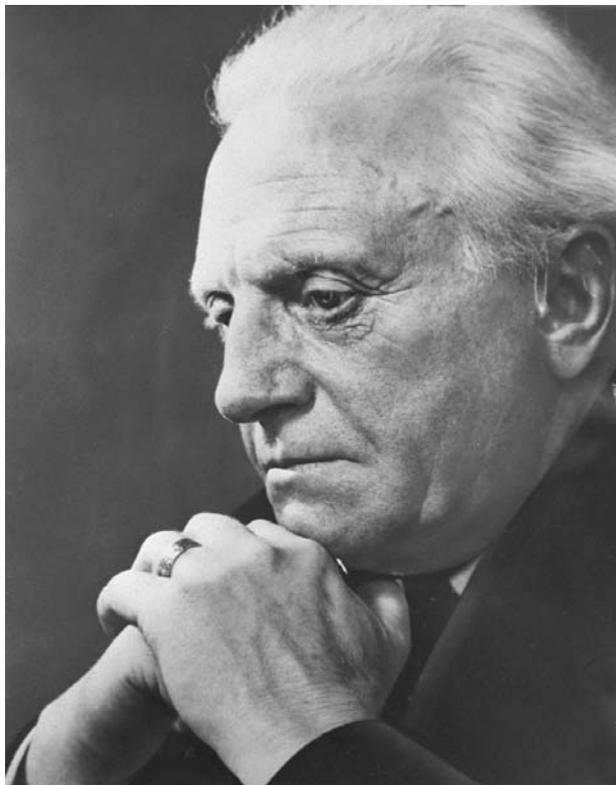
MAJOR WORKS:

Literary Art and Pictorial Art: On the Decadence of Modern Literature, on the Vitality of Modern Art (1913)

Barabbas (1951)

Pilgrim at Sea (1962)

The Holy Land (1966)



Paer Lagerkvist Lagerkvist, Par F., photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Regarded as one of the foremost Swedish literary figures of the twentieth century, Lagerkvist displayed throughout his career a concern with metaphysical and moral issues arising from conflicts between science, religion, and human conduct. Influenced by innovations in French modernist painting, as well as by the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and the expressionist techniques of dramatist August Strindberg, Lagerkvist's work often incorporates elements from folktales, fables, and myths and is characterized by obscure symbolism, abstract imagery, and simple, unadorned language.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Rejection of Tradition Paer Lagerkvist was born on May 23, 1891, in the city of Vaexjoe in the southern Swedish district of Smaland. Even though he was raised in an atmosphere of provincialism and religious orthodoxy, Lagerkvist rejected these values, and in 1913, following a year of study at the University of Uppsala, he traveled to Paris, where he became acquainted with the fauvist, cubist, and "naivist" movements in the visual arts. He found himself deeply impressed with both the intellectual discipline and aesthetic innovations of these groups.

Bitter Belief against a Backdrop of Global Gloom

Lagerkvist's early work was dark, lyrical, and pessimistic. Deeply disturbed by the immense destructiveness of World War I (1914–1918), his writings of this era feature the conflict between traditional Christian and modern scientific-determinist views. Lagerkvist's works were largely concerned with man's relationship to God, with the meaning of life, and with the conflict between good and evil. Although Lagerkvist's later works were thematically similar to his earlier works, they became more accessible, less pessimistic, and more realistic. Eventually Lagerkvist came to believe that good and love could triumph over evil. His play *Han som fick leva om sitt liv* (*He who lived his life over again*), published in 1928, is generally regarded as the beginning of the more mature, optimistic period of his writing.

Salvation for the Damned: A New (Old) Vision of Humanity

In his later years, Lagerkvist devoted himself primarily to writing the novels for which he is perhaps best known outside of Sweden. Working in the wake of the global catastrophe that was World War II (1939–1945) Lagerkvist was, like much of the world, nearly desperate for a vision of hope. During World War II, Sweden maintained its neutrality while Germany pursued a policy of aggressive territorial expansion and the systematic murder of six million European Jews. At the time, many in Sweden objected to their government's lack of involvement in fighting the Nazis.

Beginning with *Barabbas* (1950), Lagerkvist assembled a cycle of narratives that continued his examination of humanity's unending quest for meaning. One of Lagerkvist's most acclaimed works, *Barabbas* has been adapted for both stage and film; it was after its publication that Lagerkvist received the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1951).

Death of a Tyrant's Wife

Lagerkvist's final novel, *Herod and Mariamne* (1967), tells the story of Herod the Great, the tyrannical king of Judaea, and of his love for his queen, the good and compassionate Mariamne. Published a year after the death of his wife, Lagerkvist acknowledged the autobiographical element in *Herod and Mariamne*, writing that the sense of loss experienced by Herod was his own at the death of his wife. Although he continued to make preliminary sketches for new literary works, Lagerkvist published nothing else thereafter. His final notebook, begun in 1970, reveals his continued literary activity and traditional literary themes; it runs to more than one thousand pages and consists primarily of personal reflections on his ambivalent relationship to God and on his own approaching death. Paer Lagerkvist died in Stockholm on July 11, 1974.

Works in Literary Context

Lagerkvist's early work functioned as a reaction against contemporary literary trends. In 1913, in fact, Lagerkvist began a period in his career in which he

deliberately tried to incorporate the trends in the visual arts—expressionism, cubism, and fauvism, in particular—into his literary art. In his later career, however, Lagerkvist turned to a much more traditional source of inspiration: the Bible. Lagerkvist's best-known work is based on a character from the Bible and incorporates the simplistic narrative structure of vast portions of the Bible.

In Search of a New Literature Lagerkvist became acquainted with the fauvist, cubist, and “naivist” movements in the visual arts during a trip to France in 1913. Impressed with both the intellectual discipline and aesthetic innovations of these groups, Lagerkvist issued the theoretical pamphlet *Literary Art and Pictorial Art: On the Decadence of Modern Literature, on the Vitality of Modern Art*. In this, his first literary manifesto, Lagerkvist calls for a renewal of literature that would parallel the dynamic developments and formal experimentation in contemporary art. He put his principles into action in his next publications, including *Motifs* (1914), a collection of poetry and prose, and *Iron and Men* (1915), a collection of five short stories that deal with human existence in the face of the violence and anxiety of World War I. Both display Lagerkvist's attempts to put principles of cubism into literary practice, but there is a degree of stylization and a tension between violent content and artistic form that has led these to be considered among Lagerkvist's least successful works.

Back to the Bible In the majority of his works published between 1950 and 1967—a total of six novels and one collection of poetry—Lagerkvist's primary focus is the examination of the relationship between the human and the divine—specifically, humanity's relationship to the Christian God. In *Barabbas*, the scant biblical references to the robber and insurrectionist who was released instead of Christ are Lagerkvist's starting point for a masterly novel about the relationship between doubt and faith, the human and the divine. Lagerkvist uses a sparse but monumental style, consciously modeled on that of the Bible but also owing much to the narrative techniques of popular storytelling.

A Tradition of External Inspiration Since Lagerkvist's time, other authors have attempted both to incorporate the conventions of other art forms into literature and to use the Bible as a model for their own writing. As an example, Toni Morrison's *Jazz* attempts to re-create the feeling of listening to jazz music in her novel's plot structure and in her character representation. Meanwhile, Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, like *Barabbas*, takes a relatively minor figure from the Bible and spins an entire novel out of this character's experiences. Indeed, Diamant focuses on the treatment of women during the early biblical period, offering readers a unique view of that period of history.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lagerkvist's famous contemporaries include:

- Boris Pasternak** (1890–1960): In addition to his influential poetry, this Russian author also wrote *Doctor Zhivago*.
- J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892–1973): An English scholar and the author of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.
- Wilfred Owen** (1893–1918): An English soldier and poet whose work was critical of World War I, in which he ultimately died—one week before the war ended.
- Benito Mussolini** (1883–1945): The Italian leader of the National Fascist Party in Italy, he met a gruesome end that reflected his own grisly approach to controlling his populace.
- Ho Chi Minh** (1890–1969): A Vietnamese revolutionary and the first president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).
- Fatima Jinnah** (1893–1969): A Pakistani political leader who was a prime figure in the Pakistan movement for independence from Great Britain and India.

Works in Critical Context

Although Lagerkvist's early, most experimental work was largely panned, his later work—particularly *Barabbas*—has received mostly positive reviews. Critics note its sleek, spare style on the one hand, and its effortless combination of realism with spiritual conflict on the other. Nonetheless, some critics have argued that Lagerkvist does not take enough time or effort to flesh out his characters and, instead, presents flat, unrealistic characters.

Barabbas Lagerkvist was virtually unknown in the United States until the publication of the English translation of *Barabbas* in 1951, the same year he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. The novel is the story of the condemned thief whose place Christ took on the cross. In a review of the novel, Graham Bates remarks, “The work combines the utmost physical realism with an intensity of spiritual conflict not often equaled in the retelling of Biblical tales. Paer Lagerkvist has taken a man barely mentioned in the New Testament and has built him into a character as real, as evil, and as good as he must have been to the men who knew him those centuries ago. This is no outline sketch in black and white but a deeply conceived and richly colored portrait of a man driven beyond the powers of his endurance by a force he could never actually believe in.”

Charles Rollo calls *Barabbas* a “small masterpiece,” observing, “In a prose style that is swift, sparing, limpid, and hauntingly intense in its effects—a style whose energy and beauty the translator, Alan Blair, has magnificently

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Barabbas reinterprets a traditional character from a new perspective. Here are a few works that attempt to rethink the importance and personalities of famous and infamous figures in terms of contemporary values:

Marie Antoinette (2006), a film directed by Sophia Coppola. Marie Antoinette—historically seen as a queen whose excesses so enraged her people that they beheaded her—is presented in this film as a lonely young girl married to an impotent and uninterested man.

Romeo + Juliet (1996), a film directed by Baz Luhrmann. By changing the setting of this famous Shakespeare play to a contemporary one, the film attempts to point out the fact that, above all else, the two lovers' plight is a result of teenage anger, repression, and sexual drive.

A Thousand Acres (1991), a novel by Jane Smiley. In this novel, Smiley reimagines the relationship Shakespeare's King Lear had with his daughters using contemporary Iowa as a setting. Smiley suggests that Lear was a drunken child molester and that the daughters must find a way to survive their father by joining together.

preserved—Lagerkvist evokes the early Christian era with a selective realism more telling than any ponderously detailed reconstruction of the past. Every image sustains the feeling, "That is the way things were"; every movement in the story has an unerring rightness." Harvey Breit has praised Lagerkvist for taking "a complex moral theme" and constructing the tale "with a craftsman's complete mastery and simplicity," synthesizing "an elaborate, moral vision and austere poetic style."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Barabbas*. What effect do you believe Lagerkvist was trying to achieve by basing his biblical characters less on the traditional, biblical representation and more on people from Lagerkvist's own life? Do you believe he achieved this effect? Cite specific examples from the text to support your response.
2. Using the Internet and the library, research cubism, expressionism, and fauvism. Then read *Iron and Men*. In what ways do you think this text exemplifies the values of these visual art traditions? Cite specific passages from the text and paintings from the various art traditions in your response.
3. Read Lagerkvist's *Pilgrim at Sea*. Based on your reading of the text, do you agree with Michele Murray's assessment that Lagerkvist's characters in this text are merely "mouthpieces of Good or Evil or

Lust or Cupidity," not fully fleshed-out characters? Why or why not?

4. To understand what it is like to interpret the values of one art form into the traditions of another, consider a painting, sculpture, poem, film, or novel that you enjoy. Then, attempt to represent in one of the other art forms the experience you have contemplating the work of art you enjoy. For instance, if you enjoy the film *Reality Bites*, try to re-create the impression of this film in a painting or sculpture. If you like the sculptures of Giacometti, try to write a short story that explores the life of one of his figures.

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☒ Alex La Guma

BORN: 1925, Cape Town, South Africa

DIED: 1985, Cuba

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Walk in the Night (1962)

In the Fog of the Season's End (1972)

Overview

Alex La Guma was a committed opponent of apartheid, and his overriding concern in his writings was to expose its evils and help bring about its downfall. Since this system of government has come to an end in South Africa, his fiction has become an important social and

historical testament of the apartheid era. Through his vivid descriptions of person and place, and particularly in his accurate rendition of the idioms and peculiarities of polyglot Cape Town, he captured the appalling racial conditions that existed.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

In the Shadow of Apartheid Justin Alexander La Guma was born February 20, 1925, in a working-class ghetto of Cape Town, South Africa. Like most members of their community, his parents were of mixed race, which meant that they were classified as “Coloured” under the South African government’s policy of racial segregation known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for “separateness.” This government-sponsored system involved designating certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races, and forbade people of different races from marrying. It also led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups kept separate from each other. This allowed the white Afrikaners, the descendants of European colonists who made up a small percentage of the population, to remain in control of the large non-white population.

His father was Jimmy La Guma, president of the South African Coloured People’s Organisation and member of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, which was the first nonracial political party in South Africa; his mother, Wilhelmina Alexander La Guma, was a worker in a cigarette factory. In 1942, Alex La Guma left high school without graduating, but completed graduation examinations in 1945 as a night student at Cape Technical College and in 1965 was a correspondence student at the London School of Journalism. In November 1954, he married Blanche Herman, a nurse and midwife, with whom he had two sons, Eugene and Bartholomew.

Political Activity A member of the Cape Town district Communist Party until it was banned in 1950, La Guma worked on the staff of the leftist newspaper *New Age*. He came to the government’s notice in 1955, when he helped draw up the Freedom Charter, a declaration of rights for all South Africans, regardless of race. In 1956, he was accused of treason because of his political activism. In December of that same year La Guma published his first short fiction, “A Christmas Story,” in the journal *Fighting Talk*.

In 1961, he was arrested for helping to organize a strike and was detained for seven months. In 1962, he was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. This meant that he was barred from leaving his house, communicating with friends, participating in politics, and practicing journalism.

Up until his banning, La Guma continued to work as a journalist for *New Age*. Besides his news reports, he wrote a weekly column and in 1959 created a political cartoon strip. During the time leading up to his house arrest and then while in confinement, La Guma also wrote the majority of his short stories. They are of limited number—only sixteen in all were published—at first appearing locally and then in international magazines and anthologies. Collectively, the stories form a powerful indictment of the evils of apartheid, particularly in relation to the colored community of Cape Town.

A Walk in the Night and First Novels La Guma’s only novella, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), was written prior to his banning and was first published in Nigeria. It immediately became prohibited reading in South Africa. All of the characters in *A Walk in the Night*, whether black, “coloured,” or white, suffer as a result of the social system of apartheid. In varying degrees, all have been dehumanized and impoverished by it.

With the publication of *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma established himself as a protest writer of international repute. In October 1963, he and many others were jailed because the government feared a mass insurrection after several major figures of the antiapartheid movement were arrested. La Guma spent five months in prison, three in solitary confinement. In the following year, he published his first full-length novel, *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), mostly written while in jail. Once again La Guma created a world that is inhabited by slum dwellers unable to escape the limits of their socially proscribed existence.

Although La Guma’s next novel, *The Stone Country* (1967), was written while he was under house arrest, it was not published until after his departure from South Africa. In 1966, he and his family left for England on permanent exit visas, where he worked in radio and insurance, and as a freelance writer. *The Stone Country*, which draws on the author’s own experience of life in South African prisons, appeared some months after his September 1966 arrival in London. Through the central character, George Adams, daily existence in this harsh and alien environment is described in graphic terms, a condition made all the worse for nonwhites by the brutal application of the law governing apartheid.

For eight years he served as chairman of the London branch of the African National Congress, the antiapartheid political organization. During this period, he traveled extensively within Britain and abroad, and, on one occasion, toured the Soviet Union for six weeks. Having been presented by Indira Gandhi with the distinguished Lotus Award of the Afro-Asian Writers Association in New Delhi in 1969, he later attended its Fifth Congress in Tashkent (in today’s Uzbekistan), and then became its secretary general. In 1975 he visited Vietnam as a delegate to the World Peace Congress.

In the Fog of the Seasons’ End and Later Work *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* was published in 1972, in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

La Guma's famous contemporaries include:

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and poet; best known for *Things Fall Apart*, which dissects the effects of colonialism on traditional Nigerian society.

Marc Chagall (1887–1985): Belarusian-French-Jewish artist known for his sinuous figures and vivid colors.

Elmore Leonard (1925–): American mystery novelist and screenwriter. Movies adapted from his work include *Get Shorty* and *3:10 to Yuma*.

Pol Pot (1925–1998): Leader of the Khmer Rouge, a communist faction, and president of Cambodia (1976–1979). He is known for his brutal regime and social restructuring under which millions of people died.

Walter Sisulu (1912–2003): South African antiapartheid activist and secretary general of the African National Congress (1949). He was jailed for twenty-six years for his political activities.

London, six years after La Guma left South Africa. It had been conceived and substantially written while he was living in South Africa and became his most explicitly autobiographical novel. The subject matter is now directly political, and for the first time there is a clear call to action. The novel develops the familiar theme of the devastating effects that the apartheid-based socioeconomic and political system has on the oppressed people. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is La Guma's best-received work. Described by several critics as a major achievement in African literature, it has been translated into twenty languages and has outsold his other books.

Time of the Butcherbird (1979), was the first of La Guma's novels to be conceived and written in its entirety outside South Africa. Free of constant harassment and surveillance by the South African security police and able to place all his energies behind the struggle of the liberation movement in exile, he was able to address a central question of South African society in a more revolutionary way. Unlike La Guma's other stories, *Time of the Butcherbird* moves beyond the personal background of the characters into the nation's cultural and political history. The customs and traditions of white Afrikaners are given much greater scope than in his previous novels, with family histories outlined that stretch back to the Boer War (1899–1902) and earlier.

Time of the Butcherbird was La Guma's final completed novel, published in London a year after he settled with his family in Havana, Cuba, in 1978. There he served as chief representative of the African National Congress in the Caribbean until his death from a massive

heart attack on October 11, 1985. Shortly before his death, he was awarded the Order of the Friendship of the Peoples of the USSR.

Works in Literary Context

The “Englikaans” Style La Guma's style shows multiple influences, including elements of popular culture from such forms as pulp fiction, American gangster B-movies, and journalism. La Guma combines these elements to startling effect in his short stories, developing a style of writing based on what has been termed “Englikaans,” a dialect of Cape Town's mixed-race ghettos that blends Afrikaans with English. “What he gets into the English dialogue,” remarks writer and critic Lewis Nkosi, “is really the Afrikaans accents and rhythms of the Cape Malay coloureds' taal [speech] and he merges it with English more successfully than any South African writer has done, white or black.”

Propaganda and Protest Because La Guma was concerned primarily with racial injustice in South Africa, his work has come to be considered part of the tradition of protest fiction that include the works of such writers as Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852), Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*, 1906), and Richard Wright (*Native Son*, 1940). While there is no doubt that well-crafted protest novels can exert a huge impact on the public, critics tend to look down on protest fiction, even labeling it propaganda, because, they believe, the writer's art is subjugated by the writer's political message, and characters and plot tend to be less fully rounded than they are in other types of fiction. This point is debatable, but La Guma's literary reputation has suffered somewhat because of his political focus.

Works in Critical Context

Lewis Nkosi states, “The qualities which make La Guma's fiction so compellingly true and immediate are not simply its fidelity to its own source materials—which is a life of complete and naked brutality under a repressive regime—but the quiet exactness of its tone and the adequacy of its moral pressures.”

However, David Rabkin believes that La Guma's fiction increasingly shows “a consistent departure from the typical procedures of the novel form, being concerned rather to illuminate the moral character of South African society, than to portray the personal and moral development of individual characters.” A crisis, he concludes, arose in the relation between form and content, turning some of La Guma's later novels into propaganda rather than art.

A Walk in the Night *A Walk in the Night*, says Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, avoids “being a sermon of despair [while also evading] advocating sentimental solutions to the problems that it portrays. Without pathos, it creates a powerful impression of that rhythm of violence

which characterizes South African life.” He concludes, “All these characters are victims of a system that denies them the facility of living in harmony with fellow human beings and their frustrations find release in acts of violence against weaker members of their society.” Michael Wade, who considers the issue of identity as central to *A Walk in the Night*, believes that a “guerilla struggle” is being “waged by life against the forces of negation.”

In the Fog of the Season's End American novelist John Updike, writing for the *New Yorker*, said of *In the Fog of the Season's End* that it “delivers, through its portrait of a few hunted blacks attempting to subvert the brutal regime of apartheid, a social protest reminiscent, in its closely detailed texture and level indignation, of [Theodore] Dreiser and [Émile] Zola.”

South African writer Nadine Gordimer took a somewhat different view, saying: “Alex La Guma . . . writes, like so many black exiles, as if life in South Africa froze with the trauma of Sharpeville [a massacre of black South African civilians by the police in 1961]. Since he is a good writer, he cannot create at the newspaper-story level, and cannot, from abroad, quite make the projection, at the deeper level, into a black political milieu that has changed so much since he left.”

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Do you think the commission's work was necessary or unnecessary? Can a country heal without forgiveness? What does it take for the world to forgive a country that has committed serious crimes against humanity? Is this actually an impossibility?
2. Find out more about the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 by reading *Life in the Time of Sharpeville* (1995) by Humphrey Tyler. The book includes firsthand accounts of events leading up to and during the bloody atrocity.
3. Research the lives and action of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, two American civil rights leaders with very different ideas about the best way to achieve change. Write an essay that compares their ideas, and argue for what you think is the better approach to social change.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Apartheid, which in the Afrikaans language means “apartness” or “separateness,” was the system of racial discrimination and white political domination adopted by the South African National Party when it came to power in 1948. It ensured the political and economic supremacy of the white minority, which made up less than 20 percent of South Africa's total population in 1948 and less than 13 percent of the population in 1994, the year apartheid was abolished. Here are some other works that deal with the experience of apartheid.

A Human Being Died That Night (2004), a nonfiction work by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. A black South African clinical psychologist tells of her interviews with Eugene de Kock, who commanded state-sanctioned death squads during apartheid.

And They Didn't Die (1990), a novel by Lauretta Ngcobo. This novel tells the tale of a mother in rural South Africa under apartheid, caught between the political system and traditional cultural restrictions.

Journey of a Hope Merchant (2004), a memoir by Neal Peterson. This uplifting memoir by Peterson, a professional yacht racer, tells about his life, including growing up “Coloured” (mixed race) and disabled in apartheid-era South Africa.

Kaffir Boy (1986), a memoir by Mark Mathabane. A professional tennis player and writer describes his youth growing up black under apartheid in South Africa.

Mine Boy (1946), a novel by Peter Abrahams. This coming-of-age story was the first novel written by a black South African to show life through a black South African's point of view.

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Alphonse de Lamartine

BORN: 1790, Mâcon, France

DIED: 1869, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

"The Lake" (1817)

Poetic Meditations (1820)

Jocelyn, an Episode: Journal Found in the House of a Village Curate (1836)

History of the Girondists (1847)

Graziella; or, My First Sorrow (1852)



Alphonse de Lamartine *Lamartine, Alphonse, lithograph by Ratier.*

Overview

Alphonse de Lamartine, a pioneer of the French Romantic movement, is considered one of the greatest French poets of the nineteenth century. He was also a prominent statesman who wrote a number of historical works that were popular in his day. Lamartine is now remembered as a significant figure in the history of French literature whose poetry marked the transition from the restraints of the neoclassical era to the passion and lyricism of the Romantics.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Of Noble Birth Descended from minor French nobility, Alphonse Marie Louis de Lamartine was born on October 21, 1790, in the Burgundian town of Mâcon, to Pierre de Lamartine and Alix des Roys de Lamartine. Seven years after Lamartine's birth, the family moved to the nearby village of Milly, where Lamartine grew up frail and sickly.

When Lamartine was eleven, his parents sent him to the Institution Puppier, a boarding school in Lyon, which he hated. He fled the school in December 1802, and his family sent him to the Collège des Pères de la Foi in Belley. Under the direction of former Jesuits, this school was much more to the child's liking. There, he came to

love both language and literature, including the Greek and Latin classics.

Throughout his childhood, France was politically unstable, greatly affecting many French citizens. In 1789, the French Revolution began when the country's legislative body declared itself the National Assembly. After a Paris-based mob physically imprisoned French king Louis XVI and his family, the king was deposed and later executed. Throughout the 1790s, the French people saw several governments form as well as periods of intense violence as different groups fought for control of the country.

Poor Health and Wild Ways Because of his worsening health, Lamartine left the Collège des Pères de la Foi in 1808 and returned to Milly, where he remained directionless. His parents refused to allow him to serve in the military or to seek a government position under self-proclaimed French emperor Napoléon Bonaparte, who had taken power in 1799 in a military coup from the moderate, but weak, Directory (a group of five men in whom France's executive power was constitutionally based for four years). It was not long before boredom and Lamartine's renowned good looks got him into trouble. He incurred gambling debts, had several love affairs, and may have fathered a child out of wedlock.

In 1811, his parents sent him to Italy as a distraction, but he pursued his passions for gambling and women there, as well. The stay was not entirely wasted, however,

for he later turned the beauty of the Italian landscape and its women to literary account. He fell in love with a young Neapolitan servant girl named Antoniella, who eventually became the subject of *Graziella; or, My First Sorrow* (1852).

New Direction By this time, Napoléon had lost his grip on the vast empire he had built in the early 1800s after a failed attempt to conquer Russia. The emperor was defeated by an alliance of Russia, Prussia, Great Britain, and Sweden in early 1812. Lamartine was made mayor of Milly in May 1812 to avoid recruitment and performed administrative duties during the allied occupation of France. Following the abdication of Napoléon on April 6, 1814, Lamartine was commissioned into the Garde du Corps at Beauvais and the Tuileries. Military life was not to his liking, and he escaped during the Hundred Days (the short-lived, triumphant return of Napoléon from exile to regain control of France) to Switzerland. After Napoléon's second abdication on June 22, 1815, Lamartine returned to France. He rejoined his regiment in Paris in August but resigned soon thereafter because of poor health.

In October 1816, Lamartine went to Aix-les-Bains in Savoy to take a cure. There, he met Julie Charles, the wife of a prominent physicist. They fell in love and spent much of their time together at Lake Bourget. Charles returned to Paris, and Lamartine went back to Milly, but they promised to meet again. The promise would not be fulfilled, as Charles had become too ill to make the journey. Disappointed and lonely, Lamartine composed "The Lake," one of the most famous of all Romantic poems.

Marrying for Discipline On Christmas Day 1817, Lamartine learned that Charles had died a week earlier. At this point, he began to think about marriage—not for love but to establish some order in his life. His friends introduced him to various young women, and in June 1820, he married Marianne Eliza Birch, a young Englishwoman who was from a wealthy family. The couple departed immediately for Naples, where Lamartine had been appointed to the embassy as an attaché.

Literary Success Several weeks prior to the marriage, Lamartine anonymously published *Poetic Meditations* (1820). Its success was immediate, and it soon became widely recognized as a Romantic masterpiece. His time in Naples proved to be one of sustained creative activity, for Lamartine's minor diplomatic duties afforded him ample time to write. In addition to several lesser-known works, Lamartine published *New Poetic Meditations* (1823), a collection of verse that enhanced his already substantial reputation as a poet.

Upon his return to France in 1828 (then again ruled by a royalist king, Charles X), Lamartine was defeated in his bid for a seat in the national parliament. He then toured the Middle East. His recollections of this journey

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lamartine's famous contemporaries include:

- Charles Babbage** (1791–1871): British mathematician, philosopher, and mechanical engineer, who is credited with originating the concept of a programmable computer.
- James Buchanan** (1791–1868): The fifteenth president of the United States of America, who served in the period shortly before America's Civil War.
- John Keats** (1795–1821): English poet, who was a central figure in the Romantic movement in literature.
- Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792–1822): An English Romantic poet and philosopher whose odes and shorter lyrics are often considered among the greatest in the English language.
- Napoléon Bonaparte** (1769–1821): French military and political leader who became the emperor of the French.

are preserved in *A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (1835). After leaving the Middle East in 1833, Lamartine moved to Paris, where he served as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, France's national legislative body, until 1851.

In 1836, Lamartine published his next work, *Jocelyn, an Episode. The Fall of an Angel*, the only other completed segment of the projected epic, appeared in 1838. Although Lamartine had been regarded previously as a deeply religious poet, both *Jocelyn* and *The Fall of an Angel* were banned by the Catholic Church, which considered the works to be against traditional faith with their suggestions in favor of rationalism and deism.

From Poetry to Prose Beginning in 1839, Lamartine abandoned poetry for prose writing. By 1847, he had completed his multivolume interpretation of the French Revolution, *History of the Girondists*. The work was popular with the general public, even though critics felt that it suffered from a lack of scholarship. Lamartine's career as a statesman reached its apex in 1848 when "citizen-king" Louis-Philippe was ousted in a three-day revolution, and Lamartine became the president of the Second Republic's provisional government. He proved an ineffective leader during this volatile time, and his popularity diminished to such an extent that he was soundly defeated by Louis Napoléon, the nephew of Napoléon Bonaparte, in the presidential election held later that year. By 1852, Louis Napoléon had declared himself Napoléon III and established the Second Empire.

Retirement Lamartine retired from politics in 1851 and wrote prolifically until his death in 1869 to support himself and his family. He composed a large body of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers and poets who also worked in the Romantic style with themes of individualism, passion, the natural or the supernatural:

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. In this novel, the elements set the pace not only for nineteenth-century literature that challenges science but for the Gothic horror genre that developed after it.

Intrigue and Love (1784), a play by Friedrich Schiller. In this drama, manipulation in the upper middle classes leads to disastrous ends.

Lyrical Ballads (1798), a poetry collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this collaborative effort by two of the founding Romantic poets, common humanity is not only the theme but the subject.

The Scarlet Letter (1850), a Romantic and Gothic novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this work, Puritan values are closely examined and challenged when they come into conflict with individual values.

prose writings, yet debt continued to burden him. In March 1860, he had to sell much of his property and move into a modest apartment in a less fashionable quarter of Paris. His wife died on May 21, 1863. Although he continued to write, Lamartine ultimately accepted, albeit begrudgingly, a pension that was proposed by Napoléon III and approved by the National Assembly on April 11, 1867. Lamartine was a bitter and sick man when he died on February 28, 1869, in the company of a few friends and his niece, Valentine de Cessiat.

Works in Literary Context

Multiple Influences Lamartine's poetry was most likely inspired by his reading habits. *Poetic Meditations*, for example, not only spoke to the sensibility of his generation but extended the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and François-René de Chateaubriand into verse. Works such as *Graziella* (1852) and its powerful descriptive passages owed much to his responsiveness to the terrain of Italy. Other works such as *The Fall of an Angel* (1838) reflect his travels in the Middle East and his fascination with reincarnation and pantheism. During this time, his religious views were those of an orthodox Catholic. He affirmed the existence of an afterlife and encouraged his readers to accept divine will. Lamartine also based much poetry on the women in his life. His *Graziella* is based on Antoniella, with whom he had had an intimate relationship, and he took inspiration for his *Poetic Meditations* from his passionate affection for Julie Charles.

Personal and Social Themes on Religion, Nature, and Love In the period from 1851 to 1869, Lamartine's interest in social change (which influenced his political efforts) permeate his works, such as *Jocelyn* and *The Fall of an Angel*. Concerned with the French workers' quality of life, Lamartine argued for an improved standard of living and promoted honest labor, strict morality, and a return to a rural way of life.

In the two sets of poems in *Graziella*—those inspired by Julie Charles and those addressed to Elvire, his evocation of the universal woman—Lamartine wrote of ideal love and the grief experienced at its loss. In other poems, he described his religious beliefs and emotional reaction to nature. He viewed nature as a manifestation of divine grandeur and believed that its contemplation could inspire religious faith. Similar in subject and tone to *Poetic Meditations*, the work *New Poetic Meditations* includes poems that combine religious topics and idyllic natural settings.

Neoclassical Style Lamartine was an early Romantic poet and influence, but he also wrote poetry that was characteristically separate from Romanticism. Highly decorative and elaborate, for example, his work *Poetic Meditations* is neoclassical in style. This is evident in his frequent use of alexandrines (lines of poetic meter in twelve syllables with distinctive characteristics such as caesuras) and, at times, in his phrasing. The poet's experimentation with meter, rhyme, and stanza form created fresh, highly fluid effects. The best-known poems of the collection focus on his relationship with Charles and include Lamartine's most famous single work, "The Lake." In this poem, based on a boat ride with Julie Charles, Lamartine treats the ephemeral nature of life and love, writing in the highly melodious and emotional verse that epitomizes the lyrical or musical qualities of Lamartine's poetry.

Lamartine is considered to have made an impact on the French Romantic movement. Contemporaries Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Charles Saint-Beuve, and many others of his time generally admitted an admiration for his poetry, even if they disagreed with his politics. Later generations of poets—such as the Parnassians and the Symbolists—might have ridiculed Lamartine's sentimentality, but they owed a debt to his introduction of musicality into French poetry.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Lamartine achieved a substantial reputation as a poet and prose writer. By the time of his death, his reputation had waned significantly. His prose works were seldom read, and his verse lost favor with an audience that preferred the more passionate lyrics of the late Romantics. Today, critics agree that his prose writings were marred by hasty composition and are considered of little artistic value. His poetry, however, including Lamartine's most respected work,

Poetic Meditations, is still acknowledged as important in some circles.

Poetic Meditations This collection of twenty-four poems (later, twenty-six poems) became an astounding critical and popular success when it was first published and is now considered a transitional work that helped pave the way for the French Romantic movement. With both neoclassical and Romantic elements, Lamartine adopted forms common to eighteenth-century poetry and made use of the elegy and ode and themes of love and death. Reflecting the new spirit of nineteenth-century verse, *Meditations* also differs markedly from the emotionally restrained verse of the neoclassical era with its sincere tone, lyric enthusiasm, emotionality, and religious content. *Meditations* is now regarded as the first document of French Romanticism.

In a review of the book published in 1820 in *New Monthly Magazine*, the reviewer comments on Lamartine's evident power as a writer: "Lovers of French literature have long looked in vain for the grand desideratum, a good epic in that language. In the specimen before us there is, we think, great promise for the accomplishment of such a hope."

Responses to Literature

1. Lamartine was considered the first French writer to use Romanticism to revitalize the art of poetry. Read several of Lamartine's poems. In small groups, discuss what you can deduce about nineteenth-century tastes, values, and desires. What was important to the men and women of the Romantic era?
2. In a group effort, consider several works of poetry, prose, and drama by the writer and find examples of Lamartine's faith. Where in the dialogue, imagery, symbolism, or other elements is a religious theme clear? What message is suggested?
3. How are women depicted in Lamartine's poems *Graziella* and *Poetic Meditations*? Find descriptive phrases, metaphors, or other figures of speech to support your position.
4. Imagine that you have the opportunity to talk to Lamartine. Create a chart of his literary heirs, such as Victor Hugo, William Butler Yeats, and Hart Crane, and explain to Lamartine how he influenced their writing.

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Charles Lamb

BORN: 1775, London, England

DIED: 1834, Edmonton, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Nonfiction, poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Blank Verse (1798)

Tales from Shakespeare (1807)

Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare (1808)

Mrs. Leicester's School (1809)

Essays from Elia (1823)

Overview

Charles Lamb's elegant prose made him a major essayist of the Romantic era, and has formed a part of the canon of English literature ever since. His essays have delighted generations of readers, and his literary criticism testifies to his versatility and perceptiveness. He was also well-known to his contemporaries as a novelist, journalist, poet, writer for children, and fine critic, devoted to "antiquity"—particularly Latin literature and that of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century writers. His popularity extended through the nineteenth century into the twentieth, but waned after 1934, the centenary of his death. Since the 1960s, however, his reputation has risen again—with the



Charles Lamb Lamb, Charles, photograph. The Library of Congress.

publication of new biographical and critical works celebrating and analyzing his artistry becoming something of a cottage industry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Lonely Survivor and an Early Romantic
Lamb was born in London in 1775, the youngest of seven children, of whom only three survived into adulthood. His father was a law clerk who worked in the Inner Temple, one of the courts of London, and wrote poetry in his spare time. Almost nothing is known about Lamb's mother.

In 1782, Lamb was accepted as a student at Christ's Hospital, a London school for the children of impoverished families. He excelled in his studies, especially in English literature, but the seven years away from home proved lonely. Later, Lamb wrote that his solitude was relieved only by his friendship with a fellow student, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The friendship with Coleridge, who would become one of England's premier Romantic poets, had a particularly strong influence on Lamb's development as a thinker and an artist.

While in school, Lamb also began to experiment with verse. Since his family's poverty prevented him from furthering his education, he also took a job immediately

upon graduation. Working first as a clerk, he became an accountant at the East India Company, a rapacious joint-stock company whose function in the British colonies was at times quasi-governmental and even military. He remained there until his retirement in 1825. In working for the East India Company, Lamb was participating, however distantly, in one of British history's ugliest chapters. The Honourable East India Company, as it was officially known, acquired a monopoly on trade with India and, until this monopoly was limited in 1813, succeeded in colonizing—often quite brutally, as was standard colonial practice—nearly the entire Indian subcontinent. During his career at the East India Company's London offices, Lamb read widely and corresponded frequently with such friends as Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey. It was at Coleridge's insistence that Lamb's first sonnets were included in Coleridge's collection *Poems on Various Subjects*, published in 1796.

Total Mental Collapse Near the end of 1795, Lamb collapsed and committed himself to a hospital for the mentally ill. Though biographers are uncertain as to the exact cause of his breakdown, they believe it might have been precipitated by unrequited love. Adding to his misfortune, Lamb's sister, Mary, who was mentally ill, stabbed their mother to death in 1796—an event that completely transformed Lamb's life. His father, nearly senile, and his brother, John, wanted to commit Mary permanently to an asylum, but Lamb succeeded in obtaining her release and devoted himself to her care. From then on, Mary enjoyed long intervals of sanity and productivity as a writer, but these were inevitably punctuated by breakdowns. Some biographers attribute Lamb's own bouts of depression and excessive drinking to the stress of worrying about Mary, with whom he was extremely close. During her lucid periods, however, she and Charles lived peacefully together and even adopted a child.

Bringing About an Elizabethan Renaissance
Lamb's first published works were his sonnets, which critics praised for their simple diction and delicate poetic manner, but he quickly discovered that his greater talent and inclinations lay elsewhere. His first serious work in prose, *A Tale of Rosamund Gray* and *Old Blind Margaret*, appeared in 1798. Lamb, an avid theatergoer, decided to try his hand at drama next; however, *John Woodvil* (1802), a tragedy in the Elizabethan style, was neither a popular nor a critical success. His next two projects also testify to his love of Elizabethan literature. In 1807, he and Mary collaborated on *Tales from Shakespeare*, a prose version of William Shakespeare's plays intended for children. The *Tales* were generally well received, and the Lambs were commended for expanding the scope of children's literature in England, though a few critics regarded the *Tales* as distorted renderings of the plays. That same year, Lamb completed his *Specimens*

of *English Dramatic Poets, Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare*, an anthology that included selections from the plays of such Elizabethan dramatists as Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, George Chapman, and Thomas Middleton. Since many of these works were previously unavailable to readers, Lamb's anthology was an important reference source.

Unexpected Success as an Essayist In 1820, the editor of the *London Magazine* invited Lamb to contribute regularly to the periodical. Lamb, eager to supplement his meager income, wrote some pieces under the pseudonym of "Elia" for the magazine. With the overwhelming success of these essays, Lamb became one of the most admired men in London. He and Mary presided over a weekly open house attended by his many literary friends, including Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Henry Crabb Robinson.

Besides his diverse friendships, Lamb found his chief pleasure in writing, which consumed his evenings and holidays. After his retirement from the East India Company, he devoted more time to his favorite occupation. Charles "Elia" Lamb was still at the peak of his popularity as an essayist when he died suddenly from an infection in 1834.

Works in Literary Context

Lamb's virtually ignored dramas were inspired by his affinity for the theater. His short experimental writing, such as the novel *Rosamund Gray* (1798) displays the influence of Henry Mackenzie and Laurence Sterne. His criticism and "Elia" works are similar in language to the writings of Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Burton, though Lamb made them his own. He claimed that he read mainly works from the past, though the assertion was not strictly true. He celebrated the "quiddities" of his favorite little-known books, the theater, childhood and youth, the daily round, the daily grind, and most particularly the surprising qualities of some of his friends, for nearly all of his observations are drawn—or transmuted—from life.

Literary Criticism and Whimsically Personal Essays In his essays of literary criticism, such as in *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1807), Lamb supplements each author's entry with explanatory notes that are now considered his most important critical work. Lamb further elaborated on his views in such essays as "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Presentation." There, he argues that the best qualities of Shakespeare's plays can be fully appreciated only through reading; according to Lamb, stage performances often diminish the play's meaning, and individual performers often misinterpret Shakespeare's intended characterizations. Besides his dramatic criticism, Lamb composed sketches in the familiar essay form, a style popularized by Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, Robert Burton, and Sir Thomas

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lamb's famous contemporaries include:

- Jane Austen** (1775–1817): British novelist "of manners" who is still read today and appreciated for her realism and brilliant wit.
- Simón Bolívar** (1783–1830): A Venezuela-born resistance leader who was instrumental in Hispanic America's liberation from Spain, and in founding the Spanish colonies of Gran Columbia.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772–1834): A British poet, philosopher, and critic who is widely recognized as one of the founders of the Romantic movement.
- Francis Scott Key** (1779–1843): An American lawyer and author, composer of the U.S. national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- William Wordsworth** (1770–1850): A British poet perhaps best known, along with Coleridge, as the cofounder of the Romantic movement in Europe.

Browne. These pieces are characterized by a personal tone, narrative ease, and a wealth of literary allusions or references.

When Lamb's *Elia: Essays Which Have Appeared under That Signature in the "London Magazine"* was published in 1823, he was already one of the most popular writers in England, but the "Elia" essays enjoyed unparalleled success. Critics were enchanted with Lamb's highly wrought style and his blending of humor and grief. Never preachy, the essays treat ordinary subjects in a nostalgic, fanciful way, and one of their chief attractions for readers of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the gradual revelation of the author's personality.

Writing for Antiquity, but Influential Among Contemporaries Lamb's style is sometimes almost too rich in its seventeenth-century speech patterning. After one of his early literary rejections Lamb declared, "Damn the age; I will write for Antiquity!" This tendency has sometimes been found too quaint, with its "peradventures," "marrys," and "haths" or "seemeths." The many classical allusions are also often lost on the modern reader. But Lamb's sense is most often clear; his form is brief, subtle, compact, and alive with wry and witty observations on the human condition—mostly on daily, specific, minutiae as they occur to him. Lamb is a true Romantic in his rejection of abstraction, rhetorical rules, and broad philosophic systems.

Lamb was among the first to appreciate Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and the works of John Clare and William Blake,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

A key component of Lamb's oeuvre is his selection of works about the style and content of pieces by other writers. Here are a few works by authors who also wrote important essays of literary criticism:

Anatomy of Criticism (1957), a survey of the field by Northrop Frye. In this book, the critic reviews the principles and techniques of literary criticism.

Biographia Literaria (1817), a collection of essays by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this set of autobiographical writings, Coleridge includes pieces on literary criticism and explains his now famous theory of the suspension of disbelief.

The Sacred Wood (1920), critical essays by T. S. Eliot. In this work, Eliot critiques drama and poetry, including that of Dante, William Blake, and William Shakespeare.

Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (1981), a collection of essays by Mikhail Bakhtin. In this complex study set, Bakhtin closely examines such genres as parody, romance, and the picaresque.

including Blake's paintings. His criticism, mainly in letters, of the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth was sometimes heeded by those poets. John Keats was captivated by Lamb's comments on Shakespeare. Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray were both influenced by Lamb's character studies. And the Brontës, Robert Browning, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf praised him. In a letter to Clive Bell in 1908 Woolf wrote, "I had no notion what an exquisite writer Lamb is. . . . God knows how I shall have the courage to dip my pen tomorrow."

Works in Critical Context

Though he initially achieved prominence as a drama critic, Lamb's greatest fame came through his "Elia" essays, written between 1820 and 1825.

A Disputed Critical Legacy Lamb's importance as a critic has been much debated. Some scholars, most recently Rene Wellek, have commented on his literary prejudices and his lack of consistent critical methodology. Lamb's thesis in "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" is considered especially controversial. Because Lamb theorized that Shakespeare's works were best unperformed, such critics as T. S. Eliot held Lamb personally responsible for what Eliot termed "the detrimental distinction" between drama and literature in the English language. Conversely, such diverse critics as Henry Nelson Coleridge, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and E. M. W. Tillyard have asserted Lamb's historical

importance and hailed his *Specimens* in particular as a critical landmark.

The "Elia" Essays (1820–1825) No such controversy surrounds the "Elia" essays, which have been almost universally praised by reviewers since their initial appearance. Although some scholars considered Lamb's style imitative of earlier English writers, the majority now accept that quality as one of the author's distinctive hallmarks, along with his fondness for the obscure and other idiosyncrasies. Stylistic studies by Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, A. G. van Kranendonk, and Donald H. Reiman explore diverse aspects of Lamb's essay-writing artistry. Both early and recent critics, including Thomas De Quincey, Bertram Jessup, and Gerald Monsman, have probed the "Elia" persona—proving that readers' curiosity about Lamb's personality has not waned.

In one of the more recent studies of Lamb, Monsman has written that the creation of "Elia" was an "exorcism" of Lamb's troubled family's past. And while most critics acknowledge Lamb's contribution to the rediscovery of Elizabethan drama in nineteenth-century England, his reputation rests on the "Elia" essays, whose humor and spontaneity continue to capture the imaginations of modern readers.

Responses to Literature

1. Lamb is famous for arguing that Shakespeare's plays are more successful as literature than when presented on stage, where actors draw attention away from the author's words and may even misinterpret them. Others argue that to read Shakespeare's plays as prose is to deny their very purpose as staged works. With whom do you side, and why? Do you agree with some of the points each side makes? If so, which ones and why?
2. Lamb once spent six weeks "very agreeably in a madhouse"—a fact he reported to Coleridge in the first of his letters to survive. Scholars attribute the breakdown to a number of possible causes. Research the different theories offered to explain Lamb's breakdown. In your opinion, which one best fits the facts you know about Lamb? What evidence do you find for or against this in his artistic production?
3. Though he waged a lifelong battle with depression, Lamb was never again to suffer a complete breakdown. Many critics have suggested that Lamb's writing, his whimsy, his humor, and the strong expression of feeling so often discernible in his work kept him going. Consider Lamb's writing, and the craft of writing in general: How would writing help to preserve one's sanity? What benefit do you find in writing? What disadvantages might there be to creative writing as therapy?.

4. *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* and other Lamb works were read far into the nineteenth century and admired by both generations of Romantics. In both style and content they depicted the intellectual preferences and favored themes of Romantic society. Considering such works, how would you characterize their first readers? What can you deduce about nineteenth-century tastes, values, desires? What was important to Romantic era men and women?

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Philip Larkin

BORN: 1922, Coventry, Warwickshire, England

DIED: 1985, Hull, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The North Ship (1945)

XX Poems (1951)

The Less Deceived (1955)

The Whitsun Weddings (1964)

High Windows (1974)

Overview

A major poet of the post–World War II era, Larkin was an eminent member of the group of English writers known as the Movement. Writers associated with the Movement wrote fiction and poetry about ordinary experience in a realistic and rational style, consciously avoiding the idealistic principles of Romanticism and the experimental methods of modernism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Came of Age during World War II Larkin was born in 1922, in Coventry, England, to Sydney and Eva Emily Day Larkin. While attending the King Henry VIII School, he began to write poetry, regularly contributing to the school magazine. In 1940, he began his undergraduate studies at Oxford, where he developed close friendships with such writers as Kingsley Amis and John Wain. During this time, he continued to develop his poetic style, writing for student literary magazines and anthologies. After taking his degree in English, Larkin accepted a job as a librarian at the Wellington Public Library in Wellington, England.



Philip Larkin Larkin, Philip, photograph. Daily Express / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Larkin's famous contemporaries include:

Dylan Thomas (1914–1953): Welsh poet well known for his life of excess and his iconoclastic literary style. His poetry collections include *18 Poems* (1934).

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969): Influential American poet and novelist who was part of the Beat generation. His novels include *On the Road* (1957).

Charles Mingus (1922–1979): American jazz musician and bandleader considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of all time. His albums include *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956).

Helen Gurley Brown (1922–): American author and publisher best known for editing *Cosmopolitan* magazine for more than thirty years.

Paddy Chayefsky (1923–1981): Three-time Academy Award-winning screenplay writer who also wrote for the stage and television. His screenplays include *The Americanization of Emily* (1964).

Elizabeth II (1926–): Queen of England since 1952.

Ted Hughes (1930–1998): English poet and children's writer who was the British poet laureate from 1984 until his death. His poetry collections include *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Crow* (1970).

At this time, England was a major participant in World War II. One of the primary causes of the war was the rise and territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler. In the late 1930s, the government of British prime minister Neville Chamberlain sought to avoid war by appeasing Germany and allowing Germany's annexation of parts of Czechoslovakia. After Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland in 1939, Britain realized appeasement would not work and declared war on Germany. Winston Churchill soon replaced Chamberlain as prime minister. While Britain and its allies (France, the United States, and Russia) were victorious at the war's end in 1945, the country had been massively destroyed by German air attacks. More than nine hundred thousand civilian and military deaths came in Britain as a result of the war.

Published First Works Larkin published his first volume of poetry, *The North Ship*, in 1945, while working as a librarian. In the next few years, he published his only two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947), the latter receiving modest critical acclaim. Larkin seems to have been in conflict over his main writing outlet—should it be fiction or poetry? As Larkin was choosing between literary forms, he took on a new post as a librarian at the University College Library in Leicester in 1946 and remained there until 1950. Larkin then

moved to Northern Ireland to become a sublibrarian at the Queen's University Library in Belfast, where he would work until 1955.

In the postwar period, British society was also evolving. A Labour government was elected after the end of World War II that pledged to carry out a full program of social welfare from birth to death as well as nationalization of industry. This program was not fully completed, though medicine was socialized, other social services were expanded, and several industries were put under public ownership. Conservatives were put in power in 1951 and halted many reforms.

Lauded Poet Deciding to focus on poetry, Larkin published *XX Poems* (1951) at his own expense. Although this collection received very little critical notice, critics believed that it was significant to his growth as a poet as he began developing his own distinctive poetic voice. *XX Poems* was followed by an international success, the volume titled *The Less Deceived* (1955), which appeared a few years later. It was critically lauded.

Larkin returned to England in 1955 to take a position as a librarian at the Byrnmore Jones Library at the University of Hull. Being a librarian allowed Larkin to combine academia and administration, and he definitely preferred it to the alternatives of teaching or giving readings, the usual ways by which poets are forced to earn their livings. While working at Hull, Larkin continued to produce significant works of poetry. *The Whitsun Weddings*, another collection of poems, appeared in 1964. In one poem in the collection, "Send No Money," Larkin describes himself as an observer, not an active participant in life.

Confessional, Observational Poems Acute, witty observation is a hallmark of Larkin's later volume of poetry, *High Windows* (1974). The personal, reticently confessional voice is ever-present, particularly in the aftermath of a generation of sexual revolution in the 1960s, as seen here in "Annus Mirabilis": "Sexual intercourse began/. . . (Though just too late for me)/Between the end of the Chatterley ban/And the Beatles' first LP." But the deep-seated pessimism is almost always redeemed and transmuted by Larkin's wit, as illustrated in "This Be the Verse": "Man hands on misery to man./It deepens like a coastal shelf./Get out as early as you can,/And don't have any kids yourself."

Importance Recognized The years following *The Whitsun Weddings* saw Larkin repeatedly honored as probably the principal living British poet. The BBC feted him with a special "Larkin at 50" broadcast in 1972, and he was asked to edit *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (1973). Larkin's next poetry collection appeared in 1974, *High Windows*.

Between the publication of *High Windows* and his death from throat cancer in December 1985, he wrote practically no new poems and often complained of the muse having abandoned him. Indeed, his last book

published in his lifetime, *Required Writing* (1983), is a collection of prose pieces written between 1955 and 1982. His final literary triumph came posthumously with the publication of his *Collected Poems* (1988), which won a critical acclaim and commercial success in England and the United States rarely enjoyed by a book of poetry.

Works in Literary Context

Larkin's earliest poems, written mostly during the 1930s, reflect the influence of W. H. Auden and W. B. Yeats, though he was also influenced by D. H. Lawrence, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. Yeats's influence has been noted particularly in the metaphorical language and lush imagery of the lyrics in Larkin's first volume, *The North Ship*. Larkin asserted that his reading of Thomas Hardy's verse inspired him to write with greater austerity and to link experiences and emotions with detailed settings. This breakthrough into a "mature" style, as Larkin termed it, is exemplified in what critics refer to as "the Larkin line"—a taut pentameter in which various emotional effects are achieved through the use of common language, subtle rhymes, compound adjectives, and concrete images.

Life-Reflecting Themes Larkin employed the traditional tools of poetry—rhyme, stanza, and meter—to explore the often uncomfortable or terrifying experiences thrust upon common people in the modern age. He frequently focused on death and the bleakness of contemporary existence, exposing sham and hypocrisy in human behavior, religion, and urban values, and consistently expressing pessimism and futility about human endeavors. Other recurring themes in Larkin's work include solitude versus community and marriage.

Such themes are examined in *The Less Deceived*, for example. The title of the collection reflects Larkin's insistence on the need for exposing and overcoming illusions and false ideals. "Going," usually considered the first of his mature poems, and "Aubade," one of Larkin's greatest works, both present unequivocal statements of his fear of death. Some of Larkin's marriage poems are celebratory, while others discuss the hardships and compromises of matrimony or, as in "Dockery and Son," address the circumstances of the poet's bachelorhood and his singular devotion to his art.

Works in Critical Context

In a time when popular reception of poetry was perhaps more tenuous than in any period since the Wordsworthian revolution, Larkin managed to capture a loyal, wide, and growing audience of readers. He has been acclaimed the "unofficial poet laureate" of England and the "laureate of the common man," as a representative spokesman for the British sensibility since World War II. He emerged as the center, if not the starting point, of most critical debate over postwar British verse.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the recurring themes in Larkin's poetry, particularly in later years, is the prospect and inevitability of aging and death. Here are some other poems that include this theme:

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1951), a poem by Dylan Thomas. This widely quoted poem was written about the author's dying father.

"The Dance of Death" (1857), a poem by Charles Baudelaire. This poem uses florid metaphorical language to discuss the approach and effect of death.

"On Hearing of a Death" (1907), poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. This poem presents thoughts that arrive upon learning of someone else's death.

The revelations of Larkin's *Selected Letters*, published in 1992, and of his biography on Andrew Motion that appeared the next year, caused a considerable stir and, at least initially, damaged Larkin's reputation as a poet. Such hostility was a reaction chiefly to his racist remarks in letters and conversations and to his seemingly heartless and deceitful treatment of women who loved him. As a result, passages and even entire poems that earlier had appeared mildly sexist now were interpreted as being outrightly misogynist, and previously admiring critics were hard-pressed to defend many elements of his private life.

Even so, the debate among readers and critics soon turned to whether the value of at least Larkin's best poetry really turned on such matters. If many of his admirers were saddened by the revelations, and if certain critics who had never liked Larkin's work felt vindicated by them, in general the initial shock gave way to a broader discussion of the relationship between literary biography and literary value and, in Larkin's case, to a renewed acknowledgment of his preeminent position among postwar British poets.

The Less Deceived *The Less Deceived*, Larkin's second collection of poems, contains two of his most admired poems, "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" and "Church Going." Both are personal monologues, musing nostalgically on the poet's favorite theme: loss—of time, of the certainty of religious belief; for, as Larkin wrote elsewhere (commenting on imaginative literature in general), "Happiness writes white." Writing about the pieces included in the collection, the American poet-critic Robert Lowell noted, "It's a homely, sophisticated language that mixes description with a personal voice. No post-war poetry has so captured the moment, and captured it without straining after ephemera."

Responses to Literature

1. Larkin was a prominent member of the Movement, which scorned the literary modernism of such poets as Dylan Thomas, favoring anti-Romanticism, rationality, and sobriety. Read a few poems by Larkin and Thomas. Write an essay discussing the thematic similarities and differences you find in these works. Does Larkin's poetry fully conform to the tenets of the Movement? Why or why not?
2. Much of Larkin's poetry was reevaluated in light of certain biographical revelations after his death. Write an informal essay discussing whether you think the biography of a poet should influence how we read his or her works. Does studying the life of a poet help us better understand the literary value of the poet's works, or does it cloud the reader's ability to experience the poetry in its own right?
3. After reading a selection of Larkin's poems, write brief character sketches of some of Larkin's urban characters, describing the way they think and how their actions relate to their ideas.
4. The prospect and inevitability of aging and death was a recurring theme in Larkin's work. Write a poem about aging or death that expresses your current perspective on these topics.

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☒ D. H. Lawrence

BORN: 1885, Eastwood, England

DIED: 1930, Venice, France

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Novels, poetry, essays, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Sons and Lovers (1913)

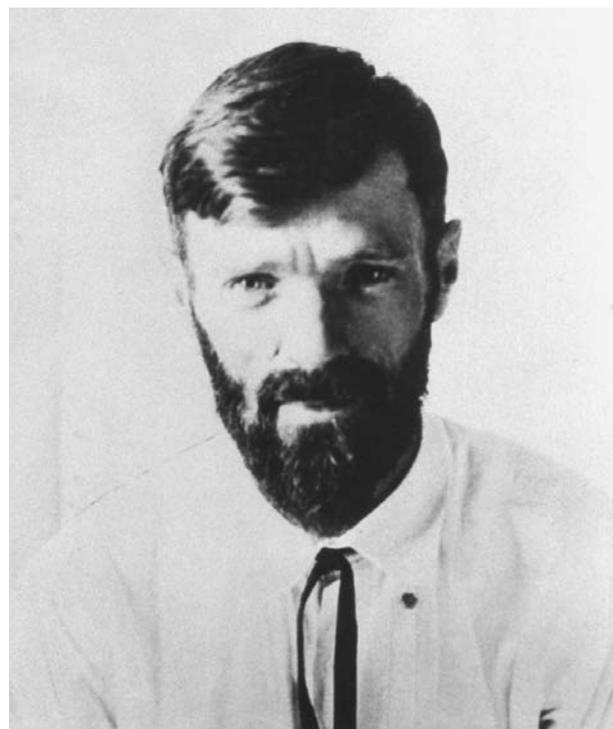
The Rainbow (1915)

Women in Love (1920)

Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928)

Overview

David Herbert Lawrence, most widely known as D. H. Lawrence, is one of the most controversial English writers of the twentieth century: His works were praised and condemned, his novels censored and banned, and his paintings seized by the authorities. During World War I he was suspected of being an enemy spy, partly because of



D. H. Lawrence Lawrence, D. H., photograph. AP Images.

his marriage to a German woman, and their movements were restricted until well after the war. Yet he has had a profound influence on the course of literature. His novels, especially *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), have provided test cases in the battle over literary censorship.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Estrangement and Inspiration Born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England, on September 11, 1885, Lawrence was the son of a little-educated coal miner and a mother of middle-class origins. His mother fought with his father, rejecting his limited way of life so that the children might escape it or, as Lawrence once put it, “rise in the world.” Their quarrels and estrangement, and the consequent damage to the children, would become the subject of perhaps his most famous novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1913).

Lawrence entered Nottingham University College in 1906 with the intention of becoming a teacher. During his second year at college in 1907, he submitted three stories in a Christmas competition to the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, which offered a prize of three pounds for stories in each of three categories. Since the rules limited each competitor to one entry, he submitted two of the stories under the names of Jessie Chambers and Louie Burrows, friends and fellow pupils, with their permission. The story entered under Jessie Chambers's name won one of the prizes. This story was the first by Lawrence to appear in print.

After completing his university course in June 1908, Lawrence got a job at the newly opened Davidson Road School at Croyden, where he remained until 1912. Here he taught with some success, although without great enjoyment. He sent parts of a novel in progress, as well as some poems, to the great friend of his youth, Jessie Chambers, who sent them on to the *English Review*. Its editor, Ford Madox Ford, hailed him at once as a find, and Lawrence began his writing career.

Love and Suspicion Lawrence's constant struggle for a right relationship with women came to a climax in his encounter, liaison, and marriage with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley. They met in 1912 and were married in 1914; their evolving relationship is reflected in all his work after *Sons and Lovers*. The fulfillment it meant to him can be seen most directly and poignantly in the volume of poems *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917). Like *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence's follow-up novels, *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), are set in England and reflect Lawrence's deep concern with the male-female relationship.

Beginning with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lawrence's famous contemporaries include:

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize-winning author.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965): A prolific author adept at storytelling through his popular novels, stories, and plays.

Amedeo Clemente Modigliani (1884–1920): Italian painter and sculptor who pursued his career for the most part in France. Influenced by a range of genres, art movements, and primitive art, Modigliani's work was unique and idiosyncratic.

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): American writer who spent most of her life in France. Stein is best known for her role as a catalyst in the development of modern art and literature.

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): Ukrainian-born Bolshevik revolutionary and Marxist theorist. One of the first members of the politburo, Trotsky was one of the leaders of the Russian October Revolution.

became divided, with Germany on one side and the Allied Powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. Because of his wife's German heritage and his questionable morals in the eyes of the British government—his novel *The Rainbow* had already been banned for obscenity—Lawrence was suspected of being a spy for the Germans. He was persecuted throughout the war, and even required to move inland when it was suspected that he was signaling to submariners from his coastal home.

Displaced The Lawrences lived in many parts of the world—particularly in Italy, Australia, Mexico, and New Mexico. Embittered by the censorship of his work and the suspicion regarding his German-born wife during the war, Lawrence sought a promising place where his friends and he might form a colony based on individuality and talent rather than possessions. This he never realized for more than brief periods. There were quarrels and desertions, and his precarious health was a factor in the constant moves. He wistfully regarded himself as lacking in the societal self, something he felt to the day he died, March 2, 1930, in Venice, France.

Lawrence's work from the war onward traces his search for that societal self. Most of these works, such as *Kangaroo* (1923) and *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), reflect his fascination with the places in which he wrote. Toward the last, his imagination returned to his English origins

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the major themes found in Lawrence's work is the relationship between men and women.

Here are a few works by writers who have also explored the theme:

The Fountainhead (1943), by Ayn Rand. An epic novel, it explores profound themes, among them artistic integrity, autonomy, and love between powerful men and women.

Pride and Prejudice (1813), a novel by Jane Austen. A timeless classic, it makes light of the seriousness of nineteenth-century courtship, love, and romance.

Women Without Men (1989), a novel by Shahrnush Parsipur. Upon its publication, the author of this allegory of life for contemporary women was jailed for her frank and defiant portrayal of female sexuality. The book is still banned in Iran.

for the scene and characters of his most notorious and controversial novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). All through his career, Lawrence's boldness in treating the sexual side of his characters' relationships had aroused the censorious. But in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his last full-length novel, Lawrence went much further. The book was banned in England, and this was followed by the seizure of the manuscript of his poems *Pansies* and the closing of an exhibition of his paintings.

Works in Literary Context

In the decades following his death in 1930 from tuberculosis, Lawrence's reputation grew until his works have come to stand among the classics of twentieth-century literature. He produced nearly fifty volumes of novels, stories, plays, and essays, and an enormous number of personal letters to a vast number of friends, including some of the most important and influential writers, critics, philosophers, and patrons of the arts of the early twentieth century. He took as his major theme the relationship between men and women, which he regarded as disastrously wrong in his time, but he also had a special gift for portraying what he called the spirit of place. Landscape is an essential character in his narratives, but often it is more a spiritual than a physical landscape.

Range of Work Lawrence used all of the literary forms successfully, except perhaps for drama. He wrote notable short stories throughout his career, including "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and "The Rocking Horse Winner." He proved himself a master of the short novel (novelette) form in *The Fox* and *The Virgin and the Gipsy*. His poetry ranges from early rhymed poems in *Love*

Poems and Others (1913) through the highly experimental and free forms of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and on to the deliberately crude satire of much of *Pansies* (1929) and *Nettles* (1930). Among travel books, a more casual, less structured Lawrence is shown in *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), and *Etruscan Places* (1932). The short journalistic pieces collected in his *Assorted Articles* (1930) are witty and challenging.

Continued Interest Interest in Lawrence has come to surpass that of contemporaries who were more favored by birth and education. His work does not seem to become dated. After relative neglect following his death, his books came back into print, and he is the subject of numerous memoirs, biographies, and critical studies. This is probably because so many of the problems he dealt with are increasingly urgent and because he explored them with an original force, commitment, and style that appeal especially to the young. When World War I broke out, he felt that it was then more important to find the grounds of faith in life itself and the means to a new integration of the individual and society. To this he added the question of the nature of a relationship between man and man that would have the same higher significance as that between man and woman. Religiously and ethically he can be described as a vitalist, one who finds a source and a guide—in a sense, God—in the "life force" itself as it was manifested in nature, untampered with by "mental attitudes." He was concerned with how this force might be restored to a proper balance in human behavior.

Influences In preparation for immigrating to America to form his ideal colony of like-minded individuals to be called "Ranim," Lawrence read several American authors, including Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe. In preparation for such novels as *Sons and Lovers*, although he denied intentional use, it seems clear he read Freudian theory—at least enough to find readers quickly identifying the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex throughout the work. Italy also influenced and informed a number of Lawrence's work. Referring to Italy, Jeffrey Meyers noted that "the sympathetic people, the traditional life, and especially the pagan, primitive element revitalized Lawrence and inspired his astonishing creative achievement. . . . Lawrence's discovery of Italy was also a discovery of himself."

His impressions of people in other countries also made their way into his depictions. Too often, however, these depictions, sexually explicit in many of Lawrence's books as well as paintings, inflamed contemporary public opinion and resulted in several notorious court cases on charges of obscenity and pornography.

Works in Critical Context

Lawrence received a great deal of criticism for both his writing and his attitude. He believed the goal for society was to keep the sexes pure, not in the sterile sense but in

the sense of keeping women purely feminine and men purely masculine—because they were “dynamically different in everything.” Various contemporary writers have supported Lawrence’s beliefs. Writer Anaïs Nin thought Lawrence had a “complete realization of the feelings of women.” Writer and feminist Kate Millet labeled Lawrence “a counterrevolutionary sexual politician.” Other critics have argued that Lawrence was an androgynous artist attuned to the inner experience of both sexes. Contemporary Spanish novelist Ramon Sender said that Lawrence saw the world as if he were the first man.

The Plumed Serpent (1926) was poorly received by readers in England but better received by the American public and press. *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920, 1921) have been claimed to represent “a supreme creative achievement” by “the greatest kind of artist.” *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the subject of intense controversy for decades, was classified by critic F. R. Leavis as being among Lawrence’s “lesser novels” because of its “offenses against taste.”

While most of his works have elicited both negative and positive attention, *Sons and Lovers* stands out as being Lawrence’s most widely read and most widely reviewed novel.

Sons and Lovers An autobiographical account of his youth, *Sons and Lovers* involves what Lawrence referred to as “the battle between mother and the girl, with the son as object.” Some critics immediately regarded the novel as a brilliant illustration of Sigmund Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex. Others, such as one reviewer from the *Nation*, warned of “boredom” and found the plot “commonplace and decadent.” Still others, such as a *Manchester Guardian* contributor, judged the book “an achievement of the first quality.”

Responses to Literature

1. Consider Paul’s feelings for Clara and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* as they progress through the novel. Is it clear whether he is more devoted to one than the other? Why?
2. After reading *Sons and Lovers* make two lists: one of the feelings Paul has for Clara, one of the feelings Paul has for Miriam. How do the feelings contrast and make up the conflict of the novel?
3. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was banned for generations because it was deemed pornographic. How would you define “pornography”? Review legal definitions of the word, then discuss whether they apply to *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

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Camara Laye

BORN: 1928, Kouroussa, French Guinea (now Guinea)

DIED: 1980, Dakar, Senegal

NATIONALITY: Guinean

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Dark Child (1953)

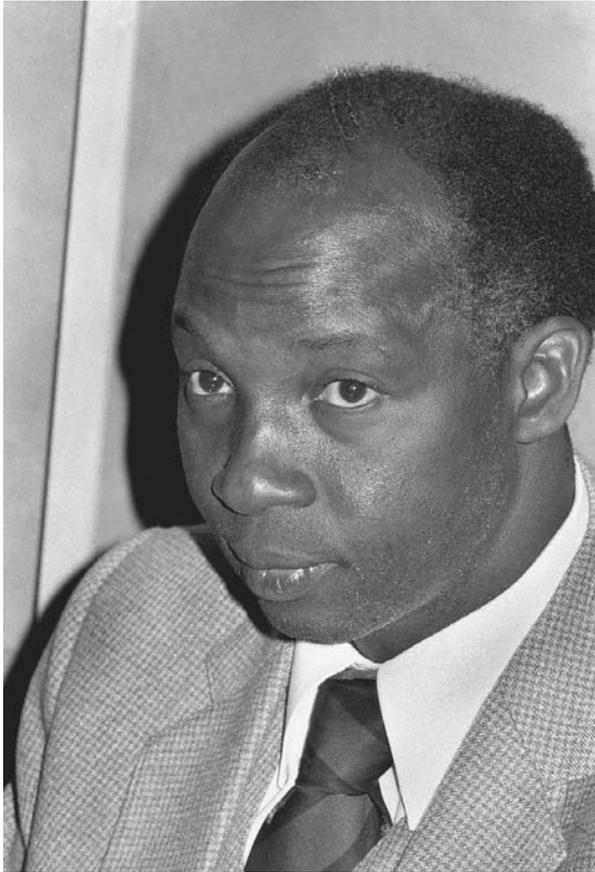
The Radiance of the King (1954)

A Dream of Africa (1966)

The Guardian of the Word (1978)

Overview

Camara Laye has long been recognized as one of the most important French-speaking novelists of Africa. His books confront such modern dilemmas as social and psychological alienation and the search for identity. Laye was exiled from his home country of Guinea in 1966 because of his opposition to its government and was forced to live in Senegal until his death. As a result, much of his writing chronicles the plight of the exiled and the problems of adapting to change and cultural dislocation.



Camara Laye © Roger-Viollet / The Image Works

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Tensions and Loneliness in Student Life Born in Guinea and raised a Muslim in that nation's countryside, Laye first encountered urban life when he left his tribal village to attend high school in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. In striking contrast to what he had experienced in his birthplace Kourossa, he found Conakry to be frankly modern: Twentieth-century technology was everywhere. The vast difference between the two societies startled Laye and made his life in the capital difficult. Upon graduating from high school, Laye accepted a scholarship to study engineering in Paris. He found the contrasts between African and European cultures even more overwhelming. To ease the tension and loneliness of his student life, Laye began to write remembrances of his childhood in the Guinean countryside. These writings became his first book, *The Dark Child*. Laye followed up this text with his masterpiece, *The Radiance of the King*, and even though this novel was a hit from the beginning, response to his next text, *A Dream of Africa* (1966), was even stronger.

Exile in 1966 Laye's third book resulted in his forced exile from his homeland in 1966. *A Dream of Africa* comments openly on the dictatorial policies of Guinean leader Sékou Touré, who forced Laye to flee the country with his family. While Touré is criticized by many for failing to institute democracy in his country, he played a key role in liberating Guinea from colonial possession by France. Until the mid-twentieth century, France remained one of the largest imperial powers in the world, controlling numerous territories, many of which, like Guinea, were located in Africa. Laye was to live in neighboring Senegal, under the protection of Senegal's president Leopold Senghor, for the remainder of his life.

Departure from Political Novels In 1970, during a visit to Guinea to see her ailing father, Laye's wife was arrested and imprisoned as an enemy of the state. Because he feared for her safety, Laye never again published an overtly political work. He married a second wife during his wife's imprisonment (a custom in his culture), but when his first wife was released from prison in 1977, she would not accept her husband's new domestic situation and she divorced him.

Laye's next book did not appear until 1978 when, after teaching in Senegal for many years, he completed *The Guardian of the Word*, his final publication. A marked departure from his earlier works, *The Guardian of the Word* is an epic novel set in thirteenth-century West Africa about the life of Soundiata (also known as Sunjata), the legendary leader of the Mali empire. The novel is based on an oral account of the period popular among Guinean storytellers, or *griots*. Laye first heard the story from Babu Conde, one of the best-known of Guinea's *griots*. Because the novel focuses in part on the conduct of Mali's first emperor and the standards of behavior he set, it indirectly comments on the proper conduct of all governments, something Laye could not afford to do openly. With *The Guardian of the Word*, Laye drew praise not only for preserving and celebrating a fragment of African culture, but also for bringing to it his own creative force. Laye spent his last days in Dakar, Senegal where he died of a kidney infection in 1980.

Works in Literary Context

All of Laye's books are written according to predominantly European literary modes, yet they paradoxically affirm traditional African life and culture. He succeeds in combining these discordant elements into a satisfying whole that expresses his individual vision. Speaking of *The Radiance of the King* in particular, Neil McEwan explained that "Laye is an artist in whom sources are entirely absorbed and the question whether this novel is French literature or African seems pointless; it is Camara Laye's." King noted that Laye transcended his cultural background, concluding that his work "belongs within the tradition of classic world literature, describing a personal and cultural dilemma in accents that speak to all

mankind.” Indeed, critical interpretation of *The Radiance of the King* alone illustrates the disparate ways in which one can understand Laye’s influences and style.

“*Stranger in a Strange Town*” *The Radiance of the King* is widely considered Laye’s finest work. Under one interpretation, this novel is rooted in the “stranger in a strange town” tradition of literature, in which a person about whom little is known enters a town and shakes things up—challenging cultural and political assumptions the town holds. In this tradition are novels like Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. *The Radiance of the King* centers on a white man alone in an African village. The story takes a white European named Clarence into the African countryside, where he is forced to adapt to the traditional culture in order to survive. He has no chance to earn a living unless he can find his way to the king’s court and gain a position there. His search for the king forms the basis of the plot. “Clarence’s search for the king with whom he hopes to hold an audience,” wrote Jeannette Macauley, “becomes an obsession. It’s the mirage which lures him on through dark forests with people he doesn’t feel anything for, with people who do not understand him.”

Possible Alternative Interpretations of *The Radiance of the King* “Attempts have been made,” Neil McEwan reported in his *Africa and the Novel*, “to prove Kafka’s ‘influence’ on the novel: ‘an African Kafka’ can be praise from some European critics, disparagement from some Africans.” But McEwan believed that *The Radiance of the King* ultimately suggests “innumerable European writers” and proposed that “symbolist, allegorical, mythic, archetypal, psychological, and comparative-cultural studies seem called for; indeed there are passages . . . in which one suspects that the author has deliberately provoked and mystified critical attention. . . . It mocks analysis.”

Because of the ambiguous nature of Clarence’s quest, the novel is not restricted to a single interpretation. As Larson stated in *The Emergence of African Fiction*, “Clarence, who is archetypal of Western man in particular, is symbolic of everyman and his difficulties in adjusting not only to a different culture, but to life itself.” King explained that “the novel deals with the theme of any man trying to adjust to a strange society, of every man’s homelessness in the world. . . . Making this ordinary European a symbol for Everyman is a way of countering ‘black racism,’ a way of showing that the essential human experiences go beyond colour.” If Larson’s interpretation is correct, then the novel can be seen as a part of the Existentialist tradition, emphasizing the homelessness and helplessness of human beings but also suggesting the importance of attempting to come together, to make the best of the world, faulted though it may be.

Works in Critical Context

Largely regarded with favor, Laye’s most harsh criticism has always been for the political stances his texts seem to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Laye’s famous contemporaries include:

Wallace Stegner (1909–1993): The American novelist, short-story writer, historian, and environmentalist whose work often focuses on the American West.

Elie Wiesel (1928–): The Romanian-born author who has written extensively about his experience as a Holocaust survivor.

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): The Italian novelist who wrote the acclaimed *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): The Nigerian novelist and author of *Things Fall Apart*, one of the most widely acclaimed novels in African literature.

B. B. King (1925–): The influential American blues guitarist.

take. Some critics of *The Dark Child* found its political message too muted, but Laye’s third novel, overtly political, was enough to force him into exile. Laye’s greatest success—indeed, his most highly praised text—remains *The Radiance of the King*. Although many have offered differing views of the meaning and tradition of this novel, few have criticized the quality of the writing.

The Dark Child Tracing Laye’s development from his tribal childhood, through his schooling in Guinea’s capital, and to his college life in Paris, *The Dark Child* poses questions about the preservation of traditional ways of life in the face of technological progress. As Irele noted in an article for *West Africa*, Laye’s autobiography presented “an image of a coherence and dignity which went with social arrangements and human intercourse in the self-contained African universe of his childhood.”

Some black critics of the time faulted Laye for not speaking out against colonialism. They saw his concern with traditional African society as an irrelevancy in an age of struggle for African independence. But Gerald Moore pointed out in *Twelve African Writers* that the world of Laye’s childhood was largely untouched by colonialism. “Though conquered and administered by France,” Moore wrote, “a city like [Laye’s native village] was complex and self-sufficient enough to go very much on its own immemorial way. Its people . . . were not constantly obsessed with the alien presence of Europe in their midst.” In contrast to this view, Irele believed that because *The Dark Child* celebrated the traditional African ways of life, it was “in fact a form of denial of the assumptions and explicit ideological outgrowth of the French colonial enterprise.”

Whatever the final judgment regarding the book’s stance on colonialism, *The Dark Child* has been widely

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *The Guardian of the Word*, Laye spins a tale about Soundiata, the legendary leader of the Mali empire. Here are a few examples of works that attempt to reimagine the myths surrounding legendary figures:

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (1970), a collection of poems and short narratives by Michael Ondaatje. This work loosely describes both the myths and the realities of the life of Billy the Kid; the text ultimately suggests that the best thing about the myths that surround Billy the Kid is that they enable people to imagine themselves as the legendary gunslinger.

Grendel (1971), a novel by John Gardner. In this book, Gardner takes the classic epic poem *Beowulf* and changes the point of view, emphasizing the humanity and sadness of the “monster” whose slaying resulted in *Beowulf*’s fame and fortune.

First Knight (1995), a film directed by Jerry Zucker. This movie offers Lancelot and Guinevere as an ideal match, negating the importance of legendary King Arthur.

praised for the quiet restraint of its prose. Moore explained that *The Dark Child* “is a unique book in many ways, written with a singular and gentle sincerity, yet with very conscious artistic skill. Laye does not proclaim his negritude or announce the coming dawn; he records what his childhood was, what was the quality and the depth of the life from which he sprang.” In her study *The Writings of Camara Laye*, Adele King called *The Dark Child* “a carefully controlled story . . . presented with economy and restraint. . . . A particular moment in Laye’s life and in the history of Africa has been transformed into a minor classic, in which the autobiographical form has been raised to the level of art.” The book, Eric Sellin noted in *World Literature Today*, won Laye “instant acclaim and lasting respect as a stylist.”

The Radiance of the King Critical regard for *The Radiance of the King* has always been very favorable, with some commentators placing it among the very best of contemporary African literature. The book’s “clever reversals, dreamlike evocations, surreal efforts and implementation in prose of techniques proper to film,” Sellin remarked, “have caused some admirers to deem it the finest African novel.”

Several critics found a religious symbolism in the novel, with David Cook in *Perspectives on African Literature* noting that “the book is, of course, cast in the form of a quest—a spiritual quest; though there is nothing pompous, ponderous or moralistic about it.” Likewise, Janheinz Jahn in *Introduction to African Literature: An*

Anthology of Critical Writings from “Black Orpheus,” explained that *The Radiance of the King* “is usually considered as an ingenious allegory about man’s search for God. But I think that the book cannot be seen in this sense only; it is ambivalent, even multivalent.” If Cook’s and Jahn’s interpretations are correct, then the novel belongs to a tradition at least as old as John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a spiritual allegory about the life a Christian must live in order to reach Heaven.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *A Dream of Africa*. Laye was exiled because he wrote this book. What do you think Sékou Touré, of whom Laye was critical in *A Dream of Africa*, was trying to accomplish in exiling the writer? Given that Laye never wrote an overtly political work and stayed out of Guinea after he was exiled, do you think Touré achieved his goals? What do you make of this situation—of Laye’s being silenced by Touré?
2. You have read the various interpretations of *The Radiance of the King*. Clearly, although critics agree that the novel is fantastic, they cannot agree on what it means. Now, read the novel. What do you think Laye is trying to say in this novel—about religion, race, the meaning of life, or whatever else you find in the text? Cite specific passages from the text to support your response.
3. In *The Guardian of the Word*, Laye uses the myth and legends surrounding an important figure in African history for fictional purposes. Pick a figure from history and write a story in which you attempt to rethink the legends and myths surrounding your chosen historical figure in a way that makes the legendary figure relevant for today. To see how to do this, read *The Guardian of the Word* and research the life of Soundiata to see how Laye changed portions of the known history of this figure for his own purposes.
4. In many ways, *The Radiance of the King* and other “stranger in a strange land” narratives emphasize the uniqueness of the cultures they describe—they offer a chance to see one’s culture from the eyes of an outsider. Imagine you are trying to describe to a “stranger” the nuances of a cultural experience that is important to you—a wedding or a sporting event are good options. What would you have to explain to this person who has never heard of the wedding practices of your culture and has no idea what the rules of your culture’s sports are? Write a story or an essay in which you describe the process of helping this person understand your culture.

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Irving Layton

BORN: 1912, Neamtz, Romania

DIED: 2006, Montreal, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian, Romanian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959)

The Covenant (1977)

Droppings from Heaven (1979)

The Gucci Bag (1983)

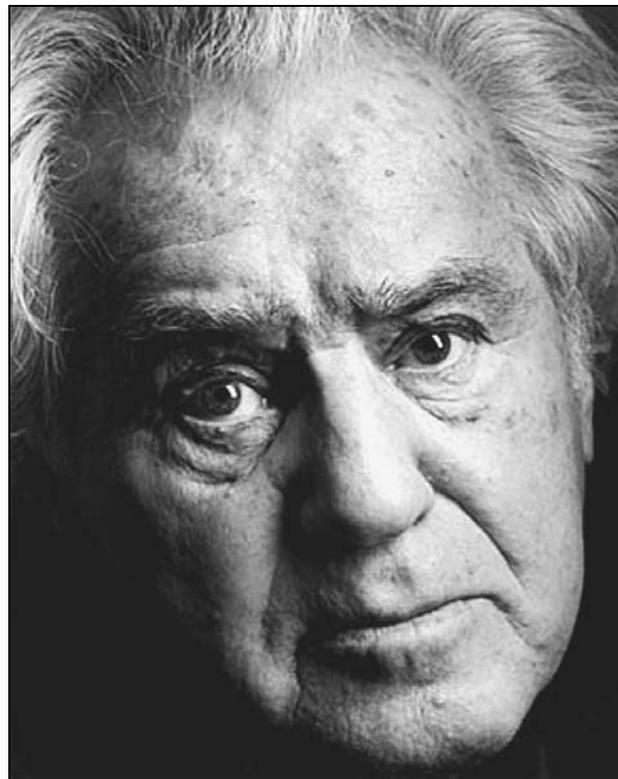
*The Love Poems of Irving Layton, with Reverence
& Delight* (1984)

Overview

A controversial and outspoken literary figure, Irving Layton is known for his energetic, passionate, and often angry verse, written in an attempt to “disturb the accumulated complacencies of people.” A prolific writer, Layton published nearly fifty volumes of poetry in as many years, many confronting what he viewed as sources of evil in the twentieth century. These “malignant forces,” he suggested, have contributed to moral and cultural decay in the modern world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Visions of Canada Layton was born Israel Pincus Lazarovitch in Neamtz, Romania, on March 12, 1912, to Jewish parents, Moishe (Moses) and Keine (Klara)



Irving Layton Layton, Irving Peter, photograph by John Reeves.
Reproduced by permission.

Moscovitch Lazarovitch. He immigrated to Canada with his family at age one. His father was a religious man whom Layton has described as “a visionary, a scholar”; his mother supported the family by running a small grocery store.

Educated in agriculture and economics at MacDonald College, St. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, in 1939 Layton received a bachelor of science degree, a year after he met and married Faye Lynch. Layton began to publish poetry while lecturing at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal in the early 1940s, and in 1943 he finished service with the Canadian Army; enraged with Adolf Hitler’s devastation of Europe during the course of the Second World War (1939–1945), he had enlisted the previous year, and had done his service in Ontario, Canada. While living in Montreal in the early 1940s, Layton, along with Louis Dudek and John Sutherland, began editing *First Statement*, a local literary journal. Some of his earliest poems were published in this journal, which highlighted the work of young Canadian writers and emphasized the social and political aspects of Canadian life—very much, of course, including responses to the war.

From Poetry to Politics, A Much-married Man But life went on in Canada, and Layton taught at Herzliah High School in Montreal from 1945 until 1960. He also lectured part-time at Sir George Williams University

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Irving's famous contemporaries include:

- Allen Ginsberg** (1926–1997): An American poet most famous for his Beat poem “Howl,” a harsh critique of materialism and modern culture.
- Benjamin Bloom** (1913–1999): An American educational psychologist, he was instrumental in mastery-learning theory, initiating what is now used the world over and known as Bloom’s Taxonomy.
- Leonard Cohen** (1934–): Canadian singer, songwriter, and poet famous for his evocative lyrics and richly emotional voice; Cohen was a student of Layton’s at Herzliah High School.
- Albert Camus** (1913–1960): An Algerian-French philosophical writer, he was the second-youngest Nobel Prize recipient—and, while associated with existentialism, actually rejected that term in favor of the more accurate “nihilism.”
- Józef Garliński** (1913–2005): A Polish historian, he was known for his popular books on World War II, including such best sellers as *Fighting Auschwitz* (1974).

from 1949 to 1965, where he was later the poet-in-residence for four years—starting in 1965. Layton published his first volume of poetry, *Here and Now*, in 1945. In 1946 he completed a master’s degree in economics and political science at McGill University; that same year, he was divorced from Lynch and married to Betty Sutherland, with whom he subsequently had a daughter and a son, Naomi and Max. Layton wrote sensitive lyric poems to both his children.

Layton’s earliest volumes met with minimal success. *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959), which included some of his best-known poems from previous volumes, proved to be his first major success, earning him popular praise as well as the Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1960. At this time he became what Tom Marshall has called an “unusual phenomenon—a genuinely popular poet.”

Distanced and then finally divorced from the increasingly religious Sutherland (with whom he nevertheless maintained a lifelong friendship), in 1961 Layton married writer Aviva Cantord. During these years, he also became a vocal anticommunist, and split with many of his friends on the left over his support for the Vietnam War. Although Canada had some citizens fighting in Vietnam as part of the U.S. armed forces there, its primary involvement was the provision of a safe haven for somewhere between thirty thousand and ninety thousand U.S. citizens avoiding the draft, a method of forced conscription into the military. Canada’s practice of harboring so-called

“draft dodgers,” many of whom were artists themselves, made Layton’s support for the war particularly unpopular in his social circle.

Layton remained at York until his retirement in 1978, when he began to write full-time. In that year Layton, whose marriage to Cantor had been dissolved, married former student Harriet Bernstein, a publicist, and the family moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Layton was divorced again in 1983. The divorce from Bernstein found expression in his next work, *The Gucci Bag*, which is devoted in part to revealing Layton’s grief over the break-up.

Full-Time Writing, Plus One More Marriage

Layton remarried in 1984 and moved with his new wife, aspiring painter and poet Anna Pottier, to a middle-class neighborhood of Montreal. As T. Jacobs explains at University of Toronto Library’s dedicated Layton pages, Irving had always “believed that his mother’s presence protects and guides him, and so when he learned that Anna was born the day of his mother’s death in 1959, he took it as a sign to commit to Anna, who became his fifth and last wife.”

When he and Pottier divorced in 2000, Layton settled in at Maimonides in Montreal with lifelong friend Musia Schwartz—maintaining a more or less comfortable lifestyle, though marred by the onset of Alzheimer’s until his death six years later. He continued to write, maintaining a consistent and confrontational style as much in his poetic works as in his public life. Throughout his lifetime, he had collected numerous prestigious honorary degrees and awards, including in 1976 the Order of Canada and, though the award ultimately went to Gabriel García Márquez, a nomination for the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Works in Literary Context

Multiple Influences The dedication in *Dance with Desire: Love Poems* (1986) suggests the many possible influences on Layton’s verse, including “Miss Benjamin—the Grade Six teacher who awakened my erotic impulses and inspired my first sensual poem.” This dedication also introduces readers to the poet’s sometimes flippant approach to his craft. In the preface to *The Laughing Rooster* (1964), Layton declared that the concern of the poet is to “change the world; at any rate, to bear witness that another beside the heartless, stupid, and soul-destroying one men have created is possible.” This attitude underlies almost all that he has written. In his insistence that art be not simply “art for art’s sake,” but that it also says something about the world—that it be a political or sociocultural statement of sorts—Layton turns away from certain of his modernist predecessors, following instead in the footsteps of such poets as Percy Bysshe Shelley, who famously argued that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

A Bold, or Arrogant, Approach to "Evil" in Society During the 1960s, Layton's meditations on the tragedy of a European culture destroyed by war, mass murder, and the failure of Christian humanism gave his poetry a very sharp focus: His foreword to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* (1963) calls for a new role for the poet, no longer the explorer of "new areas of sensibility," but the witness and judge of several hundred years of Western traditions that have been corroded.

Suffering History, Though Not Without Pleasure

A clear thematic pattern emerges in Layton's work over time. *The Pole Vaulter* (1974) successfully unites the themes of passion and politics. But it is the painful history of Europe that absorbs him, occasionally merged with the theme of sexuality, as in "An Old Nicoise Whore" from *Periods of the Moon* (1967). By the writing of *For My Neighbours in Hell* (1980) and *Europe and Other Bad News* (1981), he was elaborating on his signature themes: social injustice, the death of the spirit in an age of materialism, energetic irreverence, and the lingering glow of passion. *Europe and Other Bad News* stresses his major themes, observing with distress that the Holocaust, the primary moral and psychological event of the twentieth century, is still neglected by contemporary poets. And *The Gucci Bag* (1983), while dominated by love and conflict and demonstrating his powerful commitment to poetry in the face of crumbling personal relations, reaffirms Layton's darkest beliefs about human society. He expresses in the foreword that "poetry exists to give relief to those dark sensual impulses that our over-mechanized civilization has all but snuffed out." He responds to the "murderous times" of the present, nailing a Gucci bag to the outside wall of his house as a talisman against materialism and greed.

The difference between Layton's earlier poems and those that follow *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* is that he has become more conscious of a universal decay of values and morals. But, he argued, unlike contemporary fiction or drama, poetry remained innocent of man's twentieth-century tragedies. The gravest error, Layton claimed, is that poets have forgotten that they are descended from prophets and have "swapped roles with entertainers and culture-peddlers." For Layton, "the exceptionally heinous nature of twentieth-century evil" requires the poet's total concentration—and he loudly and harshly accused the poets of his present age for failing to deal with this issue.

The Marriage of Romance and Irony Offset by an ironic point of view and often satiric tone, Layton's romantic sense of self provides a refreshing, invigorating dimension to contemporary Canadian writing. One of the few Canadian poets to perceive poetry as performance, Layton thrives in the role of showman, and William Carlos Williams's comment, in his introduction to Layton's *The Improved Binoculars* (1956), indicates the equally exuberant reaction of readers: "When I first

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who did emphasize themes of social importance, as Layton insisted:

Collected Later Poems (2003), a poetry collection by Anthony Hecht. In this three-volume selection of poetry, Hecht's depiction of his experiences as a World War II liberator—who witnessed the atrocities firsthand—take on intense focus and profound sentiment.

Heart Mountain (1989), a novel by Gretel Ehrlich. In this novel of epic range, the story focuses on the experiences of Japanese Americans interred in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, prison camp during World War II.

A Theory of Justice (1971), a social survey by John Rawls. In this nonfiction book, the author presents a philosophical argument for a right to justice that is so great not even the collective society can overpower, eclipse, or take it away.

Sovereign Bones (2007), a volume of poetry edited by Eric Gansworth. In this collection, contributing Native American authors write on the imperative of maintaining their ethnic identity in the face of centuries.

clapped eyes on the poems of Irving Layton . . . I let out a yell of joy."

This freshness of style is demonstrated in such works as *Droppings from Heaven* (1979), poems also marked by lyrical word construction and witty phrasing. Layton's rapturous style, blunt criticisms, and flaunting sensuality came to influence several younger poets, notably Leonard Cohen—who was an early student of Layton's at Herzliah. Despite their objections to his egotism, Canadian poets have responded wholeheartedly to Layton's spiritual energy and visionary force—found in the union of romantic ideas with an ironic point of view.

Works in Critical Context

Outspoken and controversial for his poetic attacks on complacency, moral sterility, and Canadian indifference, Irving Layton rarely failed to receive attention. He strove to reassert the spiritual values of life in the tradition of William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Walt Whitman, and D. H. Lawrence. A 1962 "epigram," included in *Taking Sides: The Collected Social and Political Writings* (1977), summarized his position: "One cannot love life as much as I do . . . without abominating the pompous fools, the frustrated busybodies, the money lusting acquisitive dull clods, and lobotomized ideologues who make it difficult to live joyously."

Irritation with the Attitude, Appreciation for the Poems Because of or in spite of this attitude, Layton

has been received as a poet with verse ranging, as George Woodcock has written, “from the atrocious to the excellent.” While some praise Layton’s rambunctious style, others bristle at his pompous proclamations of self-worth. Critics agree only that Layton was a paradox: “each of his books both contradicts and affirms all that he has done before,” *Globe and Mail’s* reviewer Eli Mandel wrote in 1969. Yet according to A. J. M. Smith in the 1985 edition of *Contemporary Poets*, he was a stimulating, if uneven, writer who created some fifty or sixty poems that “must rank with the best lyrical and reflective poems of the mid-century in English.”

Responses to Literature

1. Many critics discuss Layton as a romantic poet in the tradition of William Blake and Walt Whitman. Find a Layton poem and a Whitman poem that share common tendencies, and explore both those commonalities and points of divergence, considering how and, especially, why the poems are similar and different in these ways. Following are some possible similarities to find:
 - Each poet explores elemental passions;
 - Each poet exalts the individual—particularly the poet;
 - Each poet examines the relationship between the physical and the spiritual.
2. Constituting a significant portion of his body of work are Layton’s love lyrics. Sensual, erotic, and explicitly sexual, they are intended to shock a Puritanical society. Find and discuss examples, considering how effective the poet is in startling his readership. In what ways are his poems shocking?
3. At the University of Toronto’s Web site pages dedicated to Layton are several of the poet’s comments on his philosophy of writing. In your opinion, should all poets and other writers operate by these same philosophies? Why or why not? Do you think Layton has found success because readers agree that all writers should be like him or because there are so few other writers like him and he fills a special niche?

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Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

BORN: 1814, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1873, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The House by the Churchyard (1863)

Wylder’s Hand (1864)

Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh (1864)

Guy Deverell (1865)

In a Glass Darkly (1871)

Overview

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu is a major figure among Victorian-era authors of gothic and supernatural fiction. Critics praise his short stories and novels for their evocative descriptions of physical settings, convincing use of supernatural elements, and insightful characterization. Scholars also observe that Le Fanu’s subtle examinations of the psychological life of his characters distinguish his works from those of earlier gothic writers.



Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu *Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan, photograph.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Phoenix Park: Duels, Military Pageantry, and Upper-Class Life The son of Thomas Philip and Emma Dobbin Le Fanu, Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu was born in Dublin on August 28, 1814. His family belonged to the professional and upper classes and was related to several of the leading families in Dublin, including the Sheridans (Le Fanu's paternal grandmother was a sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan). Le Fanu's father, a Church of Ireland clergyman, was appointed chaplain for the Royal Hibernian Military School in 1815; Joseph, along with his older sister Catherine Frances and his younger brother William, spent his early childhood in Phoenix Park, a large public park just northwest of Dublin that contained the school and the residences of British administrators. In 1815 the park, which still looks much the same today, was the site of duels, military pageantry, and upper-class life. On its edges were several villages, including Chapelizod, the setting for *The House by the Churchyard* (1863). The family stayed in residence at the school for eleven years.

Financial Disaster in Rural Ireland In 1823 the Reverend Le Fanu became rector of Abingdon in County Limerick, a post he held in absentia until 1826, when he received the deanery of Emly and brought his family to Abingdon to take up residence. The family now found itself in rural Ireland, in a tiny village in the heart of Irish poverty and political ferment. The Reverend Le Fanu had alienated the resident Catholic priest by his three-year absenteeism, and the priest turned the countryside against him. As a result the move, which was promising at first, became financially disastrous. Tithe income dropped to half what it should have been in the first year, and, when in 1831 the Tithe Wars began, the situation became even worse: Catholics refused to pay the required tithes (10 percent of various agricultural produce) to the established Protestant Anglican Church of Ireland, and the family went deeply into debt.

Near-Death Experiences The political situation was, at times, dangerous. As a young man, Le Fanu's younger brother, William, was nearly killed at least once, and Joseph absorbed what his biographer W. J. McCormack calls the "atmosphere of automatic, casual, and yet strangely intimate violence [that] pervaded rural Ireland" along with the acceptance of the supernatural, which was also widespread among Irish peasantry.

The Dublin Evening Mail In 1832 Le Fanu entered Trinity College, University of Dublin, then the only college at the only university in Ireland. After studying classics he graduated with honors in 1837 and began legal training in the Dublin Inns of Court. The publication of his short story "The Ghost and the Bonesetter" in the January 1838 issue of the *Dublin University Magazine* began his longterm interest in the periodical. By 1840 he had bought interest in two Dublin newspapers, the *Statesman* and the *Warder*. He married Susanna Bennett in 1843, and they had four children. The *Statesman* folded in 1846, but Le Fanu continued his association with the *Warder* until 1870.

Withdrawal from the Public Eye Both Le Fanu and his wife suffered from ill health, and Susanna died in 1858. After his wife's death, Le Fanu gradually became more and more reclusive, earning over the years the title "The Invisible Prince." In 1861 he became part owner and coeditor of the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which he edited it until he sold it in 1869. Most of his fiction appeared first in serial form in this magazine. From 1863 to his death in 1873 he wrote prolifically, mainly novels including *The House by the Churchyard* and *Wylder's Hand*. The last year of his life was extremely solitary; he refused to see even old friends. He died of a heart condition on February 7, 1873. His imposing home in Dublin, in which he lived for twenty years, was leased from his wife's kinsman John Bennett, to whom he was deeply in debt. At Le Fanu's death his children were forced to leave.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Le Fanu's famous contemporaries include:

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Born Samuel Clemens, Twain has been called the “father of American literature” by no less a figure than William Faulkner. His *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remains a perennial candidate for the greatest American novel ever written.

Paul Verlaine (1844–1896): A French Symbolist poet, Verlaine led the prototypical lifestyle of the dissipated *artiste*, most notably (and scandalously) abandoning his wife and son to run off with poet Arthur Rimbaud, with whom he had a tempestuous relationship, and eventually sinking into drug and alcohol addiction by the end of his life.

Benito Juarez (1806–1872): Five-term president of Mexico, Juarez (a Zapotec Indian) resisted French attempts to install a puppet emperor and led efforts to modernize the country, earning a place as perhaps the best-loved political figure in Mexican history.

Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855): The eldest of a trio of literary sisters, this British author wrote four novels in her lifetime, including the classic *Jane Eyre*.

Legendary Death Many writers about Le Fanu have mentioned a legend about his death, which is probably the embellishment of a minor incident. He complained, it is said, of frequent nightmares about an old house that was about to topple in on him. When Le Fanu died, his doctor looked into the terror-stricken eyes of the dead man and said, “I feared this. That house fell at last.” While this story has no known basis in fact, it creates an image of Le Fanu as a “ghost-story writer.”

Works in Literary Context

Le Fanu was born in the late-Romantic period, and its interest in the dark and macabre, which found expression in the gothic novel, was the main stimulus to his literary imagination. Like many writers of the era, he was also influenced by Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Wilkie Collins. All of Le Fanu's novels depend on mystery, often murder. Only one of his novels does not contain a crime.

Irish Life and History The elements of Le Fanu's life play significant roles in his fiction. In his early work Irish life and history are major themes. The violence and often the treachery that he saw around him in his adolescence are reflected in many of his characters and plots; and his own financial difficulties gave him sympathy with all those characters in his stories who are in debt. His legal experience taught him not only what constituted

evidence but also about lawyers and legal procedures. His experience with his neurotic wife undoubtedly contributed to his understanding of, and interest in, abnormal psychology.

Vampires, Ghosts, and the Essence of Gothic “Carmilla” is a vampire story, arguably the best in the English language. It is considered less drawn out than many others, and it does not concern itself overmuch with the outward appearances of vampirism—the sharp fangs, the blood. The terror of the tale is in its restraint, its ordinariness, yet it retains all the traditional familiar elements: The lonely castle in Styria, the innocent girl as victim, the nightmares, and the eventual destruction of the evil.

The Gothic Novel It is common to speak of Le Fanu as writing within the tradition of the gothic novel. Understandable as this comment is, it creates difficulties because gothic is not a term that can be adequately defined. Le Fanu certainly has common ground with the better exponents of the “gothic art” in his skill in the creation of atmosphere: landscape and buildings are endowed with an air of menace and of mystery. Yet within this apparatus of suspense there is very little reliance on the mechanics with which he creates his illusions. He rarely—and never in his best work—joins with the lesser luminaries of the art who depended heavily upon sliding panels, descending ceilings, and all the machinery that could occasionally dominate the story. M. R. James, one of the finest writers of ghost stories in the twentieth century and one who greeted Le Fanu as “the master of us all,” wrote that an important element in a successful ghost story is that it should not explain itself. The sense of mystery must remain at the end—not be explained away by any logical process. Le Fanu demonstrates this ideally. The footsteps which pursue Captain Barton in “The Watcher” are not in any sense explained, although they can be understood in the context of the apparition of Barton's shipmate. The “small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine” which sat on the open Bible from which the Reverend Mr. Jennings was endeavoring to preach in “Green Tea” can only be explained as the embodiment of evil. To see here a connection between this personal apparition and *The Origin of Species*, as has been suggested, is to deny an important element in Le Fanu's work: Evil is a reality in his writings, and has as much power to affect human lives as goodness. It is never clear precisely what is the origin of that evil, but there is no doubt that it exists and is an influence that cannot be ignored.

Mystery Stories Le Fanu's purpose was different from Wilkie Collins's or Arthur Conan Doyle's. As Michael H. Begnal explains, both of these men wished to maintain “a distance . . . between the reader and the event,” and “we view crime and sin in a detached, deductive way as a puzzle which Sherlock Holmes may solve as an

intellectual exercise but not as something which affects him or us very much. It is this very detachment which Le Fanu tries to avoid in his work.” Le Fanu wants his readers involved with his morally and psychologically ambivalent antagonists, who are studies of the individual who commits one crime and then has to live with the consequences. Such characters include Sir Jekyl Marlowe of *Guy Deverell* (1865), Mr. Dingwell of *The Tenants of Malory* (1867), and Walter Longcluse of *Checkmate*, all of whom are psychologically haunted. The operation of fate, through the confluence of coincidences that are completely rational except for their timing, is probably the greatest affirmation of the supernatural in Le Fanu’s work—ironically enough for a man better known for his tales of the supernatural than for his mysteries. In a Le Fanu mystery the operation of an invisible providence forces the criminal into a position or place in which he betrays himself. Thus, Wylder’s hand reappears at the precise time when Lake rides by; Silas leaves the door open when he should have shut it. In his interest in the criminal’s psyche and in the awareness of a providence that insists “murder will out,” Le Fanu has more in common with Fyodor Dostoyevsky than with Conan Doyle.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Le Fanu’s works were moderately successful, although they received scant critical attention. Le Fanu’s novels contain elements of suspense in addition to engaging emotional and descriptive passages. Critics such as Elizabeth Bowen, Julian Symons, and W. J. McCormack agree that *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* (1864) is Le Fanu’s finest novel. In his introduction to *Uncle Silas*, Frederick B. Shroyer called it “one of the most effective, gripping novels of terror . . . ever written.” In addition, *The House by the Churchyard* (1863) and *Wylder’s Hand* (1864) have also received acclaim.

Modern Criticism During the twentieth century the prominent ghost-story writer M. R. James drew attention to Le Fanu by writing introductions to several reissued volumes of his out-of-print works. V. S. Pritchett and Elizabeth Bowen also wrote essays championing Le Fanu as one of Gothic literature’s foremost figures. In 1978, Jack Sullivan summarized the opinion of modern critics in his assessment of Le Fanu’s achievement: “Beginning with Le Fanu, one of the distinctive features of modern ghostly fiction is . . . [the] synthesis of psychology and supernaturalism.” While he is not well-known today as a novelist, Le Fanu is noted by horror writers and aficionados as an innovative and masterful writer of psychological horror stories and as a pivotal figure in the history of supernatural fiction.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss Le Fanu’s innovations in the ghost story genre. What were the common features of ghost

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sheridan Le Fanu was the first modern writer of tales of vampires and ghosts, but was by no means the last. Other works that feature such creatures include:

Dracula (1897), a novel by Bram Stoker. A bridge between gothic novels and modern horror literature, the tale, told through diary entries, has inspired countless adaptations, imitations, and continuations in both literature and film.

“The Wendigo” (1910), a short story by Algernon Blackwood. Blackwood was considered by many of his contemporaries to be one of the greatest horror writers of all time; this short story, a tale of a Canadian hunting trip gone horribly wrong, is often cited as his best.

Interview with the Vampire, a novel by Anne Rice (1976). A somber, existential take on the vampire myth, this book is written as a confession given by a two-hundred-year-old vampire.

stories prior to Le Fanu? What elements of his work were copied by authors who came after him?

2. In what ways do Le Fanu’s stories reflect his Irish upbringing, both from a religious and cultural standpoint? Provide examples from his work.
3. Le Fanu was a master of indirect horror, usually derived from a supernatural element that remains ambiguous or not fully seen. In modern books and film, horror is often more direct: Killers and monsters are often described in full physical and emotional detail. Why do you think modern tales focus more on direct horror than indirect horror? Which do you think is more effective, and why?
4. Compare Le Fanu’s vampire Carmilla to Stoker’s *Dracula*. How do the two authors present vampires? What is the significance of Le Fanu using a female for his vampire as opposed to Stoker’s male?

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Leonid Leonov

BORN: 1899, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1994, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Thief (1931)

The Golden Coach (1947)

The Russian Forest (1953)

Polia Vikrova (1960)

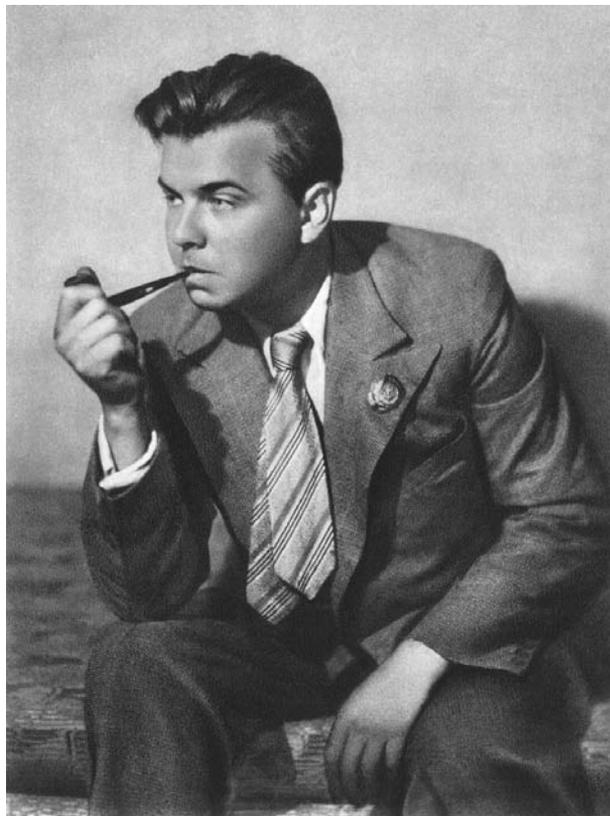
The Escape of Mr. McKinley (1975)

Overview

Leonid Leonov was a prolific novelist, playwright, and essayist. He was also a philosophical writer who has justifiably been called one of the most idiosyncratic talents of modern Russian literature. Leonov's works are often said to defy the categorization that typically defines literatures of the Soviet period, and are acknowledged for their insightful depiction of the Russian character. For this reason his works have been compared to those of Russian masters Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Anti-Czarism in the Blood Leonid Leonov was born in Moscow on May 31, 1899. His father was a poet and journalist who was arrested for anti-czarist activities and later exiled to Archangel, where he published a news-



Leonid Leonov © Mary Evans Picture Library / The Image Works

paper. Educated in Moscow, Leonov later worked for his father's newspaper as a theater critic and proofreader.

During the Russian civil war Leonov served in the Red Army, primarily as a war correspondent. The Russian civil war had followed hard upon the heels of the Revolution of 1917; in the latter, separated into two phases (a February Revolution and an October Revolution) both nationalist and socialist forces around Russia rose up against and overthrew the dictatorial regime of Czar Nicholas II. The Russian Civil War itself was a result of conflict between the Red (socialist) Army and the White (nationalist and traditionalist) forces, with the socialists—the Bolsheviks—gaining victory in 1923. Leonov edited the newspaper of the Fifteenth Inzenskaia Division in 1920 and worked for the newspaper of the Moscow Military District from 1921 to 1922. It was also in 1922 that Leonov published his first short story, “Buryga,” in the journal *Shipovnik. Al'manakh 1*.

A Red Journalist Turns to Fiction After his demobilization, Leonov published a short-story collection, but his first real success came in 1924 with the publication of his novel *The Badgers*. The novel's title derives from a group of anti-Soviet brigands who called themselves “the Badgers,” and is the story of Semen and Pavel Rakhleev, two teenage brothers from the countryside who are

brought to Moscow to earn their living. The story takes place before and after the October Revolution and provides a rich panoramic view of Russia in the 1910s and early 1920s. Semen gets drafted, fights in World War I, and eventually returns a deserter, while Pavel, after remaining out of sight for a long time, becomes a Communist. The fact that the brothers end up on opposite sides of the civil war reflects the deep fissures that the revolutionary period caused among Russians.

Leonov made a name for himself as well as a huge impact on the further development of Soviet literature with the novel. *The Badgers* was then adapted by Leonov into a play of the same title; it premiered in 1927 at the Vakhtangov Theater in Moscow, which had a company of artists who had gained a nationwide reputation for their bold yet entertaining experimentalism.

Political Success Gives Way to Suppression Leonov followed up *The Badgers* with an even more critically acclaimed book, *The Thief* (1927), the novel that for many years served as his central work and remained his own favorite almost until the end of his life. The subsequent success of *The Thief* brought him a measure of political as well as artistic success: “He had arrived,” as R. D. B. Thomson observed, and was soon elected to the governing board of the Union of Soviet Writers.

Prior to the 1930s, writers in the Soviet Union were not heavily restricted. With the emergence of socialist realism, however—and specifically with the 1932 publication of Joseph Stalin’s infamous directive, “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations”—Soviet writers suffered more intense scrutiny. Socialist realism was an art theory based partially on Marxist philosophy and partially on Soviet politics: It called for the didactic use of literature, art, and music to develop social consciousness in the evolving socialist state, and was a key tool during the beginning of the Stalinist purges. These developments had dramatic implications for Leonov’s career. Leonov’s fifth novel, *Road to the Ocean* (1935), was almost immediately suppressed and from the mid-1930s through the 1940s his works came under official attack. No new editions of his novels were issued until 1947, and his play *The Snowstorm* (1939) was suppressed in 1940 during rehearsals for its Moscow premiere.

World War II: Dramatic Renewal and Political Rehabilitation World War II—or “the Great Patriotic War,” as it was called in the Soviet Union—gave Leonov a chance to “rehabilitate” himself in the eyes of Soviet officialdom. He wrote two successful war dramas, *The Invasion* (1942), for which he won the Stalin Prize, and *Lenushka* (1943). As reflected by their many productions, both of these plays were popular with Soviet viewers and won high praise from Soviet and Allied critics alike.

Except for the novella *The Taking of Velikoshumsk* (1944), Leonov did not publish any new extended prose works until 1953—the year of Stalin’s death. He instead

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Leonov’s famous contemporaries include:

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): A French author and metaphysical philosopher who laid the foundations for early feminism with her writing.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): A German playwright, stage director, and poet who is credited, among many things, with epic theater.

M. C. Escher (1898–1972): A Dutch graphic artist who is world-renowned for his woodcuts, lithographs, and mezzotints that trick the eye, seem to defy logic or physics, and feature explorations of topics including infinity and the impossible.

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): A French general and statesman who led the Free French Forces during World War II, and founder and first president of the French Fifth Republic.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): A Soviet novelist famous for his lengthy imprisonment and exile at the hands of the Soviet government due to his “anti-Soviet” views.

devoted his efforts during this period to dramas. Beginning in 1946, Leonov also served as a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, a post he kept for twenty-four years, until 1970.

A Series of Final Triumphs After two decades of literary obscurity, Leonov published his last major novel, *Russian Forest* (1953), which scholar Reinhard Lauer called “the most significant work to be published in those years in Russia.” A substantially revised version of *The Thief* was issued in 1959, and in 1963 Leonov published *Evgenia Ivanovna*, a novel that he had begun writing in the mid-1930s. Leonov also wrote criticism and essays and published two fragments of an untitled novel-in-progress during the 1970s and 1980s. He even adapted one of his own stories for the science fiction film *The Escape of Mr. McKinley* (1975). He died in Moscow in 1994.

Works in Literary Context

Fairy Tale and Philosophy Influences Early stories by Leonov feature unusual stylistic daring and originality in their usage of *skaz*, a technique of narrative that derives from Russian oral folklore. Leonov’s *skaz* pieces, such as his 1922 story “Buryga,” for instance, reveal the influence of Nikolai Leskov—often called “the most Russian of all Russian writers.” Some early stories by Leonov

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Known for their psychological and philosophical complexity, Leonov's works address such themes as the conflict between the individual and society, the moral dilemmas associated with revolutionary upheaval, and the antagonism between urban and rural cultures. Here are a few works by writers who concerned themselves with similar themes of social, political, and individual conflict:

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton. In this acclaimed work, South African apartheid is encroaching—against the social protests of select individuals and subcultures.

Freedom Songs (1991), a historical novel by Yvette Moore. In this novel for young adults, the author explores the life of one family living in the early 1960s and the impact the civil rights movement has on that family.

Maus (1977), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. In this unusual and provocative treatment of the Holocaust, the Jewish people are portrayed as mice and the Nazis are depicted as cats.

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel explores the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

The U.S.A. Trilogy (1938), a trilogy by John Dos Passos. In this collection of three novels, the author uses innovative techniques to explore the development of America in the 1900s, 1910s, and 1920s—including close inspections of the treatment of immigrants, urban plight, and workers' unions.

betray, rather intentionally, the influence of writers other than Leskov. Shades of Dostoyevsky appear in “The End of a Petty Man” (1924), with Leonov's tendency toward the philosophical. E. T. A. Hoffmann's stories also have a bearing on “Valya's Doll” (1923), and the impact of Boris Andreevich Pil'niak is evident in “Egorushka's Demise” (1924).

Ornamentalism and the Mystical What unites these stories is their stylistic “ornamentalism”—a kind of overuse of decoration, or ornaments, in prose. What also connects them is a tendency toward the spheres of the mysterious and the mystical. A third kind of connection between Leonov's writings can be found in the inspiration he found in oral narration, which has a tradition in Russia both of being very ornamental at times and of negotiating the boundaries of the mystical. In *The Breakthrough at Petrusbikha* (1923), for instance, a history of a village and its community, there is a fairy-tale rhythm that sometimes ends in near rhyme—seamlessly

integrated in the prose, such as in “the moon is in the window, Yegory is on the horse” and other phrases.

The Individual's Place in Society Added to this extensive use of figurative language (such as metaphors and similes) is Leonov's use of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques and complex symbolism to support his philosophical concepts. Underlying his great novels, for example, is the image of the beehive as a model of an ideal social organism—a helpful community, benevolent, productive, and harmonious.

Such techniques support the themes important to Leonov throughout his writing career—in general, themes of individual morality, happiness, and purity, and the relation of the individual to society. Leonov is particularly known for works in which he explored political and social issues in postrevolutionary Soviet society. The central theme in his works is the conflict between the demands of society and the needs of the individual. In his writings about the revolution, he often focused on marginalized participants who did not fully understand what was occurring. *The Badgers*, for instance, set in the early 1920s, centers on a group of peasants in the remote Russian countryside who reject the Soviet government and engage in guerrilla warfare against Soviet officials and the Red Army. Leonov used this story to address the conflict between the urban proletariat and the peasantry. In keeping with the tenets of socialist realism, however, such themes soon had to be abandoned, and Leonov's orientation toward the mystical, too, became suspect. Instead, he was urged by some to emulate the work of artists such as writer Maxim Gorky or painter Fyodor Pavlovich Reshetnikov, both of whom were seen as providing positive examples of socialist realism in practice.

Works in Critical Context

At only twenty-three years of age, Leonov enjoyed the mixed blessing of having been officially declared a “living classic” in the presence of Joseph Stalin himself. This honor vested upon him by his fatherly friend, Maxim Gorky, saved his life and career in an era of ruthlessness and violence. Moreover, when Stalin designated Leonov as a “rightful heir to Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Gogol,” much interest was generated in Communist officialdom. Leonov cunningly employed this title to protect himself, his family, his religious faith, and his art.

Using his status as a recognized “classic,” Leonov consciously built his body of works and his public literary persona according to the conventions of the classics of Russian literature. At a certain point in Leonov's career this goal of image building, reinforced by numerous articles on his work, seems to have gained priority over being popular and known to common readers. As a result, beginning in the 1960s Leonov was respected and read by sections of the Russian intelligentsia but hardly ever loved—not even during the period when he was fighting for a popular cause, the rescue of the Russian Forest. Yet

several of his works remain important in their representation of a culture and a historical period for Russian literature—including such early novels as *The Badgers*.

***The Badgers* (1924)** *The Badgers* displays expertise in the usage of language and a psychological depth unprecedented in Soviet literature, such that even readers critical or suspicious of Leonov had to concede that he had written a masterpiece. With regard to this and all of Leonov's works, however, commentators have noted that they are sometimes overwritten. Another concern among Leonov's critics has been his likeness to Dostoyevsky. Many have noted extensive similarities between the works of the two novelists; however, while some have argued that Leonov was deeply concerned with moral, philosophical, and psychological problems, others have insisted that he was not at all motivated by the intense concern with ethics, morality, and religion that characterized Dostoyevsky's writings. Vera Alexandrova, for instance, has questioned "the view of some Russian critics abroad that, were Leonov free in his creative work, he would have become a 'Soviet Dostoyevsky.'"

Truly in Opposition? Critics have also questioned whether Leonov was simply stubborn and arrogant or truly a writer who opposed the government and managed to escape severe repression. Remarking on the "seeming conventionality" of Leonov's career, R. D. B. Thomson has argued that "of all the Soviet writers, Leonid Leonov is the most individual. His elaborate style, his highly personal thought and imagery, his characteristic range of heroes, and above all the acute conflicts on which his works are built . . . distinguish his books from those of his compatriots and contemporaries."

Once a darling of both Soviet and Western literary historians and critics—who likened Leonov to William Faulkner—he is rarely mentioned in critical discourse today and read even less frequently. A closer, unbiased look at Leonov's work in its evolution, however, reveals a mastery of language matched by few authors of any nation.

Responses to Literature

1. In some early versions of his most popular novels, Leonov elicits sympathy for his main characters; in other versions he strips the protagonist of his favorable qualities. Consider the novels *The Badgers* and *The Thief* and describe the theme of honor among thieves. In each work, is the theme helpful in bringing sympathy or contempt for the protagonists?
2. Communist conservatives attacked Leonov's fiction. Look into one or more of his works and find out why they did so. To assist you in making sense of the criticisms, find examples from Leonid's text that skewer Russian ideological failings.
3. The Russian civil war lasted from 1918 to 1923 and involved "Red" Soviet forces, who gained decisive power in the October 1917 Revolution, fighting

"White" Russian anti-Communist insurgents. Research the Russian civil war further to discover how it impacted civilians. How is this impact reflected in Leonov's work?

4. Works like *Road to the Ocean* are distinguished by the stream-of-consciousness technique Leonov used to describe the characters and delve into numerous philosophical debates. His narrations are done through the ongoing thought processes of characters. Find examples of stream-of-consciousness writing in Leonov and in Virginia Woolf, Jamaica Kincaid, Henry James, James Joyce, or others, and then try imitating this style. Can you turn ordinary observation into interesting interior monologue?

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Doris Lessing

BORN: 1919, Kermanshah, Persia

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Grass Is Singing (1950)

The Golden Notebook (1962)

Briefing for a Descent into Hell (1971)

The Summer before the Dark (1973)

Overview

Considered among the most powerful contemporary novelists, Doris Lessing has explored many of the most



Doris Lessing AP Images

important ideas, ideologies, and social issues of the twentieth century. Her works display a broad range of interests, including such topics as racism, communism, feminism, psychology, and mysticism. Lessing created strong-willed, independent heroines who suffer emotional crises in a male-dominated society, thus anticipating many feminist concerns. These works, particularly the five-volume Children of Violence series and *The Golden Notebook* (1962), were especially praised for their complex narrative techniques and convincing characterizations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Lessing attempted to function as a visionary figure for what she termed the “emancipated reader.” Her works of speculative fiction, which make use of science fiction elements, are characterized by a sense of imminent apocalypse. Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Africa Doris May Tayler was born in Kermanshah, Persia, on October 22, 1919, to Alfred Cook Tayler, an employee of the Imperial Bank of Persia, and Emily Maude McVeagh Tayler, a nurse. In 1924 Lessing’s father took the family to Southern Rhodesia

(now Zimbabwe), hoping to make a fortune growing corn and tobacco and panning for gold. The family found little fortune on its new farm, which was located in a remote corner of the Rhodesian bush not far from the border with Mozambique. Lessing was educated first at a convent school and then at a government school for girls, both in the capital city of Salisbury. She returned home at about age twelve because of recurrent eye troubles and received no further formal education. At age sixteen she began working as a typist for a telephone company and was later employed by a law firm. She also worked as a Hansard secretary in the Rhodesian Parliament, then as a typist for the *Guardian*, a South African newspaper based in Cape Town.

In the 1940s, South Africa functioned under a system known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for “separateness.” This government-sponsored system involved designating certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and forbade people of different races from marrying. It also led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups kept separate from each other; this allowed the white Afrikaners, who were descended from European colonists and made up a small percentage of the population, to remain in control of the large non-white population.

In 1949 Lessing left Africa behind for London. Her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), was published the following year and was immediately well received. Like many of the novels and short stories that would follow its debut, *The Grass Is Singing* deals with settings, characters, and issues very close to its author’s experience of Rhodesian society and, in particular, relations between white colonists and black citizens. “*The Grass Is Singing*,” an essayist for *Feminist Writers* explained, “was hailed as a breakthrough look at the horrors of South African apartheid. However, upon a second reading, the novel may seem focused on the desperate situation of a lively woman who is beat down by the grayness of her married life and the bleakness of anything the future might hold. Yet another reading of the novel brings out the harshness of the African landscape, the overwhelming power of nature, and the impending defeat of any human who tries to challenge those obstacles. Therein lies the strength of Lessing’s talent, the layering of story within story.”

The Golden Notebook and Beyond Lessing’s major and most controversial novel is *The Golden Notebook* (1962), wherein she explores, as a *New Statesman* reviewer noted, what it is like to be “free and responsible, a woman in relation to men and other women, and to struggle to come to terms with one’s self about these things and about writing and politics.” Lessing once explained that the work is “a novel about certain political and sexual attitudes that have force now; it is an attempt to explain them, to objectivize them, to set them in relation with each other.

So in a way it is a social novel, written by someone whose training—or at least whose habit of mind—is to see these things socially, not personally.” In its structure, the novel is really two novels, divided in four sections. Lessing split it into four parts to “express a split person. I felt that if the artist’s sensibility is to be equated with the sensibility of the educated person, then it is logical to use different styles to express different kinds of people.” She felt that the “personality is very much what is remembered; [the form] enabled me to say to the reader: Look, these apparently so different people have got so-and-so in common, or these things have got this in common. If I had used a conventional style, the old-fashioned novel, . . . I would not have been able to do this kind of playing with time, memory and the balancing of people. . . . I like *The Golden Notebook* even though I believe it to be a failure, because it at least hints at complexity.”

After her initial flourishing as a writer, during which time she explored the Africa of her youth from her new home in London, Lessing turned away from the land of her past and toward new settings: inner space and outer space. *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) is a novel of ideas based on her interest in the views of British psychiatrist R. D. Laing. In subsequent novels, Lessing has continued to produce work critiquing modern society. In contrast to the realism that marked her earlier novels, Lessing’s work of the late twentieth century would take startling new forms. In the five “Canopus” books she explores the destruction of life brought about by catastrophe and tyranny.

Return to Africa After leaving Southern Rhodesia in 1949, Lessing returned to Africa only once, in 1956, an experience she recounts in *Going Home*. After this first homecoming, the white minority government blocked any future returns because of Lessing’s criticism of apartheid. It was not until the 1980s, after years of civil war and thousands of deaths brought the black majority to power in the newly christened Zimbabwe, that Lessing could return. In *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe* she chronicles her trips to southern Africa in 1982, 1988, 1989, and 1992. On one level, this book offers the keen observations of a new nation’s growing pains through the eyes of someone who is neither an insider nor an outsider. She saw first a country trying to come to terms with the outcome of a long and bloody civil war based on race. In subsequent trips, she found exuberance, corruption, and finally decline.

Accolades and Criticism Late in Life In 2007, Doris Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. That same year, she published *The Cleft*, a novel almost universally panned by critics. In her 2008 novel *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing returns to the subject of her childhood in Rhodesia and the profound effects of World War I on her parents.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lessing’s famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Keneally (1935–): This Australian novelist is best known for his novel *Schindler’s List* (1982), which was later adapted into a film of the same title.

Iris Murdoch (1919–1999): An Irish novelist renowned for such works as *Under the Net* (1954).

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963): English novelist, essayist, poet, and short story writer best known for his novel *Brave New World* (1932).

John Cheever (1912–1982): An American fiction writer most famous for his highly acclaimed short stories, including “The Enormous Radio” (1947).

Nelson Mandela (1919–): After spending twenty-seven years as a political prisoner of the apartheid government of South Africa, Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994 after the country’s first fully racially representative election.

Works in Literary Context

Lessing’s influences are diverse. Throughout her career as a writer, she has espoused various philosophic allegiances, and, not surprisingly, her fiction reflects these commitments. *Retreat to Innocence* (1956) is an explicitly pro-Marxist work, but since her defection from the Communist party, she has disowned that novel. *The Golden Notebook* reflects a Jungian interest, partly in the nature of the psychoanalyst whom Lessing’s protagonist in that novel consults. *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), the novel published immediately after *The Golden Notebook* and the last two parts of the Children of Violence series, shows a distinct correlation to and dependence upon the work of psychiatrist R. D. Laing.

While Lessing’s work has its referents, particularly psychiatrists and psychologists, Lessing is unafraid of carving out new ground for her work.

Journey through Inner Space When *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* was published, critics noticed the contrasts between it and Lessing’s previous work. Even though the same dominant themes of mental imbalance and psychic phenomena that were used in *The Golden Notebook* and in *The Four-Gated City* (1969) are to be found here as well, there are some major differences. For one thing, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* has as its protagonist one of the few men to serve this purpose in any of Lessing’s longer fiction: Charles Watkins is a classics professor at Cambridge University, and his mental and emotional “journey” and eventual restoration to psychic health constitute the book’s plot.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Lessing's work often revolves around journeys, both literal and psychological. Here are some other works about journeying and how they change a person's soul and mind.

Into the Wild (1996), a nonfiction work by Jon Krakauer.

Based on the life of Christopher McCandless, this text follows the last days of a young man who leaves behind his privileged family to explore the world only to perish in the wilds of Alaska.

The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), a religious allegory by John Bunyan. This allegory describes the journey that Christians must take in order to avoid sin and, ultimately, make it to heaven.

The Lord of the Rings (1955), a trilogy of novels by J. R. R. Tolkien. The three novels describe the journey of Frodo, a hobbit, to Mordor to destroy a ring of evil power while facing along the way bigger and fiercer enemies who wish to kill him.

Lessing called this book "inner-space fiction," a label intended to suggest that it is Watkins's mental health rather than any actual physical journey that is at the heart of the book.

Structural Experimentation *The Golden Notebook* (1962) has generally been acclaimed as Lessing's masterpiece, though it is considerably less accessible than any of her earlier novels or most of her subsequent ones. It is a complex maze of differing perspectives on the same woman's life and circumstances and structurally is an exceedingly carefully controlled series of overlapping "notebooks." Lessing has repeatedly said that "the point [in this book] was the relation of its parts to each other" and that its "meaning is in the shape." Her original intent was to write a short formal novel that would serve to enclose all the rest of her material in the book, but since the formal novel is "ridiculous" when it "can't say a . . . thing," she split up the material not included in the short formal novel into four "notebooks," each concerned with a different though similar aspect of one woman's life, and then in turn divided each notebook into four parts. The result is a technique in which first a part of the short novel—called "Free Women"—is given, then one part each of the black, red, blue, and yellow notebooks; this pattern is repeated four times. Then there is a short section of the entire novel, also called "The Golden Notebook," followed by the concluding "Free Women" section that ends the novel. Hence the reader can either read from page one to the end of the book, or, if the reader wishes, read all the parts of each notebook and "Free Women" together.

Works in Critical Context

Although Lessing has enjoyed a long and fruitful career, critical response to her work has been sharply divided. She has at times received near universal acclaim for works like *The Golden Notebook*, but then readers must contend with *The Summer Before the Dark*, which has the ironic distinction of being both one of Lessing's most popular—and profitable—novels and one of the most severely criticized.

The Golden Notebook When *The Golden Notebook* was published in 1962, it was welcomed with both enthusiasm and some apprehension at its unique structure. Frederick R. Karl, writing for *Contemporary Literature* called it "the most considerable work by an English author in the 1960s," though he also considers it a "carefully-organized but verbose, almost clumsily written novel." Where the author succeeds, according to Karl, is "in her attempt to write honestly about women." Walter Allen expressed similar sentiments in *The Modern Novel*, stating, "As a work of art, *The Golden Notebook* seems to me to fail. The structure is clumsy, complicated rather than complex." However, he considers the book impressive "as an exposition of the emotional problems that face an intelligent woman who wishes to live in the kind of freedom a man may take for granted." Paul Schlueter concurs, noting that the novel "captures the authentic quality of what it is to be a woman, especially a woman in a man's world."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Golden Notebook*. Analyze your reaction to the formal experimentation of the text. Do you believe this form for this text is the best? Why or why not?
2. Read Dante's *Inferno* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. Both of these texts describe hellish journeys. Compare Lessing and Dante's portrayals of "hell." Analyze the effects each achieves in your understanding of the texts.
3. Using the Internet and the library, research the word *apartheid*, particularly as it relates to the racial divisions in Africa. In a brief essay, compare your findings to Lessing's representation of racism in Africa.

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▣ Primo Levi

BORN: 1919, Turin, Italy

DIED: 1987, Turin, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

If This Is a Man (1947)

The Reawakening (1963)

The Periodic Table (1975)

The Drowned and the Saved (1986)

Overview

Primo Levi, an Italian chemist and concentration camp survivor, is a writer whose explorations of contemporary morality put him at the forefront of Holocaust literature. He is most often associated with Holocaust writing because of his first two books, *If This Is a Man* (1947; republished as *Survival in Auschwitz*, 1961) and *The Reawakening* (1963). *If This Is a Man* is generally regarded as the most powerful description of the Nazi camps ever written and, like all of his subsequent work, is noted for its extraordinary equanimity and lack of rancor. Levi published many other kinds of writing during a forty-year career: occasional and op-ed pieces, poetry, short fiction, and novels. With the objective scrutiny of a scientist, the linguistic grace of a poet, and the profound understanding of a philosopher, Levi confronted the major issues of the twentieth century.



Primo Levi Levi, Primo, photograph by Jerry Bauer. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Imprisoned as a Young Man Primo Levi was born in Turin, Italy on July 31, 1919, less than a year after the close of World War I and three years before Benito Mussolini’s Fascist takeover of Italy’s government. He lived most of his life in the spacious apartment on Corso Re Umberto where he grew up. His family was part of a small, highly assimilated middle-class Jewish community, whose roots went back to the sixteenth century. Both his father and grandfather were engineers, and Levi cited his father as the source of his lifelong interests in science and literature. His mother was also an avid reader who devoted herself to raising Primo and his younger sister, Anna Maria.

Skinny, frail, and bright, Levi excelled in both literature and the sciences in high school and opted to pursue the latter. He enrolled in the University of Turin in 1937, at the age of seventeen. While he was studying chemistry, World War II was approaching. Mussolini established racial laws that called for the official persecution of Italian Jews. Levi graduated with honors in 1941, and took a job as a chemist under a false name; the official anti-Semitism severely limited his career options. He and his peers first

reacted by withdrawal; as he once wrote: “We proclaimed ourselves the enemies of Fascism, but actually Fascism had had its effect on us, as on almost all Italians, alienating us and making us superficial, passive and cynical.” But as the Nazi party took over northern Italy, Levi could no longer afford to be passive. He joined the partisan fighters in 1943, but his band was poorly trained and ill-equipped, and on December 13, 1943, it was ambushed by the Fascist militia. Convinced that he would be shot as a partisan, Levi admitted under questioning that he was Jewish.

He was sent to an Italian concentration camp at Fossoli, near Modena. Two months later, German troops sent the Italian Jewish prisoners to Auschwitz. Five hundred of them were immediately gassed to death, and the rest were put to slave labor. For eleven months, Levi worked at a rubber factory in the death camp. Intimates of the author speculate that his innate curiosity about his environment and his training as a dispassionate scientific observer enabled him to overcome despair and keep his spirit intact under dehumanizing conditions. Levi himself attributed his survival to good luck.

If This Is a Man Release came in January 1945 with the arrival of Allied Russian forces. Levi was one of only three partisans to survive. After a long, tortuous journey—described in detail in *The Reawakening*—Levi returned home to Turin and found work as a chemist in a paint factory. Though he had not aspired to be a writer before his internment, Levi was compelled to tell the story of the millions who perished. He completed *If This Is a Man* within two years.

Levi offered the completed manuscript of *If This Is a Man* to the Turin publishing house of Einaudi, but its editors rejected it, judging that the times were not yet ripe for a Holocaust memoir. An amateur publisher brought the book out in 1947 in a print run of twenty-five hundred copies. In 1958, Einaudi changed its mind and republished the book. This time the work was more successful and awakened intense interest.

A Scientist Writes Fiction Throughout these years, Levi continued to make his living as a chemist, working at SIVA, a large paint factory in Turin. He became the company’s general manager in 1961 and established himself as an expert in the manufacture of synthetic resins. He also married Lucia Morpurgo, a fellow Italian Jew, and had two children. Meanwhile, he contributed essays and stories to the Turin newspaper *La Stampa*. In 1963, he published his second book of Holocaust recollections, *The Reawakening*, which won the Campiello literary award.

This memoir chronicles Levi’s experiences between the liberation of Auschwitz in January 1945 and his return to Turin that October. There are two parallel stories: Levi’s slow reawakening from the horrors of Auschwitz, together with the story of his escape from a Soviet Displaced Persons camp, followed by an adventur-

ous journey on foot and by train through war-torn Eastern Europe, and the colorful characters he meets on the way home.

Levi published two collections of short stories, *Natural Histories* in 1966 and *Structural Defect* in 1971. Sometimes labeled science fiction, these stories are often metaphysical explorations that combine scientific fact with moral and ethical issues. Levi used the pseudonym Damiano Malabaila, feeling that these works did not fit with his Holocaust writing. Under his own name, he published two works in 1975: a volume of poetry, and *The Periodic Table*, a work that mixed autobiography, Holocaust memoir, short stories, and science fiction. Many critics view the latter book, which uses Dmitri Mendeleev’s table of chemical elements as its unique organizing principle, as Levi’s masterpiece. Its success convinced Levi to retire from factory life to devote himself to writing.

Late-Career Acclaim Primo Levi’s two novels demonstrate the range of his abilities. *The Monkey’s Wrench* (1978), a lighthearted story of a master rigger from Turin, demonstrated that Levi could write fiction with little or no autobiographical component. *If Not Now, When?* (1982), his only Holocaust novel, concerns a group of spirited, young Eastern European Jewish partisans bound for Palestine to build a Jewish state. Levi sought to honor those Jews who had found the strength and intelligence to actively oppose Nazism and who, in the crucible of combat, discovered a new sense of dignity and purpose. He also hoped to take advantage of his popularity in Italy to entice readers to a book infused with the culture, language, and history of an Eastern European Jewish world they knew virtually nothing about. The novel won two major Italian literary prizes.

The English publication of *The Periodic Table* in 1984 raised the author’s profile still further. With the renewed interest in his prior works, Levi had become an internationally recognized lecturer. The book that cemented his stature as a Holocaust writer was also his last, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), a series of eight penetrating essays that sum up the Holocaust issues that had occupied him for forty years, including memory, justice, the uses of violence by totalitarian regimes, the role of the intellectual in times of upheaval, and the responsibility of ordinary Germans for the Holocaust.

In 1987, at the height of his fame, Primo Levi fell to his death in the stairway of his apartment building. His death was declared a suicide rather than an accident, but some doubt that verdict. It is clear that Levi suffered from chronic depression, caused in part by his memories of the camps, but questions around his death remain hotly disputed. Regardless of the manner of his death, his written work is a testament to the survival and affirmation of the human spirit.

Works in Literary Context

Levi had a very sound literary education; in his youth, he read the works of Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Franz Kafka, and other giants. He had a special affinity for Dante, and scholars such as Risa Sodi have noted the numerous references to *The Divine Comedy* in Levi's writings on the Holocaust. Nonetheless, when he began writing down the recollections that grew into *If This Is a Man* he followed no literary guide; his model was to be found in his scientific training, with its emphasis on dispassionate observation and precision. The best of his work always retained this objectivity and curiosity, almost childlike at times, about the processes of life. The experimental fiction he wrote later reveals the influences of Jack London and Jules Verne.

Diverse Styles Levi displayed a remarkable range in his writing: from science fiction to meditative essays, from poetry to the picaresque, and from travel literature to autobiography. Nonetheless, it is often difficult to separate Levi's works into conventional categories of genre, subject, or even style. Some of his strongest works, such as *The Periodic Table*, are unclassifiable hybrids.

Ethical Inquiry One common thread running through Levi's body of work is a concern for the ethical dimensions of modern life. Due to the unusual pairing of the two dominant events in Levi's life—his career in the sciences and his internment in Auschwitz—a relentless spirit of inquiry, especially inquiry into the nature of good and evil, blazes through his literary output. In dealing with his experience at Auschwitz, Levi examines humanity's capacity for virtue and evil by portraying both the innocent victims of the Nazis and those who responded to them in despicable ways. Critics agree that even the stories that do not concern the Holocaust deepen the reader's understanding of humanity in moral crises. Some of his imaginative short stories raise questions about the implications of modern technologies, taking an ambivalent perspective on technical progress. Levi is at his best when identifying and addressing the moral questions raised by political, scientific, or cultural concerns and situations.

Works in Critical Context

Although Levi had initial difficulties finding an audience for his Auschwitz memoir, his subsequent writings were uniformly successful and admired by critics. *If This Is a Man* was adapted for theatrical and radio dramatization. This work and its sequel, *The Reawakening*, were each translated into several languages. Levi became a major literary figure in his home country; five of his books won prestigious Italian literary prizes.

In the English-speaking world, Levi achieved renown after 1984, when publication of *The Periodic Table* in the United States prompted acclaim by Nobel Prize winner Saul Bellow and prominent American book reviewers. All of Levi's major works were translated into

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Levi's famous contemporaries include:

Saul Bellow (1915–2005): Canadian-American novelist and Nobel Prize winner.

Federico Fellini (1920–1993): Italian filmmaker, one of the leading figures in the history of world cinema.

Isaac Asimov (1920–1982): Russian-American writer and biochemist; highly prolific author of both science fiction and popular works of science.

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): Italian novelist and journalist.

Philip K. Dick (1928–1982): American science fiction author.

Jerzy Kosinski (1933–1991): Polish American novelist, author of the Holocaust classic *The Painted Bird* (1965).

English over the next five years, cementing his stature as a Holocaust writer and thinker at home and abroad.

In terms of overall critical and public interest, Primo Levi's autobiographical writing receives the lion's share of attention and acclaim. Critics have praised the impressive range of knowledge, insight, and originality evidenced by his essays, often noting that Levi's talents transcend his role as a witness of the Holocaust. Some reviewers find his fiction weak in comparison to his nonfiction writings about the Holocaust, although some praise his speculative stories as imaginative vehicles for social commentary arising from Levi's scientific training. Mirna Cicioni argues that through his diverse literary offerings, Levi sought to build bridges between different fields of human endeavor.

If This Is a Man Although *If This Is a Man* had only limited success when it was first published, a later Italian edition of the book led to greater acclaim and translated versions of the book. When it was finally translated and published in English over a decade after its original publication, Alfred Werner of *Saturday Review* stated, "After the lapse of a dozen years, it is still overwhelmingly fresh and powerful in English translation, a useful reminder of events we must never forget." David Cauter of *New Statesman* called it "one of the most remarkable documents I have read." Even the passing of years has not diminished the memoir's power and importance. Philip Roth, in a posthumous tribute to the author in the *Observer* in 1987, referred to *If This Is a Man* as "one of the century's truly necessary books."

Responses to Literature

1. Summarize the psychological effects of surviving the Nazi camps, as identified in Levi's Holocaust

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Holocaust recollections of Levi have been likened to a news report from hell. Here are some classic literary visions—fictional as well as factual—of ultimate punishment.

A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962), a novel by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. This book was the first published work depicting the brutality of the Soviet prison camps.

Night (1958), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. One of the classic works of Holocaust literature, it is based on the author's experience in the concentration camps with his father.

No Exit (1944), a play by Jean-Paul Sartre. A man and two women are locked in a small room to irritate each other for eternity, resulting in their realization that "Hell is other people."

The Trial (1925), a novel by Franz Kafka. Josef K is arrested, put on trial, and sentenced, but never told the crime of which he is accused.

Inferno from *The Divine Comedy* (early fourteenth century), an epic poem by Dante Alighieri. The poet Virgil guides Dante through "the nine circles of hell" in the central epic poem of the Italian literary tradition.

writings. How would age or gender factor into the psychological effects of the trauma? Does faith enter into the psychological schema at all?

- Write an essay about Levi's perspective on science and its relationship to human ethics. Are the two in conflict with one another? Are there certain issues that will undoubtedly raise conflict? Does Levi somehow harmonize science and ethics in a positive light, or indicate how the meshing of the two can go seriously awry?
- In *The Periodic Table*, how does Levi use chemical elements to make allegorical statements about the human condition? Why would he use this type of metaphor? Do you think it is an effective allegory? Why or why not?
- Literary critics continue to debate whether Primo Levi's death was a suicide or an accident. What issues and motivations do you think underlie this controversy, and how do they affect the critical perception of Levi's body of work?

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C.S. Lewis

BORN: 1898, Belfast, Northern Ireland, U.K.

DIED: 1963, Oxford, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Pilgrim's Regress (1933)

The Allegory of Love (1936)

The Screwtape Letters (1942)

The Chronicles of Narnia (1950–1956)



C. S. Lewis *Lewis, C.S., 1956, photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

The British novelist and essayist C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) was an established literary figure whose impact is increasingly recognized by scholars and teachers. He is known and respected for both his allegorical fantasy, particularly the classic children’s series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1965), as well as his accessible and persuasive works on Christian belief and theology such as *The Screwtape Letters* (1941) and *Mere Christianity* (1952).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on November 29, 1898, the son of Albert J. and Flora Hamilton Lewis. His mother died when he was still a boy. Little Lea, the family home, had long corridors, empty rooms, and secret nooks in which Lewis and his brother, Warren, played. In the attic, the boys spent many rainy days writing and illustrating stories about imaginary worlds. Sometimes, when their cousin came to visit, the three of them would climb into a black oak wardrobe, hand-carved by Lewis and Warren’s grandfather, and sit in the dark while Lewis told stories. These boyhood playtimes would be famously fictionalized years later in the children’s fantasy classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), the first in the seven-book *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. In the series, four brothers

and sisters travel to another world called Narnia by various means, first finding it through the back of a large wardrobe.

Lewis’s early education was by private tutoring, at various public schools, and at Malvern College. In 1917 he entered University College, Oxford, but left to serve as a soldier in World War I. World War I was a devastating conflict that claimed the lives of many of Lewis’s contemporaries—indeed, nearly 900,000 British service members died between 1914 and 1918. Lewis was one of the lucky soldiers who returned from the war. After returning to Oxford and completing his studies, Lewis taught English literature there (at Magdalen College) until 1954, the year he accepted the chairmanship of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge.

Becoming a Christian As an Oxford student and eventual fellow of Magdalen College, Lewis became close friends with writers and scholars who altered his worldview and encouraged him to write. This circle of friends, later dubbed the “Inklings,” included J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Neville Coghill, and Owen Barfield. Like many writers who had survived the horrors of World War I, Lewis was eager to find meaning and comfort in a world that seemed to him so clearly flawed. Though he had been skeptical of the value of religion in his youth, Lewis was eventually able to find what he was looking for in Christianity. Each of his influential friends was instrumental in convincing Lewis of the reasonableness of Christianity, but it was Tolkien’s views on the relevance of myth to the Christian faith that most moved him. Lewis became a Christian at the age of thirty-two.

Quiet about the details of his youth, his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955), fails to provide enlightenment and leaves the Lewis scholar to speculations about his early disenchantment with emotional Christianity. His autobiography does reveal, however, that he had little interest in sports as a boy and that he was an enthusiastic reader. Among his early favorite authors was G.K. Chesterton, who was himself a paradoxical and religious writer.

Superb Conversationalist, Renowned Scholar Widely read as an adult, his knowledge of literature was impressive and made him a superb conversationalist. Lewis thoroughly enjoyed sitting up into the early hours in college rooms “talking nonsense, poetry, theology, and metaphysics.”

His subjects at Oxford were medieval and Renaissance English literature, in which he became a scholar, lecturer, and tutor of renown. His academic reputation was made secure by his *English Literature in the 16th Century* (1954) and *Experiment in Criticism* (1961). Aside from scholarly writings, his output included science fiction, children’s stories, and religious apology, a genre of argumentative writing that takes the position of defending a scrutinized or often-attacked position such as religion.

The Christian Apologist: Explaining Christianity Lewis's *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) is an allegory presented as an apology—in this use of the term, apology means “defense” or “explanation”—for Christianity. It was not until the appearance of his second allegorical work, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), however, that Lewis received acclaim by winning the coveted Hawthornden prize. This book, which addresses in easily understandable terms the theological problem of evil and related moral and ethical issues, had met with widespread success; Lewis's invitation to do a series of radio talks for the BBC was prompted no doubt by the book's popularity but also in response to its demonstration of Lewis's ability to write engagingly on complex theological issues for a nonspecialist audience.

The first four successful fifteen-minute talks—“Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe?”—were broadcast in August 1941 and later published in *Broadcast Talks* (1942) and were followed in short order by three more series: “What Christians Believe,” “Christian Behaviour,” and “Beyond Personality,” the last two separately published in 1943 and 1944. Lewis's status as a radio celebrity and as a writer and speaker in great demand was assured by the end of 1942. Throughout the remainder of World War II he pursued an exhausting schedule of speaking engagements arranged by the chaplain-in-chief of the Royal Air Force, and he lectured at numerous churches, theological societies, and religious retreats from then until the end of his life.

Allegorical Fiction *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), the first of the so-called Space Trilogy, is a work of allegorical science fiction, in which a scholar is kidnapped by evil scientists. Lewis was a master of allegory, or using a story symbolically to teach a broader moral or philosophical lesson. *The Screwtape Letters* (1941), for which he is perhaps best known, is a satire in which the Devil, here known as Screwtape, writes letters instructing his young nephew, Wormwood, how to tempt souls to damnation. Of his seven religious allegories for children collectively titled *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* (1965) he commented that, “stories of this kind could steal past . . . inhibitions which had dissuaded him from his own religion.”

Lewis's deft handling of allegory likely derives from G.K. Chesterton, whose *Everlasting Man* (1925) was instrumental in Lewis's conversion. While in the hospital during 1918 after being wounded in World War I, Lewis had read a volume of Chesterton's essays and later wrote of the experience: “I had never heard of him and had no idea of what he stood for; nor can I quite understand why he made such an immediate conquest of me. . . . His humor was of the kind which I like best—not ‘jokes’ embedded in the page like currants in a cake, still less (what I cannot endure), a general tone of flippancy and jocularly, but the humor which is not in any way sepa-

rable from the argument but is rather . . . the bloom on dialectic itself.”

Later Years Lewis was married, rather late in life, in 1956, to Joy Davidman Gresham, the daughter of a New York Jewish couple. She was a graduate of Hunter College and for a time was a member of the Communist Party. She had previously been married twice. When her first husband suffered a heart attack, she turned to prayer. Reading the writings of Lewis, she began to attend Presbyterian services. Later, led by his writings to Lewis himself, she divorced her second husband, William Gresham, left the Communist Party, and married Lewis. Her death preceded her husband's by some three years. C.S. Lewis died at his home in Headington, Oxford, on November 22, 1963, on the same day that writer Aldous Huxley died and U.S. president John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Works in Literary Context

Though Lewis reportedly read parts of John Milton's challenging *Paradise Lost* at the age of ten, his early literary influences were more ordinary: adventure novels and the Sherlock Holmes mysteries of Arthur Conan Doyle. Later, however, Lewis blossomed intellectually and became an avid scholar of ancient Greek drama and philosophy, Greek and Roman mythology, Irish mythology (an interest he shared with his contemporary W.B. Yeats), Norse mythology (an interest he shared with his friend J.R.R. Tolkien), fairy tales, and the classics of English literature. Literary influences that led Lewis toward Christianity included books by John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), the works of the German mystic Jacob Boehme, Thomas Traheren's *Centuries of Meditations* (1908), and G.K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* (1925).

Fantasy and Allegory Allegory is a kind of writing in which objects and characters are used as symbols of concepts. Lewis made memorable use of allegory, a device likely derived from his knowledge of Christian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas. Lewis knew the allegorical mode quite well: his first autobiography, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), employs the genre, and one of his outstanding pieces of academic scholarship is *The Allegory of Love* (1936).

At times, Lewis blended allegory and pure fantasy into a kind of modern myth. In *Till We Have Faces* (1956), a retelling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, the reader is clearly in the world of mythic narrative, but the book also has allegorical features. Lewis's famous *The Chronicles of Narnia* is widely accepted as a Christian allegory, though countless young readers have enjoyed it purely as a fantasy story.

Apologetics Lewis's importance as an essayist is identifiable with, and to a great extent owing to, his role as a popular apologist (in this context, apologist means

“defender”) for the Christian faith. Christian apologetics is a long tradition of scholarly explication and defense of the tenets of the faith. Lewis distinguished himself as an apologist by making complex theological concepts approachable and understandable to lay people without pandering or oversimplifying.

Lewis styled himself as a common man addressing concerns faced by all, including both the naive but honest skeptic and the unsophisticated Christian in an intellectually complex world; the title *Mere Christianity*, a phrase used by the seventeenth-century clergyman Richard Baxter, was meant to evoke the core of Christian belief system and, as well, the common intellectual issues faced by everyday believers or inquirers into the Christian faith.

Works in Critical Context

Lewis’s essays have been described by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, his biographers, as characteristically manifesting a “love of clarity,” with “striking metaphors” and “inexorable logic,” demonstrating the “ability to incapsulate a great many facts into a few words.” Nevill Coghill points to a “weight and clarity of argument, sudden turns of generalization and general paradox, the telling short sentence to sum a complex paragraph, and unexpected touches of personal approach to the reader.”

On the subject of his novels, Corbin Scott Carell writes, “Only an anti-religious bias can deny Lewis a place in the canon of worthwhile minor writers of twentieth century British fiction. He is not one of the giants (as a novelist—he is a giant as a thinker). He is not a Joyce or a Lawrence. But neither is Huxley or Orwell and they continue to be taught.”

The Chronicles of Narnia The seven Narnia books are fantasies written for children but intended to be appreciated by adults. The first book in the series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, has achieved fame apart from the rest, winning the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1962. The Narnia books have been both praised and criticized for intermingling mythologies, including not only classical fauns and talking animals but also Father Christmas and a Christ-like lion named Aslan (Turkish for “lion”). Despite mixed critical response, the books have gained popularity over the decades, and a set published in paperback by Puffin between 1977 and 1979 was a best seller.

Responses to Literature

1. An allegory is a composition, whether pictorial or literary, in which immaterial or spiritual realities are directly represented by material objects. Write a short story that is an allegory. Take an abstract concept or a virtue, such as honesty or patience or courage, and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lewis’s famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): Supreme dictator of the Soviet Union for a quarter of a century, from the late 1920s until his death.

H.L. Mencken (1880–1956): A journalist, editor, and essayist from Baltimore, Maryland, Mencken was one of the most influential literary figures of the first half of the twentieth century.

Ayn Rand (1905–1982): Russian-born American writer and philosopher who developed the philosophical system known as Objectivism that celebrated individualism and capitalism and rejected organized religion. Her novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) were international best sellers.

W.H. Auden (1907–1973): Controversial and influential English poet and author and ardent supporter of Lewis’s friend Tolkien’s fantasy writings.

Amanda McKittrick Ros (1860–1939): Regarded by many as “the worst writer of all time,” her works were often read during meetings of the Inklings, an Oxford literary club that included Lewis and Tolkien. The object was to see how far the reader could get before he started laughing.

write a story in which the main character in human or animal form conveys the characteristics of your chosen abstract concept.

2. An apologist—from the Greek word meaning speaking in defense—chooses to speak in favor of an unpopular or widely scrutinized position. Choose a position you feel has been unfairly singled out for criticism and write a defense of it. Research the terms “straw man,” “red herring,” and “syllogism” and apply the techniques to your argument.
3. Watch the 2005 film adaptation *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or the 2008 film adaptation *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, noting where the film follows Lewis’s book and where it differs. Consider elements such as theme, plot, dialogue, and characterization. Why do you think the filmmakers decided to make these changes? Prepare a class presentation in which you discuss the differences, but be sure to highlight some similarities as well. Use clips (DVD or VHS) from the movie to support your conclusions.
4. Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy (published between 1995 and 2000) is, like Lewis’s

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Lewis focused on explaining or celebrating the Christian faith in many of his works. Other famous works of Christian apologetics include:

City of God (c. 410), a religious treatise by St. Augustine. Augustine wrote *City of God* to explain the benefits of Christianity and differentiate it from competing religions of the time.

Summa Theologica (c. 1274), a religious treatise by St. Thomas Aquinas. This unfinished work was a summary of the Christian teachings of the time.

The Everlasting Man (1925), a religious treatise by G.K. Chesterton. Lewis was greatly influenced by this history of Christianity.

Narnia series, a saga of children battling dark forces in an alternate world—but Pullman’s books take a distinctly anti-church position. Compare the “good” and “bad” characters in both series. What qualities make the heroes and heroines admirable? Are the qualities different in the two series? What makes the villains dangerous or evil in the two series?

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☒ José Lezama Lima

BORN: 1910, *Campamento Militar de Columbia, Cuba*

DIED: 1976, *Havana, Cuba*

NATIONALITY: *Cuban*

GENRE: *Poetry, fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Death of Narcissus (1937)

Enemy Rumor (1941)

Paradiso (1966)

Overview

José Lezama Lima is one of Cuba’s most important writers to date and is also recognized as being among the most distinctive Latin American poetic and novelistic voices of the twentieth century. Although he cultivated all genres except drama, poetry interested him the most. Lezama Lima’s life was almost exclusively dedicated to literature and to the development of an elaborated poetic system. To this effect, Lezama Lima himself used to say that the events of his biography were so few that they could all be connected to his literary works.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Loss of His Father, and the Trials of a Revolutionary Period Lezama Lima was born on December 19, 1910, in a military camp near Havana where his father José Maria Lezama y Rodda, a military colonel, was stationed. Lezama Lima was the only son of the marriage and developed an extremely close relationship with his mother, Rosa Lima y Rosado, after his father’s death from influenza in 1919—at that time still a relatively common cause of death, even in the industrialized West. The image of his missing father haunted Lezama Lima for the rest of his life and came to figure prominently in his late novel *Paradiso* (1966).

The young Lezama Lima suffered from frequent attacks of asthma, which kept him secluded from other children and helped instill in him a great love of reading. He studied classical Spanish literature at the Colegio San Francisco de Paula under Fernando Sirgo and afterward enrolled at the Universidad de la Habana as a law student.

Lezama Lima’s life began to be impacted by the revolutionary politics of this period while Gerardo Machado was reigning as Cuba’s dictator (1925–1933). Lezama Lima’s formal schooling underwent a four-year hiatus when Machado, because of a student protest, shut down the university. Lezama Lima used the period—a difficult one for Cuba and the world, with a deep economic depression shaking the foundations of modern civilization and, in Cuba, hardship leading more to join

the struggle against Machado's increasingly brutal regime—to broaden his exposure to literature and ideas of all kinds, however remote and complex. Yet, as Lezama Lima biographers reveal, he did not intend to “isolate himself in an ivory tower but rather to find answers that would permit him to address his intellectual anxieties caused by death, discontinuity, and the dilemma between the occult and the profane.”

Resumed Studies and Significant Journalism

The university reopened in 1934, the year after Machado's overthrow, and Lezama Lima resumed his law studies—largely to please his mother—but he had come to the realization that his true interests lay elsewhere. In 1937, he published his most significant poem, “The Death of Narcissus,” and began the publication of his first critical journal, *Verbum*. *Verbum* was intended to promote a national Cuban culture, but it failed after only six months. It was followed by a series of other publications on aesthetics, including *Spurs of Silver* (1939–1941), *No One's Opinion* (1942–1944), and *Originals* (1944–1956).

In 1941, two years into World War II (1939–1945), Lezama Lima published what for many is one of his best books of poetry, *Enemy Rumor*. The readers of these poems were few, but among them was the group subsequently known as the generation of Orígenes (Originals), consisting of poets, writers, and intellectuals who gathered around Lezama Lima as their central figure and who published or exhibited their artistic designs in the journal of the same name. During the war years and thereafter, Cuban internal politics remained messy and, frequently, dictatorial. In the late 1950s, agents of the Fulgencio Batista regime broke into Lezama Lima's house in an attempt to implicate him in radical activities.

The Cuban Revolution and a Loss of Place With the Cuban Revolution of 1959 led by Fidel Castro, however, his fortunes changed. The revolutionary forces triumphed, and Lezama Lima became a director of the department of literature and publications of the National Council of Culture. By the time he published the spiritual *Dador* in 1960, the revolution was being defined as Marxist, destined to affirm Karl Marx's assessment of religion as “the opium of the people.” With his emphasis on negotiating a spiritual or mystical philosophy, Lezama Lima's place within an atmosphere so hostile to religion and spirituality would soon become difficult indeed. After years in which his relationship with the state was tense at times, he now found himself under attack by the artistic community itself.

Religion was not the only reason why Lezama Lima became a target for the revolutionary writers. They represented a new generation of poets and, as such, they used politics to affirm themselves against the members of the Orígenes group, with Lezama Lima as its most representative figure. For these poets and writers, associated with the literary supplement of the newspaper *Mondays of*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lezama Lima's famous contemporaries include:

Jean Anouilh (1910–1987): A prolific French playwright whose works range from absurdist to high drama.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): A French Algerian writer who was the second-youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature; while associated with existentialism, he actually rejected the title for, more accurately, “nihilism”.

Fidel Castro (1926–): A Cuban political revolutionary and leader of Cuba from 1959 until his retirement in 2008.

Ernst Jünger (1895–1998): A German author who details his experiences as an officer during World War I in the memoir *Storm of Steel*.

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): A Russian American novelist most famous for his extremely controversial novel *Lolita*.

Revolution, Lezama Lima embodied the elitist, bourgeois, politically uncommitted writer. In 1962 he also became an adviser to the Cuban Center for Literary Research, and to them his retreat into a literary ivory tower was unacceptable.

International Fame and Disgrace at Home

Lezama Lima acquired international fame precisely during this same decade, which marked the beginning of crackdowns in Cuba that had not only intellectuals but also homosexuals as their main targets. Lezama Lima never publicly said whether he was homosexual. But, at a time when many homosexuals were being taken to labor camps, he published *Paradiso* (1966)—the eighth chapter of which offers an elaborate description of a homosexual encounter. Lezama Lima became the Cuban writer who achieved international fame with *Paradiso*, but he also suffered a miserable downturn of luck at the same time. Government functionaries classified the book as pornography because of its homosexual content, and in 1971 a former associate accused the writer of antirevolutionary activities. Lezama Lima did not leave Havana, but he did find his life increasingly restricted and suffered the pain of a loss of place in the literature of the country he loved.

Lezama Lima died in 1976, isolated from his friends and from the Cuban cultural life he had wanted to influence—and before he could finish the sequel to *Paradiso*. The incomplete novel was published in 1977 and was titled *Oppiano Licario* after its main character. Many more of Lezama Lima's writings have been published posthumously—including poems, essays, newspaper articles,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also explored themes of angst, alienation, and the fall of humanity:

- The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel by J. D. Salinger. This novel is a cult classic because of the author's portrayal of its protagonist, the angst-ridden teenager Holden Caulfield.
- The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this futuristic dystopian novel, Canadian author Atwood speculates on the impact of a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and totalitarian takeover by a theocratic elite.
- His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), a trilogy of novels by Philip Pullman. In this trilogy, the author offers fantasy versions of the Christian notion of the fall of humanity that suggest instead a positive outcome for the fallen.
- Snow* (2005), a novel by Orhan Pamuk. In this work a clash of ideals is witnessed by a poet in exile as he comes to terms with his alienation through poetry and God.

letters, vignettes, conference presentations, and even notes. These subsequent publications give testimony to the fascination that Lezama Lima continues to inspire in his readers.

Works in Literary Context

A Poetic System, a Philosophy It is no exaggeration to say that Lezama Lima's life was almost exclusively dedicated to literature and to the development of an elaborated poetic system. This poetic system represents a continuation of the tradition initiated by the Romantic poets. His system also reveals a series of philosophical influences: in his study of the poet, Emilio Bejel traces the legacy imprinted in Lezama Lima's works by Western thinkers and writers such as Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry.

Spiritual Bankruptcy and the Search for Answers Scholar Emilio Bejel further discusses how Lezama Lima's poetic system is indebted to Western metaphysics, and how it builds on Blaise Pascal's ideas on the subject of fallen nature. According to Bejel, Lezama Lima's answer to the idea of a fallen nature—represented in his works by the death of the father—is the freedom of the poet/son who rejects imitation in favor of invention. Lezama Lima developed his system in an effort to find answers in poetry. These answers would alleviate a kind of crisis of the soul, one which began as a generalized feeling

of spiritual bankruptcy or emptiness typical among modern poets. The alienation felt by these poets was often experienced and expressed as a sentiment of the orphanhood that Friedrich Nietzsche described as accompanying "God's death."

In *Paradiso*, for instance, Lezama Lima penetrates his favorite topic, poetry itself, yet he also offers a sort of allegory to depict his exploration, using a series of sexual adventures in which the theme of incest is often present. This sexuality, marked by the incest taboo, gives the adventures their highly charged covert aspect and points to the angst of a poet in search of answers. The sexual energy of this and other pieces is part of why Lezama Lima's work exerted such a strong pull on the generation of Cuban writers who followed him, some—including Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Reinaldo Arenas—who saw themselves as not only admirers but also disciples.

Works in Critical Context

Despite his untiring dedication to literature, for many years Lezama Lima was only known by a small group within Cuba's intellectual community. His tight style and the obscurity with which he conveyed his metaphysical concepts prevented this avant-garde writer from gaining popularity for almost three decades. However, he both enjoyed and suffered the consequences of international fame with the publication of his novel *Paradiso*.

***Paradiso* (1966)** Lezama Lima brought together a lifetime's work as a literary critic and poet in his novelistic depiction of a young Cuban man's coming of age. In many ways *Paradiso* is an autobiographical novel. *Paradiso* provoked a scandal for the author, largely because of its unorthodox depiction of Cuban family life. For a time, attempts were made to ban the book and suppress Lezama Lima's work altogether. But the work also gained positive critical attention. In 1972 the Italian translation of *Paradiso* was selected as Italy's best Latin American book for the previous year. Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Octavio Paz have all acclaimed Lezama Lima's talent, calling him a master expounder of many of the principal themes of Latin American fiction. Because of *Paradiso* and all of his writings, Lezama Lima eventually came to be known as one of the writers of the "Boom," a publicity success experienced worldwide by Latin American literature during the 1960s. Octavio Paz recalls reading *Paradiso* "slowly, with increasing amazement and stupefaction," describing the novel as "a verbal edifice of incredible richness." Literary critic César Augusto Salgado, however, laments that "Paz's sense of wonderment has been difficult to replicate in translation," and writes that the English-speaking world's relative ignorance of Lezama Lima is particularly "regrettable since in great measure Lezama's exceptionality as a Cuban and Latin American writer lies in his persistent quest for 'universality.'"

Responses to Literature

1. *Paradiso* models the structure of a bildungsroman—a novel of personal development and growth. Research several common characteristics of the bildungsroman. Which of these characteristics appear in *Paradiso*? In what ways, if any, does the novel differ from a typical bildungsroman?
2. Consider how your own life or the life of someone you know would make a fine bildungsroman. Trace the events and experiences that lead you or the person on a quest (even a short-term one), facing challenges that changed you or the person, and coming “home” to the society that now accepts you or the person you choose to write about. How did you or the other person grow? How did you mature to fit in with society?
3. Lezama Lima lived and wrote in a revolutionary time for Cuba. Research the Cuban Revolution of 1959. How did it impact civilians? How is this impact reflected in the poet’s work?
4. Scholars, such as Emilio Bejel, have pointed out Lezama Lima’s indebtedness to Western metaphysics. In debate with peers, justify Lezama Lima’s personal philosophy as depicted in *Paradiso*. Find examples from the text that can be associated with philosophical attitudes. How does the writer use images and symbols to express, for example, alienation or angst?

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✠ Federico García Lorca

BORN: 1898, Fuente Vaqueros, Granada, Spain

DIED: 1936, Viznar, Granada, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Gypsy Ballads (1928)

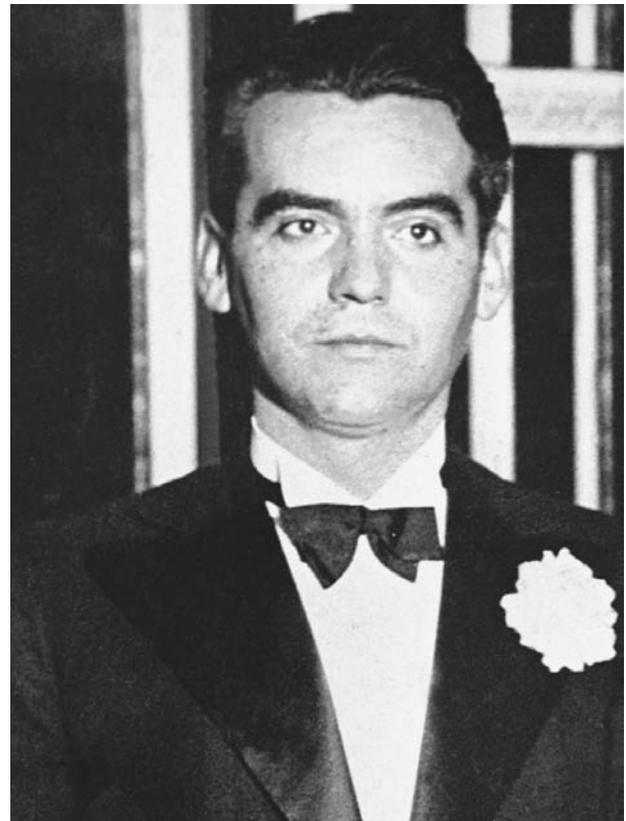
Blood Wedding (1933)

Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter, and Other Poems (1935)

Poet in New York (1940)

Overview

Federico García Lorca’s reputation rests equally on his poetry and his plays. He is widely regarded as Spain’s most distinguished twentieth-century writer. García Lorca was a major participant in the flowering of Spanish literature that occurred over the years between World War I and the Spanish Civil War, and he is normally categorized as a leading member of the group of artists known as the Generation of 1927.



Federico García Lorca Lorca, Federico García, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Arabic Roots García Lorca was born and raised in rural Andalusia, the southernmost province of Spain and a region greatly influenced by Arabic and Gypsy culture. The major points in García Lorca's life and career often seem to have coincided with significant events in the historical and political arena. For instance, the year of his birth coincided with the so-called Disaster of 1898, when Spain received a stunning double shock in losing the war against the United States and hence losing also its last remaining colonies: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. García Lorca spent his first eleven years on the *vega* (fertile plain) of Granada, to the west of the city, his family dividing its time between two villages, Fuente Vaqueros and Asquerosa. His father, Federico García Rodríguez, was a well-off farmer and landowner; García Lorca's mother, the former Vicenta Lorca Romero—his father's second wife—was a local primary-school teacher. Both parents, but particularly his mother, are thought to have exerted in their different ways a strong influence on García Lorca's character and sensibility. The loss of Cuba in the war meant that Spain's supply of sugar was cut off. The consequent boom in the market for sugar beets, which thrived in the *vega's* soil, and his father's canny business sense enabled the family to consolidate its financial position, and hence, incidentally, to support García Lorca economically throughout almost the entirety of his life. He attended schools in the nearby town of Almería and studied law and literature at the University of Granada. After moving to Madrid in 1919, García Lorca continued his studies at the Residencia de Estudiantes, a center for writers, critics, and scholars of cultural liberalism.

The Generation of 1927 While in Madrid, Lorca earned a law degree and came in contact with several emerging literary and artistic figures, many of whom would later comprise the Generation of 1927. The members of this group rejected what they considered to be the sentiment and superficiality of Romanticism and instead advocated hermetic expressionism. García Lorca's closest friend at the Residencia de Estudiantes was Salvador Dalí, whose dramatic surrealist paintings and "quest for joy for the sake of joy" would later inspire García Lorca to write "Ode to Salvador Dalí." Another prominent figure of this period was poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, whose use of symbolism influenced García Lorca's first volume of poetry, *Libro de poemas* (1921). This work is a compilation of Gypsy folklore García Lorca heard during his youth in Andalusia. Although considered a conventional account of his childhood experiences, *Libro de poemas* is recognized for its vivid, accessible language and mythological imagery. After the publication of this volume, García Lorca organized Spain's first *cante jondo* (deep song) festival. *Cante jondo* is a traditional form of

Andalusian music that, according to drama historian Felicia Hardison Londre, "combines intensely emotional yet stylistically spare poetry on themes of pain, suffering, love, and death with a primitive musical form." García Lorca's continued involvement in the *cante jondo* festival, at which Spain's most famous singers and guitarists performed, is reflected in *Canciones* (1927) and *Poema del cante jondo* (1931). These collections, which were directly inspired by composer Manuel de Falla, elevated the traditional ballad forms known as *siguiriyá gitano* and *solea* to new levels of stylization.

The "Gypsy Poet" The years 1924 to 1927 were also a time, after the closure of the *Poema del cante jondo/Canciones* phase, when García Lorca became engaged in a wide-ranging exploration of very different modes of poetic writing. One vein, or direction, is represented by what turned out to be García Lorca's most successful, most popular, and best-known collection of poetry, *Gypsy Ballads* (1928). The process of gestation was a fairly lengthy and leisurely one. While a primitive version of "Ballad of Don Pedro on Horse-back" dates back to late 1921, the concept of a series of Gypsy ballads and the composition of several of the poems can be ascribed to the summer of 1924. Others followed in subsequent years, and several appeared in small magazines (1926–1928) before the collection was completed in 1927 and published in mid-1928.

While not as well known as *Gypsy Ballads*, *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter, and Other Poems* (1935) is also considered a masterpiece. This four-part elegy was occasioned by the mauling death of Spain's most celebrated matador, Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who was one of García Lorca's closest friends. A celebration of Spanish sound, rhythm, and assonance, *Lament* evidences García Lorca's unique blend of poetry and drama.

Stereotypes and Industrial Life Provoke Poetic Crisis Despite the fact that García Lorca's work was extremely popular throughout the 1920s, the poet suffered an emotional crisis in 1928, stemming from his belief that he was being stereotyped as a "gypsy poet." Leaving the Andalusian landscape with which he was so familiar, García Lorca traveled to New York City in 1929, where he came in contact with images directly contrasting those of his homeland. Deeply disturbed by the monotony of industrial life and America's reliance on mechanization, García Lorca began writing verse that was later collected in the posthumous volume *Poet in New York* (1940), considered to be his most abstract and surrealistic volume due to its themes of chaos and alienation.

Although García Lorca wrote the drama *The Spell of the Butterfly* in 1920, it was not until he returned to Spain in 1930, shortly after the proclamation of the Spanish Republic, that he composed the majority of his dramatic works. Among his best-known plays are *Blood*

Wedding (1933), *Yerma* (1935), and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1945).

Tragic Passion *Blood Wedding*, which closely resembles a classical Greek tragedy, is the story of a bride who runs off with another man on her wedding day. In contrast to *Blood Wedding* and the similar follow-up *Yerma*, which are generally considered expressionistic and abstract, *The House of Bernarda Alba* is intensely realistic. This work focuses on Bernarda, a tyrannical woman who virtually imprisons her five daughters in her home.

In 1936, an army coup against the government of the Second Spanish Republic resulted in the start of the Spanish Civil War, a three year conflict that resulted in the founding of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, a nationalist. The political unrest forced García Lorca into hiding, despite the fact he had never aligned himself with any particular political party and referred to himself as a “Catholic, communist, anarchist, liberal, conservative, and monarchist.” García Lorca was eventually discovered at the home of a friend and arrested by Franco’s Nationalists. García Lorca had the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was well known as a man of the arts, liberal minded, rumored to be homosexual, a member of a family on intimate terms with socialist leader Fernando de los Ríos, and, therefore, as far as the opposing side was concerned, an enemy beyond a shadow of a doubt. After being detained by the civil government in Granada for several days, García Lorca was executed by a firing squad in an olive grove outside the tiny village of Viznar and buried in an unmarked grave. His murder is often considered a tragically ironic ending for an author who so frequently wrote about death. Scholars maintain, however, that although death is a prevalent theme in his works, García Lorca is perhaps more strongly esteemed for his abiding humanitarian concerns, deep affection for Andalusian culture and landscapes, and passionate dedication to all art forms.

Works in Literary Context

García Lorca drew upon all elements of Spanish life and culture to create poetry at once traditional, modern, personal, and universal. Combining classical verse with folk and Gypsy ballads, García Lorca sought to liberate language from its structural constraints and bring out the musicality inherent in Spanish dialect. While initially influenced by the symbolists, who believed the function of poetry was to evoke and not describe, García Lorca began to experiment with startling imagery, scenic metaphors, and complex rhythms after coming in contact with filmmaker Luis Buñuel, poet Pablo Neruda, and artist Salvador Dalí. García Lorca’s dramatic approach to poetry led him to devote the latter part of his life to playwriting. In his drama, like his verse, García Lorca wrote about death, frustrated sexuality, and the relationship between dream and reality. While his poetry and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

García Lorca’s famous contemporaries include:

Luis Buñuel (1900–1983): One of the most influential film directors of the twentieth century, Buñuel was a close friend of García Lorca and surrealist painter Salvador Dalí.

Ricardo García López (1890–1984): Known best by his pseudonym, K-Hito, López was a cartoonist, humorist, magazine publisher, and bullfighting critic closely associated with the Generation of 1927.

Felipe Alfau (1902–1999): Although associated with Spanish poets like García Lorca, Alfau wrote in English. His work is seen as a forerunner to postmodernist writers such as Vladimir Nabokov and Thomas Pynchon.

Miguel Hernández (1910–1942): Spanish poet of modest upbringing, Hernández was arrested after the Spanish Civil War, eventually dying of tuberculosis in a jail cell at the age of thirty-two. He wrote extensively while in prison, and even scrawled his last poem on his cell wall as he lay dying: “Goodbye, brothers, comrades, friends: let me take my leave of the sun and the fields.”

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): Leader of the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, Franco would go on to become the dictator of Spain until his death nearly forty years later.

drama continue to be widely studied among literary scholars, García Lorca emphasized that he wrote for and about common people.

New and Traditional Poetic Structures By the time *Libro de poemas* was in the bookshops, García Lorca had already turned his back on the kind of writing it exemplified, focusing instead on a new manner that would absorb him for the next four or five years. He opted for short, often minimal lines, arranged in loosely structured patterns, often employing parallelism, repetition (sometimes with internal variation), exclamations, unanswered questions, and ellipses; the resulting short poems were arranged in thematically grouped sequences he called *suites*. By contrast, the eighteen poems of the *Gypsy Ballads* are all written in the traditional octosyllabic (eight syllables per line) ballad meter, whose origins go back at least as far as the fourteenth century and which had been perpetuated in a continuous oral tradition down to García Lorca’s times.

García Lorca, along with the other members of the Generation of 1927, played an influential role bridging the gap between classical Spanish literary tradition and the European avant-gardes that came after him.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

García Lorca's so-called rural trilogy of plays—*Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*—all touched upon death and rebellion against society's restrictions, often featuring women as both protagonists and antagonists, always with tragic results. Similar dramatic works include:

Antigone, (fifth century BCE), a play by Sophocles. This work, an ancient Greek tragedy, follows the moral dilemma of a woman who acts against the will of the state, which has declared her deceased brother not be granted a funeral.

A Doll's House (1879), a play by Henrik Ibsen. Highly controversial when first written and performed, this work catapulted Ibsen to international fame (and infamy) on the strength of its sharp criticism of the traditional roles of men and women in the nineteenth century and, in particular, the institution of marriage.

Pygmalion (1913), a play by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw transforms an ancient myth into a modern story about a professor who turns a Cockney flower girl into a proper society lady.

A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), a play by Tennessee Williams. Known for his taut portraits of families in crisis, this work is perhaps Williams's best-known work—a drama of elemental passions in which a vibrant couple is challenged by the arrival and decline of an unstable heroine.

Works in Critical Context

It has been argued that García Lorca's untimely death at the hands of a firing squad, some five weeks after the outbreak of civil war, transformed him into a martyr figure for antifascists from all around Europe. Be this as it may, his enduring and increasing popularity and the richness and profundity of his works show that his status as a modern classic has a sound foundation.

The Gypsy Ballads García Lorca's *The Gypsy Ballads* (1928) is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Spanish poetry. In this volume, composed of eighteen poems written between 1924 and 1927, García Lorca incorporated images of Gypsy village life with traditional ballad forms to create verse both thematically accessible and lyrically complex. Utilizing such dramatic elements as action, characterization, and dialogue, García Lorca created what Londre described as "symbolist dramas in miniature." Since its publication, *The Gypsy Ballads* has been popular in Spanish-speaking countries worldwide due to its focus on common people and its use of idiomatic language. C. M. Bowra explained: "[*The Gypsy Ballads*] is a book which has a special place in our time

because it shows not only that the outlook of a highly civilized poet is in many ways that of the simplest men and women, but that the new devices which have been invented to express a modern sensibility are not restricted to urban and sophisticated subjects." Although *The Gypsy Ballads* brought García Lorca widespread acclaim, it also led both readers and critics to categorize him as a "gypsy poet," a label García Lorca would repudiate throughout his life: "Gypsies are a theme. Nothing more. I would be the same poet if I wrote about sewing needles or hydraulic landscapes. Besides, the gypsy myth makes me sound like an uncultured, uneducated, *primitive poet*, which . . . I am not," he once explained.

Responses to Literature

1. García Lorca has been called "the poet of the Gypsies." Citing specific examples from his work, describe the aspects of García Lorca's writing that earned him that label.
2. Choose one of García Lorca's plays and analyze the themes, beliefs, and customs contained within. What can the play tell you about Spanish culture? What can the play tell you about García Lorca's political beliefs and the political climate of Spain in the 1920s and 1930s?
3. García Lorca was associated with the symbolist movement. Identify and discuss the symbolist elements of García Lorca's writings.
4. The chorus in Greek tragedies is echoed in García Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. Research the ancient Greek chorus and compare it with García Lorca's chorus in the play. Which elements are the same? Which are different?

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John Lyly

BORN: C. 1552, England

DIED: 1606, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit (1578)

Euphues and His England (1580)

Pappe with an Hatchet, Alias, a Fig for my Godson (1589)

Campaspe (1583–1584)

Overview

Together with Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly was one of the most important pre-Shakespearean playwrights of the Elizabethan stage. Lyly was a member of the school of writing called the "University Wits," and the publication of his prose work, *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1578) marked the beginning of his literary career, made him a best-selling author, and afforded him a reputation as one of the most prominent prose writers of the era.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Oxford Education John Lyly was born to Peter Lyly, a minor church official serving the archbishopric of York, and his wife Jane. The exact date and place of his birth are unknown, but records of his years at Oxford University suggest that he was born between 1552 and 1554. By 1562 he evidently resided with his parents and a growing number of siblings in Canterbury.

Like his father and grandfather before him, John Lyly attended Magdalen College at Oxford University. However, remarks Anthony à Wood, who reported in

Athenae Oxonienses (1691–1692), Lyly was "always averse to the crabbed studies of logic and philosophy. For so it was that his genie being naturally bent to the pleasant paths of poetry . . . did in a manner neglect academical studies." Wood's testimony is suspect because he wrote at least one hundred years after Lyly's university career and was perhaps influenced by Lyly's more spectacular later career at court, but his remark about the "crabbed studies" certainly conforms to Lyly's own criticism of his alma mater and points to Lyly's developing his writing.

Hoping for a Sure, High Seat at Court After receiving his bachelor of arts degree and then taking his master's at Oxford in June 1575, Lyly settled in London. Being disappointed in his pursuit of a fellowship, he apparently decided to pursue advancement at the other venue open to educated gentlemen—the court.

A Turn from Drama to Prose Ensures Literary Success In 1578, Lyly joined the household of the Earl of Oxford, one of Queen Elizabeth I's favorites who served as Lord Great Chamberlain for a time. It was for Oxford's players at Blackfriars theater that Lyly wrote most of his plays, including *Endimion*, *Campaspe*, *Sapho and Phao*, and *Gallatea*. But it was the publication of his prose work, *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, that marked the beginning of his literary career.

The extraordinary success of *Euphues* persuaded Lyly that there were other avenues to advancement, and he turned again to his fictional hero in *Euphues and His England*, which was not published until 1580 despite promising a sequel "within one summer." Lyly completely transformed his story, his tone, and his sense of audience for the later work; the results were apparently worth his efforts, for the two *Euphues* books were reprinted at an astonishing rate, and imitators were eagerly jumping on the bandwagon. Equally notable is how Lyly's second *Euphues* book, with its extravagant patriotism and its lavish praise of Queen Elizabeth in the dedications, secured Lyly's position as court entertainer. Lyly left the Earl of Oxford's service about 1588. Soon thereafter he obtained a court position as a writer in the Revels office—though he never succeeded in advancing to the more important post of Master of the Revels.

An Anti-Puritan Propagandist In 1589 Lyly was also apparently engaged as a reader of new books for the Bishop of London. In *John Lyly* (1905), J. Dover Wilson remarks, "This connexion with the censorship of the day is interesting, as showing how Lyly was drawn into the whirlpool of the *Marprelate* controversy." The scandalous *Marprelate* pamphlets were fliers written under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate by radical Puritans making attacks on the clerical hierarchy of the established church. The bishops enlisted writers such as Lyly and Thomas Nashe to try to defeat "Martin Marprelate" at "his" own

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lyly's famous contemporaries include:

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616): A Spanish novelist and poet who wrote what is widely considered the first novel, and is certainly one of the most important literary works in history: *Don Quixote: Man of La Mancha* (1605).

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): An Italian physicist, mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer who was instrumental in the scientific revolution.

Ben Jonson (1532–1637): An English playwright, poet, and actor considered to be one of the most influential writers on the Jacobean and Caroline literature that followed him.

Mary Queen of Scots (1542–1587): The Queen of the Monarchy of Scotland, she was also queen consort in France and is best known for her imprisonment and execution for treason.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English (Elizabethan) playwright and poet, he is generally seen as one of the greatest writers of all time.

game. The result in Lyly's case was *Pappe with an Hatchet, Alias, a Fig for my Godson* (1589).

With *Pappe*, Lyly's career as a prose writer came to an end. The only other writings outside of his dramatic works are his famous petitionary letters to Queen Elizabeth of 1598 and 1601. Elizabeth had apparently led Lyly to believe that he was going to be granted the reversion of the post of Master of the Revels, but the position was instead given to Sir George Buc. Lyly was beside himself with disappointment and frustration, and wrote lifelong letters of appeal that apparently did little to advance his position. This rejection, combined with the decline in favor of his books (which were being neglected as intensely as they had been snatched up, read, and imitated), must have had a sore impact on the writer so eager to advance.

Parliament, a Prize Marriage, and Penury in the Last Days It was probably through his friends at court, however, that Lyly was seated in Parliament four times—in 1589, 1593, 1597, and 1601; and as G. K. Hunter rightly points out, “membership in Parliament was an honour that few Elizabethan writers achieved.” It was also probably through his connections at court that Lyly met and married, in 1593, Beatrice Browne, an heiress whom Hunter characterizes as “quite a prize in the marriage market for the Canterbury registrar's son.”

Nevertheless, by the time Lyly died in 1606, heavily in debt, unrewarded by the court he had tried so hard to

serve in his own way, and “all but ignored by the literary world which earlier had acclaimed him as its brightest star,” as Joseph Houppert writes in *John Lyly* (1975), it is hard to imagine him looking back on his life without a measure of disappointment and regret.

Works in Literary Context

Lyly is considered a pioneer of English literature who helped make prose a vehicle of art on the same level with poetry. He was especially noted for his artificial, elaborate prose style. Contrasted greatly with his contemporary Christopher Marlowe's bloody tragedies, Lyly's dramatic comedies marked an important change in English drama, mixing the pastoral tradition of lyric poetry with elements of classical myth.

Euphuism, or Latin in English *Euphuism, the Anatomy of Wit* is perhaps more accurately remembered for its inflated language known as *euphuism*, a highly artificial style adopted from Latin prose and never before attempted in English. Despite the disdain euphuism produced after its initial popularity, Lyly's use of language was a positive influence on the language: His alliteration, punning, and frequent references to Greek and Roman classical literature, for instance, attained great popularity in the pre-Shakespearean Elizabethan court. He heavily influenced writers in his time, who were eager to imitate him, as well as later writers including Shakespeare himself.

The Theater of Ideas Lyly's dramas also influenced later playwrights. Not only did he continue to use the euphuistic style he had originated in his first prose, but he helped introduce a theater of ideas to the English court. In *Campaspe*, for instance, the action of the play is both minimal and predictable. This is because the conflict centers not on the action of the play itself but on the questions that the protagonists have to consider to bring the conflict to a close. The primary female character, *Campaspe*, is loved by the heroic warrior Alexander and the painter Apelles. The conflict—who will get *Campaspe* in the end—is resolved when Alexander gives her up to Apelles, but in the process other ideas are introduced: Alexander returns to warfare, which had earlier been criticized, and he renounces *Campaspe* in scornful, unheroic terms after some serious soul-searching.

Works in Critical Context

Lyly's *Euphuism* books earned both praise and dismissal in his lifetime. They pioneered an influential writing style, but they also garnered Lyly rejection and a poor reputation within years of his writing them—a critical backlash that may have played a role in frustrating Lyly's hopes for a high position at court.

The Euphuism Books From the books' title and character name, *Euphuism*, Lyly's adversary Gabriel Harvey coined the term *euphuism*. This new word was and has been a term of great disapproval or even disgust for most

of the four hundred years of its existence. In 1887 critic George Saintsbury characterized it as “eccentric and tasteless.” In 1890 critic J. J. Jusserand called Lyly’s style “immoderate, prodigious, monstrous.” Much later, C. S. Lewis described Euphues as a “monstrosity” and a “fatal success.” As Walter N. King more recently asserted, “Lyly has . . . become a major whipping boy in English literature.”

The decline in popularity of the Euphues books that began so abruptly in his own lifetime has continued to a large extent to the present day. Even those who succeed in reading the first volume are rarely motivated to proceed to the sequel. Yet the current fascination with Elizabethan power politics of courtship and patronage (and the writing style strategies those politics demanded) would suggest that Lyly is ripe for reassessment.

Responses to Literature

1. Euphuism—a sophisticated and ornate prose style—originated with John Lyly. The writing was highly technical, with a set structure the author popularized to the point of influencing Shakespeare. Consider the following Lyly techniques, and compare a Lyly work or passage with a Shakespeare work or passage. Where can you identify similarities? What characteristics of the writing do you surmise Shakespeare “imitated”?

In Euphuism:

- There is a distinctive pattern.
 - There is a strict balance.
 - A line will have two phrases of equal length, and the phrases will match in grammar or sentence structure but not in meaning.
 - A line will have a matching of sounds and syllables—using such devices as alliteration (matching consonant sounds) or assonance (matching vowel sounds).
2. Both of Lyly’s Euphues works were hugely popular when they were first published. In both style and content they depicted the intellectual preferences and favored themes of Renaissance society. Considering the Euphues works, how would you characterize their first readers? What can you deduce about sixteenth-century tastes, values, and desires? What was important to Renaissance men and women?
 3. Given the unique style of Lyly’s euphuism, find one passage you see as particularly striking, and try to imitate Lyly’s style. The theme can be the same or you can devise your own. Include at least one Lyly characteristic, such as alliteration or assonance. Then, “modernize” the piece by writing in your own style, as you would write a poem or lines of dialogue today for your modern audience. How do the two styles compare? How are they different? What does this tell

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Lyly was known for his playful comedies that showed off the linguistic cleverness of his characters. Here are a few works by other writers that also mix comedy with clever language:

As You Like It (1599–1600), a play by William Shakespeare. In this pastoral comedy, double (or even triple) disguises make way for gender reversals and several humorous misconceptions and mishaps.

Barrel Fever (1994), a collection of short stories and essays by David Sedaris. In this selection of humorous stories and essays, the author offers laughs by way of his department store elf, obsessive-compulsive disordered child, and other pitifully hilarious alter egos.

If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler (1981), a novel by Italo Calvino. This novel is a comedy, a tragedy, and a thoughtful and thought-provoking experience.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. In this comedy of manners, the dialogue is bristling with irony, sarcasm, and social puns.

you about audience preferences in Renaissance times and audience preferences today?

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M

🏰 Niccolò Machiavelli

BORN: 1469, Florence, Italy

DIED: 1527, Florence, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Political theory, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius
(1513–1517)

The Prince (1513)

Mandragola (1518)

The Art of War (1520)

The Life of Castruccio Castracani (1520)

Overview

As a Florentine statesman, political philosopher, theorist, and playwright of the Italian Renaissance, Machiavelli addressed a wide range of political and historical topics while embracing strictly literary forms in his various publications. He came to be identified almost exclusively with the realist political theory that he described in *The Prince* (1513), which is basically a pragmatic guidebook for obtaining, and preserving, political power. Critics have long pointed out the incongruities between the republican philosophy that Machiavelli professed in *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* (1513–1517)—that nations should be republics guided by the principles of liberty, rule of law, and civic virtue—and the philosophy he described in *The Prince*, which has been variously hailed, denounced, and distorted as advocating an ends-justify-the-means approach to politics. His perspective in *The Prince*, in particular, quickly gave rise to the term *Machiavellian*: deceiving and manipulating others for personal gain.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

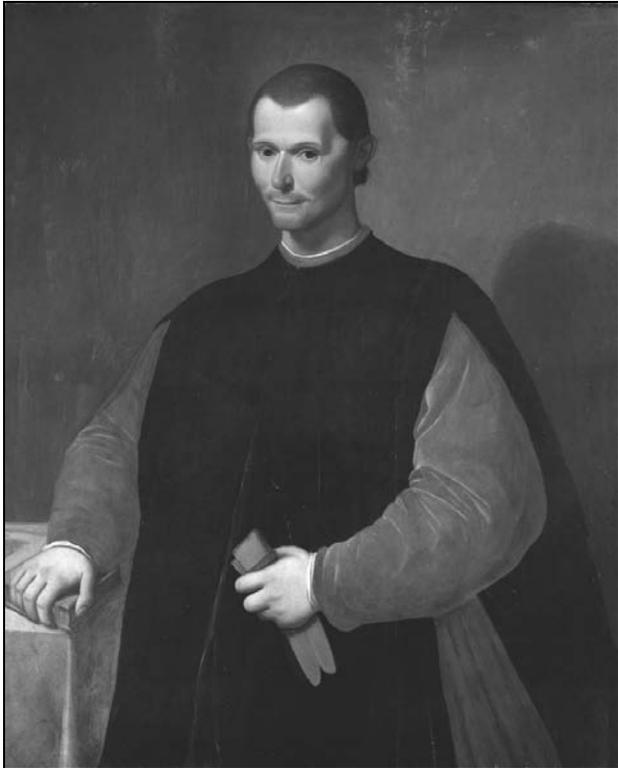
Machiavelli was born on May 3, 1469, in Florence, Italy, to an established middle-class family whose members had

traditionally filled responsible positions in local government. While little of the author's early life has been documented, it is known that as a boy he learned Latin and quickly became a dedicated reader of the ancient classics.

Machiavelli lived during the height of the Italian Renaissance, a “rebirth” of the arts and sciences that rivaled the accomplishments of the ancient Romans and Greeks. During this time, an interest in classical subjects and techniques became popular, as shown in the art of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. This interest in classical ideas is also reflected in the work of Machiavelli, who wrote much in support of the idea of republican government first developed by Plato.

Machiavelli's first recorded involvement in the complicated political scene in Florence occurred in 1498, when he helped the political faction that replaced the dominant religious and political figures in Florence at the time. That same year, Machiavelli began acting as secretary to a sensitive government agency that dealt chiefly with warfare and foreign affairs. Machiavelli participated both in Italian politics and in diplomatic missions to foreign governments. He quickly gained political prominence and influence, so that by 1502 he had become a well-respected assistant to the republican head of state. His posts afforded him many opportunities over the next fourteen years to closely examine the inner workings of government and to meet prominent individuals, including Cesare Borgia, who became Machiavelli's major model for leadership in *The Prince*.

Imprisonment and the Medici Family In 1512, Spanish forces invaded Italy, and the Florentine political climate changed abruptly. The Medici family—for centuries the rulers of Florence but exiled since 1494—seized the opportunity to depose the head of state and replace the elected government with their own regime. Machiavelli was removed from office, jailed, and tortured for his well-known republican sentiments. He was finally banished to his country residence in Percussina, Italy. Machiavelli spent his forced retirement writing the small body of political works that would ensure his literary immortality. Between



Niccolò Machiavelli *Imagno / Getty Images*

1513 and 1517, he completed *Discourses upon the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* and *The Prince*, neither of which was published until after Machiavelli's death.

Around 1518, Machiavelli turned from nonfiction to drama, writing *Mandragola* (1518). The play was popular with audiences throughout much of Italy for several years. His next effort, a military treatise published in 1521 and titled *The Art of War*, was the only historical or political work published during his lifetime. Meanwhile, Machiavelli had made several attempts to gain favor with the Medici, including dedicating *The Prince* to Lorenzo. In 1520 he was appointed official historian of Florence and entrusted with minor governmental duties. His prodigious *History of Florence* (1532) carefully dilutes his republican platform with the Medicean bias expected of him. In 1525 Pope Clement VII recognized his achievements with a monetary stipend. Two years later, the Medicis were again ousted, but Machiavelli's hopes for advancement under the revived republic were frustrated, for the new government was suspicious of his ties to the former ruling family. Disheartened by his country's internal strife, Machiavelli fell ill in 1527 and died a disillusioned man, his dream of an operational republic unrealized.

Works in Literary Context

Up to Machiavelli's time, other political theorists had masked issues of leadership in vague diplomatic terms in

their writings. Machiavelli presented his theses in direct, candid, and often passionate speech, using metaphors and examples that readers could easily understand. He was, in many ways, a superb propagandist, convincing others to accept his perspectives through well-turned exaggerated phrases, polished language, and masterly composition.

Pragmatism and the Nature of Mankind Two philosophical perspectives guided almost all of Machiavelli's writings: political pragmatism—or real-world practicality, free of wishful thinking—and the idea that people are fundamentally flawed with selfishness. Unlike what so many detractors have claimed, however, Machiavelli's plans for obtaining and maintaining power were not wholly evil. He placed some limited restrictions on bad actions, including the idea that cruelty must be swift, effective, and short-lived.

Until Machiavelli, writers, thinkers, and philosophers typically had a Christian view of history, attributing political actions to an omnipotent divine power. Machiavelli had a much more worldly perspective, believing in humanity's capacity for determining its own destiny. Fundamental to his understanding of history and politics, therefore, were concepts that had nothing to do with religion: *fortuna* and *virtù*. *Fortuna*, or fortune, gave or took away a political leader's opportunity for decisive action. Bad luck, Machiavelli thought, could sometimes undermine even the most brilliant leaders. Similarly, *virtù* in politics was nothing like Christian virtue. For Machiavelli, it meant having an effective combination of force and cleverness, as well as a touch of greatness. Leaders who had this characteristic and who were also smiled on by *fortuna*, Machiavelli argued, had the best chance of remaining in power.

It is not clear precisely when or how Machiavelli developed his notions about politics, but it is assumed that he was influenced in his youth primarily by his reading of Livy's history of the Roman Republic and later by his own observations. What is better known, however, is the extensive influence his work had on later writers. Some 395 direct references can be found to Machiavelli in Elizabethan literature, including the work of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, and the literature of the 1600s is steeped in his philosophy and what his philosophy came to represent. The authors and playwrights John Webster, Philip Massinger, John Ford, John Marston, Cyril Tourneur, and Thomas Middleton are all so heavily indebted to him, either in the form of revulsion or delight, that they could be called the children of Machiavelli.

Influence on Political Science Primarily on the strength of the *Discourses* and *The Prince*, Machiavelli has been called the founder of empirical (observation-based) political science, having a noticeable influence on the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon and on the thought of such modern political theorists as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Georges Sorel, and Robert Michels. While *The Prince* receives by far the majority of attention from scholars and critics,

Machiavelli's *Discourses*, in particular, had an influence and significance as an early treatise on republicanism. But precisely how significant Machiavelli's political thinking was for the development of modern republicanism remains controversial. Some contemporary scholars nevertheless argue that he was an important contributor to the emergence of liberal ideas of freedom and civic virtue in England and the United States through his influence on such thinkers as Marchamont Nedham, James Harrington, John Locke, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, David Hume, the baron de Montesquieu, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton.

Works in Critical Context

Throughout the centuries, Machiavelli has been loathed by some critics and loved by others. His works leave plenty of room for personal interpretation, inviting multiple perspectives. Most often, criticism of Machiavelli's ideas are bound up with criticism of the actions of people or characters who hold them, and they are not necessarily always the same thing.

Reaction to *The Prince* was initially—but only briefly—favorable. Catherine de' Medici was said to have enthusiastically included it, among others of Machiavelli's writings, in the education of her children, but the book quickly fell into widespread disfavor, becoming viewed as a handbook for atheistic tyranny. *The Prince*, and Machiavelli's other writings, were placed on the pope's Index of Prohibited Books in 1559. Toward the close of the sixteenth century, the influential Innocenzo Gentillet held *The Prince* responsible for French political corruption and for widespread contribution to any number of political and moral vices. Gentillet's interpretation of *The Prince* circulated throughout Britain and influenced Shakespeare and Marlowe. In the prologue to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (circa 1589), "Machevil" addresses the audience at length, at one point typifying the Elizabethan perception of Machiavelli by saying, "I count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance." Here, and in the works of Marlowe's contemporaries, Machiavelli was depicted as an agent of all that Protestant England despised in Catholic Italy.

One seventeenth-century commentator, philosopher Pierre Bayle, went against the trend and found it strange that "there are so many people, who believe, that Machiavel teaches princes dangerous politics; for on the contrary princes have taught Machiavelli what he has written." Since Bayle's time, further analysis has prompted the most prolonged and animated discussion relating to the work: the true intent of its creator. Was the treatise, as Bayle suggested, a faithful representation of unethical princely conduct that might justify its historian as a simple truth-teller? Or had Machiavelli, in his manner of lively presentation, written the book to promote his own opinions? A single conclusion about the author's motive has not been drawn, although patterns have certainly emerged in the history of Machiavelli criticism.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Machiavelli's famous contemporaries include:

Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492): This diplomat, politician, and patron of scholars, artists, and poets was a leading member of the ruling Medici family in Florence, Italy, during the Italian Renaissance.

Vasco da Gama (1469–1524): This Portuguese explorer was among the most successful in the European Age of Discovery. He commanded the first ships to sail directly from Europe to India.

Michelangelo (1475–1564): A famous Italian Renaissance painter, sculptor, architect, poet, and engineer best known for his sculpture of the biblical king David, his paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and his paintings on the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519): This scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, sculptor, architect, botanist, musician, and writer was also one of the greatest painters of all time (most famous for the *Mona Lisa*) and is often considered to have been the model "Renaissance man": someone who can do many different kinds of things with equal excellence.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506): Italian navigator, colonizer, and explorer who was instrumental in the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

Sandro Botticelli (1444–1510): Italian painter of the Florentine school during the early Renaissance and best known for his masterpieces *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*.

For sheer volume and intensity, studies of *The Prince* have far exceeded those directed at Machiavelli's *Discourses*, though the latter work has been acknowledged as an essential companion piece to the former. All of the author's subsequent studies treating history, political science, and military theory stem from this voluminous dissertation containing his most original thoughts. Less flamboyant than *The Prince* and narrower in its margin for interpretation, the *Discourses* contains Machiavelli's undisguised admiration for ancient governmental forms, and his most eloquent, thoroughly explicated republicanism.

So long as the means and ends of politics are seen to be at odds, people will be discussing Machiavelli. By and large, commentators have come to weigh the integrity of Machiavelli's controversial thought against the pressing political conditions that formed it. Some scholars, like Roberto Ridolfi, have endeavored to dislodge the longstanding perception of Machiavelli as a ruthless character: "In judging Machiavelli one must . . . take account of his anguished despair of virtue and his tragic sense of evil. . . . [On] the basis of sentences taken out of context and of outward appearances he was judged a cold and cynical

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Machiavelli will forever be associated with political maneuvering. Here are some other works that deal with power politics.

Arthashastra (most likely the fourth century BCE), a political treatise by Chanakya. This is an ancient treatise of political realism on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy, disclosing to a king what calculating and sometimes brutal measures he must carry out to preserve the state and the common good. The author was known as the Indian Machiavelli.

Richard III (1597), a play by William Shakespeare. In this powerful drama, Shakespeare's Richard III stops at nothing to gain the throne.

Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman (2005), a memoir by Otto von Bismarck. This multivolume collection of nineteenth-century German chancellor Bismarck's writings reveal a political mind as subtle and hard as Machiavelli's.

man, a sneerer at religion and virtue; but in fact there is hardly a page of his writing and certainly no action of life that does not show him to be passionate, generous, ardent and basically religious.”

Responses to Literature

1. How can Machiavelli's concept of war be understood as an art?
2. Where do you draw the ethical line when it comes to attaining power and maintaining it? Do the ends always justify the means?
3. Describe the ideal qualities of Machiavelli's leader as represented in *The Prince*. Are many, few, or all of these ideals shared by successful politicians today?
4. What are the stereotypes that have been assigned to Machiavelli, and what are their sources and motivations?

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Alistair Stuart MacLean

BORN: 1922, Glasgow, Scotland

DIED: 1987, Munich, West Germany

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

HMS Ulysses (1955)

The Guns of Navarone (1957)

Ice Station Zebra (1963)

Where Eagles Dare (1967)

Bear Island (1971)

Overview

Despite being one of the world's best-selling writers, Alistair MacLean was consistently modest about the literary merits of his twenty-eight novels of action and adventure. He always insisted that he was a storyteller rather than a novelist, and he felt great regret that he had never written what he regarded as a "good" book. MacLean was, however, proud of his ability to create fast-moving, exciting action-adventure stories.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Gaelic Beginnings Alistair Stuart MacLean was born on April 28, 1922, in Glasgow, Scotland. He was the third of four children born to Alistair, a Church of Scotland minister, and Mary Lamont MacLean, a prize-winning singer. Soon after Alistair's birth, the family moved to the country district of Daviot, six miles south of Inverness. The MacLeans were Gaelic speakers. At his father's insistence, Alistair did not learn English until he was seven and spoke only Gaelic at home until the age of fifteen. He was educated at the local primary school in Daviot.

In 1936, when Alistair was fourteen, his father died. By this time both his older brothers had left home, one to study medicine and one to serve in the merchant marine fleet. Mary MacLean moved back to Glasgow in the spring of



Alistair MacLean with his wife Marcella Georgeus D. Morrison / Express / Getty Images

1937 with Alistair and his younger brother, Gillespie. Alistair obtained a bursary to Hillhead High School in Glasgow.

Maritime Work and the Theater of War To support his widowed mother, MacLean left school and took a job at a shipping firm in the summer of 1939, just before the start of World War II. In 1941 MacLean enlisted in the Royal Navy. After initial training, he became a leading torpedo operator on the HMS *Royalist*, an escort ship for convoys taking supplies to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), one of the Allied Powers. MacLean fictionalized his experiences vividly in his first novel, *HMS Ulysses* (1955). The *Royalist* served in the Mediterranean and the Aegean, taking part in the 1944 bombardment of shore targets on Nazi-occupied Greek islands. MacLean used this experience as source material for his second novel, *The Guns of Navarone* (1957), and its sequel, *Force 10 from Navarone* (1968). In 1945 the *Royalist* was sent to the Far East, playing an important part in the liberation of Singapore. This theater of war provided the background for MacLean's third novel, *South by Java Head* (1958).

School and Marriage World War II ended in 1945, shortly after the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. On March 26, 1946, MacLean was officially released from the Royal Navy and, like many war veterans, went back into civilian life. In the autumn of 1946 he began to study English literature at Glasgow University, supporting himself by working in a post office and sweeping streets. He earned a second-class honors degree and graduated with a master of arts degree in 1950.

During the summer of 1949, MacLean worked as a hospital porter at the King George V Sanatorium in Surrey, where he met his future wife, Gisela Heinrichsen. They married on July 2, 1953. Gisela might have provided the inspiration for one of MacLean's later heroines, Helene Fleming of *Night Without End* (1960).

From Educator to Writer By the time of his marriage, MacLean had a secure job as a teacher of English, history, and geography at Gallowflat Secondary School in Rutherglen, south of Glasgow. His pupils recall him as a good teacher, although MacLean later said that he did not enjoy the work and had taken the job because it was

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

MacLean's famous contemporaries include:

Benjamin Creme (1922–): British painter, author, esotericist, and lecturer who champions the second coming not of Jesus Christ but of Maitreya (the new Buddha).

Jean-Luc Godard (1930–): French and Swiss filmmaker best known for being one of the pioneers of the French New Wave.

Norman Lear (1922–): American television writer and producer who has become a legend for producing such iconic shows as *All in the Family* and *Maude*.

Nathalie Sarraute (1900–1999): Russian Jewish lawyer and writer of French literature, better known as one of the pioneers of the *nouveau roman* style of writing.

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): German politician and leader of the Nazi Party; he is most famous for precipitating World War II, which included the genocide of approximately 6 million Jewish people in addition to other casualties.

“the logical thing to do with an honours degree in English.” Meanwhile, MacLean had begun writing in his spare time. In 1954 his short story “The Cruise of the Golden Girl” was published in *Blackwood's Magazine*.

A Turn for the Better MacLean's career took a dramatic turn for the better. In March 1954 he won first prize in a short-story competition run by the *Glasgow Herald* with his story “The Dileas.” Not only did the prize money enhance his teacher's income, but it led to MacLean's being sought out by a publisher eager to put more of his work into print. Ian Chapman, who worked for the Glasgow publishing firm Collins, found his wife crying over MacLean's story in the *Glasgow Herald*. Intrigued, he read “The Dileas” himself and sought out its author. Chapman met MacLean several times during the spring and summer of 1954 and urged him to write a novel. Although initially reluctant, MacLean began to write *HMS Ulysses* in September of 1954, shortly after the birth of his first son, Lachlan. A mere ten weeks later he presented Chapman with the finished manuscript. Chapman's initial reaction was that “he's written so fast it can't possibly be any good.” He changed his mind as soon as he read it, however, and gave MacLean a sizeable advance, becoming MacLean's publisher and lifelong friend.

Phenomenal Success *HMS Ulysses* was published in September of 1955. By spring of 1956 it had sold a quarter of a million copies. Motion picture rights were sold, an American edition was published (1956), and serial rights were sold to the popular British magazine *Picture Post*. *HMS Ulysses* became one of the best-selling

British novels of the twentieth century. Encouraged by the novel's phenomenal success, MacLean began a second book, *The Guns of Navarone*. Yet ever cautious, MacLean kept his job as a schoolteacher, being uncertain as to whether the success of his first book was just a fluke. He need not have worried: *The Guns of Navarone* (1957) was also a resounding success. In addition to astounding book sales, in 1961 *The Guns of Navarone* was made into a highly successful movie starring Gregory Peck, Anthony Quinn, and David Niven.

Giving up Writing The blockbuster success of his first two novels prompted MacLean to give up teaching and become a full-time writer. To escape England's punitive tax system, he and his family moved to Switzerland before the publication of his third novel, *South by Java Head*, in 1958. From this time onward MacLean usually wrote a novel per year, several of which were to be adapted for film—including, among others, *Ice Station Zebra* (1963; made into a film in 1968).

With the completion of *Ice Station Zebra* in 1963, however, MacLean announced his decision to give up writing and become a hotelier. He had become disillusioned with writing and was sure that owning property would be a “more worthwhile occupation.” He returned to England, moved to Cornwall, and bought the famous Jamaica Inn (known for being a base for pirates and smugglers in the eighteenth century). MacLean felt “more in contact with real life in one hour [selling trinkets in the Jamaica's souvenir shop] than during nine years of writing novels.”

The hotel project proved a disaster, and MacLean lost a good deal of money. He found writing had become “attractive again.” He continued to produce best sellers, including *Bear Island* (1971), published a year after he and the family moved to the Villa Murat, near the Swiss village of Celigny. By that year, MacLean's books had sold 23 million copies, earning him millions of pounds. He was one of the world's highest-paid novelists.

Divorce and Declining Years In 1972 MacLean divorced Gisela and married Marcelle Georgeus, a French movie executive and former actress. The marriage was not a happy one. By the time of the publication of *Breakheart Pass* in 1974, MacLean was losing a long-term struggle with alcoholism. Whether alcoholism is to blame is not known, but by the mid-1970s MacLean's creativity was beginning to suffer. Literary critics found his plots to be implausible and his dialogue stilted or melodramatic.

In January 1987 MacLean suffered a series of strokes and collapsed while on a visit to Munich. He was rushed to a hospital, but nothing could be done to save him. He died on February 2, 1987, and was buried near Gisela's home in Celigny. MacLean's obituary in the *Scotsman* summed up his achievement: “He wrote books to make air journeys tolerable and to take people out of themselves for a few hours. He did it very well...he gave countless hours of pleasure to millions of people. There are worse epitaphs.”

Works in Literary Context

MacLean's brief, first-person narrative style owed something to the writing of Raymond Chandler, whose works he greatly admired. While his first four novels relied on third-person narrative, starting with *Night Without End* (1960), he began using a first-person point of view instead—to “develop a technique of completely impersonal story-telling in the first-person.”

Plain and Clear Prose Style and Common Themes

From his first story, MacLean wrote in plain, clear prose and combined excitement and humor. This technique became the standard for his best novels. In these works he often pitted his protagonists against an adverse environment and their own internal terrors. This he did to illustrate a common theme: the power of raw human courage. MacLean's heroes struggle to overcome incredible dilemmas through a combination of intelligence and physical force.

Following his commercial success and the popularity of his narrative style, MacLean became an influential figure in the thriller genre, influencing later authors, including Dick Francis and Desmond Bagley. After his death in 1987, sales of MacLean's books declined. However, less so in Europe than in the United States.

Works in Critical Context

Generally speaking, critics disliked MacLean's work, but the public loved it, and his books sold by the millions. Sometimes he is faulted for his melodramatic style and one-dimensional characters. However, MacLean is also praised for his swift narratives and labyrinthine plots. This mixed regard can be seen for a work such as *Ice Station Zebra*.

Ice Station Zebra The novel is set on a U.S. Navy nuclear submarine that takes a British government representative to the Arctic to investigate the mysterious disappearance of members of a scientific expedition. Based on MacLean's usual meticulous research, the book gives a detailed and convincing picture of life aboard a submarine. Again written in the first person, the book combines excitement, humor, and suspense.

Even the *Times Literary Supplement*, which usually belittled MacLean's work, praised *Ice Station Zebra*, although the reviewer, Stephen Kroll, commented that the hero “sounds at times too much like an American private detective.” For many of MacLean's readers, however, this characteristic is one of the attractions of the novel. The hero's wry asides enliven the book and add humor to what would otherwise be a grim tale of adversity and mass murder.

Responses to Literature

1. A common MacLean theme concerns the power of human courage. In an extended definition, explore courage: What is the origin of the word? What do

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like MacLean, explored themes of racism and courage amid a backdrop of war:

A Farewell to Arms (1929), a novel by Ernest Hemingway.

This story of Italian ambulance driver Frederick Henry in love and in war is often considered the definitive war novel.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), a novel by Erich

Maria Remarque. This tale of a German student and his friends, who sign up to fight in World War I and discover not glory but alienation and death, is considered one of the most powerful antiwar novels ever written.

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This book tells the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

Winds of War (1971), a modern epic by Herman Wouk. In this immense work, readers get an epic, adventure, and love story at once.

you associate with the word? Make a list. What is your personal definition of courage? As a group, compare and contrast your definitions.

2. Compare your definition of courage with the attitudes and behaviors of one of MacLean's main characters. Does the character qualify as courageous according to your definition? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. MacLean was praised for his use of cinematic techniques in his fiction writing. Consider one or two MacLean novels and identify passages where the writing is movie-like. For instance, one technique employed by the author is crosscutting—two scenes are alternated back and forth to indicate they are happening at the same time. Find examples of this and other cinematic elements.
4. Because of his skillful inclusion of cinematic technique in his fiction, several of Maclean's novels were adapted as movies. These movies were as successful and as popular as the works upon which they were based. Choose one of MacLean's adapted novels and compare it to its movie counterpart. How similar are the two? In what ways are they different?

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Maurice Maeterlinck *Maeterlinck, Maurice, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

❏ Maurice Maeterlinck

BORN: 1862, Ghent, Belgium

DIED: 1949, Nice, France

NATIONALITY: Belgian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Intruder (1891)

Pelléas and Mélisande (1892)

Interior (1895)

The Blue Bird (1908)

Overview

Maurice Maeterlinck, a Belgian of Flemish descent who wrote in French and spent most of his life in France, had a powerful effect on the theatrical world of the late nineteenth century and was the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911. The writer is probably best remembered for his abstract and minimalist experiments, which influenced both his contemporaries and later playwrights who developed the movement called the Theater of the Absurd. In a prolific career that extended into the ninth decade of his life, he published twenty-eight plays, two collections of poetry, two short stories, many volumes of popularizing essays on philosophical, occult, and scientific subjects, and an autobiography.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Lawyer to Writer Maurice Maeterlinck was born in Ghent, Belgium, on August 29, 1862. His family was bilingual and divided its time between a town house in Ghent and a country estate at Oostacker, where Maeterlinck's father raised bees and devoted himself to gardening. Maeterlinck was educated at a convent school, the private Institute Central in Ghent, and the Jesuit Collège Sainte-Barbe, where he met and became friends with the future poet Charles Van Lerberghe. From 1881 to 1885 Maeterlinck studied law at the University of Ghent. At the successful completion of his law studies, the young man persuaded his father to send him to Paris for several months, ostensibly to study French law. Instead of studying, however, Maeterlinck spent his time there in literary circles, where he made important contacts that would later help in his theatrical career.

Returning to Ghent, Maeterlinck practiced law until 1889, "failing brilliantly," in the words of his first biographer, Gerard Harry. During these years, Maeterlinck saw the first publication of his literary work: In 1886 he had his first short story published, and in 1887 twelve of his poems appeared in *Le Parnasse de la jeune Belgique*. In 1889 Maeterlinck published his translation of Jan van Ruysbroeck's fourteenth-century mystical treatise, *Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, as well as a volume of poetry and a play titled *La Princesse Maleine*.

Except for the play, Maeterlinck's early works were unnoticed by the critics. Maeterlinck, seeking to establish a literary reputation, sent a copy of *Princess Maleine* to the influential symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé, much impressed, gave the play to Octave Mirbeau, who published a highly enthusiastic review of the play in *Le Figaro*, thereby launching Maeterlinck's career as a playwright and man of letters. During the next five years Maeterlinck wrote the plays for which he is best known in literary and theatrical history.

Success as a Playwright Maeterlinck's first produced play was *The Intruder*, which opened in Paris on May 21, 1891. His next play opened in the same year on December 7, and his fourth and perhaps best-known play, *Pelléas and Mélisande* opened in 1893. Maeterlinck's next three plays were published together in 1894 as "three little dramas for marionettes." This marked the end of the first phase of Maeterlinck's theatrical production.

At the beginning of 1895, he met Georgette Leblanc, who became his companion and collaborator and for whom he wrote a series of plays incorporating, but by no means entirely affirming, a feminist perspective. In 1896 Maeterlinck moved from his native Belgium to France, and in 1897 he and Leblanc set up house in Paris. During the next eight years, he collaborated with the actress, writing plays specifically for her to perform.

In 1911 Maeterlinck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Other official honors followed; for example, the Belgian government sponsored an official "Festival Maeterlinck" and presented the writer with the insignia of Grand Officier de l'Ordre de Léopold.

Later Life During World War I, Maeterlinck attempted to join the French Foreign Legion but was denied due to his age. Thus, instead of serving in the military, he wrote several propagandistic pieces, including *The Burgomaster of Stilmonde*. In 1919 Maeterlinck married Renée Dahon, a young woman whom he had met at a rehearsal of the French production of *The Blue Bird* in 1911. In 1920, during a lecture tour in the United States, Maeterlinck accepted a commission by producer Samuel Goldwyn to write movie scenarios for silent films. Apparently three scenarios were completed, although none was filmed.

Always a solitary figure, Maeterlinck withdrew in his later years to a series of country estates, settling at last into Orlamonde, a palatial residence on the French Riviera that he decorated in art nouveau style and where he played the roles of the country gentleman and reclusive man of letters. Although he continued to write plays after World War I, Maeterlinck was best known in the last four decades of his life for his essays and his courtly lifestyle.

In 1940 Maeterlinck and his wife settled in the United States and remained there until the end of World War II. In 1945 the couple returned to their estate in the south of France. Although Maeterlinck continued to write plays after World War II, he had little to do with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Maeterlinck's famous contemporaries include:

- Anton Chekhov** (1860–1904): Chekhov was a Russian playwright and short-story writer whose innovations influenced the development of the modern short story.
- O. Henry** (1862–1910): O. Henry was a prolific American short-story writer whose works were known for their cleverness and surprise endings.
- Claude Debussy** (1862–1918): Debussy was a French composer of impressionist music.
- William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Yeats was an Irish poet and dramatist widely considered one of the most important figures in twentieth-century literature.
- Georges Feydeau** (1862–1921): Feydeau was a French playwright known for writing light comedies and farces.
- Arnold Schoenberg** (1874–1951): Schoenberg was an Austrian-born composer of expressionist music.
- Albert I** (1875–1934): Albert was the king of Belgium from 1909 until his death in 1934.

theatrical life, and his later plays were seldom performed. The aged writer died from a heart attack on May 6, 1949.

Works in Literary Context

Symbolism Maurice Maeterlinck is considered the major dramatist of the symbolist movement, representing in the theater the philosophy and aesthetics associated with such earlier writers as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. The influence of the French symbolists is apparent in Maeterlinck's first plays, which signified a rejection of the predominantly naturalistic drama in European theater of that time. Rather than following in the "slice of life" tradition, which primarily dramatized social themes, Maeterlinck created an otherworldly, often nightmarish reality to explore the inner lives of his characters.

Literary historians generally agree that Maeterlinck's most innovative and influential works were the plays that he wrote in the 1890s and early 1900s. These early plays were especially influential outside France, particularly in Russia.

Realism In a second phase of his work, Maeterlinck turned from his previous studies of dream-world anxiety and began composing more markedly realistic and psychological plays, such as *Monna Vanna*. His greatest theatrical success, *The Blue Bird*, is a return to symbolist drama but one in which the allegorical characters and events communicate a new mood of hope based on his studies in the more positive forms of occultism. Maeterlinck's concern with supernatural realms is complemented

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Maeterlinck often made use of Gothic settings that evoked a sense of metaphysical horror. Here are some other works that use a similar approach:

"The Raven" (1845), a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. This poem is an eerie and comic psychological study of perversity and fear.

Heart of Darkness (1902), a novella by Joseph Conrad. This short novel explores both inner and outer horrors through the journey of a merchant seaman into the interior of Africa.

Rosemary's Baby (1967), a novel by Ira Levin. This novel centers around an actor who makes a deal with the devil to gain success and fame.

The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), a novel by Ann Radcliffe. This novel follows the fortunes of Emily St. Aubin during her stay in a haunted decaying castle. Radcliffe's book has often been cited as the archetypal Gothic romance.

by his naturalist studies, such as *The Life of the Bee*, which lend a scientific dimension to the predominantly spiritual character of his work.

Tranquil Agnosticism Maeterlinck's later works show that any specific spiritual convictions he might have had became less definite toward the end of his life. After a career-long devotion to the varieties of mysticism, Maeterlinck implied in his ultimate metaphysical studies a final abandonment of the pursuit for religious certainty and a lapse into tranquil agnosticism.

Maeterlinck was critical of tragedians who centered their works on sensational scenes of violence while "most of us pass our lives far from blood, screams and swords and whereas man's tears have become silent, invisible and almost spiritual." What can one learn, he asks, from beings who have only one obsession and who have no time to live because they must kill a rival or a mistress? Maeterlinck preferred drama that explores the mysteries of man's humble, ordinary life—its beauty, its grandeur, and its gravity, which he himself may not be able to observe on a daily basis. Maeterlinck famously illustrated this notion of everyday mystical experience through the image of an old man seated in an armchair who listens, albeit unwittingly, to all of the "eternal laws" pervading his home. For Maeterlinck, this "immobile old man actually lives a more profound life than the lover who strangles his mistress, or the captain victorious in battle or the husband who avenges his honor."

Legacy The legacy of Maeterlinck is double-edged. On the one hand, he was one of the most innovative dram-

atists of fin-de-siècle Europe. His plays point forward to the intimate theater of August Strindberg, Max Reinhardt, and other major twentieth-century playwrights and directors. They played a crucial role in the development of Russian symbolism. The early plays influenced William Butler Yeats, and their emphasis on myth and sacrifice also points toward the dramatic theories and practice of Antonin Artaud. Maeterlinck himself was capable of taking up and transforming a new form in the theater, such as the station drama. But, on the other hand, his writing, especially his essays, sometimes lapses into clichés and apolitical complacency. At his worst he warns of the dangers of New Age philosophy. At his best he reminds one of the necessary relationship between good theater and the unknown.

Works in Critical Context

Maeterlinck's first drama, *Princess Maleine*, was described by the French critic Octave Mirbeau as being superior in beauty to William Shakespeare. Later critics generally concurred in judging favorably these early symbolist dramas, and on their strength Maeterlinck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911. Though for the most part highly regarded, Maeterlinck has been accused by some critics of cultivating a sense of mystery for its own sake, resulting in obscure images that fail to resonate with the audience or reader.

Two Fairy Tales In the 1890 review that brought *Princess Maleine* and its author to the attention of the literary world, Octave Mirbeau celebrated Maeterlinck's play by comparing it to the work of William Shakespeare. Maeterlinck's fourth play, *Pelléas and Mélisande*, first performed in 1893, became his best known, partly because of Claude Debussy's 1902 musical adaptation.

Pelléas and Mélisande To this day, *Pelléas and Mélisande* remains one of the most representative masterpieces of symbolist drama. Like *Princess Maleine*, this ethereal play also turns to fairy tales for its subject, and its evocation of a vaguely northern kingdom ruled by an aging and ineffectual king strongly recalls *Princess Maleine*. J. W. Mackail, writing in 1897, states of the play, "all but faultless in its construction, more than faultless in its beauty, it is difficult to speak with tempered praise, or in words that shall not seem extravagant." Calvin Evans in *Modern Drama* contends that the play "represents one of the few dramatic expressions of the Symbolist movement, a movement which, above all, challenges the primacy of the intellect." Joan Pataky Kosove, in an essay for *The French Review*, writes, "The play leaves us sad but somehow satisfied. . . . Indeed one is tempted to call its outlook anti-tragic."

Responses to Literature

1. Why does Maeterlinck use fairy tale settings in many of his plays? What kinds of effects do these settings have on the messages and meanings of his works?

2. Maeterlinck's dramas explored the mysteries of ordinary life and eschewed thrilling scenes of violence. In what ways did this choice make his plays more effective than more sensationalized drama, and in what ways did it diminish their impact?
3. In addition to writing plays, Maeterlinck also wrote numerous essays, some of them on the aesthetic and philosophical principles that informed his writing. Imagine that you are a playwright and write an essay that expounds the principles that would underlie your writing.
4. Maeterlinck was noted for being an influential symbolist, but his works also contain many elements of realism. Write an essay that describes Maeterlinck's mixture of symbolism and realism, commenting on the effectiveness of this approach.

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Jayanta Mahapatra

BORN: 1928, Cuttack, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

A Rain of Rites (1976)

Relationship (1980)

Life Signs (1983)

Temple (1989)

Bare Face (2000)

Overview

Jayanta Mahapatra writes largely about the people and places of Orissa, an eastern Indian state. His sensibility is deeply submerged in the local landscape—a vast panorama of temples, rivers, mountains, marketplaces, cafés, brothels, and forests—and the rites, rituals, ceremonies, and seasons of the place.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Christian Upbringing in a Hindu Land Jayanta Mahapatra was born on October 22, 1928, in Cuttack, Orissa, the first child of Lemuel Mahapatra, an inspector of primary schools, and Sudnasubala Rout Mahapatra, a housewife of simple habits and no education. Mahapatra was brought up in a lower-middle-class Christian family, according to Christian rules and in strict separation from the surrounding Hindu way of life. The tension slowly began to affect his personality, and he began to have differences with his mother in ways that constrained him from relating with others outside the house. Mahapatra thus developed a permanent aversion to his mother (although he was fond of his father) and grew up as a reclusive, dreamy, and detached child. His family situation and dreamworld made for complex emotions that found their way into his poetry. Mahapatra's father was always a source of consolation, education, and inspiration for him. The two enjoyed a pleasant and gratifying relationship. Lemuel Mahapatra fostered in his son a love for narrative art and stimulated his creative imagination early in life.

During Mahapatra's youth, India was officially a colony of the British Empire. This led to a mix of both traditional Indian and contemporary English cultural influences, most notably the widespread use of the English language. A popular movement supporting the independence of India gained momentum throughout the 1920s and 1930s, largely due to the leadership of Mohandas Gandhi. The country finally achieved its independence from Britain in 1948, while Mahapatra was still a student.

From Physics to Poetry In 1949 Mahapatra received a master's degree in physics and began to work as a lecturer at Ravenshaw College. Subsequently, he taught at other colleges in Orissa. He wrote poems while working as a teacher but had a late start as a professional writer—he was in his early forties before he started to publish his works. Successive volumes of his verse brought him recognition not only in India but also in other countries.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mahapatra's famous contemporaries include:

Edward Albee (1928–): Albee is an American playwright who writes mainly black comedies in the tradition of the theater of the absurd.

Noam Chomsky (1928–): Chomsky is an American linguist and political activist best known for his critiques of the modern media and U.S. foreign policy.

Philip K. Dick (1928–1982): Dick was an influential American science fiction writer whose works have been adapted to several popular films.

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Fuentes is a Mexican novelist who has been a significant influence on contemporary Latin American literature.

Gabriel García Márquez (1928–): García Márquez is a Colombian fiction writer widely considered one of the most important authors of the twentieth century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

Hosni Mubarak (1928–): Mubarak is an Egyptian statesman who has been the president of Egypt since 1981.

Elie Wiesel (1928–): Wiesel is a Jewish writer and political activist who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He is best known for writing about his Holocaust experiences.

In 1975 Mahapatra became the first Indian to receive the coveted Jacob Glatstein Memorial Prize, given by *Poetry* magazine. From 1976 to 1977 Mahapatra was a visiting writer in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa; he traveled to Australia and Japan in 1978 and 1980. He continued to teach physics until he retired in 1986.

Works in Literary Context

In his poetry Mahapatra transforms the profane into the sacred in order to describe the cultural life of his people. The setting of Orissa, however, is always intersected by the poet's own experience and reactions to his homeland. As Devinder Mohan observes, "His self-exploratory journey leads him to the point of heightened self-awareness, then to self-actualization and of course ultimately towards self-realization, which has forever remained the highest goal of every *sadbhaka* (devout practitioner) of all arts." Like T. S. Eliot, Mahapatra creates order out of disorder and cohesion out of chaos by way of performing his duty as a poet.

An Indian Sensibility in the English Language

Mahapatra writes in English, yet his poetry is distinctively Indian. His struggle in his early poetry was compounded by his efforts to synchronize his Indian experience with

the English language. For this reason, in his early verse, "earth, life, and language become exterior blinking spaces, isolated yet longing for a sense of simultaneity, a sense of possibility of segmental intermingling." Mahapatra carried out this crusade of experimentation and exploration both in theme and language.

Many of Mahapatra's poems feature his home, Orissa, a rural region of India. His themes are the traditional, apparently timeless concerns of his country—spirituality, hunger, death, and rebirth. His questioning, somber poetry evokes the Indian belief in cultural stasis and inevitability. He explains that he was raised to believe that "things happen as they do because . . . of things that have happened before, and that nothing can change the sequence of things." Thus, Mahapatra often writes of immediately perceived physical and social realities without probing their causes.

A further reason for the dominance of the rural Indian sensibility in Mahapatra's poetry may lie in his lack of acquaintance with a world of poetic tradition. Mahapatra is a physics professor who admits, "I haven't read much poetry in my life," and he did not start writing until he was almost forty years old. He produced his first volumes of poetry after briefly experimenting with writing short fiction and participating in writers' workshops.

Discursive Style Mahapatra is known for his distinctively discursive poetic style. The absence of sympathy with suffering humanity in much Indo-Anglian poetry troubles him. For that reason, he emphasizes key contemporary social issues in his verse, thereby generating critical debate among readers and scholars. His subjects include poverty, hunger, prostitution, death, suicide, crime, war, violence, religious bigotry, and the exploitation of women and children. These problems afflict the entire Indian nation, and he feels them even more acutely in his native state of Orissa. Mahapatra has formulated a poetic idiom of his own; he does not concern himself with coherence in metrical arrangements and grammar in syntactical constructions in capturing the human soul.

Mahapatra uses symbols and images from his immediate surroundings (often found in nature) for an easy evocation of the native sensibility. His allusions to a variety of subjects make his poetry richer in meaning and resonant with deep erudition. As Ujjal Dutta notes, "Mahapatra is fond of juxtaposition of images in a sequence of disorder. . . . For him, the external reality is not something out there, but something that yields to the pressure of the consciousness and is sieved through it."

Works in Critical Context

Perhaps because Mahapatra started publishing poetry only in his early forties, he was not initially taken as seriously by reviewers and researchers as other Indo-Anglian poets. It therefore took some time for him to make his presence felt on the Indian literary scene. Like the works of his favorite poet, John Keats, Mahapatra's

early poems met with a hostile reception from many critics and commentators. Slowly, however, Mahapatra gained ground in Indian criticism and eventually came to be recognized as one of the significant poets of his generation.

Mahapatra's first volume published in the United States, *A Rain of Rites* (1976), was highly acclaimed and resulted in his attendance at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. His later verse heightened his reputation as an accomplished and prolific poet. Mahapatra has now become a favorite with scholars and readers in India and abroad. Reviewers have responded warmly and favorably to his poetry. He has by now acquired the status of a leading Indian-English poet and is currently one of the most active Indian cultural ambassadors to the rest of the world. His rich perception of life and experimentation with the English language have made him a major and mature presence in contemporary Indian poetry in English.

A Rain of Rites *A Rain of Rites* was published a few days before Mahapatra's departure to the United States in 1976. In response to this work, Dick Allen observed that "Mahapatra, in contrast to most American poets, is most at home with poems which touch the beyond. The poetry of *A Rain of Rites* is that of a man taking up a stance against or within mysteries, sensitive to the moods of days and years." The collection is largely devoted to women and their position in Indian society. The subject is mainly the maltreatment of women in India and their passive submission to fate for reasons such as hunger and poverty. His preoccupation with women in these poems reflects his experiences with his mother in the past and his relationship with his wife in the present. Reviewing this collection, Vernon Young wrote, "The manner of apprehension in [Mahapatra's] wonderful, sensate poems inevitably brings to the tongue the word 'sophistication.' . . . Evident in every cadence is the long over-ripening of a sardonic wisdom, the tired consciousness of too many beginnings."

Responses to Literature

1. Mahapatra demonstrates a strong concern for the dominance of senseless violence in modern society. Can literature adequately express the nature of this violence? How, if at all, does poetry such as his contribute to ending this violence?
2. Mahapatra initially had little knowledge of world literature, but after receiving critical attention, he traveled widely. Can you detect a transformation in his poetry to reflect a wider global viewpoint? What aspects of his career as a physics instructor influence his poetry?
3. Mahapatra often features his hometown of Orissa in his poems, which he uses to explore traditional and timeless concerns of India such as spirituality, hunger, death, and rebirth. List some of the traditional

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In his poetry, Mahapatra explores contemporary social issues and emphasizes present-day problems, such as poverty, violence, war, and exploitation. Here are some other works that take a similar approach:

"I Explain a Few Things" (1937), a poem by Pablo Neruda.

This poem starkly depicts the devastating result of the Spanish civil war.

Age of Iron (1990), a novel by J. M. Coetzee. This novel depicts the social and political consequences of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Blood Diamond (2006), a film directed by Edward Zwick.

This film explores the connection between diamond merchants and the financing of warlords that fuels ongoing conflicts in Africa.

and timeless concerns of your culture, and write a poem making use of your home town to explore these concerns.

4. Choose several of Mahapatra's poems that deal with a single contemporary social problem and write an essay discussing how his poetry brings to light important aspects of this problem.

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☒ Naguib Mahfouz

BORN: 1911, Cairo, Egypt

DIED: 2006, Cairo, Egypt

NATIONALITY: Egyptian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Palace Walk (1956)

Palace of Desire (1957)

Sugar Street (1957)

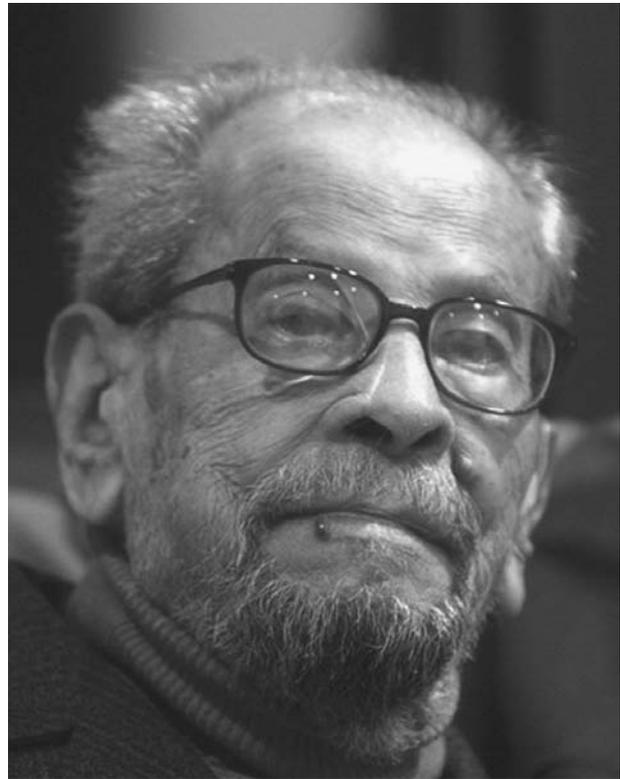
Miramar (1967)

Overview

Considered modern Egypt's foremost literary figure, Naguib Mahfouz is credited with popularizing the novel and short story as viable genres in Arab literature. He is best known for novels in which he creates psychological portraits of characters whose personal struggles mirror the social, political, religious, and cultural concerns confronting Mahfouz's Egyptian homeland. Mahfouz was the first Arabic-language author awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, winning in 1988.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Began Writing Career at University Born Najib Abdel Aziz al-Sabildi Mahfouz on December 10, 1911, in Cairo, Egypt, he was the son of Abdel Aziz Ibrahim Mahfouz, a merchant, and his wife, Fatma Mostapha. Because his siblings were many years older, he grew up essentially an only child. In 1934, Mahfouz received a degree in philosophy from the University of Cairo and did postgraduate study in philosophy for the next two years. At the time, Egypt was a protectorate of the United Kingdom but was also a nominally sovereign country ruled by a king although it also had a growing nationalist movement. While the United Kingdom controlled foreign affairs, defense, security of communications, and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the situation changed in 1936. That year, King Faruk ascended to the throne and the



Naguib Mahfouz AP Images

Anglo-Egyptian Treaty limited British control to only armed forces in specified areas, primarily along the vital Suez Canal.

Encouraged by Salama Musa, an Egyptian socialist and editor of an intellectual journal, Mahfouz began writing short stories while he was a university student. Many of these stories were collected in *Whisper of Madness* (1939). Mahfouz's first published book was *Ancient Egypt* (1932), a translation of a history text written in English by James Baikie. Mahfouz's first three novels—*Abath al-aqdar* (1939), *Radubis* (1943), and *Kiftah Tiba* (1944)—are historical narratives set in ancient Egypt that contain allusions to modern society.

The Cairo Trilogy In response to the political and social conditions in Egypt during World War II, Mahfouz turned his attention from ancient history to the contemporary situation of Egypt. During World War II, a massive conflict launched in Europe because of the aggressive territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany, Egypt served as a base of operations for the Allies (Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States). While the war was being fought, the Egyptian nationalist movement continued to grow. After World War II ended, the government in Cairo abrogated the 1936 treaty in 1951. Because of royal extravagance, government corruption, and delays in social and political reforms, King Faruk was removed from power in a coup. He was first replaced by his seven-month-old son,

but in 1953, a republic was proclaimed, with General Muhammad Naguib serving as Egypt's first president. In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of the revolution, forced Naguib out of power and took control of Egypt himself. Egypt sought international support for key internal projects, and also unified with the Syria in the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958–1961).

In what is known as the Cairo Trilogy, Mahfouz created a series of portraits of several Cairo families. *Palace Walk* (1956), *Palace of Desire: Cairo Trilogy II* (1957), and *Sugar Street: The Cairo Trilogy III* (1957) depict families and communities from the middle and lower classes of Egyptian society, some struggling to climb the social ladder, others trying to survive, while the country witnesses a period of turmoil both domestically and internationally. The novels cover such topics as the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 (in which nationalist Egyptians attempted to gain independence from Great Britain), the effects of modernization on cultural and religious values, and changing social attitudes toward women, education, and science.

Disillusionment Although Mahfouz had supported the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, which successfully overthrew the monarchy and eventually established Egypt as a republic, he became disillusioned with the resulting social, educational, and land reforms. After seven years of silence, Mahfouz wrote the pessimistic and allegorical novel *Children of Gebelawi* in 1959. In thinly veiled allusions to the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the narrative relates humanity's quest for religion, beginning with Adam and Eve and ending with the last prophet—represented as the modern man of science—who is inadvertently responsible for the death of Gebelawi (God). Although it was published in Lebanon in 1967, the novel has not yet been published in Egypt. A 1969 serialization of the novel inflamed Islamic fundamentalists and led to the banning of the manuscript's publication in book form. A new English translation of the book appeared in 1995 under the title *Children of the Alley*.

Social Commentary Fiction Drawing on his education in philosophy and his familiarity with the cities of his country, Mahfouz was committed to writing fiction that revealed the hopes and concerns of the Egyptian people. The portraits he drew were not always flattering. One such novel is *Miramar* (1967), one of Mahfouz's most acclaimed later works, which examines the behavior of several male residents in an Alexandrian boardinghouse when a beautiful and naive young rural woman is hired as a maid. The novel expands from this situation to become a general critique of Egyptian society.

Al-Hubb tahta al-matar (1973) and *Al-Karnak* (1974) contrast the repressive actions of authorities during the postrevolutionary regime of Nasser with the idealism of young people hoping for political and social reform. Reflecting the content of much of Mahfouz's later work, these novels also examine the disillusionment

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mahfouz's famous contemporaries include:

Menachem Begin (1913–1992): Begin, the sixth prime minister of Israel and cowinner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for Peace with Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, began the 1982 Lebanon War as a retaliatory gesture against the Abu Nidal terrorist organization.

Jimmy Carter (1924–): After a term marred by inflation, fuel shortages, and U.S. hostages held in Iran, Carter, the thirty-ninth president of the United States, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for the humanitarian work he did in the years after his presidency.

Tawfiq el-Hakim (1898–1987): This Egyptian dramatist and novelist established serious drama as an Egyptian art form. His plays include *The People of the Cave* (1993).

Anwar el Sadat (1918–1981): Sadat, the third president of Egypt and cowinner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for Peace with Israeli prime minister Begin, was assassinated by radicals opposed to his position on Israel.

Yusuf Idris (1927–1991): Many of the realistic short stories by this Egyptian writer are in the vernacular. His short-story collections include *Akrhas Layali* (1954).

Salman Rushdie (1947–): Rushdie is an Indian writer and novelist who uses magical realism in his novels. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) led to protests and death threats over his portrayal of the prophet Muhammad.

and malaise that affected Egypt following the country's military defeat in the 1967 Six Day War against Israel. (The Six Day War pitted Israel against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. During the six-day conflict, Israel conquered the Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and Golan Heights, which became the so-called Occupied Territories.)

Turned to Fables Many of Mahfouz's later works were extended fables. Taking its inspiration and form directly from *A Thousand and One Nights*, *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981) is more a loosely connected set of tales than a novel. A later novel, *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, (1983) is loosely based on a classic of Western literature, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

Mahfouz's influence on Egyptian literature expanded to several other areas. He contributed columns on a wide range of topics to *Al-Ahram*, a leading Egyptian newspaper. As a dramatist and scriptwriter, Mahfouz endeavored to elevate the intellectual content of theater and film in Egypt. He also published several collections of short stories. *God's World: An Anthology of Short Stories* (1973) offers English translations of stories from several phases of Mahfouz's career.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Social realism is a style of literature that gives an uncensored view of society. Here are some other works of social realism:

The Doll (1890), a novel by Boleslaw Prus. This novel examines the lives of two men living in Warsaw, Poland, under Russian rule.

Middlemarch (1871–1872), a novel by George Eliot. Subtitled “A Story of Provincial Life,” this novel examines the life and moral code of a small English town.

Les Misérables (1862), a novel by Victor Hugo. This novel, later turned into a Broadway musical, follows a group of poor French citizens and criminals during and after the Napoleonic period.

Oliver Twist (1837–1839), a novel by Charles Dickens. This novel follows an orphan through the gritty underworld of Victorian London.

The Red and the Black (1830), a novel by Stendhal. This coming-of-age novel tells of a young man’s struggle to make a future for himself in France.

Nobel Laureate In 1988, Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his dedication to developing a tradition of modern fiction in Arabic. Along with worldwide acclaim, the award also brought Mahfouz a death sentence. The same year Salman Rushdie was denounced for his *Satanic Verses* (1988), an influential Egyptian Muslim cleric issued a death sentence against Mahfouz for his notorious novel *Children of Gebelawi*. On October 13, 1994, the anniversary of the announcement of his Nobel Prize, Mahfouz was stabbed in the neck by a religious fanatic. Although Mahfouz recovered, the attack left him unable to write with a pen, forcing him to dictate his later works, which included his 1997 autobiography *Echoes of an Autobiography*.

In the years preceding his death, several of his fictional works appeared in English translation, including his first three novels. His last “writing” consisted of short pieces that he dictated for publication, including weekly newspaper columns. Up until his death, Mahfouz published accounts of his own dreams in a Cairo periodical. These pieces appeared in book form under the title *The Dreams* in 2005. Mahfouz died on August 30, 2006, at the age of ninety-four.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Mahfouz’s prose works—which have been compared in spirit, tone, and ambience with the raw social realism of nineteenth-century novelists Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens—reflect Egypt’s volatile political history and illustrate the distressing conditions

under which the Arab poor live. Mahfouz himself cited Russian novelists Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky as inspirations.

Oppressed Characters From the very beginning, Mahfouz’s interest in characters who strive to endure societal oppression has been evident. Early stories in *Hams al junun*, for instance, explore themes of conformity and deviance from the norm. In works such as *Midaq Alley* (1947) and *The Beginning and the End* (1951), Mahfouz blends formal language with colloquialisms. At the same time, he depicts the struggle and turmoil of individuals in repressive environments.

Literary Techniques In his later works, Mahfouz uses literary devices such as allegory, symbolism, and experimental narrative techniques to explore social and cultural disillusionment, spiritual crisis, alienation, political issues, and corruption in contemporary Egypt. *The Children of Gebelawi*, for instance, is an allegory in which Egypt’s contemporary social concerns are linked with those of the past. Modeling his characters on religious figures including Jesus, Adam, Satan, Moses, and Muhammad, Mahfouz explores such broad themes as the nature of evil and the meaning of life. Furthermore, he proclaims science and technology to be humanity’s modern prophets.

In the 1960s, Mahfouz abandoned the traditional realism that characterized his previous works. He produced shorter novels that employed many of the experimental techniques—including stream of consciousness and scriptlike dialogue—of modern Western literature. For example, *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961) demonstrates Mahfouz’s experiments with unconventional techniques as he uses a stream-of-consciousness narrative to create a psychological portrait of a wrongly imprisoned man who upon his release seeks revenge. This is one of several works in which Mahfouz depicts an outlaw who is rebelling against repressive values, often embodied by unscrupulous officials.

Works in Critical Context

Mahfouz pioneered the development of the modern Arabic novel and became its first genuine master. Edward Said wrote, “Naguib Mahfouz’s achievement as the greatest living Arab novelist and first Arab winner of the Nobel Prize has in small but significant measure now retrospectively vindicated his unmatched regional reputation, and belatedly given him recognition in the West.”

Khan al-khalili Most critics agree that Mahfouz’s talent matured with *Khan al-khalili* (1945), his first novel set in contemporary Cairo. M. M. Badawi commented, “*Khan al-khalili* began a series of eight novels in which [Mahfouz] emerged as the master *par excellence* of the Egyptian realistic novel, the chronicler of twentieth-century Egypt, and its most vocal social and political conscience.... [Mahfouz’s Cairo] is a recognizable

physical presence; its powerful impact upon the lives of characters is as memorable as that of Dickens's London, Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg or Zola's Paris."

The Cairo Trilogy; Roger Allen called the Cairo Trilogy "a monumental work," and Sasson Somekh added that the author's masterpiece is also "symbolic . . . because through the development of its characters you can see the development of modern Egypt. . . . No future student of Egyptian politics, society or folklore will be able to overlook the material embodied in Mahfouz's Trilogy."

Responses to Literature

1. When you read, do you read to escape or to learn about the world? Do you think realistic fiction has a place for today's readers? Why or why not? Write a paper that outlines your opinions.
2. Hip-hop artists often defend the language and topics of their lyrics by saying that they are just reflecting their society. Why do their lyrics not change once they become successful and move to wealthy neighborhoods? Are they genuinely concerned about their roots, or are they capitalizing on what made them successful? Create a presentation, using musical examples, to illustrate your points.
3. Some well-known artists, such as Bono, U2's lead singer, actively work for social justice. Do artists—singers, writers, filmmakers, and others—have a responsibility to promote solutions to the social issues they bring up? Write a paper in which you explain your arguments.
4. Books are banned in the United States today, not just in Arab countries. Are there ever cases where banning books is justified, such as books about terrorism or ones that promote violence against a particular group? Research book banning in the United States. Write an essay arguing for or against the practice of banning books. Use specific examples in your argument.

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Stéphane Mallarmé

BORN: 1842, Paris, France

DIED: 1898, Valvins, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Hérodiade (1864)

Afternoon of a Faun (1876)

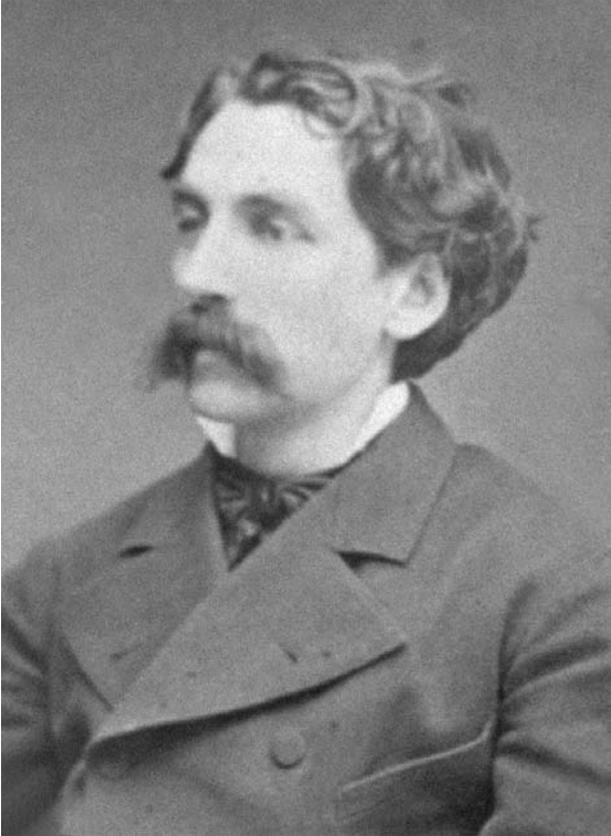
A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance (1914)

Overview

Stéphane Mallarmé is one of France's four major poets of the second half of the nineteenth century, along with Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. Although he was recognized as a prominent artist during his lifetime, much of his poetry was acknowledged to be difficult to understand because of its fractured syntax, ambiguous expressions, and obscure imagery. Critics during his lifetime and afterward have continued to disagree as to the precise interpretations of many of his later works.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Bourgeois Upbringing Stéphane Mallarmé—as he is known, although his birth certificate records his first name in its more usual French form of "Etienne"—was born into a middle-class family on March 18, 1842, in Paris. His mother died when he was seven years old, after which his maternal grandmother played an increasingly significant role in his upbringing. His grandmother sent Mallarmé to various boarding schools, generally attended by the upper-class, where he often felt self-conscious and ill-at-ease because of his bourgeois background. When Mallarmé was fifteen, his youngest sister and closest companion, Maria, died. Her death strongly affected



Stéphane Mallarmé *Mallarme, Stephane, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Mallarmé's development as a poet; he abandoned his youthful interest in Romantic lyricism and turned to Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (1857, *Flowers of Evil*) for inspiration. Mallarmé's earliest work, in which he chose to describe imaginative visions rather than depict reality, dates from this period. While his family disapproved of his interest in Baudelaire and confiscated his copy of the book, Baudelaire remained Mallarmé's first strong literary influence.

First Publication, Language Studies, and Return to France In 1860, Mallarmé received his baccalaureate degree from the university in Sens; after graduation he became an apprentice at his grandfather's registry office. He also became friends with professor Emmanuel des Essarts, with whom he discussed literature and art. Encouraged by des Essarts, Mallarmé published his first sonnet in 1862 in the short-lived literary journal *Le papillon*. Shortly after the sonnet's publication, Mallarmé met his future wife, Maria Gerhard, a schoolteacher who accompanied him to London in 1863. Mallarmé aspired to become a foreign-language teacher and to learn English in order to translate Edgar Allan Poe. He succeeded, and his translation, *Les poemes d'Edgar Poe*, appeared in 1888. When he returned to France at the age

of twenty-two, Mallarmé married Gerhard and took a teaching position in Tournon, a small village on the Rhone River.

Poetic Struggles Although Mallarmé had already begun to develop his poetic and linguistic theories, his work and meditations were constantly interrupted by what he considered the tedious duties of a schoolteacher. His pupils openly mocked him, and when Mallarmé's poem "L'azur" (*The Sky*) was published, along with ten other pieces in *Le parnasse contemporain* in 1866, the students scrawled the poem's final line over the blackboard: "Je suis hanté. L'azur! l'azur! l'azur!" (I am haunted. The sky! The sky! The sky!) Their ridicule, however, did not inhibit Mallarmé's poetic studies, and although his writing habits were slow and meticulous, his work began to receive attention in literary circles. Poe replaced Baudelaire as Mallarmé's dominant literary influence, and he began to write lengthy, dreamlike poems that reflected the poetic theories of his new mentor.

Inventing Language from Poetics After his poems were published in *Le parnasse contemporain*, Mallarmé wrote a letter to his friend Henri Cazalis in which he explained his developing poetic aesthetic and his work on a prose poem titled *Hérodiade*: "[I] am inventing a language that must necessarily spring from a very new poetics, which I could define in these few words: *to paint, not the thing, but the effect it produces*. The poetic line should be composed not of words but of intentions, and all words should efface themselves before sensations. I mean—for the first time in my life—to succeed. I would never pick up a pen again if I failed." *Hérodiade* is a reworking of the biblical story about Hérodiade, or Salome, as she is also known, who causes John the Baptist's murder by decapitation. In Mallarmé's interpretation, Hérodiade is a melancholic and chaste princess who eschews her own sexuality in order to attain moral perfection. This work, which remained unfinished, caused Mallarmé much anguish throughout his life as he struggled to properly convey his poetic vision.

An Exploration of Sensuality As Mallarmé was struggling to complete *Hérodiade*, he began to compose *Afternoon of a Faun*, which he intended to be a companion piece to the first work. In a letter to Henri Cazalis dated 1865, Mallarmé explained his motivations: "I have been at work for ten days. I have left *Hérodiade* for the cruel winter: That solitary work had sterilized me, and in the interval I am rhyming an heroic interlude with a *Faun* as its hero." While *Hérodiade* is a mystical interpretation of sexual repression, *Afternoon of a Faun* addresses how sensuality, ardor, and physical sensation attain significance through meditative introspection. Therefore, while *Hérodiade* suggests chastity can lead to spiritual perfection, *Afternoon of a Faun* explores the nature of sensual pleasure only to reveal the deceptive nature of illusion and reality.

The Belle Époque The period during which Mallarmé grew up and attained success was known in France as the Belle Époque, or Beautiful Era. This was a time notable throughout Europe for its political stability and economic prosperity. The Franco-Prussian War, the culmination of many years of hostilities between Germany and France, came to an end in 1871; the devastation of World War I would not arrive until more than forty years later. Because of this relative peace and prosperity, the Belle Époque led to a flowering of the arts, with performance arts, such as plays and music, enjoying a boost as audiences sought light entertainment. Mallarmé's work was perfectly suited for the French audiences of this time period.

The Tuesday Poets In 1875 Mallarmé moved to Paris, where he obtained a teaching position at Collège Rollin and came in contact with such notable Parisian poets as Paul Verlaine and Théodore de Banville. Gustave Kahn, in particular, admired Mallarmé's poetry and began to call on him in the evening. Others soon joined him, and Tuesdays became the day that Mallarmé received visitors. As the number of guests grew, the legendary Tuesday evening meetings or *les mardis* (Tuesdays) grew famous, and the faithful became known as *les mardistes*. In 1884, Mallarmé finally achieved widespread recognition when two books by *mardistes* were published: *Les poètes maudits* by Verlaine, and *A rebours* by Joris Karl Huysmans, which hailed Mallarmé's prose poems. By 1891, such young poets as Paul Valéry and André Gide had joined the group. At these meetings, Mallarmé lectured on how to use words as symbols and was revered by his audience as an oracle. Because of the tremendous influence he had over the writers of his time, Mallarmé became known in certain literary circles as the "Master of Symbolism."

Persistence Against All Odds Uncertain and despondent though he may have felt late in life, Mallarmé nevertheless recovered sufficiently from his pessimism on occasions to write elegies to Baudelaire in 1895, to Verlaine in 1897 and to Vasco da Gama in 1898. This last poem, "Au seul souci de voyager" (To life's sole goal of sailing onwards) was written to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of da Gama's voyage to India, but Mallarmé also saw, in the great explorer's persistence in sailing into the unknown against all odds, an image of his own unwavering pursuit of the ideal world, despite disappointments and setbacks. Mallarmé died in Valvins later that year.

Works in Literary Context

Mallarmé's vision was of the transcendent word—of language that belongs neither to the world of things nor to the human world of speech but rather to primordial emptiness, in which the splendor of beauty exists as a sheer presence, a pure quality not based on any reality but the written word. Although Mallarmé has sometimes been hailed as the originator of the symbolist school, his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mallarmé's famous contemporaries include:

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926): A transitional figure between traditional and modernist poetry, Rilke—who wrote in both German and French—is considered one of Germany's greatest poets.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright, Yeats had won the Nobel Prize in Literature even before his greatest works were published.

Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922): Inspired by his work with speech therapy, Bell experimented with mechanical speech devices. These experiments eventually led to his most famous invention, the telephone, a device he would later repudiate as too much of a distraction.

Wyatt Earp (1848–1929): One of the prototypical figures of the American Old West, lawman and entrepreneur Earp is best remembered today for his role in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, along with Doc Holliday and Earp's brothers Virgil and Morgan.

Sanford B. Dole (1844–1926): A member of the wealthy family that owned the well-known pineapple-canning company, Dole was instrumental in forcing the late-nineteenth-century transition of Hawaii from a monarchy to an American territory.

Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935): A French artillery officer who was charged with treason in 1894 in what was revealed to be an anti-Semitic conspiracy. His subsequent exoneration was one of the biggest political scandals of its day.

poetic aesthetic was greatly influenced by the works of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud, other French poets also associated with the developing trend toward symbolic representation of human emotion.

Symbolism Stéphane Mallarmé was one of the foremost contributors to French symbolism, a nineteenth-century poetic movement whose members believed that the function of poetry was to evoke moods and impressions rather than to describe concrete realities. Mallarmé differed from his predecessors, however; while he was dissatisfied with conventional interpretations of existence, he attempted to delineate other possibilities in a way that appealed not only to the heart but also to the intellect. Charles Chadwick explained: "[Mallarmé] could not simply take refuge in some exotic memory or vision of an ideal world. If there was an alternative to reality then it must, in Mallarmé's view, be capable of rational definition." Attempting to transcend the limits of language and therefore locate what he believed was the purity and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mallarmé is often cited as one of the first symbolist poets. His work was an inspiration to a generation of artists. Some of the best-known symbolist poetry includes:

A Season in Hell (1873), an extended poem by Arthur Rimbaud. The prototypical *enfant terrible*, Rimbaud had written his best work and quit poetry before his twentieth birthday; *A Season in Hell's* hallucinogenic imagery would continue to influence many artistic movements beyond symbolism.

Sagesse (1880, Wisdom), a poetry collection by Paul Verlaine. A collection of poems dealing with maturation, Verlaine's poetry was, like his partner Rimbaud's, influential on nonsymbolist poets and artists in the twentieth century.

Au Le jardin de l'infante (1893, Garden of the Princess), a poetry collection by Albert Samain. The volume that made Samain's name as a poet, these melancholy verses are firmly placed within the symbolist genre.

perfection inherent in poetry, Mallarmé often utilized innovative syntax, complex metaphors, and experimental typography to create poems that challenge readers' perceptions.

Throughout his career, Mallarmé's insistence that the reader work with the poet in search of symbolic meaning, his disdain of immediate gratification in literature, and his vacillating poetic intentions also proved problematic; he intermittently suffered from depression and creative sterility. When a student announced, for example, that he had deciphered the meaning of one of Mallarmé's sonnets, the poet replied: "How wonderful! You have figured out in one week what has taken me thirty years." Although Mallarmé failed to achieve his goals, his small output forms an important contribution to the symbolist movement and contemporary poetry because it demonstrates his belief that the inexplicability of poetry can be consciously expressed through precise symbolic language. Guy Michaud explained: "[Mallarmé] liberated the poetic instrument once and for all from the harness of three centuries of rationalistic and French rhetoric, up to and including Romanticism. He . . . forcefully established that the function of the poet, and of the writer in general, is to decipher the mystery of the world."

While Mallarmé's oeuvre is small and has sometimes been faulted for being deliberately obscure and ambiguous, his influence on twentieth-century art and literature has been lasting and profound. In addition to having a direct impact on the poetry of his disciple Paul Valéry,

Mallarmé also inspired symbolist and avant-garde theater, surrealism, the New Novelists, and such respected writers as Franz Kafka and T. S. Eliot. Charles Morice emphasized the enormous effect of Mallarmé's complex and revolutionary verse on modern letters: "[Anyone] who has listened to him, dates from him."

Works in Critical Context

Mallarmé was recognized by his contemporaries to be a highly influential innovator of French letters. Since his death in 1898, his reputation as the literary "Master of Symbolism" has grown steadily, reinforced by his ongoing influence on French literature. While critical response has not been without negative commentary on the difficulty of some of his works, by and large, Mallarmé has retained his status a significant literary figure of the nineteenth century whose work is deserving of both praise and scholarship.

Experimental Poetry Yields a Mixed Critical Response Mallarmé abandoned traditional grammar, vocabulary, and syntax in the majority of his poetry, but it is his final work, *A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance*, which is considered his most experimental. Expressing his interest in the musical and polyphonic possibilities of the verse form, Mallarmé's words are set in different typefaces to produce visual representations of the poem's subject and to accentuate the intertwining of thought and sound. By tracing the fate of the ambiguous character known only as the "Master," Mallarmé attempts to recapitulate the role chance has played in the evolution of humankind. Although critics have praised Mallarmé's stylistic experimentations in *A Throw of the Dice*, they also note that the poem is occasionally strained and overambitious. F. C. Aubyn commented: "[Poetry] cannot be read exactly like music so . . . Mallarmé's harmonic intentions get lost in the typographical inventions. But its aesthetic beauty, visual as well as auditory, cannot be denied."

Mallarmé's teaching career and the demands of his disciples left him little time for writing in later years. Some of his finest works during this period are the short pieces he composed in honor of his colleagues, such as *Toast funebre*, written in 1873 to commemorate the death of the poet Théophile Gautier. In addition to celebrating Gautier's accomplishments, this poem also delineates Mallarmé's beliefs about the role of the artist in society and the meaning of poetry. Wallace Fowlie commented: "*Toast funebre* celebrates the essential paradox of poetry and of all art: the transitoriness of human experience fixed in a form of permanency." In 1875, Mallarmé wrote "The Tomb of Edgar Poe," a celebration of Poe's "eternal genius" despite his tragic life. Considered one of the greatest symbolist poems written in the late nineteenth century, "The Tomb of Edgar Poe" is one of the most frequently quoted works in French literature. In "Tombeau," his tribute to Paul Verlaine, Mallarmé disregards Verlaine's

controversial bohemian lifestyle, emphasizing instead the poet's unique contribution to French Symbolism. F. C. St. Aubyn underscores the poetic merit of Mallarmé's tributes: "Among [the 'tombs' and homages] are to be found some of Mallarmé's most famous and most difficult poems."

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the nature of obscure allegory in Mallarmé's verse. Do you feel such obscure analogies benefit a poem, or detract from it? Why?
2. Mallarmé's works have been described as "decadent." Do you agree with this? What evidence do you see to support this label?
3. What does Mallarmé mean when he uses the term *Transposition*?
4. Do you agree with Mallarmé's position that poetry is the only way to adequately express our feelings and that ordinary language is a disappointment? Are there other forms of communication that serve the same function as Mallarmé's conception of poetry?

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Thomas Malory

BORN: c. 1410, Newbold Revel, Warwickshire, England

DIED: 1471, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485)

Overview

Thomas Malory is recognized as a towering figure of medieval English literature. His masterwork, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), is the best-known treatment in English of the tales of the exploits and deeds of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Fought in Hundred Years' War Malory's birth date is uncertain, but believed to be just before 1410. He was probably the son of John Malory, esquire, of Newbold Revel. As a young man, Malory served with the Earl of Warwick's forces in France. England had been at war with France since 1337 in what came to be known as the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). The conflict was over territories controlled by the English in France. At the war's end, England was expelled from the continent except for Calais.

Criminal Activities Malory succeeded to his father's estate in 1433 or 1434. Far from being the sort of man likely to write what William Caxton called a "Noble and Joyous book," Malory was a ruffian of the most extreme kind. He was indicted for theft in 1443 and served in parliament later in the decade. He is next heard of in 1450, when he evidently embarked upon an appalling career of rape, robbery, and brutal violence. All together, this "servant of Ihesu [Jesus] bothe day and nyght" (as he claimed of himself) was to spend years in prison for his crimes.

The most damaging document relating to Malory is the memorandum of an inquisition held at Nuneaton in 1451. Therein, it is stated that on January 4, 1450, Malory led an attempt to murder Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham. A few months later, he raped Joan Smyth of Monks Kirby, and the following week he extorted one hundred shillings from Margaret Kyng and William Hales. He raped Joan Smyth again on August 6, stealing forty pounds Sterling in goods belonging to her husband. On August 31 he extorted twenty shillings from John Mylner.

Almost a year later, on June 4, 1451, Malory and five others stole seven cows, two calves, a cart worth four pounds Sterling, and 335 sheep from a Warwickshire farm. He was arrested a month later and placed in custody, but he broke out of prison by swimming the moat. The very next day, he reconvened his band of abettors. That night, he led an attack on Coombe Abbey, stealing jewels, cash, religious objects, and other valuables. The next night, he returned to Coombe for more booty, this time inciting a riot in which he may have personally beaten the abbot bloody with a stick.

Imprisoned In spite of the seriousness of the charges brought at Nuneaton, Malory was never brought to trial for the crimes enumerated in the memorandum, though he was summoned in March 1452 to answer charges not sufficiently explained the year before. For a time, he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Malory's famous contemporaries include:

John Lydgate (1370–1451): Monk and poet who was one of the most prolific English authors of the fifteenth century. His translations include the *Troy Book* (1412–1420).

Johannes Gutenberg (1400–1468): German printer credited with the invention of moveable type that revolutionized the printing industry.

Joan of Arc (1412–1431): A national hero of France who led the French army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War before being martyred.

Henry VI (1421–1471): King of England for much of the fifteenth century, overseeing the end of and England's loss in the Hundred Years' War.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506): Italian explorer credited as being the first European to land in the New World.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519): Multitalented Italian who is often cited as the archetype of the "Renaissance Man." His paintings include the *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503–1506) and *The Last Supper* (1495–1498).

apparently continued his criminal enterprises, jumping bail in 1454 to avoid felony prosecution. He was subsequently imprisoned in Colchester, but escaped and was recaptured and sent to Marshalsea Prison. Malory was called before the King's Bench on January 16, 1456, and released on a royal pardon. He was sent to Ludgate, a debtor's prison, and released on bail in 1457.

Wrote Book While in Prison Malory soon was returned to prison, again at Marshalsea. His last recorded arrest came in 1460 when he was sent to Newgate Prison. It is believed that he completed *Le Morte d'Arthur* while serving time there. Nothing further is known of him until 1468, when he was specifically excluded from King Edward IV's general pardon of August 24. Malory died in March 1471, probably of the bubonic plague (a deadly bacterial infectious disease that was responsible for millions of deaths during this period), while still serving time at Newgate.

Works in Literary Context

Arthurian Background It is Malory who gave Arthur to England, and who shaped the legend adapted into Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1855–1885) and T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958). Arthur began as little more than a tribal chieftain. He was elevated by Geoffrey of Monmouth (who still claimed to

be writing history) in his *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1138) into a great and tragic hero whose queen is coveted by Mordred. The story grew to huge proportions through the vast prose romances, a "Holy Grail," a "Lancelot," a "Merlin," and a "Death of Arthur" written in France in the thirteenth century.

Mythic Quality Malory knew these French sources, but it is his vision that gives the Arthurian legend its mythic quality, as he tells of men (and women) who are doomed because they love each other too much. It is likely that Malory began his reworking of this material with a rather pedestrian handling of a story of Arthur at war, the book that turns up finally as Book 5, the story of the war between Arthur and Emperor Lucius. This book, different in kind and mood from the rest of Malory's output, is based on a native source, the fourteenth-century *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, rather than the French romances that support the rest of the work. In this tale, Arthur and his knights seem much more warriors than courtiers, and there is little sense that Malory put his individual stamp on these characters.

Influence The width and variety of response to *Le Morte d'Arthur* suggests the strong appeal of the work to a variety of readers. As the single greatest repository of Arthurian legend in English, its influence upon poets, novelists, and scholars has been tremendous. Equally, *Le Morte d'Arthur* has stirred the imaginations of generations of readers whose love of the Round Table and all it represents is abiding.

Works in Critical Context

Malory's masterwork, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, is esteemed on several counts. It is a mirror of medieval culture and manners, a seminal work of English prose, and a narrative of enduring entertainment value. Yet *Le Morte d'Arthur* remains an enigma. Scholars are at odds about authorship, source material, authorial intention, narrative structure, and thematic content. Whatever puzzles it presents, however, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is an acknowledged literary milestone. In the words of critic William Henry Schofield, it is "the fountainhead of [English] Arthurian fiction."

Two Key Editions According to a statement at the end of the book, *Le Morte d'Arthur* was completed in "the six yere of the reygne of kyng edward the fourth," that is, between March 4, 1469, and March 3, 1470. It first saw print on July 31, 1485, in the workshop of William Caxton. Caxton's edition is divided into twenty-one books and 506 chapters. Caxton's was the only version known until 1934, when W. F. Oakeshott discovered a manuscript of *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the Fellows Library of Winchester College.

The Winchester text parallels the Caxton version closely except for the section treating Arthur's war with the Roman emperor Lucius, but it is a decidedly distinct text nonetheless. The manuscript, which was apparently

copied during the 1470s or early 1480s, is divided into ten parts, forming five larger units, corresponding to Caxton's Books I–IV, V–VII, VIII–XII, XIII–XVII, and XVIII–XXI. The manuscript was edited by Eugene Vinaver in 1947 as *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Its relationship to Caxton's version is not altogether clear and is the subject of ongoing discussion. All that is known for certain is that the manuscript did not serve as printer's copy for Caxton.

Controversy The chief controversy about Malory studies concerns the structural unity of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. As early as 1594, Sir Walter Raleigh criticized the "inevitably rambling structure" of the work. He claimed that "to attain to a finely ordered artistic structure was beyond Malory's power; the very wealth of legend with which he had to deal put it beyond him, and he is too much absorbed in the interest of the parts to give more than a passing consideration to the whole." Two decades later, George Saintsbury viewed Malory as a "compiler" as far as the narrative of *Le Morte d'Arthur* is concerned.

The discovery and publication of the Winchester Manuscript enriched the discussion. In the introduction to his edition of the text, Vinaver set forth revolutionary views. He maintained that, far from being a continuous narrative, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is a series of eight "separate romances." Caxton, he added, produced it as a single book under a "spurious and totally unrepresentative title." Hence Vinaver formulated the new title, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, to reflect this view. Vinaver's contention set the stage for a scholarly battle that has continued.

Vinaver himself never wavered from his conclusion, and his many writings on the subject won him powerful supporters. His critics, however, have pointed to Malory's own words as evidence of the unity of the work: "I pray you all, gentlemen and gentlewomen, that read this book of Arthur and his knights from the beginning to the ending." "This book" and "beginning to the ending" suggest, it has been claimed, a continuous narrative, not a series of independent tales. Internal evidence concerning continuity is often cited, but it is generally ambiguous and has been variously interpreted.

Critical Concerns through the Centuries The structural unity of *Le Morte d'Arthur* is such a dominant critical concern that other matters might seem relatively unimportant, but this is far from being the case. From its first printing onwards, readers and critics alike have embraced the work. Initially, commentators were at pains to demonstrate the historical veracity of Arthur and the Round Table. Caxton devoted nearly half of his preface to this matter, while William Stansby included a brief introduction to his 1634 edition in order to "confute the errors of such as are of an opinion that there was never any such man as king Arthur."

It was not until the late nineteenth century that *Le Morte d'Arthur* was "discovered" as a major work of literature. Before then, commentary focused more on

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Malory's work was one of the earliest and most influential versions of the Arthurian legend. Here are some other versions of King Arthur's life and deeds:

Idylls of the King (1856–1885), poetry by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Tennyson's cycle of poems relies heavily on Thomas Malory's work, with some expansions and changes.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889), a novel by Mark Twain. This novel is a modern reworking of the Arthurian legend that introduces the idea of time travel.

The Once and Future King (1958), a novel by T. H. White. This novel offers a personal reinterpretation of the Arthurian legend, updated for relevance in post-World War II England.

the entertainment value of *Le Morte d'Arthur* than on anything else. It took the textual pioneer H. Oskar Sommer and the aesthetic critic Andrew Lang to bring *Le Morte d'Arthur* into the mainstream of English literary history. Early commentators on the artistry of *Le Morte d'Arthur* viewed the work in practically ethereal terms. In the 1910s, Vida D. Scudder, a major early promoter of Malory, concluded: "Malory's style is truly 'the man.' It belongs to no school, is the result of no tradition. It is a gift from above."

Since Scudder's time, critics have explored many further aspects of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The "moral paradox" of a criminal author having written a work on "love, curtosye, and veray gentylnesse" has emerged as a major concern, while such smaller issues as novelistic elements, characterization, allegorical imagery, "courtly love," time patterns, formulaic language, neologisms, and dialogue in the work have been treated repeatedly.

Responses to Literature

1. Could any of Malory's female characters serve as role models for modern women? Write a paper that outlines your conclusions.
2. In what ways did Malory's personal life affect how he constructed his version of the Arthurian legend? Was he drawn to the Arthur story because it mirrored or differed from his life? Were there other myths or legends that his talents might have been useful for retelling if he had lived longer? Write an essay that offers your conclusions.
3. In the late nineteenth century, Mark Twain imagined what it would be like for a modern-day American to

time-travel back to King Arthur's day in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Write a story that shows what an American of the twenty-first century would make of Arthur's court.

4. Chivalry is an important concept in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Write an essay that gives your personal definition of chivalry and explains your view on its place in modern society.

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David Malouf

BORN: 1934, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

An Imaginary Life (1978)

Fly Away Peter (1982)

The Great World (1990)

Remembering Babylon (1993)

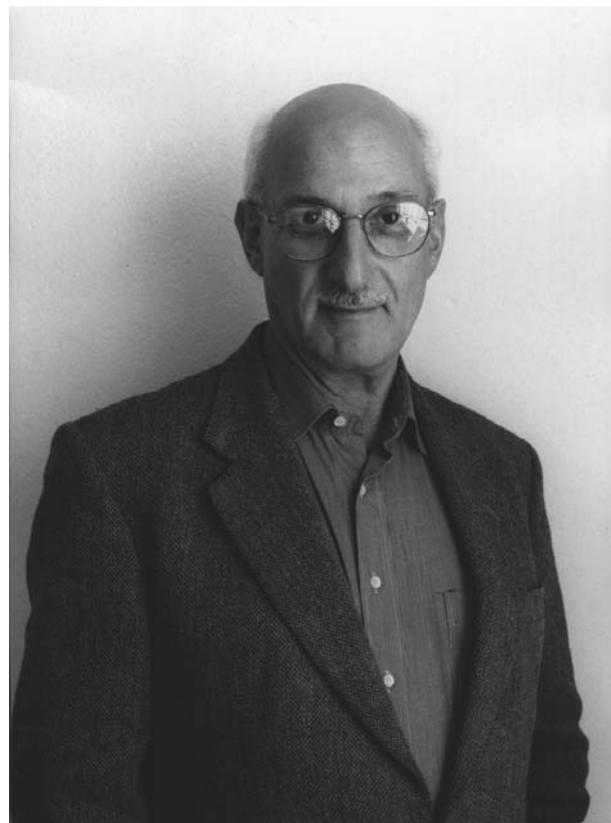
Overview

David Malouf enjoys a distinguished reputation, nationally and internationally, as a writer whose lyrical mappings of identity, place, and the body also bear upon questions of belonging and national identity. Crossing successfully from poetry to prose fiction in 1975, Malouf continues to write in a wide variety of forms and genres.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Place of Return David Malouf was born in Brisbane, Australia, in 1934 into a family of mixed British and Lebanese ancestry. Malouf's writing does not explicitly treat issues of ethnic minority or difference but instead draws upon European heritage in ways that engage primarily with the white mainstream of Australian literary culture.

After graduating with honors from the University of Queensland in Australia, Malouf departed for England, where he worked as a teacher from 1959 to 1968. On his return to his home country, Malouf took up a teaching post



David Malouf Malouf, David George Joseph, photograph. © by Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

in the department of English at the University of Sydney, where he taught for the next ten years. During this decade Malouf not only developed an increasingly sophisticated body of poetry but he also made his mark as a novelist with the publication of *Johnno* in 1975. Reviewers heralded this first novel as an innovative contribution to Australian writing, and thereafter Malouf's novels evolved in confidence, breadth, and complexity, ultimately earning him an international readership and reputation.

Europe Translated Upon winning a three-year fellowship from the Literature Board of the Australia Council in 1978, Malouf retired from teaching to commit himself full-time to writing. To date, Malouf is the author of at least six volumes of poetry, several editions of selected poems, six novels, two novellas, three short-story collections, many autobiographical and prose nonfiction publications, a series of libretti for opera, and an original play.

Living alternately in Tuscany and Sydney, Malouf has been able to harness his expatriate experience to situate Australian writing in an international frame, promoting the imaginative re-creation of both Australian and European identities. In the words of Martin Leer, Malouf "sees Australia as producing 'critical variants of Europe': it is 'Europe translated.'"

Works in Literary Context

Malouf's authorial range demonstrates unusual versatility, but his writing also exhibits remarkable consistency in approach, preoccupation, and style. Malouf advocates "a convergence of indigenous and non-indigenous understanding, a collective spiritual consciousness that will be the true form of reconciliation" in Australia. Malouf's writing maps encounters between self and other, tensions between exile and home, and relations between the individual and history—issues holding particular resonance for contemporary Australians. The transformations that, in Malouf's writing, are deployed to resolve these encounters—via death in the landscape, absorption into the other, experience of the limitless body, and immersion in the sacred—suggest the writer's belief in the efficacy and relevance of art, not merely as a powerful mode of expression but also as a strategy of belonging.

The "Noble Savage" Malouf's best-known work is the multiple award-winning *Remembering Babylon*. Updating the theme of the "noble savage," *Remembering Babylon* (1993) is set in nineteenth-century Australia and concerns Gemmy Fairley, an English citizen who is abandoned after making the crossing from Europe as a child. After living with the Aborigine people of Australia for a sixteen-year period, this "black white-feller" attempts to rejoin white Australian society, a community governed by European cultural norms and the English language. Various regarded by some settlers as a curiosity, a potential ally against the Aborigines, and an object of scientific wonder, Gemmy is also viewed with fear, loathing, and distrust. His initiation into white society, particularly after

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Malouf's famous contemporaries include:

Guy Debord (1931–1994): Debord was a French author and Marxist philosopher best known for his book *Society of the Spectacle*.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–): Gorbachev was the last leader of the Soviet Union, serving from 1985 until its collapse in 1991.

Joan Didion (1934–): Didion is an American writer well known for both her novels and her essays.

Jill Ker Conway (1934–): Conway is an Australian-born author who served as Smith College's first woman president from 1975 to 1985.

Halina Poswiatowska (1935–1967): Poswiatowska was a Polish poet who is considered one of the most important writers in modern Polish literature.

he is seen conversing with blacks in the Aborigine dialect, culminates with several settlers attacking him. Eventually he abandons the "civilized" ways of the whites and rejoins Australia's indigenous community.

Mixing Poetry and Prose Though his fiction has made a greater public impact, Malouf's poetry displays an artistry considered by some (particularly his fellow poets) to equal—if not eclipse—his prose writings. For Ivor Indyk, Malouf "remains a poet, writing in the medium of prose." From the outset, Malouf's poetic voice has been infused by a sense of immediacy, an intimacy of address, and, as Dennis Haskell observes, an emphasis on "presentation of the self."

Observing both the gravity and inventiveness of Malouf's poems—their often "anecdotal starting point" and their "sense of intellectual searching"—Thomas W. Shapcott argues that "process is centre-stage in Malouf's poetic world." Malouf's poems sometimes prefigure his fiction, especially in their recourse to meditation and the resources of memory. As Philip Nielsen points out, "The Judas Touch," an early poem dedicated to "John Milliner: drowned February 1962," foreshadows Malouf's first novel, *Johnno*. Likewise, Laurie Hergenhan shows how elements of "The Year of the Foxes" prefigure elements of Malouf's later fiction.

Experiments with the Novel Form Malouf's novels do not merely repeat the preoccupations of his poetry in another form, they also experiment with the novel as form, playing with its temporal constraints and possibilities. The intimacy of the poet's voice is modulated by the linear drive of narrative. Through the novels, Malouf explores intimate personal terrain in ways that dramatize

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Malouf uses historical fiction set in Australia to explore difficult questions of national and personal identity. Here are some other works that touch on similar questions through historical fiction tied to specific colonial locations:

A Lapse of Memory (1907), a novel by Victor Segalen. This novel explores the nature of traditional Tahitian culture by depicting the rise of Christianity on the island and the subsequent destruction of traditional religion.

Chaka (1925), a novel by Thomas Mofolo. This novel, based on the life of Zulu warrior-king Shaka, or Chaka, is an epic tragedy that depicts traditional African culture prior to the rise of colonialism and Christianity.

Strandloper (1996), a novel by Alan Garner. This novel tells the story of William Buckley, who is transported to Australia, escapes, becomes an Aboriginal lawgiver and healer, and returns to England thirty years later.

questions of Australian history and national identity. Malouf's exploration of monumental or emblematic episodes in Australian history, however (World Wars I and II, for example) is never directed by a strongly "historical" focus but proceeds by means of subjective experience and encounter. The linear thrust of history is interrupted and slowed by the personal experience of time and the expansion of the narrative.

In Malouf's novels, recurring scenarios cumulatively produce an elaborate network of ideas. These thoughts include, for instance, the narrated recollection of place (particularly of domestic interiors); the playing out of a dynamic between male alter egos or twinned characters (such male pairings are often triangulated by the inclusion of a third, female character); and exploration of the figure or role of the artist.

Works in Critical Context

Malouf's writings have been generally well received by both critics and readers. Literary scholars have focused on the postcolonial nature of his works, particularly his themes of personal and cultural identity, language, and nature. He has received praise from reviewers for his vivid, sensuous descriptions and evocative settings of his works. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1993 for *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf has been the recipient of many prestigious awards for fiction, poetry, and drama.

From An Imaginary Life to Remembering Babylon *An Imaginary Life* is arguably the most widely known and admired of Malouf's oeuvre (with the possible exception of *Remembering Babylon*, which bears many resemblances to *An Imaginary Life*). Both when

it was first published and during the subsequent years, the novel has attracted a great deal of critical attention, particularly as a text about the (post)colonial condition. For Gareth Griffiths, for example, *An Imaginary Life* suggests how texts can be "effectively open to the full complexity of the condition of post-colonial societies and the problems these societies now exhibit."

In the multiple award-winning *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf returns to the motif of the *enfant sauvage* (wild child) first treated in *An Imaginary Life*, reversing its narrative movement. Critics have lauded Malouf's focus on the relationship between politics, language, social stature, and personal and national identity in *Remembering Babylon*, praising the novel as a document of Australia's history and multifaceted population. Reviewers have additionally admired Malouf's use of the character Gemmy as a means of discussing the sublime in literature, the alienating and binding nature of language, and the paradox posed by the individual's need for acceptance and desire to distinguish between self and the "Other." In honoring Malouf with the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for Fiction, judge Annette Smith stated: "Malouf's novel testifies all along to the confusion of languages. It demonstrates the demonic nature of words, both their destructive power and their creative force, as Gemmy's past and his new identity take form."

Though widely reviewed in glowing terms, Malouf's novel also sparked a critical debate in regards to its controversial politics. The book was published in the year in which the Australian High Court reversed the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* (a legal concept meaning "the land belonging to no one" used by the British to deny the claims of the indigenous people of Australia to their native land). *Remembering Babylon* has been criticized for authenticating white experience and history at the expense of Aboriginal bodies, experience, and history (as Germaine Greer, Suvendrini Perera, and Garry Kinane discuss). Some critics, such as Bill Ashcroft, counter this charge with the argument that the novel is subversive, representing "the very different, transformative oppositionality of post-colonial discourse."

Responses to Literature

1. Some commentators have noted that Malouf is first and foremost a poet. In what ways do his poems influence his novels, and how do the concerns expressed in his novels show up in his poems?
2. Malouf makes use of the "noble savage" concept in his novel *Remembering Babylon*. In what ways does this concept show up in his other works? Does he seem to have a generally sympathetic or generally critical view of the "noble savage"? Can you compare his treatment of Gemmy to other characters from literature or film?
3. Malouf's writing explores the relations between individuals and the history through which they have

- lived. In what ways do you as an individual feel influenced by the history you have lived through? What events have had the largest subjective impact on you?
4. Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* was criticized for privileging white experience over Aboriginal history. Write an argumentative essay that either supports or opposes this criticism.
 5. Malouf's novels make use of descriptions based on his characters' recollections of certain places, particularly domestic interiors. Using only your memory, write a descriptive passage about a place that you feel you know well. If possible, return to this place after completing the piece to compare your recollection to reality.

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André Malraux

BORN: 1901, Paris, France

DIED: 1976, Créteil, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

The Conquerors (1928)

The Royal Way (1930)

Man's Fate (1934)

Anti-Memoirs (1967)

Overview

Well known as a novelist, art critic, political revolutionary, and statesman, André Malraux is a prominent figure in the development of twentieth-century thought. He is considered by many a prototype for the existentialist thought of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. In his many works, Malraux portrays the human condition—"la condition humaine"—as a tragic state characterized by alienation and absurdity resulting from Western



André Malraux Malraux, Andre, Paris, France, 1967, photograph. AP Images.

civilization's loss of faith in God. His fiction is distinguished by frequent incidents of violence and rapidly paced plots that are governed by the force of ideas rather than events. His nonfiction is characterized by its tendency to be fictional.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Flirtations with Surrealism and with Orientalism Malraux was born in the Montmartre district of Paris and raised in a nearby suburb. An avid reader, he turned his love of books into employment as a broker for a rare-book dealer, and he later edited a series of luxury editions of classical literary works. During the early 1920s, Malraux contributed literary criticism to avant-garde magazines and enhanced his appreciation of art by touring the museums and galleries of Paris. His first works of fiction, *Lunes en papier* (1921), illustrated by Cubist painter Fernand Leger, and *Royaume farfelu* (1928), demonstrate the influence of surrealism and constitute Malraux's only experimentation with fantasy literature.

In 1921, Malraux met and married Clara Goldschmidt, the daughter of a wealthy Franco-German family, who shared his love of art, literature, and film. Their archaeological expedition to French Indochina—now known as Vietnam and Cambodia—in 1923 proved a turning point in Malraux's life and work. While attempting to steal an invaluable sculpture from the ruins of a Khmer temple in Cambodia, Malraux was arrested and imprisoned by colonial authorities. He called on literary friends in Paris for support, and found it in spades. A flood of petitions got Malraux off the hook, and the whole experience, suggests biographer Olivier Todd, left him somewhat socially obligated to found *L'Indochine*, an anticolonial newspaper headquartered in present-day Vietnam. After the paper's closing in 1926, Malraux continued to protest colonialism in numerous articles and essays. His first major work of fiction, *The Temptation of the West*, was illuminated in part by these Asian adventures and explores Eastern and Western conceptions of existence. This work focuses on the theme of modern Western civilization's obsession with the individual, an issue that Malraux addressed throughout his career.

Revolution in China In 1925, while working for *L'Indochine*, Malraux reported on the nationalist uprisings in China, events that provided the basis for *The Conquerors*, his first full-length novel. Relayed through brief scenes that emphasize the chaos of revolution, this work marks the first appearance of Malraux's "new man," an individual aware of the absurdity of existence who combines, in Malraux's words, "a talent for action, culture and lucidity."

Malraux's third and most highly acclaimed novel, *Man's Fate*, won the Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary award. In this work, Malraux returns to the settings and events of the Chinese revolution featured in *The Conquerors* to dramatize humanity's unmitigated solitude and the impossibility of finding permanent meaning.

Communism and Brotherhood With the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s, Malraux's political stance became explicitly communist. He viewed communism as a more powerful opposition to fascism than capitalism because it avoided capitalism's preoccupation with the self, an obsession Malraux had decried as early as *The Temptation of the West*. Critics interpret Malraux's next two novels, *Days of Wrath* and *Man's Hope*, as fundamentally propagandistic. *Days of Wrath*, an early literary exposé of Nazi atrocities, affirms the values of collectivism over individualism and demonstrates that "brotherhood" can furnish humanity with transcendent meaning. In 1936, along with many other leftist writers and artists, Malraux became involved in the Spanish civil war—first as a delegate from an international antifascist group, then as a procurer of arms and aircraft for the Spanish Republican army, and finally as the leader of an international air squadron. *Man's Hope* utilizes these experiences to illustrate Malraux's belief in the power of fraternity and to demonstrate his opposition to war.

World War II, Resistance, and Public Service Malraux enlisted in the French tank corps in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II. In 1940 he was captured by the Germans, but five months later he escaped to the French free zone, where, before joining the Resistance in 1942, he wrote his last novel, *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*. Through the memories of a prisoner of the Nazis, this work investigates humanity's attempts to deny its impermanence. *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* offers reconciliation with a hostile universe through imagery associated with permanence and stability. After World War II, Malraux twice served in the government of President Charles De Gaulle, first as minister of information and then as minister of cultural affairs. In 1969, he retired from civil service and devoted himself to writing and revising his multivolume autobiography and continued this work until his death in 1976.

Works in Literary Context

Malraux's work is best seen as an early example of what came to be known as French Existentialism. This philosophical position is most associated with French philosophers and novelists Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. These thinkers felt that life is in some ways "absurd," because it contains no intrinsic meaning, leaving the individual fully responsible for the meaning of his or her life. Whereas Camus in particular explored the difficulty of knowing how to act in the face of the realization of the absurdity of life—and consequently wrote

protagonists who are afflicted with a kind of existential paralysis—Malraux’s protagonists are characterized by their action and their attempts to attain brotherhood despite its ultimate meaninglessness. In the face of the dissolution of meaning, Malraux offers the concepts of “fraternité virile,” or a life-giving brotherhood, and metamorphosis, both precursors to Sartrean thought on intersubjectivity and the absolute freedom of human choice.

Existentialism Malraux sees humankind as existing in a state of alienation caused by a loss of faith—which he terms “la condition humaine,” or the human condition—and the awareness of the absurdity of a human existence lacking order and meaning. As he put it himself, “The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random among the profusion of the earth and the galaxies, but that in this prison we can fashion images sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness.”

One gets a good sense of Malraux’s existentialism in his third novel, *The Royal Way*. This novel illuminates Malraux’s belief that death is not only a physical state, but also a metaphysical circumstance characterized by ignorance of the human condition and an unthinking acceptance of bourgeois values. Unlike existentialist protagonists in the works of Camus, characters who agonize over the possibility of meaningful action, however, Malraux’s characters are impelled to act by their awareness of the abyss. Additionally, the disciple/mentor relationship between the two main characters is an early example of male bonding that Malraux eventually highlights in his fiction as a source of transcendent value in the form of brotherhood. Malraux’s version of existentialism affirms the absurdity of death and the meaninglessness of life, but Malraux shows that this meaninglessness is not to be met solely with despair over the plight of humankind. Instead, in a conclusion much like that reached by Sartre in his focus on *intersubjectivité*, he offers the possibility that the lack of permanence—the fact that human beings die—necessitates that human beings act, build friendships, and love. In other words, Malraux says that since life is intrinsically meaningless, one must supply it with meaning through one’s actions and friendships. The person who does this, Malraux deems the “new man.”

Although existentialism has its roots in thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Friedrich Nietzsche—all of whom died before Malraux was born—the French representation of the philosophy is quite different from its predecessors, mostly because of the historical context in which it arose. There is, in short, a sharper edge to the writings of the French existentialists. Unlike the early existentialists, French existentialists like Malraux and Sartre in particular developed their ideas in the face of World War II, and their presentation of the questions of meaning, life, death, and action found resonance in the world at large, suffering as it was from the holocaustal logic imposed by the Nazis—and accepted to an unconscionable extent by the rest of the world.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Malraux’s famous contemporaries include:

Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969): Vietnamese revolutionary who led the fight for independence from French and other outside rule in Indochina, culminating in the Vietnam War.

Alan Paton (1903–1988): South African author and political activist whose career is best remembered for his opposition to apartheid in South Africa.

Elie Wiesel (1928–): Romanian-born Holocaust survivor who described his experiences in a concentration camp in his memoir *Night*.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French author who built upon Malraux’s literary themes with his own existentialist works, such as *Nausea* (1938) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Sartre famously declined the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964.

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): French general during World War II who went on to serve as president of France from 1959 until 1969.

Because of this peculiar historical context, French existentialism became a dominant philosophical mode for artists and authors in the twentieth century. The influence of these thinkers can be seen in the later work of many authors, including Samuel Beckett and Thomas Pynchon, each of whom explore the concept of the absurdity of life in their own fiction and drama.

Works in Critical Context

Although Malraux’s reputation rests on his novels—in particular *Man’s Fate*, for which he won the Prix Goncourt, France’s most prestigious literary award—and although his novels have found nearly universal acclaim, more recent critical attention has been paid to nontraditional aspects of his novels and, even more so, to Malraux’s autobiographical material. In *Man’s Fate*, for instance, critics have turned away from analyzing the merit of Malraux’s representation of the existential dilemma and have begun to study the novel with a critical eye to Malraux’s representation of women. As far as form goes, however, Malraux’s autobiographical material has been deemed revolutionary for its transcendence of the limitations associated with more traditional autobiographies—a transcendence achieved by making the validity of self-perception one of the central questions of the text.

Man’s Fate *Man’s Fate* takes place in Shanghai in 1927, when General Chiang Kai-shek breaks from the Communist revolutionaries, thus beginning China’s long and bloody civil war. The novel centers on several

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

After a long career as a fiction writer, Malraux set out to write his autobiography. Here are a few more examples of popular memoirs:

Memories, Dreams, Reflections (1961), an analytical memoir by Carl Jung. In this text, psychoanalyst Carl Jung recalls the major events of his life and offers psychoanalytical analysis of his dreams and memories—in essence, he turns himself into a patient.

Chronicles (2004), an entertainment memoir by Bob Dylan. Musician Bob Dylan discusses some of the pivotal moments in his life and career, focusing on his love for the work of other musicians, authors, and filmmakers. Throughout the text, however, the reader is aware of Dylan's admission that he has on numerous occasions lied to the media, thereby calling into question the validity of the memoir itself.

This Boy's Life (1989), a literary memoir by Tobias Wolff. Novelist and short-story writer Tobias Wolff describes his own childhood—including the abuse he suffered at the hands of his stepfather—in this memoir that was later turned into a film starring Leonardo DiCaprio as young Toby Wolff.

characters, mainly Chinese Communist conspirators and European adventurers, who are working against Chiang Kai-shek. These men also struggle against the meaningless solitude and absurdity that marks the human condition. Each searches for his own way to deny it, yet the solutions they seek individually, such as terrorism and torture, are all destructive and dehumanizing.

At the time of its release, *Man's Fate* was applauded by critics for its portrayal of both the acts and feelings of the characters. "I do not know of any modern book which dramatizes so successfully such varied national and social types," writes Edmund Wilson in *The Shores of Light*; "We not only witness [the characters'] acts and see them in relation to the force of the socio-political scene: we share their most intimate sensations."

More recent critical inquiry has focused on this novel's female characters and the psychology of Tchen, a terrorist whose severe isolation convinces him that absolute value lies only in acts of violence, but the novel continues to be regarded as crucial to the development of twentieth-century literature. As Christopher Hitchens writes in a review for the *New York Times*, "It pointed up the increasing weight of Asia in world affairs; it described epic moments of suffering and upheaval, in Shanghai especially (it was nearly filmed by Sergei Eisenstein); and it demonstrated a huge respect for Communism

and for Communists while simultaneously evoking the tragedy of a revolution betrayed by Moscow. It was, in short, the quintessential novel of its moment.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Man's Fate*. In the novel, Malraux depicts the Communist uprising in China that led to a civil war and ultimately the institution of a Communist government. In your opinion, how do his political and philosophical views color his depiction of events, if at all? Do you think a writer with different beliefs might have portrayed the same events in a different way? What does this suggest about the objective truth of accounts of historical events?
2. Read *Anti-Memoirs* and Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*. How do these two authors approach memoir differently? In your opinion, which one of these texts is more satisfying as a memoir? Why? Support your response with examples from the texts.
3. Although Malraux wrote about Nazi concentration camps, he was never imprisoned in one. In a short essay, compare Malraux's representation of Nazi concentration camps in *Days of Wrath* with their portrayal in the memoir *Night*, which was written by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.
4. After having read *Anti-Memoirs*, *This Boy's Life*, and *Night*, you are familiar with the characteristics of the memoir. Now try writing your own brief memoir. Consider some important episode in your life—your first love, your first funeral, your first year in high school—and write a memoir in which you explore your feelings and actions during this period of your life.

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Demetrio Aguilera Malta

BORN: 1909, *Guayaquil, Ecuador*

DIED: 1981, *Mexico*

NATIONALITY: *Ecuadorian*

GENRE: *Fiction, drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

Don Goyo (1933)

Loyal Spain (1938)

The Tiger (1956)

Seven Serpents and Seven Moons (1979)

Overview

Ecuadorian author Demetrio Aguilera Malta was a man of great talent and energy and is considered to be one of Ecuador’s greatest writers of fiction. Many of his major works have been extensively anthologized and translated into English and other languages, and in the extensive critical literature on his works, Malta has been cited as one of the initiators of the magical-realist mode in Latin American fiction.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Young Witness Malta was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on May 24, 1909, to Demetrio Flaviano Aguilera Sánchez and Teresa Malta Franco. He attended two primary schools, the Colegio San José and the Escuela Municipal Nelson Mateus, and received his secondary education at the Colegio Nacional Vicente Rocafuerte in Guayaquil. In 1922, when Malta was thirteen years old, he witnessed the massacre of striking workers by the police and military in the streets of Guayaquil, an event that left a profound impression on him. While the Radical Liberals were in power, as they had been since 1895, Ecuador kept church and state separated, and the liberty of thought, worship, and the press were put in place. However, there was some dissent as well as interludes of violence and crisis, despite the improving economic and social conditions in the country.

Malta was among the founders of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party in 1926. He then studied law for two years

at the Universidad de Guayaquil while attending classes at the Escuela de Bellas Artes. He spent five years on San Ignacio, one of the many islands in the Guayas estuary in the Gulf of Guayaquil, living with the people of Native American and African descent he would write about throughout his career.

Published First Poem Malta began his literary career during his adolescence with a poem, “Pages of Love,” published in the journal *Cromos* in 1924. He continued to publish his poetry in newspapers and journals, and worked on the journal *América*, which in the mid-1920s had an international reputation as the most important literary and ideological publication in Ecuador. He founded two literary journals, *Ideal* in 1924 and *Will* in 1927. With a student, Jorge Pérez Concha, he published a volume of poetry in 1927, *Primavera interior*. He published his own poetry book in 1929, *El libro de los mangleros*.

The Group of Guayaquil Throughout the 1930s and most of the 1940s, Malta supported himself as an educator, librarian, and journalist while writing his most important works. In 1930 he went to Panama, where he had his own column, Sap, in the *Diary of Panamá*. He also wrote for the *Star of Panamá* in Hoy while sending articles to the *Universe* in his native Guayaquil.

It was also in 1930 that Malta made his first important break into fiction when he contributed eight stories to *Those Who Go Away: Stories of the Coastal People*. This volume was published by Enrique “Gil” Gilbert and Joaquín Gallegos Lara, and along with Malta’s writing included the work of José de la Cuadra and Alfredo Paraja Diezcanseco. Together, these five writers came to be known as the Group of Guayaquil, whose members were “five like a fist.” This fist they shook during the social-realist period of 1930s and 1940s Ecuador, writing major works of international acclaim.

Interrupted by War Malta joined the Republican forces of the Spanish Civil War and went to work as a reporter, sending off material on the war from Madrid. (The Spanish Civil War pitted the left-leaning Republicans, who had been in power since the early 1930s, against the right-leaning Nationalists, who removed the Republicans from power in a 1936 coup. Civil war resulted, lasting until 1939 when the Nationalist forces prevailed. General Francisco Franco, the leader of the Nationalist uprising, then consolidated his hold on power.) Later, Malta went to Barcelona, where he stayed until he left Spain, along with other international volunteers.

When Malta returned to Ecuador in 1937, he was appointed undersecretary for education. He founded another journal, *Tropic*, in 1938. He also began working in theater, writing his first dramatic work. No doubt inspired by his recent experiences in Spain and the need to champion the Republican cause, he wrote *Loyal Spain*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Malta's famous contemporaries include:

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Hemingway was an American writer. Like Malta, Hemingway was a reporter and supporter of Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. His novels include *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Hitchcock was a British film and television director and producer. He is considered an icon for his pioneering suspense and thriller entertainment, his droll wit, and his unique style. His films include *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Rear Window* (1954), and *North by Northwest* (1959).

Golda Meir (1898–1978): Meir was the fourth prime minister of Israel and was known as the “Iron Lady” of politics.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960): Hurston was an American folklorist and writer. She is often associated with the Harlem Group and a major influence for authors Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Hurston's books include *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).

(1938), which deals with the social and political realities of the Spanish Civil War.

Inspired Drama In 1941, Malta was teaching literature at his alma mater, the Colegio Nacional Vicente Rocafuerte in Guayaquil. A new boys' high school was under construction in the city, but funds had run out before it could be completely furnished. Malta was asked to write a play to raise money to buy equipment for the school theater. The result was *Lazarus* (1941), the tragic story of an inspired schoolteacher who, out of personal poverty and lack of resources for public education, is driven to forsake his calling and invest his time and energy in menial activities to eke out a living. The play was an immense success, and has probably been staged more often than any other in Ecuador.

Ambitious Years From 1937 to 1943, Malta was also a visiting professor at universities in Guatemala, Mexico, Brazil, and the United States. In the late 1940s, he represented Ecuador at diplomatic posts in Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile. He also served with the Office for Intellectual Cooperation at the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C. In 1946, Malta worked with North American professor Willis Knapp Jones on the drama *Blue Blood* (1948), which concerns the influence of North America on Latin American culture.

Success as a Novelist It was also starting in the 1930s that Malta had established himself as a leading Ecuadorian novelist. After success as a contributor with *Those Who Go Away*, he abandoned the short story form to publish his first novel. With *Don Goyo* (1933), Malta had two goals: to portray the beauty, vitality, and genius of a group of coastal dwellers steeped in indigenous tropical-forest culture and to expose the mechanisms through which implacable economic forces from Guayaquil and the developed world bring about the destruction of a long-standing culture and viable way of life.

Abandoned History With his novel *The Virgin Island* (1942), Malta also presents the Ecuadorian coastal people, but expands on convention with two protagonists with contrasting worldviews—representative of the native and European cultural currents that coexist in much of Latin America. After several more works, during the 1960s Malta planned his *American Episodes*, a twelve-volume series of historical novels concerning the men, women, and events that make up Latin American history. Only three volumes of the series were ever completed.

During the 1970s, Malta published four novels that marked a departure from the style of his earlier work and demonstrated an intense interest in the new forms, techniques, and vision that had shifted the attention of the international reading public to Latin American fiction. However, he never lost his concern for authenticity and never abandoned Ecuadorian literary tradition.

A Break from Realism Ecuadorians speculated wildly about the mysterious kidnapping of a general in 1970. In writing *The Kidnapping of the General* (1973), Malta laid aside realism and tapped into a rich current of popular fantasy to produce a work at once humorous and bitterly complaining, yet marked with Malta's undying hope for the future of Ecuador and Latin America. In the early 1970s, Ecuadorian politics was tumultuous, with José Marí Velasco Ibarra winning yet another term as president in 1968, then suspending the constitution and assuming dictatorial power in 1970. Though Velasco promised elections in 1972, he was overthrown in a bloodless coup after refusing to give into the demands of senior army officers to postpone elections. General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara became the head of a new military government that lasted until he was ousted in 1976 and replaced by a three-member Supreme Council.

Malta then abandoned the purely mythical and returned to the geographically identifiable with *Jaguar* (1977). This novel, like the one to follow, borrows from Malta's other writing, taking from the settings, situations, and characters of *Don Goyo*, *The Virgin Island*, and *The Tiger* (1956).

Experimental in Late Career *Réquiem for the Devil* (1978) does the same. The final novel of Malta's career, it is a novelization of the author's 1967 play *Black Hell*. Just as the expressionistic play was Malta's most

experimental play, so did *Réquiem* become his most experimental novel. Malta once again focused on aspects of Ecuadorian reality that are taken for granted and amplified them to their absurd extreme in order to expose the contradictions of Ecuadorian life.

On December 29, 1981, Malta died in Mexico, where he had made his home with his second wife and collaborator, Velia Márquez, since 1958. He left behind one last, unfinished novel manuscript, *A Ball, a Dream, and Ten Cents*, published posthumously in 1988.

Works in Literary Context

As a writer, Malta was greatly influenced by contemporary events and social concerns in his country, throughout Latin America, and such world events that he personally experienced, such as the Spanish Civil War. He was also well versed in history, philosophy, international relations, and the lives of certain peoples in his country, and included these ideas in his books. Thus, Malta often had a realistic base to his fiction and plays, though sometimes with fantastical or expressionistic elements. He is considered a leader in fictional social realism.

Innovation in Novels Malta's novels, starting in the 1930s, earned him a place in Ecuadorian literature as a leader of innovative technique. His 1942 *Virgin Island*, for instance, presents a bicultural, egalitarian relationship while denouncing native cultural traditions that will not suffice in the newly colonized and alien tropics. By the 1970s, Malta's innovative technique grew to include action that takes place in distorted settings, recurring characters experiencing multiple flashbacks, truncated plots, and places where the familiar and the mundane are mixed with the futuristic and unreal.

Such devices, as those in *Réquiem for the Devil* and *Seven Serpents and Seven Moons*, also include internal monologue, broken thought, different events occurring simultaneously, and mythical elements of African, Western, or Native American origin. Themes of particular importance to Malta and his work focused on social concerns. *Réquiem* and *Don Goya*, for example, are driven by themes of exploitation of the citizenry. *Canal Zone* evokes the racial prejudice held by North American whites against blacks in the isthmus area they occupy—a major theme that was a constant in Malta's works, not only in his novels but especially his plays.

Influences Malta's early fiction and his short stories in *Those Who Go Away* became his most important contributions to Ecuadorian and Latin American literature. The innovations in his early work charted new ground and pointed the way for other Latin American writers. Malta's later novels, especially *Seven Serpents and Seven Moons*, in turn owe much to the formal innovations associated with the Latin American New Novel. That is, Malta's later works are inspired by literature while the earlier ones take their inspiration directly from the reality he personally observed on the islands of the Guayas River.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote about social injustice:

Another Country (1962), a novel by James Baldwin. In this modern work, the author explores life in Greenwich Village, New York, including the damages of racism and the consequences of hedonism.

Heart Mountain (1989), a novel by Gretel Ehrlich. In this novel of epic range, the story focuses on the experiences of Japanese Americans interred in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, prison camp during World War II.

A Theory of Justice (1971), a nonfiction book by John Rawls. In this work, the author presents a philosophical discussion of the right to justice that is so great not even the collective society can overpower, eclipse, or take it away.

Works in Critical Context

While little is written about Malta in a specifically critical context, it is largely acknowledged that he made an exceptional impact on Ecuadorian and Latin American literature. He gained international attention as a writer of fiction in 1930 as one “finger” of the “fist” known as The Group of Guayaquil. His fame draws heavily on his career as a novelist. Most remarkable today are his short-story contributions to *Those Who Go Away: Stories of the Coastal People*.

Those Who Go Away The book scandalized Ecuador. It also caught the attention of international critics who recognized its innovative qualities. Eight stories of similar style, by each of the three authors, are intermingled to emphasize the solidarity of the group. The metaphors, critics believe, reflect the world and psychology of the characters, and the dialogue imitates coastal Ecuadorian Spanish. Critics regard these stories as earthy accounts of dramatic incidents in the lives of rural coastal people and black people. Malta's “The Cholo Who Avenged Himself” and “The Cholo Who Hated Money,” are the two most frequently anthologized stories from the collection.

Responses to Literature

1. Malta incorporated the geography and social concerns of Ecuador. Survey the social conditions of Ecuador from the 1930s to the 1970s. What effect did the country's geography, location, and cultural history have on the social issues Malta wrote about? Why do you think Malta and other Ecuadorians

became involved in the Spanish Civil War? Write a paper outlining your findings.

2. Consider the members of the Group of Guayaquil, writers who introduced social realism. Research the biographies of Malta's fellows—Joaquín Gallegos Lara, Enrique "Gil" Gilbert, José de la Cuadra, and Alfredo Paraja Diezcanseco. Did the others have the writing life Malta had? Did they get the same recognition? What other literary contributions, if any, did each make? With a group, create a presentation on each author and the group as a whole.
3. Research social realism to come up with a working definition. What are the characteristics of socialism? What are the characteristics of realism? How do the two come together (overlap) to create the hybrid genre, social realism? Write an essay outlining your conclusions.
4. Many Latin American writers have become associated with the literary style known as magic realism. What are the main characteristics of magic realism? How is it different from fantasy? Do you think Malta is a good example of a magic realist? Why or why not? Create a presentation that displays your conclusions for the class.

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Osip Mandelstam

BORN: 1891, Warsaw, Poland

DIED: 1938, Siberia, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Stone (1913)

The Morning of Acmeism (1919)

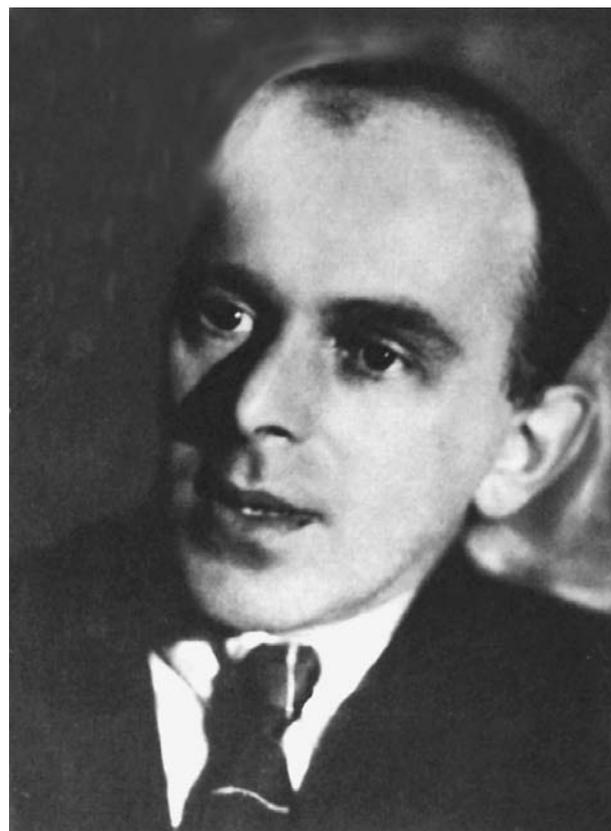
On Poetry (1928)

"Stalin Epigram" (1933)

The Voronezh Notebooks (1980)

Overview

Osip Mandelstam was a twentieth-century Russian poet associated with the Acmeist movement, which rejected the mysticism and obscurity of the Symbolists and attempted to restore clarity to poetic language. A diehard



Osip Mandelstam. *Mandelstam, Osip*. From a photograph in *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press, 1973. Reproduced by permission of Clarence Brown.

nonconformist, his attempts to maintain his artistic independence after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 resulted in ostracism, exile, and ultimately, death in Joseph Stalin's labor camps. After Stalin's death in 1953 (and long after his own death), Mandelstam was "rehabilitated" and his work has undergone a revival.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Beyond the Pale, Childhood from Warsaw to St. Petersburg Osip Emil'evich Mandelstam was born on January 3, 1891, in Warsaw, then a part of Russia, into a middle-class Jewish family. His father, a leather merchant, paid for permission for his family to leave the "Pale of Settlement" where most Jews lived. They settled in St. Petersburg, where they lived relatively free of anti-Semitic hostility. Mandelstam attended the Tenishev Commercial School, obtaining an excellent education. He began to write poetry while still in secondary school.

"Towers We Can Build Ourselves" Mandelstam described his ethnic background as "Jewish chaos," and he always experienced a tension between his Jewish home life and the Russian iteration of Western European culture. After graduating from Tenishev, he continued his education abroad, attending both the Sorbonne in Paris and the University of Heidelberg in Germany. Fluent in French and German, he learned enough Italian to quote lines from Dante by heart. Back in Russia by the fall of 1911, he enrolled in St. Petersburg University. Like some nonreligious Jews seeking career advancement, he converted to Christianity (though not the state-sanctioned Russian Orthodox Church).

While still a student, he joined the Guild of Poets and grew close to poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. A new literary movement, called Acmeism, emerged from the gatherings of this guild, with Mandelstam as one of its leaders and theorists. The Acmeists disdained what they considered the vagueness and excessive metaphysical bent of Symbolism, Russia's dominant poetic genre at the time. The Acmeists sought not to fly too high, Mandelstam wrote, but rather "to rise only to the level of towers we can build ourselves."

His first collection of poetry, *Stone* (1913), exhibits the transition from Symbolism to the new Acmeist aesthetic. The poems are direct, intuitive expressions of thoughts, feelings, and observations. They celebrate triumphs of culture such as feats of Roman and Byzantine architecture, and the city of St. Petersburg itself. The collection immediately established Mandelstam in the upper echelon of Russian poets.

A Nonconformist: Putting Self before State Unfortunately for Mandelstam, the 1910s were hardly a prosperous decade for establishing oneself as a poet in Russia. Before the First World War came to an end, Russia erupted in 1917 into revolution, and the Bolshe-

viks who took control soon began bending art, and artists, to propagandistic ends. Mandelstam had supported the revolution early on, but had difficulty applying his creativity to the political ends of Russia's new government. Instead, he promoted his own humanism, and soon earned reproach from those artists and intellectuals who saw service to the State as the highest form of humanism. Legend has Mandelstam exhibiting his independence of mind at a party in 1918: When he saw Yakov Blumkin, the deputy chief of security, drunkenly signing execution orders for alleged counterrevolutionaries, Mandelstam snatched the papers and tore them to shreds.

In 1919, he met his future wife, Nadezhda Iakovlevna Khazine. They were married in 1922 and moved to Moscow, the year the revolution achieved its own consolidation and the Soviet Union as such was formed. Their acquaintance that year with Nikolai Bukharin, a leading figure in the government, proved a very helpful relationship over the next decade. That year, Mandelstam also published his second poetry collection, *Tristia*, a book that implicitly celebrates the individual over the masses and love over comradeship—subversive views in a Communist society.

The Mandelstams returned to St. Petersburg, now called Leningrad, in 1924—the year of the death of Vladimir Ilych Lenin, leader of the revolution and early Soviet Union. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the nonconformist Mandelstam to maintain himself as a poet. He never joined the groups that controlled the literary scene under the progressively intrusive guidance of the Communist Party. Other artists who had adopted his defiant stance, such as Nikolai Gumilev, had already been executed. He made a living as a translator, journalist, and children's writer. In 1925, however, he published an autobiographical prose work, *The Noise of Time*. The authorities were again displeased with this work's emphasis on its author's personal story.

Scandal and Exile In 1928, the year Josef Stalin consolidated his rule of the Communist Party and with it the Soviet Union, Mandelstam—despite continued antagonism from state officials—managed to produce three more volumes: *The Egyptian Stamp*, a surreal, stream-of-consciousness novella about the sufferings of a Russian Jew; *Poems*, his final and most complete collection of poems in a more complex style reflecting his maturation as a lyricist; and *On Poetry*, a collection of his literary criticism. The influence of Bukharin, a poetry enthusiast in Stalin's ruling circle, helps explain Mandelstam's success at getting his work into print.

His fortunes changed the following year, when he was falsely accused of plagiarism. Mandelstam was exonerated, but the scandal and negative publicity damaged his reputation. Bukharin interceded and managed to have Mandelstam and his wife sent to Armenia as journalists. After a six-month journey, Mandelstam returned in 1930; his travel account, *Journey to Armenia*, was the last work

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mandelstam's famous contemporaries include:

Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966): A Russian poet and an Acmeist colleague of Mandelstam's, whose work was suppressed under Stalin.

Alexander Blok (1880–1921): A Russian Symbolist poet, a leading figure of the so-called silver age of Russian poetry.

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940): A Russian novelist and playwright; his satirical novel *The Master and Margarita* circulated underground in the Soviet Union.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): An Anglo-American poet, leading modernist, critic, and author of "The Waste Land."

James Joyce (1882–1941): An Irish expatriate novelist, author of *Ulysses*; one of the most celebrated twentieth-century novels.

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): The dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union from the late 1920s until 1953.

he published during his lifetime. It appeared in 1933 in the literary magazine *Zvezda* (Star), whose editor lost his job for publishing it.

Mandelstam sped his own demise when he wrote, in 1933, a satirical poem characterizing Stalin as a gleeful executioner with a cockroach moustache. This sixteen-line poem, known as the "Stalin Epigram," may have been Mandelstam's response to the great famine brought about by Stalin's policies of agrarian collectivization—where individual farmers were forced to turn their crops over to the government for distribution. Mandelstam read the offending poem to a small group, and was soon arrested and tortured. Quite likely, Bukharin saved his friend from execution or the notorious labor camps—this time. Instead, Mandelstam was exiled to the Ural Mountains. After he attempted suicide in a hospital in Cherdyn, his sentence was softened, and eventually he was allowed to settle in Voronezh, a provincial capital south of Moscow. He wrote three notebooks of haunting poetry there, fearlessly depicting his hardships and criticizing the murderous Stalin. His wife preserved these documents and published them after his death as *The Voronezh Notebooks* (published posthumously in 1980).

Death and Rehabilitation By May of 1937, Mandelstam's sentence was over, but he and Nadezhda were not allowed to settle within one hundred kilometers of Moscow. The state had seized their house; homeless and destitute, he suffered two heart attacks. Furthermore, the literary establishment attacked him in print, and he was rearrested as a counterrevolutionary in May of 1938—at the behest of the General Secretary of the Leningrad

Writers' Union. He was sentenced to five years in a Siberian labor camp, and died that December of an unknown illness while in transit. He was one of millions to die in connection with Stalin's deeply paranoid state security policies, which encouraged denunciation of one's fellows and punished suspected "enemies of the state" with implacable ferocity, if also a certain arbitrariness.

After Stalin's death, Mandelstam was posthumously deemed rehabilitated and exonerated of the charge of counterrevolutionary activity. His widow, Nadezhda, published two memoirs in the 1970s, which helped revive interest in his writing. Mandelstam has come to be recognized, particularly in the West, as one of the Russian language's greatest, most inspiring poets.

Works in Literary Context

Mandelstam was a Russian "Westernist" who derived much of his inspiration from sources foreign to his cultural background, including Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, French Symbolists such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, and the classical mythology of the ancient Greek world. Mandelstam's poetry is rich in quotations from and allusions to both Russian and world literature, art, music, and architecture; a great deal of cultural knowledge is necessary to fully appreciate Mandelstam's work.

From Symbolism to Acmeism As a young man in St. Petersburg, Mandelstam attended the literary salon of Viacheslav Ivanov, the well-known Symbolist poet, whose work encompassed metaphysical, occult concerns. Mandelstam's early poetry is clearly influenced by Ivanov in its Symbolist imagery and neo-Romantic ethos, but he broke away when he joined the Guild of Poets with Gumilev and Akhmatova. In 1913, Mandelstam penned *The Morning of Acmeism*, the manifesto for the new movement. The Acmeists would steer away from Ivanov's mysticism toward its polar opposite, order and clarity. Their voice would be direct and unpretentious, and it would embrace as supreme the achievements of human culture. Mandelstam's first book of poetry, *Stone*, is considered the movement's finest achievement—the acme of Acmeism.

Time and the Word *Stone* introduces the reader to aspects of Mandelstam's verse that are apparent in later collections. His poetry is logocentric—defined by language, the organ through which man perceives and tries to master the world. "The living Word," manifested in many ways, is one of Mandelstam's main themes. The theme of time is also central to Mandelstam's poetry. He embraces a "pan-chronic" vision, in which memory can link vast distances in space and time to form an organic whole. Prime examples of this vision are his poems devoted to great edifices, such as "Notre Dame" (1913), in which the poet connects biblical Eden, ancient Egypt and Rome, the Gothic Middle Ages, and the modern day. Similarly, in "Hagia Sophia" (1913), there is a

communion of classical, Christian, and contemporary figures.

Works in Critical Context

Mandelstam's poetry combines the virtues of musicality and intellectual challenge. It can be read and appreciated on different levels. Some commentators have derided his verse, with its refined aesthetic and copious references to works of art and architecture, as dispassionate and detached from the concerns of the world outside art. Other critics have demonstrated, however, that Mandelstam was sensitive to and often reacted to the events of the rapidly changing world around him. The poem "The Age" (from his 1928 collection), for example, expresses his hopes and apprehensions for the future of postrevolutionary Russia.

In the years since his rehabilitation, Mandelstam has been recognized as one of the most important Russian writers of the twentieth century, most significantly in his homeland, where he was once reduced to the status of literary "nonperson." During the Cold War, his work gained widespread attention in the West. His verse has been translated into many languages and published in many collections. The scholarly literature on him is voluminous and growing rapidly. Generally, the poems in *Stone* and *Tristia* are judged superior to those produced in the 1930s; however, recent studies of his later poetry take issue with this view. As Ervin C. Brody writes in his introduction to *Poems from Mandelstam*, a collection translated by R. H. Morrison:

No Soviet poet of modern sensibility reflected so intensively as Mandelstam the loss of historical and philosophical self-assurance and the emerging discrepancies between state order and the isolation of individual consciousness. . . . He was chiefly concerned with the preservation of Russia's cultural and moral heritage, and his best poetry attests to the survival of art and consciousness.

Responses to Literature

1. For Mandelstam, what is the relationship between architecture and poetry? In your opinion, why do his poems and critical essays contain so many references to Gothic cathedrals?
2. Define Acmeism as Mandelstam understood it and practiced it. Why do you think Mandelstam and other Acmeists rebelled against the ideals of the Symbolist movement? Do you think historical events in Russia played a part in the creation of Acmeism?
3. What did Mandelstam mean when he distinguished the "friends and enemies of the Word" in Soviet Russia, in his essay "On the Nature of the Word" (1922)?
4. Research the situation of artists and writers in Stalin's Russia. What choices did they face? Consider the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Osip Mandelstam is famous for the "Stalin Epigram" that led to his arrest. Epigrams—concise, witty statements in prose or verse—have a time-honored role in language and literature. Here are some representative works from some of the greatest practitioners of the epigram.

Epigrams (first century CE), a collection of epigrams by Martial. Considered the creator of the epigram, this Roman poet wrote twelve books of them, most in "elegiac couplets."

An Essay on Criticism (1711), a poem by Alexander Pope. A poem of literary advice, written in "heroic" rhyming couplets and containing such famous phrases as "A little learning is a dangerous thing" and "To err is human, to forgive divine."

Wit and Wisdom from Poor Richard's Almanack (1732–1758), an almanac by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin's annual publication always contained pithy phrases, such as "Haste makes waste."

Epigrams of Oscar Wilde (2007), a collection of epigrams by Oscar Wilde. A selection of witticisms from the outrageous Victorian satirist's plays, novels, essays, and poems, such as: "I can resist everything except temptation."

stories of the three leading Acmeists: Mandelstam, Nikolai Gumilev, and Anna Akhmatova. Why do you think artists like Mandelstam deliberately defied Stalin and his supporters even though they knew it could lead to their deaths?

5. Comparing *The Voronezh Notebooks* to Mandelstam's earlier volumes of poetry, speculate on how persecution under Stalin affected the poet artistically and/or psychologically.

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Thomas Mann

BORN: 1875, Lübeck, Germany

DIED: 1955, Kilchberg, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Buddenbrooks: Decline of a Family (1901)

"Death in Venice" (1912)

The Magic Mountain (1924)

Doctor Faustus (1947)

Overview

Considered one of the foremost twentieth-century German novelists, Thomas Mann gained fame for ironic and philosophical works that reflected the doubts and fears of his era. Mann's epic novels and short stories highlighted the struggles and psychology of intellectuals and artists, exploring philosophical issues as he investigated German national identity. Praised as the peer of writers like James Joyce, Mann won the 1929 Nobel Prize for Literature and achieved international acclaim during his lifetime.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Shared Interest in the Arts Thomas Mann was born on June 6, 1875, in Lübeck, Germany. (Germany had only recently been unified by Otto von Bismarck in



Thomas Mann *Mann, Thomas*, photograph. The Library of Congress.

1871.) Mann's father, Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, was a well-to-do merchant. His mother, Júlia da Silva Bruhns, was born in Brazil and was the daughter of a German planter and a woman of Portuguese-Creole descent. Faced with Lübeck's failing economy, Mann's father wished that two of his sons, Thomas and Heinrich, would take over positions at the helm of the family business.

However, their father's death in 1891, when Mann was sixteen years old, freed up the brothers to pursue their growing interest in the arts, though Mann would retain a suspicion of artists and nonbusiness pursuits for the rest of his life. Heinrich Mann went on to become an outstanding novelist and essayist, and even Mann's younger brother, Viktor, made a name for himself with a 1948 family chronicle.

Though Mann was bright, he hated school. He worked briefly in an insurance company, but, increasingly influenced by music and literature, he soon tried his hand at writing. He found inspiration in culture, philosophy, and opera. Mann was infatuated with the Romantic music of Richard Wagner as a teen, but became skeptical of Wagner's power as he grew older. Mann also read the work of German philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, exploring the idea of free will and the individual's relationship to society. These diverse influences would lead to a flexibility of style that would become Mann's literary trademark.

Early Success with Novels After writing a short story when he should have been working, Mann found himself a published author. The story, which gained Mann a letter of appreciation from prominent poet Richard Dehmel, encouraged Mann so much that he quit his job and began auditing courses at the University of Munich. By the time his first book, *Little Herr Friedemann*, was published in 1895, Mann had gone to Italy with his brother Heinrich.

Fruitful Excursion to Italy Though Heinrich was enthusiastic about the Italian language and culture, Mann was alienated from Italian society and spent most of his three-year stay discovering Russian, Scandinavian, and French literature and writing a book inspired by his ancestors. *Buddenbrooks: Decline of a Family* (1901) was unlike most German literature of the time. Drawing from Scandinavian and western European naturalistic novels, *Buddenbrooks* told the story of a German merchant family through lavish detail, poorly concealing the fact that it was based on Mann's own family and his hometown of Lübeck.

Stunted by writer's block after a series of literary failures, Mann went to Venice with his wife, Katia Pringsheim, whom he had married in 1905. There, he met a cast of exotic and strange characters who would appear in his short story, "Death in Venice" (1912). The story, which deals with a writer's obsession with a younger boy, has received international acclaim as an example of a major short work of fiction, exploring atmosphere, characterization, and motifs of death and repression in vivid detail. The work also created controversy with its depiction of homosexual love.

Political Controversy The advent of World War I drove a wedge between Mann and his brother Heinrich. By the early 1910s, Germany had become the strongest military, industrial, and economic power on the European continent and was involved, as many countries of the time were, in an elaborate system of alliances. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, by a Bosnian terrorist in Serbia in 1914, all these alliances came into play, and World War I broke out. Under the leadership of Emperor Wilhelm II, Germany had initial success in the war, allied with Austria-Hungary and Turkey against the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and, later, the United States. Ultimately, Germany was defeated, and 1.6 million Germans died in the conflict.

Though Mann's brother Heinrich took a stand against the atrocities of World War I, Mann himself encouraged the war effort, adopting a nationalistic position. The brothers' conflict reflected German society's debate about its place in history. Around this time, Mann published his controversial *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918), a nationalistic book celebrating Germany's unique heritage. The book was later embraced by ultra-conservative Germans for its anti-European stance. Though Mann would later change his views on German society's benefits, he would keep arguing for the remainder of his life that Germany was different from the rest of Europe. Criticized as fascistic and out of touch with reality, the book remains Mann's most controversial work.

Postwar Nobel Prize Though Mann had embraced conservatism in print, he was converted to the new democratic principles adopted in Germany after World War I. Germany became a republic, governed under the liberal

Weimar Constitution. However, the 1919 Treaty of Versailles demanded that Germany nearly totally disarm, lose all its colonies and territories gained in the Franco-Prussian War, and accept stringent reparations requirements. Thus, Germany suffered a series of economic and social dislocations in the postwar period. Mann's waffling between two political ideals was reflected in German society as it moved from imperialism to democracy to fascism.

Around this time, Mann began working on *The Magic Mountain* (1924), the novel that is now considered a landmark in world literature. Set in the years leading up to World War I, the book takes place in a sanatorium on a mountaintop in Switzerland and depicts a young man's struggles to find meaning in life against a backdrop of death, illness, and extremism. The book appeared to a tidal wave of favorable criticism, gaining comparisons to Proust's epic *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927), winning Mann the Nobel Prize for Literature, and solidifying his position as one of the world's greatest storytellers.

Forced into Exile by Nazis Mann's life once again intersected with politics when he was discouraged from returning to now-Nazi Germany from a vacation in the early 1930s because his wife was Jewish. By this time, Adolf Hitler had taken power in Germany, and he converted the republic into a dictatorship. Under Hitler's leadership, Germany greatly expanded its military and adopted a tone of extreme nationalism. As part of the Nazi agenda, Jews had their civil rights taken away and were later interned and killed en masse as part of the government's policy.

Mann decided to tread lightly, avoiding open criticism of the Nazis, but these actions earned him the scorn of antifascist groups. Tired of being cautious, Mann issued a set of strong statements against the regime. The consequences were quick and brutal: his German citizenship was revoked in 1936 and his honorary doctorate from the University of Bonn was taken away. Unswayed, Mann responded with an open letter that gained worldwide attention. "Woe to the people which... seeks its way out through the abomination of war, hatred of God and man!" warned Mann. "Such a people will be lost." Though he had initially feared speaking out against the Nazis, Mann's actions and his Nobel Prize status turned him into a leading representative of German progressive thought.

Became American Citizen Now an exile, Mann moved to the United States in 1938 and became an American citizen in 1944. He began to tackle the Nazis through his fiction, writing a series of books about ancient Jewish history and eventually moving on to an outspoken critique of German culture and its contribution to the oppressive Nazi regime. While Germany had early success in World War II, the Nazi regime was ultimately defeated by the Allies (Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States). After Hitler's suicide in 1945, Germany unconditionally surrendered. As Germany was occupied by the winners of the war and strove to rebuild in the postwar period, Mann's own struggle

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mann's famous contemporaries include:

Georg Lukács (1885–1971): Hungarian philosopher and literary critic known for founding the Western Marxist tradition. His books include *History and Class Consciousness* (1923).

Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941): Emperor of Germany and king of Prussia from 1888 until 1918, he was forced to abdicate his throne in the final months of World War I.

Henri Bergson (1859–1941): Prominent French philosopher noted for his writings on time and consciousness.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): French author famous for his massive, complicated work *In Search of Lost Time*, published in sections between 1913 and 1927.

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): An American writer famous for her Paris literary salon of the 1920s and such works as *Tender Buttons* (1914).

with the German culture with which he so closely identified was reflected in his 1947 book *Doctor Faustus*. This complex novel met with mixed critical reviews. Though the book was not popular, it is considered to be a summary of Mann's artistic vision.

Mann continued to be a controversial figure in the postwar period. Though he won many prestigious awards in Europe, he was blasted by German writers who had been compromised by Nazism. He finally returned to now-divided Germany, touring both sides in an attempt to gain reconciliation, but was immediately denounced in the United States for his supposed Communist sympathies. (The democratic West Germany was under the influence of Western powers like the United States, while the Communist East Germany was controlled by the Soviet Union, who had joined the Allies late in World War II.) Upset by his adopted homeland's intolerance, he moved to Switzerland, returning to a once-abandoned novel, *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*, a humorous picaresque novel that depicts the artist as a criminal. He died on August 12, 1955, just two months after his much-celebrated eightieth birthday.

Works in Literary Context

Mann is known for his lengthy, complex style and his exploration of German language, literature, and culture. Vivid in detail and description, his novels explore artistic figures in great depth and reflect influences of German culture, music, and philosophy. Germany's tumultuous history in the first half of the twentieth century also greatly affected Mann's output. In addition, Russian,

Scandinavian, and French literature also proved inspirational to Mann.

Exploration of German Culture As a child, Mann was influenced by his Brazilian mother's love of culture and art and his German father's love of business and order. Raised in a literary family, Mann was immersed in German language and literature. He tackled his German literary heritage in works like *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) and *Doctor Faustus*. These books directly questioned and reimagined works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of Germany's most esteemed writers. In his quest to describe and define German culture, Mann managed to alienate an entire generation of Germans who were turned off by his conservative and nationalistic message. However, his ideas and philosophies changed as World War II affected his personal life, and he was later known for speaking out against German nationalism. He is famed for his emphasis on humanism (a philosophy that focuses on the inherent worth of all people) and his celebration of Western culture.

The Artist's Place in Society One of the central themes in most of Mann's stories is the place of the artist in modern society. Many of his main or supporting characters are artists of some sort, such as the author Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*. In *Doctor Faustus*, the composer Leverkühn sells his soul to the devil in exchange for twenty-four years of musical success. While he is depicted as existing outside the norms of society, the book also suggests that such artists are actually the heart and soul of a culture. After his successful career, Leverkühn spends a decade in an increasingly deteriorating mental state, unable to function in any normal way. This parallels the decade during which Nazism rose to prominence in Germany—a time of cultural deterioration during which artists fled the country, were imprisoned, or were killed.

Reimagining Existing Literature Throughout Mann's body of work are many examples of his extensions and reimaginings of existing pieces of literature. As mentioned previously, his novels *Doctor Faustus* and *Lotte in Weimar* are, respectively, an update of and a response to two of Goethe's most well-known works. In addition, his four-book epic *Joseph and His Brothers* is a retelling of a portion of the Bible's book of Genesis. Even "Death in Venice" has been viewed by scholars as a recasting of ancient Greek mythological characters into a modern setting.

Influence Mann's own work influenced writers as diverse as Franz Kafka, Michel Houellebecq, and Orhan Pamuk.

Works in Critical Context

Known as much for cultural controversy as his great works of literature, Mann is commonly heralded as the most important German writer of the twentieth century.

However, critical response to his works varied during his lifetime, with many critics blasting his tendency to write wordy, overblown, and confusingly complex novels. Though Mann's work has gained international acclaim, he is often cited as hard for non-German speakers to appreciate, in part because of his close identification with uniquely German ideals and cultural norms.

Buddenbrooks Mann's early literary career was marked by success, with his first novel published by Samuel Fischer, a renowned literary firm that still upholds a high standard in German literature. *Buddenbrooks* brought him his first taste of literary scandal when his thinly veiled portrait of northern German society was recognized. With its detached portrayal of grasping capitalism and insensitive townspeople, it shocked many Germans. Still, the book received high critical praise, with Rainer Maria Rilke, a noted poet of the time, praising the book as giving "evidence of a capacity and ability that cannot be ignored." Thomas Rockwell, in *Preface to Fiction: A Discussion of Great Modern Novels*, states that the tragedy of the novel "is effected in a manner which brings out the beauty inherent in decay," and that with his skill at subtlety, Mann "established himself as perhaps the foremost contemporary writer of German prose."

The Magic Mountain When it was published in 1924, critics praised *The Magic Mountain* as marking "a return to his rightful standing [as] the master novelist of his age." Upon its publication, a reviewer for *Time* proclaimed, "The author displays an intellect profound, searching, inclusive, an artistry profound and subtle in all his works." Henry Hatfield, in *Thomas Mann* (1951), states of the novel: "Employing a microscopic closeness of observation, it adds a new dimension to the realistic novel, while at the same time it marks Mann's major shift to the use of mythical patterns." Hatfield also calls the book "one of the most imposing structures erected by the modern mind."

Responses to Literature

1. Mann was condemned for his nationalistic political writings. Do you think that Mann's political views should shape criticism of his literary work? Why or why not? Write an essay that outlines your conclusions.
2. Mann's work is known for its length and complexity, features he drew from influences like Russian and Scandinavian novels of the nineteenth century. Using the Internet and your library, write an essay on the distinguishing features of nineteenth-century Russian fiction.
3. Mann was born into a literary family. Using the Internet and your library, write a paper on another famous literary family and their accomplishments.
4. During his career, Mann turned from supporting German nationalism to speaking publicly against

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Thomas Mann's use of other writers' works as inspiration for his own is not uncommon. Here are some more examples of works that were inspired by the creations of other writers.

Pygmalion (1913), a play by George Bernard Shaw. This play updates Ovid's ancient tale of a sculptor who falls in love with his creation. In Shaw's version, the sculptor is replaced by a linguist named Henry Higgins, and his "creation" is a lower-class flower girl whom he teaches to act like a lady of high society.

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (1995), a novel by Gregory Maguire. The novel is set in the same universe as L. Frank Baum's series of Oz novels, but is told from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West.

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold (1956), a novel by C. S. Lewis. This novel is an alternative take on the myth of Cupid and Psyche as told by the ancient Roman Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* (c. 158 c.e.). Lewis's version of the story is told from the point of view of Psyche's sister Orual.

O, Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), a film by Joel and Ethan Coen. The film takes many elements from Homer's ancient Greek epic the *Odyssey* (c. late 700s b.c.e.) and transplants them into Mississippi in 1937.

fascism. Using the Internet and your library, create a presentation on the rise of fascism in Germany and its implications for German political and cultural stability.

5. One of Mann's primary interests was the relationship of artists to society. What place do you think an artist should hold in society? Are artists obligated to support or to question cultural values? What about artists whose aim is primarily to entertain? Write a paper that outlines your views.

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Katherine Mansfield

BORN: 1888, Wellington, New Zealand

DIED: 1923, Fontainebleau, France

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"Bliss" (1920)

"Miss Brill" (1920)

"The Garden Party" (1922)

Overview

Katherine Mansfield is a central figure in the development of the modern short story. An early practitioner of stream-of-consciousness narration, she applied this technique to create stories based on the illumination of character rather than the contrivances of plot. Her works consider such universal concerns as family and love relationships and the everyday experiences of childhood and are noted for their distinctive wit, psychological sharpness, and perceptive characterizations. Mansfield is one of the few authors to attain prominence exclusively for short stories, and her works remain among the most widely read in world literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Enamored of England Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp was born October 14, 1888, to Harold Beauchamp, a merchant and banker, and Annie Burnell (Dyer) Beauchamp in Wellington, New Zealand, and attended school in England in her early teens. She returned home after completing her education, but at nineteen she persuaded her parents to allow her to return to England.

Biographers believe that Mansfield either arrived in London pregnant as the result of a shipboard romance or that she became pregnant after her arrival as the result of an affair with a man she had known in New Zealand. She quickly married George Bowden, a young musician, and left him the next day for a German spa, where she miscarried, alone.

Burgeoning Career Mansfield returned to England following a period of recuperation, during which she wrote the short stories comprising her first collection, *In a German Pension* (1911). These stories focus on themes relating to sexual relationships, female subjugation, and childbearing.

Determined to pursue a literary career, between 1911 and 1915 Mansfield published short stories and book reviews in magazines. In 1912 she met editor and critic John Middleton Murry and was soon sharing the editorship of two magazines with him. The two began living together and married in 1918, after her first husband consented to a divorce.

Bliss and The Garden Party In 1915 Mansfield was reunited in London with her only brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp, shortly before he was killed in a military training accident. His visit is believed to have reinforced Mansfield's resolve to incorporate material drawn from her New Zealand background into her fiction. The collections *Bliss, and Other Stories* (1920) and *The Garden Party, and Other Stories* (1922)—the last that Mansfield edited and oversaw in production—contain "Bliss," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Je Ne Parle Pas Français," and "Miss Brill," which are considered among the finest short stories in the English language. The success of these volumes established Mansfield as a major talent comparable to such contemporaries as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Early End At the end of 1918, Mansfield learned that what she had regarded as "rheumatism" was a longstanding sexually transmitted infection that damaged her fertility and had seriously affected her heart. She was further weakened by tuberculosis in the early 1920s. Nonetheless, she worked almost continuously, writing until the last few months of her life, when she undertook a faith cure in France. She died of a lung hemorrhage resulting from tuberculosis on January 9, 1923, at the age of thirty-four.

Works in Literary Context

Class Consciousness Many of Mansfield's stories deal with the concerns of the upper class, as well as the chasm that exists between the upper and lower classes. This is shown most clearly in "The Garden Party," where the main character—whose most important responsibility is planning a party for her family's wealthy acquaintances—has a wrenching encounter with a lower-class neighbor whose husband has just died. The gap between the classes

is also evident in “A Cup of Tea,” in which a wealthy woman brings a poor beggar girl back to her opulent home. The wealthy woman, who appears to have everything, becomes despondent when her husband comments on the poor girl’s beauty, but fails to say the same for his wife. As illustrated in these stories, Mansfield acknowledges the vain preoccupations of the upper classes, but also shows that money alone does not provide happiness or fulfillment.

Mansfield and Virginia Woolf Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf had a significant influence on each other, although Mansfield objected to many of the Bloomsbury Group’s ideas. Mansfield developed from Woolf a capacity to describe moments of intense perception, “that condition of standing outside of things, yet being more intensely in them.” No other writers of the time could match Mansfield’s or Woolf’s capacity to convey the simultaneity of multiple and searching human perceptions.

Mansfield, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov Mansfield held deep literary debts to Russian writers Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Anton Chekhov. Her connection to Dostoyevsky focuses on his recognitions of consciousness and his extraordinary capacity to depict the agonies of the human soul. But, Mansfield felt that Chekhov knew as well as Dostoyevsky the agonies of consciousness, and he retained a capacity to respond to the outside world; he acknowledged a need to write and live simultaneously with one’s recognitions. She began translating his letters, including one she said was vital to her view of her own art, in which Chekhov asserted that “what the writer does is not so much to *solve* the question but to *put* the question.” The irresolvable suspension of human emotion between self and otherness adds to the recognition of irremediable class distinctions, a social concern in one of Mansfield’s most deeply Chekhovian stories.

Works in Critical Context

Mansfield’s fiction has been increasingly respected throughout the years, and the quality of her thought and writing praised as further material has been posthumously published. Although reminiscences, particularly those of John Middleton Murry, the husband who survived her, have sometimes tended to sanctify her, healthy reactions against sanctity have questioned the viewpoints of Murry and others. The variety and brevity of her fiction, its accessibility as well as its length, have enabled Mansfield to reach an expanding audience throughout the century.

The Garden Party and Other Stories Jan Pilditch writes: “Katherine Mansfield published *The Garden Party and Other Stories* in 1922, the same year that [Anglo-American poet] T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, and [Irish writer] James Joyce published *Ulysses*. Mansfield’s collection similarly represents the mature progress of her artistry. It contains some of her finest work, and illustrates the artistic usefulness of her New Zealand

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mansfield’s famous contemporaries include:

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930): Lawrence was an English writer and friend of Mansfield, who examined human sexuality in his novels. He was well-known for *Sons and Lovers* and *Women in Love*.

Dorothy Lawrence (1869–1964): Lawrence was an English reporter who posed as a man to become a soldier in World War I. She was discovered by the British and was made to promise not to write about her experiences for fear that other women would follow.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954): Matisse was a French sculptor, painter, and printmaker. He was a leading figure in modern art, famous for his fluid lines and use of vibrant color.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918): Owen was a British soldier and leading poet of World War I. He was well-known for his graphic and realistic, rather than patriotic, poems about the war.

background... Mansfield, no less than James Joyce, demonstrates a preoccupation with the growth of an artistic sensibility.” And Don Kleine writes: “‘The Garden Party’ is generally, and with justice, regarded as one of the most nearly flawless short stories in the language.”

Elizabeth Bowen writes: “We owe to [Mansfield] the prosperity of the ‘free’ story: she untrammelled it from conventions and, still more, gained for it a prestige till then unthought of. How much ground Katherine Mansfield broke for her successors may not be realized. Her imagination kindled unlikely matter; she was to alter for good and all our idea of what goes to make a story.”

Responses to Literature

1. Katherine Mansfield wrote about the difference between one’s inner and outer worlds. When have you felt like what’s going on inside you is not what other people see? Think about one specific instance. Was there a revealing detail that people should have noticed that indicated how you truly felt?
2. After her death, Mansfield’s husband tried to present a specific view of her. Do you think that is understandable or dishonest?
3. Do you think short stories can reveal as much about a character as a whole novel can?
4. Mansfield’s stories are fairly short, and their language is simple. Usually, we think of great literature as having complicated language and being difficult to read. Think about two musicians or artists you like,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Katherine Mansfield's short stories are driven by their characters rather than by an external plot. They are more about the interior life than specific events. Here are some other works that deal with this theme:

The Cherry Orchard (1904), a play by Anton Chekhov.

Members of an aristocratic family return to their estate before it is auctioned off to pay their mortgage; caught in inertia, they are unable to save their home.

On Golden Pond (1981), a film directed by Mark Rydell.

This movie follows the relationships between an elderly couple, their daughter, her fiancé, and his son as they reunite over the course of a summer.

Runaway (2004), short stories by Alice Munro. Three of these spare stories, reminiscent of Chekhov, focus on different stages of one woman's life; they all examine various facets of love and betrayal.

To the Lighthouse (1927), a novel by Virginia Woolf. This meditative story of a family's visit to the Scottish Isle of Skye is told by the interior thoughts of the characters and has minimal dialogue.

Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? (1976), short stories by Raymond Carver. The minimalist tales in this collection focus on small epiphanies in ordinary people's lives that lead to a change in their outlook.

one with outwardly simpler work than the other. Write an essay comparing and contrasting their two approaches. Do you feel that one is stronger than the other? Be sure to use specific examples.

5. Many of Mansfield's stories use the past to establish a connection with the present and immediate. Read Galway Kinnell's poem "Pulling a Nail." Write an essay analyzing what the connection is between the past and present in this poem, using specific examples. Compare this poem to a work by Mansfield.

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Kamala Markandaya

BORN: 1924, India

DIED: 2004, London

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Nectar in a Sieve (1954)

A Handful of Rice (1966)

Nowhere Man (1972)

Two Virgins (1973)

Overview

Kamala Markandaya is one of India's best-known novelists. The fact that her body of work, especially the novel *The Nowhere Man*, foreshadowed the explosion of published works by South Asian writers over the last several decades makes her novels required reading for anyone interested in Indian culture. Markandaya explores a

number of issues in her novels, including urbanization, poverty, sexuality, gender, interracial relationships, India's struggle to maintain its identity in an increasingly Westernized world, and colonialism's impact.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Indian and British Influences Kamala Markandaya was born in Mysore, India, in 1924 to a privileged Brahmin family. Born Kamala Purnaiyas, and often known as Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, she adopted the surname Markandaya when her first novel was published. Little is known about her childhood, but as a young woman, she graduated with a degree in history from the University of Madras before working in the Indian army during World War II. She then established herself as a journalist and short-story writer, married a fellow journalist, Englishman Bertrand Taylor, and immigrated to Britain in 1948.

During Markandaya's youth, India was officially a colony of the British Empire. This led to a mix of both traditional Indian and contemporary English cultural influences, most notably the widespread use of the English language. A popular movement supporting the independence of India gained momentum throughout the 1920s and 1930s, largely due to the leadership of Mohandas Gandhi. India finally achieved its independence from Britain in 1948, the year Markandaya left the country.

Publications *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Markandaya's first published novel, was actually the third novel she wrote. The book became an international best seller and was translated into seventeen languages. A year later, the American Library Association named it a "Notable Book." It has remained a favorite on American and British university reading lists ever since. Markandaya never reveals the setting of the novel and never sets the action in a particular time or place, thus ensuring the story's timeless quality and universal appeal. This technique is especially effective given that the novel was published less than a decade after India won its independence from Britain.

Some Inner Fury (1956) is set during the British occupation, and her third novel, *A Silence of Desire* (1960), explores marriage, the effect modernity has on traditional Indian values, and what happens when the two merge. *Possession* (1963) continues in this vein, exploring the tensions between materialism and spiritualism in the context of an Anglo-Indian love relationship. Markandaya's fifth novel, *A Handful of Rice* (1966), revisits the topic of poverty, this time in an urban setting. *The Coffer Dams*, Markandaya's sixth novel, was published in 1969. At the time, the author could not know that her book would pave the way for future activist literature like Arundhati Roy's recent offerings. In her novel, Markan-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Markandaya's famous contemporaries include:

Ravi Shankar (1920–): A sitar player who helped introduce Indian music to the rest of the world.

Truman Capote (1924–1984): A canonical American author known for his novels, plays, and nonfiction, including *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1965).

Rosamunde Pilcher (1924–): A British novelist who began her successful career in the romance genre but became known through her mainstream women's fiction.

Dennis Vincent Brutus (1924–): A South African poet who was exiled from his country for writing that reflected his activism against apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s.

daya explores the struggle Indian tribal nations face when an extensive dam project threatens to destroy their communities.

Many consider *The Nowhere Man* (1972) to be the author's greatest novel. Epic in scope, the story focuses on the cultural consequences of widespread postwar South Asian migration to Britain. Again, the book is prescient and foreshadows the work of contemporary authors Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, and Hanif Kureishi. Markandaya followed her masterpiece with *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure City* (1982). Her last novel, published as *Shalimar* (1982) in the United States, was poorly received by critics, which led to her being dropped by her publisher. Although she lived for another twenty-two years, she never published another book.

She lived an intensely private life in England, traveling to India only occasionally. As with the beginning of her life, little is known about the author's later years. Markandaya died of kidney failure on May 16, 2004, in London, England. She is survived by her daughter, Kim Oliver.

Works in Literary Context

East vs. West Whether Markandaya's novels are set in India or abroad, they consistently concern themselves with the struggle between traditional Indian values and Western modernity. This dilemma, including tensions between rationalism and faith, materialism and spirituality, and urban and rural ways of life, has become a part of India's identity over the last several decades. Markandaya embraces these opposites. Shiv Kumar of *Books Abroad* uses colorful imagery in his observation about her

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Markandaya deals with struggle, particularly in her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. The protagonist, Rukmani, faces many hardships but manages to get through most of them via hope and faith. Here are some other works that emphasize courage and persistence in times of crisis.

The Grapes of Wrath (1939), a novel by John Steinbeck. In this novel of the Great Depression, the Joad family leaves their farm and heads west.

Midnight's Children (1981), a novel by Salman Rushdie. The young narrator of this novel is born on the same day that India gains independence, and thus his childhood mimics the country's own adjustment problems.

Blindness (1995), a novel by José Saramago. In an unnamed city, a plague of blindness descends inexplicably upon its citizens, who must then struggle to survive.

Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. A boy is shipwrecked for 227 days, and his only companion on the boat happens to be a tiger.

juxtaposition of the traditional against the contemporary, suggesting that her books portray “in symbolical characters and situations this thrust toward modernity, which often assumes in her work the guise of a malignant tumor infecting the vitals of a culture traditionally quietistic.”

The Diaspora Kamala Markandaya's style is characterized by the use of metaphors and motifs, and short, clipped sentence structure. Her writing is generally empathetic, and she provides multiple perspectives on a range of subjects. In 1976, she wrote, “the Commonwealth writer abroad is lumbered with double vision. Double vision not in the sense of a flawed vision, but a vision that is slightly enlarged . . . and insists in perceiving two sides to every picture.” Her interest in issues related to the diaspora (the spread of people to other lands, usually initiated by political or economic difficulty) and to colonialism motivated her to explore ideas that, at the time, were fairly revolutionary. Indeed, many critics and scholars consider her the first diasporic Indian writer.

Works in Critical Context

Markandaya is a realistic writer, a fact that has somewhat diminished her reputation, particularly since other Indian writers have chosen instead to embrace the more fantastical style of magic realism. Much of Markandaya's value lies in the clarity of her prose, the inventiveness of her metaphors, and her gift for understanding the subtleties of human motives.

Nectar in a Sieve *Nectar in a Sieve* was highly praised for its accurate picture of Indian village life. Donald Barr of the *New York Times* wrote: “The basis of eloquence is knowledge, and *Nectar in a Sieve* has a wonderful, quiet authority over our sympathies because [Markandaya] is manifestly an authority on village life in India. Because of what she knows, she has been able to write a story without reticence or excess.” “It is a powerful book,” commented critic J. F. Muehl of *Saturday Review*, “but the power is in the content. . . . You read it because it answers so many real questions: What is the day-to-day life of the villager like? How does a village woman really think of herself? What goes through the minds of people who are starving?”

Two Virgins Reviewing *Two Virgins*, a *New Yorker* critic observed that Markandaya “writes in a forthright, almost breakneck style that could have been paced a little less relentlessly but could not be more precise or lucid. From the minutiae of the girls's lives we learn a great deal about the fabric of life in India today. They are constantly choosing between Eastern and Western ways of looking at the world—in their school, at home, in their language, and in their attitudes toward their own ripening sexuality, of which they are both keenly aware. . . . Both their stories are fascinating and demonstrate that [Markandaya] writes as well about such universal feelings as lust, friendship, envy, and pride as she does about matters idiosyncratic to her country.”

Responses to Literature

1. How might Markandaya's history degree factor into her writing, particularly of *The Nowhere Man*? Arrange your ideas into an informal essay that centers on one or two examples from the text.
2. Read a novel by Markandaya. Find three passages in the text that you think exemplify the way in which Markandaya's move to England affected her writing about her homeland of India. Write a paragraph explaining your interpretation of each passage.
3. Look up the term “diaspora” and discuss how Markandaya's work fits into that category. Who are some other writers who belong to a “diaspora”? How are their works like Markandaya's?

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Christopher Marlowe

BORN: 1564, *Canterbury, England*

DIED: 1593, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Poetry, drama*

MAJOR WORKS:

Tamburlaine the Great (1590)

The Tragedie of Dido Queene of Carthage (1594)

The Tragicall History of D. Faustus (1604)

Overview

The achievement of Christopher Marlowe, poet and dramatist, was enormous—surpassed only by that of his exact contemporary William Shakespeare. Most dramatic poets of the sixteenth century followed where Marlowe had led, especially in their use of language and the blank-verse line. The prologue to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587–1588) proclaims its author's contempt for the stage verse of the period, in which the "jyggling vaines of riming mother wits" presented the "conceits [which] clownage keepes in pay" instead the new play promised a barbaric foreign hero, the "Scythian Tamburlaine, Threatning the world with high astounding tearms." English drama was never the same again.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

On Her Majesty's Secret Service Marlowe lived his entire life during the Elizabethan era, the time period during which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England and Ireland. The era lasted from 1558 until her death in 1603, and was most notable for two great accomplishments: the rise of British sea superiority, demonstrated by both the British defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the extensive oceanic explorations of Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh; and the advancement of English

theatre to a popular and enduring art form, demonstrated by the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Marlowe was born in February 1564, about two months before Shakespeare. His father was a prosperous middle-class merchant of Canterbury. Christopher received his early education at King's School in Canterbury, and at the age of seventeen went to Cambridge, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1584.

The terms of his scholarship allowed for a further three years' study if the holder intended to take holy orders, and Marlowe appears to have fulfilled this condition. But in 1587 the University at first refused to grant the appropriate degree of Master of Arts. The college records show that Marlowe was away from Cambridge for considerable periods during his second three years, and the university apparently had good reason to be suspicious of his whereabouts. Marlowe, however, was not without some influence by this time: Archbishop Whitgift, Lord Burghley, and Sir Christopher Hatton were among members of Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council who signed a letter explaining, "Whereas it was reported that Christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Reames and there to remaine . . . he had done her Majestie good service, & deserved to be rewarded for his faithfull dealinge."

The reference to "Reames" makes everything clear. The Jesuit seminary at Rheims was the refuge of many

expatriate English Roman Catholics, banished from Queen Elizabeth's newly Protestant realm, who were thought to be scheming to overthrow the English monarch. It is likely that Marlowe was sent to Rheims on some sort of espionage mission as part of greater efforts to foil Elizabeth's Catholic foes.

Wild Years in London In 1587 Marlowe went from Cambridge to London. For the next six years he wrote plays and associated with other writers, among them the poet Thomas Watson and the dramatist Thomas Kyd. He soon became known for his wild, bohemian ways and his unorthodox thinking. In 1589, for example, he was imprisoned for a time in connection with the death of a certain William Bradley, who had been killed in a violent quarrel in which Marlowe played an important part. He was several times accused of being an "atheist" and a "blasphemer," most notably by his fellow playwright Thomas Kyd. These charges led to Marlowe's arrest in 1593, but he died before his case was decided.

Marlowe's career as a poet and dramatist spanned a mere six years. Between his graduation from Cambridge in 1587 and his death in 1593 he wrote only one major poem (*Hero and Leander*, unfinished at his death) and six or seven plays (one play, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, may have been written while he was still a student). Since the dating of several plays is uncertain, it is impossible to construct a reliable history of Marlowe's intellectual and artistic development.

Dido, Queen of Carthage For what was probably his first play, Marlowe took from the Roman poet Virgil the account of Dido's passion for Aeneas, the Trojan hero shipwrecked on the Carthaginian coast after the destruction of Troy, and added a subplot of the unrequited love of Anna, Dido's sister, for one of Dido's suitors, whose name—Iarbus—is mentioned only infrequently in Virgil's epic, the *Aeneid*. Virgil's hero is a man of destiny, ordained by the gods to sail to Italy and there establish the Roman race, the true descendants of the Trojans. The interlude with Dido is only a part of the divine plan. Aeneas must not allow himself to be detained in Carthage, even though his departure is a tragic catastrophe for the Queen. Virgil's gods are always in control of the action.

Marlowe introduces the gods at the beginning of his play, daringly presenting them as a bunch of rather shabby immortals subject to very human emotions: Venus is anxious for the welfare of her shipwrecked son, Aeneas; Juno is jealous of Venus and irritated by her husband's infidelities; and Jupiter is besotted with a homosexual passion for Ganymede. This is a grotesquely "domestic" comedy, which might seem to endanger the tragic stature of the play's heroine and the epic status of its hero, since both Dido and Aeneas are at the mercy of such deities. The character of Aeneas has provoked varying reactions in critics of the play (one sees him as "an Elizabethan adventurer"; another adopts the medieval view in which he is the betrayer of Troy; and for yet

another he is the unheroic "man-in-the-street" who has no desire for great actions). Dido, however, is unambiguously sympathetic. At first a majestic queen, she becomes almost inarticulate as she struggles with a passion that she does not understand. Her grief at Aeneas's departure brings back her eloquence, and then, preparing for death, she achieves the isolated dignity of a tragic heroine.

Tamburlaine the Great Based on the historical fourteenth-century Mongol conqueror Tamerlane, *Tamburlaine the Great*, a two-part play, was first printed in 1590 but was probably composed several years earlier. The famous prologue to the first part announces a new poetic and dramatic style: "From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,/ And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay/ We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,/ Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine/ Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms/ And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword./ View but his picture in this tragic glass,/ And then applaud his fortunes as you please." The play itself is a bold demonstration of Tamburlaine's rise to power and his single-minded, often inhumanly cruel exercise of that power.

The Jew of Malta Although written sometime between 1588 and 1592, *The Jew of Malta* was not printed until 1633, but it was frequently performed by The Admiral's Men in the years immediately following Marlowe's death. The recorded box-office receipts testify to its popularity. The chief figure, the phenomenally wealthy merchant-prince Barabas, is one of the most powerful figures of Elizabethan drama. Unlike Tamburlaine, who asserts his will openly and without guile, Barabas is shrewd, devious, and secretive. Yet Barabas is also a sympathetic character in that, at the beginning of the play, he is a man more sinned against than sinning: the victim of prejudice, his fault lies in his Jewishness—and the Knights of Malta are prepared to use religion as a cloak for theft when they take the Jews' property to pay the Turks. Barabas discloses their hypocrisy: "Preach me not out of my possessions." The prologue is delivered by a historical figure easily recognized by Marlowe's contemporary audiences: Niccolò Machiavelli, Italian political mastermind and author of *The Prince*.

Doctor Faustus *Doctor Faustus*, which is generally considered Marlowe's greatest work, was probably also his last. Its central figure, a scholar who feels he has exhausted all the conventional areas of human learning, attempts to gain the ultimate in knowledge and power by selling his soul to the devil.

In the last act of the play, he twice conjures up the spirit of Helen of Troy—the first time for the benefit of his scholar friends, who have requested to see "the noblest Lady that ever lived." The second time is for his own delight and comfort; he asks for Helen as his "paramour."

The second appearance of Helen calls forth from Faustus the most famous lines that Marlowe ever wrote:

Was this the face that Launcht a thousand ships,
And burnt the toplesse Towers of Ilium? Sweet
Hellen make me immortall with a kisse: Her lips
sucke forth my soule, see where it flies.

The high point comes in the portrayal of the hero's final moments, as he awaits the powers of darkness who demand his soul.

Audience enthusiasm for Marlowe's works reflect important elements of Elizabethan culture. Though the Italian Renaissance had already passed, the same interest in classical subjects is found in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Doctor Faustus*. At the same time, these classical and historical subjects were counterbalanced by moments of humor that might be described as "low" or inappropriate in tone. This reflects the wide-ranging audiences that were drawn to the theater during this time; England had steadily grown more prosperous under Elizabeth's rule, and even lower-class citizens frequented the theater for an evening's entertainment. Aside from historical and classical subjects, many of Marlowe's works reflected events and concerns of the Elizabethan era; *The Massacre at Paris*, for example, depicted the events of the 1572 Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre (a wave of Catholic mob violence against Protestants in France resulting in tens of thousands of deaths), which mirrored the ongoing tensions between Catholics and Protestants within England.

A Violent Death The circumstances of Marlowe's death first came to light in the twentieth century with the discovery of the original coroner's report in the Public Record Office in London. The report tells of a meeting at the house of Mrs. Eleanor Bull in Deptford—not a tavern, but a house where meetings could be held and food supplied. On May 30, 1593 Marlowe spent the whole day there, talking and walking in the garden with three "gentlemen." In the evening there was a quarrel, ostensibly about who should pay the bill, "le recknyng"; in the ensuing scuffle Marlowe is said to have drawn his dagger and wounded one of his companions. The man, Ingram Frizer, snatched the weapon and "in defence of his life, with the dagger aforesaid . . . gave the said Christopher then and there a mortal wound over his right eye of the depth of two inches and of the width of one inch; of which mortal wound the aforesaid Christopher Morley then and there instantly died."

Despite the unusual wealth of detail surrounding this fatal episode, there has been much speculation about the affair. It has been suggested, for example, that the deed was politically motivated and that Frizer (who was subsequently judged to have acted in self-defense) was simply acting as an agent for a more prominent person.

Works in Literary Context

In many ways, Marlowe's plays typify attitudes in Renaissance England. The intellectual and aesthetic rebirth known as the Renaissance began in Italy during the four-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Marlowe's famous contemporaries include:

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): English poet and playwright widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's best dramatist. His plays have been translated into every major language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): An English Renaissance poet, dramatist and actor best known today for his satirical plays and poetry.

Elizabeth I (1533–1603): The Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 to her death, and daughter of Henry VIII. Her reign saw the ascendancy of English drama and the beginnings of English naval power in the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the exploits of English "Sea Dogs" like Francis Drake.

Sir Francis Drake (1540–1596): English privateer, explorer, slave trader, adventurer. Second in command of the English fleet that faced the Spanish Armada, Drake became the scourge of the Spaniards with his raids on treasure ships returning from the New World.

Philip II (1527–1598): King of Spain and Portugal, ruler of the Spanish colonial empire, after whom the Philippine Islands are named. His reign saw the beginning of the Eighty Years' War with the Netherlands, and also the defeat of the Armada, which brought a permanent end to his ambitions to conquer Protestant England.

teenth century and, in the next two centuries, spread new ideas throughout Europe. Three aspects of Renaissance culture—Humanism, Individualism, and the New Science—figure as prominent themes in Marlowe's play. Rejecting medieval social and religious attitudes, Renaissance Humanists privileged individual over collective values. Humanism encouraged people to realize their happiness and potential in this, the material world, rather than focusing solely on eternal happiness in the afterlife.

Tragedy Although a number of English dramatists before Christopher Marlowe had achieved some notable successes in the field of comedy, none had produced a first-rate tragedy. It was Marlowe who made the first significant advances in tragedy. In each of his major plays he focuses on a single character that dominates the action by virtue of his extraordinary strength of will. Marlowe's thundering blank verse, although for the most part lacking the subtlety of Shakespeare's mature poetry, proved a remarkably effective medium for this kind of drama.

Blank Verse Critics tend to agree that Marlowe's innovation in verse was the first and most influential

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Christopher Marlowe's version of the Faust story focuses on the dire consequences of his character's choices. The following are other works with a similar focus on action and consequence.

Macbeth (1603–06) by William Shakespeare. In plotting to kill their king, Macbeth and his wife metaphorically "sell their souls" in exchange for political power. Both *Doctor Faustus* and this play successfully explore the psychology of transgression, guilt, and punishment.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In this classic of Russian literature, a student named Raskolnikov murders a pawn broker and is haunted by paranoia even as he attempts to improve society through his actions.

It's a Wonderful Life (1946), a film by Frank Capra. In this holiday favorite, a desperate and down-on-his-luck man named George Bailey finds out what the world would have been like if he had never lived.

A Separate Peace (1959), a novel by John Knowles. In this coming-of-age tale, the lives of two boys—close friends with radically different personalities—are dramatically changed by a tragic accident caused by one of them.

predecessor to the stylistic achievements of the era. It was *Tamburlaine the Great* that made this powerful verse style famous. Marlowe stresses in the prologue to Part I that it is his intention to depart from the "jigging veins of rhyming mother wits," or unsophisticated rhymes like those of a mother giving silly advice in the form of a jig, of his predecessors. Instead, Marlowe wanted to create a work of high philosophical ambitions and powerful, "astounding" verse.

The poetic tool Marlowe uses for his "mighty line" is blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which is a meter with five beats of two-syllable units called iambs. This style, adapted from Greek and Latin heroic verse, was developed in Italy before Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced it in England. Marlowe was perhaps the chief innovator to instill blank verse with emotional force and rhythmic eloquence, and he was also influential in skillfully suiting his characters' temperaments to the nature of their lines.

Works in Critical Context

Within three or four years of his death, Marlowe's career was being cited by contemporary moralists as a classic illustration of the workings of divine retribution against a blasphemous atheist. In 1597, for example, Thomas Beard recognized in it "a manifest signe of Gods judgement . . . in that hee compelled his owne hand which had

written those blasphemies to be the instrument to punish him, and that in his braine, which had devised the same." But he was also recognized as a remarkable dramatic genius who, if he had lived longer, was on track to have rivaled the likes of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

Contemporary poet Michael Drayton observed in him "those brave translunary things That the first poets had." This early appreciation has extended over the years, so that now most critics—sharing the benefits of hindsight—would agree with A. C. Swinburne that Marlowe was "the father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse." According to Havelock Ellis, "Marlowe's place is at the heart of English poetry"; and T. S. Eliot even predicted "the direction in which Marlowe's verse might have moved . . . [which was toward] . . . intense and serious and indubitably great poetry."

Although Shakespeare was able to bring his art to an ever higher level, most dramatic poets of the sixteenth century followed where Marlowe had led, especially in their use of language and the blank-verse line. English drama was never the same.

Doctor Faustus Although *Doctor Faustus* was a staple production for The Admiral's Men for several years after its creation, it was also a divisive work that some sources suggest was not that popular with Elizabethan audiences. It prompted Puritan author William Prynne, in his 1632 attack on Elizabethan theater known as *Histrionomastix*, to proclaim that the production was sinful enough to cause actual demons to materialize onstage. The play, like many of Marlowe's works, was virtually forgotten through the eighteenth century, though it was rediscovered and appreciated by later scholars. William Hazlitt, in a lecture from around 1820, states that the play, "although an unequal and imperfect performance, is [Marlowe's] greatest work. Faustus himself is a rude sketch, but it is a gigantic one." In 1908, poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne praised the play, stating that "in dramatic power and positive impression of natural effect it is . . . certainly the masterpiece of Marlowe." Writing in 1971, scholar Gâmini Salgâdo confirmed the lasting impact of the work, stating that "the action and spectacle have retained undiminished their capacity to hold an audience enthralled."

Responses to Literature

1. How are the moral themes of the plays *Dr. Faustus* and *Tamburlaine the Great* similar? How do they differ? What does *Dr. Faustus* imply about one human's relationship to the universe? How does this differ from the implications of *Tamburlaine the Great*? How do the plays differ in style and form? Which one sheds more light on today's society, and which one would you rather see performed today? Explain your choices.

2. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the pursuit of knowledge fails to produce happiness. Do you believe that too much knowledge brings unhappiness? Are there some things people were not meant to know?
3. Most readers of Marlowe's play feel that Doctor Faustus wastes a wonderful opportunity. If you had Faustus's power, what would you do?
4. Often news reporters and pundits compare certain political and entertainment figures to Dr. Faustus, saying that they made a "deal with the devil" to attain their success. Write an informal paper in which you examine contemporary figures in light of the dramatic character Dr. Faustus.

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Gabriel García Márquez

BORN: 1928, Aracataca, Colombia

NATIONALITY: Colombian

GENRE: Novels, short stories, nonfiction

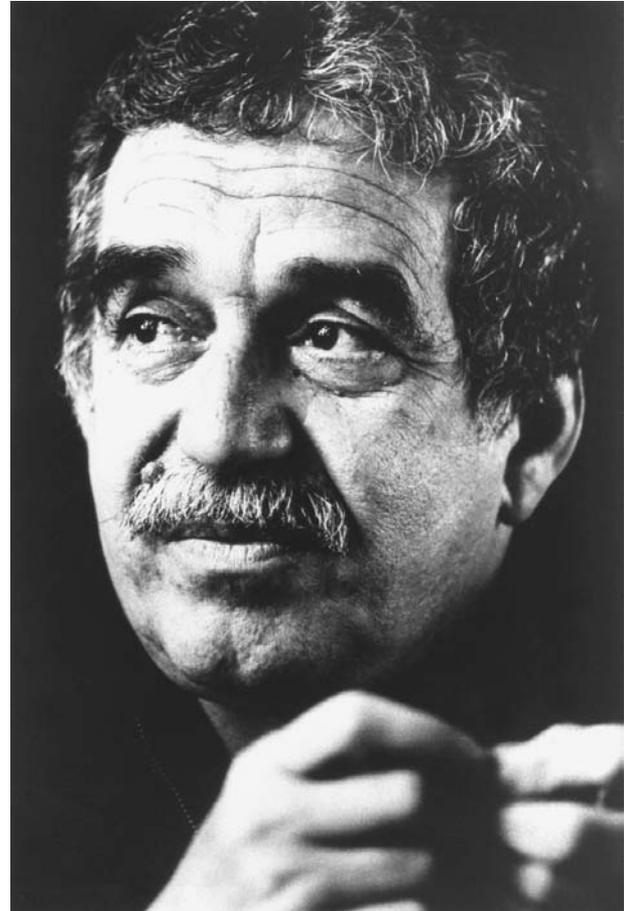
MAJOR WORKS:

No One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories (1961)

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967)

The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975)

Love in the Time of Cholera (1985)



Gabriel García Márquez *Marquez, Gabriel Garcia, 1982, photograph.*
AP Images.

Overview

Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez shares with many Nobel laureates in literature a concern for the common man, an ongoing faith in the human spirit, and a commitment to telling stories that are accessible to a broad audience. Many of García Márquez's works are considered examples of "magical realism," a literary style that typically has a strong narrative drive in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and inexplicable. García Márquez is credited with helping reinvigorate the modern novel genre.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in a Small Village Culture García Márquez was born on March 7, 1928, in the northern Caribbean coastal region of Colombia in the town of Aracataca. He was the son of telegrapher Gabriel Eligio García and Luisa Santiaga Márquez de García (a pair whose star-crossed courtship García Márquez would later fictionalize in *Love in the Time of Cholera*). García

Márquez lived with his maternal grandparents for eight years after his father left home to seek better employment. The vast majority of the population in this impoverished and strongly Afro-Colombian region of the country was illiterate and, as a result, had a strong and vibrant oral culture. National newspapers did not yet circulate in this region, and much of the news from the outside world came to Aracataca and other small towns by means of *vallenatos*, popular music that told tales garnished with real people and events. Not surprisingly, the storytelling of his grandmother, the long decline of Aracataca, and the myths and superstitions of the townspeople all played major roles in shaping García Márquez's imagination and literary style. García Márquez has acknowledged that the fictional town of Macondo, the focal point of his masterwork *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was based on Aracataca.

Journalism and Literary Circle amidst Political Violence Life changed radically for many citizens of Colombia in April 1948 when political violence broke out in the streets of Bogotá after the assassination of the presidential candidate of the Liberal Party, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. García Márquez was attending law school in Bogotá at the time. After the university closed and his boardinghouse was burned down, García Márquez moved to a more peaceful setting, the coastal city of Cartagena, where he took a job as a journalist. In 1950, he moved to Barranquilla and continued newspaper work. It was in Barranquilla that he befriended other young writers and became familiar with the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, both of whom would influence his writing. Partisan violence spread across the nation from 1948 to 1956, and Colombia experienced a civil war identified as La Violencia, which led to more than three hundred thousand deaths.

Political Dissent García Márquez returned to Bogotá in 1954, serving as a film critic and reporter for *El espectador*, and the next year his novella *Leaf Storm* (*La hojarasca*) was published. During this period he also gained political notoriety for his account in *El espectador* of the experiences of Luis Alejandro Velasco, a sailor who survived the shipwreck of a Colombian naval vessel in the Caribbean. This series of reports, later published as *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (*Relato de un naufrago*, 1970), exposed the existence of contraband cargo onboard the ship and suggested the general incompetence of the nation's navy.

Seeking to avoid governmental retribution, García Márquez traveled throughout Europe during 1955, working as a foreign correspondent for his newspaper. In 1956, however, the military government of Colombia headed by Gustavo Rojas Pinilla shut down the periodical and, fearing reprisal if he should return, García Márquez settled in Paris. During this time, many of his peers in Colombia were writing bloody accounts of La Violencia in the 1950s, but García Márquez's approach was differ-

ent: he wrote stories that subtly alluded to political violence, with political conflict only a part of the general plot. In this way, García Márquez emphasized the human drama in a more universal way than had been the case in Colombian fiction of his contemporaries.

Anti-U.S., Pro-Cuba Writings During the late 1950s and early 1960s, García Márquez wrote journalistic pieces criticizing the U.S. government and celebrating the Cuban Revolution. Like many Latin American intellectuals of this period, García Márquez viewed the Cuban Revolution as a model for the Latin American nations establishing economic and cultural independence from the United States, which had since the turn of the century taken an aggressive role in Latin American politics. During the Cuban Revolution of 1958, Fidel Castro led a successful Communist insurgency against the U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista. Because this occurred during the height of Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States government was greatly disturbed by the presence of a Communist nation just ninety miles from the American border. The United States attempted to facilitate the overthrow of the new Communist regime in 1961 by giving CIA backing to a botched, embarrassing invasion attempt known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. One year later, the Soviet Union installed nuclear weapons on Cuba, sparking the Cuban Missile Crisis, one of the most perilous superpower showdowns of the Cold War. The crisis was resolved without violence, but relations between the United States and Cuba have been frosty ever since.

As a result of his pro-Cuba writings and a visit to Cuba (which led to a lifelong friendship with Fidel Castro), García Márquez has had difficulty most of his adult life in acquiring visas to visit the United States; for many years, he was on a State Department blacklist of leftist intellectuals.

A "Boom" in Latin American Literature The 1960s were the years of the internationally recognized "Boom" of the Latin American novel. The Mexican Carlos Fuentes, the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, the Argentine Julio Cortázar, and García Márquez—these Latin American writers "who have given to its literature a maturity and dignity it never had before," to quote John Sturrock in the *New York Times Book Review*.

When *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*) was published in 1967 by the Argentine publishing house Sudamericana, its impact was swift and broad. Critics from Argentina to Spain immediately heralded it as one of the major novels to have been published in recent years. Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, himself a Nobel laureate, was quoted in *Time* as calling the book "the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes. With the novel's publication, the Boom was at its height in Latin America and gaining an unprecedented international respect.

International Celebrity After One Hundred Years of Solitude Following the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and its international success, García Márquez assumed the lifestyle of an international celebrity, with homes on several continents. When García Márquez received the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, he returned to Colombia a national hero, and the entire country celebrated. Because of his popularity after receiving the Nobel Prize, he was named an ambassador for the Colombian government and political groups within Colombia. Though García Márquez was most vocal about his progressive agenda in the 1970s (his 1975 novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was, for example, a pointed critique of Latin American dictatorships), he was a more moderate political voice for the downtrodden in the 1980s and 1990s. He promoted dialogue among such diverse political forces as the United States, Cuba, and France.

After being treated for lymphatic cancer in 1999, García Márquez continued writing and published *Memoirs of My Melancholy Whores* in 2004.

Works in Literary Context

Because of his training as a journalist, García Márquez smoothly incorporates social and historical elements into his fiction, a skill that allows him to promote the central themes of his work: violence, solitude, and mankind's need for love and companionship.

Journalistic Influence Although known as a novelist, García Márquez began his writing career as a reporter and still considers himself to be one. The *Reference Guide to World Literature* asserts that the evolution of García Márquez's individual style is based on his experience as a correspondent. In addition, this same experience has led Regina Janes and other critics to compare the Colombian to Ernest Hemingway, a famous American journalist-turned-novelist. Critics have also pointed out the similarities between García Márquez and William Faulkner, the American novelist famous for his books about the Deep South.

Magical Realism The term "magical realism" has become somewhat controversial in literary criticism because it has been perhaps too liberally applied. In a basic sense, magical realism in fiction is marked by realistic settings and everyday scenes in which sometimes the illogical, impossible, or miraculous occurs. However, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered quintessentially magical realist. The novel is on the one hand a perfectly realistic fictional chronicle of Macondo—a microcosm of Colombia and, by extension, of South America and the world—from its harmonious beginnings under founder José Arcadio Buendía to its increasingly chaotic decline through six generations of descendants. But in addition to reflecting the political, social, and economic ills of South America, the novel is filled with fantastic events, including a baby born with a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

García Márquez's famous contemporaries include:

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine short story writer and fellow magical realist, known for his intricate and interwoven plotlines.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French writer and existentialist philosopher.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): Mexican surrealist painter, who was also involved in politics with her husband, muralist Diego Rivera.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Controversial Latin American revolutionary and president of Cuba.

Isabel Allende (1942–): Chilean writer and magical realist most known for her novel *The House of the Spirits*.

pig tail and flocks of yellow butterflies that follow certain characters. The genre continues to be popular in Latin American literature, as it allows writers to blend the hard political and economic realities of their home regions with the folklore of their cultures and the often wild, grand natural landscape of their countries.

Works in Critical Context

Tribune Books contributor Harry Mark Petrakis described García Márquez as "a magician of vision and language who does astonishing things with time and reality. He blends legend and history in ways that make the legends seem truer than truth. His scenes and characters are humorous, tragic, mysterious and beset by ironies and fantasies. In his fictional world, anything is possible and everything is believable." In addition, the critic asserted: "Mystical and magical, fully aware of the transiency of life, his stories fashion realms inhabited by ghosts and restless souls who return to those left behind through fantasies and dreams. The stories explore, with a deceptive simplicity, the miracles and mysteries of life."

One Hundred Years of Solitude *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is García Márquez's best-known contribution to the awakening of interest in Latin American literature. According to an *Antioch Review* critic, the popularity and acclaim for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* signaled that "Latin American literature will change from being the exotic interest of a few to essential reading and that Latin America itself will be looked on less as a crazy subculture and more as a fruitful, alternative way of life." Similarly enthusiastic was William Kennedy, who wrote in the *National Observer* that "*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many writers have experimented with magical realism, a blend of reality and fantasy in a literary text. The result is insight—often clever, sometimes comical—into the nature of reality itself. Other works of magical realism include:

The Metamorphosis (1915), by Franz Kafka. In this famous work of magical realism, the main character awakens to find himself transformed into a giant insect.

The House of the Spirits (1982), by Isabel Allende. In this novel by the Chilean writer, the main character inhabits a house full of ghosts while she tries to understand her complex family tree.

Green Grass, Running Water (1993), by Thomas King. A novel by a Cherokee writer featuring a mythical reality inhabited by one of a quintessential magical realist figures, the trickster Coyote.

Ceremony (1977), by Leslie Marmon Silko. This highly acclaimed novel tells the story of a Native American veteran's return to his New Mexico reservation after World War II.

Life of Pi (2001), by Yann Martel. In this novel, a young boy named Pi is shipwrecked and must survive on a raft somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Pi's only companion is a tiger named Richard Parker.

The Autumn of the Patriarch In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (*El otoño del patriarca*, 1975), García Márquez uses a more openly political tone in exploring the isolation of a political tyrant. “In this fabulous, dreamlike account of the reign of a nameless dictator of a fantastic Caribbean realm, solitude is linked with the possession of absolute power,” described Ronald De Feo in the *National Review*. Some critics, however, found both the theme and technique of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* lacking. *Newsweek*'s Walter Clemons considered the novel somewhat disappointing: “After the narrative vivacity and intricate characterization of the earlier book [*The Autumn of the Patriarch*] seems both oversumptuous and underpopulated. It is—deadliest of compliments—an extended piece of magnificent writing.”

Love in the Time of Cholera Another blending of fable and fact, based in part on García Márquez's recollections of his parents' marriage, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (*El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, 1985) “is an amazing celebration of the many kinds of love between men and women,” according to Elaine Feinstein of the *London Times*. In relating both the story of Fermina Daza's marriage and her later courtship, this “is a novel about commitment and fidelity under circumstances which seem to render such virtues absurd,” recounted

Times Literary Supplement contributor S.M.J. Minta. Although the basic plot is fairly simple, some critics have accused García Márquez of over-embellishing his story. *Chicago Tribune Books* contributor Michael Dorris remarked that “it takes a while to realize this core [plot], for every aspect of the book is attenuated, exaggerated, overstated.” Still, the book is seen as García Márquez's being true to himself. As *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani described it, *Love in the Time of Cholera* “has revealed how the extraordinary is contained in the ordinary, how a couple of forgotten, even commonplace lives can encompass the heights and depths of grand and eternal passion.”

Responses to Literature

1. The term “magic realism” was coined by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925. For Roh, it was synonymous with post-expressionist painting (1920–1925) because it revealed the mysterious elements hidden in everyday reality. García Márquez has claimed more than once that he is merely a “realist” who describes the everyday reality of his nation and of Latin America. Considering the fact that García Márquez has always been more interested in writers who invent reality (Kafka, Faulkner) rather than those who merely describe it, why do you think García Márquez would make such a claim about his own work? Support your answer with examples and elements present throughout García Márquez's body of work.
2. Many of García Márquez's works span long periods of time. Why do you think he chooses to portray his characters in terms of decades instead of days or weeks? Compare his use of time as a literary device to that of other writers and conclude what method is most effective. Provide specific examples to support your argument.
3. Besides Faulkner, name other writers who set their works so steadfastly in one location. Does this literary technique seem to limit or expand the scope of those works? Provide specific examples to support your argument.

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▣ Ngaio Marsh

BORN: 1899, Christchurch, New Zealand

DIED: 1982, Christchurch, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: British, New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Man Lay Dead (1934)

Overture to Death (1939)

Opening Night (1951)

Scales of Justice (1955)

Light Thickens (1982)

Overview

During what is usually referred to as the Golden Age of the detective story, Ngaio Marsh was one of a small group of British mystery writers who set standards of the detective novel that broadened the audience for the genre. In a career that spanned almost half a century, her popularity grew steadily, and her works became as sought after in the United States as they were in England and her native New Zealand.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Developing Early Passions for Theater Ngaio Marsh was born in Christchurch on April 23, 1899, to Henry Edmund and Rose Elizabeth Seager Marsh. She first studied painting, entering art school when she was fifteen, but her great love was always the theater. Her parents had been amateur actors, and she considered the appearances of Allan Wilkie's Shakespearean troupe in Christchurch "one of the great events of [her] student days."

Acting Career, International Travel, and a Move to London Marsh had already begun to write and submitted a Regency play, *The Medallion*, to Wilkie. Though he rejected the play, he returned it in person and invited her to join his company. She toured with Wilkie for two years, meanwhile writing verse, articles, and short



Ngaio Marsh Marsh, Ngaio, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

stories for the *Christchurch Sun*. Upon her return to Christchurch, Marsh resumed painting for a brief period before leaving once again to tour with a local acting company formed by Rosemary Rees. When that company failed, she returned home and was active as actress, producer, and director in a group staging charity shows. Here, she became friendly with a British family of the peerage and accepted an invitation to visit them when they returned to England. She turned them into fictional characters in several of her books, calling them the "Lampreys." She created, as her series detective, Roderick Alleyn, named after Edward Alleyn, the great Elizabethan tragedian and founder of Dulwich College, the school her father had attended before immigrating to New Zealand. Marsh lived in England from 1928 to 1933, doing interior decorating and operating a gift shop. She frequented the London theater at every opportunity.

Early Mystery Inclinations Mysteries had always been read in the Marsh household in New Zealand. In her 1965 autobiography, *Black Beech and Honeydew*, Marsh mentions reading such authors as Baroness Orczy, Guy Boothby, and William J. Locke, and recalls her rainy-day find of *Strand* magazines and discovering Sherlock Holmes. In 1931, on another rainy occasion, she began

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Marsh's famous contemporaries include:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): German playwright, stage director, and poet, he is credited, among many things, with creating the idea of epic theater.

Frederic Dannay (1905–1982): American writer, editor, and anthologist who—along with his cousin Manfred Bennington Lee—created mystery fiction under the name Ellery Queen.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Famous expatriate writer, his name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.

Frank Sargeson (1903–1982): Noted New Zealand short story writer.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he was subsequently the de facto dictator responsible for what is today known as Stalinism.

writing her first mystery novel. This first book, *A Man Lay Dead*, was not published until 1934, by which time she had returned to New Zealand because her mother was ill.

Illness Following her mother's death after what Marsh described as "an illness as cruelly and as excruciatingly protracted as if it had been designed by Torquemada," she remained in New Zealand to care for her father. She also wrote and painted. But she became very ill herself, and "a long-standing disability" landed her in the hospital for three months for a series of operations. Just as she used painting and the theater in her books, she made use of this experience and collaborated with her physician, Dr. Henry Jellett, on *The Nursing Home Murder* (1935).

Work with the Red Cross in World War II Marsh returned to England in 1937, did some touring of Europe, and then returned to New Zealand in 1938—where she stayed during World War II, driving a Red Cross ambulance. World War II took its place in history as the most costly of all human conflicts; in it 70 million people, mostly civilians, lost their lives and the overall financial cost of the war is estimated to be, based on 1944 standards, \$1 trillion. Marsh used her experiences serving with the Red Cross to write two wartime mysteries—*Colour Scheme* (1943) and *Died in the Wool* (1945). She also became increasingly serious about her theater work, producing and directing productions at Canterbury College where she reintroduced Shakespearean productions to New Zealand after a twenty-year absence. After World War II she returned to England to

work with the British Commonwealth Theatre Company, a group she eventually brought on tour to Australia and New Zealand.

Earning Distinction as a Writer of Crime Shorts Marsh's first published short story, "I Can Find My Way Out," appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in August of 1946. She had entered the story in the magazine's first short-story contest, which attracted a prestigious list of entrants. Her entry led to correspondence with its editor, Frederic Dannay, during the course of which she wrote, "I know of no Australasian writer of crime shorts of any distinction." In announcing she had won third prize in the contest, and introducing her story with a brief history of mystery fiction in Australia and New Zealand, Dannay pointed out that this was no longer true.

Life as Dame Ngaio Marsh In 1966 Marsh was appointed a dame of the British Empire, largely as a result of her work in the theater. For the rest of her life, Dame Ngaio Marsh divided her time between the theater and mystery writing. She also split her time between England and New Zealand, spending the last years before her death on February 18, 1982, in her native city. In *Black Beech and Honeydew*, Marsh has stated that in New Zealand she was seldom interviewed by the media regarding her mystery writing but more often about her work in the theater. Therefore, she was astonished to find a great deal of interest in her mysteries among serious readers in Great Britain, writing that "it was pleasant to find detective fiction being discussed as a tolerable form of reading by people whose opinion one valued."

Works in Literary Context

Influences of Theater and Art Marsh's knowledge of the theater, London's society and art worlds, and the rugged terrain of New Zealand informed her thirty-two novels and a handful of short stories. She classified herself with the mystery writers who create believable characters and use novelistic values, rather than those whose main interest is the puzzle. Among the writers who influenced Marsh are Baroness Orczy, Guy Boothby, William J. Locke, and Arthur Conan Doyle. *Final Curtain* presents Marsh's love of the theater. *Killer Dolphin* (1966) and *Light Thickens* (1982), among others, show her love for and talent with theater as a writer with a drama background, and show her typical thinking in theatrical terms.

In several Marsh novels painting is equally important. *Artists in Crime* (1938) and *Final Curtain* (1947) both feature a painter named Agatha Troy who plays a part in each story. These and other novels contain many descriptions in which color is used vividly, suggesting a painter's eye.

Using and Expanding Mystery Genre Conventions While working within the conventions of the classic detective puzzle, Marsh adapted them to her own interests and style. Though her work inevitably bore some resemblances to Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery

Allingham, who had preceded her, it was sufficiently original that discerning readers found the typical Marsh experience to be unique.

For example, Marsh brings her clever variations on the theme of suspect likelihood: It is seldom possible to tell in one of her mysteries whether the murderer will be the most obvious suspect or the least likely—or someone in between. In her early works, the traditional reenactment of the crime came to be expected, as Alleyn used it to discover the murderer. Later, she had Alleyn use more conventional, though never ordinary or dull, means of detection to either trap or uncover the guilty party.

Lessons from Theater Prove Useful in Plot Designs As a playwright Marsh was aware of the dangers of anticlimax (of disappointment rather than satisfaction following the peak of excitement), and her summaries of Alleyn's reasoning tended to be shorter than the explanations of other mystery writers. Motive usually would prove not to be critical to Marsh's solution, since most of her suspects had equally good reasons; often they were being blackmailed. Despite her stated interest in character portrayal, she was also interested in opportunity, the "how" and "when" of the murder, rather than the "why." Physical clues, rather than verbal, are more likely to be the key to the solution in her books.

Breaking Tradition Yields Police Procedural Subgenre Another long-standing tradition with which Marsh gradually broke was that of the amateur detective. Even when the policeman, like Alleyn, was a professional, he often relied on a friend who had no official standing. With Marsh it was the flighty journalist Nigel Bathgate, who appeared in eight of the early books, providing comic relief and occasionally requiring Alleyn to rescue him. Alleyn was never a "lone wolf" and cannot be considered without the Scotland Yarders who appear in most Marsh books, those he refers to as "the usual people," when he encounters a murder and calls for assistance. Through Alleyn and his compatriots, Marsh provided an important transition to the works of Maurice Procter, John Creasey, Ed McBain, Elizabeth Linington, and others who would make the police procedural the most important new subgenre of the mystery in the 1950s.

Works in Critical Context

Marsh's works have received a wide range of criticism. Her early works, for example, were criticized for the number and length of the interviews conducted by the police within each story. With the passing years, however, Marsh shortened the question-and-answer sessions. Later, she even shunned that device as she found means to add more action to the middle portions of her books.

Nevertheless, representative of Marsh's complete body of work and the subsequent criticism are such long-standing works as *Overture to Death* (1939).

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Readers have long enjoyed works in which they are called upon to figure out the true murderer from among a group of suspects, thanks to clues carefully placed by the author along the way. Below are some other examples of murder mysteries similar to those Marsh created:

The Mousetrap (1952), a play by Agatha Christie. This murder mystery is the longest-running play in theatrical history by the best-selling mystery writer of all time.

A Is for Alibi (1982), a novel by Sue Grafton. The first of the Kinsey Millhone Alphabet Mysteries, this whodunit follows in the footsteps of Dashiell Hammett's hard-boiled detective Sam Spade.

The Club Dumas (1993), a novel by Arturo Perez-Reverte. In this detective mystery, the internationally best-selling author features Lucas Corso, a man hired by wealthy merchants to find two copies of a rare and dangerous antique book.

Rules of Prey (1989), a novel by John Sandford. This first in a series introduces readers to Lucas Davenport, an unconventional detective called in to solve a bewildering string of serial murders in Minneapolis.

Overture to Death The book is set in the Dorset countryside, and the first quarter of the book has to do with village rivalries and jealousies that have arisen during preparations for an amateur theatrical performance to raise funds for the local parish house. Though frequently referred to as Marsh's best book, *Overture to Death* did not escape the critical wrath of the famous Edmund Wilson in his equally famous essay, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Wilson read the book because critic Bernard DeVoto had referred to Marsh's "excellent prose." Wilson's judgment: "It would be impossible I should think, for anyone with the faintest feeling for words, to describe the unappetizing sawdust which Miss Marsh has poured into her pages as 'excellent prose' or as prose at all except in the sense that distinguishes prose from verse."

Wilson's judgment, however, was decidedly a minority opinion. Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor praised its excellent detection and depiction of life in a small village. Robert E. Brinney called it "a superior example of the literate whodunit." Howard Haycraft and Ellery Queen included it on their definitive list of best mysteries.

Responses to Literature

1. Read any of Marsh's novels. How does she depict her male protagonists and the other men in the

novel? What are the female views of the males in the book? What are the male views of females in the book? Given the gender treatments, which gender would you say would be more likely to read the book? Why?

2. How does Marsh incorporate her love of theater into her novels? Provide examples from one of her works, such as *Final Curtain* or *Light Thickens*.
3. Marsh was a native New Zealander. How does she depict New Zealand in her works? Does the setting contribute to the story? Does the use of New Zealand as a setting contribute to any of Marsh's themes? How much more does a reader know about New Zealand after reading a Marsh work?
4. Marsh's novels, like many murder mysteries, are primarily concerned with who committed the crime and how they accomplished the task. One popular exercise among mystery writers is the "locked-door" mystery, in which a person is somehow killed while alone inside a locked room. Try to think up a scenario in which a "locked-door" setting could be accomplished. Write your scenario as a short mystery story.

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Yann Martel

BORN: 1963, Salamanca, Spain

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios (1993)

Self (1996)

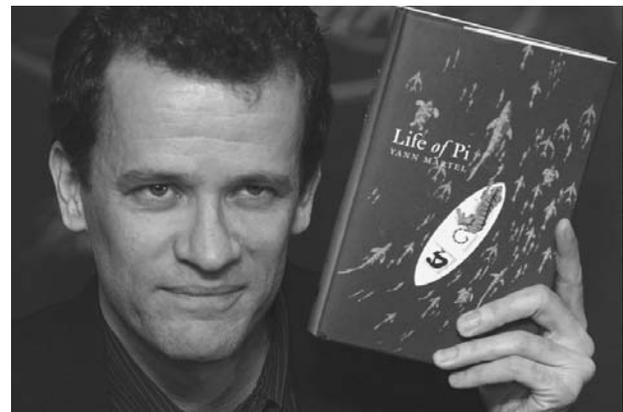
Life of Pi (2001)

Overview

Yann Martel, a Canadian writer, has received international acclaim for work that celebrates the power of the imagination in the face of adversity, blending philosophical inquiry with metafiction. All of his published works have won literary prizes; his second novel, *Life of Pi* (2001), received the 2002 Booker Prize, and became an international best seller.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An International Childhood Yann Martel was born on June 25, 1963, in Salamanca, Spain, the child of two civil servants of French Canadian descent. His father, Émile Martel, was both a diplomat and a noted poet. Martel's childhood was spent in numerous parts of the world, including Alaska, Costa Rica, France, India, Mexico, and Turkey. He attended secondary schools and Trent University in Ontario, and Concordia University in Quebec, from which he received a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy in 1985.



Yann Martel *Martel, Yann, photograph. AP Images.*

First Story Collection After graduating from Concordia, Martel took a variety of jobs—tree planter, dishwasher, parking lot attendant, security guard, and librarian. Meanwhile, he wrote stories. His first work of fiction, consisting of four stories, was published under the title *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* (1993). In the title story, a Canadian college student is forced to confront mortality when his nineteen-year-old friend Paul is diagnosed with AIDS. The story takes place over the nine-month period of Paul's decline and death. Paul and the narrator decide to lighten their mood by entertaining each other with stories; they invent the Roccamatios, "a Finnish family of Italian extraction," and weave their fictions around key events in twentieth-century history. The story won the Journey Prize for the best Canadian short story of 1991.

Breakthrough with *Life of Pi* Martel's first novel, *Self*, appeared in 1996. It is narrated by a young man who, on his eighteenth birthday, undergoes a metamorphosis into a woman. This premise allows for an extended meditation on identity and otherness, gender and sexual orientation, and—after the character undergoes a brutal rape by a neighbor—the body and its violation. After seven years as a woman, the narrator reverts to being a man. In a 2007 interview, Martel says that his exploration in *Self* originated from "the idea that the body is an environment, and just as we adapt to our outer environment, the body has an inner environment that we adapt to." Though the novel received the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction and was up for other awards, it did not sell well.

His next endeavor, however, was both a critical and a commercial breakthrough. *Life of Pi* (2001), a tour de force combining religion, zoology, and adventure on the high seas, earned him worldwide praise and England's prestigious Booker Prize. The genesis for the novel came from two sources. One was a journey he took to India in 1997, with plans to write a novel. The other is a novella entitled *Max and the Cats*, by the Brazilian author Moacyr Scliar, in which a boy finds himself alone on a boat with a jaguar. According to interviews, Martel did not read the novella, but came across a newspaper review of it. The novel he had originally envisioned did not come to fruition, but while in India Martel remembered *Max and the Cats*, and from its premise the idea for *Life of Pi* took shape. Martel, who acknowledged Scliar's influence in a preface to the novel, was accused of plagiarism in some quarters. However, Scliar declined to press the case.

Current Projects Martel spent the academic year of 2002 through 2003 in Germany as a visiting professor at the Free University of Berlin. He published a collection of stories, *We Ate the Children Last*, in 2004. He now lives in Montreal. Martel gained attention in 2007 with a public project to mail selected books to the Canadian prime minister, Stephen Harper. He has sent more than thirty paperback books, one every two weeks, each with an accompanying letter. His stated intention is to help the politician nurture "stillness" through literary appreciation.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Martel's famous contemporaries include:

Douglas Coupland (1961–): Canadian author who popularized zeitgeist terms such as "Generation X" and "McJob."

David Foster Wallace (1962–2008): American novelist and essayist, who is the author of *Infinite Jest*.

Jonathan Lethem (1964–): American novelist and essayist.

Lisa Moore (1964–): Canadian author whose works concern her background in Newfoundland.

Colson Whitehead (1969–): American novelist.

Stephen Harper (1959–): Prime minister of Canada (from 2006).

Works in Literary Context

In his brief career, Yann Martel has written in an innovative style, and earned comparisons with a wide variety of literary artists. His works share some characteristics with those of magic realists such as Gabriel García Márquez, absurdists such as Samuel Beckett, and travel writers including Paul Theroux and Bruce Chatwin. He has been compared to Italo Calvino, Paul Auster, and Salman Rushdie, three inventive and philosophical novelists known for experimenting with the boundaries between genres.

Philosophical Fiction Martel studied philosophy as a college student, and metaphysical speculations are a strong undercurrent in his fiction. His most obvious thought experiment is his novel *Self*, an extended inquiry into the role gender plays in the construction of selfhood. Martel's early stories center on the power of creativity, imagination, and storytelling; the latter theme plays a key role toward the end of *Life of Pi*, when the narrator insists that his listeners select "the better story." Florence Stratton, writing in *Studies in Canadian Literature*, reads the conflict between the bureaucrats and Pi as one between two philosophical dispositions at variance with one another, the positivist and the poststructuralist. The novel, with its ambiguous conclusion, is open to diverse allegorical interpretations.

Works in Critical Context

Yann Martel has won numerous literary prizes for his short stories and for the novel *Life of Pi*. Two stories from his first collection received awards. In addition, he won the 1993 Air Canada Award, given by the Canadian Authors Association, for the story "Bright Young New Thing." Capturing the prestigious Booker Prize in 2002

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is a cunning variation on a perennial theme: the adventure of the castaway. This story goes back, literally, to the beginnings of recorded literature (if not the beginning of seafaring). Here are some notable examples of the genre:

"The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" (c. 2200 BCE). This brief tale from ancient Egypt tells the story of a sailor who encounters a giant serpent on an island and is the first known castaway tale in world literature.

"The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor" (ninth century CE), a legend documented in the *Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. The stories of the merchant who survives shipwreck after shipwreck in the Indian Ocean are among the most well-known tales from the book.

Robinson Crusoe (1719), a novel by Daniel Defoe. This classic castaway story is a landmark of Western literature.

Lord of the Flies (1954), a novel by William Golding. In this famous allegorical novel, a group of British boys stranded on a deserted island descend into warfare.

Foe (1986), a novel by J. M. Coetzee. A postmodern revision of *Robinson Crusoe* featuring a female castaway and characters named Cruso, Friday, and Daniel Foe.

for *Life of Pi* brought him into the front rank of contemporary writers with an international following. Reviewers have responded to Martel's blend of intellectual substance, emotional appeal, and experimental style.

Reviews of Martel's first novel, *Self*, were mixed. Some found the book an unsatisfying read due to its novel narrative structure and protean protagonist; others declared the novel a highly perceptive and engaging look at problems of gender and identity. *Life of Pi* earned near-universal enthusiasm from reviewers, though some found the novel's structure cumbersome and others were critical of its religious musings. *Life of Pi* has most engaged reviewers and critics as a postmodern philosophical novel concerned with the nature of religious faith and the connection between religion and the human need for narratives. Martel endorsed this interpretation in an interview with Sabine Sielke: "To say the book will make you believe in fiction, to me, isn't very far from saying it'll make you believe in God."

Responses to Literature

1. Write about some of the liberties Martel takes with novelistic conventions, and his possible reasons for taking them.
2. In the novel *Self*, the protagonist unexpectedly transforms from a man to a woman. Through what

techniques does Martel convey the differences, and continuities, of identity created by this sudden shift?

3. Many critics view *Life of Pi* as an allegory, but for what? What is the novel's broader meaning?
4. What ideas does Martel express about the significance of stories in people's lives?
5. Martel was criticized after he admitted that he borrowed the premise of *Life of Pi* from another published work. What are your views about the line between influence and plagiarism? Is any book or piece of art truly "original" or is it always influenced by what precedes it?

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Andrew Marvell

BORN: 1621, *Winstead-in-Holderness, Yorkshire, England*

DIED: 1678, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Miscellaneous Poems (1681)



Andrew Marvell Popperfoto / Getty Images

Overview

One of the last of the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets, Andrew Marvell is noted for intellectual, allusive poetry that is rich in metaphor and conceit. His work incorporates many of the elements associated with the Metaphysical school: the tension of opposing values, metaphorical complexities, logical and linguistic subtleties, and unexpected twists of thought and argument. The poems generally thought to be his best, such as “To His Coy Mistress” and “The Garden”—both first published in *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681)—are characterized by complexity and ambiguous morality, which critics believe both define his talent and account for his appeal.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Child of Turbulent Religious Times In the first half of the seventeenth century, England was a country divided along religious lines. The Anglican Church, the official Church of England, had separated from the official Catholic Church of Rome during the previous century. In other English territories, however—such as Ireland—Roman Catholicism remained the prevailing mode of worship. Additionally, England itself became divided when a group known as Puritans, who believed the Anglican church had not moved far enough away from traditional Catholicism, gained support in the English Parliament. This ultimately led, during Marvell’s lifetime, to a civil war that resulted in the execution of King

Charles I and the creation of the Commonwealth of England (later called a protectorate), ruled by Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell. The monarchy was returned to power just eleven years after it was abolished, in 1660, with the restoration of Charles II to the throne.

The son of an Anglican clergyman, Marvell was born in Winstead-in-Holderness, Yorkshire. He received his early education at nearby Hull Grammar School and later attended Trinity College at Cambridge University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in 1638. Marvell remained at Cambridge until 1641, though he left without taking a master’s degree. During the next four years, Marvell traveled in Europe, employed as a tutor. By the early 1650s he was living at Nunappleton in Yorkshire, where he was tutor to Mary Fairfax, the daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax, retired commander-in-chief of the Commonwealth army under Oliver Cromwell. It was during his stay at Nunappleton that Marvell wrote most of the lyric poems that form the basis of his literary reputation. Marvell next moved to Eton to tutor Cromwell’s ward William Dutton. In 1657 he was appointed Assistant Latin Secretary to the Council of State through the influence of his friend John Milton, who then held the post of Latin Secretary. Two years later, Marvell was elected Member of Parliament for Hull; from this point on he ceased to write lyric poetry, concentrating instead on political satire and polemics in prose. A dedicated, conscientious statesman, Marvell channeled all his energy and talent into his political career, serving in Parliament until his death. Although it has often been rumored that he was poisoned by his political enemies, it is now generally accepted that Marvell died of an accidental overdose of medicinal opiates.

An Enigmatic Life Much of Marvell’s life remains shrouded in mystery. He is not thought to have married, yet shortly after his death a volume of his lyric poetry was published for the first time by a woman claiming to be his widow. That the woman in question, Mary Marvell, was truly Marvell’s wife has yet to be either disproved or substantiated. More relevant to his poetry is the mystery of Marvell’s political convictions, more accurate knowledge of which, scholars believe, would do much to clarify obscurities in his work. Marvell lived during a tumultuous period of British history. Although he did not actively participate in the English Civil War, which broke out in 1642 while he was traveling in Europe, Marvell was deeply affected by the bitter fighting between the Royalists (primarily supporters of Anglicanism) and Parliamentarians (primarily supporters of Puritanism) and later by Charles I’s execution and Cromwell’s assumption of the Protectorate. Scholars have often attempted to determine where Marvell’s sympathies lay, but have been unable to definitively place the poet in either camp. Some suggest that this political inconclusiveness mirrors the indecision found in Marvell’s poems. Regardless, critics

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Marvell's famous contemporaries include:

Samuel Pepys (1633–1703): A Member of Parliament and naval administrator, Pepys (pronounced “Peeps”) is most notable today for his diary, which he kept from 1660 to 1669. The diary provides a detailed account of daily life during the Restoration Period in England and documents the major English events of that decade: the Great Plague, the Great Fire of London, and the Second Anglo-Dutch War.

Charles II (1630–1685): The crowning of King Charles II marked the beginning of the Restoration period, so named for the restoration of the English monarchy after its abolition by Oliver Cromwell and the execution of Charles's father, King Charles I, in the wake of the English Civil War.

Isaac Newton (1642–1727): Perhaps the best-known scientist in history, Sir Isaac Newton's theories revolutionized mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, and optics. An eccentric genius, Newton's theoretical work covered such fundamental concepts as the force of gravity and the physics of motion, and he is credited as the cocreator of calculus.

Molière (1622–1673): The stage name for actor and playwright Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, Molière is still considered one of the great masters of theatrical comedy. His plays, among them *The Misanthrope* and *The School for Wives*, continue to be produced and adapted today.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): Mathematician and religious philosopher, Pascal made his legacy felt despite his premature death—he was a child prodigy and was already producing influential treatises on geometry by the age of sixteen. His work on probability theory is generally considered a cornerstone of both economics and social science.

Rembrandt (1606–1669): The leading painter of the Golden Age of Dutch Art, Rembrandt was a painter and etcher of unequalled proficiency. His mastery of portraiture made him well known across Europe during his lifetime; his self-portraits create a fascinating chronicle of his life.

have emphasized that an understanding of Marvell's life and poetry, particularly “An Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland,” requires some comprehension of this politically volatile time.

Works in Literary Context

Duality Marvell directly addressed the theme of the duality of spirituality and temporality in many of his overtly religious poems, including “A Dialogue between

the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure” and “A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body.” As their titles indicate, both these poems are discussions between the body and its pleasures on the one hand and the soul and its spirituality on the other, yet critics have remarked on an important distinction between the two works. In “A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure,” Marvell uncharacteristically and, many commentators believe, unsatisfactorily, resolves the conflict. In this poem, Pleasure tempts the Soul with such delights as music, beauty, wealth, and knowledge, only to be tersely rebuffed each time. This soul is indeed resolved; the result of the “debate” is a foregone conclusion. This has led many critics to prefer “A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body,” in which the tension between the two is greater and the resolution less clear. Not strictly a debate, the poem consists of the lamentations of both body and soul, interdependent yet compelled in different directions by their very natures. Commentators have noted that the body in this poem is not the wily tempter that Created Pleasure is, but rather an essential complement to the soul, and thus their eternal struggle is insoluble.

Ambiguity Political poems, such as “An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland” and “Upon Appleton House,” have prompted much critical debate due to their ambiguity. “An Horatian Ode” in particular has invited biographical interpretation as commentators have attempted to clarify Marvell's real attitude toward the political and social upheavals of the Civil War and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate. Ostensibly a paean to Cromwell's military and political victories, “An Horatian Ode” includes a moving and sympathetic description of Charles I's execution that commentators have found disconcerting. An additional critical dilemma has been raised by subtle hints in the poem that indicate the poet's belief that Cromwell's base of power, founded as it was on usurpation and bloodshed, may have been inevitable but can hardly be praiseworthy. Ambiguities also abound in “Upon Appleton House,” outwardly a poem in praise of the retirement of Marvell's benefactor Fairfax from the political arena. The extent to which this praise may be regarded as sincere has long been a critical stumbling block, as the rest of the poem seems to endorse the course of action and movement.

Works in Critical Context

Critical Legacy The history of critical assessment of Marvell's work is one of shifting focuses and sharp reversals. During his lifetime and for generations after his death, Marvell was known primarily for his political career; he was lauded as an upright, incorruptible statesman, his name becoming synonymous with disinterested patriotism. Consequently, his prose satires and polemics, controversial and often severe attacks on government policy, were highly praised. Works such as *The Rehearsall*

Transpros'd (1672), a satire against religious intolerance, and *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England* (1677), an attack on the absolute power of monarchy, were valued perhaps less for their literary merit than for the evidence they afforded of Marvell's political views. His poetry, when it was considered at all, was judged to be clever and talented, but of secondary importance; throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Marvell's reputation was that of a major statesman but a minor poet.

In the nineteenth century, critical opinion began to shift: critics of Marvell, though few in number, assigned his poetry a greater importance, while his prose works suffered a corresponding decline in popularity. William Hazlitt praised the "elegance and tenderness in his descriptive poems," while decrying Marvell's "forced, far-fetched method of treating his subject" in the political satires. Nineteenth-century commentators emphasized what they deemed his "Romantic" attributes: the theme of the mutability of earthly life in "To His Coy Mistress," the description of nature and solitude in "The Garden," and the sensitive portrayal of human emotion in "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Faun." In the twentieth century, critical appraisal of Marvell's work has undergone a still more radical metamorphosis. Although the satires continue to be generally censured for their heavy-handedness and crudity—considered of some historical interest, perhaps, but of negligible literary importance—the lyric poetry has come to be seen in an entirely new light, largely due to T. S. Eliot's pivotal essay of 1921. Eliot emphasized for the first time Marvell's Metaphysical wit, the recognition of which has both enlarged and redefined subsequent critical thought. As Marvell is now seen to be closely allied to the Metaphysical school, so also is he viewed as a much more complex and rewarding poet, both thematically and stylistically, than had been previously assumed.

"To His Coy Mistress" Many of Marvell's poems once considered simple and straightforward are now believed to be suggestive of deeper themes; an example of this is provided by one of his most famous poems, "To His Coy Mistress." For years, "To His Coy Mistress" was assumed to be a fairly representative example of the Cavalier *carpe diem* (literally "seize the day") love poetry popular among the courtier poets of Charles I and typified by Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time." Recent criticism, however, has revealed complexities and ambiguities within the poem, which most critics believe undermine the ostensible message; the suspicion of narrative irony and the curiously inappropriate imagery of the poem cast doubt on its true meaning.

The inherent ambiguity of this poem and others is now recognized as the key to understanding much of Marvell's work. Many critics believe that the ambiguities are far more than clever devices and that Marvell's recurring themes exemplify the nature of ambiguity itself.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The sixteenth century saw the development of a brand of verse known as Metaphysical poetry, a forerunner of existentialism. Some of the better-known Metaphysical works include:

Ignatius His Conclave (1611), a poem by John Donne. The man perhaps most closely associated with the Metaphysical movement (a label, incidentally, that was only applied in retrospect), Donne, like Marvell, was not above mixing politics and poetry, as in this anti-Catholic polemic that mocks the Jesuit order and name-checks several prominent scientists of the day, including Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Galileo Galilei.

The Temple (1633), a poetry collection by George Herbert. An Anglican priest, Herbert concerned himself mostly with religious themes in his poems—several have been turned into hymns. Nearly all of his poetry is contained in this volume.

Silex Scintillans (1655), a poetry collection by Henry Vaughan. Like Herbert, Vaughan was a Welsh poet, but his poetry initially focused more on the natural world and its beauty. After he met Herbert, however, he experienced a religious conversion and produced this volume of "sacred poems," becoming a noted and respected poet in the process.

Indeed, such critics claim that underlying all of Marvell's poetry is a unifying and omnipresent concern with a central ambiguity, the tension and duality of opposites, and that this is most often and most successfully expressed through his treatment of the duality of the body and the soul, the temporal and the divine. All these tensions, critics have noted, place the poems in a fundamentally spiritual or moral context, as each involves opposing human attributes or choices.

"A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body" Marvell's failure to resolve the conflict he presents in "A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body" is but one example of what many critics have seen as deliberate irresolution in his work. This intended ambiguity has frustrated some critics and impressed others with an appreciation of the poet's control over every nuance of meaning and feeling in his poetry; the latter critics have contended that Marvell's ambiguity is indicative not so much of indecision as it is of his recognition of the potentials and possibilities of both sides of an issue. The tensions found in Marvell's poetry arise not merely from the usual Metaphysical attempt to reconcile opposites; as George deForest Lord has stated in his 1968 introduction to *Andrew Marvell: A Collection of Critical Essays*:

“Ambiguity for Marvell is not so much a feature of style as it is a way of feeling, thinking, and imagining embedded in his sensibility and in his view of the human condition.”

Responses to Literature

1. Summarize Marvell’s treatises against tyranny and oppression. Whom does he view as the oppressor? Are these political tracts as ambiguous as Marvell’s poems?
2. Contrast “To His Coy Mistress” with some of William Shakespeare’s love lyrics. Identify how both authors utilize or reject irony in their works.
3. Outline Marvell’s role in the completion of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. How critical do you feel Marvell was to completion of that epic poem? Why?
4. Write a modern-day dialogue between Andrew Marvell and a girl to whom he speaks in “To His Coy Mistress”, including all of the arguments he uses in this poem and her counterarguments.

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☒ Karl Marx

BORN: 1818, Trier, Germany

DIED: 1883, London, England

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Nonfiction

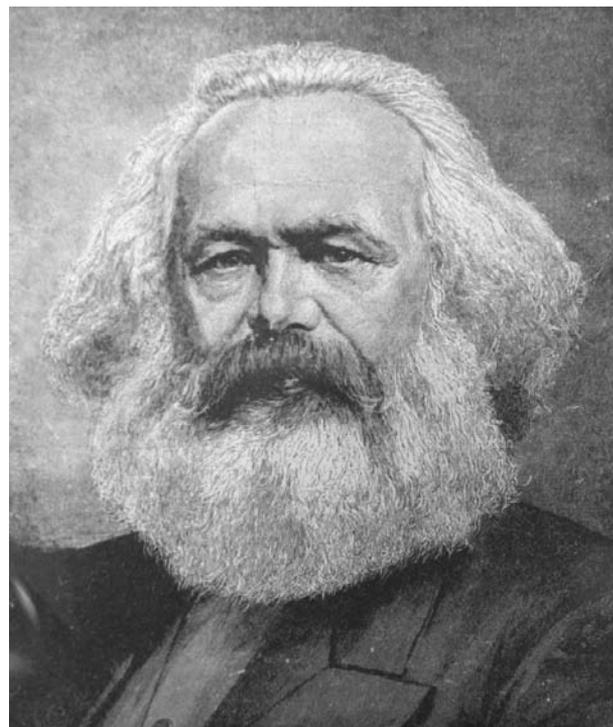
MAJOR WORKS:

The Communist Manifesto (1848)

Capital (1867, 1885, 1894)

Overview

The writings of Karl Marx have significantly influenced the course of world history over the last 150 years. Together with Friedrich Engels, he defined the modern concept of socialism, a major contribution to the wide range of new social theories developed in the nineteenth century. The principles of his social and economic theories, often called Marxism, have been applied in the social sciences and humanities, and more or less misapplied in the political arena. He was also a political activist, and his ideas inspired revolutionaries and political leaders in every part of the world. Their achievements confirm the truth—while perhaps challenging the value—of one of his most famous quotations: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”



Karl Marx *Marx, Karl, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family Rejection of the Historical for the Material Karl Heinrich Marx was born on May 5, 1818, in the Prussian (today German) city of Trier. His father, Heinrich, was an attorney whose outlook on life followed the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire. Both of Marx's parents were descended from generations of rabbis; however, since Prussia barred Jews from holding public office, Heinrich Marx chose to undergo baptism, and to baptize his son as well.

Marx got his high school education at a liberal school called the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium. He proved adept at languages—eventually learning to read at least seven—but did poorly in history. Given that the philosophy he went on to found is sometimes known as “historical materialism,” this fact is not without irony. Graduating from school at age seventeen, Marx went on to the University of Bonn in 1835. After a year of lackluster performance, he transferred to the University of Berlin, studying philosophy and law.

Young Hegelian In Berlin he joined the “Doctorclub,” a group of students interested in philosophy, especially the ideas of Gottfried Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's dialectical theory views human progress as the result of a clash between opposing movements or social forces (the “thesis” and “antithesis”), which eventually fuse into a “synthesis.” The avant-garde “Young Hegelians” in this club sought to apply Hegel's theory to challenge the ruling institutions of European society, including the church.

Marx accepted the Hegelian dialectic as part of the philosophy he was developing, but rejected Hegel's belief that ideas and spiritual forces matter more than objects in the physical world. Rather than this idealist view, grounded in Christian thought, Marx maintained that human beings make their own history, influenced only by the material conditions and social formations around them. Thus, Marx characterized his emerging theory as “dialectical materialism.”

Editorship, Marriage, and Engels In 1841, Marx received his doctorate after completing a dissertation on the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus. Unable to obtain a teaching position, he began contributing articles to a new liberal-radical Cologne newspaper, *Die Rheinische Zeitung*, and soon became the paper's editor. His bold political commentary attracted great attention from the Prussian censors, who shut the paper down early in 1843.

That June, Marx married Jenny von Westphalen after a seven-year engagement. She was the daughter of a baron who had been a tutor to the young Marx. The couple moved to Paris, a socialist center with a more permissive atmosphere, where Marx went to work on a journal called the *German-French Yearbook*.

The publication collapsed after one issue, but through the project, Marx became acquainted with Friedrich Engels, the son of a cotton mill owner, who became his closest friend and lifelong collaborator. The two men met in the spring of 1844, and—though Marx was not at first wildly enthused with the rather brash young Engels—began working together not long thereafter.

The Communist Manifesto and Eventual Statelessness In January of 1845 Marx was expelled from Paris at the request of the Prussian government, because of two anti-Prussian essays he had published in a radical Paris newspaper. With his family, he went to Brussels, and Engels followed soon afterward. There, Marx began to organize among the working classes and wrote the books *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and, with Engels, *The German Ideology* (published posthumously in 1932). The latter work is perhaps the fullest statement of Marx's materialist theory of history as determined by economic conditions.

At its congress in November of 1847, the London-based Communist League commissioned Marx and Engels to write its political program. Their statement, now known as *The Communist Manifesto*, was first published in pamphlet form in January of 1848. Here the theories of Marx and Engels appear in concise language with minimal jargon. The *Manifesto* declares that all history boils down to the struggles between classes. In the modern age, the primary class antagonism is between the oppressive “bourgeoisie,” the wealthy captains of industry, and the “proletariat,” particularly the urban poor. Marx and Engels predict that this struggle will intensify until the proletariat, organized internationally as a class, finally overthrows the bourgeoisie and builds a classless society.

The *Manifesto* was intended to serve as a call for rebellion, not a model for communist government. As it happened, insurrections did erupt in Europe in 1848; ironically, they were mostly led by bourgeois nationalists, not the “workers of the world,” and all were violently suppressed. Forced to leave Belgium, Marx witnessed and reported on the revolutions in France and Germany, but was expelled from both countries as the uprisings were crushed. In 1849, he took refuge in London. He lived there the rest of his life, a citizen of no country.

Capital and the Lack Thereof, Journalism, and the Study of Economics During his first years in London, Marx spent most of his time in the reading room of the British Museum, studying economics. He worked as a journalist for the *New York Daily Tribune* and other papers, submitting hundreds of articles (including many actually written by Engels). The pay was poor, however, and Marx was often unable to feed and clothe his family properly. Three of his children died within a few years. However, he refused to accept more lucrative work, devoting himself to his writing and revolutionary activism. Later on, he received steady financial help from

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Marx's famous contemporaries include:

Friedrich Engels (1820–1895): A German philosopher and sociologist and coauthor with Marx of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): The British scientist known as the originator of the theory of evolution by natural selection.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865): The French socialist-anarchist philosopher who coined the phrase, "property is theft."

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): A British author of classic novels such as *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): An American abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): The American president during the Civil War, famous for abolishing slavery in the United States.

Engels, who worked his way up in his father's business to support his friend.

After the tremors of 1848, Marx expected a new round of revolutions at the next economic downturn. He wrote two long pamphlets on contemporary French history, *The Class Struggles in France* (1850) and the trenchant *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852). His most important writings, on economics, were large in magnitude and slow to appear. He published his first *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in 1859. Only the first volume of his magnum opus, *Capital* (frequently referred to by its German title, *Das Kapital*), appeared in his lifetime, in 1867. The second and third volumes, extensively edited by Engels, were published in 1885 and 1894.

Capital takes a systematic, scientific approach to studying the relations between capital and labor. Marx expanded on and critiqued the theories of economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. His major contributions to social and economic thought—such as the theories of surplus value, alienation and exploitation of human labor, the means and relations of production, commodity fetishism, and the process by which global markets exacerbate class conflict—are all found in these volumes. His reasoning led him to the conclusion that the processes of capitalism will lead that system inevitably to its own collapse, out of which will emerge a socialist era.

The First International: Building Consciousness
Marx was also actively engaged in bringing about that

socialist era through the International Working Men's Association, or the First International. From its inception in 1864, he assumed a leading role in this coalition of workers' organizations from numerous countries and various political ideologies. Marx always maintained that a successful socialist revolution could only come at the right historical moment, after the workers had gradually achieved sufficient consciousness of their exploitation and their class solidarity. He opposed more militant factions, such as the anarchists led by Mikhail Bakunin, and energetically sought to establish international connections and consensus at the organization's annual congresses. The movement grew to a peak membership of eight hundred thousand by the end of the 1860s but which declined when its general council moved from London to New York in 1872.

Ill health and depression reduced Marx's productivity in the last ten years of his life. His wife died in 1881, and his eldest daughter in January of 1883. He himself passed away only two months later. Thus, he did not survive to experience the triumph of his ideas among European democratic mass parties in the 1880s and 1890s. A great many of his works, including the final two volumes of *Capital*, were published posthumously, some as late as 1941.

Works in Literary Context

Some of the major influences on Marx's thought include social thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau; earlier political economists, notably Smith and Ricardo; Hegel, from whom Marx borrowed his dialectical method; Ludwig Feuerbach, who challenged the Christian assumptions in Hegel's thought; and the French socialist-anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who attacked the concept of private property. Some scholars have detected the influence of classical Greek thinkers such as Aristotle on Marx's relentless rationality. One more influence not to be ignored is that of Friedrich Engels, a notable author himself, who had already written *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) before joining forces with Marx.

The Power of the Working Class Marx's work is notable for its emphasis on the power held by the working class in a society. For centuries, and in many ways still today, those who performed the most laborious tasks—farmers, factory workers, and low-level tradespeople—have been given little say in the operation of the government under which they live. Marx pointed out that these workers actually produce the basic materials of value for a society and were therefore an important resource that was being exploited instead of being rewarded. Although these workers had little official power, Marx argued that they potentially held economic power through their numbers and through their ability to produce—or through the conscious decision not to produce—goods.

Coherence and Consistency One remarkable characteristic of Karl Marx's writings is the consistency of philosophical perspective and premise. Many of the specifics of his political prescriptions changed over time; his program for the First International, for example, differed significantly from the *Communist Manifesto*, especially in its emphasis on labor unions as a vehicle for working-class empowerment. However, it is generally acknowledged that Marx's mature conclusions had been formulated as early as the 1840s, in good part through his famous meetings with Engels.

Worldwide Impact Karl Marx's ideas have had a stunningly deep impact—perhaps greater than that of any other single political thinker of the modern age—around the world and in many fields of human endeavor. The language, questions, assertions, and predictions in his prose have entered the standard discourse of politics, economics, history, and cultural criticism. His theory is cited just as often by its opponents as by its adherents. Among the countless Marxist or neo-Marxist thinkers and writers of the twentieth century, some of the most prominent have included Antonio Gramsci, Jean-Paul Sartre, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse (and other theorists of the Frankfurt School), and the historians E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. Marxian formulations, such as his emphasis on ideology and false consciousness, are fundamental to the intersecting bodies of late twentieth-century scholarship known as critical theory.

Lenin, Mao, and Communism Last but not least, the theories of Karl Marx have profoundly affected a large proportion of the world's population through their incorporation into the communist revolutions in Russia, China, and elsewhere. Marx himself never drew up a clear outline for communist governance, much less revolution as such; he saw a revolution as inevitable, but also imagined that it would be predicated on the growth of critical consciousness among the workers of the world. However, the major leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, both viewed themselves as heirs to Marx. Later on, a rift developed between them, and to this day Leninist and Trotskyist political parties spar over their conflicting interpretations of Marx. Mao Zedong also claimed a Marxist lineage but developed a Chinese variant in which peasants, rather than urban industrial workers, were the main class forces in the revolution. At the high-water mark of Third World socialism and communism, nearly half the world's population lived under governments that claimed allegiance to the principles of Karl Marx.

Works in Critical Context

Karl Marx did not live to witness the profound political and social impact of his thinking. The immediate reception of most of his writings was modest. For example, some people erroneously believe that the uprisings of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

A vast body of literature attempts to analyze Karl Marx's works and apply them to a wide range of fields. Here are a few of the more well-known works of Marxism:

State and Revolution (1917), a political text by Vladimir Lenin. Written in the midst of the Soviet revolution by its main leader, this pamphlet clarifies the approach the Bolsheviks would take in organizing a communist state.

Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), an analytical work by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. This is the signature work of the Frankfurt School of Marxist critics, including their critique of Enlightenment philosophy and the "culture industry."

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968), an education text by Paulo Freire. This classic describes an innovative, class-conscious approach to popular education, as developed among Brazilian adults.

Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971), a collection of essays and fragments by Antonio Gramsci. These are the most systematic writings of one of the twentieth century's most important Marxist thinkers.

Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976), a literary theory text by Terry Eagleton. Eagleton's treatise is a seminal work of critical theory, describing a method for uncovering and analyzing the ideological underpinnings of literary texts.

1848 sprang more or less directly from *The Communist Manifesto*, but at the time of its publication, it was not widely read. In the decades after Marx's death, however, larger political parties on the left, such as Germany's Social Democratic Party, began to adopt a Marxist orientation. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which took place during World War I (1914–1918), brought a great deal more attention, both positive and negative, to Marx's work.

The Communist Manifesto *The Communist Manifesto*, a relatively short pamphlet and surely Marx's most-read work, has rarely failed to spark debate. One debate surrounding this text has been its actual status as a piece of literature. As long ago as 1901—four years before the first major revolution in Russia and sixteen years before its successful progeny, the 1917 Russian Revolution inspired by Marx's thought—prominent Polish socialist Karl Kautsky observed that the document offered a useful guide for socialist revolutionaries, but warned too that "it is no gospel, no bible, as it has been called, the words of which are holy words, but an historic document that should be subjected to criticism." In a very different register, key social thinker Joseph Schumpeter argued

that “in one important sense, Marxism *is* a religion. To the believer it presents, first, a system of ultimate ends that embody the meaning of life and are absolute standards by which to judge events and actions; and, secondly, a guide to those ends, which implies a plan of salvation and the indication of the evil from which mankind, or a chosen section of mankind, is to be saved.” For Schumpeter and for countless others, Marx was a prophet of sorts—and like most prophets throughout history, prone both to important inaccuracies and to being used for a wide variety of political ends.

The End of History and Marx in the Twenty-first Century Today, Marx is universally recognized as one of the most important thinkers of the modern era. Alongside such giants as Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, he expressed ideas that changed the world immensely. Although his analysis of capitalism remains powerfully astute, many of his expectations and predictions have not been borne out by subsequent history. For example, he thought that the contradictions of capitalism would quickly intensify, not anticipating the rise of labor regulations, pensions, and other social reforms in market societies. More importantly still, he did not see how a “consumer society” would develop to help relieve the tension caused by the excess inherent in the system of capitalism. He also failed to anticipate that his “dictatorship of the proletariat,” when it took shape in revolutionary societies like the Soviet Union, could lead to the shrinking of human freedoms rather than to their expansion.

It is crucial to distinguish, however, between what Marx himself believed and what his followers have done in his name. Among those who proudly consider themselves Marxists, there is considerable diversity and bitter debate over how to interpret Marx’s words and apply his theoretical constructs to current events and political battles. Among his opponents, the term “Marxist” is an epithet broadly, and often inaccurately, invoked against liberal politicians and public policies intended to regulate the free market and distribute resources equitably. Chiding some of the more radical French activists shortly before his death, Marx is said to have remarked, “If that is Marxism, then I am not a Marxist.”

Most recent interpretations of Marx have focused on how his ideas could be transferred to or translated for a post-Communist world. After the fall of the “iron curtain” separating the Soviet bloc from the West, and the discrediting of Communism as a mode of government, many observers have argued that socialist, Marxist thought is no longer even possible. Famously, U.S. government policy analyst Francis Fukuyama proclaimed in 1989 an “End of History,” arguing that it was no longer possible to even imagine a historical alternative to capitalist democracy. He wrote, “The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western

liberalism . . . since the egalitarianism of modern America represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx.” This is, for good reason, a hotly contested—and, some argue, a hopelessly naïve or even willfully cynical—perspective. On the other end of the spectrum, though, a neo-Marxism has emerged, represented by thinkers like Slovenian psychoanalyst and philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Žižek makes the case that a careful reading of Marx must make us suspicious of today’s “humanitarian” capitalists such as Bill Gates and George Soros, arguing that “the same Soros [for example] who gives millions to fund education has ruined the lives of thousands thanks to his financial speculations and in doing so created the conditions for the rise of the intolerance he denounces.” For Žižek and many other thinkers on the Left today, Marx’s thought has not only survived the death of Soviet communism, but is perhaps more vital today than ever before.

Responses to Literature

1. Evaluate the prose style of *The Communist Manifesto*. How do the tone and language help achieve the purposes of the piece?
2. Define and summarize one of the key concepts of Marx’s theory of economics, such as “surplus value.” Can you find an example of this concept in the real world?
3. Research the state of industrial development in Europe at the time Marx began his career. What were the conditions that motivated his critique of capitalism?
4. What differences do you see between the ideas in Marx’s own writing and the way his ideas were used by Lenin and Stalin in building the Soviet Union?
5. Research the history of socialism before Marx. Where does the term come from, and what was original in Marx’s conceptualization of socialism?

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W. Somerset Maugham

BORN: 1874, Paris, France

DIED: 1965, Nice, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Novels, short stories, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Of Human Bondage (1915)

The Moon and Sixpence (1919)

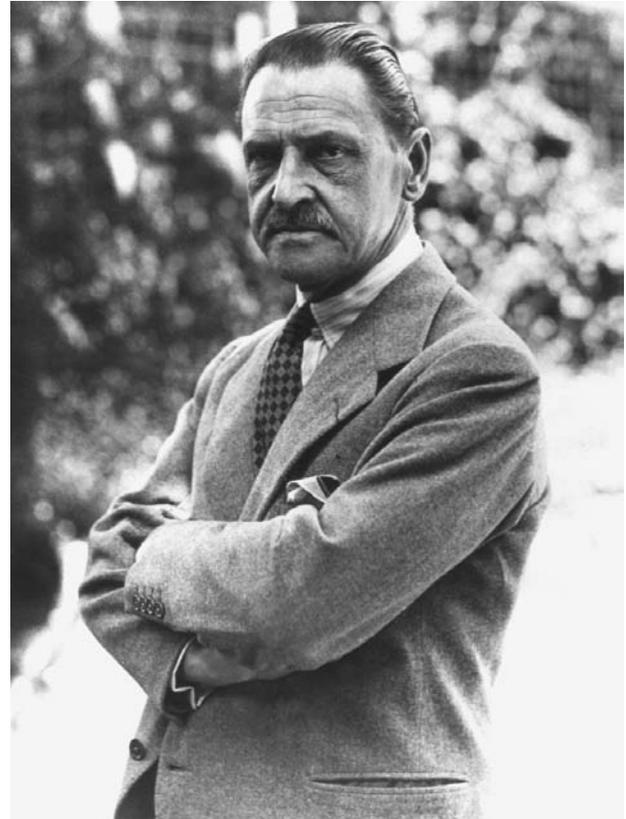
The Painted Veil (1925)

Cakes and Ale; or, The Skeleton in the Cupboard (1930)

The Razor's Edge (1944)

Overview

W. Somerset Maugham, during a career that spanned sixty-five years, attained great renown first as a dramatist, then as the author of entertaining and carefully crafted short stories and novels. Maugham's productivity has sometimes hindered his critical reception, leading commentators to assess him as a merely competent professional writer. A number of his works, however, most notably the novels *Of Human Bondage*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, *Cakes and Ale; or, The Skeleton in the Cupboard*, and *The Razor's Edge*, and the short stories "The Letter" and "Rain," are acclaimed as masterpieces of twentieth-century literature.



W. Somerset Maugham *Maugham, W. Somerset, photograph. AP Images.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

To England and Back William Somerset Maugham was born in Paris, France in 1874, the son of solicitor to the British embassy, Robert Ormond Maugham and Edith Mary (Snell) Maugham. His father died when he was eight and his mother when he was twelve, and he was raised by his father's brother, a clergyman. When he was thirteen, he was sent to King's School, Cambridge, in England, where he was supposed to prepare for a career as a clergyman. He was more interested in writing, though, and got his uncle's permission to study in Heidelberg, Germany. He ultimately decided to study medicine and trained for six years in a hospital in London. Although he spent a year-long internship in the London slums, he never went into medical practice. Instead, he moved to Paris, where he worked on his writing and lived in poverty. His first play, *Lady Frederick*, was produced in 1907, and was followed by three others within a year. Thus he launched his long and illustrious career as a writer.

Playwright Success, and Back to England *Lady Frederick* met with considerable success, and Maugham

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Maugham's famous contemporaries include:

- Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): Famous American expatriate writer whose name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.
- C. S. Lewis** (1898–1963): Irish writer and scholar known for his work on literary criticism, Christian apologetics, and medieval literature. Best known for his series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1965).
- Sergio Osmeña** (1878–1961): Fourth president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines and founder of the Nacionalista Party.
- J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892–1973): English writer, philologist, poet, and university professor best known for his fantasy classics *The Hobbit* (1936) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955).

quickly attained celebrity as a dramatist. In the play, *Lady Frederick* foregoes a fortune she desperately requires to stave off loan sharks and then generously disillusiones a captive young lord. A play that a theater manager had accepted against his better judgment as a stopgap of several weeks, *Lady Frederick* had to be transferred to four successive theaters to satisfy public demand. Maugham returned to England to continue his career in drama.

In 1908, four of Maugham's plays—*Lady Frederick*, *Jack Straw*, *Mrs. Dot*, and *The Explorer*—ran simultaneously in London theaters. Over the next twenty-six years, twenty-nine of Maugham's plays would be produced, many of them among the most well received of their time.

Importance of the Tale The writer, for Maugham, was a purveyor of pleasure, and what he wrote about was more important than how it was presented. He said, "With me the sense is more than the sound, the substance is more than the form, the moral significance is more than the rhetorical adornment." He added, "I wrote stories because it was a delight to write them."

Of Human Bondage, however, "was written in pain." Its principal character, Philip Carey, sensitive and plagued with a clubfoot, was so like the author, who was afflicted with a stutter, that Maugham was unable to read the book after it was published. Perhaps to avoid similar pain, Maugham later chose to write about other people and found material for stories everywhere.

Wartime Intelligence Work At the onset of World War I, Maugham joined the Red Cross and went to France as an interpreter. There he met Frederick Gerald Haxton and the two became lovers, remaining close companions for the next thirty years until Haxton's

death. During the war, because he was considered too old for battle, the British government recruited Maugham as an intelligence agent and subsequently involved him in covert operations in Switzerland and Russia. These experiences formed the basis of his 1928 novel *Ashenden; or, The British Secret Agent*, about a playwright who becomes a British secret agent. Despite the ongoing relationship with Haxton, in 1917 Maugham married Syrie Barnardo Wellcome, with whom he had had a child two years earlier. They divorced in 1929. During the years between the world wars, Maugham lived lavishly and wrote prolifically. He bought an expansive villa in southeast France, which remained his home thereafter, although he traveled widely. His visits to Italy, the United States, the South Seas, and the Caribbean provided the settings for his works that appeared between the world wars, including the novels *The Moon and Sixpence* and *Cakes and Ale*. Maugham fled France during the Nazi occupation of World War II and went to the United States, where he lectured and oversaw the Hollywood production of several motion pictures based on his stories and novels. Haxton, who had accompanied Maugham, died in 1944. In 1948 Maugham returned to France.

The Compulsive Writing Years By 1959 this compulsive writer was writing, he said, only for himself. At the time of his death he was reportedly working on an autobiography that was to be published posthumously. A few years before his death he destroyed all of his old notebooks and unfinished manuscripts. He continued to assert that "literature, or pure imaginative creation, was the highest goal toward which man could strive." Maugham died in Nice, France, in 1965.

Works in Literary Context

Colonialism and the Short Story Form Maugham has received greatest recognition for his short fiction. He emerged as a preeminent short story writer in the 1920s, and many commentators maintain that he consistently achieved excellence in this genre, concurring with Anthony Burgess that "the short story was Maugham's true *métier*, and some of the stories he wrote are among the best in the language." Maugham's most successful short stories—which include "Before the Party," "The Book-Bag," "The Pool," "Mr. Harrington's Washing," "The Letter," and "Rain"—exploit the oppressive atmosphere of Britain's colonies and feature petty intrigue, marital infidelity, and sometimes violent death against a background of the rigidly stratified colonial communities in India and the Far East. In "The Letter," for example, the wife of an English plantation owner in Singapore shoots and kills a man whom she claims forced his way into her room. Her lawyer, however, discovers a letter she wrote to the murdered man arranging a tryst on the night of his death. In "Rain" a medical quarantine isolates a number of travelers, including Sadie Thompson, a

prostitute; Dr. and Mrs. Macphail; and the Davidsons, a missionary couple, in a remote port of Pago Pago. Mr. Davidson becomes obsessed with reforming the flamboyant prostitute, and he bullies her into submission with the threat of a prison term. One night he is found dead, having cut his own throat. Sadie Thompson is angrily defiant, and the words she hurls at Dr. Macphail—"You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!"—suggest that what passed between her and the missionary was not entirely spiritual in nature. These two stories are among the most frequently anthologized in world literature; both have undergone several stage and film adaptations.

Espionage and Secrets Maugham's Ashenden stories, based on his experiences in the secret service, are credited with originating a style of sophisticated international espionage fiction that has remained popular for decades. His stories resemble his dramas in structure: plots hinge and pivot on a secret; suspense is heightened by the possibility of revelation; and tension builds on strategically timed entrances and exits, lost and found properties, and verbal combat. In fact, Maugham often transformed short stories into plays and rewrote unperformed dramas as novels or short stories, and this ease of adaptation attests to the unity of Maugham's literary construction.

Influences Maugham believed Graham Greene was the best British novelist, and he liked William Faulkner. Though critics attributed influences on Maugham to such authors as Dickens, Fielding, Defoe, and Trollope, Maugham once said, "I follow no master, and acknowledge none." In similar respect, Maugham is said to have influenced such differing writers as John le Carré, Ian Fleming, and Graham Greene with his skill at espionage novels.

Works in Critical Context

"In my twenties," Maugham once wrote, "the critics said I was brutal. In my thirties they said I was flippant, in my forties they said I was cynical, in my fifties they said I was competent, and in my sixties they say I am superficial." John Brophy called Maugham's writings "extroverted." Yet Maugham was "the most continuously readable storyteller of our lifetime," said Christopher Morley. He was, Walter Allen added, "the last survivor of a vanished age, an age which had not divorced, as ours has largely done, the idea of entertainment from the idea of art."

While many of his works have earned great accolades, just as many continue to be read, reread, and discussed. Among them, one, *Of Human Bondage*, stands out as his best.

***Of Human Bondage* (1915)** Based on an early manuscript called "The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey," Maugham's semiautobiographical coming-of-age novel chronicles the youth and early adulthood of Philip Carey as he struggles to retain his freedom and individuality within a rigid society. Reviews of the book were mixed upon its publication in 1915. R. Ellis Roberts, in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Maugham and his fiction are often associated with the twilight of British colonialism in Asia and the Pacific. Here are some other works that highlight the changing influence of the British Empire in the early to middle twentieth century:

A Passage to India (1924), by E. M. Forster. This novel centers on the accusation of rape made by a white British woman against an Indian man. Forster's novel is set against the backdrop of the growing independence movement in India in the 1920s.

Burmese Days (1934), by George Orwell. Orwell based this novel on his five years of service in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma (now called Myanmar).

The Long Day Wanes (1959), by Anthony Burgess. This collection of three novels takes its name from the old saying "The sun never sets on the British Empire." Set in British Malaya (modern Malaysia), the novels take place during the 1950s, leading up to the final withdrawal of the British from Southeast Asia.

Our Man in Havana (1958), by Graham Greene. Greene spins a tale of a hapless vacuum cleaner salesman caught up in British espionage efforts in Cuba in the 1950s.

Midnight's Children (1981), by Salman Rushdie. Considered a landmark in postcolonial literature, this novel is set at the time of the independence of India in 1947.

a review for the *Bookman*, called it "a remarkably clever book," but added about the author, "It is no disrespect to this piece of work to wish him a rather robust subject for his next novel." William Morton Payne, in his review for the *Dial*, objected to the book's unnecessary length, though he conceded that "allowing once for all its inartistic method, it is at least a noteworthy piece of creative composition."

Responses to Literature

1. Consider the disabilities and abilities of the characters in *Of Human Bondage*. How are they contrasted? How do they make the characters endearing? Also, as you read, take note of any favorite lines of dialogue or description that you find striking.
2. Find a favorite passage or two from the novel and write it (or them) down. Then, with three or four peers, drop the favorites into a hat. Have each person draw a paper from the hat, then take turns discussing how that quote expresses the values of the people and/or the period of the novel.

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Guy de Maupassant

BORN: 1850, Normandy, France

DIED: 1893, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

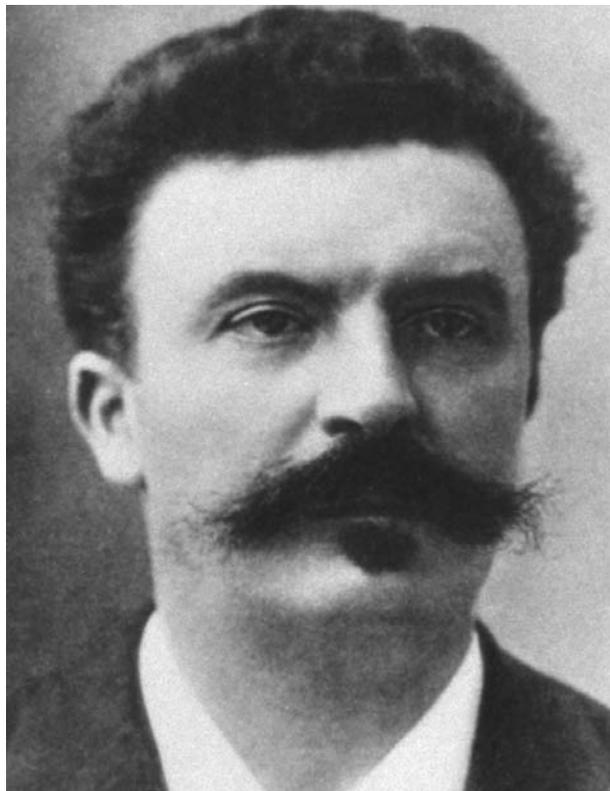
- "Boule de suif" ("Ball of Tallow") (1880)
"La Parure" ("The Diamond Necklace") (1884)
"Le Horla" ("The Horla") (1887)

Overview

Guy de Maupassant is considered one of the finest short-story writers of all time and a champion of the realistic approach to writing. His work is characterized by the clarity of its prose and the objective irony of its presentation, as well as its keen re-creation of the physical world. To the realist's ideal of precise speech, Maupassant added an economy of language and created a narrative style noted for its power, simplicity, and vivid sensuousness.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Dissolution of Family and Nation Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant, the first child of Laure le Poittevin and Gustave de Maupassant, was born on August 5, 1850, near Dieppe in Normandy, France. After



Guy de Maupassant *Maupassant, Guy de, photograph.*

a bitter and unhappy life together, Maupassant's parents separated when he was eleven years old, and Maupassant was raised by his mother. He attended schools in Paris and Rouen and eventually earned a bachelor's degree.

The Franco-Prussian War broke out in July of 1870. Maupassant, who had gone to Paris to study law, enlisted in the army immediately. The war was good for Prussia, concluding with the declaration of the existence of a new nation-state—Germany—but involved a series of terrible defeats for France. Maupassant was bitterly disappointed by the devastating outcome, in which Paris was briefly occupied by the Prussians, France lost the territory of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany (a region that would continue to be hotly contested through both the First and Second World Wars, as well as the intervening peace), and the French government collapsed. After the war, Maupassant worked as a clerk in the naval office of the reconstituted French Republic.

Naturalism and Collaboration The writer Gustave Flaubert had been a childhood friend of Maupassant's mother and served as a friend and mentor to the author during his young adulthood, introducing him to other writers. "Boule de Suif" ("Ball of Tallow"), which was Maupassant's first published story, was part of a collaborative effort, *Les soirées de Medan* (1880), which included the work of several young French naturalists under the influence and direction of Émile Zola. The story was the

first of many war stories and the one that made Maupassant an overnight celebrity. A tale of hypocrisy and betrayal, it was a stinging criticism of Rouen's "respectable" society, which made France's defeat by the Prussians inevitable. Maupassant later broke with the naturalist school, turning instead to realism. The latter set of principles, as elaborated by Flaubert, called for a close attention to form and a dedication to precision of detail and exact description.

A Publishing Whirlwind Maupassant spent several years on the staffs of two Parisian newspapers, often working under pseudonyms. From 1880 to 1890 he published nearly three hundred short stories and six novels, an astounding literary feat, by constantly reshaping and reworking existing stories and duplicating scenes, descriptions, and short scenes from his newspaper pieces. In 1881, *La Maison Tellier* (*Madame Tellier's Establishment*), Maupassant's first collection of stories, was published. Approximately half of the stories had appeared in print previously, and critical reaction was somewhat mixed, but sales were spectacular.

The years 1883 to 1885 were especially productive for Maupassant. Four additional collections of stories appeared: *Clair de Lune* (*Moonlight*, 1883); *Miss Harriet* (1884); *Les Soeurs Rondoli* (*The Rondoli Sisters*, 1884); and *Yvette* (1884). He also published *Au soleil* (1884; translated as *African Wanderings*, 1903), his first travel journal. Several of the stories in *Clair de Lune* treat the subject of madness, for Maupassant's first serious doubts about his own sanity date from this period.

In 1885 his collection titled *Contes du jour et de la nuit* (*Day and Night Stories*) was published. "La Parure" ("The Diamond Necklace"), one of Maupassant's best-known tales, is featured in this collection. The twist ending, later exploited by O. Henry, was in fact not typical of Maupassant's stories. Three more story collections next appeared, *Monsieur Parent* (1885), *Toine* (1886), and *La Petite Roque* (1886).

Personal Potshots and Glimpses of Madness His novel *Bel-Ami* (1885; translated 1891) is a biting satire of Parisian society in general, and of the journalistic milieu in particular. Greeted with anger by those who felt personally targeted, *Bel-Ami* was nevertheless reviewed favorably by most critics and was another commercial success.

The definitive version of his most famous fantastic tale, "Le Horla" ("The Horla," 1887) recounts the plight of a passive victim, an unwilling host to an invisible parasite that is slowly sapping his power and his life. Again Maupassant addresses themes of madness that would prove eerily prophetic for his own life.

Pierre et Jean, Maupassant's shortest novel and considered by most critics to be his best, was published in January of 1888. The subject of this psychological novel is the intense mental suffering of Pierre Roland, who begins to doubt the paternal legitimacy of his brother and is eventually excluded from the family circle. Maupassant's fourth novel was on the whole very well received by his contemporaries, and also met with great popular success.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Maupassant's famous contemporaries include:

Alexandre Dumas, fils (1824–1895): A French playwright, and son of Alexandre Dumas, père (author of *The Three Musketeers*); his dramatic career surpassed his father's, and he was the dominant French dramatist in the later 1800s.

Cesar Ritz (1850–1918): The Swiss hotel manager who founded the Ritz hotel chain.

Edward Smith (1850–1912): The British captain of the steamship *Titanic* when it sank after hitting an iceberg; roughly fifteen hundred people died as a result, including Smith.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893): A Russian composer who brought intense emotion into his music; best known today for his music composed for the ballet *The Nutcracker*.

Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883): A Russian novelist, best known for *Fathers and Sons* (1862), which illustrates the divide between generations.

All This Useless Beauty Maupassant's last two novels, *Fort comme la mort* (1889; translated as *Strong as Death*, 1899) and *Notre cour* (1890; translated as *The Human Heart*, 1890), differ from previous works not only in the milieu they describe—that of the indolent rich—but also in the increasingly active role played by women, who cause untold suffering in their male admirers.

L'Inutile Beauté (1890) is a collection of stories that first appeared in 1889 or 1890. The "useless beauty" of the story's title is a countess who, after bearing seven children in eleven years for her possessive husband, throws off the mantle of repeated pregnancies. She plants a seed of doubt in her husband's head by suggesting that one of her children is not his, thereby destroying his confidence and peace of mind for six years, until she reveals that she has lied. Exasperated at first, her husband suddenly sees her in a new light, as an ideal woman.

These novels were to be Maupassant's last. He had contracted the sexually transmitted disease syphilis as a young man, and it was now killing him. The disease, which was incurable at that time—indeed, it was a rather common ailment, though a debilitating one—had led to recurrent problems with his eyesight and now brought Maupassant to a complete physical and mental breakdown. He attempted suicide in 1892 and was subsequently confined to an asylum in Paris. He died on July 6, 1893, at the age of forty-two, a victim of third-stage syphilis.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Social order and class consciousness are key themes in Guy de Maupassant's work, and are common throughout literature. Here are some examples of works treating these themes:

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), a poem by Thomas Gray. This poem mourns the common people, and meditates that all people, no matter their wealth or social standing, are equals after death.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. In this novel, Emma Bovary struggles in vain to find happiness through romantic love and wealth.

"The Stationmaster" (1830), a short story by Alexander Pushkin. This short story by the noted Russian poet and writer chronicles the tragic tale of a humble stationmaster and his beautiful runaway daughter.

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. This novel follows life in Paris during the French Revolution, which resulted in the overthrow of the nobility, and questions how to best achieve social changes.

"Vengeful Creditor" (1971), a short story by Chinua Achebe. In this short story, a well-off African family falsely promises a girl she will eventually be able to go to school if she takes care of their child.

Works in Literary Context

Gustave Flaubert's role in establishing Maupassant's career was substantial. Besides offering encouragement to his young friend and intervening on his behalf in securing publishers for his early work, Flaubert shared with him his own philosophy of letters, insisting on the necessity of finding *le mot juste* (the precise word) to describe each concept and thing, as well as on the importance of accurate observation. Flaubert further aided the apprentice Maupassant by introducing him into literary circles that included not only Émile Zola but also Ivan Turgenev, Alphonse Daudet, Edmond de Goncourt, and Paul Bourget. Maupassant was truly at the center of European thought, and his work bears its stamp.

Class Consciousness and the Maintenance of Status Many of Maupassant's stories deal with the drama created by social class issues. In his short story "The Diamond Necklace," for example, the main character is a middle-class woman who aspires to a higher social status. She borrows a diamond necklace from a wealthy friend to wear to a fancy party, and when she loses it, she and her husband go heavily into debt in order to replace the necklace without the friend finding out. After many years of scrimping and hard work to pay off the debt, the woman discovers that the necklace she borrowed and lost

was actually fake, and hardly worth anything. In his novel *Pierre et Jean*, a son doubts that his brother is actually the child of their deceased father, a potential scandal among their upper-class acquaintances. Rather than reveal the truth, the family hides the secret and shuns the legitimate son in order to maintain their social standing.

Maupassant's short fiction in particular has been compared to that of Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James. The authors outside of France whom he influenced include Rudyard Kipling, August Strindberg, Joseph Conrad, William Sydney Porter (O. Henry), Somerset Maugham, William Saroyan, and Gabriele D'Annunzio. Although various labels have been affixed to him ("realist," "naturalist"), he steadfastly refused identification with any literary movement throughout his life.

Works in Critical Context

Both during his lifetime and throughout the twentieth century, writers and critics alike have praised Maupassant's writing. His stories are seen as masterpieces of economy and clarity, classical in their formal simplicity, uncommonly varied in their themes, and keenly evocative in their descriptions. His originality was believed to lie not in his subjects but in his style.

Maupassant's critical reception has focused on several major areas, among them his morality, the nature of his realism, Flaubert's influence on his work, and the autobiographical aspects of his fiction. The inherent sexuality of Maupassant's work was questioned as early as 1880, when his poem "Au bord de l'eau" shocked and offended bourgeois sensibilities, sparking threats of a lawsuit. Henry James, one of Maupassant's most perceptive commentators, called Maupassant a "lion in the path" of moralistic nineteenth-century critics because of the frankly erotic element in his work. A central concern of critics during his own time, Maupassant's sensuality continues to be remarked upon by such modern critics as Martin Turnell, who find his emphasis on sexuality evidence of his limited artistic vision.

Realism, Purity, Lesbianization? Maupassant's realism has also provided a focal point for critics. Early commentators were often appalled at what they saw as his lack of compassion for his characters. Later critics have dismissed this contention in favor of commentary on the technical virtuosity of Maupassant's prose, praising the purity of his narrative style, the use of the revelatory detail, and the absence of authorial commentary so much in vogue among novelists of his era. And still more recently, critics like Terry Castle have read Maupassant through the lens of queer theory, arguing that he enacts a "lesbianization" of those scenes and locales . . . typically associated with French impressionist painting. We seem here to look into a [Édouard] Manet or [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir canvas in which the men, paradoxically, are really women and the women who love them know it."

Responses to Literature

1. Maupassant “recycled” parts of his stories and current events. Many legal and crime dramas on television do the same thing. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using real events as the basis for fictional works? Do you think such works should be considered less important because they borrow from real life? Why or why not?
2. Maupassant died as a result of syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease that was considered shameful among the well-heeled in European society. Using your library or the Internet, research popular opinion of Maupassant at the time of his death and in the years following. Is there evidence that his unfortunate end affected critical and popular reception of his work? Do you think such an affliction would affect a celebrity’s status in modern times?
3. Using your library’s resources and the Internet, research the difference between the naturalist and realist schools of writing, promoted by Émile Zola and Gustave Flaubert respectively. Write an essay comparing and contrasting their approaches. Where does Maupassant’s work seem to fit?

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❑ Vladimir Mayakovsky

BORN: 1893, Bagdadi, Georgia

DIED: 1930, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

A Cloud in Trousers (1915)

War and the World (1917)

Revolution: A Poet’s Chronicle (1917)

Man (1918)

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1925)

Overview

Vladimir Mayakovsky is considered the central figure of the Russian Futurist movement and the premier artistic voice of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Russian Futurists saw their work as the leading mode of aesthetic expression for their time—a period distinguished by violent social upheaval and the subsequent downfall of Russia’s established government. Mayakovsky is generally thought of as one of the most innovative poets in twentieth-century literature.



Vladimir Mayakovsky *Mayakovsky, Vladimir, photograph. The Literary Gazette.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Bagdadi Vladimir Mayakovsky was born the youngest of three children on July 7, 1893, in the western Georgian village of Bagdadi to Russian parents—Vladimir Konstantinovich Mayakovsky and Aleksandra Alekseevna Maiakovskaia. His father was a forest ranger, an official of the Russian government whose work took him to the Caucasus Mountains. Young Mayakovsky would occasionally accompany him on these trips. He spent the rest of his childhood playing in and around Bagdadi, where he picked up Georgian, the only foreign language he ever mastered.

The Social Democratic Worker's Party and Prison After the death of his father in 1906, Mayakovsky's mother moved the family to Moscow. There he attended public secondary school. He was an intellectually precocious child who developed an early appreciation for literature, but he demonstrated little interest in schoolwork. In 1908 he joined the Social Democratic Worker's Party, a subversive, anti-czarist organization. At this time, Russia was under the control of Nicholas II, the last czar in the country's history. During his reign, peaceful protesters who aimed to present a petition to Nicholas II, were gunned down by the secret police in an event that ultimately undermined the power of the czarist regime, Bloody Sunday. Between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, Mayakovsky was arrested three times by undercover police who had amassed evidence linking him with such criminal activities as running an illegal printing press, bank robbery, and organizing a jailbreak of political prisoners. He was imprisoned for six months after his third arrest in connection with the jailbreak charge, and proved such an agitating presence among other inmates that he was frequently moved and eventually placed in solitary confinement.

Release from Prison and Performing Poetry Upon his release from prison, he entered the Moscow Institute of Art, hoping to become a painter. There he met the Russian Cubist painter David Burluk, who introduced him to the innovative trends in the visual arts and poetry known as *avant-garde*. Dressed in outrageous garb, such as the yellow tunic that became his trademark, the tall and ruggedly handsome Mayakovsky soon became the dominant and most popular poet-performer of the group, frequently captivating audiences with his loud, dramatic recitations.

First Drama Written and Performed In 1913, he wrote and performed in his first drama, the "tragedy" *Vladimir Mayakovsky*, which played to full houses of curious and sometimes heckling spectators. Two years later Mayakovsky met Osip and Lilya Brik, beginning a relationship that greatly affected his personal and professional life: Osip Brik, a wealthy lawyer with strong literary

interests, became Mayakovsky's publisher, and Lilya—Osip's wife—became Mayakovsky's mistress and the inspiration for most of his impassioned love poetry, including *The Backbone Flute* (1916) and *About That* (1923).

Poet of the Revolution The outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which overthrew the czarist regime and gave power to the Soviets, provided Mayakovsky with an opportunity to combine his political commitment and artistic talents, and he plunged headlong into the cause of promoting the new regime. Victor Shklovsky, a leading Russian critic, wrote in his memoirs, "Mayakovsky entered the revolution as he would enter his own home." Soon considered the official poet of the Revolution, he applied his poetic skill toward writing songs, slogans, and jingles expounding Bolshevik ideology, and also used his abilities as a painter and illustrator to produce a voluminous number of propaganda posters and cartoons. He was proud of his ability to create utilitarian literature without compromising himself as a poet, and critics also marvel at his achievement, often citing his three-thousand-line poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*—written on the leader's death in 1924—as one of his finest works, a communist equivalent of a religious epic.

Soviet Representative In the mid- to late 1920s, he traveled in Europe, Mexico, and the United States as an official representative of the Soviet government. On these trips abroad he kept a grueling schedule of public appearances and recorded his impressions of the capitalist societies he visited. He expressed his admiration of American technology and architecture in his *America* cycle (1925), which includes one of his most famous poems, "Brooklyn Bridge," a eulogy to American engineering and the universal plight of the common laborer.

Strained Relations During the last few years of his life, Mayakovsky experienced a succession of personal disappointments and critical attacks from Soviet officials, all of which eroded his confidence and stamina. He had been growing increasingly disillusioned by the expanding party bureaucracy and the infiltration of bourgeois values into the new order. At the same time, conservative Bolshevik leaders charged that Mayakovsky's writing was too individualistic. Joseph Stalin's Five Year Plan advocated collectivization of agriculture and art alike; and the Bolshevik leaders claimed that Mayakovsky's prerevolutionary Futurist beliefs were incompatible with their ideology. Under extreme political pressure, he was forced to abandon his editorship of *New LEE*, a revival of the Futurist magazine *LEE*, and joined the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), a conservative, state-controlled literary organization.

Depression, Despair, and Suicide The growing despair and ambivalence he felt toward his own life and the future of his nation is clearly reflected in his satires on the philistine Soviet bureaucrats—*The Bedbug* (1929) and

The Bathhouse (1930)—written and performed in the last two years of his life. Considered outrageous offenses to the state, the plays received scathing reviews and were banned in the Soviet Union until 1955. Although in the last months of his life Mayakovsky maintained his usual hectic public schedule, he was emotionally devastated, taking the critical rejection of his work as a personal attack. Torn between the flamboyant originality of his art and a desire to “stamp on the throat” of his talent in service to the party, he played Russian roulette, a pastime he favored when despondent, and died by his own hand on April 14, 1930.

Works in Literary Context

Influences on Voice and Revolutionary Themes Mayakovsky was strongly influenced by his love affair with Lilya Brik, his extensive travels, and by war and revolution. His lyrical verses are often about love. Yet, his political poems, which show other influences, cover a great range: He wrote a long, high-styled tribute to Lenin, funny political satire, and political pamphlets. He wrote children’s poems with political subtexts, occasional poems for events such as the building of a canal, and political poems meant to influence—not commemorate—political decisions. His love poems and even his advertisements showed political concern. *About That* (1923) is as much about politics as it is about love; one advertisement for rubber galoshes shows a hammer and sickle on the tread of a galosh.

Voicing Historical Misfortunes and Controversies As the so-called Poet of the Revolution, Mayakovsky voiced the misfortunes and controversies of twentieth-century Russian history. With his poems reading as exciting displays of verbal mastery, he strove to invent a voice that was truly revolutionary. Most notable is this voice of the poet persona, or speaker, he developed to issue forth his themes. In his politically oriented verse one role the persona takes on is that of a self-sacrificing savior who lays down his life for the Revolution. Another role the speaker frequently takes is that of a social critic and prophet of the Revolution. In *A Cloud in Trousers* (1915), for instance, this poet persona severely chastises the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) for their complacency regarding the impending destruction of their world. This speaker democratically equates himself with the “street thousands—students, prostitutes, contractors” in a manner reminiscent of Walt Whitman, whose poetry Mayakovsky had read in translation.

The Futurist Style The Futurist poets aimed to destroy traditional poetic modes. They did this through disregard for convention, use of bizarre imagery and invented vocabulary, and techniques borrowed from avant-garde painting, including irregular typefaces, offbeat illustrations, and the author’s handwriting. Mayakovsky virtually abandoned metric structure in his poetry. On

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mayakovsky’s famous contemporaries include:

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Russian composer famous for his orchestral work for ballets, most notably *Rite of Spring* and *The Firebird*.

David Burlyuk (1882–1967): Ukrainian artist closely associated with Russian Futurism who was an acquaintance of and early influence on Mayakovsky.

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): Nobel Prize-winning Russian novelist famous for his epic *Doctor Zhivago*.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Communist leader of the Soviet Union from 1922 until 1953, Stalin was infamous for his dictatorial rule and his ordered executions of perhaps millions of dissenters.

the page his verse is arranged in irregular lines—often in a step formation such as that found in the work of the modern American poet William Carlos Williams—and is generally held together by strong, but unpredictable, internal rhyme schemes. Much of his originality as a poet is attributed to his use of hyperbolic (exaggerated) imagery, often blasphemous or violent.

Individually he had no Russian poet followers to speak of, and his particular poetic style was never further developed. In Lithuania, however, Mayakovsky as a Futurist poet was considered to inform the formation of The Four Winds movement—which took its first influences from his Futurism.

Works in Critical Context

Whether Mayakovsky intended it or not, there were a few critical misconceptions about his work. To this day discussions about him still degenerate quickly to old pro- and anti-Communist positions that dominated the critical approaches to him and his work during the Cold War. Yet it is notable that a new image of the poet has begun to emerge, especially in scholarship published after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

That he excelled at studies in literature as early as the age of nine is also generally overlooked by critics, as they tend to interpret him as a populist illiterate. Further contributing to this critical misconception of the poet is the fact that Mayakovsky intentionally wrote as if he could not write. He disregarded academic verse structure. The dominant elements in his verse reveal a tendency for what is oral and a preference for emphasis on the sound of poetry. As Russian critic D. S. Mirsky describes it, “Mayakovsky’s poetry is very loud, very unrefined, and stands absolutely outside the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ taste.” It is marked by powerful rhythm, often

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also focused on themes of unrequited love or revolution, or both:

The Case of Comrade Tulayev (2004), a novel by Victor Serge. This book about the Stalinist purge is also a mystery, a thriller, and a tale of great courage and nobility.

Darkness at Noon (1940), a novel by Arthur Koestler. In this story, the protagonist is a retired Bolshevik and revolutionary who is imprisoned, tortured, and tried for treason.

In the Casa Azul: A Novel of Revolution and Betrayal (2003), a novel by Meaghan Delahunt. In this historically based novel, the author explores both revolution and love in the worlds of Frida Kahlo and Leon Trotsky.

Man's Fate (1933), a novel by André Malraux. In this fictionalized account of the Chinese Revolution, the author explores the inner workings of the minds of such characters as Ch'en Ta Erh, a terrorist-assassin with a conscience.

evocative of an invigorating march cadence, which came naturally to Mayakovsky, who would loudly declare his verses in his booming velvety voice—by all accounts beautiful to hear. This dominant oral element managed to fool critics of Mayakovsky into treating him as a genuine illiterate, even though memoirs of him are full with accounts of his lying in bed reading or eagerly talking about something he had recently read.

Responses to Literature

1. Mayakovsky was the so-called Poet of the Revolution. Research the Russian Revolution of 1917. How did it affect Russian civilians? How is this impact reflected in the poet's work?
2. Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin had a profound influence on Mayakovsky, who even wrote a tribute song called a "paean" for his leader. Study a brief biography of Lenin. Then look up the definition and study the components of a paean. In group discussion, decide how important Lenin was to Mayakovsky. What in the paean *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* suggests the poet's attitude and feelings?
3. Those interested in the Russian Revolution should read *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), a first-hand account of the October Revolution of 1917 as experienced by American journalist John Reed. Lenin himself read the book and wrote a glowing introduction to the 1922 edition.

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John McCrae

BORN: 1872, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

DIED: 1918, Boulogne-sur-Mer, France

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"In Flanders Fields" (1915)

Overview

Known to his friends and colleagues as a physician and a soldier, John McCrae is best known for his war memorial poem "In Flanders Fields," perhaps the most popular and best remembered verse of World War I.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Reader and a Cadet John McCrae was born on November 30, 1872, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada to woolen manufacturer David McCrae and Janet Eckford



John McCrae *The Granger Collection, New York. Reproduced by permission.*

McCrae. As a child, John developed a love of reading from his mother and later a passion for soldiering from his father.

In 1873, the family moved from the small cottage to a larger home on Woolwich Street. The young McCrae began his schooling at Central Public School before moving on to Guelph Collegiate Institute. At Guelph Collegiate the fourteen-year-old McCrae joined the school's affiliated Highland Cadet Corps. A year later he joined the local militia regiment of artillery commanded by his father, serving as the regiment's bugler.

Medical Training In 1894, McCrae graduated with a degree in biology from the University of Toronto and began medical studies at the university. In the summers of 1896 and 1897, he completed his internship at the convalescent home for children, the Robert Garrett Hospital in Mount Airy, Maryland. There he began writing, publishing his first article, "The Comedy of a Hospital," in the Presbyterian weekly, *The Westminster*. His first poems were also published during this time, some of which appeared in the student paper *Varsity* and in commercial publications, such as *Saturday Night* and *Godey's*. The theme of most of his poems is death, usually described as a welcome rest after the toils of life, often in images of reaping and harvest.

While at the university, McCrae joined The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, a military regiment that eventually

promoted him to captain. When McCrae graduated from medical school with his M.D. in 1898, he practiced at the Toronto General Hospital and the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore before receiving an appointment as a fellow in pathology at McGill University and a pathologist at the Montreal General Hospital.

Second Boer War In 1900, McCrae took a temporary leave of his medical studies to soldier in the Second Boer War (also known as the South African War). Joining the Royal Canadian Artillery in December, he was made a lieutenant. His distinguished performance was recorded and his letters home were published in the Guelph *Evening Mercury*. McCrae's experiences in South Africa added the theme of war to his poetry. Nearly all his poems written after his return to Canada were published in McGill's *University Magazine*.

Reputed Pathologist Upon his return to Montréal in 1901, McCrae began his appointed residency at Montréal General Hospital and soon established himself as a fine pathologist. In September of 1902, he was awarded his license to practice by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Province of Quebec and became assistant pathologist to the Royal Victoria Hospital Montréal, yet proceeded to practice clinical work instead. As a lecturer in medicine at his alma mater McGill University, which he began in 1909, McCrae joined forces with his former professor and mentor J. G. Adami to write *A Text-Book of Pathology for Students of Medicine* (1912).

World War I and Flanders Field In 1914 the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. As a dominion of the UK, McCrae's Canada was part of the declaration. Using his influence with a former Boer War compatriot, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Whipple Bancroft Morrison, McCrae ensured his appointment as head field surgeon and major in charge of the First Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. His brigade was moved to Belgium in April 1915; it was during the Second Battle of Ypres when in May 1915 McCrae's friend and former student, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was killed—inspiring McCrae's famous poem, "In Flanders Fields" (1915).

Final Service The next month McCrae left the artillery brigade. He advanced to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, assigned a post as head of medicine at No. 3 Canadian General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers near Boulogne-sur-Mer, France. Prescott recounts the reactions of the staff of former McGill University colleagues as McCrae arrived, appearing gaunt, exhausted, and emotionally changed as if "an icon had been broken." McCrae nevertheless continued to insist on the highest possible standards of service. Among his best practices, he insisted on living as his comrades lived—in tents at the front instead of in a heated shelter assigned to military heads.

The poor conditions and frigid weather lowered McCrae's resistance to illness, and though he had been

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

McCrae's famous contemporaries include:

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize–winning author.

Marchese Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937): Pioneer of the radiotelegraph system, he shared a Nobel Prize in Physics (with Ferdinand Braun) in 1909.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965): A prolific author, he was adept at storytelling through his popular novels, stories, and plays.

Charles Talbut Onions (1873–1965): English grammarian and lexicographer, he is best known for his collaborative work on *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): Profound and prolific essayist and novelist, he spent his life on one of the most revered works of the century: *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, or *Remembrance of Things Past*) (1913–1927).

forced by order to move to the warmer huts, he succumbed to meningitis and pneumonia. He died on January 28, 1918, four days after he was made consulting physician to the First British Army—the first Canadian to earn such an honorable distinction. He was buried with full military honors in the cemetery at Wimereux, France. According to the Guelph Civic Museum biographers, seventy-five nursing sisters attended McCrae's funeral; his horse Bonfire led the procession, and in military tradition, bore his master's boots backward in the stirrups.

Works in Literary Context

Influence of World War I As biographer John F. Prescott notes, McCrae published some thirty poems throughout his life, many during his early twenties. Among these earlier poems were several influenced by the tragic death from infection of a girl with whom he was in love. Likewise, the death of friends and comrades in wartime impacted the physician-poet. McCrae's close friend Alexis Helmer was killed during the Boer War, as he stood near his dugout by the Yser Canal. After the men collected the parts of Helmer's body and rearranged them on an army blanket, they gathered for a service, with McCrae presiding and reciting "Order of Burial of the Dead." According to McCord Museum scholars, it is generally supposed that his dear friend's death prompted his writing "In Flanders Fields," dated by McCrae May 3, 1915.

Pastoral Style In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, critic and scholar Paul Fussell analyzes "In Flanders Fields" (1915) as a poem that carries the mood of pastoral poetry. From "pastor," "shepherd," this style is characterized as part of the world of the shepherds as they strolled or lay in the fields tending the flocks. Pastoral poetry was common in several centuries—popularized in the seventeenth century, for example, by poets such as Christopher Marlowe and Edmund Spenser and playwrights such as Ben Jonson. In McCrae's poem, Fussell suggests, "We have the red flowers of traditional pastoral elegy; the crosses which suggest the idea of Calvary and sacrifice; the sky as seen from a trench; the larks singing in the midst of the horrors and terrors of man's greatest folly; [and] the contrast between the song of the larks and the voice of the guns."

Antiwar Sentiments Because of his many experiences with death by disease or war, says Prescott, McCrae's early poems "often had death or the search for oblivion and peace after death as their theme. Later poems tended either to be religious, inspired by the plight of his patients, or to deal with war." As McCord Museum notes also indicate, although McCrae returned from the Boer War without physical injury, "he began to disapprove of the cost of war in human and animal lives."

By the time he participated as a medical rescue soldier in World War I, McCrae was developing the theme of the consequences of war. He employed a common literary device, the voice of the dead. In "In Flanders Fields," for example, the dead speakers, along with the many pieces of imagery, work on a number of levels to present the manifold themes of war—including, as Fussell suggests, the idea of the soldiers as lovers, with a sharp contrast drawn between beds and graves.

Works in Critical Context

McCrae's small body of work has earned an unusual kind of critical reception. Most impacting on the larger culture is his poem, "In Flanders Field," published anonymously in *Punch* on December 8, 1915. It quickly became popular among the British troops and during World War I became "the poem of the army."

"In Flanders Field" In a short time "In Flanders Field" became a signature for the consequences of World War I. According to H. E. Harmon of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, "Perhaps nothing in all literature ever did so much to fire the soul of the western world to the cause of liberty." Told from the point of view of those who died in the conflict, the poem bore a symbol that became adopted by the veterans for November 11, Veteran's Day. The first lines read, "In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row on row." According to the scholar Robert Giddings, these poppies were made into paper handouts by the veterans and have been "sold" (or given to solicit donations) for the last six decades to raise funds for the war-disabled. However,

not all critics agree with popular sentiment regarding the work; Paul Fussell, for example, points out that the poem's fatal flaw is the "recruiting-poster rhetoric" found in its final third.

Responses to Literature

1. Both the Boer War and World War I influenced McCrae's poetry. To understand the impact the war had on the physician-poet, investigate the circumstances of each war, researching the causes and casualties. Discuss how McCrae's verses reflect his view of the war. Do you think most people feel the same way about war? Explain your answer using lines from the poems to support your position.
2. Biographer John F. Prescott writes that John McCrae "was a man of many talents, undergirded by the highest standards of loyalty, service, and duty." Visit the McCord Museum Web site and take the John McCrae Web Tour. Discuss what key individuals, events, and experiences contributed to McCrae's passion for medicine as well as his success as a poet.
3. Professor Harry Rusche of the Department of English at Emory University has collected the poetry and biographies of six "Lost Poets of the Great War." Among the six is John McCrae. Visit the Web site and read one poem by each poet—Rupert Brooke, McCrae, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Alan Seeger, and Edward Thomas. Compare the tones: What is the attitude of each poet toward war? What words or lines suggest such an attitude? What do the six poets have in common?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also offered descriptions of the impact of war:

"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1945), a poem by Randall Jarrell. In this poem of five lines, the speaker describes the activity and death of the soldier who works in the belly of the World War II fighter plane.

"Dulce et Decorum Est" (1920), a poem by Wilfred Owen. This poem, taken from a Latin line by Horace ("It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country"), is written from the point of view of a World War I soldier.

"Facing It" (1988), a poem by Yusef Komunyakaa. In this poem, the speaker stands facing the Vietnam War Memorial, a black wall that holds the names of 58,195 Americans taken by the war.

"The Things They Carried" (1990), a short story by Tim O'Brien. In a story from the book by the same title, the narrator describes the literal and figurative weights the Vietnam soldiers carried.

"Welcome to Hiroshima" (1984), a poem by Mary Jo Salter. In this piece, the speaker visits the site of the first atomic bombing, recounting in great detail the fallout.

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Ian McEwan

BORN: 1948, Aldershot, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

First Love, Last Rites (1975)

The Comfort of Strangers (1981)

Amsterdam (1998)

Atonement (2001)

Saturday (2005)

On Chesil Beach (2007)

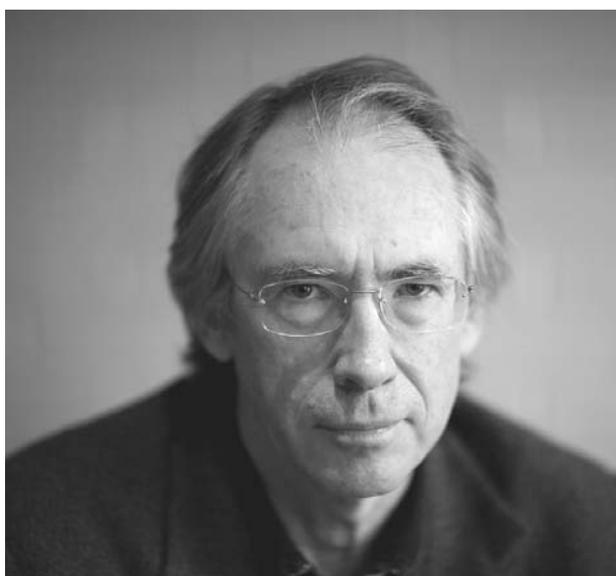
Overview

Ian McEwan, a contemporary British novelist and screenwriter, is widely recognized for the daring originality of his fiction, much of which delineates bizarre sexuality and shocking violence. Frequently centering on deviant anti-heroes, his works explore conflicts between norms and socially unacceptable drives of the unconscious.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Abroad Ian Russell McEwan was born on June 21, 1948, in Aldershot, England, to David McEwan and Rose Lilian Violet Moore McEwan. His father was a sergeant major in the British army. McEwan's childhood was spent in the tracks of his father's assignments to empire outposts such as Singapore and Libya until the age of twelve, when he was sent to boarding school in England for five years. It was there that he became interested in English Romantic poetry and modern American and English fiction.

New British University Graduate McEwan entered the University of Sussex in Brighton in 1967 and earned a BA with honors in English in 1970. He then enrolled in the MA program in English at the University of East Anglia, where he was permitted to submit some of his short fiction as part of the requirements for his degree. Under the tutelage of novelist Malcolm Bradbury, McEwan wrote more than two dozen short stories and earned his degree in 1971.



Ian McEwan David Levenson / Getty Images

McEwan is very much a product of the new British universities, popularly known as “plate-glass universities” as opposed to the older “red-brick universities” at which his contemporaries, such as Kingsley Amis or Philip Larkin, have taught or still work. Built during the 1960s, the new universities set out to revolutionize curricula and the general structure of academic life in Great Britain. To a significant extent they succeeded, and their graduates, such as McEwan, have made a distinctive impact on the cultural life of the United Kingdom.

After a brief foray traveling in Afghanistan after earning his master's degree, McEwan returned to England and focused on publishing and his writing career. The country he returned to faced numerous challenges in the 1970s. The British Empire had disappeared in the post-World War II period, leaving Britain only with a handful of dependencies with mostly tiny populations and few economic resources. A Labour government replaced the Conservative one in 1974, though the change did little to stem the rapid inflation, labor disputes, and protracted conflict in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants that marked the decade.

From Short-Story Writer to Novelist Three short stories written for his master's thesis were included in McEwan's initial collection, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), which won the Somerset Maugham Award and established McEwan as one of England's most promising young writers. However, many critics expressed discomfort with his portrayal of childhood innocence warped by such anomalies as incest and forced transvestism. Three years later the second collection, *In Between the Sheets* (1978), appeared. In the same year McEwan published his first novel, *The Cement Garden* (1978). Its concerns—incest, murder (or at least murderousness), infantilism, and gender confusion—had all been foreshadowed in his stories.

Success as Novelist The publication of the novel essentially marked the end of McEwan's career as a writer of short fiction. He has written in a variety of genres since then, including novels, plays, an oratorio, and motion-picture and television scripts, but he has published only a handful of short-fiction works. Critical acclaim for McEwan's novels began building with the first of four novels to be nominated for a prestigious Booker Prize, *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). Set in Venice, Italy, less for its romantic or historic properties than as a place of menace and distortion, it tells about an English couple on holiday. One night they lose their way and fall in with a local man who eventually involves them in his own life and eventually a murder.

New Territories In the mid-1980s McEwan's fiction moved into new territory. While traces of his interest in violence and abnormal psychological states remain, these subsequent works express much greater interest in broader questions of politics and history. With each

subsequent novel, too, McEwan's narrators have become more readily understandable and sympathetic characters. They are often artists or writers, in relationships with spouses and children, and they pay attention to world history and politics in ways that the narrators and main characters from the short-story collections do not.

In a 1987 interview with Amanda Smith in *Publishers Weekly*, McEwan noted that his 1982 marriage to Penny Allen, by which he acquired two stepdaughters, and the subsequent births of his two sons were at least partially responsible for this shift in focus.

Important Later Novels Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, McEwan continued to publish challenging novels. With *Black Dogs* (1992), the author reflects on the aftermath of the Nazi regime in Europe. The Nazi party ruled Germany in the 1930s, and their aggressive territorial ambitions were a direct cause of World War II. Included in the novel was the fall of the Berlin Wall, a significant milestone in the end of Communist domination of Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. *Amsterdam* (1998) describes the moral dilemma brought about by a lingering mental illness. *Atonement* (2001), regarded as one of McEwan's best works, is a story told from the point of view of an impressionable young narrator clearly identified as imaginative and inclined to interpret events to suit her penchant for drama. *Saturday* (2005) is set in the context of the growing opposition to the Iraq invasion. *On Chesil Beach* (2007) is a story of sexual awakening, as a couple undergoes a difficult but fruitful transition from innocence to familiarity.

Since the early 1980s, McEwan also has increasingly explored forms of writing other than those of the short story and the novel. He has written television plays, movie scripts (both original and adapted from the fiction of others), children's literature, and the words for an oratorio. He is regarded as one of the most versatile English authors of his generation.

Works in Literary Context

Influenced by his interest in contemporary American and British fiction as well as Romantic poetry, McEwan is recognized for the originality of his fiction, much of which features bizarre sexuality and shocking violence.

Unconventional Stories McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden*, exposes a distorted adolescent world. This work examines the deteriorating relationships among four children who are left alone after both parents die. It opens with the death of their father. Attempting to cover the family garden with concrete because he is too ill to tend it, the father suffers a heart attack and collapses in the wet cement. The narrator, a homely adolescent named Jack, maintains a detached voice that casts a numbness over horrifying events.

McEwan's second short-story collection, *In Between the Sheets*, flows from realism to fantasy, horror to comedy. Magical realism permeates the stories, which fre-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

McEwan's famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Atwood (1939–): Canadian Atwood is a novelist, poet, and short-story writer whose talents lie in exploring the relationship between humanity and nature and scrutinizing power as it pertains to gender and political roles. Her novels include *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

Julian Barnes (1946–): British author Barnes writes novels and publishes crime fiction under the name Dan Kavanagh. His novels include *Talking It Over* (1991).

Anne Rice (1941–): American author Rice is famous for her novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1973). In her work, she blends accurate historical elements with such themes as alienation and the individual's search for identity.

Alice Walker (1944–): African American writer Walker first gained success with her novel *The Color Purple* (1983).

Martin Amis (1949–): British author Amis is a prominent contemporary novelist and son of novelist Kingsley Amis. Martin Amis is lauded for his satirical view of the excesses of youth and contemporary society. His works include *Night Train* (1997).

Jim Carroll (1950–): American author Carroll is best known for his autobiographical work *The Basketball Diaries* (1978), which was made into a film in 1995.

quently portray peculiar sexual relationships. Thus, destructive sexuality is also a prominent theme. For example, "Reflections of a Kept Ape" is narrated by an ape who contemplates his waning relationship with his owner, a struggling female novelist. "Dead as They Come" portrays a wealthy, egotistical man who becomes obsessed with a mannequin and then destroys her when he believes she has been unfaithful.

Post-War Settings Many of McEwan's later novels share a similar setting—the post-World War II era, often continental Europe—and feature stories that are multi-layered. The theme of loss is also a hallmark of these books. *Black Dogs*, for example, explores the crumbling marriage of a couple against the fall out from Nazi rule on Europe. Their marriage falls apart after they encounter a pair of feral dogs which symbolize both the evil that humans, like the Nazis, are capable of as well as the extraordinary acts that people can accomplish when confronting such evil. While *Amsterdam* has a more contemporary setting, McEwan uses the death of Molly Lane to drive the plot and explore euthanasia issues in Great Britain. Her two oldest friends—a composer and a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

McEwan predominantly focuses on adolescent characters, depicting them as acutely alienated and prone to cruelty or degenerate behavior. Here are some other works that center around conflicted teens:

- The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel by J. D. Salinger. This novel's main character, Holden Caulfield, is a well-known icon of teenage alienation and defiance.
- The Ice Storm* (1994), a novel by Rick Moody. This novel centers around two neighboring families and the difficulties both the adolescents and the parents have in dealing with the difficult issues of the early 1970s.
- Ham on Rye* (1982), a novel by Charles Bukowski. This semiautobiographical work chronicles the coming-of-age of a young man who lives in Los Angeles during the Great Depression.
- Lord of the Flies* (1954), a novel by William Golding. This story examines a group of schoolboys abandoned on a desert island during a global war and highlights the conflict between the forces of light and dark within the human soul.

newspaper editor—make a euthanasia pact at her funeral, and though the pair come to odds, their story ends in Holland where the procedure can be more easily arranged. *Atonement* begins before World War II is launched when a working class young man, Robbie Turner, is falsely accused of rape on the estate on which his family works. The accusation is a payback for a misunderstanding a young girl sees between the young man and her elder sister. Much of the novel concerns what happens to the characters during World War II, as the young lovers lose each other, and the young girl suffers the loss of respect for herself and from her sister. Robbie goes to prison, but is allowed to serve during the war, bringing the conflict and all the death and destruction to the forefront.

Works in Critical Context

McEwan first came to public notice in 1975, and was immediately recognized as an important new voice on the fiction scene. Having at first achieved fame, or even notoriety, because of the edgy nature of his subject matter, it has also polarized the critical assessment of his work. While some critics have maintained that McEwan is a serious literary writer who addresses challenging issues in his work, others have asserted that he is merely a glorified horror writer who is solely concerned with producing gratuitously shocking prose. Despite these disagreements, McEwan has been consistently praised for his storytelling, characterizations, and adept handling of metaphor and symbol.

The Child in Time Many critics consider *The Child in Time* the most complex of McEwan's works, as it presents a political, personal, and metaphysical exploration of childhood. Based on an actual event, *The Child in Time* describes the agony of a father whose daughter is kidnapped from a grocery store. Consumed by guilt and grief, he steadily loses touch with reality, believing he sees his lost daughter everywhere.

Many reviewers stressed the novel's theme of lost youth, pointing to a character named Charles Darke, a successful politician who regresses to his childhood and ultimately commits suicide. Roberta Smoodin stated of the novel, "A lost childhood, lost childhood hopes and dreams remain present in the seemingly mature adult, McEwan suggests, not only in memory but in a kind of time that spirals in upon itself, seems to be recapturable in some plausible intermingling of Einstein and Proust, quantum physics and magical realism."

Also emphasized by critics is how McEwan explores the idea of time, its passage, and how they affect the human condition. As Mike Brett wrote in the *English Review*, "McEwan's great skill here is to explore scientific theory in a way that illuminates the unforeseeable tragic potential in the mundane choices we make on an everyday basis."

Responses to Literature

1. McEwan often features adolescent characters in extreme angst. In small groups, discuss McEwan's comment on adolescence. Stage a debate about your beliefs for the class.
2. McEwan's work first attracted public attention because it was unsettling and disturbing. Write a short review of his works commenting on his novels' shock value and literary merits.
3. Choose two scenes from McEwan's works and write an essay comparing and contrasting their events, styles, and themes.
4. After having read several of McEwan's stories, what kind of attitude do you think the author has toward the world? In your paper, support your argument with lines from his books.
5. Read *Atonement*, then view the highly acclaimed film adaptation, released in 2007. In an essay, compare and contrast the two versions of the story. Does the filmmaker fully explore the novel's themes? What would you have done differently?

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Menander

BORN: 342 BCE, Athens, Greece

DIED: 292 BCE, Piraeus, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Anger (321 BCE)

The Grouch (316 BCE)

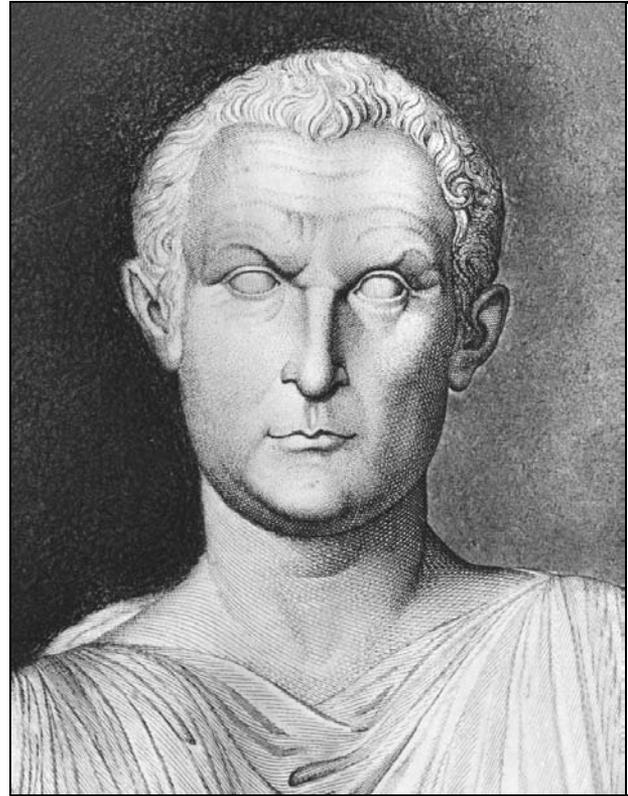
The Arbitrants (c. 304 BCE)

Overview

Menander has been called the greatest representative of Greek New Comedy, the era of drama that followed the Old Comedy (c. 435–405 BCE) and the Middle Comedy (c. 400–323 BCE) in ancient Greece. He was praised in his lifetime for his use of everyday speech and realistic depiction of Athenian middle-class life, the exemplification of a relatively new comic voice. Menander's reworking of the stock characters and plots of Greek Middle Comedy and his emphasis on love and social intrigue greatly influenced the development of romantic comedy, or the comedy of manners.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Uncertain Biography There is limited biographical information about Menander, though some facts are certain. Menander the Athenian, son of Diopetithes and Hegestrata, from the deme Kephisia, was born in 342–341 BCE and died in his early fifties. He wrote more than one hundred comedies in that time, beginning with a play called *Anger* in 321 BCE. *The Grouch*, his one play to survive virtually intact, won first prize at Athens in 316 BCE. By about 292–291 BCE, he was dead.



Menander Hulton Archive / Getty Images

During his lifetime, Menander witnessed Macedon's conquest of Greece in 338 BCE. Because Greeks were unable to unite politically, their territories were annexed by Philip II of Macedon. Philip's son, Alexander the Great, succeeded him. It is certain that Menander lived through the reign of Alexander the Great (336–323 BCE). Through Alexander's ambition for world empire and his admiration of Greek learning, Greek civilization was spread to all the lands conquered by Alexander. After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his empire soon began to break up, a process Menander partially witnessed.

Other components of Menander's traditional biography are more dubious. Some are at least credible: that his plays reflect the influence of the older dramatist Alexis (whom some call his uncle); that he studied with the philosopher Theophrastus, the successor to Aristotle (one of the greatest philosophers of the ancient world) as head of the *Peripatos* (the Peripatetic School); and that he had at least social connections with Demetrius of Phaleron, who headed an aristocratic (and pro-Macedonian) regime at Athens from 317 BCE to 307 BCE.

The Legends Surrounding Menander's Life

Other more colorful details probably reflect the ancient practice of manufacturing biography from an author's work. Thus, it is told that Menander was prone to romantic infatuations (as are the youths of his plays), that he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Menander's famous contemporaries include:

Qu Yuan (340 BCE–278 BCE): A patriotic Chinese poet active during the Warring States Period. His poems include "The Lament."

Epicurus (341 BCE–270 BCE): Greek philosopher who believed that the good life consisted of participating wholeheartedly in true friendships and enjoying excellent food. Two groups of quotes attributed to him are included in *Principal Doctrines*.

Alexander the Great (356 BCE–323 BCE): Macedonian king who conquered many lands from Greece to India.

Seleucus I Nicator (358 BCE–281 BCE): Having served under Alexander the Great, after the great leader's death, Seleucus I established the Seleucid Empire in the eastern portions of the lands Alexander conquered.

Bryaxis (c. 350 BCE–?): Greek sculptor commissioned by Artemisia II of Caria to work on a mausoleum dedicated to her brother's memory.

loved the courtesan Glykera (a name appearing in several comedies), and that he was effeminate (his style is refined). There is also a set of revealing (if unhistorical) anecdotes about him and some entertaining works of fiction, such as the correspondence of Menander and Glykera composed by the sophist (professional philosopher) Alciphron in the third century BCE. Such material tells one rather more about how Menander was read by later generations than about the life he actually led. As with most ancient authors, the material for any meaningful biographical criticism is lacking.

Menander's Literary Output Although little is known about the history of Menander himself, much more is known about his works. Literary historians believe that Menander composed 100 to 108 plays, 96 of which have been identified by title. Performances of his comedies continued well into Roman imperial times, and consequently some of his works were preserved indirectly through adaptations by the Roman dramatists Plautus and Terence. While copies of Menandrian texts were made as late as the fifth and sixth centuries, scholars believe that most of them were lost sometime between the seventh and ninth centuries. For over one thousand years, Menander was known only through references to and quotations from his works in ancient texts.

In 1905, the French archaeologist G. Lefebvre found significant fragments of his plays on Egyptian papyri. This landmark discovery recovered one-half of *The Arbitrants*, about two-fifths each of *The Shearing of Glycera* and *The Girl from Samos*, and less than a single scene from two

other plays. *The Dour Man*, discovered in 1957 in an Egyptian codex containing three of Menander's dramas, was first published in 1959. The first and last plays in the codex, four-fifths of *The Girl from Samos* and five-eighths of *The Shield*, were damaged and not published until 1969. More fragments of Menander's plays were discovered throughout the 1960s, including sections of *The Sikyonian*, *The Man She Hated*, and *The Double Deceiver*, and scholars project that more of his work may yet be found.

Works in Literary Context

Middle Comedy to New Comedy: Menander's Focus on Realism Because of the limited biographical information about Menander, a discussion of influences on him is also necessarily incomplete. However, he was probably trained in dramatic composition and studied philosophy, and such education affected his writings. Menander also drew on his knowledge of speech and habits of the middle-class life of Athens as well as greater Greek culture of his time period.

In the course of the fourth century—the process is already discernible in later plays of Aristophanes such as *The Congresswomen* (392 BCE) and *Wealth* (388 BCE)—comedy began moving from the raucous, exuberant, and often political style of what came to be called Old Comedy to a more sedate, bourgeois drama of family relationships and erotic entanglements. Style and form changed accordingly. Whereas fifth-century plays are deliberately fantastic and illogical, fourth-century plots are comparatively well made. Menander was at the forefront of this movement in drama.

Importance of Storytelling Storytelling is in fact a key ingredient of Menandrian comedy and was facilitated by the development of a true act structure that developed the plot from exposition to climax to denouement in five sections punctuated by unscripted (and apparently unrelated) choral performances. Papyri regularly mark these breaks with the laconic note "choral song" interrupting the column of text. Menander shapes his action around these act breaks with a skill of which the practitioners of the well-made play would approve, and he invariably resolves his dramatic problems in satisfying, often unexpected ways.

Emphasis on Character Though his happy endings are frequently the result of manipulation—lucky encounters, timely recognitions, and the like—the motivating force behind his plots comes from his carefully delineated and essentially realistic depictions of human character. Against a background of stock comic types such as cooks, doctors, and advisers full of familiar attitudes and even more familiar jokes, Menander develops serious and recognizable moral dilemmas for the parents and children, husbands and wives, and anxious careerists who are the focus of his interest. Their basically good intentions are nearly wrecked not by external circumstances, as they would have been in Middle Comedy, but by their own

failure to recognize the limits of their knowledge and by the natural weaknesses of their own characters.

The tradition apparently supplied each figure with a recognizable mask and costume and a name appropriate to the dramatic role, but Menander turns the central figures of each play into individuals who make credible and often poignant responses to the challenges they face. The real sense of closure in a Menandrian play, therefore, comes not from the external manipulation of its plot, but from the internal process by which characters face the limits of their capabilities and deal honestly with the absurdity of their pretensions.

Menander's Realism From antiquity onward, Menander has been much praised for his realism: the unaffected naturalness of his language, the likeness of his characters to real people, the true portrait he gives of life in fourth-century Athens. Menander's realism is not only the product of acute observation but of a refined art working in a traditional medium. His subjects, while less limited than one might believe after hearing Ovid's assertion that "there is no play of Menander's without love," are chosen and treated with a regard for the conventions of civilized high comedy.

Menander excluded from his plays a whole range of grave events and permanent misfortunes (such as murder and distressing illness) to which real human beings are unfortunately prone. He also refrains from indulging in realistic detail purely for realistic detail's sake; his plays are plays and not documentary records. One may judge his characters to be drawn with acute psychological insight, yet he is not, as a modern dramatist might be, concerned with exploring the inner depths of their personalities. His analysis of character is ethical rather than psychological, and it is striking in *The Grouch* where Knemon's major speech of self-revelation leaves the old man's emotions almost entirely to the audience's imagination.

Legacy Though some critics note the difficulty of assessing his influence in the absence of more knowledge of his writings, they agree that Menander represents the apex of ancient tradition of comedy. However, his emphasis on love and social intrigue are believed to have greatly influenced the development of romantic comedy, or the comedy of manners.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Menander was less successful than his contemporary playwrights, but after his death, ancient critics recognized his value and praised his work. The Roman critic Quintilian called him the leading dramatist of New Comedy, and the Greek biographer Plutarch preferred his style to that of Aristophanes. Since the rediscovery of fragments of his work in 1905 and of an entire play in 1957, interest in Menander's role in the development of drama has grown.

The Girl from Samos In the view of many commentators, *The Girl from Samos* is a pioneering work in New Comedy because of the author's genuine compassion for

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In the play *The Arbitrants*, Menander describes the problems that arise because of the discovery of a foundling child. A foundling is a child whose parents have abandoned it—in film and literature, the child is often anonymously left on a rich stranger's doorstep in the hopes that the child will have a better life than the parents could have offered. The foundling has remained an important figure in literature and film to this day. Here are a few more examples of literature and films that feature foundlings:

Book of Exodus (date and author unknown). In this book of the Bible, the Pharaoh in Egypt has ordered the death of all newborn Hebrew children. Unwilling to watch her son die, Moses' mother puts him into a basket and places the basket in the Nile River. He is ultimately plucked from there by a member of the royal family and raised as royalty.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749), a novel by Henry Fielding. As the title of this novel indicates, the main character of this text is a foundling. Tom Jones's status as a foundling, in this case, causes serious social problems for him when he grows up, because he is unable to marry the girl he loves on account of the social conventions regarding the status of foundlings.

Meet the Robinsons (2007), an animated film directed by Steve Anderson. Left on the doorstep of an orphanage as an infant, Lewis spends his early, precocious years trying to invent gadgets that will help him figure out who his mother is and how to find her.

his characters and his psychological insight into their moral dilemmas, which find expression in the greater realism of the play. With *The Girl from Samos*, critics also agree that Menander exploits the comic potential of the stock elements of New Comedy. Yet most have concluded that his greatest strength lies in his ability to operate within the confines of the New Comedy form while at the same time delving beneath the surface of its conventions in order to individualize character.

Some commentators have been most impressed by his poignant characterizations of Demeas and Moschion, which reveal their inner turmoil as they struggle to deal with the threats to their father-son relationship. By devoting great attention to the anguish of these characters in their respective monologues, these critics assert, Menander effectively shifts the focus of the play from the obstructed marriage of Moschion and Plangon to the estranged bond between Moschion and Demeas, thereby subordinating the conventional theme of romantic love.

Referring to the characterization of such relationships, Eric G. Turner wrote in his introduction to

Menander: “*The Girl from Samos; or, The In-Laws*,” “The relationships in this comedy ring true. It is indeed in the mutual relationships of characters in the enclosed world of each play that a just imitation of life can be claimed for Menander. The drama develops out of the interaction of the characters on each other.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read Menander’s *The Grouch* and Aristophanes’ *The Birds*. Menander’s work has been described as more realistic in its portrayal of its characters than Aristophanes’ work. How do these plays support or contradict this assessment? In your response essay, cite examples from each play to support your argument.
2. Read *The Arbitrants* and watch the film *Meet the Robinsons*. These works come from vastly different cultures and times, but they each deal with foundling children. In a short essay, analyze the different ways these pieces describe the issues and problems associated with foundling children. Which gives you a clearer picture of the issues surrounding the life of a foundling?
3. Trying to create characters who appear realistic is a difficult task. Yet, critics have consistently applauded Menander’s realistic characters. Based on your readings of Menander, do you agree that his characters are realistic? What makes a character realistic on stage and in a book? Are there different literary tactics? Write a paper that summarizes your arguments.
4. Little is known for sure about the life of Menander. Instead, through the years, a number of stories regarding his life have arisen, but these stories seem mostly to be based on his plays. Creating a biography for ancient writers that is based on their work was once a common practice. Pick a writer, singer, or filmmaker whose work you are fairly familiar with. Then, write a short biography of his or her childhood based on this person’s novels, songs, or films. In order to understand the problems associated with writing this kind of biography, it is important that you use the Internet and the library to compare your biography with the person’s real biography. Also briefly describe the difference between the two biographies—yours and the published one.

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George Meredith

BORN: 1828, Portsmouth, England

DIED: 1909, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Shaving of Shagpat (1856)

Farina (1857)

Modern Love (1862)

The Egoist (1879)

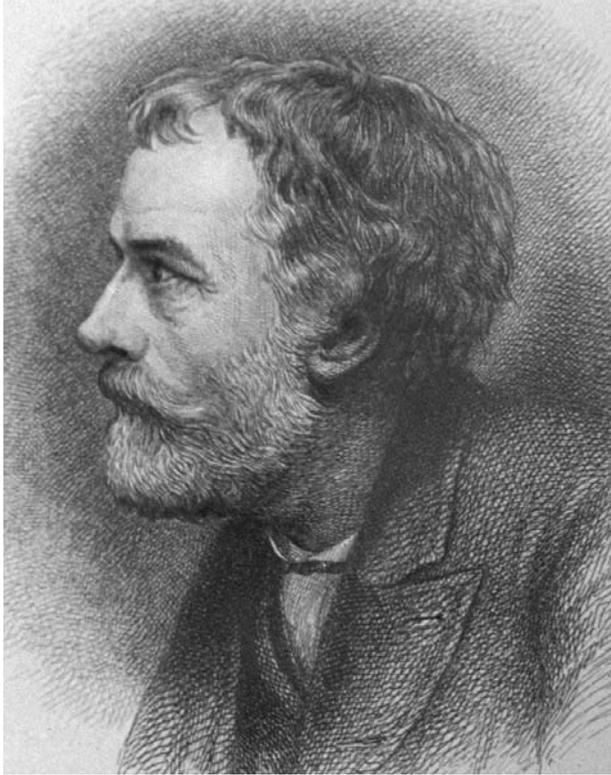
Diana of the Crossways (1885)

Overview

George Meredith is known chiefly as a Victorian novelist and poet who innovated literature by his focus on character psychology rather than plot. His shorter fiction appeared toward the beginning of his career, in the late 1850s and early 1860s, and reached its fullest development in three stories published in the 1870s in the *New Quarterly Magazine*. Meredith’s career developed in conjunction with an era of great change in English society during the second half of the nineteenth century. His treatment of issues such as shifting social class and rapidly developing industrialization established him as a heavy influence on the early modernist writers that would follow him.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Victorian Era and False Prosperity Meredith lived most of his life in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with advances in industrialization



George Meredith Meredith, George, photograph. The Library of Congress.

leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with proper behavior in society and domestic life, a topic which translated into Meredith's works as a concern for social issues and character psychology.

George Meredith was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 12, 1828, to Augustus and Jane Eliza (Mac-Namara) Meredith. His father inherited a seemingly prosperous Portsmouth naval outfitters and tailor shop from his own father, but he soon discovered that customers were not paying their bills. Augustus ran the failing business at a loss for several years while the family lived extravagantly on the dowry that Meredith's mother had brought into the marriage.

Considering themselves superior to ordinary tradespeople, the Merediths unsuccessfully attempted to establish themselves as the social equals of the elegant patrons of the tailor shop. The young Meredith quickly learned to say nothing of his family's position, instead encouraging the assumption that he was of the gentry. When Meredith was five, his mother died, leaving her money in a trust for her son's education. Lacking access to these funds for his business, Meredith's father was forced into bankruptcy. The boy was sent to boarding schools and had very little contact with his father thereafter.

At fourteen Meredith was sent to school in Neuwied, Germany, where he remained for two years. Upon his return to England, his father wanted to apprentice him to a bookseller and publisher, but Meredith disregarded the suggestion and found a post for himself assisting an attorney, for whom he worked for five years.

Early Writing, Early Marriage In his early twenties, Meredith began writing poetry. He became acquainted with Edward Gryffydd Peacock and Mary Nicolls, the son and widowed daughter of the satirist Thomas Love Peacock, a man he admired. With the younger Peacock he collaborated on the publication of a privately circulated literary magazine, *The Monthly Observer*. After a tempestuous relationship with Nicolls, Meredith married her in 1849. The marriage was neither a happy nor a lasting one, in part due to a poor financial situation. His father-in-law offered to secure him an office position, but Meredith preferred to try to make his living by his pen. However, his first book, *Poems*, a volume published at his own expense, attracted little notice and never recouped printing costs.

In 1853 the Merediths' financial difficulties forced them to move in with Thomas Love Peacock. Peacock could not adjust to the disruption of his household, which was exacerbated by the birth of the Merediths' son Arthur later that year, and he eventually quit his own house to take rooms elsewhere. By 1856 Meredith and his wife were living apart, and in 1858 she left for Italy with another man, leaving Meredith with five-year-old Arthur. Meredith's lifetime of reticence about his early years carried over into a stolid refusal to discuss his first marriage, though critics maintain that the sonnet cycle *Modern Love* (1862), which painstakingly details the dissolution of a marriage, actually chronicles that event.

Failed Relationships, Failed Publications Meredith's subsequent relationships with women proved for some time unsatisfactory. He lived alone or with male friends for years, traveling extensively in Switzerland, France, and Italy. Upon his second marriage in 1864, Meredith settled at Box Hill, Surrey, where he lived the rest of his life.

During the 1850s, Meredith was gainfully employed in magazine writing. He also began writing longer prose works, beginning with the fictional *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856). The work's favorable reception inspired him to write a serious novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). This novel, which shocked Victorian society with its sexual and atheistic innuendo, was a source of great controversy upon its publication but quickly faded from popular critical debate.

To recuperate from his first failure, Meredith attempted, according to biographer Ioan Williams, "to reconcile his artistic purpose with the demands of the reading public." Once he despaired of reaching a large audience, Meredith began to write primarily to please

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Meredith's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist best known for her book *Little Women*, she was also a seamstress, servant, teacher, and Civil War nurse before becoming an author.

Paul-Jacques-Aimé Baudry (1828–1826): A French painter who was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1850.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): English poet, painter, illustrator, and translator, he was the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1891): Russian novelist, essayist, dramatist, and philosopher, he is known for his masterpieces *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*.

himself and the small circle of admirers who had defended and praised his works from the first. It was then that he found his works more popular than at any other time in his career, beginning with his most successful comedy, the novel *The Egoist* (1879).

Popular Comic Writer Meredith's popularity grew with subsequent novels. In 1885 he published *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). Inspired by a scandal involving an adulterous married woman accused of selling a state secret, *Diana* attracted readers who believed that the novelist was revealing inside information about this widely discussed affair; in fact, so many readers assumed that the novel reflected the facts of the scandal that later editions contained disclaimers disallowing any connection between Meredith's creation and the affair.

The Poet Within Meredith died at Flint Cottage on May 18, 1909, and, according to his wishes, was buried at Dorking Cemetery. His well-known agnosticism prohibited his burial in Westminster Abbey. However, a memorial service was held at the abbey. At the time of his death, Meredith was considered one of England's premier men of letters.

Works in Literary Context

Literary Influences Meredith's early poetry was influenced by John Keats and Alfred Lord Tennyson. As a part-time reader for the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall in the early 1860s, he was able to observe literary trends and to employ them in his early novels. In *Emilia in England* (1864) and its sequel *Vittoria* (1866), for example, Meredith was inspired by the contemporary interest in local-color fiction to give the heroine a vividly realized Italian background and to introduce historical figures and events into the story. In

his position at Chapman and Hall, which he retained until 1894, Meredith also encouraged and influenced such writers as George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Olive Shreiner, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Elaborate Style As a "poet-novelist," Meredith explored new meters and stanza forms. He experimented dramatically with syntax and grammar. Critics characterize his poetry as verbally dense, full with allusions (references) and rife with metaphor. Thus, his poetry is reflective of the late nineteenth-century inclination toward intentional manipulation of the poetic form.

Meredith's short fiction tends to be more tightly plotted and less given to extended metaphor than his novels, but it still can be seen as characteristically "Meredithian" in style and theme. It is most often characterized by its use of rich psychological portraits and its ambitious and complex strategies of narrative voice. The short stories, as well as the novels, hold an important position in the change from Victorian to modernist moral and aesthetic values—most prominently in their narrative technique, development of female characters, and treatment of diverse psychological perspectives.

Modern Psychological Themes Meredith is noted as one of the earliest English psychological novelists. His early novels largely conformed to Victorian literary conventions, and they contain his first attempts at psychological portraiture and are typically concerned with demonstrating the instability of human nature as they satirically attack egoism, pretense, snobbery, and false values. In 1857, after Mary Meredith left England with the painter Henry Wallis, later bearing his child, many of Meredith's short stories featured themes of incompatibility in marriage, as well as a generous appreciation of the woman's position in such situations.

Meredith's later novels also demonstrate a concern with character psychology and modern social problems. Like his short stories in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, the keynote themes include explorations of the danger that egotism poses to the self and others; the social underdog and the slipperiness of self-definition in a rapidly altering society; and the moral integrity, intelligence, and independence of women.

In *Farina*, for example, there are several such themes: First, there is the independence, wit, and courage shown by Margarita, whose father praises her by saying, "she's worthy to be a man." The poor but noble-hearted Farina wins Margarita through courageous action and skill in modern chemistry—he invents *eau de cologne* to rid the city of the devil's stench and becomes a national hero. In the character of Monk Gregory, who cannot resist the temptation to tell others of his miraculous defeat of the devil, Meredith sounds the theme of egotism as a destructive force. Gregory says: "Vanity has wrecked me, in this world and the next. I am the victim of self-incense." "Self-incense," or ego, poses a danger

not only to Gregory's soul but also to the city of Cologne and the German nation.

Works in Critical Context

During the period from 1860 to 1875, Meredith was consciously responsive to the desires of the book-buying public. Despite the introduction of fictional devices and elements that had proved successful for many other writers of the time, however, he was unable to attract either readers or favorable critical notice. Several critics theorize that Meredith tried in each new novel to correct the faults that had been criticized in the last and to incorporate elements that would appeal to Victorian readers.

Meredith's contribution to the short-story genre reached its height in the 1870s, immediately preceding the publication of one of his most enduring critical and popular successes, *The Egoist*.

***The Egoist* (1879)** Many critics suggest that the mid-Victorian trend toward compact narrative structures inspired Meredith's experimental strategies in *The Egoist*. *The Egoist* is the most successful example of his comic method and remains his most critically praised novel. Critical consensus is that with this work Meredith most successfully combined his theory of comedy, writing style, and thematic concerns. With *The Egoist*, Meredith also finally achieved a popular success that grew with subsequent novels.

Early critics believed that Meredith crafted his books to meet public tastes only as a way to slip in his radical ideas about fickle human values. His novels featured very little action, relying instead on dialogue, or what Meredith called "action of the mind," to advance the story. This resulted in a popular perception of his novels as static and "talky." His prose therefore came to be identified as the barrier that makes his work inaccessible to readers. His supporters, however, praise the poetic quality of his prose, maintaining that each line of Meredith's work is written in the allusive, rich language usually reserved for poetry.

More recent critics, however, now argue that Meredith possessed what Judith Wilt has called a "sensitive and aggressive awareness of the presence, at the heart of his creative art, of the reader." As has been true throughout the history of commentary on Meredith, there remains a dedicated group of admirers who contend, with J. B. Priestley, that Meredith's difficult style, requiring as it does the full and undivided attention of the reader, paved the way for the public acceptance of much subsequent serious fiction, helping to shape "the modern attitude towards fiction and the modern novel itself."

Responses to Literature

1. Meredith's early novels largely conformed to Victorian literary conventions. Go online to literary sites and databases and find one aspect of Victorian literature to investigate. This could be Victorian literary

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Meredith consistently focused on the social underdog and continued to emphasize the destructiveness of egotism. Here are a few works by writers who also highlighted vanity as a human flaw:

Barrel Fever (1994), a collection by David Sedaris. In this collection of humorous stories and essays, the author entertains readers by way of a department store elf, an OCD child, and other pitifully hilarious alter egos.

A Confederacy of Dunces (1980), a novel by John Kennedy O'Toole. A modern underdog protagonist with an uncontrollable ego, Ignatius J. Reilly stumbles through a life of failed attempts at work, love, and social protest in this novel.

The Fountainhead (1943), a novel by Ayn Rand. An epic novel that displays Rand's belief that "man's ego is the fountainhead of human progress."

Perelandra (1943), a novel by C. S. Lewis. This second installment of the Space Trilogy novels presents a unique fictional interpretation of the fall of man.

style, esteemed Victorian writers, lesser-known Victorian writers, publishing venues of the period, differences in the Victorian writing of alternate continents, or even the events and concerns that influenced Victorian themes. When you have printed out examples, return to share your new area of expertise with the group.

2. Throughout his career, Meredith explored the circumscribed role of women in society, a topic known in his day as "the woman question," and had long contended that civilization can only flourish when men and women are equal. Look into feminism in nineteenth-century England. How is the feminist movement reflected in Meredith's works? Can you find other feminist texts that you believe borrow ideas from Meredith's work? How do the works compare? Do the more modern works offer a critique of Meredith's feminism?
3. Following *The Egoist*, Meredith was most concerned with writing psychological novels that portrayed the tangled motivations of individuals and explored the disparity between the public and private aspects of self. In a team effort decide on one character in one of Meredith's stories and explore the traits Meredith mentions for this character. What are the character's desires, fears, impulses, and feelings? What does Meredith try to reveal by describing these character traits?

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Thomas Middleton

BORN: 1580, London, England

DIED: 1627, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Puritan (c. 1606)

A Yorkshire Tragedy (c. 1606)

The Second Maiden's Tragedy (1611)

The Changeling (1622)

Women Beware Women (c. 1625)

Overview

Thomas Middleton was a prolific Jacobean dramatist whose plays today are regarded as ranking just below those of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson on the early stage. For twenty years at the beginning of the seventeenth century, only a few playwrights rivaled him. Yet although he wrote some of the best comedies and



Thomas Middleton © Hulton-Deutsch Collection / CORBIS

tragedies of the period, Middleton failed to establish a reputation during his lifetime.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

London to Oxford, Leaving Without a Degree Middleton was born in London to prosperous master bricklayer William Middleton and Ann Snow Middleton. No details survive of Thomas Middleton's education before he matriculated at Queen's College, Oxford in April 1598. Middleton did not complete his studies.

Inheritance Disputes Provoke a Zeal for Playwriting Middleton's premature departure from Oxford was likely partly impelled by disputes over his father's estate. When William Middleton died in January 1586, he had acquired interests in at least two substantial properties, and his will declared his children as partial heirs. However, their mother's remarriage wreaked havoc on their

future prosperity. Her new husband, Thomas Harvey, was a penniless grocer who had lost what fortune he had with Sir Richard Grenville's expedition to Roanoke Island. (European powers were keen to find ways to profit from the discovery of the Americas, and many risky expeditions to North and South America were undertaken through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Grenville led the first British attempt to colonize Roanoke Island, off the coast of what is now North Carolina, but his attempt failed.) Within weeks of their marriage, husband and wife were quarreling bitterly over control of the children's inheritance. That such control was theirs to quarrel over may seem strange in the contemporary era of protected trust funds and living wills, but during the sixteenth century children had little or no independent legal status, and could thus not directly inherit property until coming of age.

As a writer for the Oxford Middleton Project explains, "So began fifteen years of lawsuits. . . . Middleton's astute satire of the legal profession . . . surely has its origin in this extensive early experience." Court appearances reflect that Middleton was evidently in London at the end of 1600, and, as one testimony maintained, "daylie accompaning the players." His playwriting zeal may have begun at this point.

One Book Burned, Another Unread Middleton had, however, also shown early interest in writing. In 1597, when he was only seventeen years old, he published *The Wisdome of Solomon Paraphrased*, a long piece that went virtually unread. Two years later, he experimented with formal satire, but his *Micro-Cynicon: Sixe Snarling Satyres* (1599) brought no greater literary success. Worse, with six other satirical works, it was burned at Stationers' Hall on June 4, 1599, by order of the archbishop of Canterbury.

A Husband and a Working Dramatist Some time before 1603, Middleton married Magdalen Marbeck, granddaughter of the well-known musician and theologian John Marbeck. Her brother Thomas was an actor with the Admiral's company. Scholar Mark Eccles suggests that Middleton "met his wife through his association with the Admiral's Men," for whom he started to write plays in the same year. But he might well have met her somewhat earlier and then began to write for the company because of her connections and because he needed employment to support his household.

Middleton is first identified as a working dramatist in Philip Henslowe's *Diary* entry of May 22, 1602, when he shared an advance of five pounds with Anthony Munday, John Webster, and Michael Drayton for a tragedy called *Caesar's Fall or The Two Shapes*. By 1602 Middleton was writing plays for Henslowe and collaborating with Webster, Thomas Dekker, and William Rowley, among others. His relative prosperity did not last. Queen Elizabeth's illness and subsequent death in March 1603 and a

virulent outbreak of plague closed the London theaters for more than a year, until April 9, 1604.

Plague, Pamphlets, and Plays for Children King James succeeded Elizabeth to the throne. The period of his reign, 1603–1625, is termed the Jacobean era. The arts flourished under James, as they had under Elizabeth, but not before the plague caused a bumpy start to his reign. Like many of his fellow dramatists, Middleton turned to pamphleteering for an income while theaters were closed. Biographer R. Cecil Bald has Middleton at the November 1603 execution of a Francis Clarke at Winchester and at nearby Newbury at the end of 1603, having left London to escape the plague. *The Ant and the Nightingale or Father Hubbard's Tales* was licensed for publication on January 3, 1604. In March 1604 *The Black Book* was entered in the Stationers' Register.

Early in 1604, as plague deaths abated, Middleton was writing plays again. He composed a string of successful comedies of city life, including *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), his comic masterpiece. Around this time—between 1603 and 1604—he started to write plays for the children known as Paul's Boys, a reference to St. Paul's Cathedral. These children, who attended the cathedral's song school, and in some cases the grammar school, performed near the cathedral. The plays were all comedies and included such titles as his successful *The Puritan* (produced c. 1606).

Tragedies and Comedies The three years from early 1604 to the end of 1606 were intensely productive for Middleton, seeing him as a contributor, according to critic M. P. Jackson, of large sections of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*. But steady work was cut short when the Paul's company apparently ceased to play around the middle of 1606. Middleton was obliged to find other writing work. In May 1606, he handed over to Robert Keyser, Master of the Blackfriars, another children's company, a manuscript of *The Viper and Her Brood* in satisfaction of a bond. The tragedy is known only from the lawsuit which mentions it. Because this is his only known association with that company, it is likely that Keyser's dissatisfaction over his dealings with Middleton obliged the playwright to look elsewhere for income.

In short time Middleton embarked on a series of tragedies for the King's Men, the preeminent company of players, which contracted with Shakespeare and John Fletcher as their principal playwrights. The best of these, and Middleton's first masterpiece in the genre, was *The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1606). His second King's company tragedy of this period was *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (c. 1606). He collaborated with William Rowley on several plays, notably the tragicomedy *The Changeling* (1622)—one of his most respected tragedies.

In the late spring of 1611, the same year he wrote *Second Maiden's Tragedy*, Middleton renewed his collaboration with Dekker to write another comedy for Prince Henry's Men, *The Roaring Girl*. After at least one more

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Middleton's famous contemporaries include:

René Descartes (1596–1650): The French philosopher and mathematician known as “The Father of Modern Philosophy” for his profound influences on subsequent generations of thinkers.

Ling Mengchu (1580–1644): A Chinese writer of the Ming Dynasty, best known for his short-story collections *Astonished Slaps Upon the Desktop*.

John Milton (1608–1674): An English poet and essayist, he is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*.

Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660): A French patron saint who founded several charitable organizations, including Congregation of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of Priests of the Mission.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669): A Dutch painter and etcher considered one of the greatest artists in European history.

comedy—*No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (c. 1611)—he began working providing scripts for civic pageant shows, masques, and entertainments for the Lord Mayor of London.

Chronicler for London and a Fall from Favor

Later in 1620, Middleton, by now well established as a deviser of Lord Mayor's shows, gained the post of chronicler to the city of London. The last five years of his career were also occupied with one concluding triumph. His last known play is possibly one that ended his career: a controversial anti-Spanish satire, *A Game at Chess* was licensed for performance on July 9, 1624, and performed by the King's Men at the Globe theater for an unprecedented run of nine performances. The show played to packed houses and brought exceptional returns to the players. But numerous references in contemporary letters show that the play created a minor international incident. The Spanish ambassador complained to King James, who ordered the performances halted, and the Privy Council was commanded to investigate who was responsible for “such insolent and licentious presumption.”

The extent to which Middleton's final years were clouded by his connection with *A Game at Chess* is unsure. It seems that he did not write for the King's Men again, or for any other company, and his relations with the civic authorities were shadowed by allegations of “abuses and bad workmanship.” Middleton died and was buried in the parish church of Newington Butts, in Southwark, on the south side of the Thames on July 4, 1627. His death passed without remark, either by elegiac verses or the publication of a commemorative collection

such as those done for the works of Jonson and Shakespeare.

Works in Literary Context

Surrounding Influences Middleton's plays, notably his comedies, draw extensively on his experience of London life from a middle position in society. For such plays, short summaries of these comedies show the extent of their common indebtedness to Middleton's close observation of the disreputable side of London life. *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, for example, is Middleton's first venture into the style of Romantic comedy made fashionable by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. The play presents a complexly interwoven tapestry of London characters and manners. As usual, the play centers on battles of wits: There is small security in Middleton's comic world for any character, and even the best of them, such as Touchwood and Moll, can thrive only by their cleverness.

Comic Style and Jacobean Morality Middleton's earlier comedies may be characterized generally as realistic farces. The realism is found in the detailed depictions of the excesses of middle- and lower-class London manners and attitudes; many of the rogues and fools are rendered in such meticulous detail that they would be easily recognized by audiences with knowledge of the complex city life the plays treat. Yet some of the characters are grotesques, people who in some ways seem scarcely to inhabit a real world. The exaggeration of their language and reactions, the general implausibility of the situations in which they act, and the buffoonery often introduced by their use of disguise are elements of farce.

Though he is said to have had little enthusiasm or sympathy for such styles as he was obliged to use, Middleton was quick to follow the dictates of contemporary taste. Thus, morality elements are strong in his plays. Middleton had a talent for minimizing fine verse and allowing common moral generalizations to stand out. The plays' feverous vices must often have distracted audiences, so this common feature of Middleton's style was peculiarly effective to remind the audience of a world of morality. This was, it should be noted, necessary given the history of drama in England. For centuries, staged plays were regarded as licentious, wicked, and found their way into the common experience only through heavily Christianized morality plays and passion plays (the latter dramatizing the Christ story). Middleton was, then, caught in an era where moral justification was often still demanded for public performances—long before the dawning of the age of “innocent” entertainment now upon us.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Middleton had not established a reputation. Contemporary references to him are few and obligatory; only with the scandal-provoking *A Game at*

Chess did he attract much attention. His literary reputation survives largely due to pioneering nineteenth-century scholars, although scholarship on his works is beginning to increase. His reputation in general has suffered from the fact that as a craftsman (rather than an artist) of the theater, he gave in to the dictates of contemporary tastes. This, critics suggest, compelled him to compromise his skills.

His *Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611), for example, caters to the Jacobean audience's sense of morality, reinforcing it at every turn with a complex structure of contrasts: The true Lady is contrasted with the faithless Wife; spiritual love is set against sensual love. Such a dramatic device is what scholar Anne Lancashire calls "exempla of the rewards of virtue and the evil consequences of vice," and is what earned Middleton his audiences.

A Critical Resurgence If Middleton's undeserved obscurity had caused him to be dubbed "the orphan of London," however, all that is set to change. A recent Oxford edition of Middleton's collected works, writes reviewer Gary Taylor for *The Guardian*, signals change: "Thomas Middleton's reputation will be resurrected by a new edition of his collected works. It has taken 75 scholars from a dozen countries 20 years to produce, and the result revolutionises our understanding of the English Renaissance. Middleton is our other [William] Shakespeare: the orphan of London is the only English playwright who can survive the comparison."

Responses to Literature

1. The picaresque novel was a popular early subgenre of prose fiction. The writing is typically satirical and features a *picaro*, a scoundrel or rogue, who moves through adventures tricking people and living on his wits. Investigate the components and details of the picaresque novel. Then, consider a Middleton play such as *Father Hubbard's Tale*. How is the play a picaresque work? What characteristics of the play fit the definition?
2. One of the most popular kinds of plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the morality play. Middleton gave in to common demands and wrote several of them. Research the elements of a morality play, and identify those elements you find in Middleton's work. What do these characteristics tell you about people of the Jacobean period? How would you describe what was important to them? How do these values compare with values of people today?
3. Middleton made a living in the latter part of his career by writing masques—elaborate and festive entertainments for the court. What performances today would be near equivalents to masques? Who would the performers be? Who might commission such works?
4. Middleton's career as a playwright was delayed for a year due to an outbreak of bubonic plague in Lon-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *Women Beware Women*, Middleton makes famous use of the game of chess as a metaphor. Many other authors have featured chess prominently in their works. Examples include:

The Defense (1930), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov, himself a chess master, here presents the tale of an awkward young boy who discovers his enormous talent at the game of chess.

Chess (1986), a musical by Tim Rice, Björn Ulvaeus, and Benny Andersson. Several songs from this musical became hit singles. The plot centers on a love triangle between major players in the world of chess championships.

The Flanders Panel (1990), a novel by Arturo Perez-Reverte. This novel centers on a mystery hidden in a fifteenth-century Flemish painting titled "The Chess Game."

The Yiddish Policeman's Union (2007), a novel by Michael Chabon. This detective novel is set in an alternate-reality future in which Jewish refugees set up a settlement in Alaska after World War II. Chess figures prominently in the novel, both in the youth of the homicide detective and in clues surrounding a mystery he must solve.

don. Using your library or the Internet, research bubonic plague. In what ways were the realities of the plague reflected in Middleton's work?

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▣ A. A. Milne

BORN: 1882, London, England

DIED: 1956, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

When We Were Very Young (1924)

Winnie-the-Pooh (1926)

Now We Are Six (1927)

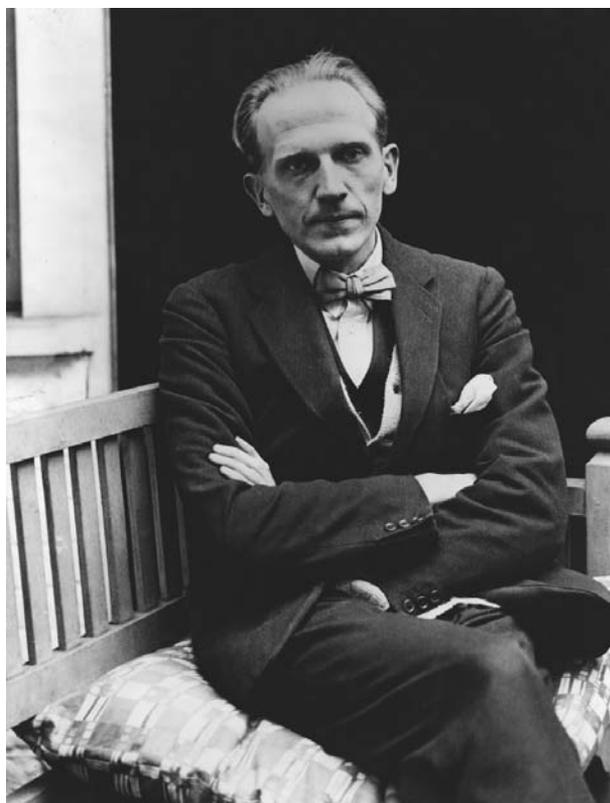
The House at Pooh Corner (1928)

Overview

British author A. A. Milne wrote plays, essays, novels, and light verse for adults; however, his most critically acclaimed works were his "four trifles for the young," as he called them, his children's tales and poems, some of which featured his best-known literary creation, Winnie-the-Pooh. Milne has been praised for his accurate and sympathetic observations of children's behavior, his wit, and his skill with language, especially wordplay and dialogue.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Life Alan Alexander Milne was born January 18, 1882, in London, England, to John



A. A. Milne *Milne, A. A., photograph.*

Vine Milne, a school headmaster, and Sarah Maria Heginbotham Milne. He attended Cambridge University, where he edited the undergraduate paper *The Granta*. Upon completion of his degree in mathematics in 1903, he moved to London and worked as a freelance journalist. In 1906, he accepted an assistant editorship with the magazine *Punch*, where he worked for eight years, contributing humorous essays and verse. Milne married Dorothy de Selincourt in 1913 and their son, Christopher Robin, was born in 1920.

First Plays and Mystery Novels In 1914, the start of World War I, he joined the army. Milne had already published three collections of essays from *Punch* and was becoming well-known as a humorist. His work as a dramatist began during his military service. His first play appeared in 1917, and his one unqualified success in the theater, *Mr. Pim Passes By*, was completed and produced in 1919. He also wrote two mystery novels; *Red House Mystery* (1921) is considered a classic in the genre and helped establish the conventions of British detective fiction between World War I and World War II. In an introduction he wrote for the 1926 reprint, Milne says he set four goals for himself: The mystery should be written in simple English; there must be no love interest; the detective must have a confidant with whom to discuss the case, clue by clue; and, most important, the detective must be an amateur.

When We Were Very Young Occasional poems written for his son Christopher quickly grew into the collections *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and *Now We Are Six* (1927). *When We Were Very Young* was immediately recognized as a new kind of children's book, one that moved away from fairytales and the overly didactic literature of the time and portrayed children realistically in an enjoyable, stylish manner. Throughout the poems, the child questions the power that adults command.

When We Were Very Young paved the way for *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and helped to immortalize the name Christopher Robin, to the embarrassment of the actual Christopher Robin Milne, who spent much of his life attempting to disentangle himself from the semibiographical, fictional character.

Winnie-the-Pooh *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six* were successful with both critics and the public, but they were soon surpassed by the stories in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). Milne wrote these works after observing the interaction between Christopher and his mother and the boy's beloved stuffed animals. Both Milne's verses and the Pooh stories became a publishing phenomenon.

Much of the delight of *Winnie-the-Pooh* comes from the illustrations by E. H. Shepard. Because Milne had acknowledged that part of the success of *When We Were Very Young* resulted from Shepard's illustrations, Shepard was asked to illustrate *Winnie-the-Pooh*. The original illustrations were black and white. When Shepard was in his eighties, he undertook the task of coloring the original illustrations.

Later Life Milne continued to write plays following the publication of his children's books, but publishers remained more interested in his work in the latter genre than in adult literature. He traveled throughout the United States in the fall of 1931 and continued writing mostly unnoticed books and plays until 1952, the year he suffered a stroke. He died January 31, 1956, at his home in Sussex, England.

Works in Literary Context

As a poet, A. A. Milne has been compared favorably with such writers as Lewis Carroll, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Walter de la Mare; his poems are distinguished by their variety of form and rhythm. Barbara Novak writes:

Often . . . they have the kind of nonsense whimsy which is too often lost in expression by and for adults. Thus, in 'Halfway Down,' the child sits on a stair which really isn't anywhere but somewhere else instead. We are reminded here of E. E. Cummings' use of this sort of expression, though Milne's poetry differs in that it is not a sophisticated adult use of a child's manner of expression, but rather, the expression of a poet who has never lost the ability to think, feel, and express as a child.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Milne's famous contemporaries include:

- J. M. Barrie** (1860–1937): Scottish novelist and playwright, best known for his children's book *Peter Pan*. A friend of Milne, Barrie helped get Milne's first play produced.
- Irene Joliot-Curie** (1897–1956): French chemist and daughter of dual Nobel Prize-winning scientist Marie Curie who, with her husband, was awarded the 1935 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the discovery of artificial radioactivity.
- J. Robert Oppenheimer** (1904–1967): As an American physicist, Oppenheimer became the director of the Manhattan Project during World War II, which developed the first nuclear weapons.
- Dorothy Sayers** (1893–1957): British writer and mystery novelist. Sayers is well-known for her mysteries featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, set in England between World War I and World War II.
- P. G. Wodehouse** (1881–1975): British writer and lyricist. Wodehouse is characterized by his humorous short stories featuring the bumbling aristocrat Bertie Wooster and his long-suffering butler Jeeves.

Humor and Fantasy Milne's style of humor is not blatant or overt; in fact, an anonymous literary critic in the October 1912 issue of *The Academy* once suggested "his quips and jokes are delicate, requiring the dainty palate for their finest appreciation." Though today's readers know Milne for his Winnie-the-Pooh character, Milne captured readers of his day with dry wit. He approached humor with subtlety, particularly in works like *The Day's Play* (1910). As another anonymous reviewer noted in an October 1910 issue of *The Academy*, Milne's "fantasies" derived from some "capital clowning," the obvious result of his keen eye toward "comical, topsy-turvy reasoning." Furthermore, Milne's knack for "clever rhyming," as well as the way in which he twisted the meaning of ordinary words surprised and delighted turn-of-the-century readers.

Family Inspiration In contrast to the dark, brooding imagery due to arrive in the twentieth century, the Victorian period was characterized by idealized, domestic images. Unlike his contemporaries (such as Ezra Pound and Aldous Huxley) who, in their art, directly responded to bleak social and political changes, Milne often looked backward to the sentimental Victorian years for artistic inspiration. Milne often acknowledged that he did not have an idyllic childhood, and some critics wonder if that may be the reason for his family focus and domestic

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

A. A. Milne's books came at the end of what has been called the "Golden Age" of British and American children's literature, from 1865 to 1928. Children's books in this period focused on playfulness and the power of the imagination. Here are some other children's works from this period:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), by Lewis Carroll. This work ushered in the Golden Age. It tells the story of Alice, a girl who falls down a rabbit hole, and her surreal adventures that follow.

Five Children and It (1902), by Edith Nesbit. In this story, five siblings come across a sand fairy that grants them one wish per day, with humorously disastrous consequences.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1902), by Beatrix Potter. The first of many books Potter wrote featuring animals, this short book tells of the adventures of Peter, a mischievous bunny, in Mr. McGregor's garden.

The Wind in the Willows (1908), by Kenneth Grahame. Later adapted for the stage by Milne, this novel tells the story of four animal friends, notably the boastful Toad.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), by L. Frank Baum. This novel, made into a famous 1939 movie starring Judy Garland, follows Dorothy, a girl from Kansas, who is caught up in a tornado and deposited in the fantastic land of Oz.

satire. Many contemporary critics, like Geoffrey Cocks, relate the strong female characters in Milne's work to his domineering mother: for example, Countess Belvane in the play *Once Upon a Time* (1917). These critics see Milne's "art as a sublimation of psychological conflict" that came from his early years.

Works in Critical Context

Although the critical response to *Now We Are Six* was generally full of praise, Dorothy Parker, a writer for *The New Yorker*, expressed distaste. Writing as "Constant Reader," she stated: "Of Milne's recent verse, I speak in a minority amounting to solitude. I think it is affected, commonplace, bad. . . . And now I must stop to get ready for being ridden out of town on a rail."

Several reasons have been given for the popularity of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. For example, readers and critics alike are drawn to the way in which the book both shows how essential the capacity for friendship is to human life and reveals how essential the ability to overlook the faults of one's friends is to achieving a joyful human existence. Additionally, as Peter Hunt observes, its "sophisticated writing, the pace, the timing, and the narrative stance all contribut[e] to the comic effect." Furthermore, Ann

Thwaite finds that "part of the strength and charm of the stories comes from the juxtaposition of toy animal and forest."

Regarding Milne's poetic style, Barbara Novak writes: "We might almost say that Milne's poetic content falls into two broad categories: one in which the poet expresses something *for* the child, and one in which he expresses *to* the child." Certainly, in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, two voices are frequently heard: Christopher Robin's words and narratives are intertwined with A. A. Milne's words and narratives. Milne is purportedly telling Christopher Robin the stories that Christopher Robin remembers, and then does not remember, and then wishes to be told again. Not all critics regard the authorial conferences between Milne and Christopher Robin as flattering to the child, who expresses delight in finding himself elevated into a creative authorial role. Alison Lurie, for instance, regards these dialogues as "condescending conversations between the author and Christopher Robin."

Responses to Literature

1. Think about a mystery novel you have read, or a detective show you have seen on TV. Write an informal, two-page essay explaining whether or not you think they follow the mystery genre guidelines that Milne established.
2. Many crime dramas today have professional investigators or doctors as the detectives. With a classmate, discuss the role of the reader when the person solving the crime has more information than the reader does. Why do you think Milne felt having an "amateur" detective was important?
3. Read some poems from *When We Were Very Young* or *Now We Are Six*. Do you agree with Dorothy Parker that they are "affected" and saccharine? Write an essay explaining your views, and argue whether children's literature should be an escape or should reflect real life.
4. Read some poems from contemporary children's poet Shel Silverstein, and write an essay comparing and contrasting Milne's verse with Silverstein's. Do you think they are both classic children's authors? Explain your opinion, using specific examples.
5. Using resources from your library or the Internet, look up the original illustrations in *The House at Pooh Corner*, and compare them to the Disney portrayal. Then think about movies based on books you have read, such as the Harry Potter, *Lord of the Rings*, or Narnia movies. Write an essay analyzing how seeing someone else's vision of a book affects your own vision when you reread it. Does it change how you see the characters in your own mind?

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☒ Czeslaw Milosz

BORN: 1911, Szetejnie, Lithuania (Russian Empire)

DIED: 2004, Cracow, Poland

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Poetry, essays, novels

MAJOR WORKS:

The Captive Mind (1953)

Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition (1959)

A Year of the Hunter (1994)

Roadside Dog (1999)



Czeslaw Milosz. *Milosz, Czeslaw*, University of Jagellonian, Cracow, Poland, 1981, photograph. Keystone / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Milosz's ABCs (2001)

To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays (2001)

Overview

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, essayist, novelist, translator, and editor, Czeslaw Milosz (pronounced *Mee-wosh*) is widely considered Poland's greatest contemporary poet, although he lived in exile from his native land after 1951. Milosz's writings are concerned with humanistic and Christian themes, the problem of good and evil, political philosophy, history, metaphysical speculations, and personal and national identity.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Birth and Early Life in Poland Milosz was born on June 30, 1911, in Szetejnie, Lithuania, then a part of tsarist Russia, to Polish-Lithuanian parents. His father, Alexander, was a road engineer and was recruited by the Tsar's army during World War I. Young Milosz and his mother traveled with Alexander on the dangerous bridge-building expeditions to which he was dispatched near Russian battle zones.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Miłosz's famous contemporaries include:

Robert Haas (1941–): American poet who has served two terms as U.S. Poet Laureate (from 1995–1997) and has contributed greatly to contemporary literature.

Johnny Mercer (1909–1976): American songwriter and singer responsible for many of the popular hits of the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s. The recipient of nineteen Academy Award nominations for his songs for movies, Mercer was also a cofounder of Capitol Records.

Robert Pinsky (1940–): American poet, essayist, literary critic, and translator best known as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1997 to 2000.

Peter Dale Scott (1929–): Canadian poet and former English professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Scott is best known for his antiwar stance and criticism of U.S. foreign policy dating back to the Vietnam War.

Humphrey Searle (1915–1982): British composer who as a pioneer of serial music also helped to further it by way of his clout as a BBC producer.

His family returned to Lithuania in 1918, and Miłosz began a strict Roman Catholic education in his hometown of Vilnius, the capital of Polish Lithuania. In his early twenties, he published his first volume of poems, *A Poem on Frozen Time*. In 1934 he graduated from the King Stefan Batory University, and in 1936 his second volume of poetry appeared. He earned a scholarship to study at the Alliance Française in Paris, where he met up with his distant cousin, Oscar Miłosz, a French poet who became his mentor. He recounted his early life in the acclaimed memoir *Native Realm*.

World War II and the Nazi Occupation of Warsaw Miłosz returned to Poland to work for the Polish State Broadcasting Company. He held this position until the outbreak of World War II. During the Nazi occupation, he stayed in Warsaw where he joined the underground resistance movement. He had an anthology of anti-Nazi poetry, *The Invincible Song*, published by underground presses in Warsaw, where he also wrote “The World (A Naïve Poem)” and the cycle *Voices of Poor People*.

Warsaw was virtually destroyed by Nazi air force bombing campaigns in response to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (an attempt by a Polish insurgent army to force the Germans out of Warsaw). The insurgents had been promised Soviet aid, but it never arrived. Thousands were killed, including most of the young intellectuals and resistance fighters that made up the insurgency. It was speculated that Soviet leader

Josef Stalin's failure to come to their rescue was deliberate: A ruined Warsaw was much easier for him to seize after World War II was over. Miłosz survived, and moved to just outside Cracow, whose state publishing house brought out his collected poems in a volume called *Rescue*.

Ketman and the Failure of the Polish Intelligentsia At the end of World War II, Miłosz worked as a cultural attaché for the Polish Communist government, serving in New York and Washington. He left his position with the Polish Foreign Service in 1951 and sought (and received) political asylum in France. Miłosz spent ten years in France, where he found himself having difficulty fitting in with the strongly pro-socialist and Communist intellectual community, whose views he considered corrupt or naïve. He penned two novels during his time in Paris, *Seizure of Power* and *The Issa Valley*. His most famous book, *The Captive Mind*, was a bitter attack on the manner in which the Polish Communist Party progressively destroyed the independence of the country's intelligentsia, in essence forcing them to accept and even perpetrate intellectual repression.

Miłosz continued to speak out against the way Polish intellectuals had adopted the stance of the Communist leaders. Too often, he believed, his contemporaries would go along with their new masters while secretly believing they could in some way still maintain their own intellectual autonomy. This phenomenon he termed “Ketman,” and in it he saw the downfall of a free intelligentsia in Poland.

Success in the United States Miłosz ultimately felt that the only way to maintain his own intellectual autonomy was in self-imposed exile in the United States. From there, he hoped to contribute to a regeneration of Eastern European culture once the wave of communism had passed. At age fifty, Miłosz began a new career as a professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of California at Berkeley in 1961 (some sources say 1960). He was initially an unknown member of a small department, but eventually he became popular on campus for his courses on Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

By the 1970s Miłosz's poetry and fiction were increasingly attracting the attention of Western critics. In 1976 he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. In 1978 he published the poetry collection *Bells in Winter*, for which he received the Neustadt International Literature Prize. In 1980 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Back to Polish Roots and a Focus on Roman Catholicism By this time, many of his poems had become infused with Christian themes connected to Miłosz's Roman Catholic upbringing. There was also a growing sadness and premonition of oncoming death, especially after the death of his wife Janina in 1986. Then, in 1989, the Soviet Union crumbled and the old barriers to travel in Eastern Europe were eased. Miłosz was able

to return to his roots. After visiting Lithuania in the spring of 1989, Milosz was flooded with memories about his childhood in the Issa River Valley. He was soon able to return to Poland, where his work had been banned for decades. He was greeted with a hero's welcome and a home in Cracow, courtesy of the Polish people. Despite being afflicted with asthma and declining health, Milosz managed to also release another volume of poetry in 1995, *Facing the River*. In 1997 he published his correspondence with poet and monk Thomas Merton, a speculative epistolary history of their inner worlds. He followed this with 1998's *Roadside Dog*, a collection of poetry.

In April of 2001 Milosz published a book-length poem entitled *Treatise on Poetry*, translated by Robert Haas. The four parts of the poem deal with turn-of-the-century Europe, Poland between the two world wars, World War II, and the place of the poet in the postwar world. Later that year, a book of essays entitled *To Begin Where I Am: The Selected Prose of Czeslaw Milosz* made its appearance. These essays chiefly deal with Milosz's attempts to sustain his religious faith, and with his battle for poetry that is "on the side of man."

Milosz died on August 14, 2004, at his home in Cracow, Poland. He was ninety-three years old.

Works in Literary Context

Milosz received a broad education during his studies in Vilnius and he read widely thereafter. Particularly important in shaping Milosz's outlook were Russian novelists, poets, and religious thinkers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev, and Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyayev (and later Lev Shestov). He also read French novels by such writers as Stendahl, Honoré de Balzac, and André Gide. As far as poetry is concerned, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Robert Browning, and T.S. Eliot were influences once Milosz learned enough English in occupied Warsaw.

The Voice of Experience In most of his work, Milosz avoided the experimentation with language that characterizes much modern poetry, concentrating more on the clear expression of his ideas. Much of Milosz's work is strongly emotional and conveys a transcendent spirituality. Critics have commented on the influence of his Roman Catholic background and his fascination with good and evil in both his poetry and his prose. Milosz's personal experiences, his interest in history and politics, and his aesthetic theories are delineated in his prose works.

For example, his essay collection *The Captive Mind* studies the effects of totalitarianism on creativity, while *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* is a lyrical recreation of the landscape and culture of Milosz's youth. In the nonfiction work *The Land of Ulro*, Milosz laments the modern emphasis on science and rationality, which he feels has divorced human beings from spiritual and cultural pursuits, by evoking a symbolic wasteland that appears in several of William Blake's mythological poems. His essay

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Milosz explored in his poetry both the rebirth of Christian belief and the corruption of thought by ideology. His is a frequently difficult and obscure poetry that is burdened by a sense of the oncoming collapse of civilization. Here are a few works by writers who have created similar poetry:

The Waste Land (1922), by T. S. Eliot. A seminal work by the Nobel Prize-winning English poet that explores the disillusionment, spiritual ennui, and casual sexuality of post-World War I European sensibility.

The Darkness and the Light (2001), by Anthony Hecht. A collection of poems by the Nobel Prize-winning American that reflect the technical, intellectual, and emotional horrors of the Holocaust and World War II.

Could Have (1972), by Wislawa Szymborska. A collection of poems by the 1996 Nobel Prize winner, which investigates reality and truth and the burdens within each in witty, subversive tones.

collection *Beginning with My Streets: Essays and Recollections*—an amalgam of literary criticism, philosophical meditations, and narrative essays—has been praised for its insightful probing of contemporary life, art, and politics.

Milosz's two novels also combine explorations of twentieth-century world events with autobiographical elements. *The Seizure of Power* examines the fortunes of intellectuals and artists within a Communist state. Blending journalistic and poetic prose, this work elucidates the relationship between art and ideology and offers vivid descriptions of the Russian occupation of Warsaw following World War II. In *The Issa Valley*, Milosz evokes the lush river valley where he was raised to explore a young man's evolving artistic sensibility. The mythical structure of this work explores such dualities as innocence and evil, regeneration and death, and idyllic visions and grim realities.

People and circumstances impacted Milosz's life, thought, and work, from the Nazi invasion to individuals such as Oscar Milosz, a French poet who became his mentor early on. Likewise, Milosz influenced several readers, students, friends, and fellow faculty. At Berkeley, both students and colleagues—such as Robert Pinsky, Robert Haas, and Peter Dale Scott—participated in the small press printing of several of the poet's works.

Works in Critical Context

Milosz faced resistance and skepticism in the years following World War II. His work was banned by the Communist regime of his native Poland and some European American intellectuals regarded him with mistrust because he did not fit neatly into a political category.

For the past several decades, however, his work has inspired near universal praise from critics and has even earned a widespread popular following.

The Captive Mind *The Captive Mind* explains Milosz's reasons for defecting and examines the life of the artist under a Communist regime. It is, maintains Steve Wasserman in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, a "brilliant and original study of the totalitarian mentality." Karl Jaspers, in an article for the *Saturday Review*, describes *The Captive Mind* as "a significant historical document and analysis of the highest order. . . . In astonishing gradations Milosz shows what happens to men subjected simultaneously to constant threat of annihilation and to the promptings of faith in a historical necessity which exerts apparently irresistible force and achieves enormous success. We are presented with a vivid picture of the forms of concealment, of inner transformation, of the sudden bolt to conversion, of the cleavage of man into two."

A Year of the Hunter *A Year of the Hunter* is a journal Milosz penned between August 1987 and August 1988. Ian Buruma praised the work in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* as "a wonderful addition to [his] other autobiographical writing. The diary form, free-floating, wide-ranging. . . is suited to a poet, especially an intellectual poet, like Milosz," allowing for his entries to range from gardening to translating, from communism to Christianity, from past to present. Indeed, as Michael Ignatieff stated in the *New York Review of Books*, *A Year of the Hunter* is successful "because Milosz has not cleaned it up too much. Its randomness is a pleasure."

Milosz's ABCs A critic for *Publishers Weekly* noted the following lines from *Milosz's ABCs*: "Man has been given to understand/ that he lives only by the grace of those in power./ Let him therefore busy himself sipping coffee, catching butterflies. . . ." The same critic then commented, "It is difficult to escape the sense that—like butterflies in a dusty case—the scraps of memory affixed here have lost their living glitter."

But Edward Hirsch said in *The New York Times Book Review* that *Milosz's ABCs* "is a source of wonderment and pleasure that at the age of 89, Czeslaw Milosz, arguably the greatest living poet, continues to publish exploratory works of self-definition and commemoration. . . . In the end, *Milosz's ABCs* is a benedictory text, an alphabetical rescue operation, a testimonial to those who have suffered and gone before us, a hymn to the everlasting marvel and mystery of human existence."

Responses to Literature

1. Milosz is quoted as saying, "Yes I would like to be a poet of the five senses. That's why I don't allow myself to become one." What does he mean by this? Do you agree that Milosz is not a poet of the five senses? Why or why not?

2. Identifying with nature allowed Milosz to maintain an identity even in exile. Read the following section from *Throughout Our Lands* and write about nature and its influence on identity as Milosz sees it. Do you agree that identification with nature helps one maintain their identity? Why or why not?

Wherever you are, you touch the bark of trees testing its roughness different yet familiar, grateful for a rising and a setting sun Wherever you are, you could never be an alien.

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John Milton

BORN: 1608, London, England

DIED: 1674, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

"Lycidas" (1638)

Areopagitica (1644)

Paradise Lost (1667)

Paradise Regained (1671)



John Milton *Milton, John*, engraving. The Library of Congress.

Overview

English writer John Milton used both his poetry and prose to address issues of religion and politics. Placing himself in a line of poets whose art was an outlet for their public voice and using the pastoral poem to present an outlook on politics, Milton aimed to promote an enlightened commonwealth, not unlike the *polis* of Greek antiquity or the cultured city-states in Renaissance Italy. Because of its length, complexity, and consummate artistry, his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) is considered Milton's masterpiece.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Gifted Young Student Milton was born in London on December 9, 1608, to John Milton Sr. and Sara Jeffrey Milton. Milton's father was a prosperous scrivener (scribe), while his mother was a gentlewoman known for her charitable works. From an early age he was immersed in literary and intellectual activity. Milton had a superior education that stressed the classics, music, and foreign languages. A highly gifted student, Milton demonstrated a faculty for language, learning Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, and Italian while still quite young. Milton's young intellect was also nurtured by a private tutor,

Thomas Young. Milton entered Christ's College at Cambridge University in 1625.

Though Milton's father had been raised in a staunchly Catholic family, he renounced the Catholic faith and became a Protestant. Milton was raised in a Protestant environment. In England at this time, religious tensions were high. King Charles I took the throne in 1625 and was widely believed to have Catholic leanings—even marrying a Catholic woman, Henrietta Maria of France—though the British monarchy was entrenched in Protestant beliefs. Charles I also faced conflict with the rising middle class, which was primarily Puritan (a Protestant sect), and which sought to make parliament superior to the king. Charles I believed firmly in the divine right of kings (that is, a monarch has a right to rule from the will of God, not from a temporal authority). This tension grew heated over the next two decades.

First Important Poems At first unpopular, Milton eventually made a name for himself as a rhetorician and public speaker. While at Cambridge he probably wrote “L’Allegro,” “Il Penseroso,” and “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” three of his earliest great poems in English. Upon graduating in 1632, Milton devoted himself to intense study and writing. To this period scholars assign the composition of some of Milton’s finest nonepic poems, including “Lycidas” (1638).

The purpose of “Lycidas” was twofold: to honor the late Edward King, a former schoolmate at Christ’s College, and to denounce incompetent clergy—a perennial concern of Milton’s. The poem also reveals Milton’s own philosophical ambitions—later undertaken in *Paradise Lost*—to justify God’s ways to humanity. Many critics consider “Lycidas” the finest short poem in the English language.

Created on Commission Milton also wrote his first extended work, *Comus*, in 1637 on commission. The play is in the Elizabethan court masque tradition. Here, in exchanges between two young brothers, a lady, and the tempter Comus, Milton explored the merits of “moral discipline” and the dangers of sexual license.

In May 1638, Milton embarked on a long journey through Italy. The experience, which he described in *Second Defence of the People of England* (1654), brought him into contact with the leading men of letters in Florence, Rome, and Naples. Upon his return to England, Milton wrote the Italy-inspired *Damon* (1640).

The English Civil War With the advent of English Civil War, Milton’s life changed utterly as his attentions shifted from private to public concerns. The English Civil War was a result of the discontent between Charles I and his subjects. Beginning in 1642, armed conflict broke out between the antiroyalist Puritans and Scots and the royalists, who supported the monarchy, and who included the Welsh. Abruptly Milton left off writing poetry for prose, pouring out pamphlets during the early 1640s in which he opposed what he considered rampant episcopal

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Milton's famous contemporaries include:

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680): Italian sculptor and architect in the Baroque style. He was extensively involved, among other works, with the design of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City in Rome.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Italian scientist whom Milton met during his trip to Italy. Galileo theorized that the earth revolves around the sun, which was considered heresy by the church, and was forced to recant his belief. His books include *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632).

William Laud (1573–1645): Archbishop of Canterbury, England. Laud encouraged King Charles I to believe that the monarchy was accountable only to God, not its subjects, and was beheaded during the English Civil War.

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678): English poet. One of the so-called metaphysical poets, Marvell was concerned with questions about the nature of the soul. His poems include *Last Instructions to a Painter* (1667).

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675): Dutch painter, known for the quality of light in his paintings. The 2003 movie *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is based on Tracy Chevalier's 1999 novel about the model for Vermeer's famous portrait of the same title.

tyranny. He declared his Puritan allegiance in tracts in which he argued the need to purge the Church of England of all vestiges of Roman Catholicism and restore the simplicity of the apostolic (that is, early) church.

During this period, Milton also published *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Restor'd to the Good of Both Sexes from the Bondage of Canon Law* (1643), in which he maintained that incompatibility is a valid reason for divorce. This work was presumably inspired by his hasty marriage in 1642 to his first wife, Mary Powell, who left him shortly after the wedding but returned to him three years later. After bearing four children, she died in 1652 from childbirth complications, and Milton married Katherine Woodcock in 1658. She died in 1658 after giving birth to their daughter, who also died. Milton married for the last time in 1663 to twenty-four-year-old Betty Minshull.

In 1644, Milton published *Arcopagitica*, often cited as one of the most compelling arguments for the freedom of the press. During the next few years Milton worked on his *History of Britain* (1670). With Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell's execution of King Charles I in 1649, however, Milton entered the political fray with *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), an assertion of the right of

a people to depose or execute a ruling tyrant. This view was a complete about-face for Milton, who had written as a good monarchist in his early antiprelatical, or anticlergy, works.

Continued Focus on Affairs of State After the execution of Charles I, Cromwell declared England a Commonwealth and himself ruler. Milton accepted an invitation to become Cromwell's Latin secretary for foreign affairs and soon wrote a number of tracts on church and state issues, including *A Defence of the People of England* (1651) and *Second Defence of the People of England* (1654), two reviews praising the achievements of Cromwell's government. Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658 and was briefly succeeded by his son Richard, until Charles II, the eldest son of the executed king, was crowned in 1660. After the restoration of the monarchy, Milton was dismissed from governmental service, arrested, and imprisoned. Payment of fines and the intercession of friends and family, including Andrew Marvell, Sir William Davenant, and perhaps Christopher Milton, his younger brother and a royalist lawyer, brought about his release.

Completed Paradise Lost Completely blind since 1652 (Milton acknowledged that in his youth he rarely quit his books before midnight and attributed his later blindness to excessive reading by candlelight), Milton increasingly devoted his time to poetry. Helpers, assisted sometimes by Milton's two nephews and his daughter Deborah, were employed to take dictation and read aloud and correct copy. During the writing of *Paradise Lost*, Milton spent mornings dictating passages he had composed in his head at night.

Paradise Lost was published in 1667, an epic poem recounting the biblical story of humanity's fall from grace. This work and its sequel, *Paradise Regained* (1671), are celebrated for their consummate artistry and searching consideration of God's relationship with the human race. *Samson Agonistes* (1671), a tragedy, appeared in the same volume as *Paradise Regained*. In 1673, Milton embraced controversy once again with *Of True Religion*, a short defense of Protestantism. He died in November 1674, apparently of complications related to gout (a disease created by a buildup of uric acid).

Works in Literary Context

As was common in his time, Milton was educated in the classics and the Bible and drew on such works for inspiration. He was also very much a product of his time, writing about issues related to the English Civil War, the rule of Cromwell, and other events and beliefs of his time. Politics was an important part of Milton's life, and his works often reflected this.

The Fall of Man As a classicist, Milton was powerfully aware of his antique antecedents. He had long planned an epic that was to be to England what Homer's works were to Greece and the *Aeneid* was to Rome.

Although he contemplated writing about King Arthur for his national poem, he later adopted a biblical subject in *Paradise Lost*: the Fall of Man as described in the book of Genesis. He begins the poem *in media res*, in the middle of things, plunging into the action with a description of Satan in hell. The remainder of the poem treats Satan's deception of Eve in Eden, her deception of Adam, their fall from perfect fellowship with God and with each other, and their banishment from Paradise. Everywhere, the poem is strong in its appeal to the ear, the intellect, and the visual imagination. While the iambic pentameter line is the norm, Milton played with the model, contriving syllables and stresses to complement the sense.

Milton's high purpose in the poem, to "justify the ways of God to men," is ever in the forefront of the action. Critics agree that this challenging objective, made all the more difficult by the complicated issue of divine foreknowledge of the Fall, is effected chiefly by imbuing Adam with a will as well as a mind of his own, enabling him to disobey God and thus mar an omnipotent Creator's perfect creation. *Paradise Regained*—more a dramatic poem than an epic—completes the action of *Paradise Lost*. Shorter and conceptually much simpler than the earlier work, *Paradise Regained* depicts Christ in the wilderness overcoming Satan the tempter. By this action, Christ proves his fitness as the Son of God, thereby preparing himself for his human, substitutionary role in the Crucifixion.

Political Idealism Milton's later influence derives from both his prose and his poetry. His influence as a political writer was felt in the American, French, and Russian revolutions, when he was cited to justify the opposition to monarchs and absolutists. Among the English Romantics, Milton was extolled as a libertarian and political revolutionary. His refusal to compromise on matters of principle, his blindness, and his punishment after the Restoration caused many admirers to cite him as a model of the spokesperson of truth and of someone who pursued idealism despite adversity.

Influence Milton's influence on later literature—particularly on eighteenth-century verse—was immense, though his reputation had waned considerably by the Victorian age. By the second half of the twentieth century, however, his works had regained their place in the canon of Western literature.

Works in Critical Context

It would be difficult to overestimate Milton's importance in English letters. In *Paradise Lost*, he gave his country its greatest epic, surpassing, most commentators believe, even Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* in the greatness of his achievement in this form. And as the author of "Lycidas," "L'Allegro," and "Il Penseroso" Milton also established himself as a master of the shorter poem. He helped fuel governmental reform and argued eloquently for major social change. Perhaps most telling of all, he wrote, unlike his nearest English rivals for literary emi-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Epic poems are long narrative poems in an elevated style that usually celebrate heroic achievement and treat themes of historical, national, religious, or legendary significance. They appear in every culture. Here are some other examples of epic poetry.

Nibelungenlied (c. 1200). This anonymous German epic recounts a story from the war between the east German Burgundians and the central Asian Huns in the fifth century.

Omeros (1990), by Derek Walcott. The Nobel Prize-winning poet retells the story of the *Odyssey* through West Indian eyes. The Caribbean island of St. Lucia reveals itself as a main character, and the poem itself is an epic of the dispossessed.

Paterson (1946–1958), by William Carlos Williams. This five-book serial poem was one of the first to redefine the epic, concerning itself with the city of Paterson, New Jersey, and examining modernization and its effects.

The Ring Cycle (1848–1874), by Richard Wagner. This cycle of four operas by the German composer is based on events from Norse sagas and the *Nibelungenlied*. The cycle is designed to be performed over the course of four nights, and the full performance takes about fifteen hours.

The Song of Roland (c. 1150). This anonymous French poem commemorates an eighth-century battle in the Pyrenees Mountains between Charlemagne's French army and the Muslim Saracens.

nence, Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare, in numerous forms on a tremendous range of issues.

Paradise Lost Soon after Milton's death, *Paradise Lost* began to draw increased attention and praise from such critics as John Dryden, who considered Milton an epic poet comparable in stature to Homer and Virgil. With the notable exception of Samuel Johnson, who dismissed "Lycidas" as cold and mechanical and *Paradise Lost* as stylistically flawed, critics throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries upheld Milton's achievement for various reasons: William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley considered *Paradise Lost* a precursor of Romanticism, ennobling Satan as a tragic rebel; William Wordsworth hailed Milton's adoption of libertarian ideals; and Ralph Waldo Emerson praised the poet's infusion of private passion into universal themes.

In the 1920s, a group of critics, led by American poet T. S. Eliot, began to attack what they perceived as the wooden style and structure of Milton's epic. Eliot, while conceding Milton's talent, lamented his influence on later poets, who, he argued, often created tortuously labored, rhetorical verse in imitation of the earlier poet. But Milton's reputation again rose in the 1940s as critics

discovered his previously neglected prose, which in its emphasis on freedom had particular resonance in the World War II era. Furthermore, because of the influential scholarship of such essayists as Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis, Milton's epic poetry was once again regarded as masterly in its breadth and complexity, and today is considered among the finest in human history.

Responses to Literature

1. Today, changing one's mind on an issue, as Milton did regarding the monarchy, is commonly seen as "flip-flopping," or a sign of intellectual weakness. Do you agree? Can changing one's mind on an issue indicate the ability to learn from further experience or information, or is sticking to one's original opinion a sign of strength of character? Write an essay that outlines your opinions.
2. Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is compelling and complex. Like most good literary villains, Satan is someone readers can almost sympathize with, despite themselves. After reading selections from *Paradise Lost*, try to think of other villains from films and movies who are similarly complex. Do you sympathize with these "bad guys" in some ways? Why? Does your reaction to them make them more effective as villains? How? Write an essay in which you define what makes a "good" bad guy.
3. In his famous anticensorship work *Areopagitica*, Milton famously wrote: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." Censors, in Milton's time and now, argue that they are attempting to protect people from dangerous material. Review the quote above in context. What, exactly, is Milton arguing? What is the "immortal garland" he is referring to? Do you agree with Milton's position, or do you think some written material is indeed too dangerous for public distribution?

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Yukio Mishima

BORN: 1925, Tokyo, Japan

DIED: 1970, Tokyo, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Confessions of a Mask (1949)

The Sound of Waves (1954)

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (1956)

A Missetting of Virtue (1957)

Death in Midsummer and Other Stories (1966)

Overview

Considered one of the most provocative and versatile modern Japanese writers, Yukio Mishima is known for the unorthodox views expressed in his fiction as well as for his eccentric personal life. His works often reflect a preoccupation with aggression and violent eroticism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Dark Childhood Mishima was born in Tokyo, where his father was a senior government official. His paternal grandmother, Natsu, was obsessively protective and would not allow Mishima to live on the upper level of



Yukio Mishima Yukio Mishima, photograph. AP Images.

their house with his parents; instead, she kept him confined to her darkened sickroom until he reached the age of twelve. Perhaps because of this extreme isolation, Mishima had difficulty developing social relationships as a youth.

In his autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima gives an uninhibited account of his struggles to come to terms with these inclinations and recalls that since childhood his “heart’s leaning was for Death and Night and Blood.” Several critics have referred to this statement as an apt summary of Mishima’s literary aesthetic, pointing to a tendency in both his personal life and his fiction to treat violence and death as sacred events. This passion and violence, which was characteristic of Mishima’s personal life, is also conveyed throughout his fiction.

Early Writing Career Whatever the effect of his unconventional childhood, Mishima did well at the elite Peers School, belonging to a literary society there that was heavily influenced by the Japanese Romantic movement. After secondary school, Mishima passed easily into Tokyo University, where he studied law. Despite the fact that he was of age to be called for military service during the Pacific conflicts of World War II, Mishima escaped serving as a result of misdiagnosed tuberculosis. Ironically, for a man who was later to die wearing a uniform,

Mishima admitted to having been relieved at his escape from the military. Mishima’s career as a writer officially began soon afterward.

Mishima began writing stories in middle school, and in 1941, when he was sixteen, his short fiction piece “Hanazakari no mori” was published in the small, nationalist literary magazine *Bungei Bunka*. “Hanazakari no mori” focuses on the aristocracy of historical Japan and displays the early development of Mishima’s acrid literary perspective. Many critics were impressed with the maturity of Mishima’s style and voice in this work, and Zenmei Hasuda, a member of the *Bungei Bunka* coterie, encouraged Mishima to approach the prominent intellectuals of a group of Japanese Romantics known as the *Nihon-Roman-ha*. Many tenets of this group’s doctrine mirrored Mishima’s personal convictions, and he was particularly fascinated by their emphasis on death and violence. Stressing the “value of destruction” and calling for the removal of party politicians in an attempt to preserve the cultural traditions of Japan, the *Nihon-Roman-ha* had a profound influence on Mishima.

His first collection of stories, *A Forest in Full Flower*, appeared in 1944 when the literary establishment was more concerned with the war effort than with reviewing new works by unknown authors. Even so, *Forest*, a rather precious and self-consciously literary example of the Japanese Romantic school, sold out its first edition soon after publication. Mishima’s other stories and novellas from the early postwar period, *The Middle Ages* (1945), *A Tale at the Cape* (1947), and his first novel, *Thieves* (1948), also revel in a typically Romantic mixture of elements, among the most important being physically attractive young lovers; beautiful, youthful death; and the sea. These early elements remain constant throughout Mishima’s career, although in his later stages they were often reworked with various degrees of irony.

Philosophy and Politics After receiving a law degree from Tokyo University in 1947, Mishima accepted a position with the Finance Ministry of Japan. He resigned within his first year, however, in order to devote himself entirely to writing. The extraordinary success of *Confessions of a Mask* solidified Mishima’s reputation as an important voice in Japanese fiction, and his subsequent endeavors in literature and drama were greeted with high critical acclaim. He received numerous literary awards and three nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Throughout his adult life, Mishima was disturbed by what he felt was Japan’s “effeminate” image as “a nation of flower arrangers.” He became increasingly consumed by a desire to revive the traditional values and morals of Japan’s imperialistic past and was vehemently opposed to the Westernization of his country. His ensuing works further reflect both his political orientation and his personal philosophy of “active nihilism,” which regards self-sacrifice as an essential gesture in achieving spiritual fulfillment. In affirmation of these personal convictions, Mishima, in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mishima's famous contemporaries include:

- Kobo Abe** (1924–1993): A Japanese writer whose works have been compared to those of Franz Kafka.
- Leon Uris** (1924–2003): An American writer who produced numerous historical fiction and spy novels.
- Flannery O'Connor** (1925–1964): An American novelist and short-story writer often likened to William Faulkner.
- Sam Peckinpah** (1925–1984): An American film director well known for his innovative and explicit depictions of violence.
- Richard Burton** (1925–1984): A Welsh film actor nominated for seven Academy Awards.
- Rod Serling** (1924–1975): An American screenwriter best known for his work on the TV series *The Twilight Zone*.
- Leo Esaki** (1925–): A Japanese physicist who won the 1973 Nobel Prize in Physics and has contributed to technological development through his work for Sony and IBM.

1970, committed *seppuku*, a traditional Japanese form of suicide by disembowelment.

Works in Literary Context

Mishima's work consistently lamented the barrenness of postwar Japan and offered fictional visions to substitute for the culturally and economically depressed reality of the country in the 1950s and 1960s. The settings and images in Mishima's writings were frequently taken from traditional Japanese culture but also occasionally from such Western writers as the Marquis de Sade.

Eroticism and Apocalyptic Visions In *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima first begins to explore the conflict between the disappointing real world and a fantasy world characterized by eroticism, violence, and beauty. This theme remained constant both in Mishima's life and in his art. Mishima also displayed an interest in imminent apocalypse and violence. His 1962 novel *Beautiful Star* is a meditation in the form of a science fiction novel on the potential for worldwide destruction. *Towing in the Afternoon* (1963) continues the themes of violence and apocalypse, but on a more personal level, tells the story of a group of precocious sub-adolescent boys who murder a sailor in order to "give him a chance to be a hero again." The novel also includes scenes of voyeurism and an implicit criticism of postwar Japanese materialism, themes that surface in later Mishima works.

Nihilism During the last four years of his life, Mishima concentrated on his tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility*, made up of four novels in which Mishima attempted to

sum up both his entire philosophy of life and his view of the history of modern Japan. Each novel can be read on its own, but they are also woven together through an explicitly fantastic device: Mishima's own interpretation of the theory of reincarnation. According to this theory, a young man named Kiyooki who appears in the first novel (and dies at the end), is reincarnated in the next novel. In the final novel's last page, the main character confronts the fact that all he has believed in, not only the reincarnation but the sense of intensity that believing in reincarnation has brought to him, has been fantasy. The novel's last lines speak of an empty, sunny garden which, combined with the ironic title of *The Sea of Fertility* (which refers to an arid "sea" on the moon), suggests that Mishima's final vision of Japan was of a barren wasteland where neither fantasy nor transcendence can exist.

In regards to his nihilism, Mishima is not alone among modern Japanese writers. Kawabata Yasunari, Abe Kobo, and Kenzaburo Oe, among others, have all shown the bleakness of the postwar period at the same time as they document characters seeking escape from this bleakness. But Mishima is perhaps the most thoroughgoing in his nihilism. Despite the fact that he himself organized a right-wing group and died shouting "Long Live the Emperor," the final message of his fiction seems to suggest that even ideology offers no ultimate refuge.

Continued Influence Mishima's work is no longer as popular as it was during his life, but it also seems certain that it will no longer be dismissed for reasons of politics or even national embarrassment. He remains securely well known in the West, and even the younger generation of Japanese citizens is acquainted with several of his titles. An American director, Paul Schrader, has made a biographical film entitled *Mishima* (1985), and in 1993 the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's American production of Mishima's play, *Madame de Sade*, drew rave reviews.

Works in Critical Context

Often overshadowed by his dramatic personal life, Mishima's fiction eludes easy critical analysis. His sensational death by *seppuku* has prompted many critics to elicit biographical meanings from his works, and critics often place him among the Japanese "I-novelists," who wrote autobiography in the guise of fiction. Other commentators note a distinct contradiction between Mishima's modern personal lifestyle and his literary aesthetic. Although critics have accused Mishima of self-indulgent prose, he is widely respected for his distinctive style, and most observers agree that he had made a significant contribution to world literature.

Death in Midsummer and Other Stories Known to the West primarily for his novels, Mishima also composed more than twenty volumes of short stories. Only one of these, however—*Death in Midsummer and Other Stories*—has been translated into English. Like his novels, this collection has garnered praise from both Eastern and Western

literary critics, and its stories display Mishima's concern with a wide range of themes. The themes of the ten pieces in *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories* vary widely.

Perhaps the most critically discussed work in *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories* is "Patriotism." Exemplifying Mishima's tendency to present eroticism and death with shocking objectivity, this piece is considered crucial in understanding Mishima's nihilistic creed. According to Lance Morrow, "Patriotism" reveals Mishima's mastery of "what Russians call *poshlust*, a vulgarity so elevated—or debased—that it amounts to a form of art." Based on the dual suicide of a young married couple during the 1936 Ni Ni Roku incident (in which a band of insurrectionists organized a rebellion against Japan's military forces on behalf of the emperor), the story centers on the union of the couple's physical and spiritual commitment to traditional ideals. Mishima himself described "Patriotism" as "neither a comedy nor a tragedy, but a tale of bliss." The couple's final sexual experience is treated as a prelude to their suicides, and the excruciating pain of the lieutenant's suicide is linked with erotic desire: "Was it death he was now waiting for? Or a wild ecstasy of the senses? The two seemed to overlap, almost as if the object of this bodily desire were death itself."

Other works in the collection, including "The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love," "Onnagata," and Mishima's modern *Noh* play *Dojoji*, deal more specifically with the traditional character of Japan. Critics note Mishima's delicate handling of the theme of homosexual love in "Onnagata," which focuses on the lives of female impersonators in the traditional Kabuki theater. In "Onnagata," as in his other stories, Mishima examines discomfiting emotional states with cool and uninhibited candor that is often startling to his readers.

Controversy More than two decades after his death, Yukio Mishima is arguably still the most famous writer modern Japan has produced. The reasons for this fame are both complex and controversial. His critics may suggest that his notorious death by ritual suicide, which Mishima performed after having unsuccessfully called for the overthrow of the Japanese government, accounts as much for his renown as do his actual writings. His enthusiasts, whether in Japan or the West, do not dismiss the *seppuku* but dwell more on the brilliance of his style, the power of his imagination, and the fascination and variety of his themes—they include homosexuality, political terrorism, Zen, and reincarnation—all of which are in marked contrast to much of postwar Japanese fiction.

Whether his critics or his supporters are correct about the quality of either Mishima's oeuvre or his political ideology, the fact remains that he is the most internationally renowned of Japan's modern writers, a writer who has helped mold the Western imagination of Japan at the same time as one who continues to haunt the contemporary Japanese mind.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Throughout his writing career, Mishima demonstrated an interest in imminent apocalypse. Here are some other works that demonstrate a similar interest:

On the Beach (1957), a novel by Nevil Shute. This novel tells the story of survivors of a nuclear war who have a limited time to live because of the slow spread of radiation poisoning throughout the world.

The Stand (1978), a novel by Stephen King. In this epic tale of good versus evil, survivors of a plague travel across an America that has been decimated by disease and supernatural happenings.

La Jetée (1962), a film by Chris Marker. This short film tells the story of an experiment in time travel conducted after a nuclear war.

The Day After (1983), a made-for-TV movie directed by Nicholas Meyer. This movie depicts the impact of a major nuclear war upon people living in the American Midwest.

Responses to Literature

1. The subject matter of Mishima's works can be shocking to many readers. What impact does this shock have on your reading of these works? In what ways does the shock enhance Mishima's messages, and in what ways does it diminish from the power of his stories?
2. Many critics believe that Mishima's books can be seen as autobiography in fictional form. What aspects of Mishima's life are apparent in his novels? In what ways are his works not autobiographical?
3. Mishima ended his life with a ritual suicide. Write an essay that argues either that he deserves to be better remembered for this act than for his works, or that his works deserve to be appreciated for their brilliance and power apart from his suicide.
4. Mishima has been noted for the nihilism present in many of his novels. Identify several scenes from his novels that depict this nihilism most directly and write a critical analysis of these scenes, focusing on their effectiveness in conveying the author's message and in convincing the reader to accept his philosophy of nihilism.

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❑ Gabriela Mistral

BORN: 1889, Vicña, Chile

DIED: 1922, Long Island, New York

NATIONALITY: Chilean

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Sonnets on Death (1914)

Desolation (1922)

Felling (1938)

Overview

Gabriela Mistral, pseudonym of Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, was the first Latin American author to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature; as such, she will always be seen as a representative figure in the cultural history of the continent. Mistral's works deal with the basic passion of love as displayed in the various relationships of mother and child, man and woman, individual and humankind, soul and God.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Raised in the Mountains of Chile Lucila Godoy Alcayaga was born on April 7, 1889, in the small town of Vicuña in the Andes mountains in Chile. She was raised by her mother and an older sister, both teachers. Her father abandoned his family when Lucila was three. Her mother was a central force in Mistral's attachment to family and homeland and a strong influence on her desire to succeed. Not less influential was her highly religious paternal grandmother, who encouraged the young girl to learn and recite by heart passages from the Bible.

Careers: Educator and Poet At the age of fifteen, Mistral began a successful career as a teacher and administrator, which enabled her to travel throughout Chile. This direct knowledge of her country, its geography, and its peoples became the basis for her increasing interest in national values, which coincided with the intellectual and political concerns of Latin America as a whole.



Gabriela Mistral *Mistral, Gabriela*, photograph. AP Images.

Mistral's love poems in memory of the dead won her literary recognition. The suicide of her fiancé in the early 1900s prompted Mistral to compose *Sonnets on Death* under the Mistral pseudonym. When she entered the poems in a writing contest in 1914, she earned first prize and instant fame.

During her years as an educator and administrator in Chile, Mistral was actively pursuing a literary career, writing poetry and prose, and keeping in contact with other writers and intellectuals. She published mainly in newspapers, periodicals, anthologies, and educational publications, showing no interest in producing a book. Her name became widely familiar because several of her works were included in a primary-school reader that was used all over her country and throughout Latin America.

In 1921 Mistral reached her highest position in the Chilean educational system when she was made principal of the newly created Liceo de Niñas number 6 in Santiago, a prestigious appointment desired by many colleagues. Now she was in the capital, in the center of the national literary and cultural activity, ready to participate fully in the life of letters. A year later, however, she moved to Mexico to work on reorganizing the country's rural education system and began her long life as a self-exiled expatriate.

Desolation In 1922, Mistral's first book of poems, *Desolation*, was published in New York, at the insistence of a group of American teachers of Spanish. Most of the compositions in *Desolation* were written when Mistral was working in Chile and had previously appeared in various publications. As such, the book is an aggregate of poems rather than a collection conceived as an artistic unit. Divided into broad thematic sections, the book includes almost eighty poems grouped under five headings that represent the basic preoccupations in Mistral's poetry, including motherhood, religion, nature, morality, love of children, and personal sorrow. This collection earned Mistral an international reputation.

Tenderness Mistral's stay in Mexico came to an end in 1924 when her services were no longer needed. Before returning to Chile, she traveled in the United States and Europe, thus beginning her life of constant movement from one place to another. Her second book of poems focuses on the theme of childhood. *Tenderness* (1924) is a celebration of the joys of birth and motherhood. While *Desolation* reflects the pain of a lost love and an obsession with death, *Tenderness* is a work of renewed hope and understanding. Infused with a decidedly Christian feeling, its poems evoke the poet's overriding desire to attain harmony and peace in her life.

Reembracing Catholicism Around 1925 Mistral returned to Chile and Catholicism. She entered the Franciscan Order as a laical member, not aiming to be a nun. As a member of the order, she chose to live in poverty, making religion a central element in her life. Religion for her was also fundamental to her understanding of her function as a poet.

When Mistral left Chile again for Europe, she served as secretary of the Latin American section in the League of Nations in Paris, where she met many writers and artists. In 1933, she moved first to Puerto Rico and then to Madrid, Spain, where she worked as a diplomat, but was forced to resign her position three years later for openly criticizing the Spanish government.

Felling Fourteen years passed between *Tenderness* and Mistral's next book, *Felling* (1938). Mistral includes poems inspired by the death of her mother, together with a variety of other compositions that do not linger in sadness but sing of the beauty of the world and deal with the hopes and dreams of the human heart. In solidarity with the Spanish Republic, she donated her author's rights for the book to the Spanish children displaced and orphaned by the Spanish civil war.

The Nobel Prize and Later Life During World War II, Mistral took the general consular post in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She was still in Brazil in 1945 when she heard on the radio that she had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. She traveled to Sweden to be at the ceremony only because the prize represented recognition of Latin American literature. In 1946, she moved to the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mistral's famous contemporaries include:

Jose Maria Arguedas (1911–1969): A Peruvian novelist, poet, and anthropologist; Arguedas brought indigenous issues and culture to the forefront through his writing.

Dorothy Day (1897–1980): This American journalist, social activist, and devout Catholic cofounded the Catholic Worker Movement, providing social services to those in need.

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): Franco was dictator of Spain from 1936 until his death; he became ruler after a failed coup that led to the Spanish civil war.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Mussolini was the prime minister of Italy from 1922 to 1943. As leader of the National Fascist Party, he focused on nationalism at the expense of personal freedoms.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950): An American poet, Millay was the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Poetry in 1923; she is well known for her lyric poetry and sonnets.

United States, which remained her home for the rest of her life.

Mistral's final volume of poetry, *Wine Press*, was published in 1954. Mistral had suffered the loss of her nephew and close friends. In addition, she had developed diabetes. Despite her losses and illness, the tone of this last collection is one of acceptance of death, marking her growing freedom from bitterness. Several critics have implied that this collection—the culmination of her literary career—is both a refinement of her simple and skillful writing style and a testament to her strengthened faith and ultimate understanding of God.

Late in 1956, Mistral was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. On January 10, 1957, Mistral died in a hospital in Hempstead, Long Island. After a funeral ceremony at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, the body of this pacifist woman was flown by military plane to Santiago, Chile, where she received the funeral honors of a national hero. Following her last will, her remains were eventually put to rest in a simple tomb in Monte Grande, the village of her childhood.

Works in Literary Context

Gabriela Mistral is known as a poet who wrote about the enjoyment in the beauty of nature, with its magnificent landscapes, simple elements—air, rock, water, fruits—and animals and plants. Her love of nature was deeply ingrained from childhood and permeated her work with unequivocal messages for the protection and care of the environment.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gabriela Mistral examines the meaning of God in much of her poetry. Here are some other works on that theme:

Gitanjali (1913), a poetry collection by Rabindranath Tagore. The poems in this collection deal with a union with the “supreme,” phrased in human, physical terms; Tagore won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, becoming the first Asian writer to do so.

“Pied Beauty” (1918), a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. In this poem filled with assonance and alliteration, the poet praises God for all imperfect things.

Songs of Life and Hope (2004), poetry by Rubén Darío. This bilingual edition collects many poems by this Nicaraguan poet on such topics as transcending suffering, Christianity, and a strong connection to nature.

Walking to Martha’s Vineyard (2003), poetry by Franz Wright. These poems examine life, renewal, and the narrator’s relationship with both God and his own father.

The Wild Iris (1992), poetry by Louise Gluck. The poems in this collection, awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, alternate between the voices of plants, and a dialogue with an unnamed god.

Religious and Poetic Influences For Mistral, the poetic word in its beauty and emotional intensity had the power to transform and transcend human spiritual weakness, bringing consolation to the soul in search of understanding. Her poetry is thus charged with a sense of ritual and prayer; poetry provides Mistral the strength of a religious, spiritual life dominated by a passionate love for all of creation. The spiritual character of her search for a transcendental joy unavailable in the world contrasts with her love for the materiality of everyday existence. Her poetic voice communicates these opposing forces in a style that combines musicality and harshness, spiritual inquietudes and concrete images, hope and despair, and simple, everyday language and sometimes unnaturally twisted constructions and archaic vocabulary. In her poetry dominates the emotional tension of the voice, the intensity of a monologue that might be a song or a prayer, a story or a musing.

Mistral’s writings are highly emotional and impress the reader with an original style. Rhythm, rhyme, metaphors, symbols, vocabulary, and themes, as well as other traditional poetic techniques, are all directed in her poetry toward the expression of deeply felt emotions and conflicting forces in opposition. Love and jealousy, hope and fear, pleasure and pain, life and death, dream and truth, ideal and reality, matter and spirit are always competing.

Works in Critical Context

Almost half a century after her death, Gabriela Mistral continues to attract the attention of readers and critics

alike, particularly in her country of origin. Her poetic work maintains its originality and effectiveness in communicating a personal worldview.

A Voice for Latin America Katherine Anne Mansfield writes that

Gabriela Mistral is a strange figure among the chattering Latin-American poets . . . in her we have the concentrated force of that humble, strong, enduring creature, the Spanish and Indian woman of the middle class and of the peasantry, the type that teaches, labors, suffers, prays, without audible protest or question. She has given speech to the accumulated sorrows of these inarticulate women. She asks their questions for them, she shouts their protests through a throat strained with the immensity of her utterance.

Chilean poet Francisco Aguilera has said that Mistral “has given new rhythms and harmonies to Latin-American Spanish. No one else has dared to use the language as she does.”

Felling *Felling*, according to Sidonia Carmen Rosenbaum, “reflects the spiritual vicissitudes which attended her [Mistral] for nearly two decades. Its mastery, its sureness of style and precise choice of words reveal the mature artist who has gone through the bitter exercise of attaining that much-prized ‘difficult simplicity.’” In *Tala*, Mistral’s verse no longer lingers on the tragic; instead, it reflects a sense of redemption and deliverance. Rosenbaum asserts that the expressions in *Felling* are “less tortured.”

In *Felling*, Mistral addresses her characteristic themes: maternity, childhood, death, and the destruction of land. But it is her nostalgia for the land and the people of America that is most striking. Rosenbaum states,

Her Americanism, in its richest and warmest sense, is patent here, not only in the section properly called ‘America,’ but in all those poems which sing, in one form or another, of its landscapes, its places, its flora, its fauna, its people, its heritage, its destiny. . . . There is an attempt—an ideal—to disregard and efface national boundaries and to fuse all into that ‘heart-shaped’ beautiful land (land of the Incas and of the Mayas, of the Quiches, the Quechuans and Aymarans) which is her America; an ardent wish to see those ‘downtrodden racemes of sacred vine’—which are the Indians of old—restored to their pristine destiny.

Responses to Literature

1. Gabriela Mistral chose to write under a pen name because she was well known professionally for her work in education. Why do you think Mistral might have decided to separate her professional self as a poet from her professional self as an educator?
2. Choose several of Mistral’s poems that deal with the theme of nature and conservation. Write two or three paragraphs discussing how these poems are relevant today.
3. Chile’s history during the twentieth century has been turbulent. Using the Internet and your library’s resources, research its history during the period that

Mistral chose to live abroad. Create a timeline outlining the major political events, and discuss as class why Mistral may have decided to live outside of her country.

4. One of the things that Mistral struggled with in her poetry was reconciling personal fulfillment with the will of God. Do you think humans have free will, or do you think our future is determined in advance? Explain your position in a small group.
5. Motherhood is a common theme in Mistral's poetry. Read "Fear" and discuss the conflict presented in the poem. What is Mistral's message about motherhood in this poem?

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Thomas Mofolo

BORN: 1875, Khojane, Basutoland (now Lesotho)

DIED: 1948, Teyateyaneng, Lesotho

NATIONALITY: Basotho, Lesotho

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Traveller of the East (1907)

Pitseng (1910)

Chaka (1925)

Overview

Thomas Mofolo is considered the first great author of modern African literature. Written in the Sesotho language, his three novels are concerned with the radical

effect of Christian teachings on traditional African society. His fame is largely attributable to the last of his three published works, *Chaka* (1925), a narrative written in Sesotho and based on the life of the Zulu king Shaka, who lived from 1788 to 1828.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Student to Teacher Mofolo was born in Kojane, Basutoland (now Lesotho), a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa, on December 22, 1876. The third son of Christian parents, he was educated at local religious schools and then sent to Morija to work as a houseboy for the Reverend Alfred Casalis, who headed the Bible school, printing press, and the book depot there. In 1894 Casalis enrolled Mofolo in the Bible School, and two years later Mofolo entered the Teacher Training College, earning a teaching certificate in 1899. He then began work as an interpreter at the printing press, but the operation was suspended during the South African War (also known as the Boer War or Anglo-Boer War), which began in October 1899 and continued until 1902. Mofolo studied carpentry for two years and taught at various schools until 1904, when he returned to Morija as secretary to Casalis and proofreader for the press.

Exposed to a variety of books at the Morija Book Depot, Mofolo read religious works, African and European histories, and novels by such writers as H. Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli. Several missionaries encouraged him to write works of his own, and his Christian allegory *Moeti oa bochabela* (translated as *The Traveller of the East*), published in 1907, became the first novel written in Sesotho. His next novel, *Pitseng*, the story of two exemplary youths inspired by an African Christian teacher, was published in 1910.

Writing and Publishing Chaka While working at the book depot, Mofolo also began research for a novel based on the life of the Zulu warrior-king Shaka. Traveling to Pietermaritzburg, the former Zulu capital Mgun-gundlulu, Mofolo visited Shaka's gravesite and collected historical data, recollections, and legends which had been passed on through oral literature. Mofolo submitted the *Chaka* manuscript to the Morija printers, but the missionaries were deeply divided over whether to publish the work. Despite acknowledgement of the novel's extraordinary qualities, those who opposed it cited their fear that the novel's depiction of traditional Africa would entice the indigenous reader to return to a non-Christian way of life. After a campaign by supporters and the excision of some material, *Chaka* was finally published in 1925.

Life After Writing Discouraged by the missionaries' qualms about publishing *Chaka*, Mofolo left for South Africa and gave up writing. For several years, he held different jobs. He worked as a recruiter and labor agent for diamond mines, sugar plantations, and large farms. For a time he managed a postal route, and he later ran a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Mofolo's famous contemporaries include:

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): An American expatriate writer who lived and worked in France for most of her life, Stein contributed to the development of modern art and literature.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): British politician who led Great Britain during World War II.

Thomas Mann (1875–1955): German writer and social critic who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929.

D. W. Griffith (1875–1948): Pioneering film director best known for his 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*.

Pancho Villa (1878–1923): Mexican general who led the first successful popular revolution of the twentieth century.

Upton Sinclair (1878–1968): American author whose novel *The Jungle* contributed to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906.

trading store. In 1933 Mofolo returned to his homeland and purchased a large farm from a white landowner. The sale violated the Natives Land Act of 1913, which prohibited blacks from owning or leasing land outside of the so-called Native Reserves, and the government seized the property. In 1940 the ailing and impoverished Mofolo retired, living on a small pension. He suffered a stroke in 1941, from which he never fully recovered, and died on September 8, 1948, at Teyateyaneng, Lesotho.

Works in Literary Context

Chaka, Mofolo's most highly regarded work, is a fictionalized account of the Zulu leader Chaka (Shaka). The novel is often interpreted as a depiction of the negative moral consequences of paganism unchecked by Christian ethics. At the same time, respect for traditional African customs and beliefs pervades the work, especially in the heroic portrayal of the Zulu king Chaka. This respect caused missionary publishers to suppress Mofolo's manuscript until thirteen years after its completion. Today the novel is considered an epic tragedy of literary and historical significance and has served as the model for numerous subsequent works about Chaka, one of the most celebrated legendary figures in African literature.

Stylistic Elements in *Chaka* *Chaka* is not a historical novel in the true sense, as many commentators have claimed; the rise and fall of the historical Chaka is used only as a point of departure. The work is a romance that has connections with various oral and modern literary genres, such as the folktale, legend, fable, saga, fantasy, and myth. There are allegorical features as well. By con-

trasting oral traditions and legends with historical basis and fictitious elements and characters, Mofolo adds his unique style and poetic prose to this literary epic.

Mofolo employed several diverse stylistic elements in *Chaka*. He used the rhythm and narrative devices of African praise poems, which were performed to honor Bantu monarchs; the didactic elements of African oral narratives, which traditionally served as vehicles for moral instruction; and biblical terminology, which reflected his missionary schooling. Because the novel form is not intrinsically African, Mofolo also utilized some of the conventions of the Western novel. He combined these various stylistic forms throughout *Chaka*, shifting from one to another when appropriate for dramatic or thematic emphasis.

Mofolo's use of witch doctors in the novel demonstrates the extent to which these various traditions are skillfully synthesized. Essential to the portrayal of Chaka's drive for power, the role of the witch doctor has been interpreted as a literal commentary on good and bad witch doctors in the tribal community; a symbolic revelation of Chaka's personality traits and true desires reminiscent of the witches in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; and an allegorical rendering of a Mephistophelean devil with whom Chaka makes a pact.

Chaka demonstrates Mofolo's respect for Chaka and traditional African ways of life, unlike the negative depictions of these subjects by white historians. For this reason, Mofolo has profoundly influenced such African authors as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Abdou Anta Ka, and Djibril Tamsir Niane, whose works go beyond his novel in celebrating Chaka's military and political genius.

Works in Critical Context

Thomas Mofolo is the most important African writers of the first quarter of the twentieth century. He still ranks with African Nobel laureates Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, and Najib Mafuz, and with others who are equally famous such as S. E. K. Mqhayi, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, André P. Brink, and Breyten Breytenbach. The early translation of *Chaka* into English and French spread Mofolo's fame as much as it did that of the Zulu king (although not at home) and led to a flood of dramatic works on the historical Shaka by Francophone writers in West Africa.

Interpretations of *Chaka* *Chaka* has been called by many critics a masterpiece of world literature. Regarded by contemporary reviewers as an "Africanized" Christian tract, the novel has more recently been assessed as a sophisticated fusion of Christian philosophy, African praise-poetry and myth, and Western literature.

There are many Christian readings of *Chaka* as an illustration of the battle between good and evil. In such interpretations, Chaka's death at the hands of his brothers is considered just punishment for his sinful paganism. Many critics, however, note that much of the so-called

Christian morality in the novel is in fact based on African traditions in which nature, the tribal community, and the gods are indivisible. Chaka's illegitimacy, for example, is fateful according to this tradition because it opposes tribal law, a law established before the introduction of Christianity to Africa. Similarly, Chaka ensures his destruction when he murders his mother, which breaks the ultimate taboo against shedding the blood of kin.

Ben Obumsele contends that a critical reading of the work as Christian morality cannot sufficiently account for the novel's complexity, which is most apparent in the portrayal of Chaka's psychological development. This careful attention to the events of Chaka's early childhood and his reaction to them does not excuse his behavior. However, it provides an explanation for his actions that goes beyond that of a simplistic pagan symbolism promoted by those who read the novel as a Christian allegory.

Several critics have also commented on the sympathetic nature of Mofolo's eulogy for Chaka and the Mazulus at the end of the novel. Daniel P. Kunene, for instance, believes that the passage reveals Mofolo's conscious or unconscious loyalty to Sesotho culture and its traditions of heroism and virility. Albert S. Gerard similarly considers the eulogy a passage wherein Mofolo sets aside religion to reflect on the Mazulu empire, pondering the "past greatness of his race and its present subjugation."

A challenging new interpretation of *Chaka* has come from Kwame Ayivor, who contends that Mofolo has adapted the *imbongi*, or African praise song, in a way that allows him simultaneously both to praise and to denigrate his protagonist: "By creating this disparity between the traditional voice of praise and the concealed anti-legendary tone bent on subverting the voice of the traditional *imbongi*, Mofolo introduces a dialectical battle between the two versions of *Chaka* from the beginning of the novel.

However one interprets Mofolo's *Chaka*, it remains one of the most important works by an African writer of the early twentieth century.

Reactions to *Chaka* When *Chaka* appeared in December 1925, it divided its readers into two camps, as it had the Morija missionaries before publication. Between 1926 and 1928, eight letters from readers appeared in *Leselinyana*. The readers' reaction was threefold: admiration, rejection, and puzzlement. Their admiration was based on the composition, stylistic grandeur, character depiction, and overall merit of the work as fiction. Rejection—although voiced by only one highly outspoken reader, N. R. Thoahlane, who called the work "*chefe*" (poison)—was on moral grounds. The puzzlement was elicited by the combination of history and fiction in the work. Some readers were able to accept the license Mofolo took with actual events. Others pointed critically to the historical inaccuracies in the novel.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mofolo's novels are all concerned with the effects of European colonists and Christian missionaries on traditional African society. Here are some other works with similar concerns:

Mhudi (1930), a novel by Solomon Plaatje. This historical novel depicts the attempts of an African tribe and a group of Boers to attain their freedom.

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton. This novel, centered around a black Anglican priest from South Africa, explores various themes in the development of South African apartheid, including the breakdown of traditional tribal communities.

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel traces the influence of British colonialism and Christianity on a traditional African community by telling the story of a leader of a Nigerian village.

Nervous Conditions (1988), a novel by Tsitsi Dangar-embga. This novel explores clashes between traditional African cultures and the cultures of the Western colonial powers by telling the story of a young black girl living in a small Rhodesian village.

Another group of readers objected to the implied offense to the Zulu crown in Mofolo's novel and asked whether it was necessary to humiliate the great Shaka to such an extent. Scholars have speculated as to whether the negative portrayal of the Zulu hero could have its origins in an antipathy that Mofolo had toward him because of the suffering of the Basotho people during the Difaqane, the wars of destruction the historical Shaka brought over southern Africa from about 1821 to 1833. Daniel P. Kunene concludes in his *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose* (1989): "As things now stand, Mofolo's 'purpose in writing this book' must of necessity, forever remain a matter of conjecture, like 'the great mysteries' of Chaka's life which are 'beyond the people's understanding.'"

Responses to Literature

1. Mofolo's main novel features Chaka (Shaka) as the main character. What are the dangers of using such a figure? What are the advantages?
2. Mofolo struggled for thirteen years to get his novel *Chaka* published. Use the Internet and your library's resources to determine if present-day authors face the same kinds of difficulties or censorship. How are these censorship similar to or different from that of Mofolo's?

- In Mofolo's time, people primarily learned about local customs and historical figures from literature. Today, the Internet gives people easier access to this kind of information. Use the Internet to locate information about Shaka, and write a short character sketch of this figure.
- Mofolo's writings concentrate on the problems faced by Africans both before and during European colonialism. Write an essay discussing the effects of colonialism on African countries.

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☒ Molière

BORN: 1622, Paris, France

DIED: 1673, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

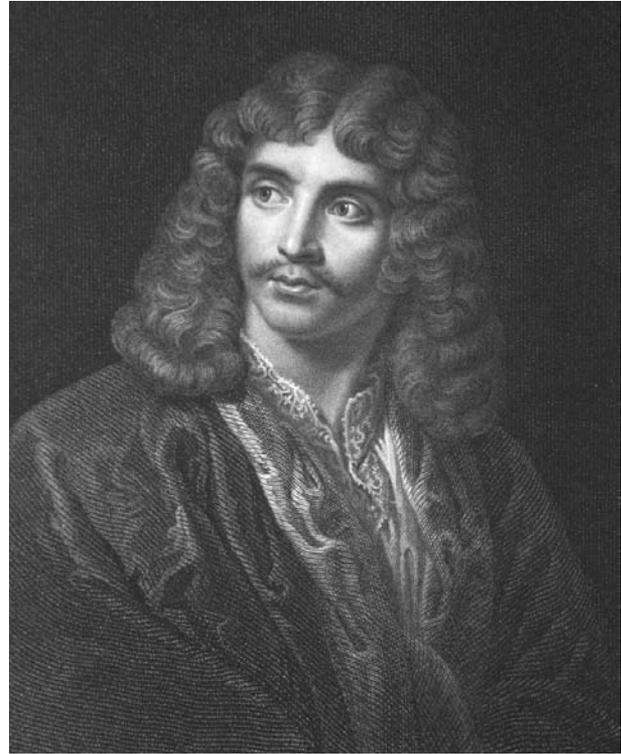
GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The School for Husbands (1661)

Tartuffe (1664)

The Misanthrope (1666)



Molière Molière, engraving. The Library of Congress.

Overview

With such satirical masterpieces as *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope*, Molière elevated French comedy. He established comic drama as a genre equal to tragedy in its ability to depict human nature, thereby changing both the focus and purpose of comedy. Though condemned by court and church officials during his career, Molière is widely recognized today as one of the most influential playwrights in world literature. His satirical denunciation of hypocrisy, vice, and foolishness, for example, became the inspiration for many of the greatest works of the English Restoration dramatists.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood of Promise in a Prosperous Merchant Family Born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin on January 15, 1622, in Paris, Molière was the eldest child of a prominent family of merchant upholsterers. When Molière was ten years old, his mother died, and his father soon remarried and moved his family to a house located in the cultural and social center of Paris. Molière was sent to the Jesuit College of Clermont, an outstanding school attended by children of prosperous families, before beginning to study law in Orléans. In the meantime, Molière's father had purchased the mostly honorary office of valet and furnisher to the king. In 1637, he obtained

hereditary rights to the position for Molière, who took the oath of office. In 1641, Molière became a notary. Given his family background, his education, his profession, and his future court position, Molière's future seemed promising.

The Overwhelming Lure of the Theater When the young Molière met actress Madeleine Béjart, his destiny was forever changed. In 1643, he renounced his court position, abandoned his social status, and risked damnation from the clergy in order to become an actor. Around this time, he started calling himself Molière and, along with Béjart, her brother and sister, and nine other actors, formed a theatrical company, which Molière managed. After renting a theater, the members of the troupe began producing their own plays in early 1644. Their venture was unsuccessful, and their financial condition so dismal, that Molière was twice imprisoned for debt and had to be rescued by his father.

In 1646, Molière, the Béjart siblings, and several other actors set out on a tour of the French provinces. During the next twelve years, Molière learned not only the methods required to be a successful actor, producer, and manager, but also the skills necessary to write farcical sketches before progressing to full-length plays. Throughout his time in the provinces, Molière proved a gifted leader whose energy and self-discipline reflected his commitment to the theater.

Back to Paris On October 24, 1658, Molière and his troupe of actors were prepared to make an impression on Paris with a performance at the Louvre before the young King Louis XIV, his brother "Monsieur" Philippe, and the court. Although the king was uninterested in their major play, a tragedy by Pierre Corneille, he found Molière's farce entertaining. As a result, the troupe was allowed to play at the royal Petit-Bourbon Theater, where they shared performance days with the Italian Comedians. Because they were under the patronage of Philippe, Molière's troupe was called the "troupe de Monsieur," the Monsieur's troupe. Young King Louis's interest in Molière would prove pivotal to the playwright in the future.

Though based on Italian comedies and farces, Molière's plays were superior in language, plot inventiveness, and character depiction. As the king showed more and more appreciation for Molière's comedies, the Monsieur's troupe began to revive some of the earlier full-length plays Molière had written while in the provinces. In 1659, Molière debuted his first comedy of manners, *The Affected Young Ladies*, which satirizes the affectations of Parisian society, followed by *Sganarelle*, a complicated story of love and misunderstanding, which became a favorite of King Louis.

The King's Entertainment Never one to conceal his disdain of hypocrisy—as evidenced by his satirical dramas—Molière made many enemies throughout his

career. Fortunately, his genius earned him friends who would defend him, including King Louis himself. Louis was a powerful and imposing force in French history. He reigned for more than seventy years and centralized the government firmly under his control. He famously remarked: "L'état, c'est moi" ("I am the state"). He was known both as the Sun King and Louis the Great. Jealous of both the king's approval and the public's appreciation of the Monsieur's troupe, rival theatrical companies united and, in 1660, succeeded in having Molière's theater demolished without notice, supposedly because it impeded construction on the Louvre. This event prompted King Louis to permit Molière's actors to use the theater of the Palais Royal, where Molière's company remained for the rest of his life. It was there that Molière staged the first of several comic ballets, which was presented as entertainment in the king's honor. From then on, Molière spent a great deal of time writing for various court entertainments, creating works that critics feel do not live up to the dramatist's potential; without the king's favor, Molière would have been in financial trouble in the years to come.

Troubling Times When he was forty, Molière married Armande Béjart, the twenty-year-old sister of Madeleine Béjart. The union proved miserable for Molière; fortunately, he was able to channel his discontent into writing. Without question, Molière's unhappy marriage is reflected in *The School for Wives* (1662), a play about a middle-aged man who attempts to create a chaste wife by raising her from girlhood in complete innocence. The drama was his greatest commercial success; however, the more successful Molière became, the more fervently his enemies worked to destroy his career.

Quick to find parallels between *The School for Wives* and the playwright's life, Molière's detractors accused him of incest, called him a cuckold, and proclaimed him a godless man. All were insults Molière and his friends refuted in a 1663 series of essays, poems, and plays. Inevitably, the incessant contempt began to affect Molière's work. In 1664, for example, he was forbidden to perform *Tartuffe*, the story of a pious hypocrite, because of religious fanatics at court. The play was not approved until 1670, five years after Molière had been forced to withdraw another one of his works, the drama *Don Juan*.

Darker Days In 1666, Molière's troupe performed *The Misanthrope*, generally considered his critical masterpiece despite its unenthusiastic reception at the time it appeared on stage. Focusing on an honest, outspoken man in a dishonest society, the play parallels Molière's own difficulties with censorship and social persecution. By this time, Molière's personal problems were mounting: His father's business was in trouble, his marriage had deteriorated, and his health was declining. Still, he continued to produce plays.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Molière's famous contemporaries include:

Benedictus de Spinoza (1632–1704): Among the most important philosophers in the seventeenth century, Spinoza was a rationalist who spoke against sensory perception as a way to acquire knowledge.

Blaise Pascal (1632–1662): This French scientist and mathematician is credited with inventing the first digital calculator.

Jean Racine (1639–1699): Racine, a master of French tragedy, followed the neoclassical tragic form—five acts in which the action took place within a single day and was usually restricted to one location.

Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681): Along with playwright Lope de Vega, Calderón dominated Spain's golden age of theater.

John Bunyan (1628–1688): An English preacher, Bunyan is the author of the famous Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Shah Jahan (1592–1666): During Jahan's reign (1628–1658), the Mongol Empire reached its height in prosperity and luxury, best exemplified by the construction of the Taj Mahal.

Molière faced even more adversity in the last few years of his life. In 1670, his father died in poverty, and, in 1672, a newborn son died. Molière himself was very ill and had to depend on doctors whom, as his plays reveal, he completely distrusted. Meanwhile, Molière's enemies in both court and clergy were at work, ensuring that he would no longer stage entertainments for the king. On February 17, 1673, Molière became ill onstage while playing the title role in *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673). Molière suffered from tuberculosis, a highly infectious disease—usually resulting in bleeding in the lungs—that was widespread but poorly understood in the playwright's time. Although Molière finished the performance, he died later that night. Even in death, Molière caused controversy: The clergy insisted that he not be buried in consecrated ground. Only when the king intervened was Molière given a quiet burial in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

By establishing a serious, refined basis for comic drama, Molière changed the very essence of French comedy. As a result of his taking the comedy of manners to new heights of sophistication, Molière inspired such playwrights of the English Restoration as William Congreve and William Wycherley. Molière remains a popular figure in literature, as his plays continue to be performed throughout the

world, immortalizing not only the playwright himself, but also his most complex characters.

Characterization Most readers agree that Molière's strength as a playwright lies not in his plot development, but in his handling of diverse, insightful characters. By using a simpler language than other writers of tragedy or farce, along with depicting recognizable character types in ordinary situations, Molière attacks the hypocrisy and defects of society. Misanthropes, misers, foolish women, court flatterers—all are familiar character types in Molière's plays. Oftentimes, his plays present a specific character flaw taken to its extreme, as evidenced by Tartuffe's hypocrisy or the obsessive greed of Harpagon in *The Miser*. In ruthlessly deriding selected characters, Molière in essence scorns an entire social institution, as is the case with the medical profession in *The Imaginary Invalid*.

Intending to guide his audience to moral and social responsibility, Molière has his characters attempt to deny their flaws. In *The Misanthrope*, for example, Arsinoé, because she cannot admit her inability to attract men, presents herself as a paragon of piety. Arsinoé, however, is not the only character given to self-delusion in *The Misanthrope*. The suitors are so consumed by gossip that they never have time—nor the inclination—for self-reflection. Rather than discover why he loves Célimène so deeply, Alceste denies his love for her by pointing out and criticizing her appalling personality traits. More often than not, the characters in *The Misanthrope* conceal their own faults by criticizing others.

Works in Critical Context

Regarded as more than the greatest writer of the French stage, Molière is extolled by critics of every century as the father of modern comic drama, whose most important innovation as a dramatist was elevating comedy to the seriousness of tragedy. Explaining Molière's significance as a literary figure in France, Margaret Webster, one of the twentieth century's most important women in theater, contributes the following to *Approaches to Teaching Molière's Tartuffe and Other Plays*: "In his own language he is as towering a figure as [William] Shakespeare is in ours." For nineteenth-century critic Henri Van Laun, Molière's reach extends beyond French literature in that "he is equal, if not superior, to any other writer of character-comedies on the ancient or modern stage."

Condemned Works Because his comedies were often extremely critical, Molière was frequently the source of controversy in French theater. Most critics agree that rather than seeking to destroy existing social structures, Molière was exposing hypocrisy, artificiality, and vice in French society with the hope that people would control and correct their behaviors. Certainly, because of possible repercussions, it was in Molière's best interests not to offend members of King Louis XIV's court and members of the clergy. Nonetheless, Molière's biting sarcasm

provoked the ire of such groups as clergymen and doctors. For instance, critic Harold C. Knutson observes that *Love Is the Doctor* (1665) is “a particularly biting commentary on doctors and doctoring,” because the doctors “drop the mask and betray their callousness . . . and contentiousness,” and that the doctors are concerned with rules and formalities instead of the well-being of their patients. Even more incendiary than *Love Is the Doctor* was *Tartuffe*, the story of a deceitful, manipulative spiritual adviser. This play resulted in demands not only for censorship, but also for excommunication of anyone who read, attended, or performed the play. Only with the king’s intervention—he was a quiet supporter of Molière—did Molière escape being executed for heresy.

Beyond Moralizing While modern scholars, like their predecessors, continue to seek ethical, philosophical, and religious messages in Molière’s comedies, critical interest has shifted away from simply evaluating his didactic and moral intentions. Instead, studies focus on the aesthetics of Molière’s comic technique. For example, some theater scholars call attention to the staging of Molière’s comedies in relation to historical relevance as well as the theatrical spectacle. Furthermore, the universality of Molière’s characters has long been recognized; however, various critics, including James F. Gaines, emphasize the playwright’s use of paradox and ambiguity in his characterizations. Still other contemporary academics approach Molière’s drama through his use of language, often finding it to be the essence of his comedy.

The Misanthrope *The Misanthrope* premiered in 1666, with Molière himself playing one of the main roles. Although audience and critical reception during its initial run was not positive, scholarly analysis over the following centuries has placed the play among the author’s most important works. According to scholar Martin Turnell, “*The Misanthrope* in the seventeenth century was the connoisseur’s play and a contemporary described it with felicity as ‘une pièce qui fait rire dans l’âme’ [a piece that makes people laugh in the soul]. Its preeminence lies not in greater depth or profundity, but in a greater variety of tone, a wider social reference, more complex and more delicate shades of feeling. It is one of the most personal of Molière’s plays.” W. G. Moore describes it as “a masterpiece, of the same order as the *Divine Comedy* or *Don Quixote*.”

Responses to Literature

1. *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope* are plays that employ several devices of farce. What is farce? Identify the elements of farce found in these works and determine how they support the overall plot, characterization, and meaning of each. How do you think physical action can parallel meaning?
2. According to Molière, what is a misanthrope? Make a list of evidence from *The Misanthrope* to support his

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Molière wrote a series of comic ballets to present as entertainment for King Louis XIV. David Whitton has noted that because the development of this genre is closely linked to royal patronage, the works often offer a glimpse into the social and political situations of the times. Whether written to amuse or to offer social commentary, comic ballets such as the ones listed below have entertained audiences worldwide:

El Güegüense o Macho Ratón (seventeenth century), a drama by an unknown Nicaraguan author. A comedy of high culture now performed as a professional folkloric ballet, the characters in this work reject Spanish control in a mocking and creative way.

The Limpid Stream, Op. 39: A Comedy Ballet in 3 Acts and 4 Scenes (1935), a comic ballet by Dmitri Shostakovich. When ballet dancers from Moscow tour the rural Kuban region, the dancers and farmers discover how much they have in common.

Coppelia (1870), a ballet with music composed by Leo Delibes. Based on E. T. A. Hoffmann’s story “The Sandman,” this ballet about a toymaker who falls in love with a doll he creates is widely regarded as dance’s greatest romantic comedy.

definition. Next, make a list of characteristics that you believe a misanthrope has, formulate your own definition, and then compare your conception of a misanthrope to that of Molière.

3. Molière was a key figure in seventeenth-century French drama. Research other genres of French literature in the seventeenth century, such as poetry, fiction, and nonfiction prose. Who are the key figures in each genre, and what are some of their major works? What general concerns and literary values characterize French literature of this period?
4. Compare the court of King Louis XIV to that of Charles I in England. Which had more influence on writers and artists? Why? What artists in the United States today are controlled by political or activist groups? Why do you think such organizations have power over artistic endeavors?

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📖 Michel de Montaigne

BORN: 1533, Chateau de Montaigne, France

DIED: 1592, Chateau de Montaigne, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Essays (1580)

Overview

French author Michel de Montaigne, the inventor of the essay form as a literary genre, raised introspection to the level of art in his monumental *Essays* (1580). The French *essai* means an experiment, test, or attempt, and such was Montaigne's intention in his writing: to attempt to understand himself, and by extension, the human condition. In so doing, Montaigne extended his questioning



Montaigne Montaigne, photograph. The Library of Congress.

to the very limits of human knowledge. His sustained skepticism contributed to the development of what is today termed “critical thinking,” at the heart of the humanities.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Well-Educated in Youth Montaigne was born Michel Eyquem in 1533 at his family's estate in the district of Perigord, in the Gascony region of France. Although his forebears had long been bourgeois traders, in 1477 his great-grandfather had purchased the chateau of Montaigne, along with the right to add the noble title “de Montaigne” to the family name. Montaigne was the first in his family to drop the name Eyquem, shedding the last traces of his family's roots in commerce. His father, Pierre Eyquem, figures prominently in Montaigne's writing.

Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne took great care in planning his son's education. He sent his son to spend his infancy with peasant godparents, so the future lord of Montaigne might develop a sense of attachment to the lower classes. He also required that the household speak to the boy exclusively in Latin. At age six, Montaigne was sent to the finest school in Bordeaux. He completed its twelve-year curriculum in seven years. His activities after leaving the school are unclear, but it is thought that he studied law, possibly at Toulouse.

Young Magistrate In 1557, Montaigne became a councilor in the Parliament of Bordeaux. He remained a magistrate until 1570, and while he mentions these years infrequently in *Essays*, they had great impact on his life. Scholars have argued that Montaigne's legal training shaped the literary form of his writing by informing his method of analysis and exposition.

At this time, France was ruled by the Valois dynasty, Henry II (who reigned from 1547 to 1549), Charles IX (who reigned from 1560 to 1574), and Henry III (who reigned from 1574 to 1589). France went through a series of Italian wars through the 1550s, which the French lost but gained the influence of the Italian Renaissance. The Reformation became bigger and more bitter as Protestants (known in France as Huguenots) fought Catholics for power. The policy of the French monarchy was generally to suppress Protestantism at home. By the 1560s, the first of eight civil wars broke out in France, dubbed the Wars of Religion, over this divide.

During this period, Montaigne grew very close to a colleague in Parliament, Etienne de La Boetie, who came to be more important to Montaigne than anyone, and was the subject of his famous essay, “On Friendship.” Their friendship was cut short, however, when La Boetie contracted an intestinal ailment. Montaigne hardly left his friend's bedside, even though both men feared that La

Boetie had the plague and might be contagious. La Boetie died in 1563. A few years later, Montaigne married Françoise de La Chassagne, whose father and brother held seats in Parliament. The couple had six daughters, but only one survived to adulthood.

Began Writing Essays At the request of his ailing father, Montaigne translated a theological treatise, *Liber Creaturarum*, by a fifteenth-century Spaniard, Raymond Sebond. The translation marked his first tangible step toward becoming a writer. During the Renaissance, translation was considered an appropriate training for literary endeavor. In 1568, Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne died, leaving his son as the new lord of Montaigne. At thirty-eight years of age, Montaigne surrendered his seat in Parliament, and retired to his estate, to what he hoped would be a life of quiet study and composition. He began the task of writing *Essays*, which would occupy him for the rest of his life.

Montaigne's *Essays* consists of three books and 107 chapters, which range in length from a few paragraphs to over a hundred pages. They treat myriad subjects, from the trivial to the profound—from the author's attitude toward radishes, to his sexual tastes, to his feelings about God. Montaigne's trademark thoughtful skepticism runs throughout the essays. The author took for his motto the words, *Que sais-je?* ("What do I know?").

Diplomatic and Government Service Montaigne composed the early chapters of *Essays* in the wake of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, in which the bodies of slain Huguenots in Paris were thrown into the Seine, turning it red with blood. During this time, he was called upon to act as a negotiator between Henri de Navarre, leader of the Protestant armies (and later King Henry IV of France), and Henri de Guise, the charismatic leader of the Catholic League. Amid his diplomatic and military service, Montaigne was made a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, an office that gave access to the king without requiring residence at court.

The first two books of *Essays* were published in 1580. Montaigne then set out on an extensive journey through France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. He kept a private journal of his trip, which was rediscovered in 1770 and published in 1774 as *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*. While still traveling, Montaigne learned to his dismay that he had been elected mayor of Bordeaux.

Montaigne tried to refuse the responsibility, but finally consented and arrived home after an absence of seventeen months. He served two terms as mayor, from 1581 to 1585, and promoted reforms on behalf of founding children and female prisoners. In addition, he prevented the gentry of Bordeaux from gaining exemption from taxation. In 1588, on a secret mission to King Henry III from Henry of Navarre, he was detained by Protestants. A few months later, Montaigne found himself briefly imprisoned in the Bastille by the Catholics.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Montaigne's famous contemporaries include:

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586): English poet and courtier, who wrote *An Apology for Poetry* (1595).

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618): English poet, courtier, and explorer of the New World. His poems include *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd* (c. 1585).

Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585): French "prince of poets," immensely popular in his time, and prominent in the canon today. His poems include "Hymne de la France" (1549).

Torquato Tasso (1544–1595): Italian poet, known for "Jerusalem Delivered" (1580), a depiction of the siege of Jerusalem during the First Crusade

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593): English dramatist and poet; author of the poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (c. 1590s).

Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603): queen of England, 1558–1603, known as the Virgin Queen, daughter of King Henry VIII.

Catherine de Médicis (1519–1589): queen consort and regent of France; mother of French kings Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III.

Revised Essays Despite the demands of public office, Montaigne did not abandon his literary endeavors. A second, expanded edition of *Essays* was published in 1582. For the next six years, Montaigne continued to make editorial changes to the existing chapters and to write new essays. In 1588, he combined both the revised and the new essays into a third edition, which would be the last published during his lifetime. Montaigne died at his home on September 13, 1592.

Works in Literary Context

As a child, Montaigne received the careful attention of private tutors. The Latin works of the ancient Romans, such as Ovid, Virgil, and Plautus, constituted his pleasure reading. One of his favorite books was Seneca's *Epistles to Lucilius*, and the early chapters of his *Essays* cite and paraphrase it abundantly. With its lessons of self-mastery in the face of adversity, Seneca's Stoic philosophy must have seemed well suited to the times.

Contending with the Classics Seneca's epistles also influenced the literary form Montaigne was elaborating, for Montaigne expresses admiration for the epistolary form. On a more general level, *Essays* grew almost organically out of Montaigne's notes on Seneca—and, indeed, on many other books. The practice of marginalia (writing commentary in the margins) was an important factor

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The essay, the literary genre associated with Montaigne, is a powerful format for communicating ideas analytically and persuasively. The following are among the world's most famous essays.

- Moral Epistles* (64 B.C.E.), by Seneca the Younger. These letters by the ancient Roman philosopher-playwright were one of the inspirations for Montaigne's writings.
- "A Modest Proposal" (1729), by Jonathan Swift. In this satirical pamphlet Swift suggests that in tough economic times, the Irish should consider selling poor children to be consumed by the wealthy.
- Common Sense* (1776), by Thomas Paine. This pamphlet, one of the best-selling pieces of literature in eighteenth-century America, helped persuade Americans to revolt against British rule.
- "Self-Reliance" (1841), by Ralph Waldo Emerson. This essay outlines many of the precepts of nineteenth-century Transcendental philosophy. Emerson encourages the reader to follow his or her own instincts and to appreciate the beauty of nature.
- "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), by George Orwell. In this essay, a devastating critique of imperialism, Orwell recounts how he was forced to shoot an elephant in occupied Burma.
- "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" (1962), by James Baldwin. In this essay, Baldwin eloquently analyzes race and religion in America.

shaping the genesis of his text. *Essays* resembles a compendium of ancient philosophy and history. Montaigne quotes and paraphrases such ancients as Plutarch, Aristotle, Cicero, and Caesar. He thus established the literary principle of the seventeenth century: respect for and imitation of the classics. However, Montaigne's references highlight discrepancies, rather than continuities, between these thinkers. The intellectual technique of weighing one idea or one author against another defines the essay as Montaigne invented it.

Radical Skepticism In *Essays*, Montaigne's literary and philosophical preoccupations converge. The unifying concept is honest introspection and self-discovery. Commentators assert that beyond Montaigne's egoism lies a higher purpose. Believing as he did that he, as one man, manifested within himself the quintessential humanity common to all people, Montaigne held that in seeking to understand his individual self, he was examining the universal traits of humanity. His approach is informal and meandering. He moves from one subject to another, following a train of thought or an association of ideas.

This rambling, intimate style and unpretentious manner foster a sense of camaraderie between writer and reader that largely accounts for the work's success.

Classical and contemporary quotations are liberally sprinkled throughout *Essays*, testifying to Montaigne's wide range of knowledge. Scholars have traced in his work the influence of a wide array of thinkers beyond Seneca, including Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics. But by far the most consistent element of Montaigne's thought is Pyrronism, or radical skepticism. He holds that presumption blinds a thinker, making one too willing to think one knows what one does not know. He shares Socrates' belief that awareness of one's ignorance is the key to wisdom.

The Subject of Self The early chapters of *Essays* are similar to Renaissance miscellanies (a collection of literary works, originally of poems), a contemporary genre defined by its variety. But as his project developed, Montaigne departed from this model. His essays fall outside the literary conventions of his era, both because of their skepticism and their author's intention to compose a multidimensional self-portrait.

Influence The centrality that Montaigne accorded to the self earned him illustrious admirers and imitators. Countless writers and thinkers have been influenced by his ideas and his literary style, including Francis Bacon, William Shakespeare, René Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. One prominent detractor was the seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who denounced Montaigne's decision to focus upon himself. He decried Montaigne's work as impious and vain, as well as intellectually specious in its meandering technique.

Works in Critical Context

Montaigne's towering achievements—the invention of a powerful method of written expression, and the assertion of the personal perspective in literature—have fascinated critics for centuries. Critics have also long debated the ideas and opinions in Montaigne's most famous pieces—subjects such as friendship, religion, humanism, monarchy, the discovery of the New World, and the aptitudes of women. Ultimately, many conclude, it is not Montaigne's answers that matter, but his questions; not his precise philosophy, but his method of exploring it; not the conclusions he drew, but the self-examination he undertook.

Essays With *Essays*, scholars have carefully studied him from a stylistic viewpoint, considering him a pioneer of the essay form, specifically the genre of the personal essay. As Joseph Epstein expressed it in *Commentary*, Montaigne "put the capital I, the first person, into literature, and while he was at it also invented the essay." The self that Montaigne laid bare in his essays, although it contains numerous ambiguities and apparent contradictions,

affords an unusually complete and panoramic view of the individual soul.

The nature of Montaigne's self-representation within his essays has been studied by a number of critics. Hope H. Glidden in *Renaissance Quarterly*, for example, maintains that Montaigne's strategy was to warn his readers "that the man and his words are not one . . . the face of Montaigne is laid bare but its very openness cannot be taken at face value." Much of the scholarship in *Essays* is devoted to the discovery and acknowledgment of the many ambiguities and apparent contradictions within the text.

Responses to Literature

1. Write an analysis of one or two of Montaigne's essays. What procedures does he use to explore a subject?
2. How does Montaigne's focus on self-knowledge enhance, or detract from, the persuasiveness of his arguments? Write an essay that explains your conclusions.
3. Consider the ways that Montaigne quotes from and refers to classical authors. What are his objectives in compiling and commenting on other works? Create a presentation that outlines your findings.
4. Scholars have debated the influence of numerous philosophers on Montaigne's thinking. Does he take a consistent philosophical stand throughout *Essays* or do his views evolve as the work progresses? Write an essay that outlines your argument.
5. Identify some instances where Montaigne violates literary conventions or expectations, especially when discussing controversial subjects. Explore the purposes, and the effects, of such transgressions in a paper.

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Eugenio Montale

BORN: 1896, Genoa, Italy

DIED: 1981, Milan, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Cuttlefish Bones (1925)

The Customs House and Other Poems (1932)

Occasions (1939)

The Storm, and Other Poems (1956)

Miscellany (1962)

Overview

Eugenio Montale, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1975, is considered one of the most important voices of modernism in twentieth-century poetry. His poetry, from the first publications in the 1920s to his complete works that appeared in 1981, is a touchstone for all those who seek to understand the potential and achievement of twentieth-century verse.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood on the Ligurian Coast Montale was born in Genoa in 1896 into a wealthy family. He spent his childhood and early adult years in Genoa and in the Cinque Terre, a rugged coastal area south of the city, where his family had a summer residence. That Ligurian coast, with its then unspoiled beauty, and the Mediterranean Sea spreading out beneath the rocky cliffs, figure prominently in his first collection of poetry, *Cuttlefish Bones* (1925).



Eugenio Montale Keystone / Getty Images

Montale attended school until the age of fourteen, when poor health prevented further formal education. In 1915 Montale decided to dedicate himself to the study of bel canto (a style of operatic singing), but his musical career was cut short by the death of his maestro, Ernesto Sivori, in 1916. Music, within Montale's poetry, is not only incidental or thematic but functions as a constitutive element of his poetics and subsequent verse. Montale himself emphasized how music and poetry have an indissoluble tie between them.

War and Its Aftermath In 1917 World War I (which had been raging since 1914) intervened, and from 1917 to 1919 Montale served as a soldier, mostly in the Trentino region and in and around Genoa. Unlike some contemporary poets, whose poetry was heavily conditioned by wartime experiences, Montale did not incorporate many direct personal or collective references to those difficult times into his subsequent poetry. There is no doubt, however, that the war was a watershed for all Italian intellectuals and artists. For some, the destruction of the old order was cause for rejoicing; for others, the war was a cause for increased disorientation and somber reflection on what the future might bring.

After the war, Montale returned to his family home and continued to frequent the literary circles of Genoa and Turin, where he had already begun to develop friend-

ships. He was an autodidact (he never studied for a university degree), immersing himself in readings of philosophy, Italian classics, and an eclectic selection of foreign writers. In 1922 he met the antifascist intellectual Piero Gobetti, who was one of the most important influences on the diffident young poet and who published *Cuttlefish Bones*. Gobetti's open anti-D'Annunzianism (opposing the ideas of fascist poet Gabriele d'Annunzio), as well as his informed interest in the increasingly potent intellectual hegemony of Crocean idealism (based on the philosophy of liberal-thinker Benedetto Croce), fed strongly into Montale's own development.

The publication of *Cuttlefish Bones* established Montale as a poet worthy of serious critical attention. Contemporary critics praised it as an event of lasting importance that presented an authentically new voice. Rather than feelings about the war, Montale's poems in this collection reflect the harsh terrain of the Ligurian coast and the Mediterranean below, his beloveds, and the constant search for an escape from necessity.

Journal and Newspaper Work Upon leaving the military after World War I, Montale returned to Genoa, cofounded a short-lived literary journal in 1922, and began contributing poems, articles, and reviews to newspapers and magazines. After relocating to Florence, where he worked for the publisher Bemporad for a year beginning in 1927, he assumed the directorship of the Gabinetto Vieusseux Library, a position he held for a decade before being forced to resign due to his antifascist sympathies.

After his dismissal from the Vieusseux, Montale lived on translations and journalistic writing, and he continued to write poetry. During the years of World War II he led a relatively quiet, if troubled, existence in Florence, working primarily as a translator and as the poetry critic of *La fiera letteraria*. He joined the staff of a Milan daily paper, *Corriere della sera*, in 1948. During his career with *Corriere della sera*, Montale functioned as a literary editor and music critic and served in the latter capacity until his death.

The second major collection of Montale's poetry, *Occasions*, includes the poems of the 1925 volume as well as many new poems. In Italian, "occasions" signify not just occurrences or casual events but also rare moments of illumination and epiphany, literally "opportunities" that the poet re-creates in brief lyrical flashes. The poems of this period (1928–1940) are generally thought of as Montale's most hermetic, both in terms of their extreme thematic privacy and their formal compression. Not all contemporary critics were pleased with this new approach, however.

Widespread Recognition In 1956 Montale published his third major collection of verse, *The Storm, and Other Poems*. The verses in this collection are filled with his emotion toward the Mediterranean landscape. The thematic variety is matched by stylistic virtuosity as

Montale experiments with the sonnet form, the madrigal, and the prose poem, which points up the deep connection between prose and poetry that emerges more vividly in his collections that follow. The decades after the publication of *The Storm, and Other Poems* were filled with public recognition of Montale's work. In 1961 he was awarded honorary degrees from the Universities of Rome, Milan, and Cambridge; in 1967 he was named Senator for Life (an honorific membership in the Italian Senate). Yet, as the 1960s progressed (and following his wife's death in 1963), he became less and less involved in the social and literary circles of Milanese society in which he had formerly moved.

Italian culture and society both had been radically transformed in the postwar years, and poets were following new directions and seeking forms of expression totally unrelated to Montale's generation. The so-called neoavant-garde sought to sweep away ancient and more recent tradition alike, and Montale was in danger of becoming a sort of living relic. The surprise was enormous, therefore, when he published a hefty collection of new verse in 1971 under the title of *Satura*. Surprise modulated into something like astonishment when this work was followed by others. The "unprolific" poet whose production seemed destined to consist of three collections was a writer of great productivity in his old age. This new outpouring of work prompted the Nobel Prize committee to award him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1975.

Montale died on September 12, 1981, exactly a month before his eighty-fifth birthday. His long life was relatively uneventful on the surface, but his poetry is deeply reflective of the eventfulness and complexity of his inner life where he absorbed the trials, the lessons, and the continuing search for answers that characterize human experience. His is undeniably a modern voice, attuned to the times in which he lived and wrote, but it is also a voice with a timeless pitch, expressing the transcendent music of poetry. Unable to offer concrete solutions to existential and spiritual dilemmas, Montale's poetry nonetheless retains an abiding power in its formal beauty, its incisive and intelligent consciousness and conscience, and its commitment to the importance of the individual and to that which is unrepeatable in life and in art.

Works in Literary Context

Montale's poetry affirmed a belief in human dignity and the ultimate value of existence, but it also expressed pessimism at the disparity between human spiritual aspirations and the reality of our condition. His existentially profound poetry is conveyed in deeply personal and impressionistic terms, in contrast to the embellished, formal style that predominated in Italy in the early decades of the twentieth century. According to Montale, "I wanted to free the music in words, apply them to reality,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Montale's famous contemporaries include:

- Benito Mussolini** (1883–1945): Fascist statesman who led Italy from 1922 until the end of World War II.
- André Breton** (1896–1966): French writer who was one of the main founders of the surrealist movement.
- Henry de Montherlant** (1896–1972): French novelist and playwright noted for his nonconformism and controversial themes.
- Paul Éluard** (1895–1952): French poet who helped found the surrealist movement.
- William Faulkner** (1897–1962): American author who is widely regarded as one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century; he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949.
- Alfredo Bracchi** (1897–1976): Italian author who wrote popular song lyrics and movie scripts.
- Federico García Lorca** (1898–1936): Spanish poet and playwright who was killed at the beginning of the Spanish civil war.

and in transcending mere depiction, capture what is essential." Because of its subjectivity, Montale's verse often verges on impenetrable, leading some critics to label him a hermetic poet.

Precursors and Influences Montale completely absorbed the Italian lyric tradition, from Dante Alighieri to Petrarch to Giacomo Leopardi, and including Montale's immediate precursors: the *crepuscolari* (twilight poets) and futurists. His poetry further reveals the extraordinary importance of certain antimodels, especially Gabriele D'Annunzio and Benedetto Croce, whose art and philosophy, respectively, dominated Montale's formative years. Although, like T. S. Eliot—to whom his work has often been compared—Montale can be seen ultimately as a philosophical poet. He himself refused this label, insisting that he sought not to promote ideas but rather to seek knowledge, however partial, of individual as well as collective truths about the human condition.

Themes and Stylistic Elements Montale was a metaphysical poet whose art probes and questions both personal and collective historical experience as well as the eternal questions of the meaning of existence, the role of love, and the place of humankind. In Montale's first major verse collection, *Cuttlefish Bones*, the sea and shore of the Ligurian coast near Genoa serve as symbols of the poet's emotional and mental states. Here Montale not only conveys the ethical and metaphysical anguish that was palpable in the aftermath of World War I but also

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While Montale's poetry expressed a bleak view of modern life, it was also characterized by a persistent hope and the recognition of human dignity. Here are some other works with a similar view:

The Waste Land (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. This modernist poem uses satire and prophecy to express both despair and hope.

Swan Song (1987), a novel by Robert McCammon. This science fiction novel depicts a nuclear apocalypse and the evolution of humanity that follows.

Arlington Park (2007), a novel by Rachel Cusk. This novel explores the difficulties of modern life by following a group of young mothers through the course of one day.

explores what he perceives as ungovernable forces that shape human experience. The poems register loneliness, exhaustion, and despair, and ultimately offer no solutions to the poet's anxiety. Later volumes incorporate some of these motifs and introduce new emphases as well.

There is a kind of dramatic progression that accompanies Montale's poetic development. In *Cuttlefish Bones*, personal considerations such as memory, identity, and the relation of the self with the outside world are paramount. In his later collections, *Occasions* and *The Storm, and Other Poems*, these same concerns are viewed in the more complex historical context of the threat to civilized values posed by the brutal forces of war and fascism.

A saving constant for the poet in this period and a compelling presence in much of his poetry is a symbolic female figure identified as "Clizia" or "Volpe." By her very nature, she is opposed to the forces of darkness. She is an idealized lover or the embodiment of goodness and strength. The poet addresses his deepest concerns for himself and humanity to these angelic beings and draws hope and inspiration from them.

Works in Critical Context

Montale is widely regarded as one of the dominant voices of modernism, not only within the context of Italian letters but also internationally. When comparing Montale to other poets, critics usually mention T. S. Eliot and Dante Alighieri. His disinterest in realism and his use of external phenomena—landscape, historical events, and physical objects—as a means of revealing thoughts and states of mind has led commentators to observe the influence of the symbolist poets in his work. Montale's focus on psychological and emotional states renders his verse subjective and sometimes inscrutable, leading to occasional accusations of intentional obscurity.

The publication of *Cuttlefish Bones* established Montale as a poet worthy of serious critical attention, but it was after *The Storm, and Other Poems* that he received considerable public recognition. The attention given Montale by renowned and respected critics such as Gianfranco Contini, Alfredo Gargiulo, and, later, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo and Glauco Cambon, among many others in Italy and elsewhere, has not abated. The first collection was not universally acclaimed, but for the most part, contemporary critics praised it as an event of lasting importance that presented an authentically new voice.

Cuttlefish Bones When *Cuttlefish Bones* was published in 1925, it was widely regarded as a success. Literary scholar G. Singh declares, "It is...those poems specifically grouped under the title [*Cuttlefish Bones*] that reveal Montale's art at its best." Singh also asserts that Montale was an artist of consistent quality, even in this first collection: "The most conspicuous characteristic of [*Cuttlefish Bones*] is its strikingly uniform level of maturity—a maturity that does not depend on, and cannot therefore be explained in terms of, the stages of development one can often trace in the works and careers of other poets." Alfred Corn seems to agree, noting that the book "makes the impression it does not only because of its serious thematic concerns but also because of Montale's careful craftsmanship."

Responses to Literature

1. Although he was accused of antifascist tendencies by the fascist government of Italy, Montale remained largely apolitical in his views and works. After reading several poems, hold a group discussion and determine if there are any underlying political messages in his works. What do his political messages suggest?
2. Montale rarely used real places, objects, or events in his poetry. Select one poem and note where his themes and images might benefit from the inclusion of external phenomena.
3. Montale's poetry focuses on psychological and emotional states while generally excluding external descriptions. Write a poem or set of poems that recreates a psychological or emotional state without making use of external description.
4. Montale often expressed a negative view of modern life that also included the hope that things could and would be better. Write an essay or poem expressing your view on the present-day world and outlining your hopes for the future.

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❑ Lucy Maud Montgomery

BORN: 1874, Clifton, Prince Edward Island, Canada

DIED: 1942, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Novels, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

Anne of Green Gables (1908)

Chronicles of Avonlea (1912)

Emily of New Moon (1923)

The Blue Castle (1926)

Emily's Quest (1927)

Overview

A popular and financially successful writer, Lucy Maud (or L. M.) Montgomery MacDonald is considered one of Canada's best-known and most enduring authors of children's fiction. Although she wrote many works for adults—romantic novels, short stories, poetry, an autobiography, and *Courageous Women* (1934), a collection of biographical sketches—her books for young readers are her most important achievement. They emphasize the imaginative, emotional, and nostalgic aspects of childhood and adoles-



L.M. Montgomery *Montgomery, L.M., photograph*. Public Archives of Canada.

cence while underscoring the importance of their Prince Edward Island settings. Characterized by both realism and sentimentality, they document the conflicts and successes of heroines who are motherless or orphaned.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Child's Respite in Books and Writing Lucy Maud Montgomery was born on November 30, 1874, in Clifton, Prince Edward Island. Her parents, Hugh Montgomery, a former sea captain turned merchant, and Clara Macneill Montgomery, came from large, long-established, and eminent Prince Edward Island families. Clara Montgomery died before her daughter, always known as Maud, was two years old. Montgomery's grief-stricken father sent her to live with her elderly, strict Presbyterian maternal grandparents at their isolated farmhouse in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island.

Montgomery was a solitary child, sensitive, imaginative, and rather out of place in her grandparents' household. She found respite in books, notably, works by Dickens, Scott, Byron, and Longfellow, and in writing stories and poems of her own, a talent that she developed at a very early age. She also enjoyed the company of her many cousins and later school friends.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Montgomery's famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922): Esteemed Scottish scientist and inventor best known for his invention of the telephone.

Charles Talbut Onions (C. T. Onions) (1873–1975): English grammarian and lexicographer best known for his collaborative work on *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

James W. Tate (1875–1922): Pianist, composer, songwriter, accompanist, and producer of popular pantomimes and revues.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator, author, and leader of the African American community. Washington, a former slave, led a teacher's college for blacks and eventually became a spokesman for African Americans.

In 1890 her father, now remarried and with a new family, asked Montgomery to join him in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and she spent the next year in the Canadian West. She found her stepmother uncongenial (she was expected to serve as an unpaid maid and nanny and was kept home from school for months) and her father too busy with a variety of enterprises—business, political, and social—to be much of a companion. However, she soon made several close friends. She was thrilled in November 1890 when her first published work, a poem, appeared in the Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island *Daily Patriot*. She was equally excited to return to Prince Edward Island in August 1891.

Trading Teaching for Writing In 1893 Montgomery went to Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown to prepare for a teaching career. She taught in rural schools for three years, finding the work rather taxing and less rewarding than she had hoped, but she was able to devote several hours a day to writing. By the mid-1890s she had achieved moderate success as a writer, having had many stories and poems published for money.

Montgomery's grandfather died in 1898, and for the next thirteen years, with the exception of a brief stint in 1901 as a reporter for a Halifax newspaper, she lived with and cared for her aging grandmother in Cavendish. Her life there was very constrained, but she found enjoyment in writing. During this time Montgomery produced poems and stories, which, by the early 1900s, provided considerable income. During this time she also began two of her most important long-term friendships, based almost entirely on correspondence, with Canadian teacher Ephraim Weber and Scottish journalist G. B. MacMillan. In

her long letters to these sympathetic friends she was able to express her hopes and fears as a writer.

Success with Anne In 1907 Montgomery's previously rejected first novel was accepted by a publisher. In 1908 *Anne of Green Gables*, the appealing story of an imaginative, irrepressible, red-headed orphan girl who was adopted by two elderly Prince Edward Islanders was published by the L. C. Page Company of Boston. The story was clearly inspired by Montgomery's own childhood in Prince Edward Island with her grandparents. It was an immediate and tremendous success with readers of all ages and both sexes. Montgomery wrote to a friend, "Anne seems to have hit the public taste." Among the thousands of fan letters Montgomery received was one from Mark Twain, who described her heroine as "the dearest and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice." A sequel, *Anne of Avonlea*, followed in 1909 and, despite not having received very favorable royalty terms from her publisher, Montgomery's professional and financial success was assured. Eventually, eight *Anne* books would be published.

Montgomery's grandmother died in March of 1911. Four months later the author married Ewan MacDonald, a Presbyterian minister to whom she had been secretly engaged for five years. After a honeymoon in the British Isles, the MacDonalds returned to Canada, where Ewan resumed his pastoral duties in Leaskdale, Ontario. Montgomery found that being a minister's wife involved endless rounds of meetings, sewing bees, Sunday school classes, choir practice, and visits. To these responsibilities she soon added those of a mother, with sons Chester born in 1912 and Stuart in 1915. Despite her hectic schedule, she continued to write.

Growing Appreciation of Her Work World War I was a source of great concern to Montgomery, and her relief over the end of the war was soon overwhelmed by a series of travails. In January 1919 her cousin and closest friend, Frederica Campbell, died. Later in the same year her husband suffered an attack of what was termed "religious melancholia," a feeling of hopeless certainty of eternal damnation. After several months Ewan recovered, but he remained subject to attacks at irregular and unpredictable intervals for the rest of his life. Henceforth, Ewan became a source of chronic anxiety for Montgomery. In addition, in 1920 she became engaged in a series of acrimonious, expensive, and very trying lawsuits with publisher L. C. Page, which dragged on until Montgomery finally won in 1929.

Montgomery did find consolations in the 1920s, however. Her growing sons were always a source of delight and pride to her. In 1926 the family moved to Norval, Ontario, where Ewan became the minister of a smaller congregation. In the early 1920s Montgomery created a new, highly autobiographical heroine, *Emily of New Moon*, who proved nearly as popular as Anne. Her achievements were recognized in 1923 when she became the first Canadian woman to be named a fellow of the Royal Society of

Arts in England. She was further honored in August 1927 when she was asked to meet the visiting Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) and Stanley Baldwin, the British prime minister and *Anne of Green Gables* fan.

Accolades and Anxieties Montgomery's successes and anxieties continued through the 1930s. Several of her new juvenile books were well received. She was invested with the Order of the British Empire in 1935, and in 1936 the Canadian government created a national park on Prince Edward Island in and around Cavendish because of the renown Montgomery's books had brought the area. Ewan's health, however, was her primary concern. In 1935, after a series of physical ailments, he had a complete breakdown and was institutionalized for months. He slowly improved, but, overwhelmed by stress, Montgomery had a brief breakdown of her own. In 1935 Ewan retired, and the MacDonalds moved to Toronto, where their sons were at college. Ewan and Montgomery both had breakdowns again in 1937, but both recovered, and by the spring of 1939 Montgomery wrote that she was feeling better than she had in years.

Her recovery was of short duration, however. The outbreak of World War II depressed her greatly. Ewan's health declined, and, after a bad fall in 1940, Montgomery herself became very ill. Her condition worsened in 1941, and she died on April 24, 1942.

The author of more than twenty books and hundreds of short stories and poems, Montgomery never felt she had achieved what she had aimed for—her “great” book. She was appreciative of her financial and popular successes and felt that her work was well done as far as it went, but she recognized and regretted her limitations. Serious critics agreed with her, and for years she was dismissed as a hack writer of children's books. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, as part of their search for a unique Canadian identity, Canadian scholars devoted a great deal of attention to L. M. Montgomery and the continued popularity of her works.

Works in Literary Context

Throughout her career Montgomery struggled with an inner conflict: whether to satisfy public taste by writing profitable light romances or fulfill her own desire and produce a serious literary work. She never realized that with *Anne of Green Gables* she had produced a classic.

The Childhood of an Orphan Having been raised by strict disciplinarian grandparents in an otherwise lonely atmosphere, Montgomery began to read a great deal. When she began writing, it was “with an exhaustive, unforgiving memory of what a thin-skinned, imaginative child can suffer and an unquenchable delight in children's pleasures,” wrote Frances Frazer in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Montgomery's own mother died before she was two years old, and her father left her to be cared for by her grandparents. This absence of typical parental figures is reflected in her two most famous fictional creations, Anne Shirley and Emily Starr. Both are

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

“Youth is not a vanished thing,” Montgomery once wrote, “but something that dwells forever in the heart.” Here are a few works by writers who reach back into their own childhoods for inspiration:

Little House on the Prairie (1935), a novel by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Part of a literary series known collectively as the Little House series, these stories feature a hard-working family who lives in the untamed West of the United States in the late nineteenth century.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), a novel by Harper Lee. Lee based her novel about racial tensions on an event that happened in her hometown in Alabama when she was ten years old.

Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948), a novel by Truman Capote. Capote, a childhood friend of *To Kill a Mockingbird* author Harper Lee, wrote this, his first novel, based on his youthful experiences in Alabama.

Claudine at School (1900), a novel by Colette. This novel and other “Claudine” novels by Colette present a roughly autobiographical sketch of a sometimes shockingly forthright girl growing up in France.

girls who become orphaned at a young age, yet remain optimistic and good-natured despite their hardships.

Works in Critical Context

Montgomery's critical reception has been mixed. Many critics label her works nonliterary, pointing to her use of excessive sentiment, flowery prose, and inconsistent characterization. Montgomery's plots and characters are sometimes regarded as derivative, and she is censured for not representing real growth except in Emily and Anne. Some critics hold that Anne's appeal diminishes as she gets older and more conservative. Others say that none of Montgomery's works equaled her first book. Most reviewers, however, commend her as a true storyteller whose charm and honesty transcend her faults. Montgomery “remembered exactly how it was to be a child,” explained Jean Little in *L. M. Montgomery: An Assessment*. “More than that,” Little continues, “she was able to record the experience of being a child so faithfully and vividly that reading children, years later, find themselves in her stories.” So it was, especially, with *Anne of Green Gables*.

Anne of Green Gables (1908) *Anne of Green Gables*, the appealing story of an imaginative, irrepressible, red-headed orphan girl who is adopted by two elderly Prince Edward Islanders, remains Montgomery's greatest popular success. It was performed as a play in 1937, made into two filmed versions in the United States

in 1921 and 1934, adapted for a British television series in 1972 and two Canadian (CBC) TV films (*Anne* in 1985 and *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* in 1987).

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne finds the subject of good behavior troubling. What does it mean to the characters in the story to be “good”? Why do you think good behavior is so important? Do any of the characters stray from the rules? How? Does Anne change her attitude and behavior, and if so, how? Why?
2. Montgomery loved fashionable clothes and looking smart. Her attitude toward fashion can be seen in the novel. What role does fashion play in it? What do the characters’ attitudes about fashion reveal about themselves, and how do these attitudes affect their relationships with one another?

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Henry de Montherlant

BORN: 1896, Paris, France

DIED: 1972, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Bachelors (1934)

The Costals Tetralogy (1936–1939)

Malatesta (1949)

Port-Royal (1954)

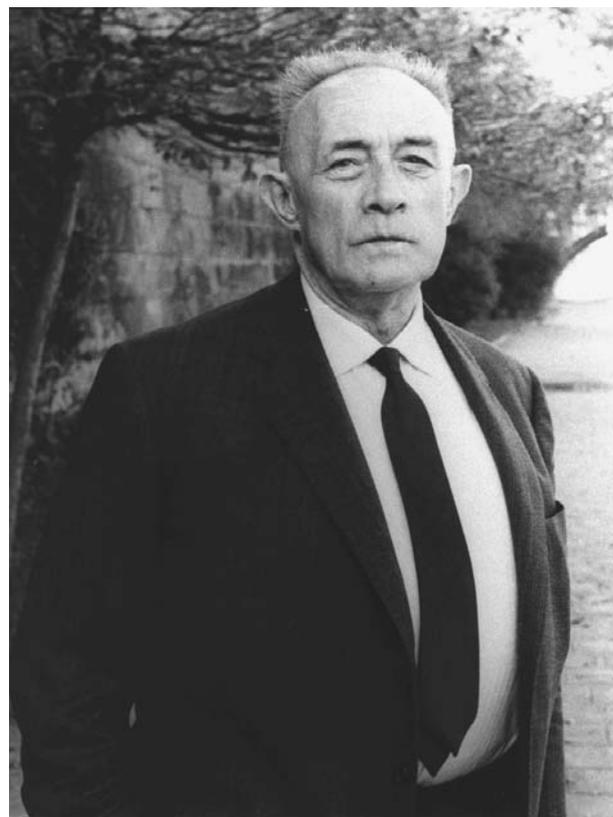
The Civil War (1965)

Overview

Henry de Montherlant was a nonconformist, and his plays, novels, and essays reflect his own experiences, particularly those he had as a soldier in World War I in addition to his personal, and controversial, relationships. Eager to provoke life as the heroes in his works do, Montherlant questioned the norms of society and valued experiences that produced intense emotions. Although created after the decadent period, his work is often classified as having decadent themes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Secrets Kept in Early Life Born in Paris, Montherlant was extremely close to his mother as a young boy, perhaps because she had almost died giving birth to him. His grandmother was also an important figure in his life, and he shared her home for years. On a trip with his grandmother, Montherlant discovered his fascination



Henry de Montherlant *Montherlant, Henry de*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

with bullfighting, a sport that lends color to much of his early work and inspired his second novel *Les Bestiaux* (1926). He also developed a keen interest in early Greek and Roman culture, which would be intrinsic to his writings in years to come.

Just as Montherlant was preparing for his baccalaureate exam at a private Catholic high school, he was dismissed for homosexual conduct. He could not forget the shame he endured from the public scandal, but he eventually passed his baccalaureate exam and, in 1912, began studying law. From then on, he kept his personal life hidden from view and adopted the pose of a compulsive womanizer in his works.

Military Experience and Adventures Abroad At the outbreak of World War I, Montherlant intended to enlist in the army, but his ailing mother begged him to delay his entrance. When she died in 1915, he applied to the army again, but his poor health kept him from being accepted until 1917. His frontline military experience influenced his first novel, *Le Songe* (1922).

The year 1925 proved a turning point in Montherlant's life. Because of his grandmother's death, nothing kept him at the family home at Neuilly. He moved to an apartment in Paris, and for the next thirteen years he treated it only as storage space: He did not even unpack his trunks. He traveled widely instead, in search of exotic experiences. Montherlant went to Spain (where he fought bulls and was more than once gored by them), and from Spain he traveled to North Africa.

During the late 1920s and the 1930s, Montherlant established a solid notoriety as a particularly caustic and even iconoclastic novelist, publishing such acclaimed works as *The Bachelors* (1934). *The Costals Tetralogy*, published from 1936 to 1939, made him famous, but even before publishing these works, he had already produced a substantial body of fiction, all of it stylish, sophisticated, and more or less shocking to conventional readers.

Montherlant tried his hand at drama as well during this period, penning *Pasiphae* (1936). The play examines the psychological life of the mother of the mythological beast called the minotaur.

A Nazi Collaborator? When World War II erupted in Europe in 1939, Montherlant became an unofficial war correspondent for the magazine *Marianne*, and was once wounded by the flying remnants from the explosion of a nearby bomb. He also took part in civic duties. He was jailed for a time after publishing seemingly pro-Nazi material, but he was later released. Nevertheless, after World War II, although not charged for collaboration with the Germans or the Vichy government (the German-controlled government of occupied France), Montherlant appeared in various newspapers on lists of traitors that included such writers as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Robert Brasillach, Marcel Jouhandeau, and Jean Giono.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Montherlant's famous contemporaries include:

Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894–1961): Céline was a French author who influenced the development of twentieth-century writing through his pioneering style and controversial works.

André Breton (1896–1966): Breton was a French writer who was one of the main founders of the surrealist movement.

John Dos Passos (1896–1970): Dos Passos was an American novelist whose nonlinear and stream-of-consciousness style had a major influence on twentieth-century fiction.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980): Piaget was a Swiss psychologist best known for his studies on children that led to his theory of cognitive development.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): De Beauvoir was a French novelist and philosopher best known for her pioneering work in feminism, *The Second Sex* (1949).

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Camus was a French author, philosopher, and journalist associated with the existentialist movement. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957.

Writing Plays Montherlant's early career was dominated by writing fiction, but as he grew older he began concentrating on writing plays. In *La Reine morte* (*The Dead Queen*; 1942), one of Montherlant's most popular plays, a king's political ambitions are upset by his son's secret marriage, and the king goes into a state of self-examination. *La Ville dont le Prince est un enfant* (1951) explores the intimate relationship of two boys at a Catholic school, a plot seemingly drawn from the scandal of Montherlant's own school days.

Later Life Montherlant continued to write to the end of his life. In the last phase of his life—during the late 1960s and the early 1970s—he returned to his first love, the novel, while still enjoying success in the theater with plays already written. Montherlant became obsessed with suicide, often writing about it in his notebooks. In 1972, after battling ill health for years, he took his own life.

Works in Literary Context

Misogyny Many critics have labeled Montherlant's work, particularly *The Costals Tetralogy* anti-female. In the novels that make up the collection, the central character, Pierre Costals, a successful writer modeled after Montherlant, finds the relationships between traditional couples horrifying because they lead to boredom, inevitably limit personal freedom, and end in a slow and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Montherlant had a lifelong fascination with bulls and bullfighting. Here are some other works centered around bulls:

Blood and Sand (1922), a film directed by Fred Niblo. This silent movie starred the famous Rudolph Valentino as a poor village boy who grows up to become a famous matador.

The Sun Also Rises (1926), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. This novel about the spiritually and morally exhausted “lost generation” of the 1920s follows a band of hard-drinking sophisticates on a trip to Pamplona, Spain for the Feast of San Fermin and the famous running of the bulls. Hemingway’s own fascination with bull fighting is clearly evident in the novel.

The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break (2003), a novel by Steven Sherrill. In this novel, the mythological half-man half-bull minotaur survives the millennia since his birth and winds up living in a trailer park in the Deep South and working as a cook in a barbecue restaurant.

torturous death. Critics have noted that in these novels, women are, to both Costals and Montherlant, manipulative, silly, and insincere beings, physically and intellectually inferior to men. However, Costals, unlike Montherlant, does not reject relationships with women and even accepts the idea of marriage with a woman who could give him children and act as a secretary, thus facilitating his work.

In her highly influential feminist work, *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir writes that for Montherlant, “The ideal woman is perfectly stupid and obedient; she is always ready to serve a man without ever asking for anything in return.” Although Montherlant’s novels may appear relentlessly antifeminist to contemporary readers, his ideas aligned with the more-or-less-accepted attitude toward women in the early 1900s. In fact, de Beauvoir suggests that Montherlant actually provoked women to speak up for themselves and thus initiated a feminist movement. She writes, “We should congratulate Montherlant for demystifying the eternal woman, because it is by rejecting the idea of womanhood that women can finally assert themselves as human beings.”

Decadence Although Montherlant’s work was published in the twentieth century, he seems heavily influenced by the decadence movement in French literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. Such writers as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine rejected conventional morality and reveled in excesses of the senses writing poetry laced with high emotion and

personal symbolism. Montherlant’s seems to have taken up the rallying cry of these poets: “*épater le bourgeois*”—“shock the middle class.”

Works in Critical Context

Montherlant was admired and praised by many notable writers and disliked by as many others. Much of the controversy surrounding Montherlant’s writings concerned his topics, even though he wrote in the style of men like Ernest Hemingway, praising war and bullfighting, and characterizing women as weak and a bother to men.

Disagreement Among Critics In 1961 Justin O’Brien wrote of Montherlant: “Many articulate Frenchmen had seen him as the greatest living writer of France.” O’Brien cited André Gide and Albert Camus as being among Montherlant’s prominent admirers. O’Brien later praised Montherlant: “However much he feels himself to be out of harmony with our time, Henry de Montherlant will live as one of the outstanding writers of the century.”

Some critics disagree with this analysis. Simone de Beauvoir wrote: “Montherlant wishes woman to be contemptible.” She continued that for Montherlant “love and friendship are trifles, scorn prevents action. He does not believe in art for art’s sake, and he does not believe in God. There remains only the immanence of pleasure.”

Responses to Literature

1. Critics have noted that the themes of war, sex, and individuality permeate Montherlant’s works. Read one of Montherlant’s novels. With a classmate, brainstorm a list of other themes that can be identified. Then, note some specific examples from the text that illustrate these themes.
2. Montherlant has been accused of both hating and fearing women. Read one of Montherlant’s novels (perhaps the one you read for the previous assignment). Write an essay in which you analyze a female character and discuss whether or not you see Montherlant’s hate and/or fear reflected in her development. Use examples from the text to prove your point.
3. Montherlant’s alleged misogyny has driven some feminist critics to dismiss his works, while it has led others to indicate that he, as Simone de Beauvoir stated, “provoked women to speak up for themselves.” Imagine that Montherlant is still alive and write a letter or e-mail to him stating your views on his treatment of women and explaining your reactions to the portrayal of women in one of the works you have read.

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Paul Muldoon

BORN: 1951, Armagh, Northern Ireland

NATIONALITY: British, Northern Irish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

New Weather (1973)

Why Brownlee Left (1980)

Madoc: A Mysterty (1990)

Hay (1998)

Horse Latitudes (2006)

Overview

Pulitzer Prize-winning Paul Muldoon is recognized as one of Ireland's major contemporary poets, though his work is often considered difficult and obscure. His poetry is characterized by archaic language, subtle wit, odd rhyme scheme, inventive conceits, and multilayered structures of meaning.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood and "the Troubles" Paul Muldoon was born in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, and raised near the village of Moy, where his mother was a schoolteacher and his father a laborer and market gardener. He grew up during a time known as "The Troubles," during which conflicts



Paul Muldoon *Muldoon, Paul*, photograph © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

between Northern Irish citizens seeking independence from England (the nationalists) and those wishing to remain a part of the British Empire (the unionists) were common and often deadly. Muldoon's home county of Armagh was in fact one of the deadliest regions during The Troubles, with nearly three hundred killed between 1969 and 2001 as a result of nationalist and unionist conflicts.

Muldoon attended St. Patrick's College in Armagh, and, inspired by several of his teachers, developed a strong interest in Irish Gaelic language, literature, and song, as well as in English literature. One of Muldoon's teachers introduced him to the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and Muldoon quickly became an Eliot enthusiast, writing poetry that was often imitative of Eliot's. He sent several of his poems to Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, Irish poets who were gaining recognition in the 1960s, and a few of Muldoon's works were published by Heaney in the periodical *Thresholds*.

As an undergraduate at Queen's University in Belfast, Muldoon studied under Heaney and joined him at weekly poetry gatherings held at Heaney's home. The group, which included the Ulster poets Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, the critic Michael Allen, as well as several other young poets, served as a critical forum.

Muldoon moved to the United States in 1987, where he currently teaches creative writing at Princeton University.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Muldoon's famous contemporaries include:

- Seamus Heaney** (1939–): An influential contemporary Irish poet, Heaney won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995.
- Neil Jordan** (1950–): Irish filmmaker and novelist who won an Academy Award for his 1992 film *The Crying Game*.
- Bob Geldof** (1951–): An Irish musician and political activist, Geldof helped found the charitable group known as Band Aid.
- Tommy Hilfiger** (1951–): An American fashion designer world famous for his “Tommy” and “Tommy Hilfiger” clothing lines.
- Joey Ramone** (1951–2001): An American musician who led the groundbreaking punk band the Ramones.
- Paul Reubens** (1952–): An American writer and comedian best known for his portrayal of the character Pee-wee Herman.
- Michael Cunningham** (1952–): An American author, Cunningham won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1998 with his novel *The Hours*.

Works in Literary Context

Muldoon's poetry seems to go in two directions at once: back to the Irish mythological roots and forward to metaphysical worlds of his own devising. These two worlds come together in his poetry and, as they are intertwined, seem not divergent at all. Muldoon's voice has remained highly individual and his verse is not associated with any particular poetical movement.

Self-Discovery Early in his career, Muldoon won praise for the wit and promise of his work, but many critics cast him as a lesser Seamus Heaney. Muldoon's third collection, *Why Brownlee Left*, marks a more mature stage in his poetic development that set him apart as a poet with a unique voice. For the first time in Muldoon's work, a single theme, that of self-discovery, connects the poems of the collection, which are more experimental in form and more extravagant in their wit and irony than his earlier work. The final and longest poem of the collection, “Immram,” is Muldoon's contemporary interpretation of the ninth-century Irish voyage tale “Immram Mael Duin.” In Muldoon's version the Celtic “Otherworld” of the original poem is represented by a surreal modern demimonde of decadence, drugs, and vice, which critics have commented gives the work the seamy atmosphere of a Raymond Chandler detective novel.

Poetry as Narrative *Why Brownlee Left* stands as a model for Muldoon's subsequent major collections of

poetry: *Quoof*, *Meeting the British*, and *Madoc: A Mystery*. With each new work, Muldoon's poetry has become more abstruse. In the title poem of *Madoc: A Mystery*, for example, the narrative is partitioned into short poems, each captioned with the name of a philosopher, from the ancient Greeks to Stephen Hawking, about whom the lines of the poem are believed by critics to make particular commentary.

The collections following *Why Brownlee Left* also exhibit a similar format in which a group of shorter poems precedes a long narrative poem. In both his long and short poems, Muldoon's poetic style remains densely allusive and witty.

Works in Critical Context

Beyond the Shadow of Seamus Heaney Muldoon was once thought to work in the shadow of Seamus Heaney, but his reputation has grown with repeated honors, which include the T. S. Eliot Prize in 1994, the *Irish Times* Poetry Prize in 1997, and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2003. Although Muldoon has obviously earned high honors with his distinctly individual style, critics and peers still compare him to famous writers. In 2001, Ben Dowling of the *Wall Street Journal* linked Muldoon to James Joyce and others, suggesting that Muldoon “shows just how dangerous it is to swallow Joyce whole, how soon one ends up coining words such as ‘oscaraboscarabinary,’ jabbering about ‘tegelmousted Tuaregs’ and generally sounding like an unholy amalgam of Ezra Pound and Dr. Seuss.” Yet Robert Macfarlane of the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2002 uses a Shakespeare reference to caution against classifying Muldoon's style: “Those who think of Paul Muldoon as the benign, pudgy Puck of contemporary poetry, imping around with a mischievous grin on his type-face, miss the vital dimension of ethical seriousness in which his work exists.”

Poetic Originality and Idiosyncrasy Although Muldoon has been criticized for what many consider the bafflingly allusive nature of his works, he is highly acclaimed for the extraordinary originality and artistic skill he exhibits in his poems. In 2003, Laura Quinney of the *London Review of Books* wrote: “Everyone who reads Paul Muldoon will be dazzled by his linguistic exuberance[.] In his best poems, the technical flair and buoyant voice go manic, outlining the shape of other emotions, and hollowing out a place for another consciousness, which does not share in the pride and prerogative of the style. He rides the wave of his swank virtuosity, but chaos and sorrow underlie it.” In the same vein, Richard Eder in a 2001 issue of the *New York Times Book Review* stated: “Muldoon's manner is both playful and troubled. Though he subverts connection, meaning and the reverence of art and life, he subverts subversion as well. If reality has become an irrelevant philosophical and artistic concept, we sense beneath the clowning a refusal of its passing.”

New Weather and Why Brownlee Left Though some readers found *New Weather* consistent with, yet not the most impressive of, Muldoon's work, the collection illuminates the complexities of ordinary things or events. A number of critics have noted that the collection explores psychological development with apparent simplicity and eloquence while offering keen insights into the subjective nature of perception. An anonymous reviewer from *The Complete Review* also suggests the volume is grounded in "biographical tidbits, scenes from [Muldoon's] life and from Ireland, the preoccupation with America, religion." *Why Brownlee Left* is deemed a more mature effort than Muldoon's earlier collections. This collection is often considered more approachable; indeed, critic Andrew Motion compares Muldoon to a "miniaturised Robert Frost," with his earthy settings and dialogue.

Responses to Literature

1. Muldoon has often been accused of being intentionally obscure and extremely difficult to understand. With a group of your classmates, discuss ways in which his poems might present undue difficulties for readers. Then, discuss ways in which readers might get something out of his poems even if they cannot fully understand his meanings. Use examples from some of Muldoon's poetry to support your opinions.
2. Muldoon has been praised for the originality of his poetry. Using resources at your library or on the Internet, research the work of Robert Frost, James Joyce, or Dr. Seuss. Create an oral presentation comparing one or two poems written by Muldoon to one or two poems written by the poet you researched. Note places that represent Muldoon's originality, as well as places that reflect the influence and style of the other poet.
3. Muldoon's collection *Madoc: A Mystery* mixes poetry with the mystery genre to create a unique effect. Write a poem or set of poems that draws on another, different literary genre.
4. Muldoon has written lyrics for rock bands, but his poetry has yet to be set to music. Choose one or more of his poems that would work if set to contemporary rock music and write a paragraph explaining why you think so.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Muldoon is noted for the use of puns and other types of witty and obscure wordplay. Here are some other works that use similar techniques:

Five Satyres (c. 1590), poems by John Donne. Many of Donne's poems make use of puns and satirical verses to achieve notable effects and images.

"Jabberwocky" (1871), a poem by Lewis Carroll. This poem is almost entirely made up of nonsense words with the intention of demonstrating an extreme type of poetic construction.

Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce. This novel was written with extremely innovative language that combined multilingual puns with a stream-of-consciousness prose style.

Kendall, Tim and Peter McDonald, eds. *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*. Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2004.

Longley, Edna. "Stars and Horses, Pigs and Trees." *The Crane Bag* Dublin: Arts Council of Ireland, 1979.

Alice Munro

BORN: 1931, Wingham, Ontario, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Short stories, novels

MAJOR WORKS:

Lives of Girls and Women (1971)

Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You: Thirteen Stories (1974)

Who Do You Think You Are? (1978)

The Moons of Jupiter (1982)

Runaway (2004)

Overview

The Canadian master of the short story, Alice Munro specializes in making the ordinary scenes of life extraordinary through straightforward storytelling that focuses on relationships, unpredictable characters, and mysterious endings. Many of her stories are set in southwestern Ontario, Canada.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years in Ontario Born Alice Ann Laidlaw in Wingham, Ontario, Canada, on July 10, 1931, Munro is



Alice Munro *Munro, Alice, photograph. AP Images.*

the daughter of a schoolteacher and a farmer. Perhaps she inherited her literary ambitions from her father, Robert Laidlaw, who would write a novel about pioneers in his later years. However, her family, especially mother Ann Chamney, discouraged her ambitions to become a writer and tried to focus instead on raising a future farmer's wife. As a result, young Munro hid her efforts at short stories.

At age sixteen, she sold her first story to CBC Radio in Canada. She won a scholarship to the University of Western Ontario, which she entered in 1949. In 1951, she left the university to marry James Munro, with whom she moved to Vancouver, British Columbia. Nostalgic for her home, she began to focus her stories on the Wingham area of Ontario. Indeed, rural Ontario would feature prominently in her work through her career. However, her career took a back seat for a while when she gave birth to three daughters in four years. Her second child died soon after birth. Munro would have another daughter in 1966, completing the family. The experience of marriage and motherhood provided inspiration for many of Munro's stories, which deal poignantly with intimate family relationships.

Another frequent backdrop for Munro's stories is the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Canada, particularly the women's rights movement. Many of her female characters undergo transformations that echo social transformations of this time. They question established female roles and try—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—to live lives that they find truly satisfying.

Inspired by Southern Fiction, Launches Successful Writing Career The Munro family moved to Victoria, British Columbia, in 1963 and opened a bookstore called Munro's. Inspired by the books that surrounded her, Munro rededicated herself to fiction and began to

publish stories in Canadian magazines and sell them for broadcast on the CBC.

Munro found inspiration in the stories of American Southern writers like Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, and Eudora Welty. She saw parallels between her life in rural Ontario and the life they described in the closed society of the South. Though she wrote about what was familiar to her, she has remarked that during this time she felt as if she were leading a double life—a solitary life as a writer, and an external life as wife and mother.

After a series of rejections, Munro's first book of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published in 1968. It emerged to great critical success, winning the Governor General's Award for fiction in 1969 and gathering a wide audience for Munro. The stories laid a groundwork for her future writing, which would deal with unique moments in real life, adding a bit of magic to the everyday.

Determined to gain further success as a writer, Munro began work on *Lives of Girls and Women*, a collection of connected stories she intended to be a novel. Munro had been thinking about this book for nearly a decade, and she worked on it at least three hours a day in the years after her first book's appearance. The book won the 1971–1972 Canadian Booksellers Award, was selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and went through a number of printings in Canada and abroad.

By this time, Munro's marriage had gone sour, and she moved to London, Ontario, in 1972 with her younger daughters. Her alma mater, the University of Western Ontario, invited her to take a writer-in-residence position in 1974 and 1975, which she accepted. She married Gerald Fremlin in 1976, and they moved to Clinton, Ontario, where she has lived ever since.

Mature Work About Complicated Issues Facing Women Some critics had wondered if Munro would ever deal with anything beyond the teenage experience in a small town. Munro's 1974 collection, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, answered this concern with a series of stories dealing not only with country life, but also with urban living, adult relationships, and conflict between generations and the sexes. The stories in the collection often rely on contrasts between old and young, city and country, past and present, to develop their characters and tell their stories.

In 1978, Munro published another collection, *Who Do You Think I Am?* This book dealt with a young woman's return to her hometown after reinventing herself in years past—a theme clearly tied to Munro's own life experience. Its issues of identity and guilt met with positive critical response. The book won the Governor General's Award in 1979 and was a runner-up for the Booker Prize in England. In addition to her blooming career in short stories, Munro also found success in

scriptwriting around this time, with her CBC film on the Irish airing in 1978.

Although it was widely believed that short stories could never make any money, the publication of *The Moons of Jupiter* in 1982 proved critics wrong. The book's paperback rights sold for a record amount, and the book debuted to great reviews. Dealing with women at various stages in life, *The Moons of Jupiter* showed women coping with the random hand dealt to them by fate.

Munro continued to publish books about every four years throughout the 1980s and 1990s. *The Progress of Love* brought Munro yet another Governor General's Prize, and both *The Love of a Good Woman* and *Runaway* (2004) won the Giller Prize for fiction. Munro continues to publish short stories in magazines like *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, has toured the United States, Asia, and Europe promoting her books, and shows no sign of slowing her now-legendary literary career.

Works in Literary Context

Although she claims to have been strongly influenced by writers of the American South such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers, Alice Munro is most widely compared to the Russian writer Anton Chekhov, who was known for his short stories and attention to detail.

Small-Town Life Most of Munro's stories are set in small towns and use small-town life as a way of shining light on such human experiences as love, loss, and generational conflict. The focused setting of a small town allows Munro to explore the deeper meanings of seemingly normal experiences like preparing a turkey for a meal or meeting an old friend.

Random Encounters Munro often deals with themes of random experience and seemingly haphazard fate. The incidents that initiate conflict in her stories are often random or accidental: for example, in "Accident" a child's death in a random car accident sparks the beginning of one marriage and the end of another. Other stories feature random encounters such as old acquaintances running into one another. Though the initiating event is often random, the series of events that follow always points to a bigger picture.

Generation Gap Munro's mother suffered from Parkinson's disease, and her stories often involve children taking care of their parents. In addition, her stories frequently deal with conflict or lack of connection between generations. Outrageous parents clash with timid children, a daughter comes to realize that she has given up life's opportunities to avoid being like her mother, and children must navigate a new world without their parents.

Magic Realism Although Munro's work does not fall within the literary movement of Magical Realism, her use

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Munro's famous contemporaries include:

Maya Angelou (1928–): American poet and Civil Rights figure famous for her autobiographies and activism.

Fay Weldon (1931–): British novelist and scriptwriter whose often comic work focuses on the trouble of women in contemporary society and the oppressiveness of marriage.

Philip Glass (1937–): American composer known for his minimalist musical style.

Andy Warhol (1928–1987): American artist and Pop Art icon.

of exact details to create a better-than-the-real-thing world is reminiscent of such visual artists as Edward Hopper and Jack Chambers, who adopted a magical realist style in their paintings. Munro likes to take everyday situations and twist them just enough to make them seem magical and exciting. Her recognition of mysterious and enchanted moments in life makes all of life seem less ordinary.

Works in Critical Context

Alice Munro's short stories and books have been hailed by modern critics, gathering an impressive list of awards and becoming best sellers worldwide. While her initial work met with rejection and difficulty finding a publisher, her perseverance paid off and her later work met with almost unanimous praise.

Though critics liked Munro's early books, they disliked her tendency to write about adolescents in small towns. Munro answered their challenge in her later work, which deals with child and adult experiences and even added urban settings to the mix. Critics are especially appreciative of Munro's attention to detail and her willingness to leave the reader hanging with her ambiguous endings and uncertain stories.

Some critics are unwilling to admit that the short story still has a place in English-language literature, but many critics hail Munro's work as a new renaissance for the form. Joyce Carol Oates, herself a master writer, has stated that "Munro writes stories that have the density—moral, emotional, sometimes historical—of other writers." Another reviewer stated that "from rather unpromising-sounding subject matter, [Munro] fashions short stories of extraordinary delicacy and resonance."

While relatively few books have been written about Munro to date, a number of periodicals and Web publications have devoted pages to her life and works. Robert Thacker gives a good overview of critical response to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Alice Munro's short stories often deal with conflicts between people of different generations. Here are a few other works that focus on contrasts between different age groups:

Fathers and Sons (1862), by Ivan Turgenev. One of the first Russian novels to find widespread popularity, *Fathers and Sons* highlights what Turgenev saw as the growing generational divide in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century.

Cheaper by the Dozen (1946), by Frank Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, tells the story of a family of twelve children whose wild ways clash with their parents' interests in efficiency.

The Catcher in the Rye (1951), by J.D. Salinger. In this novel, teenager Holden Caulfield feels alienated against the adult world around him during a visit to New York City.

The Joy Luck Club (1993), by Amy Tan. Tan's best-selling novel is a series of vignettes told by Chinese mothers, all immigrants to America, and their Chinese-American daughters.

Munro's work in his essay "Go Ask Alice: The Progress of Munro Criticism," which appeared in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* in 1991. Munro's continuing career will doubtless bring "the mother figure of Canadian fiction" to an even wider and more receptive audience.

The Moons of Jupiter With this book, Munro put the lie to the notion that readers do not buy or read collections of short stories. The Canadian paperback rights were sold to Penguin of Canada for \$45,000, a record amount for a Canadian short-story volume. The reviews were almost uniformly laudatory, with William French of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* asserting that Munro's "ability to convey nuances and imply the ambiguities inherent in human relationships has never been greater" and Benjamin De Mot in the *New York Times Book Review*, calling the book "witty, subtle, passionate . . . exceptionally knowledgeable about the content and movement—the entanglements and entailments—of individual human feeling."

Runaway Munro's *Runaway* also impressed critics, who praised it in the highest terms. *Kirkus Review* declared: "In a word: magnificent." *The Boston Globe's* David Thoreen wrote: "Munro's stories are often praised for their scope and depth, and rightly so. Each of the stories in *Runaway* contains enough lived life to fill a typical novel, and reading them is to become immersed in the concerns and worlds of their various characters." In fact, some reviewers found the book so perfect they were

at a loss for words of praise sufficient for it. Jonathan Franzen of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote: "Basically, *Runaway* is so good that I don't want to talk about it here. Quotation can't do the book justice, and neither can synopsis. The way to do it justice is to read it."

Responses to Literature

1. Alice Munro was discouraged in her ambitions to become a writer, and her family tried to steer her toward a more traditional role as a farmer's wife. How do you think this upbringing influenced the subject matter and themes of her stories?
2. Alice Munro has compared her own work to the short stories of such Southern writers as Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. Read a short story by one of these authors and compare and contrast it to one of Munro's stories. How do their portrayals of small-town life differ? How are they similar?
3. Munro's attention to detail is legendary. To find out more about how Munro's use of detail informs her writing, take a two-paragraph section of the Munro story of your choice and remove all description and detail. How does it differ from the original passage? Does removing detail improve or take away from the story? What does this exercise teach you about Munro's use of detail?
4. Munro is often compared to Anton Chekhov, an influential Russian writer of the nineteenth century. Using the Internet and the library, write a paper on the life and work of Chekhov. How might Chekhov compare to Munro? How does his work differ from Munro's?

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■ H. H. Munro

SEE *Saki*

▣ Haruki Murakami

BORN: 1949, *Kyoto, Japan*

NATIONALITY: *Japanese*

GENRE: *Fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

A Wild Sheep Chase (1982)

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (1985)

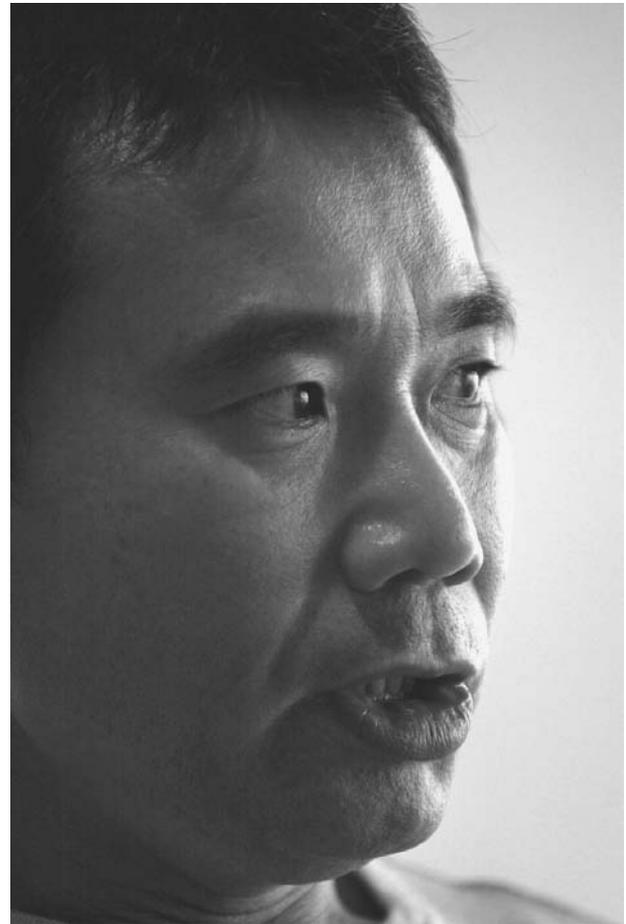
Norwegian Wood (1989)

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1994–1995)

Kafka on the Shore (2002)

Overview

Haruki Murakami is an important figure in contemporary Japanese letters mostly due to his extensive translations of



Haruki Murakami *Murakami, Haruki, photograph. AP Images.*

classic American fiction. At the same time, he has initiated a revolution in the style of Japanese fiction by nurturing new, urban, cosmopolitan, and distinctly American-flavored tastes in Japanese writing.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood with Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto, Japan, on January 12, 1949, the only child of schoolteachers Chiaki and Miyuki Murakami. He grew up in the immediate aftermath of World War II, in which an aggressive Japan had battled the United States furiously in the Pacific. The war was only brought to a conclusion by two atomic bomb attacks launched by the United States against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer of 1945. The attacks wiped out both cities and led to Japan's unconditional surrender. Allied forces occupied Japan after the war until 1952.

Murakami spent his early years listening to his parents discuss eighth-century poetry and medieval war tales at the dinner table. Yet, the boy was not interested

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Murakami's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Bukovsky (1942–): Russian author and activist, he is most noted for being a former Soviet political dissident.

Ken Follett (1949–): British author of historical and thriller fiction, he has sold over 100 million copies of his books.

Alexander Godunov (1949–1995): When Godunov, a Russian ballet dancer, defected to the United States, he caused an international stir.

Robert Haas (1941–): This American poet has served two terms as U.S. poet laureate (from 1995 to 1997) and has contributed greatly to contemporary literature.

Paloma Picasso (1949–): Despite her fame as the French-Spanish daughter to Pablo Picasso and Françoise Gilot, she has earned her own way as a successful designer.

in the cradle of imperial culture, and in his early teenage years, he turned instead to the works of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky as well as to American writers like Raymond Chandler, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Kurt Vonnegut. In Kobe's many used-book stores, he found works written in their original languages available at less than half the price of their Japanese translations.

Writing, Motion Pictures, and Jazz Although Murakami actively contributed to his school newspaper and considered becoming a scenario writer while he was studying film at Waseda University in 1968, his development into a novelist did not immediately emerge. The student riots of 1969 protesting the Vietnam War disrupted his college years, and after he completed a thesis on the idea of the journey in American film and graduated in 1975, he became the owner of a successful jazz bar in a Tokyo suburb. He was making good money from the bar when, in 1981, after the success of his first two novels, he regretfully left it to begin full-time writing.

Boku and the Rat Murakami's first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979), won Gunzō magazine's twenty-second newcomer's prize in June 1979 and inspired a series of works featuring his signature characters, a worldly Boku and an anguished, inward-burrowing writer called the Rat. Though this tale was framed by the years during and after the Tokyo student uprisings from 1969 to 1973, his *Pinball, 1973* (1980) introduced readers to a twenty-four-year-old Boku and twenty-five-year-old the Rat in a type of modern fairy tale. The two main figures never meet in *Pinball* but reappear and eventually reunite in Murakami's

next novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), for which Murakami was awarded the Noma Literary Newcomer's Prize.

Murakami wrote his next novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, in five months between August 1984 and January 1985, after which he spent two more months revising it. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) won the Tanizaki Literary Prize the year it was published.

Translation, Icon Status, and Successful Dance

In the three years between the publication of these two novels, Murakami translated works by Raymond Carver and John Irving—two of many writers whom he met when he visited the United States briefly in 1984. From translating their works Murakami has said simply, “I learned a lot.” He also learned from experimenting in short-fiction formats, publishing three collections in that genre.

Murakami returned to writing long fiction with *Norwegian Wood* (1987). The novel was wildly successful, selling about 2 million copies within its first year of publication. A sequel to *A Wild Sheep Chase* inspired by a Western pop song, *Dance, Dance, Dance* (1988), sold over a half million hardcover copies in Japan during the first six months after publication and received favorable reviews. *South of the Border*, which some critics considered a “companion” novel to *Norwegian Wood*, was also a success with the public and critics alike.

Wind-Up Bird and War In the interim between *Dance, Dance, Dance* and *South of the Border*, Murakami produced a novel that strayed from his usual concerns. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994) focuses on what Murakami has said is the most important thing: “facing our history . . . and that means the history of war.” Specifically, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, a three-volume work, presents World War II not as a firsthand experience, but as part of the psychological baggage that affects all Japanese of Murakami's generation. In 1995, Murakami was presented the Yomiuri Literary Prize by one of his most demanding critics, Kenzaburo Oe.

Kafka Prize and Fantasy Award As his works were translated abroad, Murakami acquired greater fame and collected several more literary awards, including the 1999 Kuwabara Takeo Academic Award for *Underground* (1997–1998); the 2006 Franz Kafka Prize; and the 2006 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel for *Kafka on the Shore* (2002). The author whose work has been adapted for film by such esteemed artists as Japanese director Jun Ichikawa, served as a visiting fellow at Princeton University and a Distinguished Writer in Residence at Tufts University. Today, he lives in Japan where he continues to write what he believes is, and should be, truly “global literature.”

Works in Literary Context

Western Influences Murakami grew up during the American occupation of his Japan, and he admired the

United States for its wealth and its cultural energy. The music of the United States also attracted him. For example, after hearing drummer Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers at a live concert in 1964, Murakami often skipped lunch to save money for records. His encyclopedic knowledge of jazz and of much popular culture of the United States is immediately apparent even to casual readers.

Murakami has been called the first writer completely at home with the features of American popular culture that permeate contemporary Japan. At the end of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* (1985), for instance, the protagonist begins to lose consciousness while listening to Bob Dylan on a car stereo.

Crisp, Clear Style for Ambitious Themes Murakami has created an original, immediately recognizable style marked by humor, lightness, simplicity, and clarity, with bold, imaginative leaps and startling juxtapositions of images. In both his conspiracy novels and love-story novels, the author offers profound themes in his ambitious attempt to explore human relationships and political and historical issues that earlier works only faintly address.

Conspiracy, American-Style His conspiracy novels are designed to make readers uneasy in one sense, but in another sense use narrators who seem bemused by, rather than genuinely threatened by, hollow consumerism or dislocated modern life. In this way, his conspiracy novels become captivating rather than suffocating. By way of curious characters and labyrinthine undercurrents, his novels suggest that Japan's uniqueness has been preserved despite intrusive Americanization. These themes play well with American readers, who perhaps see in them two welcome consolations: that a McDonald's on every foreign corner does not necessarily mean global displacement; and that it is possible for a country such as Japan to remake itself from an imperialist aggressor to an economically successful pacifist.

Works in Critical Context

For the critics who were used to sincere confessions of narrators easily identified with their authors, Murakami's playful, apolitical adventures into the undefinable—complete with an American soundtrack in some instances—proved most unacceptable. Young readers, however, loved his work from the start. “The Murakami phenomenon” was established early in the author's career and reached a crescendo in 1988, when girls were choosing their wardrobes to match the color of whichever volume of *Norwegian Wood* (1987)—the red or the green—they happened to be carrying that day.

***Norwegian Wood* (1987)** *Norwegian Wood* is an adolescent adventure and an exploration of the thoughts and feelings of an emotionally detached thirty-seven-year-old Watanabe, who hears a Muzak version of the Beatles song this book is named for and is transported back to his college days. The two-volume work has sold more than 2 million hardback copies and has been Murakami's most

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle focused on the psychological impact of World War II. Here are a few other works that focus on aftermath of the war:

The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), a film directed by William Wyler. Winner of seven Academy Awards, this film follows the lives of three American soldiers who face various difficulties as they return to civilian life after World War II.

The Tin Drum (1959), a novel by Günter Grass. In this novel, protagonist Oskar Matzerath, an inmate in an German insane asylum in the 1950s, recalls his experiences during World War II.

The Great Fire (2003), a novel by Shirley Hazzard. This award-winning novel is set during the Allied occupation of Japan immediately after the end of World War II.

popular novel—particularly with teens and women in their twenties. The differences between this and his other novels is often noted; Brooke Horvath, in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, states that the book “is less startling than [*A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*], a quieter novel, but no less rewarding.”

When he wrote this “straight boy-meets-girl story,” as Murakami describes it, many readers felt it to be “a retreat, a betrayal of what my works had stood for until then. For me personally, however, it was just the opposite: it was an adventure, a challenge. I had never written that kind of straight, simple story, and I wanted to test myself.” This simple and often humorous style makes Murakami's works products of a new sensibility: his stories are liberated from the ghosts of World War II and are far removed from the traditional Japanese mainstream of autobiographical realism.

Responses to Literature

1. Besides several other conventions, Murakami uses some involved symbolism in his novels. In his first works, he features a character who is the Rat; in his *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), he introduces Boku's search for sheep and eventual encounter with the Sheep Man. With a team of your classmates, come to your own interpretations of such symbols, each student choosing one to research, study, and identify. It might be helpful to consult a literary dictionary, a dream encyclopedia, or even Eastern astrology or cultural symbol references—to come up with what each symbolic element represents.
2. Consider one story or novel by Murakami and identify and discuss several ways in which Murakami

establishes one character's identity—his own or that of his culture—and where that identity takes on new characteristics from a second culture. Cite examples from the texts.

3. Some of Murakami's works are considered to be the kind of novel called a *Bildungsroman*—a building novel, or novel of personal development and growth. *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), for example, is a *Bildungsroman* about the quest for love and independence. Do some minor research on the term *Bildungsroman*. Then, consider how your own life would make a fine *Bildungsroman*: Trace the events and experiences that lead you on a quest (even a short-term one), facing challenges that changed you, and coming “home” to the society that now accepts you. How did you grow? How did you mature to fit in with society? Then, explain how *Kafka on the Shore* is a *Bildungsroman* by tracing the personal growth of either the teenaged Kafka or the elder Nakata. Do a time line or create a storyboard if it helps—to trace the character's maturation process. Compare your personal story with Kafka's or Nakata's story of personal development. Where are the two of you alike? Where do you differ? How are you both products of the *Bildungsroman*?

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☒ Iris Murdoch

BORN: 1919, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1999, Oxford, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Novels, essays, poems, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Under the Net (1954)

The Sandcastle (1957)

A Severed Head (1961)

The Black Prince (1973)

The Sea, the Sea (1978)

Overview

One of the most prolific writers of the second half of the twentieth century, Iris Murdoch wrote well-crafted fiction containing rich characters and complex plots woven together with elements from philosophy and psychology. In addition to more than two dozen novels, her body of work includes several plays and an assortment of critical studies. She was nominated for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize six times and eventually won the honor for *The Sea, the Sea* in 1978. Murdoch's achievements in philosophy have often been overshadowed by her reputation as a novelist and dramatist. Her philosophical and literary works are closely interrelated: Her novels and plays can be read as meditations on the problems about



Iris Murdoch *Murdoch, Iris*, 1966, photograph. Horst Tappe / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

freedom, consciousness, and the nature of the good that she addresses in her philosophical writings. Murdoch herself, in a 1978 interview with Bryan Magee, stressed the unity of her philosophical and literary work when she remarked that “philosophy and literature are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Academics and Existentialism Jean Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin on July 15, 1919, to Wills John Hughes Murdoch, a civil servant, and Irene Alice Richardson Murdoch. A few years later, the family moved to London, where Murdoch began her education at the Froebel Institute; she was a boarding student at Badminton School in Bristol from age twelve to eighteen. In 1938, she won a scholarship for three years at Somerville College of the University of Oxford. There she became engaged to a classmate, Frank Thompson, who was killed early in World War II. Extremely left-wing politically, Murdoch was briefly a member of the British Communist Party. She graduated with first-class honors in “Greats” (ancient history, classics, and philosophy) in 1942. She was an assistant principal in the British Treasury from 1942 to 1944. Between 1944 and 1946 she was an administrative officer with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in London, Belgium, and Austria. This experience had a profound effect on her as a philosopher and as a novelist. During this time she read the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, and she later met Sartre in Brussels.

In 1947, Murdoch received a Sarah Smithson Studentship to study philosophy at Newnham College of the University of Cambridge. That same year she was elected to the Aristotelian Society. Her early philosophical influences included Sartre; the Austrian linguist and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whom she met at Cambridge; and Wittgenstein’s student—and later, translator, editor, and literary executor—G. E. M. Anscombe, with whom she formed a lifelong friendship. Denied a visa to enter the United States (where she had been offered a scholarship) because of her previous membership in the Communist Party, Murdoch in 1948 became a tutor in philosophy and a fellow of St. Anne’s College of the University of Oxford. Murdoch published several philosophical studies during the early 1950s, including one of Sartre, a philosopher with whom she has often been compared. In 1956, Murdoch married John Bayley, a novelist and lecturer.

Turning to Fiction Murdoch wrote more than fifty novels. The first was *Under the Net* (1954), about a man who fails in his personal relationships because he sees the world as a hostile place. Her second novel, *The Flight*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Murdoch’s famous contemporaries include:

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French existentialist philosopher and novelist.

Simone Weil (1909–1943): French philosopher and political activist.

Penelope Fitzgerald (1916–2000): Novelist and essayist who won the Booker Prize the year after Murdoch did.

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993): Prolific British novelist famous for the dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962).

Fidel Castro (1928–): Cuban revolutionary leader and president of communist Cuba from 1959 until 2008.

from the Enchanter (1956), is about a rich and powerful protagonist who sees all human relationships as power struggles and uses his power to draw the other characters into his grasp. Murdoch’s third novel, *The Sandcastle* (1957), deals with an individual who attempts to free himself from what he considers the death of him: his marriage. *The Bell* (1958), has a similar theme, except that a young woman decides not to go back to her mate so that she may find herself.

Many of Murdoch’s later novels contain themes that are rewritten from her earlier works. For example, *A Severed Head* (1961) examines the extent to which human relationships—in this case, sexual ones—are damaged when they are used to overpower others, a theme also explored in *Flight from the Enchanter. An Unofficial Rose* (1962), like *The Sandcastle*, features a hero who feels enslaved by his marriage. Murdoch often wrote novels that involved the fantasy of freedom versus conventional responsibility and the difficulty of establishing relationships. Also characteristic of much of her late work is the brooding, dreamlike landscapes and the bizarre turns of plot that prompted many critics to refer to her as a Gothic novelist.

In her later years, Murdoch continued to write rather lengthy, complex novels. Her later titles were *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1982), *The Good Apprentice* (1986), and *The Green Knight* (1993). Murdoch died on February 8, 1999, in Oxford, England, after a five-year battle with Alzheimer’s disease.

Works in Literary Context

Master and Servant Murdoch relied heavily on philosophy and politics to give substance to her depictions of human relationships. Several of Murdoch’s works revolve around a manipulative character who achieves power and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Murdoch's literature centers around her philosophical interests; her characters often confront ethical issues and have relationship struggles that come about as a result of their beliefs. Here are some other works in which characters wrestle with ethical issues:

The Scarlet Letter (1850), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this American classic set in a seventeenth-century Puritan community, heroine Hester Prynne gives birth out of wedlock, refuses to name the child's father, and suffers the consequences for her "crime" alone.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In this tale, a Russian student named Raskolnikov murders a pawnbroker and then becomes increasingly paranoid.

The Stranger (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. This classic work is a philosophical novel in which the main character kills a man for no reason and must deal with the ethical consequences.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972), a film directed by Luis Buñuel. This French surrealist film concerns a group of friends and their dreams.

control over the lives of others. For example, her first novel, *Under the Net*, focuses on Jake Donoghue, who attempts to establish a pattern for his life in order to insulate himself from the impact of random happenings, which are not part of his design. The lives of most of the characters in *The Flight from the Enchanter* are determined by how they respond to a charismatic and domineering "enchanter" who preys upon their personal obsessions. Murdoch introduces supernatural elements into this work that illuminate her examination of myth and reality. *The Black Prince* (1973) blends a murder mystery with ruminations on creativity by centering on an aged writer who attempts to impose his fantasies on others. Several critics have noted parallels between this work and such Shakespeare plays as *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*; in fact, many of Murdoch's works involve characters whose relationships resemble that of the domineering Prospero and the servile Caliban in *The Tempest*.

Unhealthy Love and Loss of Faith Murdoch explores various forms of love throughout her fiction, generally in bleak depictions of relationships. *A Severed Head* addresses such topics as promiscuity, self-deception, and the unpredictable actions of individuals in love by detailing the interactions of three groups of characters who share progressive attitudes toward sex. *The Sea, the Sea* depicts a man who sustains an obsessive love for a girl he knew during childhood. When they meet again years

later, the man uses his expertise as a magician and theater director to interfere in her happy marriage. In addition to her exploration of themes relating to love, Murdoch frequently examines spiritual issues. *The Bell* (1958), for example, is set in a religious community and involves conflicts among characters with diverse personalities, and a central character in *Henry and Cato* (1976) is a Catholic priest who gradually loses his faith.

Art and Philosophy Murdoch's complementary interests in philosophy and art are also evidenced in her nonfiction writings. For example, her *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953) examines the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre by focusing on his use of the novel as a means of developing and exploring philosophical ideas, a recurring trait in Murdoch's novels as well. Among her other theoretical works, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banned the Artists* (1977) expounds upon Plato's views of art, while *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* (1986) involves several characters who discuss the role of art in human life.

Works in Critical Context

Murdoch never read any of her reviews. Her books, though often controversial, generally enjoyed positive critical reception. Nicholas Spice has stated: "Like Henry James's, Iris Murdoch's style is high, in the sense that she writes about lofty matters—the nature of morality, the reasons for existence, how we should live and love, how we should die." The complexities of her plots and the interrelationships she develops among characters have led critics to compare Murdoch's novels with those of such nineteenth-century writers as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Charles Dickens. While Murdoch writes primarily in the realist mode, many of her works describe supernatural events that lend allegorical and symbolic implications to her themes. Murdoch has explained: "In real life the fantastic and the ordinary, the plain and the symbolic, are often indissolubly joined together, and I think the best novels explore and exhibit life without disjoining them."

Early Works Between 1954 and 1987, Murdoch published twenty-three novels that explore various types of love, the relationship between imagination and reality, the role of art, and moral issues and dilemmas pertaining to questions of good and evil. By developing diverse scenarios and characters and presenting fantasies and supernatural events, Murdoch examines abstract ideas within the context of human drama. Michael Levenson has commented: "Murdoch, a philosophic novelist, spurns the idea of the philosophic novel. This is because she believes that fiction should shiver like the quicksilver of life. She wants a fiction that can engage with urgencies and accidents."

A critic has commented about one book: "Naturally, this being a Murdoch novel, nothing is so simple as it might appear to be. While *Nuns and Soldiers* works wonderfully as

an archetypal tale of love triumphant, it presents dozens of other possibilities. . . . This is an exceptionally full book, packed with ideas, symbols, references, questionings, and with characters who, more than usually in Murdoch's novels, seem caught in the real web of life."

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the philosophical and literary movement known as existentialism. Are Murdoch's works existentialist? If so, how so? If not, how not?
2. Read *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. What roles does Murdoch think the artist has in society? Do these roles of the artist exist today? Has the artist's role diminished? Is the artist no longer an archetypal figure? Write an essay detailing your position.
3. In *The Bell*, the characters struggle with the problems that arise when their human desires conflict with their moral beliefs. Pick a few scenes in the novel in which characters choose to favor one or the other—to follow their hearts, or to stick to their moral absolutes. Do you agree with these choices? Why or why not?

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Les Murray

BORN: 1938, Nابیac, New South Wales, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

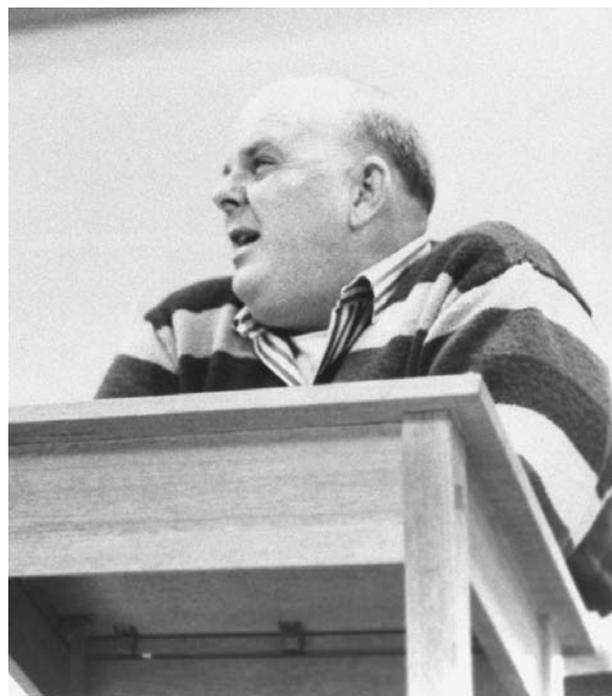
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 "The Buladelah-Taree Holiday-Song Cycle" (1976)
The Boys Who Stole the Funeral (1980)
Subhuman Redneck Poems (1993)
Fredy Neptune (1998)

Overview

Les Murray is a prominent Australian poet and one of the foremost Australian literary critics. For decades, this author of seventeen volumes of verse, five books of literary essays, and many influential editions has helped shape the Australian literary landscape and has been one of the most authoritative literary voices in national debates on a variety of issues.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Meager Beginnings and Early Tragedy Leslie Allan Murray was born on October 17, 1938, in Nابیac, on the central coast of New South Wales, to Cecil and Miriam (née Arnall) Murray. Cecil was a struggling dairy farmer whose 150 acres were owned by his domineering father; Miriam had trained as a nurse in Newcastle. Murray was raised in a family home that was little more than a shed with wooden walls, an iron roof, and only three



Les Murray Murray, Les, photograph by Peter McFarlane. Reproduced by permission.

rooms. The boy's childhood was devoid of luxuries and had few comforts.

Although his father was nearly illiterate, Murray learned to read at age four. He was homeschooled by his mother until age nine, when he went to a local rural school at Bulby Brush. He began attending high school in 1951, but his education was disrupted by a great trauma: His mother died in April of that year. Murray's father suffered a nervous breakdown and ceased to care for the farm, himself, or his son. Murray did not return to school until 1952, then dropped out again after a year; he lived with his slowly recovering father in considerable squalor, spending his days outside or reading on his own.

High School Traumas and College Depression

From 1955 through 1956, he attended Taree High School, where he did well academically but felt himself shunned and mocked by his peers. His weightlifter's build saved him from physical bullying, but he was socially ostracized for two years. He carried these lifelong psychological scars, and some of his most vivid poems feature these experiences.

In his last year at high school, Murray wrote his first poems. In 1957, he entered University of Sydney with a Commonwealth Scholarship. There he edited student journals, catching the attention of a group of established poets that included Clive James, Germaine Greer, Robert Hughes, Mungo MacCallum, and Laurie Oakes.

Murray disregarded his schoolwork and instead focused on reading the contents of the university's Fisher Library. As a boy, he had begun studying German in his spare time, and at the University of Sydney, learned several more languages, mastering more than a dozen by age twenty-five. He was also publishing a steady output of quality verse in student publications and became a prominent figure in the literary life of the university.

By the end of 1959, however, Murray sank into a depression connected with his mother's death and his own feelings of isolation. In 1961, he dropped out of college and, living hand-to-mouth, hitchhiked around Australia. He was partially rescued from utter devastation by two events: his return to the university in 1962 and meeting fellow student Valerie Gina Morelli. Murray proposed to her in April 1962, and they were married on September 29, 1962.

Lucrative Career and Early Writing Success

While working as a translator of Western European languages with the Australian National University in Canberra, Murray continued writing. In 1965, nearly coinciding with the birth of the first of his five children, he published *The Ilex Tree*, a book of poetry written jointly with Geoffrey Lehmann. The volume was well received by the critics and won the Grace Leven Prize for poetry. This success brought him in contact with

other established poets and the chief publisher of Australian poetry, Angus & Robertson.

Changing Jobs In 1967, Murray resigned from his translation job to move his family to Britain, supported by his first Commonwealth Literary Fellowship. On their return to Sydney in 1968, he took temporary jobs, ranging from a clerkship in the prime minister's office to a railway laborer job, to support his poetry career. By 1971, he was confident in his ability to earn money from both his writing and Valerie's teaching to declare himself a full-time freelance author. From that point, the flow of his poetic publications was copious and rapid. In 1972, *Poems Against Economics* garnered mixed reviews but confirmed his growing reputation and generated further support: the Commonwealth Literary Fund sent him on a lecture tour of Western Australia. Thereafter, the Literary Fund and its successor, the Literature Board of the Australia Council, supported Murray generously over many years.

The establishment of the Literature Board owed something to Murray's own persuasive writing on the subject of government support for writers; by 1970, Murray was publishing the first of a long series of essays on issues related to publicly funded art. His essays appeared in major newspapers and journals, such as *Quadrant*, and were eventually published in a five-volume collection.

In 1973, Murray took over as director of the journal *Poetry Australia*—which he continued to edit until 1980. In 1978, he became the sole poetry reader for Angus & Robertson. His editorial work put him at the center of the "poetry wars" that so enlivened the Australian literary scene during the 1970s and 1980s.

Aboriginal Culture and the Verse Novel

In 1976, Murray wrote *Selected Poems: The Vernacular Republic* as well as an extraordinary cycle of poems, "The Buladelah-Taree Holiday-Song Cycle"—written as the oldest verbal manifestations of Australian rural culture, Aboriginal oral poetry. The Jindyworobak poets of the 1940s had been mocked for their weak understanding of Aboriginal culture, and Murray took a great risk with this daringly experimental poem: Critics were waiting to accuse him of cultural arrogance, or ignorance, or daring to speak for Aboriginal people. But, his work was triumphant, reinforcing both his powers as a poet and his knowledge as a scholar of Aboriginal culture, and rewarding his refusal to admit the inevitability of cultural apartheid in Australia.

Murray's increasing interest in Aboriginal Australians inspired another kind of work, the truly long narrative poem. Declining to call it an epic, he published *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* as a "verse novel" in 1979. In this work, Murray also attended to his notion of what he considered the "collapse of masculinity" by featuring a look at feminism through the figure of Noeline Kampf, a two-dimensional caricature of the feminists he met,

mainly on university campuses, in the late 1970s. By creating Kampff, Murray offered himself as a target for feminists: For years, he was hounded on campuses by demonstrators who disrupted his talks, displayed posters attacking him, wrote obscene comments in lipstick in the staff toilet, and sent him anonymous envelopes of excrement. By contrast, the reviews for *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* were mostly respectful; and when the work was published in Great Britain and America, it received enthusiastic welcome. The book also won Murray the Grace Leven Prize in 1980.

In 1982 and onward, Murray's verse was routinely published overseas following its Australian appearances and to much acclaim. By 1985, he had won numerous awards for his poetry, including the 1984 National Book Council Prize and the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal. He also established his status as a critic in his own right, publishing several volumes of collected essays. In 1985, he made a bold statement about his connection to the bush by moving from the Chatswood home in Sydney where he had stayed since 1971 to Forty Acres, land he had bought in his ancestral valley near Bunyah. There, he built a small house within sight of the spot on which he had been raised.

Reawakened Distress and Supreme Success After a party in 1988, where Murray met a woman who had been one of his teenaged persecutors at Taree High School, he was reminded of the dark days following his mother's death and fell into a deep depression: This time what he called "the black dog" hung on for years. His position as poetry reader for Angus & Robertson came to an end in 1990, partly because of this psychological stress.

But, even as he descended into familiar depression, Murray continued to write, publish to great acclaim, and earn numerous esteemed honors and awards, including the 1993 New South Wales Premier Prize. His depression culminated in July 1996, when he was rushed to a hospital in Newcastle with a liver abscess from which he nearly died. After many days in a coma he regained consciousness to find a mountain of sympathetic mail and the depression gone.

Murray's next volume, *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (1996), became a hit, selling more than ten thousand copies in Australia. The work was also a great critical success; and, it won Murray the premier British poetry award, the T. S. Eliot Prize. The work was such a sensation that television news helicopters thwacked the skies above Forty Acres and floated down into the paddocks around the little weatherboard house as journalists competed for interviews.

In 1998, the epic narrative poem *Fredy Neptune*, which Murray had been writing since 1991, was published in sections and was recognized immediately as one of his greatest achievements. Les Murray continues to write, travel, give readings, and lecture. His reputation

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Murray's famous contemporaries include:

Sawako Ariyoshi (1931–1984): Ariyoshi was a prolific Japanese novelist whose works concerned significant social issues such as environmental pollution and treatment of the elderly.

Graham Chapman (1941–1989): Chapman was a core member of the English comedy troupe Monty Python.

Elgar Howarth (1935–): Howarth is a world-renowned English conductor, composer, and former trumpet player.

Wilma Rudolph (1940–1994): A 1960 Olympian, she became the first American woman to win three gold medals (in track and field) in a single Olympic season.

John Updike (1932–): An award-winning novelist, essayist, and literary critic, he is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

still grows both nationally and internationally, and his name has been both honored and recommended for such esteemed spots as chair of poetry at Oxford and Poet Laureate of Britain.

Works in Literary Context

Influences of Australia on Style and Theme As one who objects to the pervasive influence of British culture on Australian society, Murray expresses a strong sense of nationalism in his work. He celebrates his homeland by exploring Australia's wildlife, vegetation, and aboriginal folklore. Living in the countryside that has inspired so much of his work, Murray has stated, "I like poetry because it isn't tied exclusively to the human. One may write about trees, mountains, the future, the heavens, because it is understood that one is also writing about the human whatever the ostensible subject."

While Murray's themes are typically provincial, his keen perceptions and creative use of language have attracted a wide audience. *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980), for example, is an experimental narrative which takes the form of a sonnet. Focused on the theme of maturation or emphasizing the natural world, Murray's poetry is distinguished by its wit and verbal ease and has been praised for its efforts to establish a uniquely Australian viewpoint.

Works in Critical Context

By the time of the publication of *Poems Against Economics* (1972), with two volumes already behind him, Murray had been typecast, both by his supporters and by critics:

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by poets and authors who also wrote on themes involving their homelands:

Another Country (1962), a novel by James Baldwin. In this modern work, the author explores the Greenwich Village, New York, life, including the damages of racism and the consequences of hedonism.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this volume, the poet reflects on childhood, identity, and the settings of rural Ireland.

Hunger for Memory (2004), an autobiography by Richard Rodriguez. In this nonfiction work, the author revisits his experiences as a Mexican American.

Nectar in a Sieve (1955), a novel by Kamala Markandaya. In this award-winning novel, the author presents an in-depth look at the culture clashes between urban and rural Indians.

He was the poet of the countryside in subject matter and a conservative in style—straightforward and accessible.

Poems Against Economics While *Poems Against Economics* unsettled both those views and his sometimes polemical slant has drawn the fire of several critics, more often Murray is hailed for the creativity and technical excellence of his poems. In his assessment of the work, James Tulip writes, “Les Murray doesn’t go to the country for his philosophy. His philosophy drives him there. *Poems Against Economics* is the active stand which Murray is taking in terms of belief and judgment about Australia today. . . . Murray is aggressively for the folk and their culture.” In reviewing Murray’s *Poems the Size of Photographs* critic David McCooney wrote, “Part Banjo Paterson, part Emily Dickinson, Murray is a traditional poet whose work is radically original.” In reviewing two later collections, *The Daylight Moon* and *The Vernacular Republic*, Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott hailed Murray as a candidate for “the bard of modern Australia.”

Responses to Literature

1. Some of Murray’s most vivid poems focus on his experience of group cruelty at Taree High School—among them “A Torturer’s Apprenticeship” (published in *Dog Fox Field*, 1990) and “Burning Want” (published in *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, 1993). After a close reading of one or more of these poems, write your own poem about a high school experience that has influenced you. Include dialogue, descriptions, or unique feelings. Consider how this experience has shaped who you are today.
2. In a group effort, research the 1950s in Australia. What did the period offer to the teens of that time? What trends characterized their recreation, social habits and values, and likes and dislikes? Does Murray reflect any of this in his poetry? If so, what does his referencing say about his attitude toward the popular culture of his teen years? If not, what does he use instead: What is important to him in his early poetry?
3. Using resources from the Internet or your library, investigate Australia—its history, geography, culture, and people. Then, read two or three poems by Murray. Write an essay about how Murray’s poetry reflects Australia. For example, how does the country contribute to the imagery? Does this imagery help to characterize the people? How does the use of Australia contribute to Murray’s themes? How much more does a reader know about Australia after reading a Murray poem or work?

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altered by their encounters with Trinidad. The book mixes elements of Naipaul's fiction and nonfiction, drawing on his Indian and West Indian heritage, along with British history and culture, to reveal the complex impact of British imperialism on the sensibilities and memories of individuals.

Snubs and Honors In February 1996, Patricia Naipaul died. That April, Naipaul married Nadira Khanum Alvi, a Pakistani journalist whom he had met while on a speaking tour. Naipaul—who for some time had been associated with conservative politics in England and the United States—began to speak more aggressively on behalf of Hindu nationalism, generally taking the line of India's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party. India has long been marked by sectarian violence between its Hindu and Muslim citizens, and Naipaul's siding with the Hindu faction stirred more controversy.

On October 11, 2001, it was announced that Naipaul had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Naipaul has continued to write prolifically since receiving the prize, despite advancing age. He has claimed, though, that *Magic Seeds* (2004) is his last novel.

Works in Literary Context

Influence of Conrad One author Naipaul has publicly cited as an influence is Joseph Conrad, another British immigrant (from Poland) whose novels forced the British, and the world, to examine the disturbing implications of empire. Critics have noted that the dark, brooding atmosphere, tropical settings, and alienated perspective in Naipaul's prose resemble similar qualities in Conrad's writing, including the latter's most famous work of fiction, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). As in that work, some of Naipaul's European characters come emotionally undone as their pretensions are exposed in the alien African setting. *A Bend in the River* bears direct comparison with *Heart of Darkness* in the journey each work's protagonist undertakes. However, some critics have interpreted Naipaul's work as a defense of the colonial project rather than an indictment of its bitter consequences.

Literature of Displacement Naipaul has contributed richly to the body of modern literature dealing with the theme of displacement, exile, and rootlessness, as dealt with by major authors such as James Joyce, Albert Camus, Ezra Pound, Vladimir Nabokov, Milan Kundera, and Conrad. This theme is embodied in characters such as Salim in *A Bend in the River*, an Indian Muslim living in Africa who is treated like an outsider during his country's political upheaval. It is also shown in the story "One out of Many" from *In a Free State*, in which an Indian servant finds himself in New York and realizes he is utterly lost regarding matters of money and law in the strange land.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Naipaul's famous contemporaries include:

Derek Walcott (1930–): Trinidadian poet and playwright, 1992 Nobel laureate in literature.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): former president of South Africa; imprisoned for twenty-seven years by the apartheid regime.

Julius Nyerere (1922–1999): First president of Tanzania (previously Tanganyika); served from 1964 to 1985.

Gore Vidal (1925–): American novelist and essayist.

A Towering Figure The extent of V. S. Naipaul's influence is large. His carefully observed, forcefully worded assessments of social and political life in such geographically disparate locations as central Africa, the West Indies, the Americas, India, and the Islamic world are widely studied and cited. For example, scholars have asserted (ruefully) that since World War II, no single text has influenced popular views of the politics and culture of Argentina more than Naipaul's *The Return of Eva Peron*. Indeed, the whole genre of contemporary travel journalism, of which Paul Theroux is a leading exponent, is substantially indebted to his work. Authors from all parts of the world have claimed him as an influence.

Works in Critical Context

Naipaul is widely acknowledged as one of the giants of contemporary literature. He is admired for his command of language and dialect, his acuity of observation and detail, and for his insights into the way human beings internalize and live out the effects of social and geopolitical conditions. Others have accused him of being unduly pessimistic. For example, the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, another Nobel laureate, derided his fellow West Indian as "V. S. Nightfall" in his poem "The Spoiler's Return."

***A Bend in the River* (1979)** When *A Bend in the River* was published in 1979, Naipaul was already known for his bleak themes and subject matter. Irving Howe, in a *New York Times* review for the book, states, "Naipaul seems right now to be a writer beleaguered by his own truths, unable to get past them. . . . Perhaps we ought simply to be content that, in his austere and brilliant way, he holds fast to the bitterness before his eyes." However, many critics saw in the novel a slightly refined and less bitter perspective than his previous works. Charles R. Larson, writing for the *Chronicle Review*, asserts that the book "shows us the mellowing of one of our greatest contemporary writers." Benny Green, in a

N-Q

▣ Vladimir Nabokov

BORN: 1899, Saint Petersburg, Russia

DIED: 1977, Montreaux, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Russian-American

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

King, Queen, Knave (1928)

Speak, Memory (1951)

Lolita (1955)

Pale Fire (1962)

Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle (1969)

Overview

Novelist, literary critic, chess enthusiast, and butterfly expert, Vladimir Nabokov left behind a body of work characterized by a love of language and wordplay. Although his style markedly changed over time, becoming increasingly less lyrical, all his works are marked by a complex and sophisticated attention to detail. He achieved worldwide fame in 1955 with his highly controversial *Lolita*, the story of a middle-aged man's love affair with a twelve-year-old "nymphet."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Family with Liberal Leanings Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on April 22, 1899, to Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, a distinguished jurist known for his liberal political views, and Elena Ivanovna Rukavishnikova. Nabokov's father was an Anglophile, and the family had a leaning toward English products that included not only English soap and syrup but also a series of English governesses. As a result, Nabokov initially learned to speak English better than Russian.

A Numb Fury of Verse-Making Nabokov's parents encouraged him to follow his mind and imagination. He played with language and linguistics, mathematics, puzzles and games, including chess, and sports from soccer to boxing to tennis. Interested in butterflies, he became a recognized entomological authority while still young and remained a noted butterfly expert his entire life. Nabokov began to write poems when he was thirteen and, as he described it, "the numb fury of verse-making first came over me." He began writing poems in Russian, French, and English, but his real passion for writing poetry began in 1914.

Fleeing Revolutionary Russia Nabokov's father, a lawyer who edited St. Petersburg's only liberal newspaper, rebelled against first the czarist regime, then against the communists. He was an active member of the *Duma* (the Russian parliament) until he was briefly jailed and stripped of his political rights in 1908 for signing a manifesto opposing conscription. In February of 1917, at the height of World War I and in the midst of a chaotic military mutiny, the *Duma* seized power, thus creating the Russian provisional government. Later that same year, Vladimir Lenin led the Bolsheviks in overthrowing this new governing body, thus inciting a bloody civil war. The Russian Revolution, as these two events are called, marked the transfer of governing power from the czarist autocracy to the Soviet Union, ending the Russian Empire. After the Russian Revolution, deprived of their land and fortune, the family fled Russia for London in 1919, where Nabokov and his brother entered Cambridge University. At Cambridge, Nabokov graduated with honors in 1922 and rejoined his family in Berlin in the wake of an unexpected tragedy. Nabokov's father was assassinated in Berlin by Russian monarchists as he tried to shelter their real target, Pavel Milyukov, a leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party-in-exile.

Romance and Marriage After relocating to Berlin permanently, Nabokov received some income from public readings and from his publications, which included not



Vladimir Nabokov Nabokov, Vladimir, photograph. Gertrude Fehr / Pix Inc. / Time and Life Pictures / Getty Images.

only literary works but also journalistic pieces and chess problems, but he found a more reliable means of support in providing instruction in French and English to students, primarily Russians. A romance with Svetlana Siwert, the subject of several of his poems, was terminated in January 1923 by her parents, who had insisted that he obtain a steady job as a condition for becoming engaged to their daughter. A few months later, he met his future wife, Véra Slonim, at a charity ball. Sensitive and intelligent, she could recite Nabokov's poetry by heart and became indispensable to him.

Nabokov married Slonim in 1925. In the fall, Nabokov wrote his first novel, *Mary* (1926). Based on Nabokov's relationship with Valentina Shulgina (Nabokov's first love), *Mary* is perhaps the most poetic novel Nabokov ever wrote. The original Russian version of the book received little attention, but after Nabokov's reputation burgeoned and the work was translated into English, *Mary* received closer critical attention.

Growing Literary Reputation and Travel As his literary reputation grew, Nabokov traveled extensively throughout Europe, visiting his siblings and giving readings of his work. In 1937, he obtained permission for his family to relocate to France. It was at this time that Nabokov began to experiment with English, translating his Russian novel *Otchayanie* (1934) into the English *Despair* in 1937. After Adolf Hitler rose to power in

Germany, the Nabokovs fled the Nazi advance into France in 1940 and sailed to the United States.

Early Days in America: A Series of Professorships

His next book, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), was written in English and marks the demise of the use of the pen name V. Sirin and the emergence of Vladimir Nabokov, an American writer. In 1940, Nabokov taught Slavic languages at Stanford University. From 1941 to 1948, he taught at Wellesley College and became a professor of literature. He was also a research fellow in entomology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University from 1942 to 1948 and later discovered several butterfly species and subspecies, including "Nabokov's wood nymph." A Guggenheim fellowship in 1943 resulted in his scholarly 1944 biographical study of Russian author Nikolai Gogol. Nabokov became an American citizen in 1945 and by then was a regular contributor to popular magazines.

In 1949 Nabokov was appointed professor of Russian and European literature at Cornell University, where he taught until 1959. In 1951 he published the memoir of his early life in Russia, *Speak, Memory*. Six years later, several short sketches published in the *New Yorker* were incorporated into *Pnin* (1957), his novel about a Russian émigré teaching at an American university.

Lolita Brings Notoriety Despite Nabokov's vast productivity, scholarly status, and high standing in literary circles, Nabokov did not gain widespread popularity until the publication of *Lolita*. The story of a middle-aged man's obsessive and disastrous lust for a twelve-year-old schoolgirl, *Lolita* is widely considered one of the most controversial novels of the twentieth century. Rejected by four American publishers because of its pedophilic subject matter, the book was finally published by Olympia Press, a Parisian firm that specialized in pornography and erotica. *Lolita* attracted a wide underground readership, and tourists began transporting copies of the work abroad. While U.S. Customs permitted this action, the British government pressured the French legislature to confiscate the remaining copies of the book and forbid further sales. However, the English author Graham Greene located a copy and, in a pivotal *London Times* article, focused on the novel's language rather than its content, designating *Lolita* one of the ten best books of 1955. Public curiosity and controversy fueled the book's popularity, and in 1958 it was published in the United States. Within five weeks, *Lolita* was the most celebrated novel in the nation and remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for over a year.

Nabokov sold the film rights and wrote the screenplay for the 1962 movie directed by Stanley Kubrick. With royalties from the novel and the film, Nabokov was able to quit teaching and devote himself entirely to his writing and to butterfly hunting.

In 1959 Nabokov published *Invitation to a Beheading*, a story of a man awaiting execution, which he had

first written in Russian in 1938. In 1960 he and his family moved to Montreaux, Switzerland. Nabokov received critical acclaim for *Pale Fire* (1962), a strange, multidimensional exercise in the techniques of parable and parody, written as a 999-line poem with a lengthy commentary by a demented New England scholar who is actually an exiled mythical king.

In his seventieth year, Nabokov produced his last major work, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), a sexually explicit tale of incest, twice as long as any other novel he had written and, according to the *New York Times's* John Leonard, “fourteen times as complicated.” An immediate best seller, *Ada* evoked a wide array of critical response, ranging from strong objections to the highest praise. While the value of the novel was debated, *Ada* was universally acknowledged as a work of enormous ambition that represented the culmination of all that Nabokov had attempted to accomplish in his writing over the years.

Nabokov died on July 2, 1977, at the Palace Hotel in Montreux, Switzerland, where he had lived since 1959.

Works in Literary Context

Nabokov stated that his fiction expresses his passionate regard for human feelings and morality. Yet, some critics have accused Nabokov of being indifferent to social and political issues of his time, comparing his stories and novels to elegantly constructed, labyrinth-like narratives and riddles. This similarity is largely because of Nabokov's curious ability to combine his passion for literature with his strong interest in chess and crosswords. Many of Nabokov's stories share the motifs, themes, and techniques of his larger narratives and function as “little tragedies,” with some mythological, psychological, and metaphysical overtones. While he has been compared to author Joseph Conrad by some critics, Nabokov was critical of other prominent authors and rejected such comparisons. It was the authors he read in his youth, like Aleksandr Blok, that exerted the most influence on his poetic works.

Themes in *Lolita* It has been suggested that the character Dolores, whom Nabokov's antihero Humbert Humbert idealizes as “Lolita,” represents the superficiality of American culture viewed from a sophisticated European perspective. While other literary scholars do not deny this interpretation, they view an examination of the effects of the artist's antisocial impulses in addition to *Lolita's* satirical vision of American morals and values. Several commentators maintained that the accusations of pornography stemmed from Nabokov's lack of moral commentary regarding Humbert's actions, while some argued that the true crime of the novel is not the murder Humbert commits but his cutting short of Lolita's childhood. Critics feel that Lolita is not entirely blameless, however, for at twelve she is already sexually active, and, despite Humbert's extravagant designs, it is she who first

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Nabokov's famous contemporaries include:

Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999): Few American directors were as simultaneously revolutionary and popular as Kubrick. His films—most based on novels—are meticulously constructed masterpieces that push the boundaries of cinematic vision.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): Russian novelist and dramatist best known for his exposé of the Soviet system of political prison camps, or *gulags*. Awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970, Solzhenitsyn was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974.

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930): Russian futurist poet, he coauthored the 1912 declaration *A Slap in the Face to Public Taste*. As a futurist, his work focused on the dynamic, hectic pace of modern life and tearing down old social orders and authority figures.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986): American visual artist most closely associated with the American Southwest. O'Keeffe is best known for her paintings of flowers, rocks, shells, animal bones, and landscapes that synthesize abstraction and representation.

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969): A leading voice among the so-called Beat Generation, a loose association of poets, writers, and musicians that revolted against the conformity of post-World War II America, Kerouac is best known for his stream-of-consciousness travelogue, *On the Road*.

seduces him. Lolita's character, as well as other characterizations in the novel, have won Nabokov consistent, unified praise for his ability to evoke both revulsion and sympathy in the reader. For example, it is generally agreed that Lolita has a truly unattractive personality, yet her unhappy life inspires compassion. Humbert is a pedophile and murderer but wins the reader's appreciation for his humor and brutal honesty, while Charlotte, Dolores's mother, is depicted as both a piranha and a pawn.

Throughout *Lolita*, Nabokov challenges the reader. The novel's foreword, written by “John Ray, Jr., PhD,” a bogus Freudian psychiatrist, introduces Humbert's confession through overly complex psychological jargon, which Nabokov hated. Unwitting readers believe the foreword is sincere, especially because of *Lolita's* controversial subject matter. Nabokov's myriad uses of anagrams, coded poetry, and puns provide clues concerning Lolita's mysterious lover. Nabokov also parodies numerous styles of literature in *Lolita*; it is at times viewed as a satire of the confessional novel, the detective novel, the romance novel, and, most frequently, as an allegory of the artistic process.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Nabokov often employed emotionally detached, unreliable narrators in his stories, most notably in *Lolita*. Other writers stretching back to the nineteenth century have approached their stories in a similar fashion; strongly rooted in Russian literature, the technique later became widespread in both fiction and film during the twentieth century. Here are some other works that share Nabokov's detachment:

The Stranger (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. One of the best known works of absurdist fiction, *The Stranger* features an emotionally detached, unreflecting, and unapologetic main character named Meursault.

Notes from Underground (1864), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Narrated by a bitter, anonymous bureaucrat, this short novel is a collection of disjointed and often contradictory notes that decry the central character's alienation from his fellow man.

Diary of a Madman (1835), a short story by Nikolai Gogol. Considered one of his greatest works, and written from the first-person perspective of a diarist slowly slipping into love-induced insanity, Gogol plays with perceptions of reality and trustworthiness.

Psycho (1960), a film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. This groundbreaking work utilizes two unreliable narrators, first introducing a female "lead" who is quickly killed off, then misleading the audience as to the relationship between Norman Bates and his mother.

Influencing a Generation of Postmodernists Nabokov's powerful writing impacted his contemporaries, such as John Banville, Don DeLillo, Salman Rushdie, and Edmund White, as well as generations of authors after him. Other prominent authors that acknowledge Nabokov's influence include Martin Amis, John Updike, Thomas Pynchon, Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon, Pulitzer Prize winner Jeffrey Eugenides, T. Coraghessan Boyle, Jhumpa Lahiri, Marisha Pessl, and Zadie Smith.

Works in Critical Context

Nabokov earned a secure reputation as one of the twentieth century's most inventive writers. His prose was lauded as both complex and playful, and his descriptive power was unparalleled. While many of his novels might be regarded as masterpieces, it is the blockbuster *Lolita* for which he is most remembered.

Lolita The initial reviews of *Lolita* were varied. While several critics expressed shock and distaste, most believed the "pornography" charges were erroneous. Praising Nabokov's lively style, dry wit, and deft characterizations, many reviewers concurred with novelist and literary critic

Granville Hicks, who called the novel "a brilliant *tour de force*." Beat novelist Jack Kerouac described *Lolita* as "a classic old love story," and Charles Rolo commented in his September 1958 *Atlantic Monthly* article, "*Lolita* seems to me an assertion of the power of the comic spirit to wrest delight and truth from the most outlandish materials. It is one of the funniest serious novels I have ever read; and the vision of its abominable hero, who never deludes or excuses himself, brings into grotesque relief the cant, the vulgarity, and the hypocritical conventions that pervade the human comedy."

Responses to Literature

1. Research the history of the Russian emigrant community in Berlin in the 1920s through the 1940s. What part did Nabokov play in the larger community? Why did he leave Germany after the Nazis came to power, and what happened to those who chose not to leave?
2. At one point in *Lolita*, Humbert admits that he never found out the laws governing his relationship with Lolita. Investigate what rights Humbert had as a stepfather in 1955 and what the penalties for incest were. Investigate the effects of incest on children and compare your findings to the effects Lolita's relationship with Humbert had on her.
3. Analyze Nabokov's use of names in *Lolita*, such as how names are used in the book's word games. How does the comical name of Humbert Humbert influence the reader's opinion of his criminal acts? How are names used to reinforce the recurring theme of coincidence?
4. Compare Nabokov's treatment of taboo-shattering sexual relationships in *Lolita* and *Ada or Ardor*. Is there an implied moral judgment in either work? How are the relationships treated differently? How are they similar?

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❏ V. S. Naipaul

BORN: 1932, *Chaguana, Trinidad*

NATIONALITY: *British, Trinidadian*

GENRE: *Novels, essays, short stories*

MAJOR WORKS:

A House for Mr. Biswas (1961)

Guerrillas (1975)

A Bend in the River (1979)

The Enigma of Arrival (1987)

A Way in the World (1994)

Overview

V. S. Naipaul, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001, is one of the world's most accomplished authors. His work centers on the Third World, including countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America, and the Caribbean. He has spent much of his life traveling, and his work usually expresses the viewpoint of a rootless, stateless wanderer who observes his surroundings as an outsider. His detached stance and bleak, skeptical outlook have made Naipaul's work controversial, but his lucid style, skillful use of dialect, and perceptive eye are highly praised.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Roots of Rootlessness Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born August 17, 1932, on the island of Trinidad. His grandfather had come to the West Indies as an indentured servant, as many Indians did between 1880 and the 1930s, to work on sugar, tea, and rubber planta-



V. S. Naipaul *Naipaul, V. S.*, photograph. AP Images.

tions. His father was an aspiring journalist who never gained the respect of his wife's family, a prominent clan in the island's high society. Naipaul later fictionalized this situation in his breakthrough novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Early in life, Naipaul experienced a profound alienation, both from his close-knit family life and from the social and political life of Trinidad. He attended one of the island's best high schools and won a scholarship to attend Oxford University (University College) in 1950. England, more than Trinidad, became his home beginning in the 1950s, and in 1955 he married a political-science student, Patricia Hale. Nevertheless, studying English literature at Oxford was not the most suitable preparation for the literary career he was already planning. Naipaul worked as a broadcaster for the BBC during the late 1950s, but soon gave up this position to write full-time.

These youthful experiences set the terms for his entire literary career. Saddened by Trinidad's material and cultural poverty, distanced from his ancestral India, and unable to relate to the heritage of his adopted home—both country's former imperial ruler, England—Naipaul recognized that he was “content to be a colonial,

without a past, without ancestors.” Most of his work deals with people who, like himself, feel estranged from their society and who desperately seek ways to belong. By the same token, many of Naipaul’s stories are set in Third World countries creating new national identities from the remnants of native and colonial cultures.

Emerging from Trinidad, in Fiction In the late 1950s, the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, once colonies of the British Empire, began the process of becoming an independent nation. In his first four novels, culminating in *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul drew on his Trinidadian background and current events for subject matter. The first three are short, gently satirical novels, emphasizing cultural misunderstandings and various ironies resulting from an illiterate society’s shift from colonial to independent status.

A House for Mr. Biswas marks a turning point for Naipaul. Set also in Trinidad, it echoes in some passages the light tone of the earlier pieces, but far surpasses them through the detailed, compassionate character study of Biswas, the ambitious writer of Hindu extraction, defeated in the struggle for a place of his own, the fictional representative of the author’s own father. Many critics regard *A House for Mr. Biswas* as Naipaul’s first masterpiece. In 1998, The Modern Library listed the work among the finest one hundred novels written in English.

A Global Canvas After the success of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul increasingly sought broader geographic and social contexts in which to explore his themes of drift and dislocation. He began to travel extensively, using London as a permanent return base. He wrote prolifically, alternating between journalism and autobiographical fiction, always from the persona of an alienated ex-colonial. His earlier lighthearted tone faded as he examined the more tragic consequences of rootless alienation through the eyes of various “universal wanderers.”

The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies—British, French, and Dutch—in the West Indies and South America (1962) was Naipaul’s first work in the journalism/travel genre for which he became famous. Naipaul is unsparing in his view of the Caribbean as blighted by the legacy of slavery and imperialism—indeed as a region with no real past or useful tradition to draw upon. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) describes Naipaul’s travels to India. His harsh portrayal of this country shocked many readers; some critics accused him of arriving in India with a rigid bias in favor of Western tradition and ideology. (His second book on the subcontinent, *India: A Wounded Civilization* [1977], generated similar criticism.) With *The Loss Of El Dorado* (1969), a critical history of Trinidad since the Spanish conquest, Naipaul was widely hailed as an explainer of the Third World to the First.

Naipaul’s next novel, *In a Free State* (1971), was his first nontraditional work, consisting of five stories set in

an unnamed developing country in sub-Saharan Africa. The work’s conception and execution won rich praise, but its author’s tragic outlook struck some readers as unduly bitter and pessimistic.

Portraits of Civil and Moral Disorder *Guerrillas* (1975), Naipaul’s most sexually explicit novel, takes place on a Caribbean island recently liberated from colonial rule. Naipaul returned to an African setting four years later with his most acclaimed novel, *A Bend in the River*. In a setting of a small village, the writer further explores all of his important themes: the social and moral disorder left in the wake of imperialism; the problems of underdeveloped Third World nations caught between old tribal ways and the new technology of dangerous weaponry and flashy consumer goods; and the liberal white woman in the Third World landscape, a catalyst for volatile sexual and political emotions. Although Naipaul does not name the postcolonial state in which he lays his story, readers familiar with current events could recognize it as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), during the early days of Mobutu Sese Seko’s brutal regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

A Bend in the River, like *In a Free State* and *Guerrillas*, contains elements of sexual and political violence within an atmosphere of impending chaos, causing some reviewers to conclude that Naipaul views Third World societies as essentially hopeless. The controversy surrounding his work intensified with the publication of *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1982), in which he examines the Islamic revival in Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Naipaul presents a scathing picture of the civil and social disorder in these countries and attributes this to the dominance of Islamic fanaticism. In the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the lengthy Iranian hostage crisis in 1980 (in which radical students stormed the American embassy in Tehran, seized American hostages, and held them for more than a year), some Americans antagonistic to radical Islam responded favorably to this argument. Others perceived Naipaul’s analysis as shallow, too negative, or even biased.

Fact and Fiction, Outer and Inner Landscapes Naipaul’s next novel is also considered a masterpiece by many, although a highly unconventional one. *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (1987) is a work of fiction, although the narrator writes autobiographically and much of the material is indistinguishable from Naipaul’s own life; for example, the novel explicitly mentions the death of Naipaul’s sister. Most of this book is set in the countryside of southern England around Salisbury. *The Enigma of Arrival* was Naipaul’s first book to sell well in England. Part of this success was attributable to his depiction of a specifically English landscape and of the rural working-class characters that populate it.

A Way in the World: A Sequence (1994) combines memoir, historical scholarship, and imaginative writing in a series of nine narratives of people whose lives have been

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Naipaul's celebrated novels *In a Free State* and *A Bend in the River* concern political turmoil in postcolonial Africa and the havoc caused by clashing cultures, European and African, tribal and modern. The following works of literature, all set in Africa, set in narrative motion a related set of forces:

Heart of Darkness (1899), a novel by Joseph Conrad. A major inspiration for Naipaul, this tale concerns an ambitious European who has fallen prey to delusions of grandeur in the Congo and the man who is sent to retrieve him.

The Sheltering Sky (1949), a novel by Paul Bowles. A married couple from New York travels into the North African desert, ignorant of the dangers surrounding them.

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. The most celebrated African novel in English, this tale concerns British disruption of village life in Nigeria.

The Constant Gardener (2001), a novel by John Le Carré. A British diplomat, investigating his wife's murder in a remote region of Africa, discovers the corporate conspiracy that led to her death and which may doom him as well.

The Pick-Up (2002), a novel by Nadine Gordimer. This tale treats the issue of loving across the divides of class, race, religion, and immigrant status.

review for the *Nation*, notes that "while the book might be said to be deficient in the conventional tensions of fiction," it is nonetheless "a book of wonderful authority and wisdom."

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the depiction of women, and in particular Caucasian women, in the novels of V. S. Naipaul. Do these views conflict with or conform to the general view of women in North American society today?
2. Research the history of the immigrant community on the island of Trinidad, the social milieu in which Naipaul sets his novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Why do you think Naipaul grew disenchanted with his home at such an early age? Did this disenchantment remain a constant theme in his writings? Provide several examples.
3. How exactly is *The Enigma of Arrival* a work of fiction, and how exactly is it a memoir? Write an essay on the ways that Naipaul subverts, or transcends, the expectations of both genres in this book. You may want to look at *A Way in the World* as well.

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✠ R. K. Narayan

BORN: 1906, Madras, India

DIED: 2001, Madras, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Malgudi Days and Other Stories (1941)
The Financial Expert (1952)
The Guide (1958)
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961)
Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985)

Overview

When R. K. Narayan died at the age of ninety-four, he left behind a body of work that will continue to impress generations of readers. He published novels, short stories,



R.K. Narayan Narayan, R.K., photograph. The Library of Congress.

travel books, essays, and retellings of Indian epics, as well as articles he produced as a journalist in his early years. From the 1930s to the early 1990s, he managed to write at least three books every decade. Most of Narayan's prose centers around the fictional village of Malgudi, which Narayan used as a microcosm for studying the interaction between various classes and races of Indian society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Hardships in Colonial India Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born on October 10, 1906, in his grandfather's home in Madras, the son of school-teacher R. V. Krishnaswami Iyer and Gnana Iyer. Narayan spent the early years of his life in Madras in the care of his grandmother and a maternal uncle, joining his parents mainly during vacations. At the time, India was still the "jewel in the crown" of the British empire, a colony held since 1857. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, Indian nationalism intensified to

the point that by 1919 the Government of India Act was passed giving India limited self government.

Narayan first went to school in Madras. In 1922 he was shifted to the school in Mysore where his father was the headmaster. *My Days* indicates that Narayan was an indifferent student but an avid reader. He failed the school entrance examination twice and also was unable to get through college easily. Eventually he did graduate from Maharaja College of Mysore with a bachelor of arts degree in 1930.

Serious Aspirations Narayan began to write seriously in the 1920s. His biographers Susan Ram and N. Ram describe his intense desire to see his name in print and the hard work he did to accomplish this, not only reading major English writers and periodicals but also going through books on how to sell one's manuscripts. He grew accustomed to receiving rejection slips from publishers and editors, but he continued to harbor hopes of making a living as a writer, until his father persuaded him to take up a teaching position in a school. The experience proved distasteful, and he soon returned to submitting his manuscripts. He eventually succeeded in getting an article on Indian cinema published in the *Madras Mail* in July 1930. The 1920s in India were also marked by the nonviolent protest campaigns of Mohandas Gandhi, whose actions were aimed at forcing Britain to relinquish control of India.

First Love, First Publication In his memoir, Narayan recalls wandering the streets of Mysore one day when Malgudi, the setting of most of his fiction, just seemed to "hurl" into his mind, along with a vision of a character called Swaminathan. He thus began his first Malgudi novel, *Swami and Friends*, completing it two years later in 1932.

In publishing short pieces in the *Indian Review* and *Punch*, Narayan satisfied his dream of writing and seeing his name in print. Also during this time, he fell in love. He had spotted fifteen-year-old Rajam Iyer as she was waiting for water at a local street tap. He persuaded his father to send a proposal of marriage to her father. He married Rajam on July 1, 1934. Around this time, he also became the Mysore reporter of a newspaper called the *Justice*.

Malgudi Is Put on the Map Narayan knew that for an Indian writing English fiction, *Swami and Friends* would not find a publisher in his country, and publishers in England were not responding. Sometime in 1934 he contacted his friend Krishna Raghavendra Putra, who soon persuaded the famous English novelist Graham Greene, who was already attempting to get some of Narayan's short stories published in English magazines, to look at *Swami and Friends*. Greene was so impressed that he recommended the book. It appeared in October 1935, and Malgudi was launched. Though sales were weak, public and critical response was positive. The year 1935 also

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Narayan's famous contemporaries include:

Rachel Carson (1907–1964): Marine biologist, environmentalist, and naturalist and science writer, her work *Silent Spring* (1962) was instrumental in the advent of global environmentalism.

Hiroshi Inagaki (1905–1980): Japanese filmmaker who is best known for his *Samurai* trilogy.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): Mexican painter who became an influential figure with her distinctive style and representation of indigenous culture.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French philosopher, writer, and critic who is often attributed with pioneering modern existentialism.

saw the passage of another Government of India Act that moved the country one step closer to true independence.

Stalled Writing Efforts After *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The Dark Room* (1938), both of which sold poorly but received better and better reviews, Narayan entered the darkest period of his life: Five years into his marriage, his wife died after a short illness of what was probably typhoid. Overwhelmed with grief, he stopped writing. He finally managed to get out of his depression at the same time as the outbreak of World War II. During this time, however, Greene became inaccessible due to his involvement in the war effort, and Narayan found paths to publishing doubly difficult.

Malgudi Lives On Narayan managed to sustain himself in this difficult period through his journalism and by giving talks on Madras radio. He became the editor of a journal called *Indian Thought* in 1941, and by 1944 he had managed to complete his fourth novel, *The English Teacher* (1945). It was widely praised and sold well in England. In 1947, Britain ceded control of India by signing the Indian Independence Act, which simultaneously created the Muslim-majority nation of Pakistan.

The author's work returned to Malgudi in *Mr. Sampath* (1949), and the fictional but no less realistic land continued in *The Financial Expert* (1952), arguably one of Narayan's best and most popular novels. Narayan followed that work with his most political novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), and repeated the success with *The Guide* (1958). Narayan followed *The Guide* with another triumph: *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961). After two less popular works, Narayan's twelfth novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), made yet another impression—with a tiger as the protagonist. *A Tiger for Malgudi* was the last of Narayan's novels to receive wide critical attention, but it

got mixed reviews, and a few critics noted their disappointment with it.

Final Work Efforts At eighty years old, Narayan published *Talkative Man* in 1986, and followed it with his last novel, *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), four years after. He received a number of major awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award for *The Guide*, the Padma Bhushan, and several honorary degrees up until 2001, the year he died.

Works in Literary Context

Influences In *My Days: A Memoir* (1974), the novelist says that his grandmother was a major influence on his life and his storytelling. His maternal uncle, who published a literary journal in Tamil, also played a part in the growth of the novelist's mind in his early years. Narayan is most noted for his creation of Malgudi, a fictitious village set in southern India that most critics consider a composite of his birthplace of Madras and his adult residence of Mysore. These narratives derive from India's oral and literary traditions.

Economical Style Among Narayan's strengths as a novelist are the economy of his storytelling and the skill with which he manipulates his plot so that events that complicate the lives of his central characters are resolved within a few hundred pages. Narayan is also a master of shorter forms of fiction—his five collections of short stories, such as *Malgudi Days* (1943), cover the same territory as the novels. The stories of the early collections are slight pieces and usually journalistic in style. Some are anecdotal or no more than character sketches. The stories of the later collections are longer and more intricately built. A few of the stories are satirical in tone and sometimes slip into the absurd.

Sympathetic Humor in Themes of Struggle Narayan's stories usually show people as fallible, eccentric, and often amusing. Narayan often uses wry, sympathetic humor to examine the universalized conflicts of Malgudi, focusing on ordinary characters who seek self-awareness through their struggles with ethical dilemmas. All of Narayan's characters, in accordance with principles of Hinduism, retain a calm, dignified acceptance of fate. In his early fiction, Narayan makes use of personal experience to address conflicts between Indian and Western culture. *Swami and Friends: A Novel of Malgudi* (1935), for instance, chronicles an extroverted schoolboy's rebellion against his missionary upbringing. Such novels, like Narayan's later works, were noted for his natural and unaffected language, his subtle humor, and his ability to transform a particular lifestyle into a universal human experience.

Works in Critical Context

Peers as well as successors have been quick to acknowledge Narayan's contribution to Indian writing in English.

In an essay written at Narayan's death, for instance, the distinguished Indian poet Dom Moraes called Narayan "by far the best writer of English fiction that his country has ever produced." Typical of the praise heaped on the novels and their writer are comments such as those made about *The Financial Expert* and *The Guide*.

The Financial Expert (1952) *The Financial Expert* shows Narayan's powerful handling of the central theme of the vanity of human wishes and his deft manipulation of plot. The portrait of the central character, Margayya, reveals a man who is deeply flawed but also capable of retaining the reader's sympathy. The novel is memorable, too, for the portraits of Dr. Pal, the archetypal confidence man; Meenakshi, Margayya's long-suffering wife; and Balu, his prodigal son.

Margayya's rise and fall take place against a backdrop of a world full of poverty, corruption, bureaucracy, and the opportunism displayed by cynical businessmen and officials in wartime India. Narayan manages to be serious and comic throughout the novel; he also alternates details of everyday life in Malgudi with moments where readers view the workings of Margayya's mind. The critic William Walsh writes that the novel "has an intricate and silken organization, a scheme of composition holding everything together in a vibrant and balanced union."

The Guide (1958) *The Guide* is usually considered Narayan's most accomplished novel. In this work, a former convict named Raju is mistaken for a holy man upon his arrival in Malgudi. Implored by the villagers to avert a famine, Raju is unable to convince them that he is a fraud. Deciding to embrace the role the townspeople have thrust upon him, Raju dies during a prolonged fast and is revered as a saint.

In a 1958 issue of the *New Yorker*, critic Anthony West praised *The Guide* as "the best of R. K. Narayan's enchanting novels about the South Indian town of Malgudi and its people. . . . It is a profound statement of Indian realities." The Malgudi novels as a whole are most often highly regarded. Critics often compare Narayan's creation of Malgudi to William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and most agree with Charles R. Larson's assessment: "While Faulkner's vision remains essentially grotesque, Narayan's has been predominantly comic, reflecting with humor the struggle of the individual to find peace within the framework of public life."

Responses to Literature

1. Narayan books often feature Hindu cultural practices. Using your library and the Internet, research the modern Hindu practices in India and write a paper summarizing your findings.
2. Narayan lived and wrote during a time of great change in India, as control of the government passed gradually from the British to the Indians themselves. To find out more about Britain's long involvement in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who focused on the tragedy of human fallibility:

The Infernal Machine (1936), a play by Jean Cocteau. In this play, the playwright turns the classic story of Oedipus into a tragic-comedy by using irony where there originally was none.

"A Rose for Emily" (1930), a short story by William Faulkner. In this short story, Emily Grierson is alienated from her immediate society and is isolated in her aging, eccentric, and "spinster" years.

Snow (2005), a novel by Orhan Pamuk. In this work, a clash of ideals is witnessed by a poet in exile as he comes to terms with his alienation from poetry and God.

A View from the Bridge (1955), a play by Arthur Miller. Italian American longshoreman Eddie Carbone suffers the profound betrayals and conflicts of family and friends in this play.

India, read *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (2000), a historical work by Lawrence James.

3. Chronologically, Narayan's fiction takes up the major events of Indian history. Read one of his novels, then research and write a paper describing the historical context of the action in the novel.

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☒ Irène Némirovsky

BORN: 1903, Kiev, Ukraine

DIED: 1942, Auschwitz, Poland

NATIONALITY: Ukrainian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Misunderstanding (1926)

David Golder (1929)

De Bal (1930)

The Wine of Solitude (1935)

Suite Française (2004)

Overview

Irène Némirovsky was a prolific Ukrainian novelist and biographer. Best known for her unfinished *Suite Française*, a book composed of two novellas about life in France during the Nazi occupation, Némirovsky has been the subject of a wide range of criticism. Present-day scholars are impressed with her eloquence and critics are appalled by her more than implicit anti-Semitism—despite her Jewish origins and the fate of European Jews at the hands of the Nazis.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Russian, French, and Jewish Influences Irène Némirovsky was born on February 11, 1903, in Kiev, Ukraine. Her father, Leon Némirovsky, was a rich Jewish banker; Irène's mother was not interested in her. The Némirovsky family lived in Saint Petersburg in Russia, where the young Irène was brought up by a French governess. The environment almost made French her native tongue; however, she also spoke Yiddish, Basque, Finnish, Polish, and English.

In 1918, following the start of the Russian Revolution, the Némirovskys moved to Finland. The following year they moved to Paris, France, where the eighteen-year-old attended the Sorbonne and began her writing career. In 1926 Némirovsky met and married Michel Epstein, a banker, and three years later, she had her first child, a daughter named Denise. Elisabeth was born in 1937.



Irène Némirovsky © Albert Harlingue / Roger-Viollet / The Image Works

Early Novel and Film Success In 1929 Némirovsky's novel *David Golder* was published. The book drew upon the author's own experiences as the daughter of a Jewish banker. The novel was an early success in Némirovsky's budding career, and in 1930, the book was adapted into a film, featuring Harry Baur as David Golder. The same year also saw her novel *De Bal* become a movie and a play. More success followed, with Némirovsky being hailed as one of France's most talented young authors. She was so successful that she was bringing in an income that surpassed that of her banker husband.

Jewish Condemnation and Flight from Paris Némirovsky converted to Catholicism in 1939, a year after she and her husband tried to gain French citizenship. Némirovsky had also been writing for two arguably anti-Semitic magazines. In 1940, after Nazi troops had occupied a large portion of France, Némirovsky's husband was unable to work at the bank and her books could no longer be published due to her Jewish ancestry. Like other Jewish people, she and her husband were forced to wear the yellow Star of David.

Apparently attempting to disclaim any Jewish connections, Némirovsky wrote a letter to Marshal Pétain, who had just become head of Vichy France, a region that remained free from direct German control only through its willing cooperation with Nazi policies. She expressed how "greatly distressed" she was by the "fate" she feared

awaited her and her family, and made efforts to explain that she and Epstein were born in Russia, but their children were born in France and she and her husband had been living in France for twenty years and had tried without success to gain French citizenship.

Her reasoning and petitions went ignored. When the Nazis came to occupy Paris, Némirovsky and her family fled Paris, taking up residence in a village called Issy-l'Évêque. Némirovsky wrote stories based on what she experienced and expressed her apparent shock at the rapid moral decline she saw in France—the French people showing their basest sides under the pressures of Nazi infiltration. Her view of mankind became very bleak, and she wrote the beginnings of a multipart work that she planned to be structured like a symphony. On July 13, 1942, before Némirovsky could complete her work, she was arrested by the Vichy police. In accordance with Nazi German rule, Némirovsky was taken from her family and as a “stateless person of Jewish descent” was transported to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, where she died of typhus one month later.

The Surviving Suite Française Manuscript

After her arrest her husband, Michel Epstein, pleaded with the German ambassador for her release, arguing that his wife’s family had never practiced Judaism (and there is no indication that they had) and claiming that Némirovsky’s writing was most often anti-Semitic. But his pleading was to no avail. Instead, he too was deported to Auschwitz and died three months after Némirovsky. Némirovsky and Epstein’s daughters escaped capture and lived on the run. Before fleeing their home, the elder child, Denise, grabbed a small suitcase that had belonged to her mother, containing photographs and what Denise thought was a diary. Denise took this suitcase with her from one hiding place to another, but even after the war had ended, she avoided reading the “diary,” fearing it would bring up painful memories.

When Denise finally did read her mother’s writing, she found not a diary but an unfinished novel about the panicked exile from Paris when the Nazis marched in. Published as *Suite Française* (2004), the book drew international acclaim.

Works in Literary Context

Anti-Semitism Critic and scholar Ruth Franklin suggests that Némirovsky found her style early on, becoming “predominantly a novelist of society, somewhat in the vein of Edith Wharton, but with an acerbically satirical tone that negates the possibility of authorial compassion for her characters.” From the start, claims Franklin, Némirovsky’s fiction involved “anti-Jewish stereotypes that would become something of a trademark.” For example, in an early novella entitled *The Misunderstanding* (1926), the critic points out, “an aristocrat consults a Jewish coworker for financial advice: a ‘typical young Jew, rich,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Némirovsky’s famous contemporaries include:

Anne Frank (1929–1945): Known throughout the world for the posthumously published *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947). Anne and her family went into hiding when the Germans occupied Amsterdam.

Zora Neale Hurston (1903–1960): African American writer who paved the way during the Harlem Renaissance for future African American women writers.

Clare Booth Luce (1903–1987): American editor, activist, and writer, she was also a high-profile socialite, a congresswoman with a Republican seat in the House of Representatives, and an ambassador to Italy.

George Orwell (1903–1950): Celebrated English author and journalist, he concerned himself with government, politics, language, and censorship.

elegant, with a long pointed nose in a narrow, pale face.’ And the Jew takes advantage of his colleague financially.” *David Golder* (1929), which Franklin calls “an appalling book by any standard,” further exploits the Jewish stereotype.

Whether veiled or explicit, anti-Semitism was hardly uncommon in European literature of the early part of the twentieth century. Writers as prominent as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway have all, more or less rightly, been accused by critics of employed Jewish stereotypes in their works. The fact these stereotypes were so pervasive helps explain to some degree why the world was so slow to respond to the threat posed by Adolf Hitler’s anti-Jewish agenda.

Works in Critical Context

As critic Jonathan Weiss reminds, the same France that denied Némirovsky citizenship “embraced her incredible writings, and the masses compared her work to Proust.” General reception for Némirovsky’s works, however, has been mixed. This is particularly the case for her most well-known work, *Suite Française*:

Suite Française The posthumously published *Suite Française* is regarded by Helen Dunmore of *The Guardian* as “eloquent and glowing with life,” with a “deep understanding of human behavior under pressure and a hard-won, often ironic composure in the face of violation.” Though the book is an unfinished fragment, it could have been a classic had it been completed. Jane Stevenson of *The Observer* notes that the two novellas “are an unrevised response to current events, they have the urgency and immediacy of a diary. Hindsight would

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also portrayed the Jewish condition—in either positive or negative ways:

The Birthday Party (1958), a play by Harold Pinter. In this realist drama the playwright features an innocuous Webber and a calculating Goldberg who represent the extremes.

Daniel Deronda (1876), a novel by George Eliot. In this social satire the author explores the search for a national identity and a definition of the self as a Jewish person during Victorian times.

Maus (1977), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. In this unusual but provocative format for the story of the Holocaust, the Jewish people are portrayed as mice and the Nazis are depicted as cats.

The Merchant of Venice (c. 1596–1598), a play by William Shakespeare. Though he attempts to retain his dignity as a Jew, the infamous Shylock has gone down in literary history as the stingiest of penny-pinching moneylenders.

Shylock (1976), a play by Arnold Wesker. Using the original stories upon which Shakespeare based *Merchant*, the playwright places his loan-banker protagonist in a 1563 Jewish ghetto in Venice.

have brought more art, but something valuable would have been lost.”

Ruth Kluger of the *Washington Post* prefers this book over diaries of this era and memoirs published after the event. She claims that *Suite Française* is “the perfect mixture: a gifted novelist’s account of a foreign occupation, written while it was taking place, with history and imagination jointly evoking a bitter time, correcting and enriching our memory.”

In *Suite Française*, Némirovsky does not write about the condition of Jews in a Nazi-occupied France. Instead, her stories highlight the relationships between the French and the Germans as the Germans begin to invade their homeland. Critics have been impressed with the fact that Némirovsky found it possible to show the German soldiers in a sympathetic light. Most noted is her compassion and her balanced viewpoint against those who have sent her to the concentration camp. Némirovsky’s presentation of the German soldiers contrasted the popular anti-German sentiments during the time that she was writing the novel.

Responses to Literature

1. Do you think Némirovsky’s book *Suite Française* would have been well received if people did not

know about her own tragic end? Is the novel more relevant due to her personal tragedy? Explain your response in a short essay.

2. Visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage online. Investigate the artifacts, art, and diary entries found on the second floor, which features the Holocaust Memorial material. Choose a poem that has relevance to you. Share the poem with a group and discuss its significance.
3. *David Golder* is the story about a villainous Polish Jew. Do you think Némirovsky wrote the book to stereotype Jews, or does the book have a more universal message? Discuss your opinion with the class, using excerpts from *David Golder* to support your view.

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▣ Pablo Neruda

BORN: 1904, Parral, Chile

DIED: 1973, Santiago, Chile

NATIONALITY: Chilean

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924)

Residence on Earth (1933)

General Song (1950)

Black Island Memorial (1964)

Overview

Arguably the most widely read Latin American poet of all time, Pablo Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971. This honor came as the culmination of more than fifty years of writing poetry popular with readers the world over. In the Nobel citation, the Swedish Academy praises Neruda “for a poetry that with the action of an elemental force brings alive a continent’s destiny and dreams.” Both his lyrical voice and his committed, collective voice bespeak the passion and insightful observation that characterized his life and his works.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The poet known as Pablo Neruda was named Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto at his birth in 1904. He signed his work “Pablo Neruda” (although he did not legally adopt that name until 1946) because his father, a railroad worker, disapproved of his son’s poetic interests.

Literary Success at a Young Age Neruda grew up in southern Chile and in 1921 moved to Santiago and enrolled in college with the intention of preparing himself for a career as an instructor of French. He left college soon after, however, to devote more time to poetry, which had already become his central interest. His first book, *Twilight Book* (*Crepusculario*), was published in 1923, and the following year he published *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (*Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*), a book of intensely romantic and erotic poems. This became his most popular work, more than a million and a half copies of which were published in Spanish alone before his death.

Surrealist Poems and Work as a Chilean Diplomat In the late 1920s and early 1930s, he completed the first two volumes of *Residence on Earth* (*Residencia en la tierra*, 1933, 1935), universally considered the finest surrealist poetry in Spanish. He claimed, however,



Pablo Neruda Chilean poet and activist Pablo Neruda, photograph. Sam Falk / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Neruda's famous contemporaries include:

Salvador Allende (1908–1973): The first democratically elected Marxist leader in Latin America, Allende instituted a massive Socialist overhaul of Chile upon his election, which included nationalizing industry—especially the lucrative, American-owned copper mines. His term was marked by interest from both the KGB, which supported his reforms, and the CIA, which actively attempted to depose him. The Nixon administration's reaction to his reforms caused a crippling downturn in the economy, and he died suspiciously during a right-wing coup financed by the CIA.

Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006): In the wake of Allende's death, General Pinochet set up a military dictatorship that was as far right and politically savage as Allende's government had been far left and democratic. Where Allende had attempted to work with his opponents, Pinochet simply had them arrested without a trial, tortured, and killed—as many as three thousand individuals were “disappeared,” and never heard from again.

Federico Garcia Lorca (1898–1936): A Spanish poet and dramatist. Lorca and Neruda established a friendship while the latter was stationed in Barcelona. Lorca was killed during the Spanish Civil War by right-wing Nationalist guerrillas.

Cesar Vallejo (1892–1938): A Peruvian poet and another friend of Neruda from his time in Spain. His three books of poetry were each considered revolutionary in their own ways, anticipating much of later avant-garde poetry.

that when he wrote these works he knew nothing of surrealism; he had simply responded to the same currents in the air that led to the formation of the surrealist movement elsewhere. In 1930 he married for the first time, but the marriage was unhappy, and a few years later he left his wife to live with Delia del Carril, with whom he stayed until 1955. Between 1927 and 1935, Neruda was a Chilean diplomat in, successively, Burma, Ceylon, Java, Singapore, Argentina, and Spain.

The Spanish Civil War and Neruda's Communism
Neruda was the Chilean consul in Madrid, Spain, in the mid-1930s, a time of great political turmoil that led to the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. The forces of ultranationalist general Francisco Franco were triumphant, and he installed himself as the country's dictator. Neruda's horror at the civil and military barbarities (including the assassination of his friend, poet Federico García Lorca), which accompanied Franco's war against the Spanish Republic, transformed him into a deeply committed polit-

ical poet and led to his eventual membership in the Communist Party. Neruda's political awakening is clear in *Spain in My Heart*, his volume of verse published during this time. After the war, Neruda was in charge of helping 2,000 Republican refugees in France find asylum in Chile.

Neruda's new commitment to communism is clear in the third volume of *Residence on Earth* (1947) and his subsequent poetry, particularly *General Song* (*Canto general*, 1950). In place of the introspection and surrealist complexities of the first two volumes of *Residence*, he produced a poetry that is open and direct, written not for academics and other sophisticated readers of poetry but rather, as Neruda repeatedly emphasized, workers and the politically oppressed. Neruda was openly supportive of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin for many years, until it became clear he had been a ruthless, murderous dictator. Though Neruda disavowed his earlier praise of Stalin, he remained committed to the pure principles of communism.

On the Run from the Government
Neruda was elected to the Chilean senate as a representative of the Communist Party in 1945. Following a dramatic public falling-out between Neruda and Chilean president Gabriel Gonzalez Videla, Neruda was forced to go into hiding, first in Chile, then in Argentina. With help from his friends, writer Miguel Asturias and artist Pablo Picasso, Neruda made his way to Europe, and from there he traveled widely. It was during this time he composed *General Song*, a broad catalog of his experiences. The Gonzalez-Videla government crumbled in 1952, and the new administration welcomed Neruda back to his home country. A few years later, Neruda's wife left him, and he was free to marry longtime mistress Matilde Urrutia. He spent most of the rest of his life with her at his homes in Santiago and at Isla Negra on the Chilean coast. Isla Negra provided him with the subject or inspiration for many later poems, including his verse autobiography, *Black Island Memorial* (*Memorial de Isla Negra*, 1964).

Final Years and Criticism of U.S. Foreign Policy
Neruda was a vocal critic of U.S. foreign policy, and he denounced U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the U.S. response to the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). Unsurprisingly, he was not welcome in the United States, but he did travel to a 1966 literary conference in New York City, thanks to the efforts of American playwright Arthur Miller to persuade the U.S. government to grant the Chilean poet a visa. In 1969 he was nominated by the Chilean Communist Party for president, but he stepped aside in favor of his friend Salvador Allende. When Allende died in a bloody coup led by General Augusto Pinochet four years later, Neruda was very sick from cancer, but that event undoubtedly hastened his own death, which occurred a few days afterward. At his death, he left thirty-four books of poems, essays, and drama in print as well as eight more volumes of poetry and a memoir he had hoped to publish on his seventieth birthday.

Works in Literary Context

Neruda was an educated, widely traveled person with diverse literary influences. Because his poetry often addresses broad universal themes with a personal, confessional tone, his work is likened to that of American poet Walt Whitman. The poems of Neruda that paint a bleaker picture of modern society have prompted comparisons to T.S. Eliot, particularly *The Waste Land* (1922). Though Neruda is often grouped with surrealist poets of the 1920s and 1930s, he pointed out that he had no firsthand knowledge of them, and came to his own surrealist tendencies individually.

La Canción de la fiesta (1921), Neruda's first volume of verse, reflects the influence of the symbolists and of Walt Whitman and Ruben Dario in its quiet, confessional tone. The poems in this collection address such themes as love and death in a traditional style. A similar blend of romantic and symbolist influences characterizes his second volume, *Twilight Book* (1923), which Neruda later dismissed as unsophisticated, although it is often considered a classic of Chilean poetry. Neruda's next major volume, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, is considered to mark his transition from symbolist to surrealist poetry. A best seller, this volume is apparently chaotic and arbitrary in its enumeration of material objects and complex evocation of thought and sensation. The book features poems that convey personal emotion in mystical natural terms. Although these verses initially shocked critics with their everyday language and lyrical yet explicit treatment of the joys and failures of love and sex, Neruda later asserted in his famous essay "Sobre una poesía sin pureza" ("On a Poetry without Purity") that poetry should be "corroded as if by an acid, by the toil of the hand, impregnated with sweat and smoke, smelling of urine and lilies."

In such works of political verse as *Poesía política* (1953) and *Las uvas y el viento* (1954), Neruda employs a new, simpler style to communicate more directly with the common people, a goal that had eluded him despite the popular and political thrust of his earlier poetry.

Most critics agree that *Extravagaria* (*Estravagario*, 1958) signals the last major development in Neruda's poetry. Like the *Elemental Odes*, the poems in this volume are characterized by a flippant, self-indulgent tone and lucid style. Returning to the egocentrism of his earliest verse, Neruda employs self-parody to gently satirize his previous works and persona, particularly mocking his early stance of the poet as hero. His later poetry includes didactic political poetry, light, frivolous verse, and serious, prophetic works, often combining elements from all three styles.

Works in Critical Context

Geoffrey Barraclough called Neruda "a one-man Renaissance . . . who has modified the outlook of three generations of Latin Americans. His roots are firmly planted in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) had a profound effect of Neruda's work, politics, and personal life. Other works directly influenced by this war include:

Homage to Catalonia (1938), a nonfiction work by George Orwell. In this work, Orwell gives a firsthand account of his experiences during the Spanish Civil War.

For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's novel tells the story of an American working with an anti-fascist guerrilla unit during the Spanish Civil War.

And No Man's Wit (1940), a novel by Rose Macaulay. Macaulay's book was widely praised but now largely forgotten. Its view of the possibility of heroism and honor during the Spanish Civil War stands in sharp contrast to those expressed in Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

Pan's Labyrinth (2006), a film directed by Guillermo del Toro. Set in Spain in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the film is a nightmarish fairy tale set against the backdrop of the repressive regime of Francisco Franco.

Chile . . . ; his appeal is to the whole continent." Although translations of his works have existed since the 1940s, Neruda remained relatively unknown to English-speaking readers prior to the translation of several of his works in the early 1960s.

Scholars concur that misinterpretation of the surrealist images in *Tentativa del hombre infinito* resulted in critical neglect, and the collection is now regarded as one of Neruda's major achievements. While most critics have agreed that Neruda's Marxist view of Chile's history of poverty and tyranny results in a work of uneven quality, *General Song* is often regarded as one of Neruda's major achievements. Fernando Alegria called Neruda's *Elemental Odes* "a song to matter, to its dynamism and to the life and death cycles which perpetuate it."

Responses to Literature

1. Take a walk in a natural setting: the woods, the beach, a park. Write a poem about what you see. Does your mood in any way affect your descriptions?
2. Compare and contrast the statements on despair in W.H. Auden's "Funeral Blues" and Neruda's "Song of Despair." How does the style in each reflect the theme?
3. After reading *General Song*, discuss the influence of Neruda's pro-Communist stance on his poetry. In what ways do the poems suggest an intended

audience of working-class rather than academic or bourgeois readers?

4. Discuss how Neruda's travels and friendships with world artists broadened the scope of his subject matter.

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Edith Nesbit

BORN: 1858, Kennington, England

DIED: 1924, New Romney, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Grim Tales (1893)

The Story of the Treasure Seekers, Being the Adventures of the Bastable Children in Search of a Fortune (1899)

The Wouldbegoods, Being the Further Adventures of the Treasure Seekers (1901)

Five Children and It (1902)

Oswald Bastable and Others (1905)

The Railway Children (1906)

Overview

Edith Nesbit, one of the most prolific writers of fantasy both for children and adults, is best known for two series of children's stories, the Bastable books and her "magic" series, which were praised in her own time by Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells. Her stories distinguish them-



Edith Nesbit © Mary Evans Picture Library / The Image Works

selves from many of the children's fantasies produced in the nineteenth century in their focus on children as members of families, in contrast to the solitary adventures of Lewis Carroll's Alice or the various heroines and heroes of George MacDonald's stories.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Longing for Stability Nesbit was the youngest of the six children of John Collis Nesbit and Sarah Green Nesbit. Her father, who single-handedly administered an agricultural college—the first of its kind, founded by his father—died when Nesbit was three years old. Although she could not have had many memories of her father, the return of the absent father becomes a poignant moment in many of her fantasies. Her mother—indulgent toward all her children—took over her husband's work for a time. Failing finances and the onset of tuberculosis in her oldest child, Mary, occasioned a series of moves, both in England and continental Europe. Consequently, Nesbit's concern with stability of place and her nostalgia for the scenes of childhood play and relative calm were to remain intense throughout her life.

Nesbit published "My School-Days" in a series of articles for *The Girl's Own Paper* during 1896–1897; many of these memories—adventures with her much-loved elder

brothers, Henry and Alfred—were to be transformed into the escapades of her fictional children.

Nesbit was born and raised in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in urban factories instead of on farms, as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with the rules of proper behavior in society and a celebration of the innocence of childhood. This was reflected in the many popular periodicals of the time that focused on home and family life, such as the ones in which Nesbit's work was published.

Early Writings and Marriage In 1880, Nesbit married Hubert Bland. Shortly after their marriage Bland contracted smallpox, and during his illness his business partner abandoned him, taking their joint capital. Nesbit, with her first child as well as her husband to support, wrote verses and painted pictures for greeting cards. She began writing short stories as well. The first of these was accepted by Alice Hoatson, a manuscript reader for a minor publication, *Sylvia's Home Journal*. Hoatson later gave up her job and lived with the Blands, giving Nesbit needed assistance with her writing and with household tasks.

Nesbit's first published novel, *The Prophet's Mantle* (1885), was written in collaboration with her husband under the pseudonym Fabian Bland; it was not well received. After Bland's recovery, he began a successful journalistic career in which Nesbit also collaborated. However, it was Nesbit's steady and increasing production of verse and short narratives that supported their growing family, which eventually included the two children of Bland and Alice Hoatson. This was not Bland's first infidelity; he had maintained a mistress during his courtship of Nesbit and continued to have affairs throughout his life. Nesbit's reaction to the revelation of the paternity of Hoatson's children was complex, yet she acquiesced at Bland's insistence that Hoatson remain with them. It is possible that Nesbit realized, although not consciously, that by taking upon herself the household management and a great deal of the child rearing, Hoatson was helping to facilitate Nesbit's increasingly demanding career.

Nesbit and Bland were active members in the Byron and Shelley societies, and they became influential in the newly founded socialist group, the Fabian Society. These activities brought them into contact with many of the leading intellectuals of their time, notably H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw.

An Independent Voice Nesbit was almost forty before she began to publish fiction outside of serial collections edited by others. Her own first ventures were two collections, *Grim Tales* and *Something Wrong*, both

published in 1893; these books included stories from various serial publications. Both collections received cautiously positive reviews and are the earliest evidence of Nesbit's work as a writer of the fantastic. Between 1894 and 1899, Nesbit published more verse, and continued to produce minor children's books such as *Pussy Tales* and *Doggy Tales* (both 1895), which resembled Beatrix Potter's more famous animal stories, although Nesbit's characteristically astringent tone was already present in parent/child exchanges. These were almost the last such books she produced. She also wrote children's versions of William Shakespeare's plays and a series of historical narratives, *Royal Children in English History* (1897), although her own historical novels would not appear for several years.

Success with Children's Books The deep fund of memory tapped first by her Bastable stories, beginning with *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) and continued in *The Wouldbegoods* (1901) led to success that was instantaneous and lasting. The highest royalties Nesbit ever received were the eleven hundred pounds she earned for *The Wouldbegoods* in its first year. It was not until she was commissioned by the editors of the *Strand Magazine* to write a series of stories, at thirty pounds per episode (as opposed to fifty pounds for a single book), that she began the series of fantastic tales upon which much of her fame as a writer would rest.

These seven stories, collected in *The Book of Dragons* (1899), are Nesbit's playful variations on dragon stories, and they contain almost all of the elements, excepting only time travel, that were to become the hallmarks of Nesbit's fantasies for children. On occasion, Nesbit favored a mathematical or logical solution to the narrative dilemma, and an early case in point is "The Island of the Nine Whirlpools," in which the dragon can be defeated only when all of the whirlpools are stilled. The hero discovers the equation that determines the crucial moment and is able to claim that he has won the princess by "love and mathematics."

"The Crowded Years" Nesbit called her next collection of stories *Nine Unlikely Tales for Children* (1901). The title is appropriate since Nesbit exploits the fairy tale for structure while interpolating her own, distinctively improbable, content. These stories may have been, in part, a reaction against the conventionality of the tales she had contributed to other collections. Nesbit departs almost completely from the fairy tale into the fable in "Whereyouwanttogo; or, the Bouncible Ball," the story of two children who spoil a perfect vacation by bickering and, in a fit of pique, cut open the magical ball that has provided their adventures.

Nesbit's biographer, Julia Briggs, calls the 1900s "the crowded years." because not only was Nesbit completing the Bastable books and writing several minor stories, she was also embarking on a new children's series, her "magic" series, beginning with *Five Children and It*.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Nesbit's famous contemporaries include:

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898): Author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and a distinguished Oxford don.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): The author of many science-fiction novels, including *The Time Machine*.

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963): A British author and Christian scholar; creator of the famous Narnia series for children.

P. L. Travers (1899–1996): An Australian author best known for her *Mary Poppins* series.

This book, again a collection of tales first published in serials, was the beginning of Nesbit's most influential contribution to fantasy literature.

The course of Nesbit's fiction from 1909 until 1923 recapitulates the sequence of her earlier career, as she tried her hand again at Gothic stories for adults.

Nesbit died in New Romney, Kent, England, on May 4, 1924, of heart disease and possibly lung cancer; she was buried in Jesson St. Mary's, Kent. Her daughter Rosamund published a posthumous collection, *The Five of Us—and Madeline* in 1925.

Works in Literary Context

Nesbit's plots are often motivated by the desire not merely for amusement but for marvels. She introduces her fantastic creatures into the contemporary reality of her characters, whose adventures are inspired by their reading books about Atlantis or Babylon, besieged castles, or the novels of James Fenimore Cooper. Finally, she adds the element of time travel; her fantastic voyages are inspired by works of F. Anstey, such as *Tourmalin's Time Cheques* (1891) and *The Brass Bottle* (1900), as much as by H. G. Wells.

Fantasy and Fairy Tale Conventions Oswald Bastable and Others shows contradictory tendencies in Nesbit's fiction; certain tales seem to look beyond affirming the status quo, while elsewhere in the collection the reader encounters stories that are conventional, if not reactionary. For example, the story "The Ring and the Lamp" presents a twist in the usual genie story because the servants of the two magical objects reject their assigned roles—"No one really likes being in service,"—form a company, and employ the fathers of the two girls who originally summoned them.

Unlike the Bastable stories, which suffer from a lack of real variety in adventures, the "magic" series shows Nesbit at her most consistently inventive. Especially effective is the distinctive character of each magical creature.

The dominant trait of the phoenix in *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), is vanity, which makes careful flattery the children's most effective way of getting wishes granted and which also leads to their final adventure. The phoenix, convinced that a theater to which the children have taken it is one of its own temples, starts a fire that brings the adventures to the brink of disaster. The children are forced to become objectively critical, and the renunciation of magic becomes as inevitable as their invoking it. Yet, Nesbit was a pioneer in the use of time travel in children's fantasies, and her work influenced the writings of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Edward Eager.

Works in Critical Context

Modern critics such as Eleanor Cameron and Roger Lancelyn Green attest not only to Nesbit's influence on other writers but also to the number and diversity of testimonials her work has received—for example, it has been highly praised both by Noel Coward and by Gore Vidal. Valuable for its own sake, Nesbit's fantastic fiction has much to offer those who study the craft of fiction either as readers or as creators, as well as those who seek insight into the literary culture of the late nineteenth century.

Five Children and It One testimony to children's responses to *Five Children and It* is found in a letter from Rudyard Kipling to Nesbit, dated March 11, 1903. Speaking of his children, aged five and seven, he writes: "Their virgin minds never knew one magazine from another till it dawned upon Elsie that a thing called the *Strand* with a blue cover and a cab was where the *Psammead* tales lived.... I have been sent for *Strands* in the middle of the month, I have had to explain their non-arrival; and I have had to read them when they came. They were a dear delight to the nursery."

In writing for children Nesbit proved her ability to combine humor and sympathy, the personal and the universal. Not only does her popularity in this genre continue today, she also served as a major influence upon other writers for the young, including Edward Eager and C. S. Lewis. Her work, in turn, owes much to Victorian authors, so that in reading Nesbit's productions one gets a glimpse of a much wider range of literature beloved by young and old alike. She thus stands as an important transitional figure, both participating in the final years of an era often referred to as the golden age of children's books and anticipating the children's literature of the later twentieth century.

Responses to Literature

1. Archetypes are symbols that are more or less universal. Choose a few of Nesbit's stories and make a list of the archetypes you find. Are they used

- traditionally, or does Nesbit alter the typical function of these archetypes somehow?
2. Give examples of the feminist ideas found in Nesbit's middle works.
 3. C. S. Lewis borrows from Nesbit's work in his Narnia series, particularly *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *The Magician's Nephew*. Find two instances in these books where Nesbit's influence is obvious (see her *The Island of the Nine Whirlpools* in particular).
 4. Using your library or the Internet, find out more about the Fabian Society in London. Write a paper summarizing its history.
 5. Look at the way children are portrayed in *Nine Unlikely Tales for Children*. Does Nesbit see children as victims or as instigators? Is that view prevalent in her other books?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Time travel is a recurrent theme in much of Nesbit's work. In many other works of literature, time travel is used as a plot device and a way to explore different, often fantastical worlds. Here are a few other works in which time travel plays a role:

The Time Machine (1895), a novel by H. G. Wells. In this novel, the main character, an inventor, creates a machine with which he travels forward in time to what he at first assumes is a utopian future society.

Back to the Future (1985), a film directed by Robert Zemeckis. A teenager travels back in time, meets his parents, and then must ensure that they fall in love so he can be born.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (1999), a novel by J. K. Rowling. In this third book of the famous series, the title character and his magic friends travel back in time to save themselves from imminent harm.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

BORN: 1938, Kamiriithu, Kenya

NATIONALITY: Kenyan

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

A Grain of Wheat (1967)

Devil on the Cross (1980)

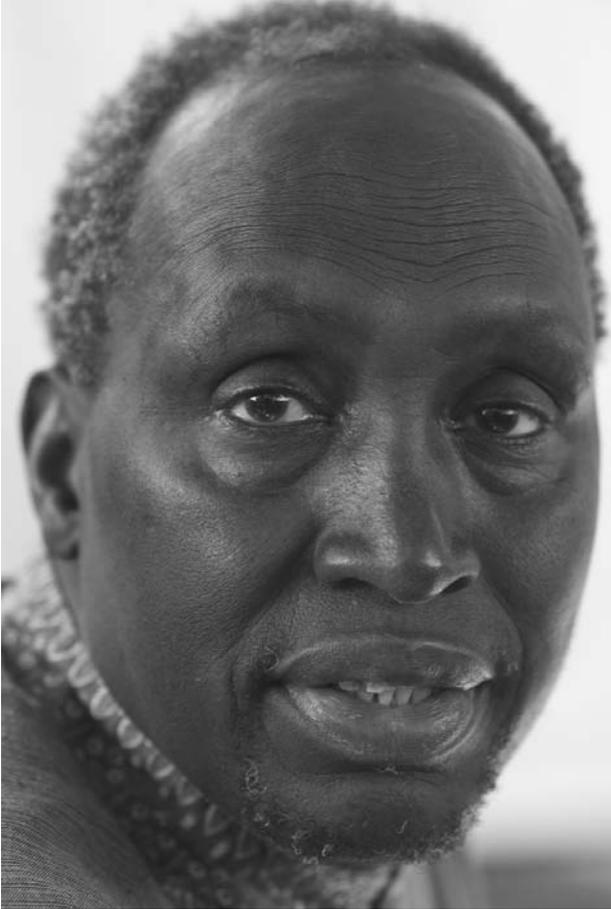
Wizard of the Crow (2004–2006)

Overview

Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a pioneer in the literature of Africa. He published the first English language novel by an East African, *Weep Not, Child* (1964), and wrote the first modern novel in Gikuyu, a Kenyan language, *Devil on the Cross* (1980). Writing in Gikuyu enables him to communicate with the peasants and workers of Kenya.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Political Unrest during Childhood Born James Thiong'o Ngugi on January 5, 1938, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was the son of Thiong'o wa Nduucu and Wanjika wa Ngugi. Ngugi was the fifth child of the third of Thiong'o's four wives. Ngugi grew up in the city of Limuru in Kenya, a British colony at the time, as it had been since the late nineteenth century. Starting in 1952 with a rebellion against the British, a state of emergency was imposed throughout the country. English then became the language of instruction, and Ngugi learned English.



Ngugi wa Thiong'o Geraint Lewis / Writer Pictures / drr.net

The state of emergency arose from the armed revolt of the Land and Freedom Army (called the “Mau Mau” by the British and made up of certain Kenyan tribes) against the injustices—particularly the unequal distribution of land—of the colonial system. The revolt was also caused by a growing sense of nationalism and a rejection of European dominance over Kenya. Ngugi’s elder brother joined the guerrillas between 1954 and 1956. As a consequence, Ngugi’s mother was detained for three months and tortured. On his return home after his first term at school, Ngugi found that, as part of the colonial forces’ anti-insurgency “protected” village strategy, his home had simply disappeared. The state of emergency lasted until 1959, and by its end, more than thirteen thousand civilians had been killed, nearly all African.

Ngugi attended Makerere University in Uganda and then the University of Leeds in England, where he was exposed to West Indian-born social theorist Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which Fanon argues that political independence for oppressed peoples must be won—often violently—before genuine social and economic change is able to be achieved. But more influential were works by communism’s original theorists, Karl Marx

and Friedrich Engels. By the early 1960s, he was writing for a living as a regular columnist for such Kenyan newspapers as the *Sunday Post*, the *Daily Nation*, and the *Sunday Nation*.

During this time, Kenya had achieved independence from Great Britain. After major Kenyan political parties agreed on a constitution in 1962, Kenya became independent on December 12, 1963. A year later, Kenya became a republic within the Commonwealth of Nations, a group of independent sovereign states many of which had been British colonies or dependencies.

Published Early Novels During this time also, Ngugi began writing works that criticized Kenyan society and politics. Ngugi’s first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, is the most autobiographical of his fictional works and was written while a student at Makerere. Its four main characters embody the forces unleashed in central Kenya with the 1952 declaration of the state of emergency. The novel, written in English, was the first published English language novel by an East African writer.

In his second novel, *The River Between* (1965), Ngugi examined the relationship between education and political activism, and the relationship between private commitment and public responsibility. *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) followed. The four main characters of this novel reflect upon the Mau Mau rebellion and its consequences as they await “Uhuru Day,” or the day of Kenyan independence, achieved in 1963. Where *A Grain of Wheat* breaks most significantly with the earlier novels is in the abandonment of the idea of education as the key to solving Kenya’s problems and the acceptance, at least in the abstract, of the need for armed struggle. After writing *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi rejected the Christian name of James and began writing under the name Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

In 1968, Ngugi—then an instructor at the University of Nairobi—and several colleagues successfully campaigned to transform the university’s English Department into the Department of African Languages and Literature. Ngugi was named chairman of the new department. He became a vocal advocate of African literature written in African languages. Ngugi next accepted a year’s visiting professorship in African literature at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, before returning to University College in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1971. Before long, he was acting chairman and then chairman of the department.

Wrote Significant Plays While Ngugi had written full-length plays as early as 1962—namely, *The Black Hermit*—he began focusing more attention on them in the mid-1970s. He began translating his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) into Gikuyu in 1978, and, with fellow Kenyan playwright Ngugi wa Mirii, wrote another play in Gikuyu, *Ngaabika Ndeenda* (1977). It was translated into English as *I Will Marry When I Want* in 1982. Ngugi published his last English language novel, *Petals of*

Blood, in 1977. That same year, in response to *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, the Kenyan government arrested and detained him for one year.

Wrote in Gikuyu While Detained In detention, Ngugi wrote *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981). He also began writing his first Gikuyu language novel, *Caitani mutharaba-ini* (1980) on sheets of toilet paper. Ngugi was never given any reason for his detention. Upon his release, he lost his position at the University of Nairobi. Although he continued to write nonfiction in English after this point, Ngugi wrote his novels and plays in Gikuyu and translated some of his works into other African languages.

Ngugi was occupied for the next two years with the English translation of *Caitani mutharaba-ini* (*Devil on the Cross*, 1982) and his second collection of essays, *Writers in Politics* (1981). This collection is made up of thirteen essays, written between 1970 and 1980, the main concern of which is summed up by Ngugi in the preface: "What's the relevance of literature to life?"

Lived in Exile In 1982, Ngugi left his country for a self-imposed exile. While Kenya had been very politically stable through the decades, the country's National Assembly voted to formally make Kenya a one-party state in 1982. Later that same year, a group of junior air force officers, supported by university students and urban workers, tried and failed to impose a military coup. During his exile, Ngugi lectured at Auckland University in New Zealand, and those lectures were published as *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). This collection condenses many of his earlier arguments on language, literature, and society into four, often informatively autobiographical, essays.

In 1986, Ngugi announced that he would bid a complete "farewell to English." Ngugi then published three children's books in Gikuyu and a booklet, *Writing Against Neocolonialism* (1986), as well as a second novel in Gikuyu, *Matigari ma Njiruungi* (1986; translated as *Matigari* in 1989), which was banned in Kenya for a decade.

Since 1989, Ngugi has lived in the United States, teaching at universities in New York and California. In 2006, he published *Wizard of the Crow*, an English translation of his Gikuyu novel, *Murogi wa Kagogo* (2004), to glowing reviews. It is a political satire with elements of magical realism.

Works in Literary Context

Ngugi has singled out three works as having impressed and influenced him in particular: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), and Peter Abrahams's *Tell Freedom* (1954). Informally, Ngugi's political thinking was revolutionized by his exposure to works by Karl Marx and Franz Fanon and by socialist academics. Apart from the West Indian writers on whom Ngugi's university research

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Thiong'o's famous contemporaries include:

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist who chose to write in English in order to reclaim the language from its association with the British colonizers of Africa. His novels include *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Wangari Muta Maathai (1940–): Kenyan environmental activist and member of Parliament who, in 2004, became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Colombian novelist and writer with radical political views and father of the "magical realist" movement in literature. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. His novels include *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

Daniel arap Moi (1924–): president of Kenya, 1978–2002, and ardent anti-Marxist, he established a single-party state and presided over human rights abuses and a major corruption scandal.

Gao Xingjian (1940–): Chinese novelist, playwright, critic, and artist living in France, whose work is banned in China. In 2000, he became the first Chinese writer awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His plays include *Signal Alarm* (1982).

focused, the specific literary influences to which he was first exposed at Leeds were German dramatist Bertolt Brecht's plays and Irish-British novelist Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), described by Ime Ikiddeh as a "major influence" on Ngugi.

History Like their counterparts in other postcolonial settings, African writers confront a history that has been written about them by outsiders, a set of defining (often derogative) tropes and stories to which they often feel compelled to respond. They need to "remember" a history that has effectively been dismembered as a result of the violent encounter of colonialism. Thus revisiting Kenyan and Gikuyu history plays a central role in Ngugi's works. His first novels are set in the recent colonial past; the middle novels, while set at the time of independence and after, feature extensive flashbacks as an integral part of their structure. Traditional Gikuyu stories, songs, myths, and customs, along with the stories and songs of the resistance movement before and after independence, are also key elements in this urge to recover an obscured or misrepresented past.

Such an oral tradition can be found in *Devil on the Cross*. In formal terms, the writing of this novel in Gikuyu has resulted in a far heavier reliance on devices drawn from, and deliberately signaling the novel's relationship

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While imprisoned, Ngugi wrote *Detained*, his memoir of the experience. Here are some other works written about or during the time their authors were in jail.

Consolation of Philosophy (c. 524), a philosophical treatise by Boethius. Jailed for treason and awaiting trial, the Roman Christian philosopher examines such issues as whether humans have free will and how evil can exist. This work uses classical philosophy to answer its questions and was very influential in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Long Walk to Freedom (1995), an autobiography by Nelson Mandela. Much of this book was secretly written during the twenty-seven years Mandela was imprisoned in South Africa for working against the apartheid regime, which segregated and oppressed nonwhite people. Mandela later became the first elected president of South Africa and received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Night (1958), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. This work by Wiesel, born a Romanian Orthodox Jew, describes his existence in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps during World War II, during which his parents and sister died. It is considered a classic of Holocaust literature.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962), novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This short novel draws on the author's own experience of eight years in a Soviet labor camp. It was the first widely read work exposing repression in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.

This Earth of Mankind (1980), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Imprisoned as a political prisoner by Indonesian president Suharto's regime and forbidden to write, Toer dictated this and three other novels to his fellow prisoners. The so-called Buru Quartet, named for the prison, examines the development of Indonesian nationalism.

with, an oral tradition. The narrator refers to himself as "Prophet of Justice" and is addressed as "Gicaandi Player" on the opening page. Extensive use is made of proverbs and riddles in the dialogue; figurative language almost always has a local reference. Songs, particularly Mau Mau liberation songs, are integrated into the narrative.

Christian Imagery Christian imagery and allusions feature prominently in all of Ngugi's work. If this seems surprising from someone who does not call himself a Christian, it must be remembered that, as Ngugi regularly points out, Kenyans and especially the Gikuyu are widely Christianized, and the Bible is probably the one

text with which a largely illiterate population is familiar. The Bible thus offers a rich and handy store of characters, events, and symbols for a writer to exploit. Ngugi's cast of characters contains a wealth of Moses, Messiah, and Judas figures alongside allusions and quotations from the book of Psalms, the prophets, and Gospel parables.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have consistently acknowledged Ngugi as an important voice in African letters. He has been called the voice of the Kenyan people by certain commentators, while others have lauded his novels as among the most underrated and highest quality to come from Africa. Ngugi's fiction has been noted for its overtly political agenda, its attempt to give a literary voice to the poor of Kenya, and its consistent critique of colonization and oppressive regimes. Critics have also praised Ngugi's role as an influential postcolonial African writer, particularly in his portrayal of corrupt postliberation African governments.

A Grain of Wheat *A Grain of Wheat* is widely considered by critics to be Ngugi's most successful novel, as he had honed the skills that were less evenly displayed in his first two books. Angus Calder wrote that *A Grain of Wheat* "is arguably the best, and certainly the most underrated novel to come from Black Africa." Taking *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* together, Gerald Moore asserts that these two novels "form the most impressive and original achievement yet, in African fiction."

Wizard of the Crow This novel has received near universal praise from critics. Stuart Kelley wrote that he had "every expectation that [Ngugi's] new novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, will be seen in years to come as the equal of [Salman Rushdie's] *Midnight's Children*, [Gunter Grass's] *The Tin Drum*, or [Gabriel García Márquez's] *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; a magisterial magic realist account of 20th-century African history. It is unreservedly a masterpiece."

Other critics praised Ngugi's ability to express the colonial and postcolonial attitudes of Africans as well as his storytelling ability. David Hellman believed that "the effort to throw off the shadow chains of the [colonial] past while establishing an authentically African continuum has been at the thematic center of much African literature, but in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's epic novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, this theme may well have found its ultimate expression." And Scottish-African writer and critic Aminatta Forna noted that "*Wizard of the Crow* is first and foremost a great, spellbinding tale, probably the crowning glory of Ngugi's life's work. . . . He has turned the power of storytelling into a weapon against totalitarianism."

Responses to Literature

1. What should the relationship be between education and political activism? Do people have a

responsibility to speak up against oppression and for their beliefs? What if speaking out will put them or their families in danger? What would you do? Write an essay that outlines your responses to these complex questions.

2. Ngugi has asked, "What is the relevance of literature to life?" Write an essay responding to his question. Use specific examples in your response.
3. Write your own definition of *political action*. Did you include writing a novel as being a political act? Why or why not?
4. Research novelist Chinua Achebe's reasons for choosing to write in English. Write an essay analyzing his reasons for doing so, and contrast them with Ngugi's reasons for refusing to write in English. Whose point of view do you agree with more? Why?
5. Research Martinique revolutionary Franz Fanon's political views in terms of liberation and anticolonial movements. Write an essay summarizing his position, then explain your own opinion.

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Friedrich Nietzsche

BORN: 1844, Röcken, Germany

DIED: 1900, Weimar, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Birth of Tragedy (1872)

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883)

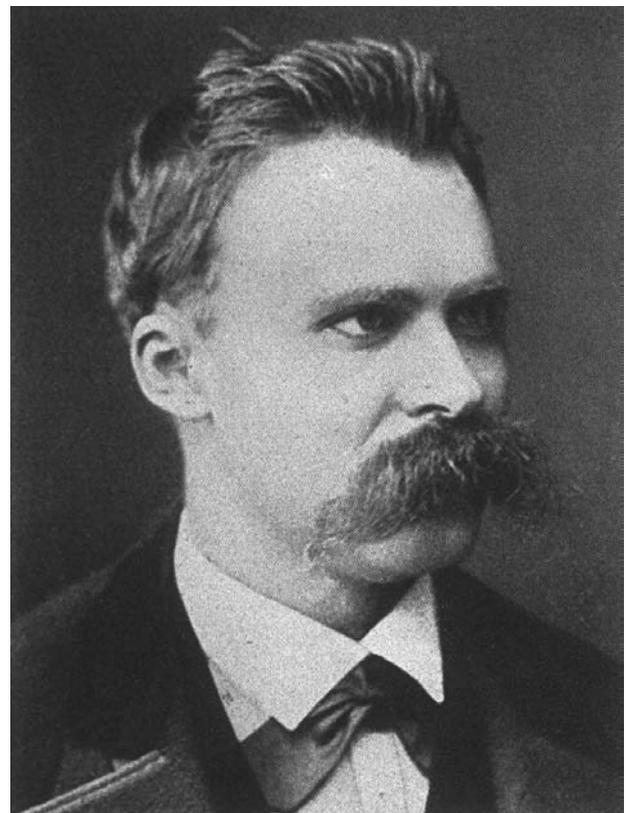
Beyond Good and Evil (1886)

On the Genealogy of Morals (1887)

The Will to Power (1889)

Overview

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, believing European society was standing at a critical turning point, foresaw Europe collapsing into nihilism. The advance of scientific enlightenment, in particular the Darwinian theory of evolution, had destroyed the old religious and metaphysical underpinnings for the idea of human dignity. "God is dead," declared Nietzsche's spokesman Zarathustra, and man, no longer "the image of God," is a chance product of a nature indifferent to purpose or value. The great danger is that man will find his existence



Friedrich Nietzsche Popperfoto / Getty Images

meaningless unless a new grounding for values is provided. In works of powerful prose and poetry Nietzsche struggled to head off the catastrophe, writing which has made him the most compelling and provocative figure of German philosophy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Household of Women Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844, in Röcken, a Prussian province in Saxony where his father served as a Lutheran pastor in a long line of clergymen. His father was loving to his son, keeping the child close when he wrote sermons and entertaining him with songs at the piano. But in 1846, Pastor Nietzsche, still in his mid-thirties, began suffering blackouts and extreme neurological distress. Three years later he died, and an autopsy reportedly revealed a condition described as “softening” of the brain. This death left Nietzsche in a household of women: his mother, grandmother, several aunts, and a sister, Elisabeth.

The death of Nietzsche’s father meant upheaval for the remaining family. In the spring of 1850, they moved to Naumburg to live with relatives. There, young Nietzsche began studying for the ministry and wrote his first poems and plays. After attending local schools in Naumburg, in 1858 Nietzsche won a scholarship to Pforta, one of the best boarding schools in Germany. Here he received a thorough training in the classics and acquired several lifetime friends. While in school, Nietzsche became increasingly interested in music. He studied piano and, like his father, showed promise as an improviser. But Nietzsche was already suffering the headaches and eye strain that would debilitate him throughout his adult life. The headaches, which had begun when he was ten, were particularly painful, leaving him bedridden for weeks, while the eye strain resulted in burning sensations and blurred vision.

The Inception of a Disease At the end of this period of schooling, Nietzsche, who had earlier shared the genuine piety of his family, found that he had now ceased to accept Christianity—a view that soon hardened into outright atheism. With the highest recommendations of his Pforta teachers, Nietzsche enrolled in the University of Bonn in 1864. There he pursued classical studies with philologist Albrecht Ritschl, and when the latter, within the year, moved to Leipzig, Nietzsche followed.

Nietzsche attempted to enter into the social life of the students, even joining a dueling fraternity, but soon discovered that his own mission in life had isolated him from the pursuits and interests that most other students shared. Some scholars theorize that it was at this time that Nietzsche contracted syphilis, a venereal disease that was incurable at the time, in a Leipzig brothel, which may have been the cause of his later madness (late-stage syph-

ilis causes madness). In the 1890s, the insane Nietzsche prompted such speculation when he confessed to having had deliberately exposed himself to the disease on two occasions in 1866. But even these revelations are rendered dubious by his questionable sanity during disclosure. By the middle of his life, Nietzsche suffered almost constantly from migraines and gastric upsets. Loneliness and physical pain were the constant background of his life—though Nietzsche later came to interpret them as the necessary conditions for his work.

The Birth of Nietzschean Philosophy Nietzsche’s early publications in classical philology so impressed Ritschl that when a chair of philology opened up at Basel, he secured it for Nietzsche, then only 24 years old and still without his degree. The University of Leipzig awarded the chair to Nietzsche on the strength of his writings without requiring an examination, and Nietzsche entered into a teaching career. When Nietzsche took up residence in Basel, German composer Richard Wagner was nearby at Tribschen, and Nietzsche was soon drawn into his circle. Wagner was then at work on the Ring Cycle and on the great festival at Bayreuth that would soon present its premiere. The project needed publicity and financial support, and was backed by many German intellectuals. Nietzsche entered into this cause with enthusiasm and for several years was a frequent house-guest at Tribschen. Friendship with the charismatic but egocentric Wagner was, however, short-lived due to Nietzsche’s independence of thought, the quality he most valued.

Prior to the break, Wagner had greatly influenced Nietzsche’s first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which gave an imaginative account of the forces that led to the rise of Athenian tragedy and to its subsequent decline. Nietzsche ended the book with a rousing advocacy of Wagner’s musical drama as a revival of Hellenic tragedy. No sooner had the book been published than Nietzsche began to perceive the difference between Wagner’s musical genius and the shabby pseudo-philosophy of the Wagnerian cult. From then on, though he still felt affection for Wagner himself, Nietzsche attacked ever more vigorously the decadence of Wagner’s political and philosophical ideas. Two works of his last year of writing would deal with the subject: *The Wagner Case* (1888) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1888).

The Rejection by Salomé In late spring, 1882, while awaiting publication of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche vacationed with Paul Ree in Italy. There Nietzsche met Lou Salomé, a young, independent woman who had already impressed Ree during philosophical discussions. Nietzsche also responded immediately to Salomé’s independent demeanor and he was soon confiding his thoughts on religion and morality while hiking with her in the mountains and fields. Eventually, Nietzsche, Salomé, and Ree formed plans to platonically share living quarters. Nietzsche greatly anticipated this arrangement as his first

possibility for steady companionship in many years. But when Nietzsche, increasingly giddy from Salomé's friendship, professed to Salomé sensual desires for her, she fled with Ree. Subsequent correspondence was minimal, and Nietzsche soon found himself alone and ignored. Scholars have since cited this painful break with Salomé as a possible explanation for the cruel misogyny of Nietzsche's subsequent works.

The Magnum Opus Nietzsche's teaching at Basel was frequently interrupted by prolonged bouts of sickness and by several months of service as a medical orderly during the Franco-Prussian War, a conflict that led to the unification of various regions into the German Empire. In April 1879 his health had deteriorated so much that he was driven to resign. He was given a small pension and began a ten-year period of wandering in search of a tolerable climate. Though racked by increasing pain from the relentless progression of his disease, Nietzsche would manage to produce ten substantial books before his final collapse, works now belonging to the first rank of German literature and containing a provocative set of philosophical ideas.

After publishing his landmark philosophical work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche undertook revision of an earlier work, *Human, All Too Human*, and its sequels. Following these he also felt compelled to articulate his beliefs in straightforward prose, and from the summer of 1885 to early 1886 he wrote with this purpose. The result was *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, a caustic condemnation of conventional morality. In this nine-part volume, Nietzsche applied the concept of the will to power to specific philosophical issues, including the will to truth and the will to morality. Objective truth, Nietzsche had already proclaimed in *Untimely Meditations*, was unprovable; in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he applied the same logic to refuting notions of the self, thus reducing even human existence to the will to power.

The period in which Nietzsche wrote *Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* was full of personal anguish. His health was constantly poor, and conflict with his publisher, who was bankrupt from promoting anti-Semitic literature, further aggravated the already bedeviled Nietzsche. By early 1883 when he heard of Wagner's death, he lapsed into still another bout of physical distress. He also experienced strained relations with his sister, who had married—on Wagner's birthday—notorious anti-Semite Bernhard Foerster. For Nietzsche, the prospect of relations with a bigoted brother-in-law were immensely distasteful, and he even missed the wedding to avoid introductions.

By mid-1887, Nietzsche was prepared to resume writing. He had already published aphorisms, poems, and sequential diatribes, but with his next work, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), he attempted a more formal polemic. Here he addressed three specific philosophical

issues—the nature of good and evil, the essence of guilt, and the meaning of asceticism—and related each subject to the failings of Christian morality. Portraying Christianity as a sado-masochistic, ultimately self-destructive order, and following his logic that the will to truth was a will to nothingness, he now added that the will to morality would prove similarly futile for Christianity. Christian morality would be destroyed by its dogmatism, a decline he called “the great spectacle” of his age.

In 1888, Nietzsche went to Turin, Italy, and wrote *Twilight of the Idols; or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*, a seething, anti-Christian, anti-German work full of irony and sarcasm. Despite the poisonous tone of the book, Nietzsche was refreshed by his new surroundings and even considered moving his mother there with him. But his optimism was soon undermined by a disastrous trip to Switzerland, where he endured days of vomiting, and a return to his suddenly chilly home. Impoverished from a lack of steady income, Nietzsche aggravated his financial troubles by paying for publication of his new works, and was thus without means to keep warm during a cold spell that extended into June and July. After a late summer vacationing with friends, he returned to Turin to write *The Antichrist*, an alternately analytical and unreasoning account of Christianity and its destructive impact on humanity in the context of its relationship to Judaism.

Upon completion of the book, Nietzsche is said to have experienced a final euphoria or final delusions. He believed citizens of Turin basked in his presence, that shop owners and merchants gave him preferential treatment, and that his physique was more youthful. He even wrote cheerful notes to friends describing the sunny, tree-lined boulevards. Especially refuting these perceptions, however, is biographer Ronald Hayman, who notes that Turin's climate was actually rainy and Nietzsche's own home was particularly drab.

Nietzsche celebrated his forty-fourth birthday by beginning *Ecce Homo*, a flamboyant account of his life and work. In what Kaufmann calls “one of the great treasures of world literature,” Nietzsche presented stunning, if often brazen, insights into his own life and work, titling chapters with such grandiose lines as “Why I Am So Clever” and “Why I Write Such Good Books,” and making such bold statements as, “I am by far the most terrible human being that has existed so far; this does not preclude the possibility that I shall be the most beneficial.”

Nietzsche completed *Ecce Homo* within weeks, and became progressively worse, physically and mentally. In letters he wrote how his facial features were difficult to control and that he would often smile for long periods. Everything seemed to be achieved with the greatest ease. And, he would soon suggest, he was destined to rule the world. Nietzsche was eventually taken to a clinic, where he alternately strolled the halls muttering to himself or remained in bed. When his mother arrived from

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Nietzsche's famous contemporaries include:

William James (1842–1910): American philosopher and pioneer in the field of psychology.

Randolph Caldecott (1846–1886): British artist and illustrator for whom the Caldecott Medal was named.

Dame Ellen Terry (1847–1928): British actress who came to be known as the best Shakespearean actress in Britain in her time.

Czar Nicholas II (1868–1918): The last czar of Russia. He ruled from 1894 to 1917, when he abdicated in response to pressure by revolutionaries. He and his family were executed in 1918.

Naumburg, Nietzsche recognized her and showed relatively stable behavior before proclaiming himself a tyrant and degenerating into lunacy once again. After staying in an asylum, where he believed someone was trying to shoot him, Nietzsche moved to Naumburg under his mother's care. In 1897, when his mother died, he was tended by his sister Elisabeth, whose husband had previously committed suicide.

Nietzsche was too incoherent to appreciate that since his breakdown he had become famous through the efforts of scholars such as Georg Brandes. Elisabeth, however, realized that the family still possessed several volumes of unpublished material, including *Ecce Homo* and many notebooks, and she exploited her brother's newfound fame. She hired anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner to instruct her on the fundamentals of her brother's philosophy and cultivated a new image as a social benefactor. Her new lifestyle was entirely supported by Nietzsche's now lucrative writings, which she augmented in new editions with her own comments. Among her most notorious literary enterprises was the suppression of *Ecce Homo*, which she pillaged for her own literary purposes, and an entirely forged work, *My Sister and I*, attributed to Nietzsche.

By August of 1900, Nietzsche had been signing his last letters "Dionysus the Crucified," had suffered two strokes, was immobile and inarticulate, and had incurred a respiratory infection. On August 24, following a third stroke, he died. Elisabeth arranged a final fate that doubtlessly would have enraged him: a Christian burial replete with a solemn benediction that included the phrase, "Hallowed be thy name for future generations."

Works in Literary Context

The Will to Power In his constructive works, Nietzsche sought to find a force in life itself that would serve to

set human existence apart. He found it in the hypothesis of the will to power—the urge to dominate and master. All creatures desire this, but only humankind has achieved sufficient power to turn the force back upon itself. Self-mastery, self-overcoming: these are the qualities that give a unique value to human life. The ideal man, the "superman," will achieve a fierce joy in mastering his own existence, ordering his passions, and giving style to his character. Self-overcoming will release in him a flood of creative energy. The lives of such men will be the justification of reality; their preferences will constitute the standard of value. In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche pronounced the will to power as the basic motivating force of human action, the will to power characterized as the will to overcome one's weaknesses and embrace difficulties, both moral and social. To overcome one's failings is to become, according to Nietzsche, the superman.

The Concept of Eternal Recurrence In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche also conceived of eternal recurrence, which he ranked above the will to power and the superman as the principal tenet of his entire philosophy. Derived from scientific formulations regarding energy conservation, eternal recurrence was defined by Nietzsche as a recycling of everything in endless repetition throughout time. In later volumes, notably *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche elaborated on this theory and shaped it into an integral part of the will to power. But in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche's conception is nearly theological instead of philosophical—with the will to power revealed by a devil who is hailed as a god for his disclosure.

Influences Important for Nietzsche's intellectual development was his discovery and extensive reading from the works of the Greek philosophers, along with the philosophers Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Lange, John Stuart Mill, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Baruch de Spinoza, as well as those he had shared ideas with or expressed affinity for: the seventeenth-century French moralists, Darwinists, and authors on a list including everyone from Leo Tolstoy to Charles Baudelaire.

In turn, worshipped by some as the savior of humanity and damned by others as its foe, he has had a profound, volatile influence on later and contemporary peoples and thought. Left-wing Germans of the 1890s began to follow his work, while right-wing Germans wanted to censor and ban it—though this faction would eventually come to use Nietzsche's works as inspiration for their militaristic points of view. Likewise, the anti-Semitic right-wing French faction opposed the left-wing individualists and intellectuals, the Nietzscheans, while Nazi Germans (ironically, connected at some point to Wagner) identified with Nietzsche, and several esteemed philosophers—from Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida to Albert Camus—have since been informed by his work.

Works in Critical Context

Nietzsche's far-reaching, controversial concepts such as "eternal recurrence" and the "superman" marked him as an insignificant eccentric during much of his career, and though he labored in obscurity he anticipated the day when his ideas would be realized in all their power and magnitude. "I know my fate," he wrote in 1888 before succumbing to insanity. "One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous—a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up against everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man. I am dynamite."

While most of his ideas and many of his works have gained popularity and loyalty, many standing out as most often read, re-read, studied, discussed, and even adopted, there are particular works that are considered most impacting, among them *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

***Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)** With its searing criticisms of conventional morality and German culture, *Beyond Good and Evil* ranks among Nietzsche's most vehement and vicious diatribes, one even Nietzsche admitted was "devoid of any good-natured word." However disturbing, with its exposition of the will to power and its stirring criticisms of Christianity, *Beyond Good and Evil* must also be considered one of Nietzsche's most profound works, and some critics have even cited it among the most important works of Nietzsche's era. Walter Kaufmann has been especially enthusiastic, calling it "one of the great books of the nineteenth-century."

***Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883)** Upon Lou Salomé's rejection of his rare advances, Nietzsche returned to the melancholy of solitude and to working on what is also considered one of his greatest works. In this verse epic—which developed into four volumes over the next two years—Nietzsche altered his theories of the will to power and eternal recurrence and introduced his most popular, and most misunderstood, concept, that of the *übermensch*, or superman.

Zarathustra, with its explication of the will to power and characterization of the superman, is probably Nietzsche's most popular work. Its poetry alone renders it a classic of German literature, and its far-reaching philosophy establishes it as a seminal work in nihilism and existentialism. In 1888, Nietzsche expressed the belief of many contemporary scholars when he said that *Zarathustra* was his finest achievement. "Among my writings my *Zarathustra* stands to my mind by itself," he wrote in the preface to *Ecce Homo*. "With that I have given mankind the greatest present that has ever been made to it so far." He added that *Zarathustra*, which he had conceived as an alternative to the Christian Bible's New Testament, was "the highest book there is."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Writing to analyze and criticize an old system of values or to formulate a new system, Nietzsche aimed in all his work to provide a new meaning for human existence in a meaningless world. In the absence of any higher power, men must create their own values, he maintained. Here are a few works by writers who also produced similar philosophical assertions:

The Reality of the Mass Media (2000), a nonfiction work by Niklas Luhmann. A thorough discussion of the moralizing or demoralizing of a culture by way of contemporary media/technology.

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), a philosophical essay by Albert Camus. Futility, absurdity, and meaninglessness compose the approach by the author, who explores humanity's hopeless attempts to understand human existence.

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947), a philosophical essay by Simone de Beauvoir. In this well-conceived departure from existential philosophy as Nietzsche commanded it, the author explores freedom and free will, politics and phenomenology, and much more.

Responses to Literature

1. After reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, consider how you would explain the concept of the will to power to someone who knows nothing of Nietzsche or his concepts.
2. Several philosophers throughout history have offered allegory and recognizable, concrete objects to their readers to illustrate profound concepts. Plato used the cave, for instance; Camus had Sisyphus. Kierkegaard referred to the abyss. What allegory or objects would you use to explain Nietzsche's concepts of the will to power and eternal recurrence?
3. Considering the sociopolitical climate in Germany during Nietzsche's time, why was it, in your view, that Nietzsche's popularity went in waves? With which groups was he popular at that time, with which was he not? Why? With which groups might he be popular today?

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Josephina Niggli

BORN: 1910, Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico

DIED: 1983, Cullowhee, North Carolina

NATIONALITY: Mexican, American

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Mexican Silhouettes (1928)

Soldier-Woman (1936)

Mexican Folk Plays (1938)

Mexican Village (1945)

Step Down, Elder Brother (1947)

Overview

A novelist and playwright whose work is set entirely in Mexico, Josephina Niggli informs readers with her profound knowledge of Mexican customs, traditions, and history. Today she is best known not only for acquainting her readers with the struggles that would bring about the birth of modern Mexico but also for shunning popular stereotypes to capture the true flavor of northern Mexican culture. In doing so, Niggli demonstrates many of the sensibilities that would develop into a full-blown literary movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Mexican and American Traditions Josephina Niggli was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, on July 13, 1910. Her father, Frederick Ferdinand Niggli, was a Texan who managed a cement factory in Mexico; her mother, Goldie Morgan Niggli, was a violinist. Niggli was brought up in a bicultural environment, learning English and Spanish as well as American and Mexican traditions.

The young Niggli came to the United States with her parents in 1913 during the Mexican Revolution. She was homeschooled by her mother until she began attending Main Avenue High School, a Catholic school in San Antonio, Texas. The family returned to Mexico in 1920,



Josephina Niggli Photo courtesy of Western Carolina University

but Niggli was sent back when the violence in Mexico continued. She studied at Incarnate Word College, where she earned her bachelor of arts degree in 1931. It was during this time that Niggli seriously considered becoming a writer, and she began writing for publication in such periodicals as *Mexican Life* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Early Literary Successes Niggli's early pieces established her as a popular-fiction writer and poet who had won prizes for her earliest efforts—including a fiction-writing prize awarded by *Ladies' Home Journal* and a poetry prize for her entry in the National Catholic Poetry Contest. In 1928, Niggli's father saw to the publication of her first poetry collection, *Mexican Silhouettes*. The poems in this collection reflect her identity with her native homeland.

According to biographer and critic Catherine Cucinella in *American Women Writers, 1900–1945*, Niggli spent four years studying theater and playwriting with the San Antonio Little Theater after graduating from Incarnate Word College. In 1935, she entered the Carolina Playmakers graduate program at the University of North Carolina and received her master's degree in drama in 1937. Niggli wrote the play *Singing Valley* as her thesis for the program.

Theatrical Successes In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Niggli saw production of several of her plays.

Plays such as *The Fair-God*, *The Cry of Dolores*, and *Azteca* were historical dramas about Mexico. Other plays, including *Soldadera* and *This is Villa!* focused on the Mexican Revolution. As her work continued to gain popularity, Niggli's plays were included in literary anthologies.

Teacher and Novelist Niggli was well on her way as a playwright. With a 1938 Fellowship of the Bureau of New Plays, Niggli moved to the East Coast and began teaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Niggli taught courses in radio, television, theater arts, and speech. In 1945 the University of North Carolina Press published her first and most famous work, *Mexican Village*, a collection of ten related stories about life in rural Mexico. The book won Niggli the Mayflower Cup Award for “best book of the year by a North Carolinian.” Two years later Niggli saw the publication of a novel, *Step Down, Elder Brother* (1947). This latter work was so successful that it was featured as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection.

Hollywood and Dublin In 1948 Niggli was called to Hollywood to work on the screenplay for *Mexican Village*. The movie adaptation appeared in 1953, titled *Sombrero*. After Hollywood, Niggli was awarded another fellowship, one that took her to Dublin, Ireland. There she visited the Abbey Theatre, where she studied the performances—an effort she would do again in 1954 in Bristol, England, at the Old Vic School.

In 1956 Niggli accepted a professorship at Western Carolina University as a drama and journalism instructor. She remained there until her retirement in 1975. The playwright and novelist slowed her efforts, but published two more works. In 1964, she published a young adult book, *A Miracle for Mexico*; in 1967 she presented the popular guide *New Pointers on Playwriting*. Niggli died on December 17, 1983 in her home in Cullowhee, North Carolina.

Works in Literary Context

Local Color: Mexican Village Life Throughout her drama and fiction, the most significant influence is Niggli's vivid depictions of Mexico and Mexican life. She reveals knowledge of Mexican customs, traditions, and history. Some of her works analyze the role of women from a bicultural perspective. Other works depict the Mexican Revolution in a realistic way, acquainting readers with the struggles that would bring about the birth of modern Mexico. In *Mexican Village*, for example, Niggli conveys the rich and varied aspects of life in small-town Mexico. She relies on folktale and lore to enhance the tale.

In all of Niggli's work, village life is extensively revealed. Tradition is seen as an immensely important aspect of village life, and social customs are emphasized as key elements in day-to-day activities. These social values figure as strongly in Niggli's themes as they do

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Niggli's famous contemporaries include:

Jean Anouilh (1910–1987): Prolific French playwright, his works range from absurdist to high drama.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Philosophical writer who was the second-youngest Nobel Prize recipient. Although associated with existentialism, he rejected the label for, more accurately, “nihilism.”

Eudora Welty (1909–2001): American fiction writer, she was widely known for her writings about the South.

Adolfo López Mateos (1909–1969): President of Mexico from 1958 to 1964. He was a noted supporter of the arts and education.

in her style—offering explorations of issues important to the people, those concerning identity, class, and tradition.

Works in Critical Context

Niggli has distinguished herself with critics in a variety of media and literary genres. As a playwright, she has won particular acclaim for her one-act works, and as a novelist she has been recognized as a formidable local colorist.

Mexican Village (1945) Upon publication, *Mexican Village* was hailed as a classic portrait of small-town Mexico. Orville Prescott, in *Yale Review*, declared that Niggli “is steeped in Mexican atmosphere” and added that *Mexican Village* is “an utterly engaging book by a richly gifted writer.” Similarly, J. H. Jackson wrote in the *Weekly Book Review* that Niggli's novel is “without a peer in its field.” “The American reader,” Jackson continued, “will understand this particular Mexico . . . better, after he has read *Mexican Village*, than ever before.”

Reviewers of *Mexican Village* also praised Niggli's narrative sensibility and her skill in creating believable characters. *New York Times* critic Mildred Adams noted the work's “pace and charm,” while Prescott wrote in *Yale Review* that Niggli “is a strong advocate of the old-fashioned story-telling virtues.” *Booklist* reviewer J. T. Frederick noted that the book's “characters and incidents are warm with human reality.” And as Cucinella quotes critic Raymund A. Paredes saying in his essay *The Evolution of Chicano Literature*, Niggli's “*Mexican Village* is a landmark in Mexican-American history.”

Responses to Literature

1. Research Mexico—its history, geography, culture, and people. Choose one of Niggli's folk plays, and in an essay, explain how the setting contributes to the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Niggli uses local color in her works, featuring particular habits, values, customs, regional ways of speech, and traditions to characterize the work and give it realism. Here are a few works by writers who also emphasize local color and write about social or personal issues concerning local values, traditions, and mores:

The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896), a novella by Sarah Orne Jewett. This work offers the local color of a fishing village community in Maine.

For the Major (1883), a novella by Constance Fenimore Cooper. This early work is centered in the United States in the post-Civil War South.

"Gimpel the Fool" (1953), a short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer. This short story features life in the shtetl, the Jewish village.

"The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (1869), a short story by Bret Harte. This piece features the pioneering West in the fictional California town of Poker Flat.

story line. How does the setting help to characterize the people? How does the setting affect the mood and theme?

2. Niggli is known to use local color to enhance her stories, including using Spanish words and phrases. Find several examples of Spanish locutions and phrases in *Mexican Village*. Comment on how this writing technique affects the realism of the story.
3. Niggli often uses gender stereotypes in her work. After reading *Soldadera*, discuss the significance of Niggli's portrayal of women. Provide evidence from the text to support your discussions.

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☒ Anaïs Nin

BORN: 1903, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

DIED: 1977, Los Angeles, California

NATIONALITY: French, American

GENRE: Nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Diary of Anaïs Nin (1966–1977)

D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study (1932)

Cities of the Interior (1946–1961)

Delta of Venus (1977)

Overview

Anaïs Nin gained international fame with the publication of seven volumes of unabashedly introspective and candid diaries laced with fiction. In addition to her diaries, Nin also wrote novels, short stories, and erotica, all of which reflect her attention to physical details along with the effects of sensuality on her characters. Bold, innovative, and determined, Nin's work transcends conventional standards and calls for an expanded definition of literary art. By challenging the impediments of literary form and genre, Nin was able to explore methods of expression that allowed some understanding of the individual's hidden psyche.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Cosmopolitan Childhood Anaïs Nin was born on February 21, 1903, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a suburb of Paris, to Joaquin and Rosa Culmell de Nin. As a result of her father's travels as a concert pianist and composer, Nin lived a cosmopolitan childhood, visiting various



Anais Nin Nin, *Anais*, photograph. The Library of Congress.

European capital cities, until her father deserted the family in 1914. Nin's mother relocated from Barcelona to New York City that summer, a move that prompted Nin to begin a diary as a letter to her father. Begun when she was eleven, this "letter" would continue throughout the rest of her life and become an important record not only of the development of a feminine tradition in literature, but also of the creative process.

Independent Adolescence and Romantic Affairs Precocious and energetic, Nin largely educated herself during adolescence, reading in public libraries and writing in her journal, in which she carried on an imaginative relationship with her absent father. In her late teens, she studied art and often worked as a model for artists and photographers. When she was eighteen, Nin fell in love with Hugh Guiler, a banker she married in Havana, Cuba, two years later. Despite Nin's numerous affairs and her bigamous marriage to Rupert Cole, her union with Guiler lasted more than fifty years.

Art and Entanglement

Nin's ambition to be a writer was supported by Guiler: Under the name Ian Hugo, he illustrated Nin's books. When she was twenty-two, Nin and Guiler settled in Paris, and Nin briefly reunited with her father. The artis-

tic atmosphere of Paris provided Nin the opportunity to free herself from social convention in order to develop as a writer, and she worked on an assortment of projects during the 1920s and 1930s that never reached fruition as novels, but appeared piecemeal as prose poems, novellas, and short stories. Despite her attempts at fiction, Nin's first significant literary contribution was *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, a work that reveals Nin's struggle for aesthetic realization on her own terms. In fact, in responding to the fiction of Lawrence, Nin describes what she herself would do as a novelist instead of what Lawrence had done, in essence preparing for the emergence of her own fiction.

Work Banned as Pornographic Nevertheless, it was almost five years after her study of Lawrence that Nin found her voice in fiction. During these years, Nin became intimately involved with American writer Henry Miller, whose works were banned in England and the United States as pornographic. Authors like Miller and Nin played a key role in advancing what later became known as the sexual revolution of the Western world. In 1961 Miller challenged existing obscenity laws in the United States with publication of *Tropic of Cancer*; a legal battle ensued and, ultimately, Miller's work was labeled a work of literature and freed subsequent novels from similar legal constraints. Nin became involved with Miller's wife, June, and psychotherapist Otto Rank. With suggestions from Henry Miller and Rank, Nin produced *The House of Incest* (1936) and *The Winter of Artifice* (1939), both intense, original, and poetic, but neither of them novels. While *The House of Incest* is clearly influenced by surrealism, and explores the human psyche through dreams, *The Winter of Artifice* thinly disguises real people and situations from Nin's diary. "Lilith," for example, is the story of a disappointing reunion between a woman and the father who had deserted her in her childhood, while "Djuna" tells of a love triangle that parallels the relationship between Nin and Henry and June Miller depicted in Nin's diary.

Artistic Freedom In the early 1940s, Nin moved to New York, where commercial publishers were unresponsive to her writing. Dedicated to her art, she sought readership by establishing the Gemor Press and printing her work at her own expense. Her first Gemor publication, a shortened version of *The Winter of Artifice*, captured the attention of poet William Carlos Williams, who praised Nin's quest for a female approach to writing that showed art, not activism. As Nin continued to explore how she could unify narrative fragments without restricting them to a central plot as did traditional novels, Gemor Press issued *This Hunger*, a work that helped land her a contract with the E. P. Dutton publishing company.

Tired of life in New York, Nin moved to California in 1946, settling into an environment of artistic freedom that was less frantic and confining than New York or Paris. Between 1946 and 1961, Nin published *Cities of*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Nin's famous contemporaries include:

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright who based many of his works, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), on his family experiences.

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956): A key figure in Abstract Expressionism and avant-garde art in America after World War II.

Doris Lessing (1919–): In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Lessing compartmentalizes life by approaching experience from different fictional perspectives, including parody and political documentation.

W. H. Auden (1907–1973): British-born poet who, like Nin, spent much of his later professional life in the United States.

Lázaro Cárdenas (1895–1970): President of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, Cárdenas is known for his attempts to carry out the social and economic goals of the Mexican Revolution.

Irving Berlin (1888–1989): American composer who wrote the lyrics to countless classic songs, including "God Bless America."

the Interior, which she described as a "continuous novel." The work is composed of five parts: *Ladders to Fire* (1946), *Children of the Albatross* (1947), *The Four-Chambered Heart* (1950), *A Spy in the House of Love* (1954), and *Seduction of the Minotaur* (1961). Early in the *Cities of the Interior* series, Nin became more sure of herself as a writer who could not be bound by convention.

Life in a Collage

Published in 1964, *Collages* was Nin's self-proclaimed last novel. Most of the stories in the work involve a single character who is the common thread in a series of vignettes that reinforce Nin's view of creative freedom. *Collages* is the most autobiographical of her fiction, as characters' real-life counterparts are not concealed, and the factual events recorded in Nin's diaries are embellished with fictional elements. As such, *Collages* paved the way for the publication of Nin's diary volumes, beginning in 1966. The last volumes of her diaries appeared posthumously in the 1980s, after Nin's death from cancer on January 14, 1977, as did two collections of erotic pieces, *Delta of Venus* (1977) and *Little Birds* (1979).

Works in Literary Context

Nin's work, particularly her novels and short stories, are significantly influenced by surrealism, a movement founded

in Paris in the 1920s by artists devoted to exploring irrationality and the unconscious. In addition, the textual experiments of such modernists as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, whose narrative techniques included expressionistic and stream-of-consciousness narration, helped shape Nin's writing. Perhaps the most powerful influence on Nin was the literary partnership she had with Henry Miller. Despite their differences in both personal and professional matters—Nin was elegant and sensual, Miller crude and sexual; Nin's writing was implicit, Miller's explicit—the two inspired and provided valuable feedback for each other for more than three decades. In addition to Miller, Woolf, and Lawrence, Nin enjoyed the influence of other authors including Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Paul Valéry, and Arthur Rimbaud.

Transformation Although Nin's diaries have led to her being criticized as a narcissist, such charges seem unsubstantiated in light of her psychological insight, the feminist perspective of her works, and her quest for self-knowledge. More than a recurring theme, Nin's preoccupation with personal creation—specifically, that of the female psyche—marks her diaries and novels alike. An optimist in a world of psychological desolation, Nin contended that individuals are obligated to pursue completeness, even though the journey is difficult and one's success not guaranteed.

Nin used the word "transformation" to describe the conversion of a negative situation into a positive experience, an act she believed every individual has the power to do by changing external circumstances to suit one's personal needs. In all of Nin's fiction, characters have opportunities to solve their problems by being resourceful and creative. Her work explores the psychological barriers women face and the importance of overcoming those obstacles in order to reach a state of inner peace in their personal lives. In *Cities of the Interior*, for example, the female faces a basic duality: the compulsion to please and nurture others as opposed to her own self-fulfillment. Unlike women in her erotica, however, the female characters in *Cities of the Interior* are rendered psychologically powerless by this situation.

Eroticism Although Nin believed that eroticism had its place in literature, she opposed completely focusing on sexuality at the expense of literary merit. At risk of not being taken seriously as a writer, Nin, aware that American literature was lacking female sexual expression, intended for her work to describe sexual experience from a woman's point of view as an avenue of learning about the nature of the true self and transcending ordinary life. Whereas all five parts of *Cities of the Interior* accentuate the sexual experiences of her main characters, their eroticism is not gratuitous; instead, like all other worthwhile experiences, sexuality leads to self-knowledge. Although far from popular Nin was influential in that she tested the

social norms of sexuality in the context of literature, challenging previous definitions of acceptability.

Works in Critical Context

With the exception of Edmund Wilson's favorable review of *Under a Glass Bell* in the *New Yorker*, response to Nin's work was generally hostile or indifferent. Certainly for many years she was neglected as a serious writer by critics as well as readers, garnering only a few books of criticism through the years. With the publication of the first volume of her diary in 1966, combined with the women's movement of the 1970s, Nin's readership grew; however, focus was almost solely on the diaries, not her fiction.

Criticism of Novels When her first three novels were reissued in 1974, the few positive reviews Nin received for her poetic style and psychological insights were overshadowed by voices of disapproval. Called tedious, abstract, and obscure, Nin's writing was further attacked as intrusive and editorial in its narrative. Her characters, according to some critics, were unattractively self-absorbed.

In *Anais Nin and the Discovery of Inner Space* (1962), scholar Oliver Evans refutes arguments presented by Frank Baldanza in *Anais Nin* (1962) that Nin's writing is merely "pointless, rambling explorations of erotic entanglements and neurotic fears." Evans, in turn, praises Nin's rhythmic language and psychoanalytic insight. However, Evans evaluates only Nin's fiction. Criticism in the years that have followed is centered on her multi-volume diary.

Criticism of Erotica To a great extent, Nin's more recent fame rests on her reputation as a writer of erotica. Much of this attention is the result of the short erotic pieces that were collected and published in the late 1970s as *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds*. Of great interest in 1986 was the appearance of *Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anais Nin*, which revealed the love triangle involving Nin, Henry Miller, and June Miller. Philip Kaufman adapted this particular section of Nin's diary for his 1990 film *Henry and June*.

Responses to Literature

1. Nin's diaries were not originally written with the intention of being published. In this sense, like all diaries, they were not meant to be read in the way her other, crafted work was. In your opinion, is it possible for such work to have literary or artistic merit? If a writer reworks his or her own diaries with an eye toward publication—dramatizing certain elements, improving descriptions, or expanding upon certain insights—does the work lose some of its authenticity as a true living record?
2. Much of Nin's writing is considered erotic. The same is true of author Henry Miller, with whom Nin had a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Even as all seven volumes of Anais Nin's diaries record a woman's journey of self-discovery, they also reveal her emphasis on the importance of creativity in an individual's life. Throughout the years, Nin has been a source of inspiration for those who are willing to take professional or personal risks for the sake of art, including the authors of the works below:

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. In this lengthy work, Rand explores a variety of themes that, ultimately, she would develop into a philosophy of life, which she later termed "objectivism."

Our Lady (2001), a painting by Alma Lopez. Mexican-born Lopez outraged many Catholics with her representation of the Virgin Mary wearing a bikini of flowers.

Satanic Verses (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. Rushdie earned a fatwa (an edict calling for his death) from the spiritual leader of Iran for this comic allegorical story that continues to earn praise for its satiric artistry as well as its psychological truths and self-consciousness.

Tender Buttons (1933), a poetry collection by Gertrude Stein. Though some considered Stein's linguistic techniques vulgar distortions of the English language, she persisted in developing her own poetic methods.

passionate affair. However, Miller's novel *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) was widely praised by critics even as it was banned for its obscene content. Nin's work remained largely obscure, with her most explicit writing remaining unpublished for several decades. Do you think this represents a fundamental difference in how male and female writers are perceived by readers, or do you think the difference between the two is based mostly on the difference in literary quality of their work? Could the truth lie somewhere in between? Explain your opinion.

3. Nin said, "Love never dies a natural death." What do you think this quote means? How do you think this reflects Nin's own experiences with love in her life?

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◻ Lewis Nkosi

BORN: 1936, Durban, Natal, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Home and Exile and Other Selections (1965)

Malcom (1972)

Mating Birds (1983)

Overview

Known in the United Kingdom for his analytical studies of contemporary African literature, Lewis Nkosi gained attention in the United States with *Mating Birds*, his first work of fiction. In addition to being a respected novelist and literary critic, he is also noted for his forthright comments about the cultural and political developments in Africa under the apartheid system. Although Nkosi was exiled from South Africa in 1960 and later settled in Switzerland, he continues to be considered one of Africa's greatest writers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A New African Lewis Nkosi was born in Durban, Natal, South Africa, on December 5, 1936. He attended local schools before enrolling at M. L. Sultan Technical College in Durban. Nkosi began his career in Johannesburg, writing for the magazine *Drum*, a legendary publication founded by and for African writers, people whom Nkosi described in *Home and Exile and Other Selections* as being "the new African[s] cut adrift from the tribal reserve—urbanized, eager, fast-talking, and brash." According to many scholars, Nkosi himself fit such a description.

Apartheid's Effects Nkosi grew up under a system known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for "separateness." This government-sponsored system involved designating certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and forbade people of different races from marrying. It also led to the segregation of



Lewis Nkosi Doris Poklekowski / Writer Pictures / drr.net

living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups kept separate from each other; this allowed the white Afrikaners, who made up a small percentage of the population, to remain in control of the large nonwhite population. These were some of the issues Nkosi was concerned with as a writer and as an African.

Because the pieces he wrote for *Drum* deal with the social and political developments in his homeland during apartheid, Nkosi faced strict regulations on his writing and was eventually not allowed to comment on the regime. When he accepted a fellowship to study at Harvard in 1961, he was given a one-way exit permit, meaning he was forbidden by the South African government to return to his country. After becoming a literature professor, Nkosi held positions at universities in the United States, Poland, and Zambia, all the while continuing to write about and criticize events in South Africa. Settling for a time in England, he taught and published articles about African literature, along with several dramas and screenplays. Since 1994, the year Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president in the country's first democratic election, Nkosi has visited his home frequently and currently divides his time between South Africa and Basel, Switzerland.

Works in Literary Context

Although many would argue that the apartheid system has been the most significant influence on Nkosi's writing, his works have obviously been influenced by other sources as well. For instance, several scholars have compared the surreal, mysterious atmosphere surrounding the crime in *Mating Birds* to that of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. In addition, Nkosi's dramatic works, especially *The Rhythm of Violence*, reflect the inspiration of

French playwright Jean Genet, particularly as seen in Nkosi's technique of using characters who exemplify their own most despicable fantasies.

Apartheid The most prominent recurring theme in Nkosi's work has been the effects of apartheid, the policy of racial discrimination and white political domination implemented by the South African National Party when it came to power in 1948. From regulations affecting daily routines—for instance, which hospitals, schools, and theaters people of different races were allowed to attend—to laws that prohibited nonwhite people from voting or holding office, apartheid ensured the political and economic supremacy of the white population, which was comprised less than 20 percent of South Africa's total population. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., “As a playwright and short-story writer, [Nkosi] is . . . the most subtly experimental of the black South African writers, many of whom are caught in the immediacy of the struggle against apartheid.” With his documentation of South Africa's apartheid system, Nkosi's legacy lies not only in African literature, but also in South Africa's political history. Academic Alan Ryan offers this tribute: “Nkosi's quiet voice is likely to linger in the ear long after the shouts and cries have faded away.”

Works in Critical Context

From the very beginning of Nkosi's writing career at the *Drum*, critics have enthusiastically praised him as one of Africa's best writers, one “whose vision of South Africa remains fiercely his own,” says Michiko Kakutani. Much of his work dealing with African literature and cultural concerns is commended by academics who analyze his writing from such social perspectives. Furthermore, Nkosi is highly respected as a literary scholar himself.

Mating Birds *Mating Birds*, Nkosi's first novel, immediately gained widespread critical attention. Through the story of Ndi Sibiyi, a young man attracted to Veronica, a white woman, Nkosi explores miscegenation. Although the rules of apartheid prevent Sibiyi and Veronica from speaking to one another, they carry on a silent flirtation, Sibiyi growing more obsessed with her every day. Eventually, he follows her home, and Veronica seduces him. However, when their relationship is discovered, Veronica accuses Sibiyi of rape, a claim that leads to his arrest and probable execution.

Critics unanimously recognize *Mating Birds* as a comment on South Africa's system of apartheid—and acknowledge Nkosi's courage in writing such a public political condemnation of South Africa's racial intolerance. George Packer, for instance, observes, “*Mating Birds* feels like the work of a superb critic. Heavy with symbolism, analytical rather than dramatic, it attempts nothing less than an allegory of colonialism and apartheid, one that dares to linger in complexity.” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. asserts that *Mating Birds* “confronts boldly and imaginatively the strange interplay of bondage, desire and torture inherent

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Nkosi's famous contemporaries include:

Nathan M. Pusey (1907–2001): As the president of Harvard University from 1954 to 1971, Pusey led the largest fundraising campaign in the history of higher education in America.

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969): A leading figure of the Beat Generation, Kerouac was the author of *On the Road*, an autobiographical novel that gave voice to the young, dissatisfied generation of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972): Nkrumah was the first president of Ghana when it gained its independence in 1957.

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996): Winner of the 1987 Nobel Prize in Literature, Brodsky was an exiled Russian poet who became an American citizen in 1977.

Toni Morrison (1931–): Known for its epic themes and vivid dialogue, Morrison's fiction explores the roles of black women in a racist, male-dominated society.

Dario Fo (1926–): An Italian playwright, director, and actor, Fo's dramatic work incorporates elements from ancient Italian comedies.

in interracial sexual relationships within the South African prison house of apartheid.”

Other commentators, however, have attacked the novel's ambiguous depiction of rape. “Nkosi's handling of the sexual themes complicates the distribution of our sympathies, which he means to be unequivocally with the accused man,” notes Rob Nixon. For some, even the question of whether Sibiyi committed a crime at all remains unclear, which causes problems for the reader, as “we are never certain who did what to whom or why,” says Gates. Sibiyi himself is unsure: “But how could I make the judges or anyone else believe me when I no longer knew what to believe myself? . . . Had I raped the girl or not?” Gates responds, “We cannot say. Accordingly, this novel's great literary achievement—its vivid depiction of obsession—leads inevitably to its great flaw.”

While many critics praise Nkosi's portrayal of Sibiyi's feelings for Veronica, scholars including Sara Maitland object to Nkosi's depiction of the white woman. Says Maitland, “Surely there must be another way for Nkosi's commitment, passion and beautiful writing to describe the violence and injustice of how things are than this stock image of the pale evil seductress, the eternally corrupting female?” Nixon agrees that in refuting the conception of the black man as a sexual predator, “Nkosi edges unnecessarily close to reinforcing the myth of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Miscegenation, or the intimate relations between a man and woman of different races, is the focus of *Mating Birds*, Nkosi's most famous novel. Listed below are other works that deal with miscegenation and its consequences:

The Last of the Mohicans (1826), a novel by James Fenimore Cooper. In this novel about race and the problems associated with overcoming racial divisions during the French and Indian War, Cooper suggests that interracial relations are dangerous, yet strangely desirable.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), a novel by Harper Lee.

Compassionate, humorous, and moving, this novel deals with serious issues of racial inequality and rape in 1930s America.

God's Stepchildren (1924), a novel by South African writer Sarah Gertrude Millin. The plot of this novel presents racial mixing as a new kind of original sin.

raped woman as someone who deep down was asking for it." Despite such negative commentary regarding sexual relations, however, reviewer Alan Ryan writes, *Mating Birds* is very possibly the finest novel by a South African, black or white, about the terrible distortion of love in South Africa since Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*."

Responses to Literature

1. Read one of Nkosi's novels. Write an essay in which you explore three different instances in the text that reveal Nkosi's longing for his South African life.
2. With another classmate, research the etymology of the word "miscegenation." Then, discuss what kind of role this term plays in South African history and culture. What kind of role does this term play in Nkosi's work? What are the similarities and differences between miscegenation and taboo?
3. Nkosi is a highly respected literature professor. Assume the persona of Nkosi and write a course outline/syllabus for a semester-long class on the history of African literature during the 1900s. Include works by specific writers that your students will read. In order to complete this assignment, you will need to study examples of syllabi you can find on the Internet, as well as research major twentieth-century African writers and literary movements during this time period.

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■ Nevil Shute Norway

SEE *Nevil Shute*

▣ Silvina Ocampo

BORN: 1903, Buenos Aires, Argentina

DIED: 1993, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentine

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Book of Fantasy (1940)

Extraordinary Tales (1955)

Leopoldina's Dream (1988)

Overview

Although not well known outside her homeland, Silvina Ocampo was a highly regarded artist, poet, and short-story writer in her native Argentina. In general, English-speaking readers are most familiar with her collaborations with husband Adolfo Bioy Casares, an Argentine novelist, as well as with Argentine poet and short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges. She and Borges worked as editors on *The Book of Fantasy*, an anthology of fantastic tales that exemplify the magic realism evident in modern Latin American fiction. In those short stories written independently by Ocampo, the probable and the improbable are fused so effortlessly that readers are challenged to question what they think they know about the world and their place in it.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Artistic Pursuits in Paris and Buenos Aires

Born in 1903 to a privileged family in Buenos Aires, Ocampo was the youngest of six daughters, including Victoria Ocampo, editor of the highly respected *Sur* magazine. Because of her family's social position, Ocampo received an education in both European and Argentine culture and early on lived in Paris, where she studied painting. In 1934, she met fellow Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares, an association that helped her establish a reputation among Argentine literary circles.

An artist as well as a writer, Ocampo published drawings based on the early poems of Jorge Luis Borges, the renowned poet and short-story writer who remained Ocampo's lifelong friend, before publishing *Forgotten Travel*, her first collection of short stories, in 1937. In 1940, the same year she debuted her paintings in Buenos Aires, Ocampo married Bioy Casares, and the couple began hosting a weekly open house for Borges and other writers, including Chilean novelist Maria Luisa Bombal and Argentine poet Ezequiel Martínez Estrada.

An Artist in Argentina In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentines but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. This turmoil continued throughout Ocampo's life, with Perón and his cohorts returning to power frequently; democracy finally returned to Argentina in 1983, and efforts were made to foster improved relations between the government and the country's creative communities. Unlike some artists, Ocampo worked relatively free from the pressures of government hostility.

Although Ocampo's second collection of short stories did not appear until eleven years after her first, those years were not idle ones for the writer. Ocampo collaborated with Bioy Casares and Borges on two anthologies, *The Book of Fantasy*, a collection of fantastical stories published in 1940, and *Anthology of Argentine Poetry*, published in 1941. At the same time, Ocampo worked with her two partners, and she published her own stories, paintings, and poetry, producing a substantial body of work throughout her lifetime. Among several other national literary awards, Ocampo received the National Prize for Poetry in 1962. In December 1993, Ocampo died in Buenos Aires.

Works in Literary Context

As an illustrator of Borges's poetry and his collaborator on *The Book of Fantasy* as well, Ocampo was inspired by Borges throughout her writing and artistic career. Borges himself referred to Ocampo as one of the greatest Spanish poets of all time. In regard to her fiction—which draws

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ocampo's famous contemporaries include:

Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964): O'Connor's short stories combine realism with monstrous situations, and violence strikes seemingly without reason.

Mother Teresa (1910–1997): Mother Teresa founded the Order of the Missionaries of Charity in 1950 to help sick people in India who would otherwise have died on the streets.

George Orwell (1903–1950): Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* address social conditions and totalitarian political systems.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): With their combination of personal symbolism and surrealism, Kahlo's paintings are classified by many as magic realism.

Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974): President of Argentina from 1946 to 1955 and 1973 to 1974, Perón led a new political group backed by the most neglected factions of the agricultural and working classes.

Stephen Spender (1909–1995): Believing poets need to be politically engaged, Spender joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, though he later renounced that affiliation in *The God That Failed*.

Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968): The work of this Italian poet is personal, nonpolitical, and filled with striking imagery.

from myth, fairy tale, and popular romances—Borges, writing in the preface to *Leopodina's Dream*, points out the paradox within: “[Her short fictions have] a strange taste for a certain kind of innocent and oblique cruelty.”

Indeed, much of Ocampo's fiction draws its energy and power from this paradox, along with her refusal to solve it. Ocampo's style, the very way she uses words and sentences, conveys something both innocent and cruel. She writes in a voice that is purposely sporadic and free of literary devices, almost as if the narrators were not accustomed to expressing themselves. As a result of gaps between sentences, the reader senses that something is missing, that something is not being told, perhaps the very something that would help give sense and order to events or help explain why the characters do what they do. That order or explanation, however, is never to come, as Ocampo's stories typically end ambiguously, requiring readers to draw their own conclusions about the fate of the characters.

Cruel Children In Ocampo's short stories, the cruel characters are often children who narrate or participate in brutal acts, though whether they are aware of what they are doing is unclear. Sometimes, the children

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The author of stories suffused with surreal, mystical elements, Silvina Ocampo was a key figure in the conception of magic realism that led to the Latin American boom of the 1960s. Listed below are other works of magic realism:

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. The epitome of Latin American boom literature, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reflects reality and fantasy from multiple perspectives.

The Famished Road (1993), a novel by Ben Okri. In this book, Azaro is a spirit child who lives in the real world yet remains tied to the supernatural realm by visions of demons and witches.

Kingdom of This World (1949), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. Amid an atmosphere in which elements of the fantastic appear without seeming unnatural, Carpentier's work portrays the contradictions between political reality and mythical belief.

have magical or supernatural powers. For instance, in "The Velvet Dress," a story narrated by a little girl who accompanies a seamstress to the home of an arrogant wealthy woman, Ocampo vaguely hints that the story's tragedy is either predicted by or caused by the girl. A story more disturbing in its depiction of cruelty by a child is "The Prayer." In this work, a woman who hates her husband witnesses two young boys fighting over a kite. One of the boys pushes the other's face into a ditch filled with water and holds him there until he drowns. Swept by the emotion of watching "a crime in the midst of games that looked so innocent," she wants to protect the boy, so she takes the murderous child into her home. The boy quickly comes to despise the woman's husband, who insists on disciplining him. Then she leaves the boy and her husband alone in the house while she goes to church, where she thinks, "I don't know why I am afraid that something has happened in my house." Whether a crime is committed is never revealed. What is certain, however, is that the boy has demonstrated a propensity for cruelty.

Works in Critical Context

Borges was one of the first to praise his colleague: "Silvina Ocampo is one of our best writers. Her stories have no equal in our literature." Nevertheless, she has remained an obscure literary figure. Some critics regard Ocampo as overshadowed by the more famous members of her literary circle and, therefore, underrated. Other scholars have offered the possibility that Ocampo's relative obscurity during her lifetime may have been a result

of her unwillingness to be touched by fame, preferring, instead, the dark depths of her fantasy worlds. According to the *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, Ocampo has said, "What matters is what we write: that is what we are, not some puppet made up by those who talk and enclose us in a prison so different from our dream."

The Book of Fantasy In *The Book of Fantasy*, Ocampo, Bioy Casares, and Borges combined their creative intelligence to compile what they judged to be the best stories from fantastic literature. In addition to stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Saki, Ray Bradbury, and Julio Cortázar, the collection, according to Laurence Coven in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, "provides a woodshed of tales, parables and fragments to rekindle the fire of our imagination." Appearing in English more than forty years after its original Spanish edition, the volume provides an early look at the fantastic element evident in many of the works of Latin American writers in recent years. Scholar Alberto Manguel comments on the importance of *The Book of Fantasy* in literary history: "The *Antología* was an extraordinary success, not as much in the actual number of copies sold . . . but in the influence it had on its select public. It provided readers with a guide to realms that had until then belonged to either campfire talks or to the psychological novel, and it showed to writers vast areas of fiction that demanded neither the journalistic constraints of Sinclair Lewis nor the fancies of children's fairy tales."

Responses to Literature

1. Ocampo, Borges, and Bioy Casares selected almost eighty pieces for *The Book of Fantasy*. Consider the fact that they were choosing stories for a collection of magic and fantasy. With a group of your classmates, discuss what criteria they might have used in their selection process. If you were compiling short stories for an anthology of American sports stories, what criteria would you use to determine which works to include?
2. Research the career of Silvina Ocampo's sister, Victoria Ocampo, who was an editor for the famous magazine *Sur*. Based on what you learn about Victoria's career, determine to what extent, if at all, Silvina's career was affected by her sister. Write a paragraph about whether you think Silvina's obscurity during her lifetime could be a result of her sister's success.
3. Ocampo often drew sketches to accompany not only her own poetry, but also that of other Argentine writers. Think about how her artistic talents could enhance her poetry, as well as how her poetic talent could enhance her art. With another classmate, research other writers who illustrated their own works. What were their motivations for doing so? Report your findings to the class.

4. Write a paragraph about what you think happens to the woman's husband in "The Prayer" when she leaves him alone with a murderous child. Is she really unaware of what the boy is going to do to her husband? Would she or the child be guilty if a crime is committed? How does the title of the story relate to the woman?

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Sean O'Casey

BORN: 1880, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1964, Torquay, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Shadow of a Gunman (1923)

Juno and the Paycock (1924)

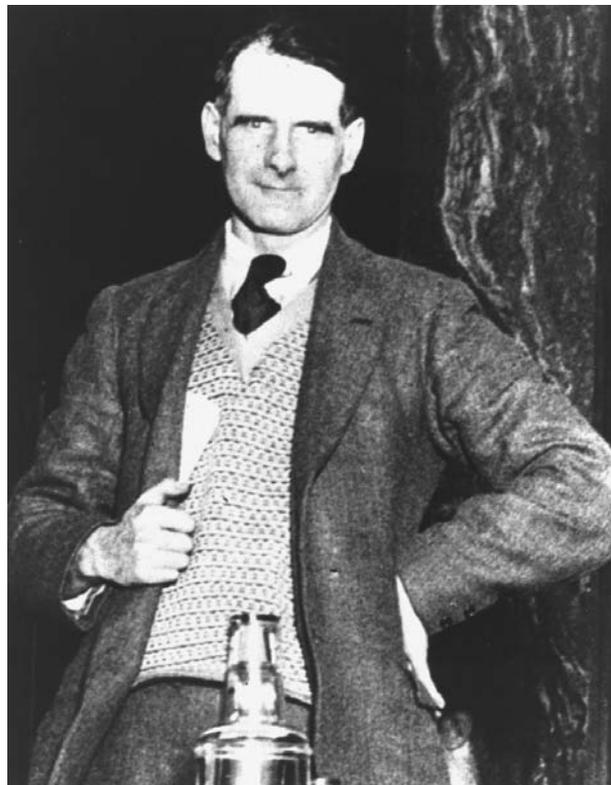
The Plough and the Stars (1924)

The Silver Tassie (1929)

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy (1949)

Overview

One of the key dramatists of the early twentieth century, O'Casey was a prolific writer whose work displays a wide range of style and a willingness to experiment with form, language, and theme. A fervent advocate of the Irish



Sean O'Casey O'Casey, Sean, photograph. AP Images.

labor movement, O'Casey rose to both prominence and controversy with his "Dublin Trilogy," a series of plays focusing on the effects of the revolutionary struggle on the Dublin working class. Although he exiled himself to London in the midst of his career, his subject matter remains almost exclusively Irish.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Child of the Dublin Slums to Labor Leader

Sean O'Casey was born in 1880 in a slum neighborhood of Dublin, an area that in those days was as well known for its wretched conditions as for its colorful characters and speech. The importance of this locale for O'Casey should not be underestimated. Working as a common laborer, he became involved with the Irish nationalist movement, joining the Gaelic League, learning to speak, read, and write fluent Irish, and Gaelicizing his name from John Casey to Sean O'Cathasaigh, under which his writings of that time were published. The Gaelicizing of one's name was and, to some extent, remains a symbol of resistance to British colonialism in Ireland and, indeed, O'Casey (as his name is most frequently rendered) soon became involved with the Irish struggle for freedom, joining the Irish Republican Brotherhood, an underground group devoted to ending British rule. At the

age of thirty, O'Casey began to devote his energies to the Irish labor movement headed by Jim Larkin, helping to fight the appalling living and working conditions of his fellow workers. He served under Larkin as the first secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, wrote articles for the labor union's newspaper, and helped organize a transport strike in 1913. He resigned his post, however, in 1914 when he was unable to prevent a rival group, the Irish Volunteers, from weakening the labor union. O'Casey viewed this group's rebellion (alongside his own Irish Citizen Army) of 1916—the Easter Rising, which declared Ireland an independent republic and for which the leaders were executed—as “a great mistake,” seeing it as having robbed Ireland of its potential leadership. That leadership would be needed when, in 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty ended the several years of guerilla fighting that had been initiated by the Easter Rising, formally establishing an independent state of Ireland (and a still England-dependent state of Northern Ireland). Though distancing himself from the Irish Citizen Army, O'Casey continued to work as a journalist throughout this period.

A Journalist Turns to Drama, Questions “The Cause” In his midthirties O'Casey moved away from journalism and returned to a still earlier interest in drama. He had begun writing plays in 1918, submitting them to the Abbey Theatre, which was under the leadership of poet-dramatist William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory. Those early plays were primarily naturalistic in theme and style, emphasizing the grimness and savagery of everyday life. It was not until 1923 that *The Shadow of a Gunman*, his fifth play, was accepted for production. *Shadow* is the tragedy of a poet and a peddler who becomes inadvertently involved in the guerrilla warfare of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1920s Dublin; it was to become the first part of O'Casey's “Dublin Trilogy.” His next play, *Juno and the Paycock*, studied the effects of Dublin's 1922 postwar disturbances—in large part a response of disgruntled IRA members to a peace with England that had left Northern Ireland under British rule—on a tenement family. Soon after *Juno* was completed, O'Casey began work on the last play in the trilogy, a drama focusing on the 1916 Easter week uprising itself. Named for the symbols of the Irish Citizen Army's flag, *The Plough and the Stars* was a product of O'Casey's disillusionment with nationalist politics. At its fourth performance at the Abbey, a riot broke out in the audience, partly because of the appearance of a prostitute in the second act, but primarily due to O'Casey's unsympathetic treatment of the Republican cause. “For O'Casey,” writes critic Julius Novick, “the essential reality of war, revolutionary or otherwise, no matter how splendid the principle for which it is fought, is pain, and pain dominates the last half of *The Plough and the Stars*: fear, madness, miscarriage, and death. No wonder the Nationalists rioted when the play was new; they did not want to see the seamy side of their glorious struggle.”

A Relocation to London: Abandoning Ireland?

In 1926 O'Casey traveled to London to receive the Hawthornden Prize for *Juno and the Paycock* and decided to remain there with his new wife, Englishwoman Eileen Carey Reynolds. His next play, *The Silver Tassie* (1929), was the first he wrote outside his native land. Set in the Dublin slums, it studies the gruesome effects of the First World War. Critics had already noted O'Casey's growing impatience with naturalism throughout his earlier work, and in the second act of *The Silver Tassie* he rejected stage naturalism altogether in favor of a more expressionistic style. Set behind the British front line, Act II used a combination of Cockney and Dublin soldiers, a mixture of realistic speech and stylized plainsong chant, and several other expressionistic techniques. The Abbey—Ireland's premier drama stage—refused to produce the play, and Yeats's public criticism of the play—calling it unconvincing and technically inferior—did tremendous damage to O'Casey's reputation. The ensuing feud between the two lasted nearly seven years, until the drama was finally produced at the Abbey in 1935. By that time, O'Casey had severed all ties with the Abbey, leaving him without a theater workshop. His increasingly experimental dramas never received the preproduction treatment they needed, and commentators were frequently critical of his later work. Although he had begun experimenting with expressionistic techniques early in his career, it was not until *Within the Gates* (1933) that O'Casey created an entirely stylized piece. Throughout his later work O'Casey continued experimenting with both form and style, producing a number of plays (usually tragicomedies) that, according to Joan Templeton, often promoted the idea that “merriment and joy are the primary virtues in a world that has denounced them for too long.” The better known of those later works include *Purple Dust* (1942), *Red Roses for Me* (1943), and *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949). These later works were, of course, written under the shadow of World War II, which gripped Europe and the world from 1939 through 1945, and they thus are attempts to trace out a way of being in a world that has been shattered. They never achieved the same critical success as O'Casey's earlier pieces, however.

In 1939, O'Casey had published the first book of his six-volume, partly fictional autobiography, each volume of which would cover about twelve years. He also began writing drama criticism for the journal *Time and Tide* around the same time, later claiming that he was “altogether too vehement to be a good critic.” Alongside the plays just mentioned, and several studies of common life in Ireland, the remainder of his creative life would be devoted to his autobiography, *Mirror in My House* and to criticism, until his death of a heart attack in Torquay, England, in 1964.

Works in Literary Context

For all the spontaneous gusto that characterized his writings, O'Casey was a deliberate and painstaking craftsman

in the making of plays for stage performance, continually exploring the resources of the modern theater and seeking to expand the range and depth of the drama. He was also a literary artist—throughout a long career, he took his work seriously, searching for the right words in the right order and for the most effective means of organizing material. He was a poet by method as well as by nature, making extraordinary efforts over minor details, writing and rewriting many drafts of each play. His literary discrimination and self-criticism are plainly evident in his working methods, as shown by the successive manuscripts and typescript drafts of the plays among the papers that he left to his wife on his death.

Social Commentary O'Casey was seldom content with social criticism or satire of things as they are: His imagination continually reached beyond—to things as they might be. Envisaging a future in which men and women will have more time and energy for leisure activities, he contemplated a new folk culture involving music, song, and dance, and attempted to realize something of this experience in his own work. The result is meant to have theatrical validity in its own right and is also intended as a yardstick by which the present—as portrayed in the plays—may be judged and found wanting. His preoccupations in this respect anticipated a good deal of modern literature and drama, particularly the plays of Arnold Wesker and John Arden. It is surprising that a number of theater critics who find such younger playwrights of interest because their work reflects contemporary concerns should often ignore the influence of O'Casey. At the same time, it may be contended that his dramatic practice looks backward as well as forward. His last plays, for example, are comparable to Shakespeare's: in theme they explore the conflict between the generations and between past and present values, and, in technique, they display a similar interest in the creation of a more diversified form of stage play.

Politically, though O'Casey's plays may be loosely equated with the drama of social protest or left-wing commitment, moral and aesthetic attitudes are always as important political points. Although he experienced many horrors and disappointments throughout a long and active life, the dominant impression put forward by the Irishman's writings is of an expansive vision and optimism in regard to mankind, science, and the future. As such, his true affinities are with Walt Whitman, whom he admired, rather than with, say, contemporaries Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett.

Works in Critical Context

O'Casey was a prolific writer whose published work reveals a wide range of subject matters and styles. Critics of his time first appreciated his nationalism and then decried his skepticism toward the results of that nationalism. Since then, readers have focused not only on his early Dublin Trilogy, but also on his cogent emotional responses to World War II and his keen studies of common life in Ireland.

The Dublin Trilogy and Beyond Critic Kevin Sullivan has remarked that "O'Casey's reputation for genius

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

O'Casey's famous contemporaries include:

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): One of the most popular and recognizable film directors of the twentieth century, Hitchcock displayed his mastery of the suspense genre in such works as *Psycho*, *The Birds*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*.

Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953): Awarded the Nobel Prize for his plays, O'Neill was the first playwright to introduce American audiences to the techniques of realism pioneered by artists such as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov.

Fritz Lang (1890–1976): This innovative filmmaker was born in Austria but worked in the United States, successfully making the transition from silent to sound motion pictures. His expressive films often deal with the psychology of crime and death, and they set a high standard for the emotional depth and artistic potential for early cinema.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): An Irish poet and dramatist who won the Nobel Prize in 1923, Yeats was the driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival, and later served two terms as a senator in the Irish Senate, or Seanad Éireann.

Helen Keller (1880–1968): World famous for her triumphs over her disabilities, Keller went on to become an active and influential speaker and activist for progressive causes such as workers' and women's rights and anti-war movements.

H. L. Mencken (1880–1956): Journalist, essayist, satirist, and critic of American culture, Mencken delighted his readers with his witty barbs. He became nationally famous for his coverage of the Scopes trial (a legal case that pitted Darwinism and evolution theory versus creationism), which he dubbed the "Monkey Trial."

begins, and I think ends," with his first three plays. He proceeds to explain that this belief "is the commonly accepted critical judgment on O'Casey which only his most fervent admirers . . . would care to dispute." In Robert Hogan's critical view, the negative reception of O'Casey's later plays may be attributed to most critics' unquestioning acceptance of the belief that "when O'Casey left for England, he left his talent behind on the North Circular Road." Yet Hogan himself has argued that "you can only prove the worth of a play by playing it," and having staged or performed in five of O'Casey's later plays, he asserts that "most of O'Casey's late work is eminently, dazzlingly good."

Legacy O'Casey's style and technique, constantly adapted and modified to present historically relevant

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

O'Casey's plays became increasingly expressionistic as he grew older. Other examples of expressionistic plays include:

Murderer, The Hope of Women (1909), a drama by Oskar Kokoschka. Often called the first expressionist play, this brief work features simplified, almost mythical characters, and the declamatory dialogue that would come to characterize the expressionist movement.

The Hairy Ape (1922), a play by Eugene O'Neill. One of several expressionist plays written by O'Neill in the 1920s, this play follows the plight of a working-class man adrift in Manhattan, and condemns both rich capitalists and socialist labor organizers. In the end, the man can only find solace with a gorilla at the zoo.

A Dream Play (1907), a drama by August Strindberg. A precursor to both expressionism and surrealism, this play has been successfully revived many times. Strindberg was in the process of breaking from his earlier naturalist approach when he wrote this dream tale of the daughter of the goddess Indra descending to Earth to meet a variety of symbolic characters.

themes in new and theatrically exciting ways, may often be uneven in quality, but there is a continual striving for variety and originality. The importance of such formal experimentation and the reasons for its critical neglect were succinctly expressed in the playwright's obituary in the *London Times* on, September 21, 1964:

There was a time when the general public eagerly expected him to go on working indefinitely in the style of his famous Dublin trilogy. . . . He insisted on his right as an artist to develop in his own way. Neither politically nor stylistically were the developments in his middle period popular. The consequence was that when he had mellowed politically and critics were in a position to appreciate that his real preoccupation as a dramatist had not been with the destruction of society but with the destruction of dramatic realism it was too late. O'Casey could no longer count on getting the plays he continued to publish adequately performed, if at all.

That his primary aesthetic aim was "the destruction of dramatic realism" and the creation of a more diverse and theatrically exciting form of drama now seems indisputable. To what extent he succeeded in that aim remains for future generations to determine.

Responses to Literature

1. Summarize the focus of *Juno and the Paycock*. What do you feel accounts for its enduring popular-

ity? Why do you think the musical adaptation flopped?

2. Describe O'Casey's role in the foundation and support of the Abbey Theater. How does his legacy compare to that of W. B. Yeats, the theater's most famous member?
3. Sean O'Casey was one of several Irish writers who helped revive interest in Irish myths and legends. Research Irish mythology, then write about why you think the old tales would have been important to Irish citizens in the early twentieth century. What legends specifically would have spoken to modern Irish revolutionaries?
4. O'Casey's play *Red Roses for Me* is set during the 1913 Dublin Lockout. Research the event and consider the literary techniques O'Casey uses to bring it into focus. In what ways does his writing—in its structure, in its diction, in its use of formal stylistic elements—evoke the spirit of that moment?

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Christopher Okigbo

BORN: 1932, Ojoto, Nigeria

DIED: 1967, Nsukka, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Poetry

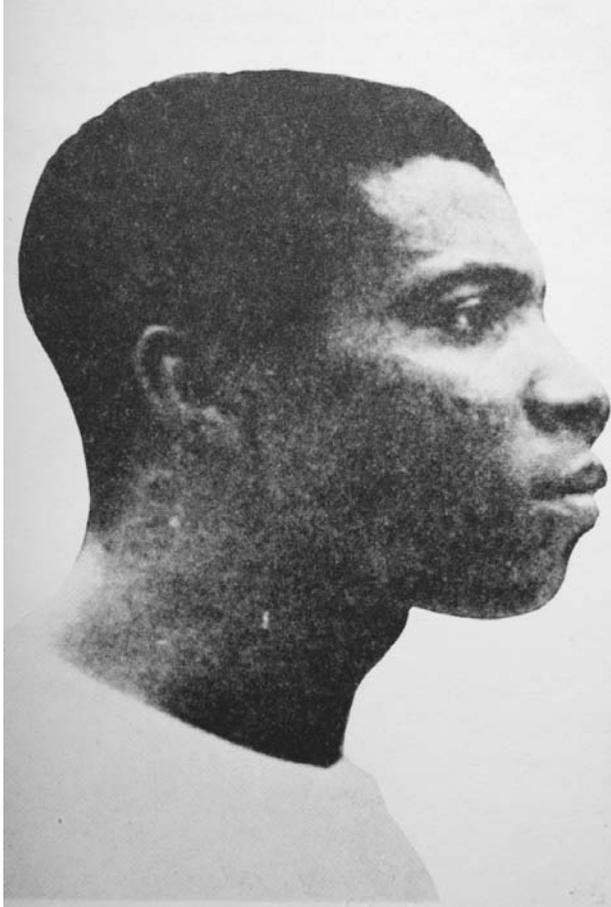
MAJOR WORKS:

Heavensgate (1962)

Limits (1962)

Poems: Four Canzones (1968)

Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder (1971)

Christopher Okigbo *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

Overview

An important transitional figure between traditional and contemporary African literature, Christopher Okigbo was one of Africa's most prominent poets writing in English. In rhythmic, musical poems, he imaginatively blends African culture and ritual with such influences as Christianity and Western poetics. With work reflecting a broad interest in the aesthetics of a variety of art forms—music, poetry, and the visual arts—Okigbo became an important figure in the international literary world. As a result, he drew attention to the postcolonial experience in Africa, particularly in Nigeria.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Missionary Background Christopher Okigbo was born in Ojoto, Nigeria, on August 16, 1932, to a traveling teacher and headmaster for a local Roman Catholic mission. Okigbo's childhood was shaped by his village of Ojoto, as well as the Nigerian mission schools where he lived, and the combination of indigenous and Western views of the world was to become a central element in his

poetry. In 1936, Okigbo's family moved to Ekwulobia, where Okigbo began primary school and met the teacher he refers to as "Kepkanly" in *Heavensgate* (1962).

Education and Teaching In 1945, Okigbo entered Umuahia Government College and developed an interest in such Western sports as football, tennis, and boxing. From Umuahia, Okigbo gained admission to the prestigious University College, Ibadan, and graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in 1956. For the next four years, he held various jobs, including a teaching position at Fiditi Grammar School, where he encouraged the study of poetry and helped coach a few of the school's athletic teams. During this time, Okigbo wrote his first poem, "Debtor's Lane," which was published in the *Horn* literary journal.

Literary Connections While working as a librarian at the University of Nigeria between 1960 and 1962, Okigbo, along with academics and students alike, joined Nigeria's emerging literary circles. In 1962, Okigbo resigned from his library post and became the representative for Cambridge University Press in West Africa, a position that gave him the opportunity to travel throughout the region, as well as to pursue his literary interests, which included making international literary contacts. Also in 1962, Okigbo was appointed the West African editor for the intellectual journal *Transition*, in which he published a number of his own poems.

The Nigerian Civil War The nation of Nigeria was established by the British after they claimed the region as a protectorate in 1901. The area had previously been claimed by a British mercantile company known as the Royal Niger Company, despite the fact that many different tribes native to the area already had their own longstanding claims within the region. Creating the new nation of Nigeria, Britain grouped these tribes together, and over the first half of the twentieth century, tensions among several of the largest ethnic groups began to grow. These problems continued even after Nigeria became an independent nation in 1960 and culminated in a civil war beginning in 1966. In 1967, a small portion of southeastern Nigeria withdrew and formed its own independent nation called Biafra. The battle to recapture Biafra as a part of Nigeria lasted for three years, and was ultimately successful—though the resulting warfare and famine cost the lives of as many as one million Africans.

Untimely End In 1966, the massacre and resulting exodus of eastern Nigerians prior to civil war led Okigbo to write his renowned collection of poems, *Path of Thunder: Poems Prophesying War*, which were published after his death in *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder* (1971). When civil war eventually broke out in Nigeria, Okigbo was commissioned as a major in the Biafran army. In August of 1967, two months after the beginning of the war, Okigbo was shot and killed on the Nsukka front.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Okigbo's famous contemporaries include:

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian author whose novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is acknowledged as the most popular work of African literature ever written.

Wole Soyinka (1934–): Nigerian playwright who in 1986 became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Harold Pinter (1930–): Despite its wit, lively dialogue, and depiction of humorously irrational human behavior, Pinter's drama has been called the "comedy of menace" because it always imparts a sense of threat to one's identity.

Seamus Heaney (1939–): This Irish poet, playwright, and critic won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995.

Richard Wilbur (1921–): Praised for his perfectly crafted poems, Wilbur's recollections of childhood and his observations of town life are captured as universal experience.

Elie Wiesel (1928–): Wiesel's poignant memoir, *Night* (1958), captures his experiences as the survivor of a Nazi concentration camp.

Works in Literary Context

During his short lifetime, Okigbo published only two collections of poetry: *Heavensgate* and *Limits; Poems: Four Canzones* and *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder* appeared posthumously. Despite Okigbo's limited number of published volumes, his work is considered a significant contribution to both African and world literature, primarily for the innovation he brought to African poetry. At a time when African verse was restricted to patriotic themes and conventional poetic methods, Okigbo's work involves complex, personal themes.

Western Influence Okigbo's style was influenced by Western artists, especially American expatriate poet Ezra Pound. In addition to stylistic elements and images inspired by Pound, much of Okigbo's poetry shares similarities with several other notable modernist writers, including T. S. Eliot. Scholars have linked the musicality of Okigbo's poems not only to Pound's *Cantos* (1975, posthumous), but also to pieces of such composers as Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Though Okigbo participated in the tradition of Western literature, he also adapted its devices and symbolism to explore African identity. This blending of Western ideas and techniques with a Nigerian perspective has distinguished Okigbo's work from that of his contemporaries.

Musicality Okigbo is perhaps best remembered for the distinct musical style of his verse. Recommending

that readers listen to Okigbo's poems in order to appreciate them fully, scholar Paul Theroux observes that "looking is confusion: what we see in the poem may be an impenetrable mystery, and there are words and phrases in Okigbo's poetry that are nearly impossible to figure out. Listening is simpler and more rewarding; there is music in [his] poetry." Artistically stimulated by Okigbo, many African poets have imitated his practice of infusing poetry with rhythm and song.

Works in Critical Context

Okigbo was widely praised during his career and continues to be acknowledged as a master poet; however, his use of intricate symbolism, myth, ritual, and personal experience has evoked mixed critical reactions regarding the meaning and importance of his work. While some scholars argue that Okigbo's poetry reflects mankind's quest for divinity, others interpret it as an attack on Christianity. Still others maintain that Okigbo's poetry is a vehicle for his political and social views, especially the poems that delve into the cultural and political alienation of Nigeria during the colonial period.

Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder A few critics have claimed that Okigbo was more a stylist than a poet with a message; however, several recent scholars call attention to his role as a prophet. Because of the powerful imagery and voice in *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder*, academics have analyzed the work through this lens. Other critics have focused their investigations on the construction of *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder*, emphasizing its reliance on musical patterns in both sound and phrase. For example, in an article titled "From Pre-history to Post-history: Revisiting the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo, the Prophet of the New African Renaissance," Catherine Acholonu comments that the "musicality of language, the recurrent patterns and variations upon the same theme, the accumulating images of infrastructure and dramatized experience function as carriers of the poet's vision. Through music, the poet attains a state of abstraction in his pursuit of the artistic ideal of purity, of the perfect identification of matter with form."

Many critics have contemplated how Okigbo's verse might have developed if he had not died at such a young age. In light of Okigbo's short life and prophetic vision, Chukwuma Azuonye comments in "Christopher Okigbo: The Road Not Taken," "*Path of Thunder* is not a fulfillment but a promise of the revolutionary direction of the unrealized future of Okigbo's poetry. Had he survived to realize that future, it is conceivable that he would have shed the remnants of obscurity in imagery and allusion, which, despite his new poetic manifesto, can be found still lingering in this essentially transitional piece." *Path of Thunder* scholar Sunday O. Anozie declares, "Nothing can be more tragic to the world of African poetry in English than the death of Christopher Okigbo, especially at a time when he was beginning to

show maturity and coherence in his vision of art, life and society, and greater sophistication in poetic form and phraseology. Nevertheless his output, so rich and severe within so short a life, is sure to place him among the best and the greatest of our time.”

Responses to Literature

1. A year before the Nigerian civil war in which Okigbo lost his life, he wrote a volume of poetry prophesying the war; Okigbo’s “Come Thunder” has been compared to “The Second Coming” by W. B. Yeats. Read these two poems, as well as the backgrounds of the wars each poet anticipated. Make a list of portents in each poem. Do you believe each work contains enough evidence for critics to say the writers were able to predict war?
2. At the onset of the Biafran war in Nigeria, Okigbo decided that it would not be enough to write about the war, so he joined the army and died fighting on the front lines. Many of his fellow Nigerian writers survived the conflict and went on to long and illustrious careers. In your opinion, did Okigbo better serve his cause by fighting, or would he have proven himself more effective by staying alive and continuing to write?
3. In a book by Ali Mazrui titled *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (1971), Okigbo is put on trial in heaven, where he must defend his decision to give up his art in order to go to war. Why would Mazrui write such a book? Assume the voice of Okigbo and write a one-page essay in your defense.
4. In a speech on the Web site Panafrikan.org, scholar Alex I. Ekwueme states: “There is some of Okigbo’s poetry that I understand at first reading and some I do not understand at all; some that I did not understand at first reading but which made some sense later; and some that appear to make different senses at different readings. But whatever be the case, be the lines clear or obscure, they make enjoyable and inspiring reading—especially aloud.” How can writing that is beyond comprehension be valued as literary? Is a poem effective if it can be enjoyed only for its musicality and cadence when read aloud? What criteria concerning art, its form, and its vision would you establish for it to be considered worthwhile or important?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rich with mythological imagery and archetypal symbolism, Okigbo’s verse explores the human pursuit of divinity. Indeed, many scholars believe that Okigbo’s poetry is an account of his inner struggle to reconcile the concepts of two different faiths, Christianity and his native religion. Mankind’s spiritual quest for the divine has been a recurrent theme in the literary traditions of all cultures, including in the following works:

The Creation of Adam (1508–1512), a fresco painted by Michelangelo. The focal point of this inspirational piece on the Sistine Chapel ceiling is the near contact between the fingers of Adam and God.

The Divine Comedy (1321), a poem by Dante Alighieri. This long narrative poem traces a man’s journey from darkness into divine light, or God.

Women in Praise of the Sacred (1994), a poetry anthology edited by Jane Hirshfield. From Enheduanna of ancient Sumeria to American lyric poet Emily Dickinson to Subok of Korea, this collection of poetry explores and celebrates women’s spirituality.

Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study (2004), a nonfiction book edited by Teun Koetsier and Luc Bergmans. The purpose of this work is to show that throughout history and across cultures, mathematics and theology are intimately related.

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Ben Okri

BORN: 1959, Minna, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

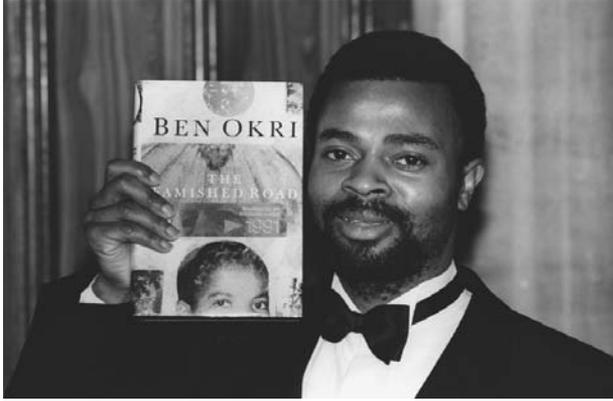
MAJOR WORKS:

Flowers and Shadows (1980)

The Landscapes Within (1981)

The Famished Road (1991)

Songs of Enchantment (1993)



Ben Okri *Okri, Ben, London, 1991, photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

Nigerian novelist, poet, and short-story writer Ben Okri continually seeks to capture the post-independence Nigerian worldview, including the civil war and the ensuing violence and transformation, no matter how troubling or painful these events may be. He is known as an ambitious, experimental writer who seeks to abandon conventional European notions of plot and character. Among his best-known works is the novel *The Famished Road* (1991), which won the 1991 Booker Prize for Fiction.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Return to Africa Okri was born in Minna, Nigeria, on March 15, 1959, to Silver Oghenegueke Loloje Okri, an Urhobo from near the town of Warri, on the Niger Delta, and Grace Okri, an Igbo from midwestern Nigeria. In 1961, Okri's father left for England to pursue a law degree at the Inner Temple in London. After the family had joined him some months later, the Okris settled in Peckham, in the Greater London borough of Southwark. From September 1964, Okri attended John Donne Primary School, a rough primary school in Southwark. After his father had been called to the bar in July 1965, Okri was horrified to discover that he and his mother had to return to Nigeria. He went back to Nigeria, both a stranger and an innocent, at the age of six.

The Nigeria he had been born in was as unstable as the one he returned to in the mid-1960s. In October 1960, Nigeria gained its full independence from Great Britain and became a fully independent member of the British Commonwealth. The new republic almost immediately was embroiled in internal unrest, primarily caused by the complex ethnic compositions of its regions. In early 1966, these tensions resulted in a military coup that put Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi in power. A

countercoup a few months later led to the murder of the general, and he was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as head of the military government. Civil war soon began between the military government and the republic, which ended in 1970 with Gowon and his military regime in control until the mid-1970s. After Gowon failed to transfer power to civilian rule as promised, he was overthrown in 1975. Political unrest continued, however.

Immigrated to England In this atmosphere, Okri started his first novel in 1976, at age seventeen. Armed with the manuscript of his novel, Okri left Nigeria for England in 1978 after he was denied entrance to Nigerian universities. Okri lived with his uncle in New Cross, in the inner-London borough of Lewisham, while working as staff writer and librarian for *Afroscope*, a France-based current-affairs digest, and attending evening classes in Afro-Caribbean literature at Goldsmiths College in New Cross. Awarded a Nigerian government scholarship, Okri enrolled in 1980 as an undergraduate at the University of Essex, where he later obtained a BA in comparative literature.

Published First Novels Okri's first novel, *Flowers and Shadows*, was published in 1980, when he was twenty-one. His second novel, *The Landscapes Within* (1981), came out the following year. They were generally ignored by critics and the book-buying public, forcing the author to live on the streets and subway stations for a time. From 1983 to 1987 Okri served as poetry editor for the London-based weekly magazine *West Africa*. Although he enjoyed the job, he was depressed by the poems submitted to the journal, which were almost exclusively about human suffering. In the end, he was fired because he was not publishing enough poetry. At the same time, Okri started to work as a freelance broadcaster for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) African Service, introducing the current affairs and features program *Network Africa*. One year later, he was awarded a bursary by the Arts Council of Great Britain that allowed him to continue work on his writing.

Artistic Success In 1991, Jonathan Cape published Okri's *The Famished Road*, the first in a trilogy of novels centered on the same characters. That same year, Trinity College of Cambridge University named Okri the Trinity Fellow Commoner in the Creative Arts, an award that gave him the salary of an academic and allowed him to continue his writing. The Trinity judges were much influenced by the qualities of *Stars of the New Curfew* (1986) and had the opportunity of reading *The Famished Road* in proof form.

Okri published the second volume in *The Famished Road* trilogy, titled *Songs of Enchantment*, in 1993. The third volume, *Infinite Riches*, appeared five years later. In

1997, Okri was elected vice president of the English branch of International PEN and was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was named a member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2001.

While winning awards, Okri continued to write challenging novels. They include *Astonishing the Gods* (1995), which was concerned with the same thematic material as the *Famished Roads* novels. In 2002, he published *Arcadia*, which diverged sharply from his previous works by focusing on Lao, an ordinary television reporter. Okri published the novel *Starbook* in 2007, and continues to live and work in London.

Works in Literary Context

It is not surprising that critic Giles Foden sees influences as disparate as African mythology and Western science fiction in the work of Okri, given the depth and breadth of Okri's reading. He began reading the classics of the Western tradition—Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare, for example—in his early teen years. As he grew and became more concerned with Nigerian politics and society, his reading also grew. Indeed, his early work can be fruitfully compared with the novels of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka—both African novelists—and James Joyce, the acclaimed Irish author, and his later work shows the marks of the African “animist” tradition—akin to “magical realism”—in which spirits and spiritual phenomena take physical form.

The Artist in Nigeria: The kunstlerroman Okri's works frequently focus on the political, social, and economic conditions of contemporary Nigeria. In *Flowers and Shadows*, for example, Okri employs paradox and dualism to contrast the rich and poor areas of a typical Nigerian city. Set in the capital city of Lagos, the novel focuses on Jeffia, the spoiled child of a rich man, who realizes his family's wealth is the result of his father's corrupt business dealings. In *The Landscapes Within*, the central character, Omovo, is an artist who, to the consternation and displeasure of family, friends, and government officials, paints the corruption he sees in his daily life.

Detailing the growth and development of the protagonist as well as that of Nigeria, *The Landscapes Within* has been classified as a *kunstlerroman*—a novel that traces the evolution of an artist—and favorably compared with other works in the genre, notably James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). The clarity and precision of Okri's style owe something to Chinua Achebe in *The Landscapes Within*, and his vision of social squalor and human degradation is as unflinching and as compassionate as that of Wole Soyinka. Omovo is actually described at one point reading Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1965), whose title points up the social significance of his own artistic dedication.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Okri's famous contemporaries include:

Mark Z. Danielewski (1966–): American experimental writer whose novels include *House of Leaves* (2000) and *Only Revolutions* (2006).

Cyprian Ekwensi (1921–2007): Nigerian author credited with popularizing the novel in Nigeria. His novels include *Jagua Nana* (1961).

Dick Francis (1920–): English author who has published prolifically since the early 1960s. His first book was his autobiography of his horse jockey days, *The Sport of Queens* (1957).

David Lynch (1946–): American filmmaker whose *Eraserhead* (1977) made him a cult hero. His later films include *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Blue Velvet* (1986).

Benazir Bhutto (1953–2007): Pakistani politician who was the first woman to serve as prime minister of Pakistan.

Tony Blair (1953–): British politician who served as prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1997 until 2007.

Animism *The Famished Road* tells the story of an *abiku*, a child who is born to die and return again and again in an endless cycle to plague his mother. Okri makes of this myth a parable of migrancy, transition, and metamorphosis. Having made a pact with his spirit-companions to return soon, Azaro refuses to return after birth and struggles to hold on to life despite the temptations of his companions in the spirit world.

Reviewers and critics often point to Okri's debt to magical realism and writers such as Gabriel García Márquez. One of the essential features of African animist thought is a dogged refusal to conceive of abstractions that cannot be physically represented. Ancestors, spirits, gods, and other mythical figures necessarily possess palpable physical characteristics. The animist imagination imposes no inherent radical dichotomies on the world, as Western thought has done. The animist understands not the principles of singular identity and contradictions but those of plurality and metamorphosis. The *abiku* is both human and nonhuman and moves between those states as easily as water turns to ice or steam.

The “animist realism” of *The Famished Road* makes it possible to evoke naturally, within a single narrative, simultaneous orders of existence. The motifs of the spirit boxer, the local lore surrounding the photographer, the various figures from folk beliefs who take over people's bodies or see with their eyes, and the domineering

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many fiction writers, like Okri, often take current events, couch them in their novels and short stories, and in so doing allow the ridiculousness or grotesque nature of these incidents to shine. Here are a few more works of art that utilize real-life events in order to critique them:

The Jungle (1906), a novel by Upton Sinclair. This social commentary on the plight of the working class uses as its basis the meatpacking industry, describing the horrifying working conditions that meatpackers must endure in the process.

Elmer Gantry (1926), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. This work exposes the godlessness and hypocrisy of a fictional preacher—a composite of a number of preachers Lewis met while researching the novel.

Heart of Darkness (1902), a novella by Joseph Conrad. Inspired by Conrad's own experiences working on the Congo River as a steamboat captain, this work describes the horrendous exploitation of native inhabitants along the Congo by a Belgian trading company.

presence of the road, all give this novel a distinctively Nigerian flavor that links it with the works of D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark. The major achievements of the author are his ability to carry his audience along and his acceptance of the major parameters of the world he creates, a world that “straddles twilights.”

Works in Critical Context

Stressing his inclusion of African myth and folklore, emphasis on spirituality and mysticism, and focus on Nigerian society and the attendant problems associated with the country's attempts to rise above its third world status, critics have lauded Okri's writings for capturing the Nigerian worldview. Okri has additionally received praise for his use of surrealistic detail, elements of Nigerian storytelling traditions, and Western literary techniques, notably the magic realism popularized by Gabriel García Márquez. Placing Okri's works firmly within the tradition of postcolonial writing and favorably comparing them with those of such esteemed Nigerian authors as Chinua Achebe, critics cite the universal relevance of Okri's writings on political and aesthetic levels.

The Famished Road Okri's novel *The Famished Road* explores the Nigerian dilemma. Charles R. Larson, writing in the *World & I*, remarked that “the power of Ben Okri's magnificent novel is that it encapsulates a critical

stage in the history of a nation . . . by chronicling one character's quest for freedom and individuation.” *The Famished Road's* main character is Azaro, an *abiku* child torn between the spirit and natural world. His struggle to free himself from the spirit realm is paralleled by his father's immersion into politics to fight the oppression of the poor. The novel introduces a host of people, all of whom “blend together . . . to show us a world which may look to the naked eye like an unattractive ghetto, but which is as spiritually gleaming and beautiful as all the palaces in Heaven—thanks to the everyday, continuing miracle of human love,” wrote Carolyn See in the *Los Angeles Times*.

By novel's end, Azaro recognizes the similarities between the nation and the *abiku*. Each is forced to make sacrifices to reach maturity and a new state of being. This affirming ending also “allows rare access to the profuse magic that survives best in the dim forests of their spirit,” according to Rob Nixon of the *Village Voice*. Similarly, in her appraisal for the London *Observer*, Linda Grant commented, “Okri's gift is to present a world view from inside a belief system.” *Detroit Free Press* contributor John Gallagher deemed the work “a majestically difficult novel that may join the ranks of greatness.”

Songs of Enchantment In *Songs of Enchantment*, Okri continues to explore the story and themes raised in *The Famished Road*. While the focus in the first book was on the efforts of Azaro's parents to keep him among the living, however, the focus in the second book is, wrote Charles R. Larson in the *Chicago Tribune*, “an equally difficult battle to restore the greater community to its earlier harmony and cohesiveness.” *Songs of Enchantment* more clearly explicates Okri's concerns with the problems visited upon Africa after decolonization. Wrote Larson, “The wonder of *Songs of Enchantment* . . . is that it carries on so richly the saga of nation building implying that countries that have broken the colonial yoke may face an even more difficult struggle.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Landscapes Within* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, both of which are about the growth of young novelists into men. In a paper, compare Okri's description of the growth of the artist in his novel with Joyce's description of the same. How do issues like geographic location and historical context affect their representation of artists' coming of age? In your response, cite relevant passages from the novels to support your position.
2. Read *The Famished Road*. This novel includes elements of animism—in which spirits and spiritual phenomena are represented in physical objects. What effect does Okri achieve by including these

elements of animism? In other words, how do you think the novel would be changed if it did not include animism? Write a paper that outlines your response.

- Okri uses current events to illustrate certain points he wishes to make in his fiction. These current events are often chosen because they epitomize some viewpoint or the ridiculousness of a certain action. (Think of the politician harming his potential voters by dropping heavy but worthless coins on their heads from a helicopter.) Pick a current event that you think illustrates the foibles of a particular worldview or the ridiculousness of some set of beliefs or practices. Then, try to spin a short story out of this single current event. Visit the short fiction of Okri, especially *Stars of the New Curfew*, to get an idea of how to do this effectively.
- Using the Internet and the library, research *abiku*. In what ways does Okri deviate from traditional representations of the *abiku* in *The Famished Road*? What effect does Okri achieve by deviating from these representations? Construct your response in the form of an essay.

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Michael Ondaatje

BORN: 1943, Colombo, Ceylon

NATIONALITY: Canadian, Sri Lankan

GENRE: Fiction, plays, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems (1970)

Coming through Slaughter (1976)

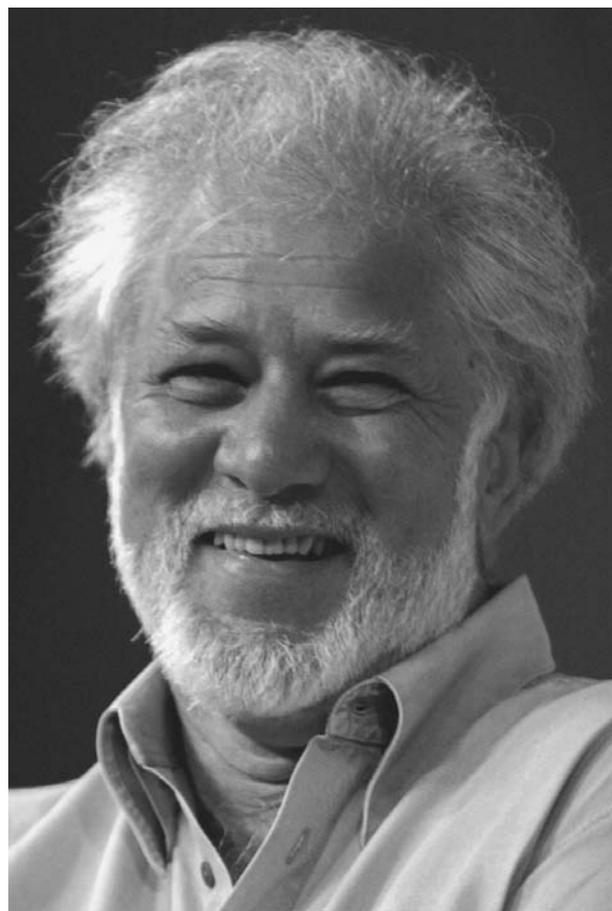
In the Skin of a Lion (1987)

The English Patient (1992)

Anil's Ghost (2000)

Overview

Best known for his novel *The English Patient* (1992), Michael Ondaatje has made several contributions to literature and film. He started his writing career as a poet in the 1960s, later attracting widespread critical acclaim by blending verse, fact, and fiction to create unique works. Besides impacting existing literary genres with everything from narrative mixing to fictional documentary, Ondaatje has contributed editing, critical analysis, and the first



Michael Ondaatje Mauricio Lima / AFP / Getty Images

book-length study of renowned poet and balladeer Leonard Cohen to his list of credentials. He continues to influence drama and film with adaptations of his poetry and prose.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Ceylon to London to Montreal Born Philip Michael Ondaatje on September 12, 1943, in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the writer began life in a class and environment that would thereafter influence his literary subjects and themes. His father, Mervyn Ondaatje, was superintendent of a tea and rubber plantation owned by Michael's wealthy grandfather, while his mother, Enid Doris Gratiaen, was a part-time performer, doing radical dance as influenced by renowned choreographer Isadora Duncan. Despite appearances, Ondaatje's childhood was less than idyllic. His father drank to excess, and before he was ten his parents' marriage had ended. As a result, Ondaatje went to London with his mother in the early 1950s, and eventually studied at Dulwich College. Finding the English educational system constricting, Ondaatje left to join his brother, already living in Montreal, Quebec, and enrolled in Bishop's University in the early 1960s.

Early Work He began writing poetry at Bishop's and continued his writing plans at the University of Toronto. In 1967 he earned an MA at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and was hired as an instructor at the University of Western Ontario in London. Ondaatje's first book, the poetry collection *The Dainty Monsters*, was published that same year.

New Family Life and Subjects As Ondaatje began his chosen occupation, he reached for the readings that would inspire him, including the works of poets Robert Browning, T. S. Eliot, William Butler Yeats, and the younger Modern poets. He came in contact with writers and poets who would influence his writing, such as poet and critic D. G. Jones. He sought out stimulating environments, such as a job on a road gang. This experience lent inspiration for *The Dainty Monsters*. His marriage to Kim Jones in 1964—which brought with it Jones's four children from a previous marriage and soon two more children of their own—made for subjects and themes that continued through his next titles, such as *Rat Jelly* (1973). Later, the pain of divorce from Jones found expression in *Secular Love* (1984).

Making Myths and Movies In the 1970s, Ondaatje began combining his poetry with other genres and media forms. This artistic blending would become his trademark. The 1970 *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems*, for instance, became material for radio and stage readings. After adding songs and reforming the work, the 1974 *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*,

became a play performed first by the Toronto Free Theatre and later at the Brooklyn Academy in New York. It has since been performed in various countries. *Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970) traces the career of the poet bp Nichol (Barrie Phillip Nichol), with whom Ondaatje shared the 1970 Governor General's Award. *Carry on Crime and Punishment* (1972) featured his family and friends as the cast.

Making Continued Impressions Ondaatje collected numerous awards throughout the 1970s. His 1979 collection of poetry *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do* won the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1980. He followed this success with the publication of one of his most important works, *Running in the Family*. The publication of Ondaatje's 1987 *In the Skin of a Lion*, though, gave the writer his first taste of international acclaim. The hybrid novel is about a young man coming of age in Toronto during the 1920s and 1930s. Building upon the facts of a real-life incident from that time—the mysterious disappearance of a well-known millionaire—the novel is as much about the search for the missing tycoon, the hero's involvement in the potentially lucrative quest, and his ensuing mix-up in the radical politics of the era as it is about Toronto's immigrant communities and their role in building the city.

Ondaatje became a household name with the 1996 film adaptation of his 1992 novel *The English Patient*. Set in a Tuscan villa at the end of World War II, the story begins with a Canadian nurse, Hana, who readers learn is the daughter of the protagonist of *In the Skin of the Lion* and who is left almost alone in a bombed-out former convent. She has stayed behind at the former military hospital with a badly burned patient who has been brought there to pass his remaining days. Hana reads to the nameless man, gives him morphine, and ministers to his charred skin as she listens to his story. The screen version, adapted by director Anthony Minghella, won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1996. The novel version was awarded Britain's top literary honor, the Booker Prize, in 1992.

Ondaatje continues to teach contemporary literature in translation and creative writing at Glendon College as professor of Canadian and American literatures. Still a Coach House editor and coeditor of *Brick: A Literary Journal*, he continues to win awards, including another Governor General's Award for his 2006 novel *Divisadero*.

Works in Literary Context

One of Ondaatje's earliest influences was poet and musician Leonard Cohen. He was later influenced by a wide variety of authors, including Italo Calvino, Willa Cather, and Gabriel García Márquez. He also credits Diego Rivera, Henri Rousseau, Sri Lankan temple sculpture, and

jazz music as major influences. Finally, Ondaatje has said that his family, “everyone yakking and inventing stories and gossiping,” was a “big thing” for him and a “literary influence in some odd way.”

Blending Genres Ondaatje’s work defies categorization into individual genres. His writing tends to blend the oral, visual, historical, narrative, and the poetic. For example, his 1976 novel, *Coming through Slaughter*, about New Orleans cornetist Buddy Bolden, contains few available facts about Bolden as well as altered dates, people brought together who never met, and polished facts “to suit the truth of fiction.” *Coming through Slaughter* also strays from chronological order and varies from historical documentation to narrative to interior monologue.

Blending Themes In a style characterized by wry humor, flamboyant imagery, extravagant metaphors, and sudden shifts in tone, Ondaatje’s writing is based on themes of family and social issues. In his poetry, observed critic Sam Solecki, “the fundamental or essential nature of experience is consistently being described and examined.” Likewise, in his prose, he takes on the personal task of exploring family dynamics and of giving expression to social issues he finds important, such as those he discussed in a 1987 *Quill and Quire* interview with Barbara Turner: the “gulf between rich and poor, the conditions of the labour force, racism . . . in Canada.”

Works in Critical Context

Ondaatje’s body of work has received consistently high critical praise. *Running in the Family* (1982) was appreciated for its re-creation of a particular society and for its stylistic exploration of the relationship between history and the poetic imagination. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, widely considered Ondaatje’s most celebrated work, was praised and challenged by critics and readers for dealing with an American folk hero and outlaw. Most of his other writing continues to be revered for its “jungle-lush” aesthetic, as Douglas Barbour once noted, and its “rhythmic control over his language.”

While several of his works have earned prestigious honors, others stand out as most often read, studied, and discussed—among them *Anil’s Ghost* and *The English Patient*.

***The English Patient* (1992)** The movie *The English Patient*, released in 1996 and based on the 1992 novel of the same name, won nine Academy Awards and more than forty other awards. The novel also received wide critical praise, especially for its dynamic interrelationships, dialogues, and imagery. Writer and critic Richard Ford, for example, quoted on the book’s dust jacket, called it “an exotic, consuming and richly inspired novel of passion . . . [which] in its elegance and its satisfactions . . . resembles no book I know.”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ondaatje’s famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Atwood (1939–): Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, feminist, and activist who is one of the most highly esteemed writers of Canada and of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Leonard Cohen (1934–): Canadian singer-songwriter, poet, and novelist. Cohen’s songs and poetry have influenced many other writers and more than a thousand renditions of his work have been recorded.

Ken Kesey (1935–2001): American author best known for his debut novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962). Kesey is credited as being a counterculture figure who linked the Beat generation of the 1950s with the hippies of the 1960s.

Gloria Steinem (1934–): Leading American feminist, journalist, and women’s rights advocate and activist who founded *Ms.* magazine in 1972.

***Anil’s Ghost* (2000)** Ondaatje’s novel *Anil’s Ghost* involves the war in Sri Lanka, his native land. Focusing on themes of human and civil rights, the book won the International Fiction Prize from the *Irish Times*, and wide critical acclaim. The *New York Times* review read, “Gorgeously exotic. . . . As he did in *The English Patient*, Mr. Ondaatje is able to commingle anguish and seductiveness in fierce, unexpected ways.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The English Patient*; then consider how maps and mapmaking (cartography) represent significant moments in the memories of the characters. Identify five or six locations recalled by either Hana or the unnamed English patient and decide what each particular location suggests, represents, or means to you. Then, make a map including each of those events you came up with, creating the image/imagery you interpret as significant in each location. Be prepared to offer rationales for your choices.
2. How is the theme of nationality and nationhood expressed in the novel? Does Ondaatje think that nationality and ethnicity can be transcended? Why or why not?
3. What role does the desert play in the novel? How does the setting affect or impact or otherwise inform the themes of the story?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ondaatje's work frequently focuses on themes of racism, class division, and labor force conflict. Here are a few works by writers who also explore such issues:

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, Canadian author Atwood speculates on a horrifying future of gender division and reproductive control under a religious totalitarian regime.

"Harrison Bergeron" (1961), a short story by Kurt Vonnegut. In this science fiction tale, Vonnegut presents a representative family of the future: one who reflects the perfection of society and who carries the burdens of the scapegoated lesser class.

Catfish and Mandala (2000), a novel by Andrew X. Pham. In this autobiographical work of fiction, Pham investigates identity and the duality of the immigrant, the displacement of being a hyphenated human—both American and Vietnamese, yet neither at the same time.

Fences (1985), a play by August Wilson. In this play, Pulitzer Prize winner Wilson examines not only the black experience in the 1950s but race and labor issues in context.

Native Son (1940), a novel by Richard Wright. In this award-winning novel, Wright probes the personal and public themes of racism and explores the consequences of socialization between rich and poor and black and white.

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Juan Carlos Onetti

BORN: 1909, Montevideo, Uruguay

DIED: 1994, Madrid, Spain

NATIONALITY: Uruguayan, Spanish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Pit (1930)

A Brief Life (1950)

The Shipyard (1961)

Overview

Juan Carlos Onetti is an Uruguayan novelist and short-story writer whose works were available only in limited editions and were read by only a few of his compatriots for many years. When South American writers gained international recognition during the Latin American Boom of the 1960s, Onetti was recognized as an important voice in the development of modern Latin American literature. Along with such contemporaries as Gabriel García Márquez, Onetti contributed to the genre of magic realism with his use of innovative points of view, fantastic events, and existentialist themes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Dropout to Literary Star Juan Carlos Onetti was born on July 1, 1909, in Montevideo, Uruguay. Because his father, a customs worker, moved the family often, Onetti received a sporadic education and eventually dropped out of high school. Although he spent much of his spare time reading, he made his living by working a series of odd jobs—waiter, doorman, and grain inspector, among others—before moving to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he began writing for periodicals and the Reuters news agency in both Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Around this time, he also began writing fiction.

Concerned about government corruption and cultural materialism, Onetti openly supported progressive reforms and, returning to Montevideo, founded the influential journal *Marcha* in 1939 with a group of other intellectuals. After working as a manager at an advertising firm in Montevideo, he took a position as the director of municipal libraries in 1957, simultaneously



Juan Carlos Onetti *Onetti, Juan Carlos*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

publishing fiction expressing his social and political concerns. As his fame as an author grew, Onetti was awarded a number of literary prizes, including the Iberian-American Award from the William Faulkner Foundation in 1963.

Exile Onetti lived during politically unstable times in his native country. Economic hardship throughout the mid-twentieth century led to a militant group known as the Tupamaros opposing the government. This group rose to prominence when President Jorge Pacheco Areco declared a state of emergency in Uruguay in 1968, which led to an erosion of individual rights. The situation became progressively worse for Uruguayan citizens, especially after a military coup in 1973 led to an outright dictatorship instead of a democratically elected government. The regime became infamous for its use of torture and its high rate of political imprisonment.

Despite his activist ideas, Onetti avoided problems with the government until 1974, when he served as a judge for a literary contest. The judges awarded a prize to a short story that the Uruguayan government considered pornographic and subversive, and Onetti was briefly jailed before being exiled to Madrid, where he began publishing internationally acclaimed works. In 1975, he became a Spanish citizen and, in 1980, won the Cervantes Prize,

which is widely considered the most prestigious award for literature in the Spanish language. Even though Uruguay had become a democracy by the time he received the National Literary Award in 1985, Onetti refused to return to his homeland, prompting the president of Uruguay to travel to Spain to present the award. Onetti died in Spain on May 30, 1994.

Works in Literary Context

Scholars have often cited the influence of American writer William Faulkner on Onetti's work. Indeed, Onetti's imaginary setting of Santa María, a coastal town appearing in several of his books, was inspired by Faulkner's invented Yoknapatawpha County. Even Onetti's characters have been compared with those of Faulkner, for both authors create "desperate characters without dreams but who are not lacking in humanity," says Jorge Campos in an essay in *Onetti and Others: Comparative Essays on a Major Figure in Latin American Literature*. Additional sources of inspiration for Onetti include French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline for his powerful use of language and Jorge Luis Borges for fiction that blends the fantastic with everyday life.

Alternate Realities In addition to social and political concerns, Onetti explores such existentialist themes as alienation, isolation, and the creation of one's own reality through fiction. Many of his novels contain characters who seek to create satisfying lives for themselves through writing, thereby escaping into their own imaginations. In *The Pit*, for example, Eladio Linacero attempts to gain satisfaction by giving meaning and order to his life through writing his memoirs; however, these recollections prove to be nothing more than stories of the fantasy life he wishes he had lived.

With the publication of *A Brief Life*, another novel in which a character escapes into his imagination, Onetti introduced the fictional town of Santa María, which would appear in several subsequent works. In *A Brief Life*, Juan Brausen, faced with financial troubles and an unhappy marriage, escapes into his conception of an ideal world, complete with two alter egos, Dr. Diaz Grey and Arce. The adventures of Brausen's fictional characters intermingle with his own everyday experiences in the real world until Dr. Grey and Arce finally break away from the control of their creator. Because the narration switches back and forth among characters, readers must decide if the narrators are telling the truth, as their stories are entirely based on subjective observations. Thus, the meaning of the story varies according to the characters' accounts of events, as well as the readers' interpretation of the stories and their trust in the characters' narrative reliability.

Impact of the Boom As a writer during the Latin American Boom, Onetti helped change the way the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Onetti's famous contemporaries include:

Saul Bellow (1915–2005): Author whose novels deal with man's isolation, spiritual alienation, and potential for awakening.

J. D. Salinger (1919–): Author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, a novel about sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield's experiences in New York after being expelled from an elite private school; this book is renowned for the frankness of its first-person narration.

Arthur Miller (1915–2005): This American dramatist wrote many celebrated plays, including *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): Nixon, the thirty-seventh president of the United States (1969–1974), improved U.S. relations with the USSR and China. However, the Water-gate scandal ultimately led to his resignation in disgrace.

Walt Disney (1901–1966): Film producer, director, screenwriter, and animator, Disney was one of the most innovative and influential figures in the world of twentieth-century entertainment.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Recurrent themes in Onetti's novels center around man's alienation and isolation, themes born from existentialism. What distinguishes Onetti from traditional existentialists, however, is that his characters attempt to create their own realities through literary production, a technique many writers have used in their own works. Listed below are examples of other works whose main characters escape reality through writing:

The Glass Menagerie (1944), a play by Tennessee Williams. In this play, Tom is unable to live in reality. He retreats into his own world of writing poetry, while other characters have their own methods to escape from the real world.

Griffin & Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence (1991), fiction by Nick Bantock. After the exchange of postcards and letters with Sabine, a fellow artist from a fictional group of South Pacific islands, Griffin concludes that Sabine is a figment of his imagination that he created out of loneliness.

A Fast and Brutal Wing (2004), a novel by Kathleen Jeffrie Johnson. The fantasy world of two troubled siblings is revealed through Emmet's journal entries written in a psych ward and Niki's short story about animal transformation, both of which expose conflicting details about the disappearance of a famous local writer.

world viewed Latin American culture. The boom writers achieved commercial success when their works were translated, opening them up to a much larger audience, and the major authors of this movement continued to produce best sellers for decades. The most enduring impact of the boom, however, is seen in the works of not only Latin American writers such as Isabel Allende, but also writers from around the world who credit Onetti, García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa as their inspiration.

Works in Critical Context

After many years of being ignored by scholars, Onetti's work began to receive critical attention in the 1960s during the Latin American Boom. Nevertheless, he did not receive widespread notice until he moved to Madrid and his works were translated for an international audience. The recipient of many literary awards and honors, Onetti is considered to be an important voice in Latin American fiction.

The Pit The first of Onetti's works to be approached critically was 1939's *The Pit*, which, according to M. Ian Adams, "marked a new stage in Uruguayan literature." In regard to the cultural context of *The Pit*, scholar Angel Rama comments, "From 1938 to 1940 a fracture occurs in Uruguayan culture that opens, through the course of a new interpretation of ethical and artistic values, a creative period that, after intense struggle, will control the intellectual life of the country. This fracture coincides with the rise of a generation of writers who vary between twenty and thirty years of age, who in part provoke it, and whose action is projected on the particularly disordered background of national and international life of those years." Because Onetti used such modernist techniques as stream-of-consciousness narration and inner experience—including memories, dreams, and fantasies—*The Pit* is recognized by most scholars as a work of fiction that introduced a new narrative method in Latin American literature.

Difficult Meaning and a Tense Universe In 1983 Jack Murray noted that many Onetti critics, including Ivonne Bordelois, suggested that Onetti forced his readers to untangle the meaning of his stories; in other words, his work was not simple or direct in its delivery. Instead, Onetti often relied on symbols to get his ideas across, kept information from his readers, and purposely constructed the text in a piecemeal fashion. Yet, Murray ultimately concluded that Onetti "succeeded" with this style, even providing a "unified and coherent picture" through the fragmented construction. In 1994, following Onetti's death, Fernando Ainsa referenced the fragmentation of Onetti's fictional worlds and characters. He wrote that Onetti "establishes a formal, tense universe, a world closed existentially on itself, rigorous in style and

without concessions yet saved by the act of writing placed at the disposal of its antiheroes. Disoriented beings (when not frustrated), uprooted nonconformists, *outsiders*, and marginal figures face the difficulty of communicating with others and feel that authenticity is repressed by society.” David Butler, in 2005, echoed Ainsa’s ideas and focused an entire study on how “the body is foregrounded, fragmented, and estranged” in Onetti’s novels.

Responses to Literature

1. Onetti served on a panel of judges that awarded a literature prize to writer Nelson Marra, whose short story was declared pornographic and offensive by the Uruguayan military dictatorship. Write an informal essay addressing the following situation: If you had been a judge with Onetti, would you have chosen Marra’s story to win the contest, even if you knew the government would object? How might the panel of judges have avoided conflict while still honoring Marra?
2. Research the Latin American Boom in literature during the 1960s. Create a poster or computer presentation that includes major writers and characteristics of the movement, along with details about what initiated the boom and how it affected literature worldwide.
3. Based on textual evidence, create a map of Santa María, Onetti’s imaginary coastal town. Use the computer program of your choice or draw the map by hand. On the back of your map, write a short advertisement inviting tourists to visit Santa María, highlighting specific areas of interest and why they are important.
4. Many of Onetti’s characters are afflicted by despair and alienation and yearn for meaning in their lives. In *The Shipyard*, for example, Larsen undertakes the restoration of a decrepit shipyard, which gives him the illusion that his life has dignity. With a group of your classmates, discuss the following: What do you feel gives a person’s life dignity? What makes an individual’s existence complete? Do you think people should ever reach a point of satisfaction?

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George Orwell

BORN: 1903 Motihari, India

DIED: 1950 London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, Essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Burmese Days (1934)

Coming Up for Air (1939)

Animal Farm (1945)

“Politics and the English Language” (1946)

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)

Overview

George Orwell gained an enduring international reputation with his two last works of fiction, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Although he was never primarily a writer of speculative fiction, these works have been extremely influential in the fields of fantasy and science fiction. In these works, as in the other writing that filled the rest of his career, he gauged the contemporary European scene of the troubled 1930s and 1940s with critical insight drawn from personal experience and a deep moral commitment.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, Bengal, India in 1903. At the time, India was under direct British control (it remained so until 1947). Many British government officials worked and lived there, including Orwell’s father, Richard Walmesley Blair, a minor customs official in the opium department of the Indian Civil Service. When Orwell was four years old, his family returned to England and settled at Henley, a village near London. His father soon returned to India.



George Orwell *Orwell, George, photograph. AP Images.*

When he was eight years old, he was sent to a private preparatory school in Sussex. He later claimed that his experiences there determined his views on the English class system (Orwell was a socialist who rejected the British idea of hereditary social classes). From there he went by scholarship to two private secondary schools: Wellington for one term and Eton for four-and-a-half years.

Orwell then joined the Indian Imperial Police, receiving his training in Burma (modern Myanmar, which was also at the time under British control), where he served from 1922 to 1927. While home on leave in England, he made the important decision not to return to Burma. His experiences there had given him a distaste for imperialism, and his feeling about his experiences can be seen in *Burmese Days* (1934).

The Long Struggle to Make Writing a Career
Orwell attempted to establish himself as a writer—with very little success at first. He lived virtually as a tramp in London and Paris in the late 1920s, finally settling in 1929 in his parents' home in Suffolk. Still attempting to establish himself as a writer, he earned his living by teaching and by penning occasional articles, while he completed several versions of his first book, *Down and Out in London and Paris*, a recounting of his rough-and-

tumble life in the two European capitals. He was earning his living as a teacher when the book was scheduled for publication, and he preferred to publish it under a pseudonym. From a list of four possible names submitted to his publisher, he chose “George Orwell,” taking the name “Orwell” from a Suffolk river.

First Novels Spring from Early Experience
Orwell's *Down and Out* was issued in 1933. During the next three years he supported himself by teaching, reviewing, and clerking in a bookshop and began spending longer periods away from his parents' Suffolk home. In 1934 he published *Burmese Days*, followed shortly thereafter by *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936).

In the spring of 1936 he moved to Wallington, Hertfordshire, and several months later married Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a teacher and journalist. His reputation up to this time as a writer and journalist was based mainly on his accounts of poverty and hard times, and his next book was a commission in this direction: the Left Book Club authorized him to write an inquiry into the life of the poor and unemployed. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) was divided into two parts: the first part was a typical reporting essay, and the second part was an essay on class and socialism. It marked his birth as a political writer, an identity that lasted for the rest of his life.

The Spanish Civil War
In July of 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out, with the forces of the Spanish Republic on one side and the ultranationalist forces of General Francisco Franco on the other. Franco's forces prevailed by 1939, and he set himself as the country's dictator. Many foreigners, including many artists and intellectuals, spoke out in support of the Republicans, and some volunteered for military service in the Republican Army—Orwell among them. He arrived in Barcelona in 1936 and joined the militia of the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), serving with them in action in January 1937. Transferring to the British Independent Labour party contingent serving with the POUM militia, he was promoted first to corporal and then to lieutenant before being wounded in the middle of May. During his convalescence, the POUM was declared illegal, and he fled into France in June. His experiences in Spain caused him to become disillusioned with the leftist philosophy associated with the Soviet Union, but inspired him to become a revolutionary socialist.

After his return to England, Orwell began writing *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a book about his Spanish experience, which completed his disengagement from the orthodox left. He then wished to return to India to write a book, but he became ill with tuberculosis and was forced to convalesce.

World War II
When World War II began, he again wanted to help out. The army, however, rejected him as

physically unfit, though later he served for a period in the home guard and as a fire watcher. Instead, moving to London in 1940, he began writing “London Letters” for *Partisan Review* and joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a producer in the Indian section, remaining in this position until 1943. BBC’s main purpose was to help boost the morale of Indian soldiers fighting in British service. Orwell’s involvement in what was basically a propaganda operation was both frustrating and a learning experience for him and may be counted among the sources of inspiration for his two subsequent masterpieces, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, both of which deal satirically with government use of propaganda.

Orwell’s Satirical Masterpieces The year 1943 was an important one in Orwell’s life for several reasons. His mother died in March; he left the BBC to become literary editor of the *Tribune*; and he began book reviewing on a more regular basis. But the most significant event occurred late that year, when he commenced writing his novel *Animal Farm*, which relates what happens to animals who free themselves and then are again enslaved through violence and fraud. Orwell had completed this fantasy satire by February 1944, but several publishers rejected it on political grounds. It was not published, however, until August 1945, when the war was over, purportedly because of paper rationing but mostly because of the unmistakable fact that it parodied the history of the Soviet Union, then an important war ally.

Toward the end of World War II, Orwell traveled to France, Germany, and Austria as a reporter. His wife died in March of 1945. The next year he settled with his youngest sister as his housekeeper on Jura, off the coast of Scotland. By then, his health was steadily deteriorating and his tuberculosis flared up frequently, but his physical weakness did not prevent him from writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. By the end of 1948 he was seriously ill. He entered a London hospital in September 1949 and the next month married Sonia Brownell. He died only months after that, in London, on January 21, 1950.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Critics have noted that Orwell took from an eclectic group of influences, including Charles Dickens, Henry Fielding, Gustav Flaubert, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Jack London, W. Somerset Maugham, and Emile Zola, among others.

Dystopias: A Bleak Vision of the Future It has also often been pointed out that in creating *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell drew on earlier dystopian novels. A dystopia is a vision of society, often a future society, that is the opposite of paradise, or utopia. It is a vision of society gone horribly wrong. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* bears some similarity to H. G. Wells’s dystopic *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), in which the protagonist is transported

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Orwell’s famous contemporaries include:

Rachel Carson (1907–1964): Marine biologist, environmentalist, naturalist, and science writer whose work, *Silent Spring* (1962), was instrumental in the advent of the ecology movement and global environmentalism.

Zora Neale Hurston (1903–1960): African-American writer who paved the way during the Harlem Renaissance for future African-American women writers.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Modernist Irish expatriate writer who is typically considered one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): Bolshevik revolutionary who as People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs and of War and founding commander of the Red Party was exiled for his failed opposition to Stalin. He was later assassinated in Mexico.

into a world of technological tyranny two hundred years into the future. Wells had been Orwell’s favorite author when he was young. He shared not only Wells’s fascination with utopian thinking but also his critical attitude toward the British class system.

However, Wells’s later belief in science and rationality as the ultimate problem solvers had, in Orwell’s opinion, been outdated since World War I. After all, both Hitler and Stalin had been able to harness science in the service of their dictatorships. Some scholars have also pointed to *Swastika Night* (1937) by Katharine Burdekin (writing as Murray Constantine) as a likely model. A more significant influence on Orwell’s novel was probably *We* (1924), by Russian novelist Evgeny Zamyatin. In Zamyatin’s dystopia, individuality has been all but obliterated; personal names have been replaced by numbers; people’s lives are regulated down to the minutest details. Those who do not conform are tortured into submission by corrective brain treatment with X-rays, or publicly executed by a chemical process that might be described as vaporization, the word used in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* about the sudden disappearance of unwanted persons. Orwell reviewed Zamyatin’s novel in 1946 and found that it was a better novel than Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) insofar as it provided a more credible motive for the power elite to stay on top than Huxley had done. In Orwell’s view no totalitarian system could exist without a ruling class motivated by power hunger, the wish to exercise power over others and keep it at any cost.

The Left In the early part of the twentieth century, many intellectuals and artists were sympathetic toward the Soviet Union because they had hopes that the great

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Orwell's most significant works are what are considered dystopian novels as well as commentaries on the absurdity of totalitarian cultures. Here are a few works by other writers who explore such issues:

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, Canadian author Atwood speculates on a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and takeover of society by the small class of elite.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953), by Ray Bradbury. In this dystopian novel, the theme of totalitarian suppression of the masses is reflected in the storyline, one which includes burning of books (which are illegal) as the basis for the plot.

A Clockwork Orange (1962), by Anthony Burgess. In this futuristic work (which has its own dictionary), the powers that be have select ways for treating the truants and thugs in the small gang called the Droogs.

suffering experience by the majority of Russians under tsarist domination would be alleviated by a pure communist form of government. Quite simply, a government that valued the well-being of all its citizens seemed preferable to a government that seemed concerned only with the desires of wealthy landowners. Those who sided with the Marxists were called "leftist," and they stood in opposition to "right-wing" politicians who favored traditional social structures and governmental authority.

To Orwell the factional fighting during the Spanish Civil War between leftist political parties that were supposed to be united in their war against fascism was a shock, and *Homage to Catalonia* marks a turning point in his political outlook. He saw himself as a socialist and continued to do so for the rest of his life, but he was never a member of a political party. For him, socialism was first of all a matter of "justice and common decency." Even before Spain, Orwell had expressed impatience with the Marxist theorizing of left-wing intellectuals, and in Spain the Communists, Orwell realized, were employing methods for acquiring power similar to those employed by the Fascists. The common man was the sufferer. His feelings about the corruption of both right-wing and left-wing politics are clear in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*.

Works in Critical Context

Orwell's work generally received praise in his lifetime and after. Both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* are still widely assigned for classroom study. Orwell's socialism made him the target for some politically motivated critical

attacks, but as Cold-War tensions have faded, Orwell's personal politics have seemed less controversial and his work has enjoyed a period of renewed critical attention.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)** The horrors Orwell envisioned in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were criticized for being excessive or unbelievable. Undaunted, Orwell emphasized that the novel was meant as a satire, displaying certain totalitarian ideas in their extreme consequence. Conversely, in a review of Orwell's posthumously published *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (1950) E. M. Forster wrote of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that "There is not a monster in that hateful apocalypse which does not exist in embryo today." It is difficult to point to any major inconsistency that may detract from the overall impact of Orwell's vision, and its detailed realism makes it all the more distressing. The book made *Time's* 2005 list of the one hundred best English-language novels since 1923.

Responses to Literature

1. While Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, consider the different personalities in the book. Who is meek and easily intimidated? Who is likely to resist suppression/oppression? Where do you think you would have been on the spectrum of personalities? How would you have responded—as a rebel against the absurdity? As a non-confrontational one who wants no trouble?
2. Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* was controversial at the time of its publication because its events mirrored events taking place in the Soviet Union, a wartime ally of Great Britain. Use the library and the Web to research the power struggle between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky so that you can compare the novel's fantasy plot to the reality of the historical events.
3. Orwell fought in and wrote about the bloody Spanish Civil War that began in 1936. One of the worst atrocities of that war was the Nazi saturation bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica, which became the subject matter of a mural by Pablo Picasso. Research the painting in the library and on the Web. How does Picasso's depiction of the Spanish Civil War compare to that of Orwell. It might be useful to note that Picasso was a member of the French Communist Party.

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Ovid

BORN: 43 BCE, Sulmo (now Sulmona), Italy

DIED: c. 18 CE, Tomis (now Constanta), Romania

NATIONALITY: Italian, Roman

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Art of Love (1 BCE)

Metamorphoses (8 CE)

Overview

Known for his elegiac couplets and a narrative poem called *Metamorphoses* that mythologizes the creation of the world, Ovid is widely recognized as one of the greatest poets of classical Rome. His works are among some of the most influential in European literature and have inspired centuries of imitation. He is considered a master Latin stylist whose technical accomplishments permanently enriched the language. His verse is distinguished by clarity of expression and exactness.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life and Early Years at the Twilight of the Roman Republic Ovid was born in 43 BCE, the year in which the ancient Roman republican system of govern-



Ovid © Sandro Vannini / Corbis

ment finally came to an end when both heads of government fell in battle against the would-be usurper Mark Antony. The bloody series of civil wars that followed until 31 BCE coincides with the years of Ovid's childhood and adolescence: The chilling events that accompanied this—after his defeat by Octavian, his one-time ally, Mark Antony committed suicide, as did his lover Cleopatra—cannot have failed to leave their mark, but they do not haunt Ovid's early imagination as they do those of other Roman writers such as Vergil or Propertius.

Ovid was born in Sulmo (modern Sulmona, Italy), ninety miles and a world apart from Rome, into a prosperous family of the equestrian order. The *equites*, or knights, were the second class of Roman society and supported the status quo of the ruling senatorial elite. Sent to Rome to study rhetoric under the leading rhetoricians of the time in preparation for a legal career, Ovid distinguished himself as a student, but ultimately chose the vocation of a poet. His poetic genius gained him admission to the circle around statesman and literary patron Messalla, and Ovid quickly became a favorite of the Roman elite. Here, he met the other leading poets of the day, including Propertius and Horace.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ovid's famous contemporaries include:

Caesar Augustus (63 BCE–14 CE): The first emperor of the Roman Empire, from 27 BCE until his death, Augustus's strong rule ushered in the *Pax Romana*, or time of peace and stability in the empire.

Herod the Great (73 BCE–4 BCE): A Roman king of Judea who, according to the New Testament, was responsible for the Massacre of the Innocents, the deaths of all first-born male children in Bethlehem, in an attempt to prevent the coming of the "king of the Jews."

Horace (65 BCE–8 BCE): A Roman lyric poet, Horace is best known for his *Odes*.

Livy (59 BCE–17 CE): A Roman historian, Livy wrote a comprehensive, seven-hundred-year history of Rome.

Vergil (70 BCE–19 BCE): Vergil, a classical Roman poet, wrote *The Aeneid*, an epic poem telling of Rome's origins.

Love Poetry Ovid's first work, *Loves*, appeared originally in five volumes around 20 BCE and by 1 CE was rereleased in a shorter three-book edition, which is the only version extant today. The *Heroines* is generally regarded as Ovid's second endeavor, although some evidence suggests the work was published later in his career. Here Ovid highlights his profound knowledge of mythology and creates clever, rhetorical dramatic soliloquies of unhappy love that breathed new life into an almost exhausted Greek genre.

The Art of Love was published around 1 BCE and instantly caused a sensation. The poem consists of three books, a light and irreverent series of loosely connected instructions on how to find and win one's love in contemporary Rome. As this poem implicitly ridiculed the conservative moralism of the Augustan regime, Ovid quickly wrote a recantation, *The Remedies of Love*, but critics have found that work rather biting as well.

Banishment and *Metamorphoses* In 8 CE, Emperor Augustus banished Ovid, then Rome's most popular poet, to Tomis on the Black Sea (now Constanta, Romania) under somewhat peculiar and still unexplained circumstances. The poet was tried for high treason in the emperor's private court, and his sentence was pronounced directly by Augustus. Ovid's books were subsequently removed from public libraries, but he lost neither his citizenship nor property, nor was he forbidden to communicate with his friends or wife, as was normal in such cases. Ovid claimed that a poem, most likely *The Art of Love*, and an indiscretion, perhaps with Augustus's granddaughter, had caused his exile. On the eve of his

exile Ovid was composing the *Calendar*, a description of the Roman religious year, and the *Metamorphoses*. The epic *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), long recognized as his masterpiece, describes the loves and transformations of characters from classical mythology, providing masterly and accessible renditions of ancient tales.

Exile came as a great shock to Ovid; his reaction to the blow provided some of the most remarkable poetry of personal expression from antiquity. He responded to his changed circumstances by investing his emotions in elegy, the genre in which he had written as a poet-lover in his youth. Ovid's exile poetry in the *Lamentations* and the *Letters from the Black Sea* is not in the confessional style a modern reader might expect. While he frequently describes the misery of his surroundings, he focuses his defense upon his art. His pleas were in vain, however; he died in Tomis, still banished. Ovid, over the course of his life, would marry three times and divorce twice, with one daughter.

Works in Literary Context

Metamorphoses as Classical Sourcebook Out of the remnants of classical literature, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* survived as a sourcebook for artists, writers, and readers seeking access to the world of Greek and Roman mythology. Many of the most seemingly familiar myths of antiquity owe their main outlines, and often their survival, to the form Ovid gives them in his poem. For modern readers, Ovid is the sole source for many tales, but his contemporaries had access to a wealth of literature, written in both Latin and Greek, in which they might have found similar versions of these narratives to hold up in comparison. While epic in scope, the work's meter, tone, and subject are quite unlike Rome's imperial epic, Vergil's *Aeneid*. Drawn from Greek mythology, Roman folklore, and Mesopotamian sources, the stories constituting the *Metamorphoses* are all linked by a common motif—transformation.

Ovid's Lasting Literary Influence Ovid's banishment and the removal of his works from public access did nothing to diminish his popularity, as illustrated by the appearance of quotes from *The Art of Love* in graffiti around the city of Pompeii. While some contemporaries criticized Ovid for his lack of control and irreverent tone in his verse, other writers freely mimicked Ovidian poetic technique. In medieval times, commentators and translators revised his poems into allegories by purging their erotic content in accordance with Christian doctrine. However, the stories and concepts in the *Metamorphoses*, *Loves*, and *Heroines*, as interpreted by the medieval traveling poets, or minstrels, helped form the concept of courtly love, which played an important role in the creation of Arthurian literature.

Ovid's influence upon English literature began with Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower. William Shakespeare

drew heavily on Ovid in his earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, and Ovid's influence can be traced throughout Shakespeare's career. For the poets of the Enlightenment, the intellectual play, which represents the hallmark of Ovid's style, evoked a deep similarity to their own approach to poetry. John Dryden and Alexander Pope not only translated much of Ovid's verse, but their original work also shows his influence. In the twentieth century, readers of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* encounter the poet of the *Metamorphoses* in revived form.

Ovid's Influence on the Visual Arts In the visual arts, Ovid's myths have always provided a rich source of inspiration. The list of painters and sculptors who have treated Ovidian themes is long and includes such artists as Italian Renaissance painter Titian, French painter Nicolas Poussin, Dutch painter Pieter Brueghel, Flemish Baroque painters Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck, French Romantic painter and lithographer Eugene Delacroix, and Belarusian-French modernist painter Marc Chagall.

Works in Critical Context

Ovid has always appealed more to artists than to scholars. His works never formed part of the school curriculum in antiquity, and the *Metamorphoses* were sanitized during the fourteenth century. At various times during this period, Ovid's poetry was also banned or heavily censored. However, Ovid's works were frequently translated into English in the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and his critical reputation was enhanced. Opinions varied: For instance, Arthur Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses* in 1567 became immensely popular, going through six printings during Shakespeare's lifetime, while Christopher Marlowe's adaptation of *Loves*, published in 1597 as *The Elegies*, was publicly burned in 1599. In general, though some critics regard Ovid as a frivolous and superficial poet, others praise his complex mastery of poetic form and narrative skill, and extraordinary grasp of the human, particularly feminine, psyche.

The Complexity of Metamorphoses In the Spring 1972 issue of the journal *Arethusa*, Leo Curran questioned the rhetorical intention and meaning of *Metamorphoses*. He addressed the "numerous possibilities" of the work and asked the reader whether *Metamorphoses* could be considered epic or entertainment, neutral or profound, poetic or philosophical. Eight years after Curran's article, Catherine Rorer also wrote in *Arethusa* that "Ovid has moved beyond the stable and architectonic structures of classical art." In translating *Metamorphoses* in *Tales from Ovid* (1997), poet Ted Hughes chose to simplify Ovid's varied and often complicated metonymic references; Ovid used so many different words for a person or object that sometimes the actual identity may not be obvious. Hughes also streamlined Ovid's excessive use of detail, as scholar Christian Hogel noted, and tried to centralize certain themes. Hogel offered Hughes's work almost as a critique of Ovid: Hughes pared down

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ovid turned myth from the realm of the religious to the aesthetic and imaginative. The stories in his *Metamorphoses* have influenced much literature and popular culture, including the following works.

The Labors of Hercules (1947), a collection by Agatha Christie. This short-story collection takes the twelve labors of the classical strongman Hercules and turns each into a related mystery that Hercule Poirot, Belgian detective, must solve.

The Mask of Apollo (1966), a novel by Mary Renault. An actor in ancient Greece reluctantly gets involved with the volatile political situation; his moral guide is a mask of Apollo, god of music, representing harmony and order, to whom there was a famous shrine in Delphi.

My Fair Lady (1964), a film directed by George Cukor. This musical starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison reinvents the myth of Pygmalion, the sculptor who falls in love with the woman he creates.

Orpheus (1950), a film directed by Jean Cocteau. This movie, set in Paris, retells the story of Orpheus, a gifted musician, who goes to the Underworld to reclaim his beloved wife after her death.

Tales from Ovid (1997), poetry by Ted Hughes. The former poet laureate of England translates twenty-four stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in this prize-winning collection.

Ovid's classic layering to focus on the "stories told by Ovid" and reveal their "symbolic value."

The Meaning of Loves As suggested by scholar Sara Mack, the title of Ovid's work *Amores*, or *Loves*, can hold a number of meanings: in Latin, "The plural amores can . . . refer to girlfriends, love affairs, or love poems." The fifty poems in the volume follow a style called a "love elegy" and express a hopeless passion; they are playful in tone, indicating that the narrator will not truly die of his love. With *Amores*, Ovid is said to have invented the "posing poet-lover" and inspired John Donne.

Responses to Literature

1. Ovid's banishment arguably might have been the defining moment of his life. Write an informal essay addressing this question: If you were forced to live in a different country from your family and friends, do you think you would adjust, or would you always be affected by it?
2. Ovid was an immensely popular writer in Roman times, but some people today consider him "frivolous." Think of a contemporary writer or other artist

who is very popular but whom critics don't always take seriously. Write an essay describing his or her work, what critics object to in it, and whether you think the author is being criticized fairly.

3. The theme in *The Art of Love*, how to find and keep your love, is still popular. Think of tips you could give someone today—for example, “don't text message the person you like more than three times a day.” In a small group of your classmates, write out three to five tips, and read them aloud.
4. In his poems from exile, Ovid writes about the place of art in his life, not only as the cause of his personal disaster, but also as the source of his salvation. Write a personal statement in which you describe how the arts might help you deal with your problems when things go wrong. Be sure to give specific examples.

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Amos Oz

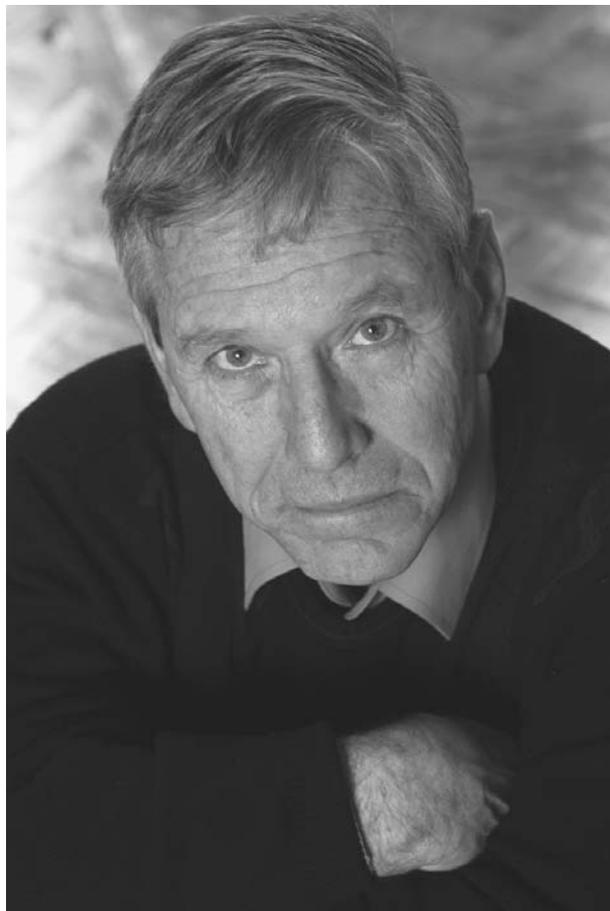
BORN: 1939, Jerusalem

NATIONALITY: Israeli

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Where the Jackals Howl, and Other Stories (1965)



Amos Oz. Oz, Amos, photograph. Ulf Andersen / Getty Images.

Elsewhere, Perhaps (1966)
My Michael (1968)
Unto Death (1971)
A Perfect Peace (1983)

Overview

In his fiction and nonfiction alike, Israeli author Amos Oz describes a populace under emotional and physical siege and a society threatened by internal contradictions and contention. Immensely popular in his own country, Oz has also established an international reputation, with translations of his books appearing in more than fifteen languages.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Zionism, to the Right and to the Left Born into a family of right-wing Zionist supporters that included several writers and scholars, Oz grew up in a house that both eschewed religion (a tendency strengthened by his mother's suicide when Amos was twelve years old) and supported a strong and independent Jewish state. In this, Oz's background typifies one of the central quandaries of

Jewishness in the modern world: a difficult blend of religious history and ethnic claims that makes identity a site of struggle. Partially in response to just this struggle, Oz left his native city of Jerusalem during the 1950s to join a kibbutz, or collective farm. The kibbutz movement in Israel was dedicated to communal Jewishness, such that many kibbutz members of that period owned no personal property at all; although distinctly a movement of the left, kibbutzim (the plural of kibbutz) were not Marxist in orientation, primarily because of their commitment to religious principles. In this sense, there was a continuity with his childhood, since Zionism (the desire for an independent Jewish nation-state) continued to play a large role in his life. Later, sent to study literature and philosophy at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Oz received his bachelor's degree in 1963 and returned to his kibbutz to concentrate on farming, teaching, and writing. In stories collected in *Where the Jackals Howl, and Other Stories* (1965), Oz uses the jackal as a symbol of forces that threaten the stability of an isolated kibbutz, both from outside its guarded perimeter and from within its domestic sphere. Although mildly received in Israel, this collection won praise in the United States for its accurate rendering of kibbutz life.

Personal Challenges to the Political With his novel *My Michael* (1968), Oz achieved popular success and established an international reputation as one of Israel's foremost authors. Set in Jerusalem during the 1950s, this work alternates between stark realism and romantic lyricism to relate excerpts from a diary that describes the ambivalent sexual fantasies of an unhappily married woman. While some Jewish nationalist reviewers regarded the book as a nearly seditious allegory of their country and its relationships with Arab Israelis, western critics compared *My Michael* to Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* for its restrained portrayal of an individual's private struggle against adverse social circumstances. *Unto Death* (1971), inspired by Oz's reaction to Israel's Six-Day War with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in 1967, consists of the novellas *Late Love* and *Crusade*. In addition to shifting the balance of power in the Middle East, the Six-Day War—precipitated in large part by Egyptian aggression, and begun with a “preemptive” attack by the Israelis—cemented a tradition of Arab-Israeli struggle in the region. Together with the 1973 Yom Kippur War, it has often served, within Israel, as a justification for oppression of Palestinian Arabs and, in the Arab world, as an incitement to destruction of the Israeli state altogether.

In *Touch the Water, Touch the Wind* (1973), Oz blends comic fantasy, allegory, and symbolism to chronicle the experiences of a Polish-Jewish mathematician from his internment in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany during World War II through the Six-Day War. Incorporating the protagonist's rise to world prominence and his reunion with his estranged wife with fantastical events, including the transformation of humans into animals, this novel garnered angry reactions from Israeli

critics for attempting to deal with atrocities in comic or surrealistic terms. Critic Alfred Kazin, however, declared that Oz “is an immensely clever, subtle, and mischievous writer whose new book is a brilliant scenario of all Jewish experience of our day.” *True Repose* (1983), published in response to Israel's war with Lebanon, reflects Oz's dissatisfaction with his country's often violent response to differences with its neighbors. This novel concerns the decision of a young man to flee his confining existence in a kibbutz and seek suicidal escape in the Jordanian desert. Oz also began, long before this, to support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palstinian conflict (the ongoing animosity and hostilities between a largely Jewish Israeli majority and a largely Muslim Palestinian minority in the state of Israel), a position that has made him less than popular with many Zionists inside and outside of Israel.

Oz's next novel, *A Perfect Peace* (1983), centers on domestic conflicts that result when the son of a Zionist founder rejects his family and life in a kibbutz to escape the constrictive ideologies of his ancestors. After a naïve but passionate young man who idealizes kibbutz existence joins the community and supplants the protagonist, Oz's hero shames his family by inviting his successor to share his wife and home before departing to seek his own identity in enemy territory.

The Unity of an Essay Versus the Plurality of a Novel Oz is also noted for his essays on political and literary topics. *In the Land of Israel* (1983) is a collection of interviews Oz conducted with Jewish and Arab Israelis from diverse social and political backgrounds. Originally published as a series of articles in the socialist newspaper *Davar*, these pieces, according to Robert Alter, “reflect a strenuous effort to go out into Israeli society and sound its depths.” Oz is also coeditor of the Israeli magazine *Siach lochamium* and has contributed articles to such journals as *Encounter* and *Partisan Review*.

Married and the father of three children, Oz continues to live and work at Kibbutz Hulda, and is a professor of literature at Ben-Gurion University in Be'er Sheva, Israel. He also speaks and travels frequently, bringing his personal thoughts to television and lecture audiences in Israel and abroad. Describing his creative impulses, Oz told the *New York Times*: “Whenever I find myself in total agreement with myself, then I write an article—usually in rage—telling the government what to do. But when I detect hesitation, more than one inner voice, I discover in me the embryo of characters, the seeds of a novel.” His more recent work has included the novels *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God* (2000) and *Suddenly in the Depth of the Forest (A Fable for All Ages)* (2005), and the nonfiction *How to Cure a Fanatic* (2006).

Works in Literary Context

Writing exclusively in Hebrew, Oz has been widely praised for his use of a carefully modulated literary style that blends surrealistic fantasy, symbolism, and allegory.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Oz's famous contemporaries include:

Arthur Miller (1915–2005): An American playwright famous for his plays—including *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*—and for his personal life—his controversial politics and his marriage to Marilyn Monroe.

Günter Grass (1927–): A Nobel Prize-winning German playwright and author, Grass is a key figure in the magical realist movement. He was the subject of controversy in 2006 when he revealed his service with the Nazi Waffen-SS in the last months of World War II, in contradiction to earlier statements and to his leftist politics.

Moshe Dayan (1915–1981): Distinctive for his bald pate and black eyepatch, Dayan was a celebrated and controversial figure in the history of Israel. As minister of defense, he helped lead his country to victory in both the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War.

Anwar El Sadat (1918–1981): The Egyptian president who most radically altered Egypt's foreign and domestic policies, instituting a multiparty political system and signing the first Arab peace treaty with Israel. The latter action was directly responsible for his assassination at the hands of an Egyptian extremist.

Oliver North (1943–): An obscure U.S. Marine Corps lieutenant colonel, North was thrust into the public spotlight when he was implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan administration, which involved illegally trading arms to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages.

Pope John Paul II (1920–2005): The second-longest-reigning pope, the first Polish pope, and the first non-Italian pope in over four hundred years, John Paul II was one of the most successful and popular popes of the modern age. Upon his death, calls were raised by many theologians and laypeople for his immediate elevation to sainthood.

“As a seamstress who takes different pieces of cloth and sews them into a quilt, Amos Oz writes short pieces of fiction which together form a quilt in the reader's consciousness,” notes J. Justin Gustainis in *Best Sellers*, continuing. “Just as the quilt may be of many colors but still one garment, Oz's stories speak of many things but still pay homage to one central idea: universal redemption through suffering.”

The Kibbutz and the Family Unit The kibbutz provides Oz with a powerful symbol of the nation's aspirations, as well as a microcosm of the larger Jewish family in Israel, suffocatingly intimate and inescapable, yet united in defense against the hostile forces besieging its borders. *New York Times Book Review* contributor

Robert Alter observes that nearly all of Oz's fiction “is informed by the same symbolic world picture: a hemmed-in cluster of fragile human habitations (the kibbutz, the state of Israel itself) surrounded by dark, menacing mountains where jackals howl and hostile aliens lurk.” According to *Jewish Quarterly* contributor Jacob Sonntag, the people of Oz's fiction “are part of the landscape, and the landscape is part of the reality from which there is no escape.” If the landscape is inescapable, the bonds of family also offer little relief. Oz's fiction addresses the generational conflicts that are particularly tense in modern Israel: conflicts often marked by a contrast between the bitter pragmatism of a younger generation and the increasingly desperate pragmatism of their elders.

The Conflicts of Zionism A central concern of Oz's fiction is the conflict between idealistic Zionism and the realities of life in a pluralistic society. Paul Zweig claims in the *New York Times Book Review* that when *My Michael* was published in Israel shortly after the Six-Day War, it proved “extremely disturbing to Israelis. At a time when their country had asserted control over its destiny as never before, Oz spoke of an interior life which Israel had not had time for, which it had paid no heed to, an interior life that contained a secret bond to the Asiatic world beyond its border.”

As a corollary to this, many of his *sabra*, or native-born Israeli, characters have decidedly ambivalent feelings towards the Arab population, especially Palestinians. *Commentary* essayist Ruth R. Wisse writes that in book after book, “Oz has taken the great myths with which modern Israel is associated—the noble experiment of the kibbutz, the reclamation of the soil, the wars against the British and the Arabs, the phoenix-like rise of the Jewish spirit out of the ashes of the Holocaust—and shown us their underside: bruised, dazed, and straying characters who move in an atmosphere of almost unalleviated depression.” A part of the bruisedness of these characters is in relation to a system of morality that, on the one hand, is guided by deeply felt ideals of communality and brotherhood and that, on the other, has served to justify the oppression of Palestinians for decades.

Internal Demons and Redemptive Humor “Daytime Israel makes a tremendous effort to create the impression of the determined, tough, simple, uncomplicated society ready to fight back, ready to hit back twice as hard, courageous and so on,” Oz told the *Partisan Review*. “Nocturnal Israel,” he continued, “is a refugee camp with more nightmares per square mile I guess than any other place in the world. Almost everyone has seen the devil.” The obsessions of “nocturnal Israel” fuel Oz's work, in which few psychic stones if any are left unturned—no matter what might be found beneath them. This is not to suggest, however, that Oz's work is unrelentingly somber or polemical. Indeed, many find that Oz's humor has a redemptive quality of its own.

Works in Critical Context

According to Judith Chernaik in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Oz writes books that are “indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to understand . . . life in Israel, the ideology that sustains it, and the passions that drive its people.” In a *New Republic* assessment of the author’s talents, Ian Sanders notes: “Amos Oz is an extraordinarily gifted Israeli novelist who delights his readers with both verbal brilliance and the depiction of eternal struggles—between flesh and spirit, fantasy and reality, Jew and Gentile. . . . His carefully reconstructed worlds are invariably transformed into symbolic landscapes, vast arenas where primeval forces clash.” *Times Literary Supplement* contributor and novelist A. S. Byatt observes that in his works on Israel, Oz “can write with delicate realism about small lives, or tell fables about large issues, but his writing, even in translation, gains vitality simply from his subject matter.” And *New York Review of Books* reviewer D. J. Enright calls Oz Israel’s “most persuasive spokesman to the outside world, the literary part of it at least.”

My Michael *My Michael*, a novel about the psychological disintegration of a young Israeli housewife, was Oz’s first work translated and published in English. *New Republic* contributor Lesley Hazleton calls the book “a brilliant and evocative portrait of a woman slowly giving way to schizoid withdrawal” and “a superb achievement, . . . the best novel to come out of Israel to date.” In *Modern Fiction Studies*, Hana Wirth-Nesher expresses the view that Oz uses his alienated protagonist “to depict the isolation and fear that many Israelis feel partially as a country in a state of siege and partially as a small enclave of Western culture in a vast area of cultures and landscapes unlike what they have known.” Alter praises *My Michael* for managing “to remain so private, so fundamentally apolitical in its concerns, even as it puts to use the most portentous political materials.” Disturbing though many found it, *My Michael* was a best seller in Israel; it established Oz’s reputation among his fellow Israelis and gave him entrée into the international world of letters.

Portraits of Israel Critics find much to praise in Oz’s portraits of the struggling nation of Israel. “Mr. Oz’s words, his sensuous prose and indelible imagery, the people he flings living onto his pages, evoke a cauldron of sentiments at the boil; yet his human vision is capacious enough to contain the destruction and hope for peace,” writes Richard R. Lingeman in the *New York Times*. “He has caught a welter of fears, curses and dreams at a watershed moment in history, when an uneasy, restless waiting gave way to an upsurge of violence, of fearsome consequences. The power of his art fuses historical fact and symbol; he makes the ancient stones of Jerusalem speak, and the desert beyond a place of jackals and miracles.” In the *Saturday Review*, Alfred Kazin states that Oz’s effect on him is always to make him realize “how little we know about what goes on inside

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works to address the theme of redemption through suffering include:

The Brothers Karamazov (1880), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. One of the central themes of Dostoyevsky’s last novel is having to experience misery on the way to redemption, as personified by such characters as Dmitri, Grushenka, and Katerina.

David Copperfield (1850), a novel by Charles Dickens.

Throughout Dickens’s coming-of-age novel, several characters choose to repent for previous misdeeds through hard work and good deeds.

The *Star Wars* movies (1977–1983, 1999–2005), a series of films directed by George Lucas. The central character of the six-film arc is Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader, whose descent into evil is reversed by his son’s love. Ultimately Anakin dies to save his son, thus redeeming himself.

the Israeli head. . . . To the unusually sensitive and humorous mind of Amos Oz, the real theme of Jewish history—especially in Israel—is unreality. When, and how can a Jew attain reality in the Promised Land, actually touch the water, touch the wind?”

Responses to Literature

1. Amos Oz often addresses the animosity that sometimes arises between Jews and Gentiles. Select one of his works in which this occurs and, in a short essay, trace the origin of the animosity and how it develops into open hatred.
2. Despite the fact that Oz’s stories center on Israel, they have a universal quality. Analyze how Oz is able to evoke this universality. What techniques does he use in his descriptions of characters and locations that makes them seem to be “more than they are”?
3. Research the *kibbutz* movement in Israel: its history, its goals, its current status. Apply what you have learned to Oz’s depictions of the kibbutz. With a group of your classmates who have read the same Oz stories, analyze the camaraderie and purpose of a kibbutz in Oz’s fiction.
4. Amos Oz has taken an active role in promoting peace in the Middle East, meeting Palestinian leaders in an effort to hammer out a workable peace plan, performing what he calls the “gruntwork of peace.” Write a paragraph describing how you think Oz defines the gruntwork of peace. Why is it so critical to the peace process?

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☒ José Emilio Pacheco

BORN: 1939, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"You'll Die Far Away" (1967)

Don't Ask Me How the Time Goes By (1969)

"You Will Go and Not Return" (1973)

"I Look at the Earth" (1986)

The Silence of the Moon (1995)

Overview

José Emilio Pacheco is considered the most mature and original of the generation of Mexican poets who began writing in the 1960s. Critical and ironic, self-conscious yet modest, socially aware and aesthetically impressive, his poetry provides excellent insight for the reader interested in contemporary Mexican literature and culture.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Collaborative Efforts from the Start José Emilio Pacheco was born in Mexico City on June 30, 1939. His father was an attorney who had come from humble



José Emilio Pacheco Víctor Rojas / AFP / Getty Images

beginnings, and his mother came from a family of conservative and devoutly Catholic businesspeople.

In his teens Pacheco began studying law and Spanish literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1957. His twenties and thirties coincided with a boom in literary and artistic production in Mexico City. In the 1950s and 1960s, he moved in the same circles as Rosario Castellanos, Carlos Fuentes, and Octavio Paz, entering this set in 1957 by coediting with Carlos Monsiváis a literary supplement for young writers in *Seasons*. This early collaboration with strong mentors began a life in journalism that yielded thousands of articles, book reviews, essays, and notes in several publications, including *News*, *Mexican Literary Journal*, *Plural*, and *Return*. He became a contributor to the literary supplement *Mexico in Culture* in 1958 and served as editorial secretary to the journal, among others. Pacheco's best-known journalistic contribution is his long-running column of cultural criticism, "Taking Stock," published weekly in *Process* beginning in 1976.

Working with Imagined Others Pacheco's first book, a slim volume of short stories titled *The Blood of Medusa*, appeared in 1958. This early work includes a section of "Approximations," consisting of "translations" of imagined "original" versions of poems by such major figures as Gérard de Nerval and Arthur Rimbaud. This section demonstrates Pacheco's early tendencies toward making poetry "collective."

Pacheco's father died in 1964. Two years later Pacheco's second book, *The Repose of Fire* (1966), was published. The work reflects the turbulence of the 1960s and considers the notions of the destructive passing of time. The poems, thick with disillusionment, began what was to be a central focus of Pacheco's poetry for years to come. In 1966 Pacheco also collaborated with Paz, Homero Aridjis, and Alí Chumacero on the canon-forming anthology *Poetry in Motion: Mexico 1915–1966*. In 1967 he published the novel *You Will Die in a Distant Land*, which was critically acclaimed and won the Magda Donato Prize.

Responding to History On October 2, 1968, riot police and soldiers opened fire on an antigovernment demonstration at the Plaza of the Three Cultures in the Tlatelolco neighborhood of Mexico City. An estimated three hundred unarmed citizens were killed. This event led Pacheco in his next book, *Don't Ask Me How the Time Goes By: Poems 1964–1968* (1969), to begin to blend artistic sensibilities with ethics and to craft poetry with a clear social message. The book introduced one of Pacheco's most effective poetic weapons against social injustice: poems that interweave historical texts with contemporary issues.

Pacheco's next work was a short-story collection titled *The Pleasure Principle* (1972), which won the prestigious Xavier Villaurrutia Prize. Next Pacheco coauthored with the director Arturo Ripstein the screenplays for the award-winning movies *The Castle of Purity* (1973) and *The Holy Office* (1974). By 1978 Pacheco had written two more books and had collaborated with the artist Rojo on *Kindergarten*, a limited-edition book/art object that includes the series of twenty poems of the same title that was later included in *Since Then: Poems, 1975–1978* (1980). *Kindergarten* was the most autobiographical, or self-referential, poetry Pacheco had written to that point.

Gaining International Recognition By the late 1970s Pacheco's poems were receiving international recognition. Esteemed poets and translators Alastair Reid and Thomas Hoeksema worked translations of two of his books, and in 1980 Pacheco won the National Prize for Journalism and News for his "Inventario" column. Perhaps the most important sign of Pacheco's stature at this time was the publication of *Sooner or Later*. This lauded volume appeared in 1980, shortly after the poet's fortieth birthday.

In 1981 Pacheco published a hugely successful novel, *Battles in the Desert*. Another volume of poetry, *The Works of the Sea*, appeared in 1983. In 1984 Pacheco published the collection *Century's End and Other Poems* and in 1985 the illustrated *An Ark for the Next Millennium: Poems*. Also in 1985, José María Guelbenzu edited a collection of his work as *High Treason: Poetic Anthology*, and Pacheco was elected to the National Academy of Mexico, one of the highest honors a Mexican intellectual can achieve.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pacheco's famous contemporaries include:

- Robert Haas** (1941–): An American poet, he has served two terms as U.S. poet laureate (from 1995 to 1997) and has contributed greatly to contemporary literature.
- Stephen Hawking** (1942–): A British theoretical physicist known for his important work on relativity, black holes, and radiation theory.
- Carlos Fuentes** (1928–): Mexican novelist whose works have been hugely influential in Latin American literature. His works include *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *The Old Gringo* (1985).
- Luis Echeverría** (1922–): President of Mexico from 1970 to 1976.
- Joe Orton** (1933–1967): An English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies that shocked and amused his audiences.

Mexico City Earthquake Pacheco had noted in *Repose of Fire* that Mexico City was constructed on the unstable dry bed of Lake Texcoco, in a valley rimmed by two volcanoes where three tectonic plates meet. The citizens of Mexico City are accustomed to tremors and seismic rumblings, but on September 19, 1985, the city was struck by an earthquake that measured eight on the Richter scale, claimed more than eight thousand lives, and caused an estimated \$4 billion in damage. Pacheco, who was teaching at the University of Maryland at the time of the earthquake, recorded his reaction to the disaster in the poem sequence "The Ruins of Mexico," which appeared in his *I Watch the Earth: Poems 1983–1986* (1986). These sixty short poems, says critic Michael J. Doudoroff, were Pacheco's "aftershock."

New Media, Professorship, Fighting the Fascist Within In 1995 Pacheco saw the publication of *The Silence of the Moon: Poems 1985–1993*. *The Silence of the Moon* won the Premio José Asunción Silva (José Asunción Silva Award) as the best book of poetry written in Latin America from 1990 to 1995.

Since 1996 Pacheco has been distinguished university professor of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Maryland. He also teaches at the National College of Mexico, where he became professor emeritus in 1990. He has lectured in universities across America as well, including University of California at Berkeley and New York University. In 2000 he received the Premio Alux a la Eminencia for his work as a whole, and in 2003 he was awarded the International Octavio Paz Prize for Poetry and Essay.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Pacheco was quite concerned with the sites of human failure. Here are a few works by other writers who have addressed themes of disintegration, ruin, and catastrophe:

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. In this acclaimed work, the central theme is one of detachment—revealing the effect of war on soldiers.

Love in the Time of Cholera (1985), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. In this work of fiction the esteemed author explores unrequited love as well as themes of aging, suffering, and physical and emotional deterioration.

State of Siege (2002), a novel by Juan Goytisolo. This highly praised work explores human indifference and decline in war-torn Sarajevo.

The Waste Land (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. In this seminal work, the Nobel Prize-winning English poet explores the disillusionment, spiritual ennui, and social erosion of post-World War I European sensibility.

Works in Literary Context

Profound Influences Pacheco is a largely self-taught man with an encyclopedic knowledge of literature and history, and his work reflects a wide range of influences. He writes poems in traditions ranging from that represented by Jorge Luis Borges's story "Borges and I" (1960) to that of Heraclitus of Ephesus, with significant dips into translations of Matthew Arnold and Constantine Cavafy along the way.

Death, Destruction, and the Lethality of Time Pacheco's poetry often takes further influence for its themes from contemporary civic and political events and concerns—local catastrophes, the Vietnam War, the death of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and Mexican politics. The war in Vietnam, for example, informs "Idyll" (1973), in which lovers unwittingly stumble onto the grounds of a chemical weapons plant (manufacturing chemicals to be used against the Vietnamese people; the use of the defoliant Agent Orange, in particular, has proven to have devastating long-term consequences for Vietnamese soldiers and civilians from affected areas alike, as well as for the invading soldiers upon their return home). The Mexico City earthquake of 1985 informs "The Ruins of Mexico" (1986).

The theme that ties all these pieces together, however, is a familiar one in the work of Pacheco—the theme of the insubstantiality of experience through time. Throughout his work the poet consistently deals with

themes of world catastrophe, disintegration and change, and, especially, the destructive properties of time.

Common Speech Style In moving toward a distinctive style of writing, Pacheco shared in a literary trend with a group of other young Mexican poets. This new development was known as colloquial realism: Its main objective was to bring Mexican poetry nearer to common speech. Pacheco's poetry is notable for such use of speech, just as it is most original for a multitude of new components he brought together—sets of short poems, satires, epigrams, quotations, letters, haiku, fables, bestiaries, and "approximations" (Pacheco's word for his own free translations of others' works).

Works in Critical Context

In addition to being adamantly private and modest about his life and work, Pacheco has also stated that he believes that no text is ever fully complete; therefore, he tends to edit and even to rewrite his poems so that a poem that appears in one of his collections may reappear in different versions in subsequent editions of that book and in other collections. Bibliographers and critics thus have difficulty in making definitive statements about many of the poems. Nevertheless, critics of late have made efforts to identify the intellectual and moral precision that enables Pacheco to create a poetic form for his vision. One work that demonstrates Pacheco's style and skill is "The Ruins of Mexico."

"The Ruins of Mexico" (1986) Critics like Michael Doudoroff have called this piece "perhaps his most important single poem since *The Repose of Fire*." In this first and longest poem of *I Look at the Earth* (1986), Pacheco responds to the devastating event of the Mexico earthquake of 1985 by discarding the ironic and detached tone of most of his mature work. At the center of the poem is a real human calamity, approached from every possible point of view: The poem is written from a geological angle, the standpoint of specific images of destruction, and the point of view of the spectator responding to destruction and personal loss. It also features perspectives that question reality and perception, make predictions after the fact, and discuss personal historical markers promising a reattachment to reality.

Critics are in agreement that Pacheco's strengths are the authenticity of his poetic voice and his creation of new poetic forms, such as his "approximations" and his combining of sets of related poems and associated texts into one Pacheco poem.

Responses to Literature

1. The "approximations" that appear in Pacheco's books range from very precise and formally exact translations to extensively rewritten interpretations. One of his approximations in *I Look at the Earth*, for example, is a translation of American poet Ezra

Pound's translation of a Japanese version of an ancient Chinese poem. Consider in a group the importance of translations (in this case, a fourth-generation translation). What effect does a poem from a different language have on readers today? Who would find different translations beneficial?

- Pacheco's poetic quotes, translations, and rewritings reflect his view of poetry. He sees poetry as essentially social and transient, with no single meaning enduring through all ages and cultures and, in a sense, no single author. To better appreciate his intentions, decide how poetry is "social." Then, discuss how poetry can be transient—moving from one place to the next and having no roots in any one place. What are some examples of how Pacheco treats poetry as a collective creation rather than the work of a single author?
- Pacheco's work sometimes includes "found" poems—fragments of prose texts from many sources. Found poems can also derive from movie scenes, dialogue, or even overheard conversations. Go out in the world and "find" some poetry. Listen to a conversation on a bus. Pull a technical book from the shelf. Take ideas for colors from a famous painting. Jot down anything you find striking and turn your findings into a poem.

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Orhan Pamuk

BORN: 1952, Istanbul, Turkey

NATIONALITY: Turkish

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The White Castle (1985)

The Black Book (1990)

The New Life (1994)

My Name Is Red (1998)

Snow (2002)

Overview

Novelist Orhan Pamuk is the first Nobel laureate in literature from Turkey. He is an author shadowed by controversy and censorship, yet he has earned more than fifteen esteemed literary awards for works that have been translated into more than fifty languages. About his career, Pamuk has asserted, "I think less than people think I do about politics. I care about writing."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Wealthy Beginnings and Western Influence
Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1952. He grew up in a family that began wealthy but lost much of its fortune by the time Pamuk reached adulthood. Pamuk's father, a civil engineer by training, inherited his father's railroad company, but he and his brothers mismanaged the business, and their inheritance vanished in unwise real estate investments. Pamuk's mother came from a textile-manufacturing dynasty; as a result, her family was part of the new, middle-class elite.



Orhan Pamuk Pamuk, Orhan, photograph. AP Images.

Turkey emerged from World War II as an ally to the Western powers, and in the 1950s, a sweeping modernization, a booming economy, and a rising democracy party inspired a change in the country's identity as an Islamic, Arabic-world-allied state. As a child, the only time Pamuk ever visited a mosque was with a family servant, he told Fernanda Eberstadt in an interview that appeared in the *New York Times*: "It was a place where the servants met to gossip, and I was so Westernized I felt naked taking off my shoes."

Architecture and Writing Pamuk dreamed of becoming an artist during much of his youth, but his family viewed this pursuit as impractical. Instead he studied architecture at Istanbul Technical College, but quit after three years. He spent much of that time writing and reading books from the Western world's most well-known authors.

Pamuk earned a degree from the University of Istanbul's Institute of Journalism in 1976 and continued to work on his fiction. After several years, he found a publisher for his first work, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (1982), which became the first of his books to top Turkey's best-seller list. The first of Pamuk's works to appear in English was *The White Castle* (1985), in 1990. A year later, the

novel reached the *New York Times* year-end list of the most notable books of 1991.

Success and Rejected Accolades *The White Castle* was published in English the same year that Pamuk's fourth novel, *The Black Book*, appeared in Turkey. Pamuk wrote it in the mid-1980s while living in New York City with his wife, who was pursuing a doctorate in history at Columbia University. After Pamuk's next novel, *The New Life*, another best seller, the success of *My Name Is Red* (1998) in Turkey resulted in an unusual offer for Pamuk: his government wanted to give him the title of state artist, a prestigious honor. He refused, however, telling *Time International* journalist Andrew Finkel that "for years I have been criticizing the state for putting authors in jail, for only trying to solve the Kurdish problem by force, and for its narrow-minded nationalism. I don't know why they tried to give me the prize." Pamuk referenced a longstanding conflict with Turkey's Kurdish minority, an ethnic group whose population spills over into Iran, Iraq, and Syria, all of which share borders with Turkey. The Kurds have long sought an independent state, but have repeatedly been the target of ethnic cleansing by various powers, including Turkey and Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in Iraq.

Nobel Prize Pamuk's next book, the political thriller *Snow*, appeared in 2002. Acclaimed author John Updike, reviewing *Snow* in the *New Yorker*, found some fault in the story and the conflict Pamuk's protagonist represents, but conceded, "We should not forget that in Turkey . . . to write with honest complexity about such matters as head scarves and religious belief takes courage." Updike also predicted that Pamuk was Turkey's "most likely candidate for the Nobel Prize." Updike's assertion proved true, when, a little more than two years after that *New Yorker* review, Pamuk became the first Turkish writer to win the world's most prestigious literary honor.

Speaking Out against Ethnic Cleansing In the intervening months, Pamuk successfully won a lawsuit that might have resulted in jail time. The charges were filed against him by a conservative Islamic group in Turkey for remarks he had made to a Swiss publication in February 2005 about the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and the organized slaughter of Armenians in 1915 during the final days of the Ottoman Empire. The judicial proceedings attracted international attention and were considered a potential setback for Turkey's bid to join the European Union at a future date; some viewed the Nobel committee's choice of Pamuk as a clear political statement on the question of cultural freedom in the twenty-first century.

Works in Literary Context

Caught between Two Worlds Just as Pamuk's fiction deals with protagonists who are caught between two worlds, his style blurs the line between the realism of Western literature and fantasy elements common to

Arabic literary tradition. As the *New Yorker's* David Remnick suggests, “The polarities of Pamuk’s books echo the basic polarities of Istanbul: the tension between East and West, the pull of an Islamic past and the lure of modern European manners and materialism.” As scholar Walter Armbrust explains, the novelists of the republic wrote with “everyday speech” in a style of writing known as “inverted sentence.” In other words, theirs was the genre of realism and the key characteristic of their style was brevity. By contrast, Pamuk’s novels are longer, the style more elaborate, the tone often cold and distancing. Such advanced techniques moved Pamuk into the newer genre: postmodernism.

Digging Up the Past Furthermore, in keeping with his most prevalent theme—preoccupation with the past—Pamuk’s novels are “full of speakers who reminisce at excessive length,” notes Armbrust. In *The Black Book* (1990), for example, Pamuk offers the city of Istanbul as a representation of Turkey’s “unseen and unwanted past,” says Armbrust. For the novelist, the city represents a buried Ottoman past and the present can only be “redeemed” by the digging up and uncovering of that past.

Works in Critical Context

Much controversy has surrounded Pamuk’s work, in particular his recurring motif of once-powerful world players who become sandwiched between the ancient and modern, the Arabic world and Europe, and secular liberalism and Islamic fundamentalism. Yet, Pamuk’s popularity soared with such works as *My Name Is Red*. Pamuk became his country’s most famous writer, as well as a spokesperson on the international stage for human rights and the growing conflict between the Islamic world and democratic ideals, particularly in parts of the world where large Muslim immigrant communities arose. For this, he was often a target of censorship; more conservative elements objected to the fascination with the West evident in his fiction, while his liberal critics disapproved of the unfavorable light in which Turkey was often presented. When he was awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, some viewed the Nobel committee’s choice of Pamuk as a clear political statement on the question of cultural freedom in the twenty-first century. Pamuk responded by commenting that he cared far more for writing than for politics, conceding, “I am essentially a literary man who has fallen into a political situation.”

***My Name Is Red* (1998)** The story is set in sixteenth-century Turkey over a nine-day period, when a group of artists have gathered at the Sultan’s palace. The ruler has commissioned them to illustrate his laudatory biography, but their task presents an unusual challenge, because Islam prohibits direct representation of the visual world. The plot is driven by a pair of murders that occur during their seclusion and told through a series of shifting

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pamuk’s famous contemporaries include:

Tony Blair (1953–): The British prime minister from 1997 to 2007, Blair was also the leader of the Labour Party from 1994 to 2007, and a member of Parliament for Sedgefield from 1983 to 2007.

Carol Ann Duffy (1955–): Scottish-born playwright and poet known for her social critiques and feminist perspective.

Arundhati Roy (1961–): An Indian novelist and activist, Roy has won such awards as the 1997 Booker Prize and the 2002 Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize.

Jerry Seinfeld (1954–): Seinfeld is an award-winning American comedian, actor, and comic writer whose television show, *Seinfeld*, was named by *TV Guide* as “the greatest American television program of all time.”

narrative voices, including a horse, a corpse, and even a coin.

In its original Turkish-language edition, *My Name Is Red* was not only another best seller, but the fastest-selling title in the history of Turkish literature. *New York Times* writer Richard Eder called it “by far the grandest and most astonishing contest in Pamuk’s internal East-West war. . . . Readers will have spells of feeling lost and miserable in a deliberate unreliability that so mirrors its subject: a world governed by fog.”

Responses to Literature

1. Authors and other professionals take serious consideration of the past: some regard it as a phenomenon to be used for learning important lessons; others see it as that which must be forgotten. Consider the following list of quotes about the past. Choose one that you find striking and interpret it in a brief, one-page essay: what is the speaker suggesting about the past? How does this compare with Pamuk’s philosophies as shown in his work?

Wendell Berry: The past is our definition. We may strive, with good reason, to escape it, or to escape what is bad in it, but we will escape it only by adding something better to it.

Jan Glidewell: You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present.

Pliny the Elder: God has no power over the past except to cover it with oblivion.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Scholar Walter Armbrust writes that "For Pamuk . . . , to look back at the past is not necessarily to repeat the past's mistakes—it is, in fact, the only way forward." Here are a few works by writers who also wrote with concerns for the past:

Hunger of Memory (2004), an autobiography by Richard Rodriguez. In this nonfiction work, the author revisits his Mexican American background experiences, particularly in American Catholic schools.

Nisei Daughter (1979), an autobiography by Monica Itoi Sone. In this tender and often humorous account, Japanese American author Sone revisits her days before and during World War II as a resident of Seattle and as an internment camp evacuee.

Remembrance of Things Past (1913–1927), a series of novels by Marcel Proust. In these seven autobiographical volumes, which the author spent his life writing, the past is a binding element.

A Sketch of the Past (1939), an essay by Virginia Woolf. In this piece, the author revisits several disturbing memories.

Carl Sagan: You have to know the past to understand the present.

Oscar Wilde: The one charm of the past is that it is the past.

Virginia Woolf: Each has his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart and his friends can only read the title.

- Most of Pamuk's works are set in his native Turkey. Choose one of Pamuk's works to focus on and write an essay that considers the following questions: How does Pamuk use Turkey in that particular text? That is, how does the setting contribute to the story line? Does his portrayal of the country help characterize the people? How does the use of Turkey contribute to the theme? How much more does a reader know about Turkey after reading a Pamuk work?
- It might be said that use of such a thorough and repeated setting is Pamuk's way of paying tribute to his native country. Write your own tribute to your country: in either a poem, essay, or short story, highlight the place's best features by describing it using sensory details. What are the familiar (or seasonal) smells? What sounds might your reader find striking? What colors, textures, and other sight details would help you pay homage to your country?
- In works such as *The Black Book* (1994), Pamuk blurs the line between fantasy and the realism common to

other novelists of his time and country. This particular style distinguished him from the other authors and also made him popular with readers. In a team effort with a group of your classmates, research both realism and fantasy to come up with a working definition of Pamuk's style. What are the characteristics of realism? What are the characteristics of fantasy? How do the two come together (overlap) to create the hybrid genre Pamuk writes? What might this combined style be called?

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Nicanor Parra

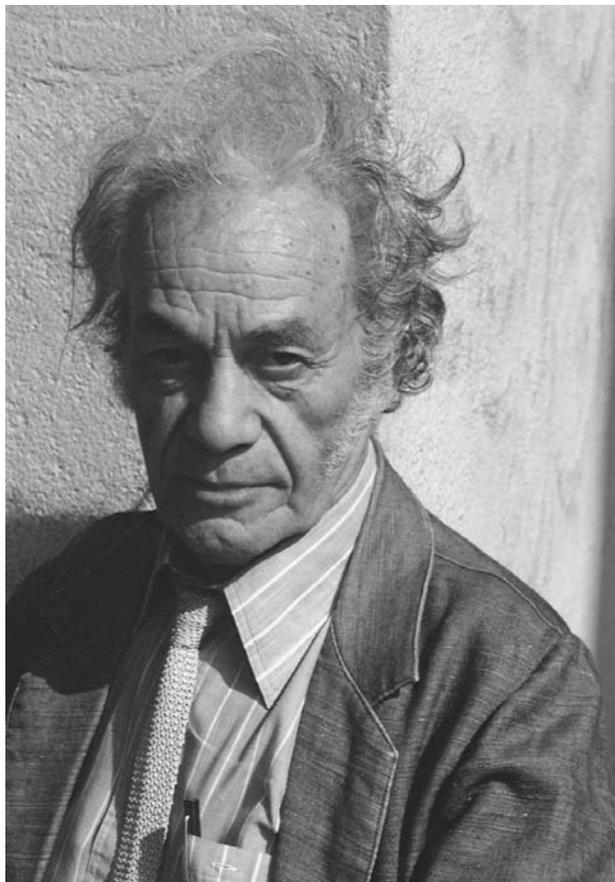
BORN: 1914, Chillán, Chile

NATIONALITY: Chilean

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems and Antipoems (1954)



Nicanor Parra © Bassouls Sophie / CORBIS SYGMA

Manifiesto (1963)

Emergency Poems (1972)

Artifacts (1972)

Sermons and Homilies of the Christ of Elqui
(1977)

Overview

Chilean writer Nicanor Parra is known for humorous, satirical verse that has been labeled “antipoetry,” a poetic form that is irreverent and nonsymbolic in reflecting the fragmented state of modern society. In Parra’s opinion, the appropriate subject matter of poetry is not truth and beauty, but the vulgar surprises of life that, more often than not, amount to a bad joke. Through antipoetry, Parra relates the ironies of life in ordinary speech, making colorful, witty insights into the unpretentious characters he presents. In doing so, Parra aims to show that poetry belongs to everyone, not to an elite group of intellectuals.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Birth of an Antipoet Parra was born in southern Chile near the small town of Chillán on September 15,

1914, to Nicanor P. Parra, a teacher, and Clara S. Navarrete Parra. Throughout his youth and early education Parra considered himself both a poet and a student of science. In 1932 Parra went to Santiago, where he completed his final year of high school at the Internado Barros Arana (Barros Arana Boarding School). There he became acquainted with the school’s leading intellectuals—Jorge Millas, Luis Oyarzún, and Carlos Pedraza—and resumed writing poetry. Parra’s school friends, who later formed the nucleus of the group of prominent writers and artists of his generation, introduced him to current trends in Chilean, European, and North American culture and literature, including surrealism. The following year, Parra enrolled in the Instituto Pedagógico (Pedagogical Institute) at the University of Chile in Santiago, where he majored in mathematics and physics while training to become a teacher.

Following in His Father’s Footsteps As a university student Parra continued to associate with his boarding-school friends, and together, in 1935, they began publishing a literary magazine with a limited circulation, *Revista Nueva* (New Review). Parra contributed a short story, “Gato en el camino” (Cat in the Road), to the first issue and two years later published his first collection of poems, *Cancionero sin nombre* (1937, Untitled Songbook), a work that brought him national attention. Although the book was awarded the Premio Municipal de Poesía (Municipal Poetry Prize) for 1938, it received, like much of Parra’s work, mixed critical reviews. In 1938, Parra graduated from college with a degree in mathematics and physics and spent the following six years teaching high school in Chillán.

Higher Education Brings Exposure to Western Literature During the 1940s, Parra continued his education in both science and literature while living abroad in the developed world. After six years of high-school teaching, he decided to pursue graduate study in physics at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, from 1943 to 1945. Later, from 1949 to 1951, he studied cosmology at Oxford University. While in the United States and England, Parra became an admirer of North American and British writers who incorporated everyday language and colloquial expressions in their poetic commentary on politics, manners, religion, and society.

Antipoetry Attracts National Attention When Parra returned to Chile in 1945, he joined the faculty at the University of Chile. In 1948, he was appointed the director of the school of engineering at the university, and four years later he was named professor of theoretical physics. In 1954, the work that brought him wide critical acclaim, *Poems and Antipoems* was published. Basically viewed as pessimistic, *Poems and Antipoems* satirizes political systems and social structures that, in Parra’s view, prevent humankind from transcending their own tragic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Parra's famous contemporaries include:

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): Italian postmodernist writer who works, such as the short story collection *Cosmicomics* (1965), reveal a fascination with science and mathematics.

Rachel Carson (1907–1964): An American marine biologist and early environmental activist famous for her 1962 book *Silent Spring*.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Renowned Chilean poet and diplomat, and winner of the 1971 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): An antiapartheid activist in his early career, Mandela served as the South African president from 1994 until 1999.

history. Appearing in 1962, Parra's *Versos de salón* (Salon Verses) retained a pessimistic view of life, with an added element of hope, expressed in his admonition, "try to be happy." *Sermones y prédicas del Cristo de Elqui* (Sermons and Homilies of the Christ of Elqui) followed in 1977. In it Parra utilizes folk-legends to demythologize Chilean prophets and other religious figures, permitting the reader to recognize that people or objects traditionally considered sacred are not, and that both often mask the realities of life.

Writing in Defense of the Environment During the 1980s and 1990s, Parra published no fewer than ten books of poetry in which he continues to blend a prophetic tone with sociopolitical examination. Rather than rest on his laurels, Parra has persevered with his goal of poetic renovation through ongoing experimentation with new forms, and during the 1980s began writing in defense of the environment and treating ecological themes in his *Ecopoemas* (Ecopoems; 1982). In these poems Parra shows his solidarity with nature and the universe. For example, in an untitled poem from this collection, he chides humanity for contaminating the earth. In *Hojas de Parra* (1985; Leaves [Pages] of Parra), Parra humorously addresses the subject of death—both literally, as in physical death, and metaphorically, as in political death—as he reflects on Chile's dictatorship. From 1974 until 1990, Chile was ruled by the military dictator Augusto Pinochet Ugarte; his rule was marked by violent suppressions of political opposition and human rights violations, for which he was ultimately arrested and tried.

Hojas de Parra is the only work of Parra's that has been staged as a theater piece. His more recent works include, *Poemas para combatir la calvicie* (1993; Poems to Fight Baldness), *Páginas en blanco* (2001; Blank

Pages), *Lear Rey & Mendigo* (2004; Lear, King & Beggar), *Obras completas I & algo +* (2006; Complete Works & Something +), and *Discursos de Sobremesa* (2006; After-Dinner Discourses).

Accolades in Spite of Controversy In spite of the controversial nature of his poetry, and the few translations made available to English-speaking readers, Parra has been widely honored for his work. The list of awards he has received includes the Writers Union Prize in 1954 for *Poems and Antipoems*, a Guggenheim fellowship in 1972 for *Emergency Poems* (1972), the American Translators Association and University of Missouri Press award in 1984 for *Sermons and Homilies of the Christ of Elqui*, and the Juan Rulfo Prize in 1990. Parra has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times but has not yet received the award.

In addition to teaching science and engineering, Parra's accomplishments in writing have earned him invitations to serve as visiting professor of Spanish American literature at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge (1966–1967), and at New York University, Columbia University, and Yale University (1971). Parra has given poetry readings and lectures in many countries and conducts poetry workshops at his home institution. He is also a member of the Academia Chilena de la Lengua (Chilean Academy of Language). He has been married twice—to Ana Troncoso and Inga Palmén—and has seven children. He presently resides in La Reina, a suburb of Santiago.

Works in Literary Context

While in the United States and England, Parra became an admirer of North American and British writers who incorporated prosaic language and colloquial expressions in their poetic commentary on politics, manners, religion, and society. He was most influenced by his readings of British poets W. H. Auden, William Blake, C. Day-Lewis, John Donne, T. S. Eliot, Louis McNeice, Ezra Pound, and Stephen Spender. In addition, Parra read Walt Whitman in Spanish translation and, under his influence in 1943, wrote a series of twenty poems, "Ejercicios retóricos" (Rhetorical Exercises), which were published eleven years later in the Chilean magazine *Extremo Sur* (Extreme South). The factor that perhaps shaped his personal aesthetic the most, however, was writing in the shadow of his friend and fellow poet, the Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda.

Having inherited a poetic tradition of lofty themes in grandiose language, Parra adopted a radically divergent form and style of his own. Often compared with Neruda, Parra writes poems that differ in both style and scope. According to Emir Rodríguez Monegal in *The Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature* (1977), Parra became an antipoet "in order to negate the exalted conception of the poet that Neruda represented so grandly. The fact that he finally succeeded in creating a viable alternative confirms his unique gifts." Through common language, bizarre images, and strong political themes, Parra

ultimately refined the art of writing antipoetry until he developed a kind of poem—‘artifact’—that is just as irreverent as antipoetry but marked by extreme minimalism.”

Antipoetry Parra made his feelings about poetry and its proper forms known in the text *Manifesto* (1963). In this work, the title of which alludes to past literary pronouncements as well as to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Parra issues a public declaration of literary and sociopolitical beliefs. Juxtaposing past and present, this work declares what poetry should not be and proclaims the proposition of poetic renovation: “For our elders / Poetry was a luxury / But for us / It is an absolute necessity: / We cannot live without poetry.” Parra insists on the ordinariness and indispensability of poetry and compares the poet, who shapes commonplace language into accessible form, to a bricklayer: “We maintain / That the poet is not an alchemist / The poet is a man like everyone else / A bricklayer who builds his wall: / A builder of doors and windows. / We speak / In everyday language / We don’t believe in cabalistic signs.” Quite simply, in contrast to Romantic and avant-garde notions of a poet’s superiority, the antipoet is an average human being.

Artifacts Throughout the years, Parra’s antipoetry became more truncated and austere, until it assumed new form in *Artifacts* (1972). Parra had begun to experiment with this poetic structure as early as 1967, and from that time the artifact has been variously compared to slogan, haiku, and graffiti for its verbal compression, minimalism, and fragmentation. For Parra, artifacts are simplified linguistics that plainly state weighty ideas. Published as a set of picture postcards with illustrations by artist Guillermo Teieda, *Artifacts* is both a literary and visual text, in the style of French avant-garde writer Guillaume Apollinaire’s visual poetry, or calligrams. Generally fewer than ten lines, Parra’s artifacts are characterized by detachment from poetic context, maximum verbal concentration, and incorporation of disparate styles of discourse, such as advertisements, popular sayings, newspaper headlines, and political slogans.

The term “artifact” suggests an anthropological document or record of human social and cultural development. Appropriately, Parra’s critical eye is once again trained on societal defects in *Artifacts*. From a nonideological stance, he condemns all forms of large government equally. In “U.S.A.,” for instance, Parra criticizes the weaknesses of democracy in a country “where liberty / is a statue.” Likewise, he takes a dim view of Cuban socialism: “If Fidel were fair about it / he’d believe in me / just as I believe in him: / History will absolve me.”

Parra has influenced his own and subsequent generations of Spanish American writers, and his work has been translated into all major languages, including English, notably by North American beatnik poets—such as Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—with whose work his has been compared.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In many of his antipoems, Parra engages in iconoclasm, or the deliberate destruction of sacred ideas and figures and, for Parra, the beliefs surrounding these figures. For example, in *Sermons and Homilies of the Christ of Elqui*, Parra represents a popular Chilean “prophet” as a regular, perhaps vulgar person, suggesting that there is nothing about the man that is holier than anyone else. Other artists have engaged in similar kinds of iconoclasm. Here are a few examples:

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), a philosophical work of nonfiction by Friedrich Nietzsche. In this text, as in many other writings of Nietzsche’s, the philosopher claims that “God is dead,” undermining many popular beliefs about God, particularly his infiniteness.

The Life of Brian (1979), a film directed and performed by the Monty Python comedy team. In this comedy, a young Jew named Brian Cohen, born in the same time and place as Jesus, is mistaken for the Messiah.

A People’s History of the United States (1980), a history book by Howard Zinn. In this controversial work, Professor Zinn provides a shocking challenge to the conventionally taught narrative of American history.

Works in Critical Context

Parra’s iconoclastic approach to traditional poetry techniques, his biting satire, as well as his peculiar brand of humor, have encouraged various critical viewpoints. Many commentators point to what they term postmodern elements in Parra’s poems as a key to understanding his antipoetry, arguing that his unorthodox style successfully addresses the realities of a fragmented universe and the chaotic pace of contemporary life. Conservative scholars, however, reject Parra’s irreverent, disjointed imagery, which they assert conveys an overly pessimistic and anarchistic impression of life.

Antipoetry Sparks Controversy: *Versos de salón* Owing to its provocative nature, antipoetry often sparked fierce reactions. *Versos de salón* was one such work. Capuchin priest Father Prudencio Salvatierra condemned this collection in a November 15, 1964, review in the conservative newspaper *The Illustrated Daily*: “Can a work like this, with neither head nor tail, that exudes poison and rottenness, madness and Satanism, be released to the public? . . . I cannot provide examples of antipoetry here: it is too cynical and demented. . . . They have asked me if this book is immoral. I would say not; it is too dirty to be immoral. A garbage can is not immoral, no matter how many times we walk around it trying to figure out what’s inside.” Equally as passionate in response, was Neruda; however, his response was one of excitement and approval.

The poetry in *Versos de salón*, Neruda said, “is as delightful as the gilded tint of early morning or fruit ripened to perfection in the shadows.” Clearly, Parra managed to evoke visions of both heaven and hell in the same work.

Certainly Neruda is not the only reader to praise Parra’s work. In his *New York Times Book Review* piece about *Poems and Antipoems*, Mark Strand comments, “Parra’s poems are hallucinatory and violent, and at the same time factual. The well-timed disclosure of events—personal or political—gives his poems a cumulative, mounting energy and power that we have come to expect from only the best fiction.” In a *Poetry* review, Hayden Carruth adds: “Free, witty, satirical, intelligent, often unexpected (without quite being surrealistic), mordant and comic by turns, always rebellious, always irreverent—it is all these and an ingratiating poetry too.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Versos de salón* while considering Father Prudencio Salvatierra’s evaluation of the text—that it is, essentially, the literary equivalent of a garbage can. Do you agree with Salvatierra’s assessment that the text “exudes poison and rotteness, madness and Satanism”?
2. In *Artifacts*, Parra criticizes the democracy of the United States, “where liberty / is a statue.” What do you think Parra means by this statement? Evaluate this claim. Do you agree with it? Do you disagree? Why?
3. After reading Parra’s *Artifacts*, choose a subject—a person, place, or object—that you have strong feelings about and attempt to write a few “artifacts” about your subject.
4. Compare Parra’s version of iconoclasm with the iconoclasm presented in the “Lisa the Iconoclast” episode of *The Simpsons*. Who is the target of each of these iconoclastic texts? Do you think that there are larger implications for each of these instances of iconoclasm? What might they be?

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✠ Pier Paolo Pasolini

BORN: 1922, Bologna, Italy

DIED: 1975, Ostia, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

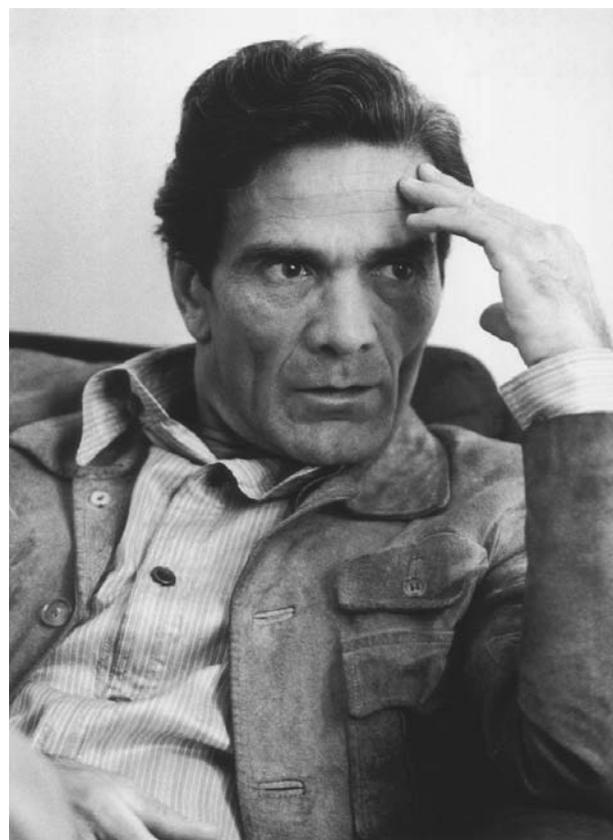
Poesie a Casarsa (1942)

The Ragazzi (1955)

A Violent Life (1958)

Overview

Pier Paolo Pasolini is best known throughout the world primarily for his films, many of which are based on literary works, such as *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*. In his native Italy, however, Pasolini is recognized as a complex artist: a celebrated novelist, poet, and critic as well as a filmmaker. As one of the most influential and controversial writers of his generation, Pasolini produced both literary and cinematic art that reflects his empathy for the poor, his religious conviction, and his involvement in nonconformist politics.



Pier Pasolini Evening Standard / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Child of Casarsa Pasolini was born March 5, 1922, in Bologna, Italy. His childhood and early adult experiences in the poverty-stricken village of Casarsa, located in the province of Friuli, forever linked him to the poor, inspiring sympathies that would later emerge in his writing. In addition to the plight of the people there, Pasolini was influenced by the dialect spoken in that region, as evidenced by his early poetry.

In 1937, Pasolini attended the University of Bologna, where he studied art history and literature and began publishing articles in *Architrave*, a student politico-literary journal. At his own expense, he published his first collection of poetry, *Poesie a Casarsa*, in 1942. These poems reveal a deep love for the Friulian language, landscape, and peasants that had so shaped his childhood.

Political Affiliations Pasolini grew up at a time when Fascism was the rule of law in Italy. Fascism is characterized by intense nationalism over other interests—including individual rights—as well as a strong military state and an authoritarian leader, who controls the government with little opposition by a legislature or parliament. In Italy, this leader was Benito Mussolini, who ultimately joined Hitler and his Nazi forces as part of the Axis Powers during World War II. Pasolini was drafted as a reluctant soldier during this time.

Relieved of his duties after only a week of military service in 1943, Pasolini fell under the influence of the ideas of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, the leading voice of Italian communism at the time. Communism emphasizes the importance of workers's rights and the sharing of wealth and resources among productive members of society. From 1943 to 1949, while teaching at a public school, Pasolini dedicated himself to intellectual and artistic pursuits, writing and publishing poetry in the Friulian dialect with the hope of creating a literature accessible to the poor. Pasolini's writing became his form of protest and resistance against Nazism and Fascism, as well as a rejection of the official language of Italy, which he believed had been created by and for the bourgeoisie. In 1949, after being arrested for his involvement in a homosexual relationship, Pasolini lost his teaching position and was expelled from the Italian Communist Party. Seeking to escape the scandal, Pasolini and his mother moved to Rome, where he became immersed in the city's slum life, all the while documenting the depravity of that lifestyle in poetry and such novels as *A Violent Life*.

In 1957's *The Ashes of Gramsci*, Pasolini returned to ideological debate. After being inspired by a visit to the grave of Gramsci, Pasolini wrote a meditation of passion and ideology that neither embraces nor challenges Marxism: While he accepted the rational arguments of Gramsci, Pasolini was tormented by his simultaneous attraction to and revulsion for the world around him. Instead of coming to a resolution, Pasolini establishes a tension between the movements of history and individual desire.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pasolini's famous contemporaries include:

- Akio Morita** (1921–1999): Morita founded Sony, the Japanese electronics company that built the first transistor radio, the Walkman portable cassette player, and the 3.5-inch floppy disk.
- Arthur C. Clarke** (1917–2008): In 1945, this English science-fiction author, most famous for his novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, predicted worldwide communication using satellites.
- Robert Redford** (1931–): An Oscar-winning director as well as a legendary actor, Redford founded the Sundance Film Festival and Sundance Institute, an organization dedicated to the discovery and development of independent filmmakers.
- Allen Ginsberg** (1926–1997): Ginsberg, author of the notorious *Howl*, and *Other Poems* was an American Beat poet, a group of writers who detested middle-class values.
- Terence Rattigan** (1911–1977): The successful comedies by this English playwright are based on actual people and incidents.
- Nadine Gordimer** (1923–): Much of Gordimer's work deals with the moral and psychological tensions in a racially divided South Africa, her native country.
- John Bowen** (1924–): The work of this British novelist and playwright is noted for its complex and ambivalent human motives and behavior.

Filmmaker In addition to writing—especially scriptwriting—Pasolini worked as an actor in the 1950s and, in 1961, made his debut as a director with the film *Accattone*, an adaptation of his novel *A Violent Life*. For the next fourteen years, he made films in which he combined his socialist sensibilities with a profound, nondenominational spirituality. Most always controversial, his movies were often anti-Catholic and sexually explicit, and he was officially accused of blasphemy by the Catholic Church in 1962. As a director, he was known for constantly changing his style and artistic approach, using nonprofessional actors, avoiding many industry standards, and choosing his subject matter from classical legends, tragedies, political diatribes, and other unconventional sources.

Mysterious Murder Murdered by a young male prostitute, Pasolini was found on the morning of November 2, 1975, in the seaside resort of Ostia. Accounts of his death differ: Some sources say Pasolini was hit in the head with a board and then run over repeatedly with his own car; others say he was bludgeoned to death. Some people even believe that the killer was an assassin sent by one of Pasolini's political enemies.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One theme that recurs in Pier Paolo Pasolini's work is the belief that innocence is being corrupted by capitalism. Especially in the years after World War II, intellectuals have explored this idea in both fiction and nonfiction works. Listed below are examples of books that address materialism and innocence in capitalist societies:

The Pearl (1945), a novella by John Steinbeck. As Kino, the main character in this novel, seeks wealth and status via the pearl, he becomes a savage criminal, personifying the way ambition and greed destroy innocence in a materialistic, capitalistic society.

Fighting Evil: Unsung Heroes in the Novels of Graham Greene (1997), nonfiction by Haim Gordon. This book offers a discussion of the evils of capitalism in the works of Graham Greene and the thought of Thomas Hobbes.

The Innocent (1990), a novel by Ian McEwan. Concerned with the postwar struggle between the political philosophies of communism and capitalism, this novel is also about deception, aggression, and the loss of innocence.

Kekexili: Mountain Patrol (2004), a film by Chuan Lu. This film, based on a true story about Tibetan volunteers attempting to stop poachers from hunting endangered antelope, depicts the lure of capitalist influence in remote areas and shows how ideals can be affected by desperate circumstances.

Works in Literary Context

Without a doubt, Pasolini's work was most inspired by the time he spent among the poverty stricken in Casarsa and in the slums of Rome. Stylistically, his poetry shows inspiration from several poets, including Giovanni Pascoli, the subject of Pasolini's thesis, and Eugenio Montale. Many of the poems in *Poesie a Casarsa*, Pasolini's earliest volume, are written in the *terza rima* form—a three-line stanza with the rhyme scheme *aba, bcb, cdc*, etc.—invented by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*.

The Language of Art and Politics Suggests writer Tony D'Arpino, "Pier Paolo Pasolini, poet, novelist, philosopher, and filmmaker, came of age during the reign of Italian fascism, and his art is inextricably bound to his politics." This opinion unites much of Pasolini's work, as he often employs his social and cultural ideologies as poetic inspiration and the basis for a new mythology. He resisted the "unreal, functional, unpoetic languages of the bourgeoisie," as Sam Rohdie notes, "the languages of reason, of modern society, of capitalism, of exploitation, of politics." Instead, Rohdie says, Pasolini attempted to capture the language of "the earthly real." Pasolini challenged what he called "practical politics"

with collages composed of what he viewed as true world realities: "language, gestures, faces, bodies." In a sense, Pasolini looked toward a "primitive world," at the same time addressing the artifice of the "bourgeois world."

Slang in The Ragazzi Based on Pasolini's experiences in the Roman slums, the highly controversial novel *The Ragazzi* tells the story of a group of young people whose poverty has driven them to a life of violence, crime, and indiscriminate sex. Pasolini, rejecting the formal official language of Italy, uses crude, obscene Roman street slang to create a shocking picture of Italian youth. In fact, although it avoids overt political implications, *The Ragazzi* is regarded as an indirect comment on the Italian establishment as a whole. Because of his harsh, explicit language, Pasolini angered many groups and was charged with obscenity, of which he was acquitted.

Works in Critical Context

Critical reaction to Pasolini's work usually extends beyond its value as literature or film because of its inclination toward political and religious thought. Over the course of his career, his explorations of communism, Catholicism, and class struggles alternately pleased and angered conservatives and liberals alike. According to an essay by Joseph P. Consoli in *Gay and Lesbian Literature*, actor Stefano Casi said that "Pasolini was first a thinker, and then an artist," that despite the many genres in which Pasolini worked, "in reality only one definition can render to by Pasolini: intellectual." As a result, scholars look beyond the story itself for meanings and messages, often citing them as evidence for his position for or against a particular theory, practice, or political system.

Poetry Most critics agree that Pasolini's greatest contribution to literature is the creation of a "civic" poetry, verse that conveys the rational argument of a civilized mind. Intellectuals have considered Pasolini an "organic intellectual," a term first used by Gramsci to designate a militant intellectual who personally identified with the working class. Still, Pasolini's poetry is viewed by some as eluding historically established classification. While the intimate candor of Pasolini's poetry has been praised by some critics, others have found fault in his failure to resolve his internal struggles in his work, along with his inclination toward egocentrism and martyrdom.

Adapting Oedipus Rex In Pasolini's version, *Oedipus Rex* (1967) takes on the image of the Everyman and appeals to the ordinary person. Pasolini uses only the basic elements of the mythical hero and hones in on Oedipus's sense of alienation and fear. Pasolini's Oedipus lives in the 1930s, with a lower middle class Italian family. He unifies, as Kostas Myrsiades offered, "the ancient myth and Pasolini's own childhood," plus "the psychological relationship between Oedipus and all men who as children have rivaled their fathers for their mother's

affections.” Audrène Eloit in *Language Film Quarterly* went further, calling the work a “palimpsest,” which points to the layers of mythical retellings and adaptations of the Oedipus story originally written by Sophocles. Eloit also claims the film “turns into a map of the soul, a translation of the works of Freud and his successors,” and thematically focuses on the debate between free will and fate in the context of psychoanalysis. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* suggests the film “contains somewhat more Pasolini than Sophocles” and praises the “modern, semi-autobiographical sequences” where the myth and author intersect. Most critics found the movie visually stunning and honored it with several awards, including the Best Foreign Language Film at the Kinema Junpo Awards.

Responses to Literature

1. Some scholars believe that Pasolini’s poetry was influenced by both Dante and American poets. Read a selection of Pasolini’s poetry. Write an essay describing what evidence you find of such influences.
2. Pasolini achieved fame in Italy with novels based on his experiences in the Roman slums and his impressions of urban poverty. Compile a list of five or more authors today who write about life in undesirable conditions. What genres do these works encompass? Do you think fiction or nonfiction is a more effective vehicle for describing such conditions?
3. Biographers often write about the innocence with which Pasolini viewed the world. However, his works, filled with obscenities and acts of violence, do not convey such an outlook. With a group of your classmates, discuss how you can reconcile Pasolini’s worldview with his works. Why do you think an optimist in his real life would create such controversial films and literature?

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✻ Boris Pasternak

BORN: 1890, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1960, Peredelkino, USSR.

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

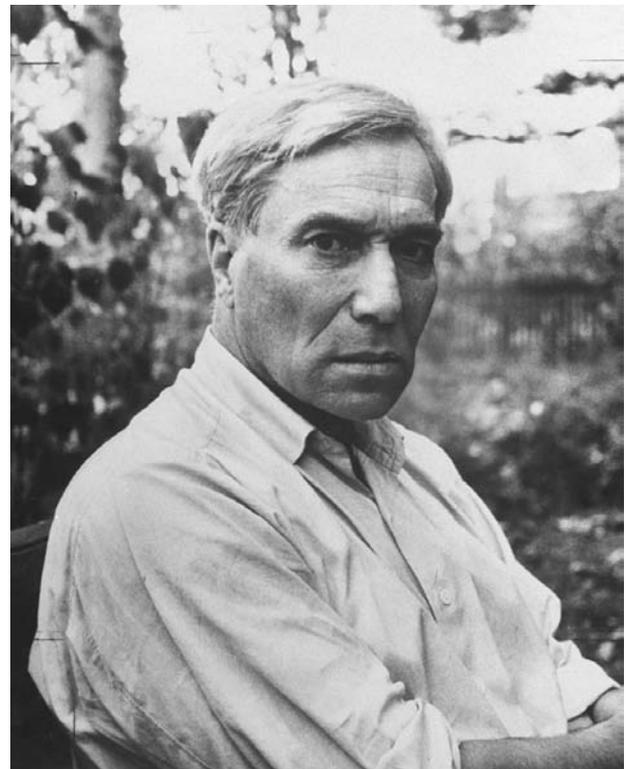
Sister My Life: Summer, 1917 (1923)

The Last Summer (1934)

Doctor Zhivago (1956)

Overview

Nobel laureate Boris Pasternak was regarded in his native Russia as one of the country’s greatest postrevolutionary poets. He did not gain worldwide acclaim, however, until his only novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, was published in Europe in 1958, two years before the author’s death. Banned in Russia as anti-Soviet, the controversial novel was hailed as a literary masterpiece by both American and European critics, but its publication was suppressed in Russia until 1988.



Boris Pasternak Jerry Cooke / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood of High Culture The son of an acclaimed artist and a concert pianist, both of Jewish descent, Pasternak benefited from a highly creative household that counted novelist Leo Tolstoy, composer Alexander Scriabin, and poet Rainer Maria Rilke among its visitors. In 1895, when Pasternak and his brother, Aleksandr, became gravely ill for a brief time, Pasternak's mother stopped playing music in public for ten years. Apparently, her decision to end her public concerts was a source of guilt for the children. Pasternak's image of his mother's sacrifice manifests itself throughout his work in the persistent theme of women and their difficult lot in life.

Association with the Futurists After spending six years studying music, Pasternak turned to philosophy, eventually enrolling in Germany's prestigious Marburg University. In 1912, however, Pasternak abruptly left Marburg when his childhood friend, Ida Vysotskaia, rejected his marriage proposal. Deciding to commit himself exclusively to poetry, he eventually joined Centrifuge, a moderate group of literary innovators associated with the Futurist movement. The Futurists advocated greater poetic freedom and attention to the actualities of modern life. Pasternak's first two poetry collections largely reflect these precepts as well as the influence of Vladimir Mayakovsky, Pasternak's close friend, who was among the most revered of the Futurist poets.

Pasternak was declared unfit for military service and spent the first years of World War I as a clerical worker. When news of political turmoil reached Pasternak in 1917, he returned to Moscow, but the capital's chaotic atmosphere forced him to leave for his family's summer home in the outlying countryside. There he composed *Sister My Life: Summer, 1917* (1923). Considered Pasternak's greatest poetic achievement, this volume celebrates nature as a creative force that permeates every aspect of human experience and impels all historical and personal change. Pasternak's next poetry collection, *Tem'i i variatsi* (1923), solidified his standing as a major modern poet in the Soviet Union. He also received critical acclaim with *Rasskazy* (1925), his first collection of short stories.

Communism and the Avant-Garde In 1923, enthusiastic about the possible artistic benefits of the Revolution, Pasternak joined Mayakovsky's Left Front of Art (LEF), an alliance between Futurist writers and the Communist Party that used the avant-garde movement's literary innovations to glorify the new social order. His works from this period, *Vysokaya bolezn* (1924), *Deviatsot piatyi god* (1926), and *Lieutenant Schmidt* (1927), are epic poems that favorably portray events leading up to and surrounding the Marxist revolution of 1917. During the late 1920s, Pasternak grew disillusioned with the government's increasing social and artistic restrictions

as well as with Communism's collective ideal that, in his opinion, directly opposed the individualistic nature of humanity. He eventually broke with the LEF.

Optimism Dashed The following year, Pasternak divorced his first wife, Evgeniya Lurie, as a result of his affair with Zinaida Neigauz, whom he later married. Critics often cite this new relationship and the couple's friendships with several Georgian writers as the source of the revitalized poetry found in *Vtoroye rozhdenie* (1932). A collection of love lyrics and impressions of the Georgian countryside, *Vtoroye rozhdenie* presented Pasternak's newly simplified style and chronicled his attempt to reconcile his artistic and social responsibilities in a time of political upheaval. Pasternak's newfound optimism, however, was subdued following the inception of the Soviet Writers's Union, a government institution that abolished independent literary groups and promoted conformity to the ideals of socialist realism. Recognized as a major poet by the Communist regime, Pasternak participated in several official literary functions, including the First Congress of Writers in 1934. He gradually withdrew from public life, however, as Joseph Stalin's repressive policies intensified. He began translating the works of others, including the major tragedies of Shakespeare, rather than composing his own.

Following the publication of *Vtoroye rozhdenie*, Pasternak reissued several of his earlier poetry volumes under new titles. His new collections of verse, however, did not appear until World War II. *Na rannikh poezdakh* (1943) and *Zemnoy proster* (1945) reflect the renewed patriotic spirit and creative freedom fostered by the conflict, while eschewing conventional political rhetoric. Suppression of the arts resumed following the war, and many of Pasternak's friends and colleagues were imprisoned or executed. Pasternak, who had publicly condemned the actions of the government, escaped Stalin's purges of the intelligentsia. While some credit his translation and promotion of writers from Stalin's native Georgia, others report that the dictator, while glancing over Pasternak's dossier, wrote "Do not touch this cloud-dweller."

Doctor Zhivago During this dark era, he began work on what became his novel *Doctor Zhivago*. The exact year in which Pasternak started writing *Doctor Zhivago* is difficult to establish; scholars Evgenii Pasternak and V. M. Borisov approximate that the novel was started in the winter of 1917–1918. Drawn from Pasternak's personal experiences and beliefs, the novel utilizes complex symbols, imagery, and narrative techniques to depict Yury Zhivago, a poet and doctor who is caught up in and eventually destroyed by the Communist revolution of 1917. When Pasternak submitted *Doctor Zhivago* to Soviet publishers in 1956, they rejected the novel for what the editorial board of *Novy mir* termed its "spirit . . . of non-acceptance of the socialist revolution." Pasternak then smuggled the manuscript to the West, where reviewers

hailed the novel as an incisive and moving condemnation of Communism.

The Nobel Prize Debacle In 1959, the Swedish Academy selected Pasternak for the Nobel Prize in Literature, citing his achievements as both a poet and novelist. Nevertheless, the implication that the award had been given solely for *Doctor Zhivago* launched a bitter Soviet campaign against Pasternak that ultimately forced him to decline the prize. Despite his decision, the Soviet Writers' Union expelled Pasternak from its ranks, and one Communist Party member characterized the author as a "literary whore" in the employ of Western authorities.

Pasternak published two more works outside the Soviet Union, *When Skies Clear* (1959), a volume of reflective verse, and *Remember* (1959), an autobiographical sketch, before his death in 1960. At his funeral, Pasternak was not accorded the official ceremonies normally provided for the death of a member of the Soviet Writers' Union. Though his funeral was not announced in the official papers, thousands accompanied his family to the grave site, which remains a place of pilgrimage in Russia. In 1987, under the auspices of Communist leader Mikail Gorbachev's policy of social reform, the Writer's Union formally reinstated Pasternak, and in 1988, *Doctor Zhivago* was published in the Soviet Union for the first time.

Works in Literary Context

Pasternak's work has an overwhelming and ever-present tendency to penetrate the essential reality of life, whether it is in art, in human relations, or in history. His approach—which consciously avoids everything formal and scholastic—can be termed "existential" in the broadest sense of the term, as a concern with the fundamental problems of existence rather than with systems or ideologies.

Poetry Both Clear and Obscure Though Pasternak won the Nobel Prize in 1959 for his novel, the Nobel committee first noted his outstanding achievements in verse. He was cited "for his important achievement both in contemporary lyrical poetry and in the great Russian epic tradition." Pasternak's mastery of verse was evident in his first complete book of poetry, *Twin in the Clouds* (1914). This collection reveals a voice of startling originality and, from the point of view of Pasternak's poetic predecessors, some eccentricity. His verse mixes stylistic registers and introduces colloquialisms, dialect, rarely used words, technical words, and foreign words—even in rhyme. Pasternak's critical reassessment of his own writings prompted him in 1928 to revise many of the poems from his first two books. He tried to shed them of "romantic" elements, including foreign words, openly autobiographical references, and hyperbolic intonation.

Pasternak's Clear Vision of Doctor Zhivago Pasternak did not write *Doctor Zhivago* for what he called

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pasternak's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930): Mayakovsky was a widely read and respected Russian Futurist poet and political agitator and became the archetypal Soviet poet after his death, when Stalin praised his work.

H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937): Although his short stories of cosmic horror had only a niche following among enthusiasts of "weird fiction" during his lifetime, Lovecraft's modern take on horror would prove hugely influential with later writers of the supernatural.

Raymond Chandler (1888–1959): Along with Dashiell Hammett, Chandler was the premiere author of "hard-boiled" detective fiction for over two decades. His detective, Philip Marlowe, is perhaps the archetypal private eye.

Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966): Poetically outspoken, Akhmatova's work was often not allowed to be published by the Soviet regime. Her writings circulated via underground networks, and during World War II her patriotic poems inspired her countrymen to fight on. After Stalin's death, Soviet leadership grudgingly acknowledged her place among twentieth century Russian poets.

Agatha Christie (1890–1976): The pen name of Dame Agatha Miller, Christie is the most successful modern author, second only to Shakespeare in terms of volumes sold and breadth of readership. Her 80 mystery novels, especially those featuring her iconic characters Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, have been translated into dozens of languages and adapted time and again for stage and screen.

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): From Vladimir Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin ruthlessly consolidated power and became the de facto dictator of the Soviet Union until his own death. His decades as the USSR's leader were marked by political purges on a massive scale, forced deportations, accelerated industrial programs, collectivization of agriculture, and the defeat of Nazi Germany. A cult of personality centered on Stalin extolled him as the savior of the Soviet Union.

"contemporary press." He wanted to create something that would slip beneath the systemic control of writers and editors, to write something "riskier than usual" that would "break through to the public." With this novel, Pasternak wanted to elude censorship and reach truth; in *Doctor Zhivago*, "Everything is untangled, everything is named, simple, transparent, sad. Once again, afresh, in a new way, the most precious and important things, the earth and the sky, great warm feeling, the spirit of creation, life and death, have been delineated." With *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak believed he could show "life as it is."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Pasternak often dwelled on the difficult lot for women in society. Other works that touch upon this theme include:

The Second Sex (1949), a nonfiction work by Simone de Beauvoir. Considered a landmark of feminist literature, this work examines the treatment and perception of women throughout history, particularly how they have been perceived as an aberration of the male sex.

House of Mirth (1905), a novel by Edith Wharton. The title is ironic, for this novel traces the downfall of an independent-minded woman in the stifling high society of America at the turn of the twentieth century.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), a novel by Zora Neale Hurston. An important work for both African-American and women's literature, this novel traces the fate of a black woman living in Florida in the early years of the twentieth century, and her experiences throughout her three marriages.

Works in Critical Context

While his complex, ethereal works often defy translation, Western critics laud Pasternak's synthesis of unconventional imagery and formalistic style as well as his vision of the individual's relationship to nature and history. C. M. Bowra asserted: "In a revolutionary age Pasternak [saw] beyond the disturbed surface of things to the powers behind it and found there an explanation of what really matters in the world. Through his unerring sense of poetry he has reached to wide issues and shown that the creative calling, with its efforts and its frustrations and its unanticipated triumphs, is, after all, something profoundly natural and closely related to the sources of life."

Doctor Zhivago Scholarship on *Doctor Zhivago* appeared entirely outside the Soviet Union until its 1988 publication in Russia. Some early Western studies criticized the novel for its lack of a logical progression of events, its inexplicable use of time, its unbelievable coincidences, and its single-minded language in which only variants of Pasternak's own voice are present. Evaluations of *Doctor Zhivago* often disagree as to the novel's importance. Several critics regarded its many coincidences and Pasternak's distortion of historical chronology and character development as technically flawed. Other commentators compared Pasternak's thorough portrayal of a vast and turbulent period to that of nineteenth-century Russian novelists, particularly Leo Tolstoy. Additionally, the major themes of the novel, often distilled in the poems attributed to the title character, have been the subject of extensive analysis. Through *Zhivago*, critics maintain, Pasternak realizes his vision of the artist as a Christ-like figure who bears witness to the tragedy of his

age even as it destroys him. This idea is often linked to Pasternak's contention that individual experience is capable of transcending the destructive forces of history. It is this concept, commentators assert, that gives *Doctor Zhivago* its enduring power. Marc Slonim observed: "In *Doctor Zhivago* man is shown in his individual essence, and his life is interpreted not as an illustration of historical events, but as a unique, wonderful adventure in its organic reality of sensations, thoughts, drives, instincts and strivings. This makes the book . . . a basically anti-political work, in so far as it treats politics as fleeting, unimportant, and extols the unchangeable fundamentals of human mind, emotion and creativity." In memoirs he kept during the mid-1960s, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet premier who suppressed the novel in 1956, concluded: "I regret that I had a hand in banning the book. We should have given readers an opportunity to reach their own verdict. By banning *Doctor Zhivago* we caused much harm to the Soviet Union."

Sister My Life: Summer, 1917 Often uniting expansive, startling imagery with formal rhyme schemes, *Sister My Life: Summer, 1917* is marked by the spirit of the revolution and marks a synthesis of the principal poetic movements of early twentieth-century Russia, including the Futurists, the Acmeists, and the Imagists. De Mallac suggested that it was Pasternak's "sincere endeavor to apprehend the era's political turmoil, albeit in a peculiar mode of cosmic awareness." Robert Payne commented in *The Three Worlds of Boris Pasternak* that the author's "major achievement in poetry lay . . . in his power to sustain rich and varied moods which had never been explored before."

Responses to Literature

1. The Nobel Prize for Literature is normally the most coveted award for any writer to achieve, yet for Pasternak it only served to increase his paranoia. With a group of classmates, discuss why you think this is. Why do you think only one other Russian author publicly congratulated him?
2. The character of Lara in *Dr. Zhivago* is subjected to pressures both internal and external. Write an essay in which you explore how her own emotional demons affect her, and how her inner turmoil differs from the stresses placed on her by external political forces.
3. With a classmate, research Stalin's rise to power and his totalitarian regime on the Internet or in your library. Create a report for the class in which you describe how Stalin's approach to personal and political freedom is reflected in the particular text by Pasternak's that you have read. Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
4. Write a 5–7-page essay on how you think Pasternak's background as a poet influenced his literary style in *Dr. Zhivago*. Use examples from the text, as well as from Pasternak's poetry, to support your ideas.

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Alan Paton

BORN: 1903, Pietermaritzburg, Natal Province, South Africa

DIED: 1988, Durban, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Novels

MAJOR WORKS:

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948)

The Land and People of South Africa (1955)



Alan Paton Paton, Alan, photograph. AP Images.

Towards the Mountain (1980)

Journey Continued: An Autobiography (1988)

Save the Beloved Country (1989)

Overview

Alan Stewart Paton was a South African writer and liberal leader. His novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* won him world acclaim for the insights it gave into South Africa's race problem. As Martin Tucker commented in *Africa in Modern Literature*, "Paton is the most important force in the literature of forgiveness and adjustment."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth in Politically Charged British Colony

Alan Stewart Paton (rhymes with Dayton) was born on January 11, 1903, in Pietermaritzburg in the Natal Province, a former British colony that is now part of the Republic of South Africa.

European immigration to South Africa began in 1652, much earlier than in other parts of Africa. Its mineral wealth made it a particularly attractive territory

for the British Empire, which established dominance there over the native black population and another white European population, the Boers (descendants of Dutch settlers), in a series of wars spanning the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time of Paton's birth, Great Britain had just cemented its power in the region after winning the second Boer War in 1902. The British fought the Boers for control of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The two states had been annexed by Great Britain after the First Boer War in 1877, but enjoyed limited self-government until the British decided to take complete control. The war was unpopular even in Britain, where the military's brutal actions in South Africa were viewed as naked imperialism. In 1910, the Union of South Africa became a dominion of Great Britain.

Paton the Teacher From 1919 to 1922, Paton attended the University of Natal, from which he graduated with degrees in science and education. At this time, Paton began writing poetry and drama. In 1925 he became the assistant master at the Ixopo High School and, in 1928, joined the staff of Pietermaritzburg College. Paton was appointed principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory in 1935. The Diepkloof Reformatory just outside Johannesburg, had been administered as a prison for delinquent youths from the slums rather than an institution for their rehabilitation. Paton insisted that this defeated the purpose of the reformatory. He introduced reforms that enabled some of the young to regain their self-respect. His granting of weekend leave was considered revolutionary. To the surprise of some of his colleagues, most of the boys returned at the end of their leave.

The Rise of the Apartheid Government Legal racial separation between the majority black population and the ruling white had existed to some degree since 1923, but in 1948, Boer-led political parties gained control of the government on the "apartheid" slogan that whites must remain masters of South Africa ("apartheid" means "apartness" in Afrikaans, the language of the Boer South African population). The new apartheid government systematically repressed and terrorized the majority black population until its downfall in 1994. Paton retired from government service in 1948 and devoted his life to writing, lecturing on the race question, and organizing the Liberal Party of South Africa in opposition to apartheid.

Paton and his Controversial Best-Seller It was in this environment that Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was published. *Cry, the Beloved Country* made a tremendous impression outside South Africa and among the English-speaking citizens in the republic. The nationalist-minded Boers dismissed it as a piece of liberalistic sentimentality. It caused only a minor stir in the black African community where Paton was criticized for using stereotypes in depicting his black African characters. He was accused of approaching the black African characters from white, patronizing perspectives. This projected

them either as the victims of violent and uncontrolled passions or as simple, credulous people who bore themselves with the humility of tamed savages in the presence of the white man.

Formation of the Liberal Party of South Africa *Cry, the Beloved Country* had called for peace and understanding between races, but to Paton and those who shared his views, it was not enough for white liberals to preach race conciliation; they had to involve themselves actively in opposition to apartheid. Early in the 1950s, he took part in the formation of the Liberal Association, which later became the Liberal Party of South Africa (SALP). He was elected its president in 1953 and remained in this position until the government enacted a law making the party illegal. The SALP welcomed South Africans of all races in its ranks and sought to establish an open society in which one's merit would fix the position of the individual in the life of the nation. It advocated non-violence and set out to collaborate with the black Africans' political organizations. Like most leaders of the SALP, Paton was criticized bitterly in the Afrikaans press for identifying himself with black Africans. The underlying fear was that he and his colleagues were creating potentially dangerous polarizations in the white community.

Continued Literary and Politic Activity During the 1950s and 1960s, SALP gained a substantial following among both blacks and whites. In 1960, the government declared the party illegal. Some of the party's leaders fled the country, while others were arrested and tried on conspiracy charges. Paton was spared arrest. The government did, however, seize his passport upon his return from New York where he accepted the Freedom House Award honoring his opposition to racism.

Paton continued writing during these tumultuous times, publishing the novel *Too Late, the Phalarope* in 1953 and the play *Sponono* in 1965. After a little less than ten years, the government returned Paton's passport. That made it possible for him to undertake a world tour (1971) during the course of which he was showered with honors in America and Europe.

Paton died of throat cancer on April 12, 1988, at his home outside Durban, shortly after completing *Journey Continued: An Autobiography*. He was mourned as one of South Africa's leading figures in the anti-apartheid movement. Shortly after his death, his widow, Anne (Hopkins) Paton, released a large portion of the contents of Paton's study for the establishment of The Alan Paton Centre on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal. The university set aside space for this permanent memorial to Paton for future generations of writers and activists.

Works in Literary Context

In assessing Paton's work, Paton scholar Edward Callan compares the author to American poet Robert Frost. Paton's art, says Callan, "is related to South Africa as Robert Frost's is to New England. Both of these writers

work within the framework of an external landscape where they know all the flowers and shrubs, birds and animals by their familiar names. As observers of the human inhabitants of these landscapes, both writers recognize the profound aspirations of human personality; and both communicate their insights in language that is fresh and simple, yet vibrant with meaning.”

Protest Fiction Because Paton was concerned primarily with racial injustice in South Africa, his work has come to be considered part of the tradition of protest fiction that includes the works of such writers as Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852), Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*, 1906), and Richard Wright (*Native Son*, 1940). While there is no doubt that well-crafted protest novels can exert a huge impact on the public, critics tend to look down on protest fiction, even labeling it propaganda, because, they believe, the writer's art is subjugated by the writer's political message, and characters and plot tend to be less fully rounded than they are in other types of fiction. This point is debatable, but Paton's literary reputation has suffered somewhat because of his political focus.

Works in Critical Context

Over an initial period of approximately fourteen years, Paton produced a body of work that critics first used to judge him as a writer. F. Charles Rooney in *Catholic World*, for one, lauded Paton's skill as a writer and pointed favorably to his unwillingness to moralize in his first books. “In *Too Late, the Phalarope*, wrote Rooney, “Tante Sophie . . . becomes such a real person to the reader that there is never a question of sermonizing.” In *Tales from a Troubled Land*, however, asserted Rooney, “Paton has unfortunately abandoned his story to profess his heart.”

One of the earliest proponents of racial equality in his native South Africa, Paton came into the most favorable reviews, however, with his very first work, *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

***Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948)** A landmark publication for its time, the novel follows the fate of a young black African, Absalom Kumalo, who, having murdered a white citizen, “cannot be judged justly without taking into account the environment that has partly shaped him,” as Edmund Fuller writes in his book *Man in Modern Fiction: Some Minority Opinions on Contemporary American Writing*. The environment in question is typified by the hostility and squalid living conditions facing most of South Africa's nonwhites, victims of South Africa's system of apartheid.

The novel won enthusiastic reviews from critics and elicited tears from readers. *Cry, the Beloved Country*, wrote Rooney, “is a great novel, but not because it speaks out against racial intolerance and its bitter effects. Rather, the haunting milieu of a civilization choking out its own vitality is evoked naturally and summons our compassion. . . . It is a great compliment to Paton's genius that he communicates both a story and a lasting impression without bristling, bitter anger.”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Paton's famous contemporaries include:

Ella Josephine Baker (1903–1946): Leading African-American civil rights activist who worked behind the scenes alongside Dr. Martin Luther King and several others.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize-winning author.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Famous expatriate writer whose name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.

Todd Matshikiza (1921–1968): South African jazz pianist, composer, and activist who was instrumental in apartheid resistance efforts and subsequently was banned (exiled) by the South African government.

“I have just finished a magnificent story,” wrote Harold C. Gardiner in a 1948 review. As the novel took up complicated issues, and “reduced to these simple, almost fabular terms, it was intelligible and it made an impact,” wrote Dennis Brutus in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*. “The emotional impact of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is achieved, first of all and most consistently, by Paton's stylistic understatement, by his use and reuse of a few simple, almost stilted, formal phrases,” explained Myron Matlaw in *Arcadia*.

“Three artistic qualities of *Cry, the Beloved Country* combine to make it an original and unique work of art,” Edward Callan notes in his study *Alan Paton*. “First, the poetic elements in the language of some of the characters; second, the lyric passages spoken from outside the action, like the well-known opening chapter; and third, the dramatic choral chapters that seem to break the sequence of the story for social commentary, but which in fact widen the horizon of the particular segments of action to embrace the whole land, as well as such universal concerns as fear, hate, and justice.”

Yet as Carol Iannone noted in *American Scholar*, “[a]fter initial widespread adulation, critics began to find fault with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, seeing it as sentimental and propagandistic, more a treatise than a work of art. The novel tends to survive these objections, however, because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Responses to Literature

1. While reading *Cry, the Beloved Country* consider what it means to get a good night's sleep. What could interfere with that if you lived in a country where democracy did not rule?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* highlights the many ways that the social and legal oppression of a racial or ethnic group harm both the oppressed and the oppressors. Other works that focus on this theme of oppression include:

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (1845), by Frederick Douglass. Perhaps the most famous of the American slave narratives, Douglass's life story highlights how being a slave and owning slaves transforms people.

Things Fall Apart (1959), by Chinua Achebe. The story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

Once Were Warriors (1990), by Alan Duff. Maori cultural struggles are closely examined in the setting of urban New Zealand and by way of the impoverished, under-educated Heke family.

The Last Witchfinder: A Novel (2006), by James Morrow. Morrow's inventive novel focuses on the enormously destructive witch hunts of the European middle ages and how this persecution affected the lives of millions of women.

2. After reading *Cry, the Beloved Country* consider the following passages and discuss the following related questions:

"Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much." What in this comment by the narrator about his home country do you find striking? What does the wording remind you of, if anything? Why does the narrator seem to suggest discouraging loving the earth, or laughing too loudly, or getting too emotional about the water and birds of South Africa?

- "Happy the eyes that can close." How does this comment by the narrator connect with peace or peace of mind?
- "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find we are turned to hating." What conflict does this comment by Reverend Msimangu point to?
- "Who indeed knows the secret of the earthly pilgrimage? Who indeed knows why there can

be comfort in a world of desolation?" What does Stephen Kumalo mean when he thinks this during his stay in Johannesburg? What is he trying to understand?

- "For it is the dawn that has come, as it has come for a thousand centuries, never failing. But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret." How do these final thoughts by Kumalo connect to his earlier thoughts? What do you interpret is the "secret"?

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Octavio Paz

BORN: 1914, Mexico City, Mexico

DIED: 1998, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Labyrinth of Solitude (1950)



Octavio Paz Paz, Octavio, photograph. AP Images.

Sun Stone (1957)

Blanco (1967)

A Draft of Shadows (1975)

Overview

The intellectual body of work of Octavio Paz is one of the most extensive and important in the history of Latin America. He wrote more than twenty books of poetry (more than thirty if all editions of the books are considered) and as many book-length essays about such topics as literature, eroticism, politics, anthropology, and painting. Until his death, he fueled an intellectual passion that—through his essays and the magazines that he headed—turned him into an indispensable guide for several generations in the area of Spanish language. Not only with his poetry, but also with his prose, Paz renovated Spanish, thanks to his mastery of nuance, the communication between words, and the architecture of syntax.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Spanish Heritage Paz was born in Mexico City. His mother's family had emigrated from Spain and his father's ancestors traced their heritage to early Mexican settlers and indigenous peoples. Paz's paternal grandfather was a journalist and political activist, and his father was an attorney who joined Emiliano Zapata's farmer-backed revolution in the early 1900s. During the Mexican Civil War, a conflict led by Francisco I against the dictator Porfirio Diaz, Paz's family lost their home and relocated

to a nearby suburb of Mexico City, where they lived under financially unstable conditions. Nonetheless, Paz received his secondary education at a French Catholic school and later attended the National University of Mexico. While in his late teens, he founded *Barrandal*, an avant-garde journal, and published his first volume of poems, *Luna silvestre* (1933). In 1937, he traveled to Spain, which was at the time in the middle of a civil war pitting the ultranationalist/fascist forces of General Francisco Franco against the forces supporting the Spanish Republic. The fascists won the war and Franco became the Spanish dictator until his death in 1975. Paz participated in several antifascist activities in Spain before moving on to France. In Paris, he became interested in surrealism, a highly influential literary and artistic movement dedicated to examining the irrational, paranormal, and subconscious aspects of the human mind.

Disillusionment Paz returned to Mexico from Europe in 1938, just as the continent was heading toward World War II. Paz spent the war in Mexico and the United States, traveling extensively. While in the United States he became influenced by the formal experiments of such modernist poets as William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens.

Diplomacy and Literary Repute Paz joined the Mexican diplomatic service in 1945 and was assigned to the Mexican embassy in Paris. While in France, he became reacquainted with the aesthetics of surrealism and the philosophy of existentialism, eventually favoring what he termed "the vital attitude" of surrealism. It was during this time he wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, a collection of essays concerning the importance of loneliness as the core of human—and especially Mexican—identity. This book and *Sun Stone* (1957), a long poem generally considered his finest achievement in verse, established Paz's international literary reputation. Paz continued to travel extensively as a diplomat. He was named Mexican ambassador to India in 1962 and served in this position until 1968, when he resigned in protest following the killings of student demonstrators in Mexico City's Plaza of Three Cultures by government forces. Later editions of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* include an additional essay by Paz discussing this tragic event.

Paz continued to lecture and travel around the world. In 1987 Paz published *Arbol adentro*, his first collection of poetry in eleven years. In 1990, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He died of cancer in 1998.

Works in Literary Context

Paz was introduced to literature in his grandfather's personal library. Later, he read authors who influenced his work including Gerardo Diego, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Antonio Machado, and D. H. Lawrence. In addition, his philosophical stance was influenced by his exposure to the writings of David Rousset, André Breton, and Albert Camus. His works reflect his knowledge of the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Paz's famous contemporaries include:

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973): Oxford professor and fantasy author whose tales of Middle Earth—including *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy—brought him widespread critical and popular acclaim.

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954): A Mexican painter and wife of muralist Diego Rivera, Kahlo's style was influenced by a combination of European surrealism and indigenous traditions. She was not widely recognized until after her death.

Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962): An iconic beauty of the mid-twentieth century, Monroe starred in classic films such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like It Hot*.

Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957): In 1950, McCarthy was an obscure junior senator from Wisconsin when he began claiming that he had a list of Communists that had infested government agencies. The resulting hearings, as well as McCarthy's blustering, bullying demeanor, came to symbolize the anti-Communist hysteria of the time.

George Balanchine (1904–1983): Of Georgian descent, Russian choreographer Balanchine would prove a major influence on American ballet after his move to New York City in the 1930s. His productions of *The Nutcracker* every Christmas made the ballet a holiday tradition.

history, myths, and landscape of Mexico as well as his interest in surrealism, existentialism, romanticism, Eastern thought, and diverse political ideologies.

Surrealism In his early verse, Paz experiments with such diverse forms as the sonnet and free verse, reflecting his desire to renew and clarify Spanish language by lyrically evoking images and impressions. In many of these poems, Paz employs the surrealist technique of developing a series of related or unrelated images to emphasize sudden moments of perception, a particular emotional state, or a fusion of such polarities as dream and reality or life and death. According to Paz, surrealism is a “negation of the contemporary world and at the same time an attempt to substitute other values for those of democratic bourgeois society: eroticism, poetry, imagination, liberty, spiritual adventure, vision.” Topics of Paz's formative verse include political and social issues, the brutality of war, and eroticism and love. *Eagle or Sun?* (1951), one of his most important early volumes, is a sequence of visionary prose poems concerning the past, present, and future of Mexico. *Selected Poems*, published in 1963, and *Early Poems: 1935–1955* (1973) contain representative compositions in Spanish and in English translation.

Radical Diversity The variety of forms and topics in Paz's later poems mirror his diverse interests. *Blanco*

(1967), widely considered his most complex work, consists of three columns of verse arranged in a chapbook format that folds out into a long, single page. Each column develops four main themes relating to language, nature, and the means by which an individual analyzes and orders life. In *Ladera este: 1962–1968* (1968), Paz blends simple diction and complicated syntax to create poems that investigate Asian philosophy, religion, and art. In his long poem *A Draft of Shadows* (1975), Paz examines selfhood and memory by focusing on poignant personal moments in the manner of William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude*.

Influence The influence of Paz is vast and continues to grow. Writers that have been influenced by Paz include but are certainly not limited to Samuel Beckett, Charles Tomlinson, Elizabeth Bishop, Mark Strand, and Mexican author Carlos Fuentes. The work of Paz continues to be translated into numerous languages, thus increasing the scope of his enduring influence.

Works in Critical Context

Octavio Paz's reputation as one of the greatest literary figures of Latin America in the twentieth century—and certainly Mexico's most important writer at that time—rests on his extensive output. He wrote more than thirty collections of poetry over the course of fifty years. His essays almost equaled his poetry in quantity, thoughtfulness, and influence. The two categories of writing complement each other. As John M. Fein states in an essay titled “Toward Octavio Paz: A Reading of His Major Poems, 1957–1976,” “His success in diversified fields is heightened in the ways in which his essays and his poetry are complementary: the core of his creativity is a concern for language in general and for the poetic process in particular.” In other words, critics' positive reaction to Paz's poetry is brought to an even higher level by the fact that his poetry is based on sound principles enumerated in his nonfiction, particularly those regarding the use of language.

Because critical approval of Paz's work is nearly universal, the only question that emerged when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990 was why it had taken so long. In his introduction to a volume about essays on the poet, Harold Bloom noted that giving him the prize was “one of the sounder choices,” alluding to the unusual degree of approval from literary critics around the world. As *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* summarized Paz's career, “There is Spanish American poetry after Octavio Paz: generations of poets who reject his legacy, and others that continue his line of experimentation. Nevertheless, the imprint that Paz has given to the tradition as a whole will be with us for years to come.”

The Labyrinth of Solitude *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, in which Paz explores Mexican history, mythology, and social behavior, is his most famous prose work. According to Paz, modern Mexico and its people suffer

a collective identity crisis resulting from their mixed Indian and Spanish heritage, marginal association with Western cultural traditions, the influence of the United States, and a recurring cycle of war and isolation. While critics debated Paz's contention that this description also symbolizes the modern human condition, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* received widespread praise. Irving Howe commented: "This book roams through the phases of Mexican past and present seeking to define the outrages, violation and defeats that have left the Mexican personality fixed into a social mask of passive hauteur. . . . At once brilliant and sad, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* constitutes an elegy for a people martyred, perhaps destroyed by history. It is a central text of our time."

Responses to Literature

1. Paz often addressed themes concerning the impact of the ancient native cultures of Mexico on twentieth-century Mexican culture and society. Read *Sun Stone*. In what ways does it reflect ancient Aztec beliefs?
2. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz contends that humans are unique among living things for their awareness of their own loneliness. Do you agree? If possible, provide reasons to support your position based on your own firsthand experiences with animals.
3. One of the main ideas in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is that Mexican culture is a sort of orphan child of Spanish settlers and pre-Columbian societies such as the Aztecs. How do you think this is related to the feelings of solitude Paz mentions in the title?
4. Although Paz was born in Mexico City and died there, he spent many years in other countries and cultures around the world. Provide examples of how his exposure to other cultures—particularly European artists and Hinduism—influenced his writing.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Paz was strongly influenced by the French literary movement of the post–World War I era known as surrealism; his early poetry, particularly *Sun Stone*, incorporated surrealist elements. Here are some other works that focus on surrealist conventions or ideas:

Manifestoes of Surrealism (1924), a nonfiction book by André Breton. Breton is the father of surrealism in literature; this text lays out the tenets of that movement that other authors would eagerly follow.

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs. This story is about the world travels of a junkie, told in a weirdly disjointed narrative; Burroughs claimed it could be read in any order.

The Capital of Pain (1926), a poetry collection by Paul Éluard. This work is a seminal collection of surrealist poetry; the poems would inspire the landmark 1965 French film *Alphaville*, directed by Jean-Luc Goddard.

Thomas the Obscure (1941), a novel by Maurice Blanchot. A philosopher primarily, Blanchot wrote this abstract, challenging novel over the course of nearly ten years.

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Okot p'Bitek

BORN: 1931, Gulu, Uganda

DIED: 1982, Kampala, Uganda

NATIONALITY: Ugandan

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Are Your Teeth White? Then Laugh! (1953)

Song of Lawino: A Lament (1966)

Two Songs: Song of Prisoner and Song of Malaya (1971)

Overview

One of the best-known and most original voices in East African poetry, Okot p'Bitek helped redefine African literature by combining the oral tradition of the native Acholi people of Uganda with contemporary political themes. At the same time he emphasizes the form of Acholi songs, p'Bitek explores the conflict between

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

P'Bitek's famous contemporaries include:

Zulu Sofola (1935–): In addition to being Nigeria's first female playwright, Sofola achieved success as an accomplished musician, theater director, and professor.

Gunpei Yokoi (1941–1997): Yokoi was the head of a team at the Japanese company Nintendo, which created the Game Boy handheld gaming system.

John Gardner (1933–1982): An accomplished medieval scholar, this American novelist's most notable work is *Grendel* (1971), a retelling of the Old English *Beowulf* epic from the point of view of its main villain, the monster Grendel.

Mu'ammar al-Gadhafi (1942–): As Libya's head of state, al-Gadhafi expelled foreigners, closed British and American military bases, and supported international terrorism.

David Malouf (1934–): A prize-winning poet before publishing his first novel, Malouf uses vivid, sensuous descriptions and evocative settings in his works.

Desmond Tutu (1931–): Tutu, the first black Archbishop of Cape Town, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his efforts to unite people of all ethnicities in his country.

Luisa Valenzuela (1938–): The fiction of this Argentine writer deals with violence, political oppression, and cultural repression.

African and European cultures. In challenging the effects of colonialism and Christianity on Africa in his musical poetry, p'Bitek urges his countrymen to evaluate African society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Inspired by Acholi Songs and Dances Born in Gulu, Uganda in 1931, p'Bitek was exposed to the songs and ceremonial dances of the ancient Acholi, a grassland people of the Uganda-Sudan borders, at an early age. His father, a teacher, was a gifted storyteller, while his mother was an accomplished singer of Acholi songs. After studying at King's College in Budo, where he wrote and produced a full-length opera before graduating from the secondary school, p'Bitek published *Are Your Teeth White? Then Laugh!*, also known as *White Teeth*, at the age of twenty-two.

Diverse Talents In 1956, p'Bitek played on Uganda's national soccer team at the Olympic Games held in London and then remained in England to study at schools such as the Institute of Social Anthropology in

Oxford, where he presented his thesis on Acholi traditional songs, and University College, Wales. Returning to Uganda in 1964, p'Bitek assumed a teaching position in the sociology department at Makerere University College in Kampala. He was first recognized as a major voice in African literature with the publication of *Song of Lawino* two years later.

Artistic Festivals Named director of the Uganda National Theatre and Cultural Centre in 1966, p'Bitek soon founded the Gulu Arts Festival, a highly successful celebration of the traditional oral history, dance, and other arts of the Acholi people. After criticizing the government of Uganda under the rule of Prime Minister Milton Obote, p'Bitek was forced to resign his position in 1968, and he moved to Kenya, remaining there throughout the reign of notorious Uganda dictator Idi Amin. While in Kenya, p'Bitek both served as a professor in Nairobi and organized the Kisumu Arts Festival, which was attended by a large number of talented local artists and writers.

Academic Career Throughout his teaching career, p'Bitek was a frequent contributor to such journals as *Traditions*, his articles displaying a variety of intellectual interests and ranging from poems to anthropological essays to literary criticism. Focusing on translating African literature, p'Bitek published 1974's *The Horn of My Love*, a compilation of Acholi folk songs about death, ancient Acholi chiefs, love, and courtship. In 1978, the same year he left Nairobi for the University of Ife in Nigeria, he published *Hare and Hornbill*, a collection of folktales featuring both human and animal characters. After traveling as a visiting lecturer at various universities, including in Texas and Iowa, p'Bitek returned to Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, where he was a professor of creative writing until his death in 1982.

Works in Literary Context

Praised as the first major East African poet to write in English, p'Bitek has influenced a number of other poets. According to scholar K. L. Goodwin, works such as *Song of Lawino* revealed an East African audience for volumes of poetry in English by a single author, thereby demonstrating that East African poetry could consist of more than the casual lyrics or graphic pieces that were typically published in anthologies or periodicals. As p'Bitek's work gained recognition as the unique voice of East Africa, other writers drew inspiration from it, including Ugandan novelist and poet Okello Oculi.

Preserving the Past Within the majority of p'Bitek's poetry and fiction is a plea to save Acholi cultural traditions from Western influences. Along with capturing the evolution of Acholi society and the expressiveness of Acholi song, p'Bitek urges East Africa to avoid succumbing to Western ideas of art. In *Song of Lawino*, for example, Lawino, an illiterate Ugandan housewife, bitterly

complains that Ocol, her university-educated husband, has rejected not only her, but also his own Acholi heritage in favor of more modern ways. Lawino criticizes Ocol's disdain for the African lifestyle, heralding her native civilization as beautiful, meaningful, and satisfying. Through the character of Lawino, who realizes that African society is quickly moving away from its historical and cultural roots, p'Bitek issues a warning for his countrymen not to forget their heritage.

A World Voice Though p'Bitek believed Uganda should be the core of literature and drama in his homeland, his work spoke to a more universal reader. Edward Blishen, in the 1971 introduction to *Song of a Prisoner*, calls p'Bitek “a master of writing for the human voice—and sometimes, I suspect, for the animal or insect voice, too.” Blishen goes on to say that *Song of Lawino* “is a poem about the situation in which we all find ourselves, being dragged away from all our roots at an ever-quickening rate.” Bahadur Tejani points out p'Bitek's way of encompassing more than a specific people in Africa; Tejani, in speaking about a particular section in *Song of Malaya*, says that “the malaya's song is for everyone. The sailor coming ashore with ‘a time bomb pulsating’ in his loin, the released detainee with ‘granaries full to overflow,’ the debauching Sikhs at the nightclubs with heads broken open, and the vegetarian Indian ‘breeding like a rat’ . . . Okot's merciless satire takes toll of a whole humanity[.]” Tejani suggests that, as shown in *Song of a Prisoner*, p'Bitek's message is one that readers can all understand: “[A]t least if we can't have social and political justice, let's have the freedom of spirit to sing and dance.”

Works in Critical Context

Both p'Bitek's poetry and academic works have sparked debate among scholars. Because he condemns a blind acceptance of Westernization and, to a certain degree, modernization, p'Bitek has evoked negative analysis from Western critics. He has been criticized by British reviewers for what they view as his extreme Africanism and nationalism. Furthermore, feminist critics have opposed p'Bitek's one-dimensional, often satirical portrayal of African women.

The Songs While some critics have focused on the musical qualities of p'Bitek's poetry, most academics address p'Bitek's concern with the social and political themes of freedom, justice, and morality. For example, *Song of Malaya* (“malaya” translates as “whore”) attacks society's basic ideas of good and bad. Bahadur Tejani describes the work as “one of the most daring challenges to society from the malaya's own mouth, to see if we can stand up to her rigorous scrutiny of ourselves.”

Written after the death of his friend, politician Tom Mboya, p'Bitek's *Song of a Prisoner* details a cynical search for justice. In the introduction to *Song of a Prisoner*, Edward Blishen notes that p'Bitek's poetry is musical and entertaining even as it expresses the agony of his

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In the preface to the essay collection *Africa's Cultural Revolution*, p'Bitek writes, “Africa must re-examine herself critically. She must discover her true self, and rid herself of all ‘apemanship.’ For only then can she begin to develop a culture of her own. . . . As she has broken the political bondage of colonialism, she must continue the economic and cultural revolution until she refuses to be led by the nose by foreigners.” Such concern for the preservation of African culture from the invasion of Western influences is evident throughout p'Bitek's works. Other works that explore the clash between two cultures include the following:

Orphan (1968), a poetry collection by Okello Oculi.

Through allegory, this work addresses the modern African social and political situations within a framework of traditional village wisdom.

The Joy Luck Club (1989), a novel by Amy Tan. Composed of four sections with four narrators in each section, Tan's novel expresses the conflicts between Chinese immigrant mothers and their Americanized daughters.

House Made of Dawn (1952), a novel by Scott Momaday. Caught between two worlds—life on his reservation and American industrialized society—the main character in this novel embodies the Native Americans' struggle to assimilate standards of the white culture into their heritage.

American Son: A Novel (2001), a novel by Brian Ascalon Roley. Roley represents the Filipino immigrant experience in the early 1990s through the dark portrayal of two brothers as they struggle to assimilate into the alienating culture of Southern California.

people. Interpreting the work as an allegory for the turbulent socio-political situation in East Africa during the 1970s, Tanure Ojaide observes that “[p'Bitek's] viewpoint in *Prisoner* is pessimistic about Africa's political future, for there is no positive alternative to the bad leader. The successor could be equally bad or worse.”

Responses to Literature

1. Contrast the *Song of Lawino* with the *Song of Ocol*. In a 5–7-page essay, identify and describe how the poems dramatize a clash between cultures. Use examples from each text to support your opinions.
2. Some academics assert that African literature written in English is not really African. With another classmate, research the ways in which English as spoken and written by people in African countries differs from what you know as “standard,” or even American English. What is the origin of Africa's English and why would African nations adopt the English

language? Collect your findings in an organized oral report for the rest of your class.

3. Evaluate the following statement and be prepared to defend your position in a roundtable class discussion: Because of differences in language, politics, and culture, Western critics are not qualified to analyze or teach African literature.
4. Write an essay in which you describe what features and characteristics of *Song of Lawino* you think reflect an oral tradition. Incorporate in your essay the ways in which you think p'Bitek's training as an anthropologist might have affected how he creatively presents issues within the context of the poem.

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Samuel Pepys

BORN: 1633, London, England

DIED: 1703, Clapham, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Memoirs Relating to the State of the Royal Navy in England (1690)

The Diary of Samuel Pepys (1825)



Samuel Pepys *Pepys, Samuels*, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

British author Samuel Pepys (pronounced "Peeps") fused together two opposite personality traits—he had a chaotic, unbridled personal life bursting with creative energy and physical passions, but he also had the ordered and disciplined mind of a highly successful bureaucrat. For over thirty years, he undertook the massive project of restructuring the entire British navy. But starting around this same time, he also wrote an astonishing diary, published in 1825 as *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, that, better than any other primary source, gives us a detailed portrait of the dynamic Restoration period in British history. Pepys essentially invented the form of the personal diary as it is known today.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

English Civil War Marred Childhood Pepys was born in London in 1633, the son of a tailor and a butcher's sister. During his childhood, the English Civil War broke out. Lasting from 1642 to 1651, the war was a conflict between royalist forces who supported King Charles I (a Catholic-leaning believer in the divine right of kings) and Puritan rebels led by Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell's forces wanted a shift of power away from the king, the landed aristocracy, and the Church of England and more toward Parliament,

the urban merchant classes, and Puritan theology. The rebels won, and Charles I was executed in 1649. Great Britain became a commonwealth, and Cromwell was its leader.

Pepys was educated in Puritan schools, and in 1650, he entered Cambridge University. He graduated in 1653 with few prospects and little money, and in 1655 he married the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth St. Michel, a French Protestant who was even poorer than he. The couple was supported by Pepys's cousin Sir Edward Montagu, later the first Earl of Sandwich. Pepys became a secretary for Montagu, who was a powerful naval officer.

Began Writing Diary The year 1660 marked an important transition for Pepys and for all of England. Cromwell died in 1658, succeeded by his son Richard Cromwell, but by then the public was dissatisfied with Puritanical rule. Parliament voted to restore Charles II, the eldest son of Charles I, to the throne. The following period (1660–1700) was known as the Restoration. The first entry in the most revealing and intimate account of the Restoration period, Pepys's diary, is appropriately dated January 1, 1660.

Pepys accompanied Montagu on the voyage to Holland that returned Charles II to England. That same year, Pepys was appointed clerk at the Navy Office. The British navy at the time was totally chaotic by today's standards: Ships might or might not be owned by the state; there was no clear distinction between civilian and military sailors; no regular systems were in place for supplying the ships or paying the men; officers were likely to be courtiers appointed without experience; bookkeeping varied from person to person, and taking bribes was considered one of the privileges of office. Pepys pioneered thousands of small changes that would eventually transform this chaos into an orderly and professional navy.

Increased Naval Responsibilities When the Dutch War (a conflict between England and what would become the Netherlands over Dutch domination of world trade) broke out in 1665, Pepys was appointed surveyor general of the Victualing Office in addition to his regular duties for the navy. He remained at his post throughout the Great Plague of 1665 when most other inhabitants of London had left to avoid an outbreak of the deadly bubonic plague, a bacterial infection transmitted by fleas carried by rats. Pepys saved the Navy Office from the Great Fire of 1666 (when as much as 80 percent of London was destroyed by the blaze) by having the buildings around it destroyed in advance. Once the Dutch War ended in 1667 with a Dutch victory, Pepys established his reputation as a skilled public servant by eloquently and honestly defending the navy's management of the disastrous war before angry committees in the House of Commons.

Served in Parliament Pepys's appearance before Parliament evidently whetted his own aspirations for a seat. He was elected to Parliament in 1673 and again in 1679. In 1673, King Charles II transferred Pepys from the Navy Office to the secretaryship of the Admiralty. At the time of the Popish Plot in 1678, a time of anti-Catholic paranoia in the wake of a failed attempt to assassinate Charles II, the Whig opponents of one of Pepys's political allies accused Pepys of giving naval secrets to the (Catholic) French. Pepys resigned his office and was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1679, but the charges against him were unfounded, and Pepys was freed in 1680.

Meanwhile, Pepys's marriage was under strain starting in 1668 after his wife discovered him groping the household maid. The history of the affair, and the emotional turbulence for all concerned, is described in memorable detail in the diary. Pepys's wife died of a fever in 1669. His main companions afterwards were many of the most brilliant men of the Restoration, including John Evelyn, Christopher Wren, and John Dryden.

Personal Restoration In 1684 Pepys was elected president of the Royal Society, a prestigious organization of scientists, intellectuals, and (in Pepys's case) collectors and cataloguers of exotica. Pepys was restored to the secretaryship of the Admiralty, retaining the post until his voluntary retirement, with his eyesight failing, when dramatic political changes came through England in 1688. At that time, King James II, who had succeeded his elder brother Charles II in 1685, was overthrown because he attempted to restore Roman Catholicism to Britain. James II was replaced on the throne by his daughter, Mary II, and her Dutch husband, William III. This transfer of power was known as the Glorious Revolution.

Retiring in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution was completed, Pepys moved to the London suburb of Clapham. There, he devoted time to reading and writing. He spent much time writing what became the only work he saw published *Memories Relating to the State of the Royal Navy of England* (1690). Pepys died on May 26, 1703.

Works in Literary Context

Advent of Modern Diary With *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Pepys essentially invented the modern diary, if by that word we mean an informal account of the thoughts, passions, events, and gossip of the day. Before the diary, however, there was the Puritan spiritual autobiography, to which he would have had some exposure in the Puritan schools he attended as a child. Most Puritans endorsed John Calvin's theology of "predestination," or the idea that if God truly knows everything and biblical prophecies are true, then God must know the future, which includes knowing who will go to heaven or hell even before they are born. Calvin believed that each

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pepys's famous contemporaries include:

Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus (or Tschirnhausen) (1651–1708): German mathematician, physicist, physician, and philosopher. He is most familiar today, however, for the chemical experiments that led to the invention of European porcelain. His books include *Medicina mentis sive artis inveniendi praecepta generali* (1687).

Arthur Annesley, first Earl of Anglesey (1614–1686): Irish politician. Annesley represented Dublin in the British parliament under Richard Cromwell. During a time when the English led brutal attacks against the Irish to stamp out political dissent and crush Catholicism, Annesley argued for moderation and nonviolence. He was a leader in bringing about the restoration of Charles II.

Jeremy Collier (1650–1726): English bishop. Collier is best known for his pious attack on the sexually charged Restoration comedies of William Congreve and John Vanbrugh in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698).

Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné, Comtesse de Grignan (1646–1705): French aristocrat. When she got pregnant, married, and moved from Paris to Provence, she began one of the most remarkable series of correspondence in literary history. For the next thirty years, she exchanged over a thousand letters with her mother, sometimes writing up to twenty pages a day.

William Bradford (1663–1752): English printer and settler of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. His arrest in 1692 for offending the colonial Quaker leaders of Philadelphia helped shape the early debate over freedom of the press in early America. The jury was split in his trial, delivering no verdict.

Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (1667–1743): Italian aristocrat. De Medici was the last of the powerful family who held sway over Florence for over four hundred years. Because of their banking interests, the Medicis were at one point the most wealthy family in Europe. She willed all of the vast Medici property to the city of Florence.

human being is born predestined for his or her fate and has a duty to discover the path that God has already laid out for them. Puritans were therefore encouraged to keep spiritual journals, noting the small coincidences and subtle clues in their lives that together sketch a map of one's life.

Individualism Pepys articulated the new modern *individual*, moving through his days according to his

own shifting passions, curiosities, likes and dislikes, speculations, and high ambitions. In this sense, Pepys reflected the same cultural influences that would later become the mode of the modern novel—a genre that explores individuality, subjectivity, the small details of daily life, the highs and lows of love and marriage, the foibles and confessions of imperfect people trying to make the most of their lives, and the relationship of the individual to larger society.

Public versus Private One recurring theme of the diary concerns tensions between the public, the private, and the idea of “secret.” Pepys sometimes goes to extremes in one direction, but most often he ends up with a kind of compromise. As he writes chronologically of his day, he will often move fluidly between his public duties as a navy bureaucrat, his private life as a husband or friend, and his secret life as a confessional writer or adulterous lover. In one famous passage about the coronation day of Charles II on April 23, 1661, he carefully details the grand public ceremonies of the event, his personal concerns with the location of his wife in the crowd, and his private bodily requirements of urinating and vomiting.

The frequent shifts between the public and the personal are captured in the sometimes bizarre writing style of the diary. Pepys kept his diary secret, stuffing it in cabinets and drawers. Most of it is written in shorthand, but when he wanted to be particularly secretive about something like a sexual affair, he would slip into an improvised mish-mash of numerous foreign languages. When the massive manuscript of the diary was discovered among Pepys's papers in the early 1800s, it was entirely and painstakingly decoded. The hapless transcriber failed to notice until after he was finished that one of the other books in the Pepys collection was his customized shorthand manual.

Reflection on Restoration Culture The Restoration was a period obsessed with novelty, passions, and enthusiasm, all processed through a balancing sense of reason, self-control, and social decorum. Pepys's diary is full of examples. Pepys was curious about whatever was new and exciting, whether it was shipbuilding, the new sciences, music, languages, prints, ballads, mathematics, or the theater. He was enthusiastic about beauty, especially the beauty of music and women; yet he labored constantly to resist the temptations of drink, the theater, and the numerous young women whom he pawed in closet, kitchen, or coach. He was a compulsive collector, acquiring countless ship models, scientific instruments, portraits, books, and coins—and his logical side led him to catalog all of it very precisely. Pepys's entire diary can be thought of as the most sophisticated expression of his instinct to collect and possess.

Influence Puritan spiritual autobiographies were influences on some early novels, particularly Daniel Defoe's

Robinson Crusoe (1719). But most novels are far from Puritan theology and deal more often with the free choices that characters make as they shape their own destiny. Pepys's diary helps bridge the gap although his diary was not a direct influence on the early novel, as it was not widely known until the twentieth century. Pepys wrote his diary for self-exploration and as a creative outlet rather than out of religious duty.

Works in Critical Context

Pepys's diary was not transcribed and published until 1825. Even then it appeared in excerpts, and the first virtually complete edition was issued between 1893 and 1899. It was not until the 1970s that a fully decoded, uncensored version was available. The critical history of Pepys's diary, therefore, is oddly dislocated from his own period. Pepys was a well-known public servant and socialite in his own time, but even his literary friends such as John Dryden knew nothing about his diary and the remarkable literary talent that it would reveal.

The Diary of Samuel Pepys The diary was a revelation when it first appeared. One reviewer, Francis Jeffrey, wrote in 1825, "[We] can scarcely say that we wish it a page shorter; and are of opinion, that there is very little of it which does not help us to understand the character of his times and his contemporaries, better than we should ever have done without it; and makes us feel more assured that we comprehend the great historical events of the age, and the people who bore a part in them." No doubt many Victorian critics would not have approved of the scandalous sexuality in the diary, but these passages were generally not published until the more permissive late twentieth century.

Since Pepys was a theater lover, literary critics have regularly turned to the diary as a rare source of firsthand accounts of the great age of Restoration drama. Recent critics have been interested in the ways in which Pepys defines the modern man, analyzing the complexity of his self-portrait. Cultural criticism and New Historicism often draws upon Pepys, noting the many ways in which his collections demonstrate aspects of an emerging material culture in the late seventeenth century, and how his alternating patterns of concealment and revelation are indicative of the new mode of self-invention that characterized the period.

Responses to Literature

1. Pepys was very careful to hide his diary and write it in ways that are difficult to understand. Who, therefore, is the intended audience for the diary? Does your answer to this matter relate to how we read the diary today, and what value we assign to it? Create a presentation of your conclusions.
2. Look for phrases in the diary where Pepys expresses the extremes of pleasure. How many times do you

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Since Pepys's time, the diary form has proven to be a popular mode of storytelling. Writers such as Anais Nin, for example, have published their diaries, while other writers have adapted the form to fiction. The accumulation of small details in a diary establishes a sense of realism, while the intimate, confessional tone allows readers an emotional connection to the narrator. Well-known works written in the diary form include:

A Diary from Dixie (1905), a diary by Mary Boykin Chesnut. Chesnut's wonderfully written diary details her experiences on a South Carolina plantation throughout the Civil War. The diary was republished in a new edition, edited by prominent scholar C. Vann Woodward, in 1981 and won Pulitzer Prize in 1982.

Lonelygirl15 (2006), an Internet series. More than two hundred thousand viewers regularly followed the video diary entries that the anonymous "Lonelygirl15" posted on the video sharing site YouTube. The compelling storyline of a girl involved in a religious cult and her struggles with her restrictive parents intrigued readers, even after the series was exposed as a fake.

The Diary of a Young Girl (1952), a diary by Anne Frank. Begun on her thirteenth birthday, this diary covers two years of Frank's life while she and her family hid from the Nazis during Hitler's occupation of the Netherlands. The family was discovered, and Frank died in a Jewish concentration camp in 1945. The diary has become one of the most important and useful documents for understanding the history of World War II.

The Diary of Virginia Woolf (1915–1941), five volumes of diaries by Virginia Woolf. Woolf had one of the most wide-ranging intellects of her era, and she was friends with most of the great thinkers of her time, from Sigmund Freud to James Joyce. Her diary reveals the wide sweep of her emotional life, and it is a near-epic document about the creative process of writing.

find him saying something is the "best," the "greatest," etc.? Note some of the places where Pepys expresses "enthusiasm," and then do some research on what exactly this word meant in Pepys's time and why it was controversial. Write an essay about your findings.

3. What can Pepys's diary tell us as a firsthand account of the most significant historical events of the era: the restoration of Charles II, the plague of 1666, the Great Fire of London, and the emergence of Restoration comedy? What does the diary offer that straightforward historical accounts leave out? Write a paper about your conclusions.

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Arturo Pérez-Reverte

BORN: 1951, Cartagena, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Flanders Panel (1990)

The Club Dumas (1993)

The Seville Communion (1995)

Overview

The Spanish novelist Arturo Pérez-Reverte may have been aided in his writing career by his popularity as a war correspondent and television personality, but it is his



Arturo Pérez-Reverte Lalo Yasky / Wire Image / Getty Images

intelligence and literary acumen that have allowed him to remain a best-selling author in his native country and around the world. His novels have been translated into some nineteen languages and have sold more than 3 million copies. Five of his literary thrillers have been translated into English.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Avid Reader of Novels of the Golden Age of Spain

Pérez-Reverte was born November 24, 1951, in Cartagena, Spain. His childhood on the Mediterranean coast in the province of Murcia has had a profound and continual impact on his life and writings, a fact demonstrated through his strong interest in scuba diving and long-term sojourns on his private sailboat, where he spends time composing his novels. Another childhood interest that he still maintains is reading; during his youth he read a book every two to three days. From age nine to eighteen, he read thousands of books, with an abiding interest in the Spanish Golden Age of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as the Spanish novel of the nineteenth

century, a time period and genre present in many of his own narratives.

War Correspondent After obtaining his undergraduate degree in political science and journalism, Pérez-Reverte worked on oil tankers in the early 1970s in order to see the world. His time at sea also allowed him to follow to a certain degree in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, both of whom had been employed in the merchant marines. After only a few years, however, he switched professions, working from 1973 to 1985 as a reporter for the Spanish newspaper *Pueblo*, specializing in reports on terrorism, illegal trafficking, and armed conflict. During his years as a journalist—from 1985 to 1994—he worked for Televisión Española—covering wars in Cyprus, Lebanon, the Western Sahara, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Falkland Islands, Chad, Libya, the Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Croatia, and Sarajevo, as well as the coup in Tunisia, the Romanian Revolution, and the Gulf War. Twice he disappeared and was presumed dead: once in Western Sahara in 1975, and once in Eritrea in 1977. In an interview with Alix Wilber, Pérez-Reverte commented that war “was a fascinating, passionately interesting adventure for a 20-year-old youth. I discovered horror later, when I started to see that war was not an adventure.”

Almost all of Pérez-Reverte’s novels have war as a backdrop to a critical examination of both Spanish society and human nature in general. His first published novel, dealing with the Spanish War of Independence, appeared in 1986 under the title *The Hussar. The Fencing Master* (1988), translated from the Spanish in 1998, is, however, the first novel he wrote. Set in the fall of 1868 shortly before the ouster of Queen Isabel II, the plot centers on the fencing expert don Jaime Astarloa, who, having fallen in love with doña Adela de Otero, a mysterious Italian woman desirous of learning don Jaime’s unstoppable fencing thrust, is soon swept up in the world of politics, secrecy, and betrayal. In this novel the author is portraying the society and day of 1868 Spain but embellishing that history with the events that he witnessed as a war correspondent in places such as Beirut, Sarajevo, Eritrea, and El Salvador.

Leaving Journalism In 1991, Pérez-Reverte covered the Gulf War and the war in Croatia. From 1992 to 1994 he was a war correspondent to Sarajevo, experiencing many of the events that he later placed in *Comanche Territory: A Report* (1994), published shortly after he left his full-time job at Televisión Española. His departure from journalism was not unexpected. As early as March 1993, Pérez-Reverte was taking a cynical view of his life as a reporter and program host, once stating at the onset of the *Code One Program* that he hosted: “Today you are going to see a really bloody program with all the horror that you can imagine and even more. It is so disgusting that I refuse to watch it. Goodbye,” at which point he walked off the set.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pérez-Reverte’s famous contemporaries include:

- Dan Rather** (1931–): American journalist who covered the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
- Ronald Reagan** (1911–2004): The fortieth president of the United States of America, who held office from 1981 until 1989.
- Umberto Eco** (1932–): Italian novelist who has effectively woven semiotics, or the study of meaning, into the plots of his novels.
- Kingsley Amis** (1922–1995): British writer known for his satiric novels.
- Sandra Cisneros** (1954–): Mexican American author who has received acclaim for her representation of young Latinas in America, particularly in *The House on Mango Street*.

By this time the author-journalist had already become something of a celebrity. On January 19, 1993, he had received the Asturias–92 de Periodismo prize for his coverage of the civil war in Yugoslavia, and on November 3, 1993, he received the Premio Ondas for his *Law of the Street*, a five-year Radio Nacional de España program on marginalized members of society. Additionally, in March the movie version of *The Fencing Master* won the Goya Prize for best adapted screenplay and best original music. Also in 1993, he was selected by the French magazine *Lire* as one of the ten best foreign novelists.

Further Success with Fiction With the release of the multiple-award-winning *The Club Dumas* in 1993, Pérez-Reverte began something of a roll. He followed up his success with *The Seville Communion* in 1995 and *The Nautical Chart* in 2000. Pérez-Reverte has continued to publish frequently in recent years, even returning to his abiding interest in the sea in *Cape Trafalgar* in 2004.

Works in Literary Context

Arturo Pérez-Reverte, one of the leading detective fiction writers of contemporary Spain, has successfully built a career since 1986 with a style that harks back to the historical and pamphlet novels of the nineteenth century. He is also one of the most widely known and read Spanish writers outside of Spain. Often compared, particularly in France, to Alexandre Dumas *père*, Pérez-Reverte’s works have been translated into more than thirty languages, adapted for the cinema, anthologized, and honored with multiple awards in various countries. Pérez-Reverte himself, however, considers his fictions to be simply a rewriting of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Pérez-Reverte was no stranger to the dangers of reporting from the frontlines of wars. Here are some works that analyze the lives of war correspondents:

A Mighty Heart (2007), a film directed by Michael Winterbottom. This film is Mariane Pearl's recounting of the life and death of her husband, Daniel Pearl, a journalist who was killed when he was investigating a possible connection between al Qaeda and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence.

The Best and the Brightest (1972), a nonfiction work by David Halberstam. In this work, Halberstam covers the Vietnam War and events leading to it.

Active Service (1899), a novel by Stephen Crane. Like Pérez-Reverte, Crane decided not merely to describe his own story as a war correspondent but to recreate his experiences in the Greco-Turkish War in novel form.

many books that he has read and loved in his life, manipulating them in a manner that details the historical implications and cultural influences on the modern world.

Historical Novel? Detective Stories? In a 1999 interview with Alix Wilber, Pérez-Reverte stated that he never really wanted to be a writer but that he began to write books after traveling abroad and feeling a desire to bring a sense of order to his world. This desire is also reflected in the characters within his works, characters that cling to their memories or culture in order to survive better in a world that they do not like. While some critics argue that Pérez-Reverte writes historical novels, this claim is true only in the sense that he uses history to expound upon the present-day conflicts he has witnessed as a journalist. As he stated in an interview with Ron Hogan: "The person who sees in my novels simple detective stories is making a mistake, as is the reader who sees them as historical novels." As José Belmonte Serrano writes, "In the magical pot he continues cooking ... History, art, and the Gothic novel.

Intertextuality Pérez-Reverte's love of and incorporation of history can best be seen in terms of his works' intertextuality—their reference to other pieces of literature. *The Club Dumas* is perhaps more intertextual than any other of the author's works. Pérez-Reverte noted to Wilber that "some students from the University of Salamanca did a paper on the implicit and explicit literature in *The Club Dumas*, and there were about 500 titles, some of which are cited expressly, others not quoted but indirectly referred to. . . . I must confess there were some that even I had not foreseen. But I will say that there were

others I knew were there, and that nobody caught." This novel is one instance of the author's incorporation of other texts into his own stories.

Works in Critical Context

Arturo Pérez-Reverte's gift at interweaving history and sweeping metaphors to enhance and expand upon the plots of his novels has received near universal acclaim. Those who have disapproved of some aspects of Pérez-Reverte's generally see only minor flaws, however, and typically deem the entire work worthy.

The Club Dumas Pérez-Reverte's most acclaimed novel is *The Club Dumas* (1993), translated into English in 1997. The novel revolves around a rare-book scout, Lucas Corso, who is asked to find the last two of the three existing copies of the Renaissance work *The Book of the Nine Doors to the Kingdom of Shadows*. Margot Livesey of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote, "Mr. Pérez-Reverte . . . is extremely good on the business of book collecting. Among the pleasures of *The Club Dumas* is the intimate sense it conveys of this highly specialized type of commerce. . . . [He] does an admirable job of describing these bibliophiles, as well as of creating works like *The Nine Doors*, whose illustrations are reproduced and described in fascinating detail." A *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer reported, "Readers get, together with a mass of tables, diagrams, clues, decoys, and nudgings about intertextuality . . . all twenty-seven illustrations, so that they can play spot-the-differences, and draw their own conclusions." The reviewer called *The Club Dumas* a "wayward and moderately enjoyable" mystery novel. *Booklist* contributor Brian Kenney labeled the novel "witty, suspenseful, and intellectually provocative." Although Livesey said she found herself "growing impatient" with some of the plot twists and narrative techniques, she called the book an "intelligent and delightful novel." *The Club Dumas* was adapted as the 1999 film *The Ninth Gate*, starring the American actor Johnny Depp.

The Flanders Panel *The Flanders Panel*, published in 1994, is a translation of Pérez-Reverte's 1990 Spanish novel *La Tabla de Flandes*. It belongs to the genre of postmodern mysteries made popular by Italian author Umberto Eco, but in the opinion of the *Times Literary Supplement*'s Michael Eaude, "Pérez-Reverte's plotting is much tighter and his narrative is more exciting." The novel's heroine, Julia, is an art restorer who discovers a murder mystery hidden in a medieval painting of a chess game. The game's moves are continued in the form of messages and events in Julia's life amid the Madrid art world; gradually, she realizes that she has become a target in a centuries-old mystery.

Discussing the book with reservations about its "undistinguished" prose style and stereotyped characters, Eaude maintained that "*The Flanders Panel* is never boring." The critic commended the way Pérez-Reverte

worked background material, including chess moves, into the plot, and noted “a number of shocking twists.” “Above all,” EAUDE concluded, “Pérez-Reverte makes use of a vivid imagination.” PRAUDITS also came from a reviewer from the *London Observer*, who called the novel a “delightfully absorbing confection” and “ingenious hocus pocus from start to finish.” A *Publishers Weekly* contributor characterized the novel as “uneven but intriguing.” That reviewer, like EAUDE, faulted the characters as underdeveloped and also felt that the mystery was solved unconvincingly and conventionally. The reviewer responded most favorably to the author’s use of chess metaphors for human actions and to Julia’s analyses of the painting, termed “clever and quite suspenseful.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Club Dumas* and then view the adaptation of it, *The Ninth Gate*. What are some of the key differences between these two representations? In a short essay, combine your analysis of the differences between the two with a few observations on how you responded to each. (Consider which representation was more appealing and why, and why would this be or not be appealing to a contemporary audience.)
2. Pérez-Reverte does not establish a specific time for the events told in *The Club Dumas*. In which time period do you see the events occurring? Can you pick out a few clues that indicate this time period is the intended one? Could the novel actually have a sense of timelessness? What do you think?
3. As a war correspondent, Pérez-Reverte has seen and written about many scenes that have left lifelong impressions. What kind of skills do you think a correspondent of this sort would need to be successful at the task at hand? In Pérez-Reverte’s writings, is there a particular passage that stands out as more realistic than others because of this? If you were a correspondent today, is there a political hot spot that you would like to cover as a reporter? Which one and why?

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Francesco Petrararch

BORN: 1304, Arezzo, Italy

DIED: 1374, Arquà Petrarca, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

On His Own Ignorance and That of Many (1367)

Africa (1396)



Francesco Petrararch Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Canzoniere: The Sonnets and Stanzas of Petrarch
(1470)

Triumphs (1470)

Overview

Regarded as the father of Italian humanism, Francesco Petrarch brought the classical world of Greece and Rome to life with his enthusiastic scholarship of the words and wisdom of ancient writers. Poet, philosopher, and moralist, Petrarch captured the vitality and variety of life in his work. He is recognized for the lyric poetry in his *Canzoniere: The Sonnets and Stanzas of Petrarch* (1470), a collection of poems expressing his unrequited love for a woman named Laura. Primarily, however, Petrarch is remembered as the writer who popularized the Italian sonnet form—also referred to as the Petrarchan sonnet—that influenced poets throughout Europe for more than three hundred years.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Intellect Flowered during Early Renaissance

Born Francesco Petrarca (but commonly called Petrarch in English) in 1304 in Arezzo, in what is now Italy, he was the oldest son of a notary who had been banished from Florence in 1301 because of his political activities. (At the time, the Italian peninsula was divided into city-states, like Florence, as well as larger territories like the Kingdom of Naples. The city-states in particular were emerging as centers of commerce, the arts, and sciences. Because many city-states were a conduit of goods and learning from the Byzantine and Islamic empires, they provided great impetus to the developing Renaissance, which was a flowering of the arts, literature, music, and science. (The Renaissance lasted from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries in Italy.)

In 1312, the family moved to Avignon, France, where Petrarch's father established himself as a successful lawyer. After being privately educated by tutors, Petrarch began studying civil law at the University of Montpellier in 1316. Extraordinarily bright and intellectually curious, he spent so much of his allowance on the works of classical poets that his angry father once burned the young Petrarch's library except for works by Cicero and Virgil.

Wrote First Poems Around this same time, Petrarch's mother died, inspiring him to write his earliest known poem in tribute to her. In 1320, Petrarch and his younger brother entered law school in Bologna, where they remained until the death of their father in 1326. Abandoning his legal studies and quickly spending his inheritance, Petrarch settled in Avignon and entered minor orders at the papal court there, planning to pursue a religious career. (In 1309, Avignon had been chosen by Pope Clement V as his residence. Thus the seat of the papacy was Avignon instead of Rome, a situation that

lasted until 1378. Clement and his successors who made the city the center of the church were French.)

Love for Laura According to literary legend, while attending services on Good Friday in 1327, Petrarch saw and fell in love with a woman he thereafter called Laura. For the rest of his life, he wrote verse about his unrequited love for her, poems he initially collected into a volume around 1336 and from then on reworked.

Petrarch became a private chaplain to Giovanni Cardinal Colonna in 1330, a position he would hold for almost twenty years. During those years, Petrarch proved a prolific writer, producing not only poetry in both Latin and Italian, but also essays on topics as diverse as destiny, famous people, religious life, and the nature of ignorance. As he traveled on diplomatic business, Petrarch composed or revised most of his major works and maintained faithful correspondence with friends, scholars, and the nobility of Europe, as evidenced by the hundreds of letters he wrote.

Poet Laureate Included among Petrarch's major poetic works are *Africa* (1396) and *Triumphs* (1470). *Africa* is an epic poem celebrating the victory of the Roman general Scipio Africanus over the Carthaginian general Hannibal in the Second Punic War. The poem is written in Latin hexameter, while *Triumphs* is written in Italian terza rima—lines of eleven syllables, arranged in groups of three and rhyming “ababcbcdc”—the measure Dante uses in his *Divine Comedy*. Petrarch's most popular work during the Renaissance, *Triumphs*, a long allegorical poem, depicts six stages of the soul's spiritual journey: Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity. The popularity of this work was the result of its encyclopedic catalog of famous people, its visionary outlook, and its emphasis on salvation through God.

Because his works were widely distributed, Petrarch was admired for his talents as a lyric poet and famous for his passion for the unknown Laura. He received simultaneous invitations to be named poet laureate in Rome and Paris in 1340 and ultimately accepted the position in Rome. On Easter Sunday a year later, in an elaborate coronation ceremony held in the Palace of the Senate on the Capitoline Hill, Petrarch was named the poet laureate of Rome. In the classical tradition, Petrarch was crowned with laurel leaves. It is believed that no ceremony of such magnitude had taken place for over a thousand years.

Focused on Seniles at End of Life After years of traveling and writing, Petrarch went to Padua, in June 1361 to avoid the Milan outbreak of the Black Plague—a deadly pandemic of the bacterium commonly known as the bubonic plague—that had taken the lives of Petrarch's sons, the woman believed to have been his beloved Laura, and several of his friends, including Cardinal Colonna. In Padua he began a new collection, *Seniles*.

In the fall of 1362, Petrarch moved to Venice, where he received a house in exchange for the bequest of his library to the city, residing there until Francesco da

Carrara, his patron in Padua, gave him some land in Arquà, near Padua. In 1370, Petrarch retired to a house he had built there and studied, worked on *Triumphs* and *Canzoniere*, and received friends and family. At the time of his death in July 1374, Petrarch was working on a biographical letter intended to end the *Seniles*.

Works in Literary Context

Petrarch's work is filled with extended metaphors and references to classical antiquity, features that exemplify Renaissance poetry. He is widely believed to have been influenced by the study of Greek and Latin and was recognized for reviving interest in the classical languages. In particular, he emulated famous Romans Virgil, Cicero, and Seneca in his work and wrote biographies of famous Romans, *On Illustrious Men* (begun c. 1337). Petrarch was also influenced by the Italian sonnet, a form with an octet rhyming in the pattern "abbaabba" and a sestet following the pattern "cdccde." He is credited with popularizing the Italian sonnet, and it is generally regarded as his most important contribution to English writers.

Importance of Italian and Latin Having lived both in Provence and in Italy and having been a student of the classical lyric, Petrarch was the inheritor of an ancient and thriving tradition. Despite his notion that Latin was a more noble instrument of expression, he must have sensed that the Italian language provided him the means of externalizing the subtlest nuances of his inmost feelings and thoughts. Although many of his Latin compositions are more forward-looking, the *Triumphs*, which is medieval in design, and the *Canzoniere*, which belongs to an ancient tradition of love lyrics, have remained the most popular, perhaps because they were written in the vernacular and because they reflect Petrarch's own highly refined sensibilities and his wondrous skill with a language that was not wholly his own.

Laura and the Canzoniere In its final form, the *Canzoniere* contains 366 poems: 317 sonnets, twenty-nine canzoni (songs), nine sestinas, seven ballads, and four madrigals. The collection is divided into two sections. Composed of 266 poems, the first section primarily focuses on Laura during her lifetime, with some political, moral, and miscellaneous verse interspersed. The poems in the second section are memories of Laura after her death. For the most part, the narrator of the *Canzoniere* contemplates his passion for Laura, the suffering caused by unrequited love, and his efforts to free himself from his desire for an unobtainable woman. The last poem of the volume closes with a plea to the Virgin Mary to end the narrator's heartache. While the existence and identity of Laura remain unknown, it is obvious that Petrarch loved her through the poetry he created, and critics have determined that she has served as the embodiment of feminine virtue and beauty for generations of poets.

Influence Petrarch's influence on the literary world was immediate and vast. Most all of the great European

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Petrarch's famous contemporaries include:

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375): Italian author. A contemporary of Petrarch, Boccaccio is the author of *The Decameron* (c. 1353), a collection of tales told by seven ladies and three men who are fleeing Florence to escape the plague.

John of Gaunt (1340–1399): English royalty. The father of King Henry IV, Gaunt was a prominent political figure during the reign of King Richard II, as well as Geoffrey Chaucer's patron.

Inca Roca (birth and death dates unknown): Inca ruler. Roca ruled from around 1350 to 1380, and organized schools for boys of the imperial class.

Kazimierz III Wielki, Kazimierz the Great (1309–1370): Polish king. The last king of Poland of the Piast dynasty, Kazimierz the Great helped create a strong, stable nation by establishing peace with the Czechs in 1334.

Andrew of Wyntoun (c.1350–c.1425): Scottish poet. Wyntoun wrote *The Orgynale Cronykil* (c. 1420), a history of the world from creation to the accession of James I.

Nicholas Trivet (c.1258–c.1334): English prior and author. Trivet is best remembered for writing three histories in the 1320s: an Anglo-Norman chronicle that covers the creation to 1285, which contained the story of Constance later told by Chaucer; *Annals of Six Kings of England 1136–1307* (c. 1320), which provided guidance for Edward I during his reign; and *Historia ab orbe Conditā* (c. 1327), an encyclopedic history influenced by Vincent of Beauvais.

writers continued Petrarch's legacy, whether through imitation or translation. Italian poets Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, Spanish author Luis de Góngora y Argote, French poet Pierre de Ronsard, Portuguese writer Luis de Camoëns—Petrarch provided an innovative, captivating form for all of these writers. Indeed, even much of the English poetry by such writers as Chaucer, Donne, Wyatt, Surrey, and Shakespeare owes its craft to Petrarch, who introduced the technique of cataloging physical perfections, along with the resulting feelings such adoration inspires.

Works in Critical Context

Critics consider Petrarch not only one of the greatest love poets in all of world literature, but also the founder of humanism, the intellectual, literary, and scientific movement that based every branch of learning on the culture and literature of classical antiquity. His works in the Italian sonnet form are generally regarded as his most significant contribution to literature. Numerous critics have credited Petrarch with reviving traditional poetic forms.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Who Laura was—even if she really existed—is a mystery. Without a doubt, the love Petrarch held for Laura was unrequited and based on an idealized image of womanhood. Other works of literature that are centered around the idea of unrequited love include:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831), a novel by Victor Hugo. Archdeacon Frolo falls hopelessly under the spell of the beautiful gypsy girl Esmeralda in this novel set in fifteenth-century Paris.

Great Expectations (1860–1861), a novel by Charles Dickens. Although Estella's ability to love any man has been destroyed by the bitter Miss Havisham, Pip, the main character, seeks a romantic relationship with Estella throughout the novel.

The Great Gatsby (1925), novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Jay Gatsby, the novel's protagonist, spends his life trying to attract the attention of the pampered, pretty socialite Daisy Buchanan.

Poetry Critics laud the importance of Petrarch's Italian sonnets. Observes Christopher Kleinhenz, "In their attempts to define the excellence of the Petrarchan sonnet, critics praise it for its precision and compactness, for its graceful symmetry and vibrant musicality, and for its noble sentiments and intimate tones." Additionally, scholars note the relationship between form and meaning in Petrarch's poetry, his imagery, and his use of intricate syntax. Furthermore, critics frequently discuss the tension between body and spirit present in Petrarch's works, his efforts to reconcile Christian and pagan ideals, his extensive use of classical mythology, and his celebration of figures from the classical period.

Responses to Literature

1. Some scholars have presented evidence to show that Laura was an actual person, although Petrarch never mentioned her in any of his correspondence. Investigating the facts available, determine whether you agree to the existence of a real Laura in Petrarch's life. If she were real, do you think Petrarch ever spoke to her? Did she ever know about his feelings for her? Create a presentation that displays your findings.
2. Pretend you are Laura, the object of Petrarch's desires, to whom he wrote many love poems. Write Petrarch a letter refusing his love, responding to specific lines in his verse. Explain the circumstances in both of your lives that prevent you from being together.
3. How is Petrarch important in the ways Romeo, the male protagonist of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*,

experiences and talks about love? To what extent do you believe Shakespeare would have been familiar with the work of Petrarch? Write an essay that presents your conclusions.

4. Why has Petrarch been called the inventor of modern research? How did he revive culture? Write a paper that outlines your beliefs on these subjects.
5. Read Petrarch's "Letter to Cicero." Determine why Petrarch compares himself with Cicero. Why was Petrarch disappointed in Cicero? What does he accuse Cicero of? Do you think Petrarch was really writing to the dead Cicero, or was he writing a letter to himself? Write a paper that addresses these questions.

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Arturo Uslar Pietri

BORN: 1906, Caracas, Venezuela

DIED: 2001, Caracas, Venezuela

NATIONALITY: Venezuelan

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Barrabas, and Other Stories (1928)

The Red Lances (1931)

Net (1936)

Robinson's Island (1981)



Arturo Uslar Pietri Pietri, Dr. Arturo Uslar, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Both a writer and a statesman, Arturo Uslar Pietri achieved recognition in Latin American literature primarily for his poetic fiction and his essays. The vividness of his writing, with its arresting similes and metaphors, won praise from a variety of critics, and he was called a master of the short story. One of the first writers to apply the term *magic realism* to Latin American fiction that juxtaposes reality and wondrous events, Uslar Pietri used the technique in his own writing, which often focuses on his native Venezuela.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth and Wonderment in the Venezuelan Countryside Uslar Pietri, born in Caracas, was the son of a general and attended private schools to prepare him for acceptance to the Universidad Central de Venezuela in 1923. When Uslar Pietri was eight years old, he and his family moved to Cagua, a rural town southwest of Caracas, where his father had been designated civil administrator. For the young Uslar Pietri, this association with the Venezuelan countryside was an unforgettable experience. During this first contact with Cagua and later during his stay in Maracay (1916–1923), Uslar Pietri was

charmed by the wild nature that surrounded him and the almost magical atmosphere in which people lived. He collected and retained in his memory the superstitions, legends, fables, and tales of mysterious or extraordinary happenings circulating among peasants and farm workers. Uslar Pietri's preference for rural settings in most of his short stories and his familiarity with the environment and psychology of country people cannot be understood without taking into consideration his Cagua and Maracay experiences.

Law School and a Break with Regionalism From 1924 to 1929, Uslar Pietri studied law at the Universidad Central in Caracas. These were important formative years in his life. He took part, with other members of his generation, in several *tertulias*, or social-literary gatherings. He was not only attracted by Spanish American *modernistas* but also by a variety of foreign writers: Henri Barbusse, Gabriel Miró, Azorín, Antonio Machado, Oscar Wilde, Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Korolenko, and especially Leonid Andreyev. His early inclination to modernism, evident in his first poems and short stories, gave way to an increasingly sympathetic appreciation for the avant-garde movements.

In the following years, he began publishing short stories and his first major work, *Barrabas, and Other Stories*. The impact of the book was extraordinary. *Criollismo* (local color) had dominated Venezuela's literary world until then and was especially prevalent in the short story: use of regional attire, local symbols, countryside dialect, and a "picturesque" approach to reality was common. *Barrabas, and Other Stories* was a striking departure from that tradition. Three of its stories have Oriental settings; two have urban backgrounds; and another two take place on the high seas.

Paris, City of Light After graduating from law school in 1929, Uslar Pietri accepted an appointment as civil attaché to the Venezuelan embassy in Paris. The next five years (1929–1934) were decisive in his intellectual and cultural development, as he told Margarita Eskenazi: "I left a backward, marginal and rural country without a publishing house, a symphonic orchestra or any signs of intellectual life. I felt privileged to arrive in the Paris of surrealism, a city with all kinds of literary opportunities. My life made a 180-degree turn." Uslar Pietri took full advantage of the favorable circumstances offered by the new milieu. He attended the League of Nations meetings in Geneva and listened to Aristide Briand, Gustav Stresemann, and Arthur Henderson as they tried to chart a course for peace in a Europe stuck with the results of the "bad peace" (the Treaty of Versailles, which many saw as unbearably punitive toward Germany) that had concluded World War I in 1919. He also got to know artists and writers such as Paul Valéry, André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Rafael Alberti, Jean Cassou, and Massimo Bontempelli. Two of the Latin American exiles he met in Paris, Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias, remained his close friends until the end of their lives.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pietri's famous contemporaries include:

B. Traven (1890?–1969?): An enigmatic author best known for his novel *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1927), a tale of the corrupting power of greed and violence. The author's true identity remains a subject of much debate today.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984): A controversial French philosopher and sociologist, Foucault's work ranges from criticism of social institutions, most notably the prison system, to the history of sexuality. His death was the first well-known AIDS-related fatality in France.

Norman Mailer (1923–2007): A novelist, poet, playwright, film director, and journalist, Mailer was a true American Renaissance man. One of the founders of the so-called New Journalism, also called creative nonfiction, Mailer won the Pulitzer Prize twice.

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): A Cuban writer acknowledged as one of the earliest Latin American authors to create works of magic realism.

Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974): A Guatemalan poet and novelist famous for his incorporation of Mayan myths into modern fiction with his novel *Men of Maize*.

Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1914–2001): A Venezuelan soldier who participated in a coup in 1945 and the subsequent military junta that ruled the country from 1948 to 1952; that year he was declared president outright. He ruled as virtual dictator until 1958, when rioting mobs forced him to flee the country.

A Turn toward History While in Europe, writing as the world found itself increasingly in the grip of a deep economic depression, Usler Pietri published *The Red Lances*, his first historical novel, in which he offers a panorama of the Venezuelan War of Independence (1811–1823), with the sheer brutality of its destructive forces. Usler Pietri presents this story on three distinct levels: the atmosphere of fantasy and superstition of the black slaves; a legendary vision of history seen mainly by Fernando Fonta, the main character; and the realistic presentation of the sordid life in the slave barracks and the orgy of violence among José Tomás Boves's *llaneros* ("plainsmen," or cowboys). This is not an idyllic version of the war for independence, and yet it has an epic aura. Mariano Picón Salas has pointed out its cinematic qualities and refers to the "pictorial impressionism and great splashes of color."

Entry into—and Exit from—Politics In 1939, after returning to Venezuela with the onset of World War II in Europe, Usler Pietri served first as a minister

of education, then of finance, and finally the interior before a military coup in 1945 (coinciding closely with the end of World War II in both Europe and Asia) prompted him to take up temporary residence in Canada and the United States for the next five years. He returned home in 1950 and reentered politics in 1959. He ran unsuccessfully for president in 1963 and continued as senator until 1973, when he retired from politics to write and teach.

Usler Pietri wrote many more essays and several more novels in the years between his departure from the political scene and his departure from the "mortal coil," maintaining a role for himself as a critical commentator on Venezuela's different political and social controversies. Perhaps his best-known work of this period is *Robinson's Island* (1981), though he continued to write—and then dictate—newspaper columns up until shortly before his death in 2001. In 1989, Venezuela was shaken by widespread riots responding to a general decline in well-being throughout the country—in part a result of the overdependence on oil against which Usler Pietri had warned back at mid-century. Usler Pietri played his role in opposing the military's violent suppression of these riots, though he was skeptical of the 1992 coup attempt and rise toward power of Hugo Chávez (who would later become president of the country), whom he saw as rather megalomaniacal. Upon his death in February 2001, in Caracas, Usler Pietri was recognized for his many contributions—artistic, political, and intellectual—to both Venezuelan and world culture.

Works in Literary Context

Usler Pietri's early works secured for him a place in literary circles, especially among some of the most noted Latin American authors; Mario Vargas Llosa called *The Red Lances* the work that first brought world attention to the Latin American novel. This status allowed him to experiment with magic realism (a term he coined in 1948 to describe "the depiction of man as an element of mystery surrounded by realistic data," or "a poetic intuition or denial of reality.") and to continue writing political essays without worrying about pleasing either his critics or his constituency. While not as widely recognized as that of many of his literary contemporaries or successors, Usler Pietri's part in revolutionizing literature in Venezuela earned the appreciation of his compatriots and the respect of critics.

Magical Realism Usler Pietri was perhaps best known for his short fiction; the publication of *Barrabas, and Other Stories* in 1928 revolutionized the genre in Venezuela, departing from a local emphasis and experimenting with modernistic and surrealistic techniques. *Barrabas* also contains the author's first work in the Latin American genre of magic realism, which he would continue to develop in later compilations such as *Net*.

National Interpretation Uslar Pietri's "novels of national interpretation" eschew these more experimental styles in dealing with historical subjects, somewhat typical of Latin American novels of the 1920s and 1930s. He enlisted the aid of stock characters, narrative structure, and local dialect common to the genre but added his own realistic twist: most of the characters in the conflicts have no real idea of how or why they are part of the given situation of the plot. His first and most acclaimed novel, *The Red Lances*, dramatizes Venezuela's war for independence from Spain by following several characters. While the novel's broad scope and poetic language give it an epic cast, it is also brutally honest in its treatment of the violence of war. Uslar Pietri's later novels, including *Robinson's Island*, earned him laurels because of his innovative use of nonlinear time.

Works in Critical Context

Arturo Uslar Pietri has been acclaimed as one of the best short-story writers in contemporary Latin American literature. Although his novelistic talent has not received the unanimous recognition given to his skill in the other narrative genre, many critics feel he deserves to be considered one of the most able practitioners of the historical novel in Latin America.

Barrabas, and Other Stories Although Uslar Pietri has received some criticism from traditionalist quarters, the reception given to *Barrabas* and its author was overwhelmingly favorable. Pedro Sotillo, a respected Venezuelan critic, stated prophetically when the book was published, "This young man is an intellectual new reality in our world of letters. I am afraid that he is going to spoil our literary tribe's dance of mummies." Rafael Angarita was more emphatic. The book, according to him, was a dividing scaffold in Venezuelan literature, "the farewell to plastic and superficial landscapes, to vernacularism and nativism."

The Red Lances Uslar Pietri has also won particular acclaim for *The Red Lances*. Set during Venezuela's struggle for independence from Spain in the early 1800s, the book depicts several minor characters "irrevocably involved in what [Uslar Pietri] deemed the moment of emergence of the national character," as Donald Yates describes it. "All the characters," notes Herbert L. Matthews in the *New York Times Book Review*, "are killed, as they would have been in real life." Uslar Pietri's realism in the novel includes descriptions of the brutalities committed by war leaders and what Matthews calls an "evil, brooding atmosphere" hanging over everything. Violent and bloody, the book nonetheless struck Matthews as "a poetic evocation" of the difficult birth of a country. Assessing *The Red Lances* in 1963, upon its publication in English, Matthews declared that "it remains today as fresh and vivid as it was in 1930."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Uslar Pietri was one of the first Latin American writers to work in the genre of magical realism. Other books in the same vein include:

The House of the Spirits (1982), a novel by Isabel Allende.

In the first novel from the acclaimed Chilean author, the tradition of magical realism is carried forward with this tale of a family's experiences, including spirit intervention and paranormal phenomena, over four generations.

Men of Maize (1949), a novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias.

Written by one of Uslar Pietri's Parisian roommates, this novel indicts capitalism for the devastating effects of capitalists' greed upon Latin America's indigenous peoples, while simultaneously delving into native myths, magic, and lore.

The Aleph (1949), a collection of short stories by Jorge Luis Borges. One of the acknowledged masters of magical realism, Borges' stories in this work deal largely with concepts of infinity and the universe.

"The Nose" (1836), a short story by Nikolai Gogol.

Although this short story by the Russian author predates the term by over a century, it is clearly a work of magical realism, as it tells the tale of a bureaucrat's nose that detaches from its owner's face and goes on to live its own life.

Responses to Literature

1. What motivated Uslar Pietri to write *The Funeral Mass*? Is the motivation clear in the text?
2. How does history inform and influence Uslar Pietri's work? How do you think Uslar Pietri views history?
3. Research Venezuelan folklore traditions. How are they expressed in Uslar Pietri's work? Describe a few of your own folkloric traditions.
4. Uslar Pietri set *The Red Lances* during a time he considered to be a defining point in Venezuela's national character. If you were to write a historical novel set in a similar character-defining moment in your own nation's history, what era would you choose? Why do you think Uslar Pietri made his work brutally realistic? Would you follow his example in your own novel? Why or why not?

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☒ Harold Pinter

BORN: 1930, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Birthday Party (1957)

The Caretaker (1959)

The Homecoming (1964)

Landscape (1967)

Betrayal (1978)

Overview

English playwright Harold Pinter ranks among the foremost postwar British dramatists. He invested his plays with an atmosphere of fear, horror, and mystery. These plays continue to encourage scrutiny and reexamination from not only the author himself, but from scholars as well. Pinter's works remain among the most respected plays written for the modern stage.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Working-Class London Roots Harold Pinter was born October 30, 1930, in Hackney, East London, England, the only son of a Jewish tailor, Jack, and mother Frances. He grew up in a working-class neighborhood that, despite dilapidated housing, railway yards, and a dirty canal, he remembers fondly. However, like other English children who grew up in London during the German air raids of World War II, he learned firsthand about living with imminent and omnipresent terror, a theme that appears in much of his work. Relocation in 1940 and 1941—from London to Cornwall and Reading,



Harold Pinter AP Images

as part of the evacuation of civilians from bombing targets during the war—would also affect his writing.

Early Theatrical Work Pinter's theatrical career started early. While attending Hackney Downs Grammar School on scholarship, he won title roles in *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Reviews of these early performances point to Pinter's gift for the dramatic.

Also appearing early was his skill with words, which not only launched his career as a writer, but also helped him survive the streets and alleys of the East End. He recalled in a *Paris Review* interview with Lawrence M. Bensky, "If you looked remotely like a Jew you might be in trouble. Also, I went to a Jewish club by an old railway arch, and there were quite a lot of people often waiting with broken milk bottles in a particular alley we used to walk through. There were one or two ways of getting out of it—one was purely physical, of course, but you couldn't do anything about the milk bottles—we didn't have any milk bottles. The best way was to talk to them, you know,

sort of ‘Are you all right?’ ‘Yes, I’m all right.’ ‘Well, that’s all right then, isn’t it?’ and all the time keep walking toward the lights of the main road.”

Pinter left grammar school in 1947, having earned a grant to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) the following year. At RADA, a place he detested, he cut classes, faked a nervous breakdown, and after two terms, finally dropped out in 1949. At the same time, Pinter was called to National Service, but instead registered as a conscientious objector. For this he was taken to trial and fined.

In 1951, after another grueling six months at the Central School of Speech and Drama, he joined the Anew McMaster repertory company, touring England and Ireland and performing in over a dozen roles. The next year he took regional acting jobs in England, followed by work for the Donald Wolfitt Company, which continued from 1953 through 1954. Under the stage name David Baron (after his grandmother, whose maiden name was Baron), Pinter supplemented his meager income for the next five years by waiting tables, making postal deliveries, working as a bouncer, and shoveling snow.

From Stage to Radio, Radio to Big Screen During this time, in 1956, Pinter married actress Vivian Merchant. He gave up writing poetry and began writing the plays that would, by 1957, establish his career. That year he completed two one-act plays, *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, as well as the full-length play *The Birthday Party*. All three plays would lend themselves to future adaptations, several awards and accolades, and the tormenting-villain-versus-tormented-victim dynamic present in many of Pinter’s works.

Pinter had his first real success with *The Caretaker* (1960), which ran for twelve months in London’s West End and in October 1961 opened on Broadway to critical, even though not commercial, success. Subsequent plays and themes—invasion, cruelty, infidelity, threat—would contribute to Pinter’s acclaim with *The Dwarfs* (derived from his novel and appearing on radio in 1960); two television plays for the stage, *The Collection* (1961) and *The Lover* (1963); and the full-length play *The Homecoming* (1965). Those same years also saw his work being produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). His story “The Tea Party” premiered in 1964 and was televised throughout Europe the following year. *The Basement* aired in 1967.

In 1973 Pinter was made the Associate Director of the National Theatre, a post he would hold until 1983. After his first marriage dissolved, in 1980 he married British historian and novelist Lady Antonia Fraser. It was also during this period that he was at his most prolific. Between 1975 and 1995, Pinter wrote nine full-length plays for stage and television, a dramatic sketch, four prose works, four poetry collections, and eleven screenplays, including the screenplay for John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which earned

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pinter’s famous contemporaries include:

Clifford Brown (1930–1956): American jazz trumpeter who died young, leaving a brief but remarkable recording legacy.

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): Influential Swedish screenwriter and film and stage director known for such films as *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *The Seventh Seal* (1958).

Philip Larkin (1922–1985): Twentieth-century English poet who was once deemed by readers the nation’s best-loved poet.

Timothy Leary (1920–1996): An American psychologist and countercultural phenomenon who famously experimented with and wrote about his use of hallucinogenic drugs like LSD.

Pinter several award nominations and won him the David Di Donatello (the Italian Academy Award) for Best Foreign Screenplay.

Over the ensuing decade, a winner of nine film awards and a double-digit nominee, Pinter’s writing has evolved, from verbal indulgence to a greater emphasis on scene-setting. This increasing influence of scenery playwriting is apparently due to his increased involvement in film. After writing several plays that were subsequently filmed, he wrote screenplays that have garnered continued acclaim. These have made use of his linguistic skills and devices and have addressed his own penchant for themes such as adultery, duplicity, artistic stasis, and homosexuality.

Pinter’s screenplays along with his poetry and letters, thrillers, and stage plays have earned him a major place in drama. Critics and scholars alike consider many of his full-length plays to be among the most important plays of the mid-twentieth century. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors for his lifetime achievement, including the 2005 Nobel Prize for Literature. He has remained active in the worlds of publishing, theater, and film, even after his announced retirement in 2005. Pinter continues to be applauded by everyone, from the British Library, which has purchased his literary archive, to Pinter scholars and fans who appreciate his rigorous scrutiny of the common, the comic, and the classes.

Works in Literary Context

Intrusion and Conflict What Pinter learned as a young actor, he turned into his writing. His characters—making up the largest part of dramatic tension in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Pinter's plays attempt to portray working-class characters in realistic situations using natural speech patterns. Other dramas about working-class characters include:

- Look Back in Anger* (1956), a play by John Osborne. A lower-class husband and his upper-class wife get disturbingly ensnared in a triangle with a third protagonist.
- A Taste of Honey* (1958), a play by Shelagh Delaney. This drama features the dynamics of a working-class teen and her sexually promiscuous and neglectful mother who abandons her.
- A View from the Bridge* (1955), a play by Arthur Miller. Italian-American longshoreman Eddie Carbone suffers profound betrayals and conflicts with family and friends in this stage drama.

the plays—are at their most compelling when their conflicts are “inner” and “mental,” unseeable and therefore frequently unnameable. Often, because the past is unverifiable in a Pinter play, all that viewers can know about a Pinter character is what they themselves discern. The plots, despite their surface calm, are often spiked by what audiences find equally disturbing: the unexpected intruder who enters the rooms or houses of Pinter's characters and in some way disrupts the residents' lives.

The Comedy of Menace Pinter's first few plays, labeled “comedies of menace,” occur in confining spaces and bleak settings and feature lower-class characters with their Cockney idiom who surrender what is left of their individuality. In Pinter's later plays he is especially concerned with what he regards as the nearly impossible task of verifying appearances. He creates images of the human condition that are despairing yet also comic in his deft handling of dialogue that attacks, evades communication, and shields privacy with debasing non sequiturs, pat clichés, repetitions, contradictions, and bad syntax.

Influences It has been said that epic theater appeared to have the least influence on Pinter, who shunned such Bertolt Brecht conventions as having his characters and themes make implied social and political statements. In one or two plays, he does touch on social commentary, in an epiclike fashion, appealing to his audience's intellect rather than to its emotions. This is where Pinter shows multiple influences. Examining the private rather than the social sphere, Pinter's work shows the particular absurdist influence of, for example, Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett. He also displays a similarity with Kafka and other existential writers, exposing, as he does in several plays, the fragmentation of attitude, thinking,

and, therefore, the self. Considered to belong to no single school, Pinter has instead drawn from each to create a body of work idiosyncratically and recognizably his own. Those dramatic elements that are identifiably “Pinteresque” include his characters' mysterious pasts, his theme of the intruder, and his use of silence.

Pinter has been thought to take some influence from renowned writers Wilfred Owen, Marcel Proust, and William Shakespeare. In turn, Pinter's work unquestionably influenced a number of contemporary dramatists, from realists to international surrealists, from English playwrights Michael Frayn and Patrick Marber and American playwright David Mamet to Irish dramatist Martin McDonagh and Czech writer Václav Havel.

Works in Critical Context

While some have praised Pinter's work for its originality, others have dismissed it as willfully obscure. Such responses have been evoked by the plays' unconventional plots and character development, their inexplicable logic and inconclusive resolutions, and their distinctive dialogue, echoing the inanities of everyday speech, including its silences. Pinter plays, these critics have determined, recall the social, psychological, and linguistic verisimilitude (realism) found in “kitchen sink” drama, yet are of a surface realism. As Martin Esslin pointed out in *Pinter the Playwright, a Realistic Dramatist*: “This is the paradox of his artistic personality. The dialogue and the characters are real, but the over-all effect is one of mystery, of uncertainty, of poetic ambiguity.”

Enthusiastic dramatic criticism was plentiful for Pinter, especially with such plays as *The Caretaker*.

***The Caretaker* (1959)** Pinter's second full-length play received high accolades, but only in the context of his first. After *The Birthday Party*'s lackluster debut (running for only one week), for example, *Observer* critic Kenneth Tynan commented that with *The Caretaker*, “Pinter has begun to fulfill the promise that I signally failed to see in *The Birthday Party* two years ago. The latter play was a clever fragment grown dropsical with symbolic content. . . . In *The Caretaker* symptoms of paranoia are still detectable . . . but . . . considerably abated; and the symbols have mostly retired to the background. What remains is a play about people.”

The Caretaker—which ran for twelve months in London's West End and in October 1961 opened on Broadway to critical acclaim—prompted *New York Times* writer Howard Taubman to report that it “proclaims its young English author as one of the important playwrights of our day.”

Responses to Literature

1. While reading *The Dumb Waiter*, make note of all the props (objects) that appear in the play as well as any response you have to their appearance. Using your list of props, discuss what you associate with

each. Name any associations at all, no matter how simple. For example, sheets may make you think of bed, laundry hanging on the line, or toga parties. Once you have cited all possible connections you have to each item, consider how each has meaning for the play. Pinter's props have been said to "resonate symbolically." What do you think these items represent? Feelings? Tone? Memories? Attitudes?

2. Pinter's language is notably and intentionally provocative. His style is actually tactical, in that language becomes almost like a weapon, probing his audience. Using the play *The Homecoming*, find several instances of such passages and discuss whether these tactics would be equally provocative with a contemporary audience. How are audiences different today from Pinter's time, which is actually quite recent?

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Luigi Pirandello

BORN: 1867, *Agirgenti, Sicily, Italy*

DIED: 1936, *Rome, Italy*

NATIONALITY: *Italian*

GENRE: *Drama, fiction, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Late Mattia Pascal (1904)

Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921)

Henry IV (1922)

Overview

Luigi Pirandello was a controversial artist whose work traversed many genres and media. He was, first and foremost, a dramatist, but he was also a novelist, an essayist, a poet, and a painter. Pirandello is world famous for his plays that explore the relationship between reality, sanity,



Luigi Pirandello *Pirandello, Luigi, photograph. AP Images.*

and identity. He often portrayed characters who adopt multiple identities, or "masks," in an effort to reconcile social demands with personal needs.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Love of the Theater Pirandello was born on June 28, 1867, in Girgenti, Sicily to Stefano and Caterina Pirandello. His father, a prosperous sulfur merchant, initially sent him to study commerce at the local technical institute. However, Pirandello lacked interest in the subject and transferred to an academic secondary school, where he excelled in oratory and literature. He began writing at a young age and by the time he was twelve had, with siblings and friends, produced his first play, *Barbaro*. He also wrote poetry and fiction, publishing his first poem in 1883 and his first story a year later. After graduation, Pirandello attended university first in Palermo, then in Rome. During his stay in Rome, he became an avid theatergoer. In 1889 he moved to Germany to continue his studies at the University of Bonn, where he earned a doctorate in Romance philology. He then returned to Rome, living on an allowance from his father while trying to establish himself as a writer.

Loss and Madness In 1894, Pirandello married Antonietta Portulano, the daughter of a business partner. The couple settled in Rome and had three children. To support his family, Pirandello was forced to increase his literary output and to take a position as professor at a women's school. In 1904 he saw his first critical success with the novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (*The Late Mattia Pascal*), but this was overshadowed when his father's sulfur mines, in which Pirandello was heavily invested, were destroyed in a flood. All of Pirandello's wealth, including his wife's dowry, was wiped out. Upon hearing the news, Antonietta suffered an emotional collapse; she subsequently became

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pirandello's famous contemporaries include:

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): American-born Eliot spent much of his writing career in England and became a British citizen in 1927, at the age of thirty-nine. He is the author of acknowledged classic poems such as "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

James Joyce (1882–1941): One of the greatest and best-known novelists of the modernist period in literature, Irish-born Joyce is particularly famous for his epic novel *Ulysses*.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Leader of the Italian Fascist Party and primary European ally of Hitler's Germany during World War II, Mussolini came to a gruesome end with the end of the war itself.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945): U.S. president for most of World War II and the greatest ally of "Free Europe" in the United States, Roosevelt was the only U.S. president elected to serve four terms, from 1933 until his death in 1945.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): A prolific British writer, Russell was a well-respected philosopher and an outspoken pacifist. Later in life, he devoted his considerable energies to campaigning against the proliferation of nuclear arms.

obsessively jealous and delusional. Pirandello choose to keep his wife at home, but ultimately had her committed to an asylum in 1919. During these difficult years, Pirandello took refuge in his study, where he lost himself in writing short stories, novels, and essays. He also wrote several plays, but he was unable to get them produced.

The War Years Pirandello began working on a play that was much different from his other work. *Liolà*, (performed in 1916, published in 1917; translated, 1952), was clearly an extravaganza for the author who, at the time, was profoundly troubled by the death of his mother and by his wife's descent into madness. Perhaps of even greater consequence, however, was the outbreak of World War I and the decision on the part of his son Stefano to go to war, a decision that led to his eventual internment in Austrian concentration camps. Perhaps because of this overriding sensation of looming death, Pirandello created the character of Liolà: a peasant, but who also stands for beauty, youth, virility, and, most of all, fertility. The play is lively and fresh, and the characters are not torn by internal turmoil, but experience life in a largely joyful manner.

The next phase of Pirandello's writing focused more on plays than novels. A period of intense creativity set in and lasted from 1916 to 1922, culminating in the production of his two greatest works: the dramas *Sei person-*

aggi in cerca d'autore (1921; *Six Characters in Search of an Author*) and *Enrico IV* (1922; *Henry IV*). Pirandello quickly went from being an author with a respectable but modest reputation to being one of the major literary figures in Italy.

Fascism, Mussolini, and the Theater In the desperate years following World War I, Italy came under the control of ultranationalist dictator Benito Mussolini. Pirandello took advantage of his public prominence to help Benito Mussolini and his Fascist Party. Pirandello welcomed and supported Mussolini's regime, believing Mussolini was someone who could bring order and discipline to Italy. Pirandello openly chose to join the Fascist Party immediately after the assassination of the socialist congressman Giacomo Matteotti by Mussolini supporters. In a letter to the pro-Fascist paper *L'imperio*, Pirandello asked to join the party and pledged his "humble obedience" to Mussolini. Mussolini, showing his appreciation for the gesture of support, provided funds for the Arts Theater that Pirandello had established. Pirandello, as producer and director, saw many of his plays first performed in this theater, and he took his company on tour throughout the world. However, the Arts Theater never achieved financial success and was dissolved in 1928. Frustrated by the failure of his theater, by his unsuccessful attempts to establish a government-sponsored National Theater in Rome, and by the decreasing popularity of his plays, Pirandello lived in self-imposed exile for the next five years.

In 1925 Pirandello met Marta Abba, the actress who would serve as the muse for many of his plays and with whom he was in love until his death. The seven plays that he wrote for her all feature women protagonists. They began their relationship as the political climate in Italy became increasingly unbearable. Pirandello decided to leave Italy and spent long periods of time in Berlin and Paris. His direct experience with the staging of his plays and Marta's acting helped him to further cultivate his ideas about the theater and to accept its extraordinary power. For him the theater no longer consisted exclusively of only the playwright's text but also of how the directors, actors, and scenographers interpreted the play on stage.

In 1934 Pirandello won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Though still fighting for a national theater in Rome, Pirandello nonetheless knew that eventually nothing would come of Mussolini's promises and that modern theater had no future in Fascist Italy. He convinced Marta to leave the Italian stage and renew her career in the United States, where, he believed, the theater was respected and loved much more than in Italy. He died in Rome on December 10, 1936.

Works in Literary Context

Verism and Naturalism Pirandello's early works were strongly influenced by *verism* (*vero* means "real" in

Italian), an Italian naturalist movement led by Giovanni Verga. The verists revolted against Romanticism and wrote about real people and real problems, and they included real dialogue. Writing in his native Sicilian dialect, Pirandello chose to describe the landscape and inhabitants of Sicily. His first successful novel, *The Late Mattia Pascal*, displays a distinctly verist and naturalistic style.

The Mask: Reality and Illusion In an essay titled *On Humor*, which he dedicated “To the Memory of Mattia Pascal, Librarian,” Pirandello articulated the major aesthetic principle that guided his work: humorism. Pirandello’s theory of humorism is based upon his vision of the conflict between surface appearances and deeper realities. According to Pirandello, when an opposition exists between a character’s situation and an audience’s expectations, the audience gains an “awareness” of this opposition, and the situation appears comic. When the audience additionally recognizes a character’s suffering beneath the comic appearance, the audience gains a “sentiment” or “feeling” of this opposition. Catharsis occurs when, through a combination of opposing reactions, the audience achieves both a compassionate understanding of the character’s situation in the fictional world and a deeper insight into the real world. Pirandello was thus more interested in the audience’s direct emotional experience of the drama than in the purely abstract and philosophical aspects of his plays.

Pirandello described his dramatic works as a “theater of mirrors” in which the audience sees what passes on stage as a reflection of their own lives: When his characters doubt their own perceptions of themselves, the audience experiences a simultaneous crisis of self-perception. In questioning the distinction between sanity and madness, Pirandello attacked abstract models of objective reality and theories of a static human personality. For these reasons, many critics have labeled him a pessimist and a relativist. Others, noting the strong sense of compassion that Pirandello conveys for his characters, contend that Pirandello is not preaching a definable ideology but is simply expressing his acute consciousness of the absurdities and paradoxes of human life. As Pirandello explained: “My works are born from live images which are the perennial source of art, but these images pass through a veil of concepts which have taken hold of me. My works of art are never concepts trying to express themselves through images. On the contrary. They *are* images, often very vivid images of life, which, fostered by the labors of my mind, assume universal significance quite on their own, through the formal unity of art.”

Works in Critical Context

The Danger of Criticism After writing *Henry IV*, Pirandello read a discussion of his plays in Adriano Tilgher’s *Studies in Contemporary Theater*, and the remainder of his

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Pirandello’s deep involvement with Mussolini’s brutal Fascist regime in Italy makes him one of a number of prominent artistic figures who found themselves fascinated by both Italian and German fascism. Here are a few other works by authors and filmmakers fascinated with totalitarian systems:

The Cantos (1915–1962), a poem by Ezra Pound. This poem has been the subject of much controversy over the years, drawing heavy fire for its implicit and overt anti-Semitism, as well as for its role in Pound’s development and elaboration of a Fascist political and economic perspective.

Triumph of the Will (1935), a film by Leni Riefenstahl. This disturbing propaganda movie of a National Socialist Congress in Germany was the height of film technique and artistic sensibility—in the service of the basest of agendas, which Riefenstahl appears to have enthusiastically supported.

Journey to the End of the Night (1931), a novel by Louis-Ferdinand Céline. This novel chronicles the life of a misadventurer who stumbles through both war and peace with a savage, laughing hatred for humanity.

career as a playwright was influenced by this critic’s perception of his work. Tilgher saw in Pirandello’s dramas a consistent and compelling philosophical formula that explained the often confusing and contradictory elements of these works, and this vision of his artistry came to haunt Pirandello perhaps as madness had haunted his wife.

Tilgher wrote: “The philosophy implicit in Pirandello’s art revolves round the fundamental dualism of Life and Form: Life, perpetually mobile and fluid, which cannot help developing into a form, although it deeply resents all form; and Form which determines Life, by giving it rigid and precise borders, and freezes it, suppressing its restless motion.” Pirandello was pleased by the academic authority that Tilgher’s essay gave to his dramas, and he was stimulated to approach more intently the life/form dichotomy in his works.

Many critics have blamed this aim for a decline in the quality of Pirandello’s later plays, which were viewed as overly intellectual, obscure, and lacking emotional vitality. Tilgher himself later wrote that “it would have been better if Pirandello had never read my essay. It is never good for a writer to be too conscious of his inner world, and my essay fixed Pirandello’s world in such clear and well-defined terms that Pirandello must have felt imprisoned in it, hence his protests that he was an artist and not a philosopher . . . and hence his attempts to escape. But the more he tried to escape from the critical pigeon-holes

into which I had placed him the more he shut himself into them.” Pirandello was bitterly disappointed by the critical and popular failure of his later dramas, a disappointment only partially mitigated by winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934. However, after his death, critics began to question the utility and appropriateness of the life/form dichotomy as the principal critical approach to Pirandello’s works, and the rise of existentialist theory and of the Theater of the Absurd did much to alter the context of the debate on Pirandello.

The Contemporary Perspective Pirandello is today viewed with a more sophisticated appreciation for his philosophical themes and with near universal esteem for all his works, including his later dramas. What was previously scorned as overly intellectual and incoherent is now respected for its provocative treatment of relativism and antirationalism. Pirandello foresaw the abatement of the critical controversy that he inspired during his lifetime, and he looked to that time when his works would be judged according to the artistic terms in which they were created.

Six Characters in Search of an Author When *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was first performed in 1921, audiences were so shocked by its unconventional style that it caused riots. Although it ultimately proved successful with audiences, critics were initially less impressed. In the decades following its initial run, however, critics have come to recognize the work for its importance in the development of modern theater. According to scholar Anna Balakian, the point of the work was simple: “Pirandello wants to break down the rules the better to preserve the theater.” Umberto Mariani refers to it as a “revolutionary play” and notes, “Pirandello’s *Six Characters* reveals itself from the outset as thematically much more complex than his earlier masterpieces and far more original in form vis-à-vis the bourgeois theater at the turn of the century.” Fiora A. Bassanese calls the work “his greatest and most essential play.”

Responses to Literature

1. In a short essay, describe the humor Pirandello uses in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Explain how humor, irony, and unconventional form highlight the theme of the play.
2. Research the idea of “reality-testing,” a psychological phenomenon discerned by Sigmund Freud and many others. How can this concept help you better understand the behavior of the characters in one or more of Pirandello’s plays? What emotional effect do you think these characters’ reality-testing is likely to have on viewers or readers of the play(s)?
3. Examine Pirandello’s idea of the mask as an obstacle to mutual understanding between human beings. As a class, discuss specific statements by Pirandello on

this theme, and explore the way the idea plays out in one of his dramas.

4. Use one of Pirandello’s plays to consider the concepts of truth, identity, and sanity. Discuss how Pirandello presents his message, either through the characters or through the play’s form.

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Plato

BORN: 427 BCE, Athens, Greece

DIED: 347 BCE, Athens, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Republic (c. 360 BCE)

Phaedrus (c. 370 BCE)

Symposium (385 BCE)

Euthyphro (399 BCE)

Apology (c. 399 BCE)

Overview

Plato stands at the center of philosophical thought in the ancient world. He was the first person to approach philosophical issues systematically, but it was the genius with which he treated those issues that made his thought so influential. Virtually every philosopher in antiquity who lived after Plato offered a response to what he had written. Moreover, Plato’s influence was hardly limited to the ancient world. His thought was studied throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and continues to be crucial to an understanding of philosophical issues. Although the accuracy of his doctrines has always been



Plato Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

the subject of vigorous debate, no one can deny Plato's pervasive influence on the history of Western philosophy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life Plato was born in Athens, the son of Ariston and Perictione, both of Athenian aristocratic ancestry. He lived at a time when ancient Greece was considered the most powerful empire in the known world; the Greek Empire consisted of many city-states, such as Athens and Sparta. Athens was one of the most important regions of ancient Greece, functioning as a center of both political power and cultural advancement. Plato lived his whole life in Athens but did travel to Sicily and southern Italy on several occasions, and one story says he traveled to Egypt. Little is known of his early years, but he was given the finest education Athens had to offer its noble families.

The Influence of Socrates Plato's acquaintance with Socrates altered the course of his life. The compelling power that Socrates' methods and arguments had over the minds of the youth of Athens gripped Plato as firmly

as it did so many others, and he became a close associate of Socrates.

The end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BCE), which resulted in Athens being taken over by Sparta and its allies, left Plato in a difficult position. His uncle Critias was the leader of the Thirty Tyrants, a group that had been appointed to power by the victorious Spartans. One way of manifesting their power was to indict as many Athenians as possible for treason. As documented in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates was ordered to arrest a man and take him from Salamis to Athens for execution. When the great teacher refused, his life was in jeopardy, and he was probably saved only by the overthrow of the Thirty and the reestablishment of democracy. Plato had been repelled by the purpose and methods of the Thirty and welcomed the restoration of democracy to Athens.

Four years later, when Socrates was tried and sentenced to death, Plato was present at the trial, as evidenced by the *Apology*. Although Plato was not present when the hemlock (a fatal poison) was administered to his master, he describes the scene in vivid and touching detail in the *Phaedo*. Disgusted by what had transpired, Plato turned away from contemporary Athenian politics and never took an active part in government, although he did, through friends, try to influence the course of politics in the Sicilian city of Syracuse.

Journeys Plato and several of his friends left Athens after Socrates' death and sojourned with Euclides in Megara. Highly productive during this time, Plato wrote *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Gorgias*. Socrates is the main character in all of these dialogues, and various abstractions are discussed, including courage, piety, and friendship. The *Apology* and *Crito* stand apart from other works of Plato's in that they deal with historical events: Socrates' trial and the period between his conviction and execution.

During his first trip to southern Italy and Syracuse in 388–387 BCE, Plato made the acquaintance of Dion of Syracuse and his infamous brother-in-law, Dionysius I, ruler of Syracuse. Dionysius was at the height of his power and prestige in Sicily for having freed the Greeks there from the threat of Carthaginian rule. Plato became better friends with Dion, however, and Dionysius, it appears, was jealous of the relationship between Plato and Dion. On Plato's return journey to Athens, Dionysius's crew deposited him on the island of Aegina, which at that time was engaged in a minor war with Athens. Plato would most likely have been sold as a prisoner of war had he not been ransomed by Anniceris of Cyrene, one of his many admirers.

Return to Athens After his return to Athens, Plato began to teach in the Gymnasium Academe and soon acquired property nearby. There he founded his famous Academy, which survived until philosophical schools were closed by the Christian emperor Justinian in the early sixth century CE. At the center of the Academy stood a shrine to the Muses, and at least one modern scholar

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Plato's famous contemporaries include:

Socrates (470–399 BCE): In addition to being Plato's mentor, Socrates is widely considered the father of Western philosophy.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE): Aristotle was Plato's favorite student, and for many centuries after Aristotle's death, Aristotle's legacy was so great that he was known simply as The Philosopher.

Aristophanes (456–c. 386 BCE): Aristophanes was an Athenian comic dramatist who wrote *Lysistrata*, a play about government by women.

Alexander of Macedonia (also known as Alexander the Great) (356–323 BCE): Alexander was a Macedonian king who, in his brief thirty-three-year life, vastly increased the size of his kingdom and built a lasting reputation as a conqueror.

Democritus (460–370 BCE): Although little is known about Democritus, his most important theory was that all matter is composed of what he called "atoms."

Dionysius I (432–367 BCE): This ruler conquered a number of cities and states, including Syracuse, which he turned into a Greek colony.

suggests that the Academy may have been a type of religious brotherhood.

The Republic Socrates is again the main character in Plato's *Republic*, although this work is less a dialogue than a long discussion by Socrates of justice and what it means to the individual and the city-state. The great utopian state is described only as an analogy for the soul in order for men to understand better how the soul might achieve the kind of balance and harmony necessary for the rational element to control it. Just as there are three elements to the soul—the rational, the less rational, and the impulsive irrational—so are there three classes in the state: the rulers, the guardians, and the workers. No matter what their class, all citizens receive an education appropriate to their abilities. The rulers are not a hereditary clan or wealthy upper class, but are those who have emerged from the population as a whole as the most intellectually gifted. The guardians serve society by keeping order and by handling the practical matters of government, including fighting wars, while the workers perform the labor necessary to keep the state running smoothly.

The wisdom, courage, and moderation cultivated by the rulers, guardians, and workers ideally produce justice in society. Only when the three work in harmony, with intelligence and wisdom clearly in control, does the

individual or state achieve the happiness and fulfillment of which it is capable. The *Republic* ends with the great myth of Er, in which the wanderings of the soul through births and rebirths are recounted. According to Plato, one may be freed from the cycle after a time through lives of greater and greater spiritual and intellectual purity.

Death Plato's second trip to Syracuse took place in 367 BCE after the death of Dionysius I, but Plato and Dion's efforts to influence the development of Dionysius II along the lines laid down in the *Republic* did not succeed, and Plato returned to Athens. Plato's third and final voyage to Syracuse was made some time before 357 BCE, and he was no more successful in his attempts to influence the young Dionysius than he had been earlier. Dion fared no better and was exiled by the young tyrant, while Plato was held in semi-captivity. Plato's "Seventh Letter", the only one in the collection of thirteen letters considered authentic—perhaps even from the hand of Plato himself—recounts his role in the events surrounding the death of Dion, who returned to Syracuse and overthrew Dionysius in 357 BCE. The "Seventh Letter" is of even more interest because of Plato's statement that the deepest truths may not be communicated.

Although the date is not exactly known, Apollodorus's *Chronology* (late second century BCE) recorded Plato's death as 347 BCE at the age of eighty-one. When Plato died, he was succeeded at the head of the Academy, not by Aristotle, who had been a student and then a teacher at the Academy for about twenty years, but by his nephew, Speusippus. As noted above, the Academy continued for centuries after Plato's death.

Works in Literary Context

Plato was a student of philosophy, and his literary output reflects this role. His works fuse the arguments of Heraclitus, Socrates, and the Pythagoreans (those who followed the mathematician Pythagoras). Whatever other influences have been claimed, there can be little doubt that it was Socrates who had the most profound impact on Plato.

Socrates Plato chooses Socrates as the main character in most of his works, a clear reflection of Plato's reverence for the man he regarded as his true master. In the "Seventh Letter," Plato deemed Socrates "the most just man alive" during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants in Athens. Diogenes reports that the interest was mutual: he tells the story of Socrates' dream of a swan sitting on his knees, which all at once sprouted feathers and flew away after crying out a loud, sweet call. The next day, Plato was introduced to Socrates as a pupil, and Socrates believed the young man was the swan in his dream.

It is the relationship that Plato had with Socrates, in fact, that has been memorialized in Plato's dialogues, his largest contribution to literature. In form, these dialogues are merely representations of conversations held between

two or more people. In content, they demonstrate and record the philosophies Socrates taught his pupils. Indeed, Plato's dialogues have been staples of education ever since their rediscovery in the late medieval period. However, the objectivity of Plato's representation of Socrates' character and philosophy has come into question through the years.

Diogenes reports in his *Lives* that there was a rivalry or animosity between Plato and several fellow philosophers and literary figures, especially other "Socratics," including Xenophon, Antisthenes, Aristippus, and Aeschines. It is certain that each of these men also wrote "Socratic dialogues," though only those of Xenophon and Plato exist in complete form. It is important to note that the Socratic dialogues written by others deviate significantly from Plato's in their philosophies and their portraits of Socrates.

Legacy The Academy continued for centuries after Plato's death, though its members deviated from Platonic teachings in several striking ways. Within a century (c. 276 BCE) the school had become a center for the philosophy of the Skeptics under Archesilaus. Revivals of some versions of Platonism were undertaken both at the Academy itself under Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 87 BCE) and elsewhere; for example, "Middle Platonism" developed at the same time in Athens and Alexandria (which included Plutarch). So-called Neoplatonism began with Plotinus in Rome and continued until Justinian closed the pagan schools in 529 CE. In many ways, Neoplatonism continued to provide a significant source of ideas for later medieval thinkers.

Plato's influence, though transformed and reshaped by the Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists, can be found later in the conceptions of temporal order and eternity in Augustine and Boethius, and in other ideas among the medieval rationalists, especially Anselm. The Platonic conception of knowledge as derived from and secured by innate and infallible cognitive capacities—which make contact with a truth or reality that is independent of the human senses—continued after the Enlightenment in the philosophies of what have come to be known as the Continental Rationalists, most notably René Descartes, Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. It echoes even later in the transcendentalism of Immanuel Kant, the British idealist Francis Herbert Bradley, and, later still, in the American transcendentalists, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Works in Critical Context

In considering the work of Plato, it is first important to note that Socrates, his illustrious teacher, wrote no text in which he outlined his teachings. Consequently, what scholars know about Socrates can be gleaned only from those who wrote about his work. This fact, along with Plato's repeated use of Socrates as his main character, has led to several seemingly irresolvable scholarly disputes.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While Plato's *Republic* covers a number of topics, the text outlines an idealized manifestation of both an individual and the surrounding government. As such, it reads as a manual or guidebook. Other artists have taken on the task of delineating the proper structure of government and the individuals who run it. Here are a few of the results:

The Prince (1532), a treatise by Niccolò Machiavelli. This work describes the role of a country's leader, based on Machiavelli's belief that a country must be stable above all else, even if a leader must behave ruthlessly to achieve that stability.

Utopia (1516), a treatise by Thomas More. The word *utopia* means "no-place," and so underscores the impractical nature of the fictional island culture More describes.

The Leviathan (1651), a treatise by Thomas Hobbes. This text describes Hobbes's "social contract theory"—the mutual obligation of individuals to help other individuals and how these obligations become the foundations of societies.

Does the character Socrates actually speak for Plato himself, who articulates his own thoughts through Socrates? Or does Plato seek only to represent the philosophy of Socrates by recounting the conversations of Socrates? Plato's student Aristotle often wrote as if he believed that the Socrates whom Plato employs is expressing Plato's own philosophy. Never a speaking character in his own dialogues, Plato speaks for himself only in the "Letters", and the authenticity of these is disputed. It has been argued, in fact, that readers should never assume that Plato is presenting dogmatic pronouncements; instead, he is using the dialogue form simply to offer arguments for consideration. This issue is an important one for scholars because Socrates is largely considered the father of philosophy as we know it.

What Is Plato, What Is Socrates? Although a decisive resolution of the many debates about Plato's relationship with Socrates is not likely to be achieved, certain points of view seem well enough supported to be agreed upon by scholars in general. Perhaps the most important point concerns the dating of the dialogues. Partly because of the strategies used for dating the pieces, some separation of the Platonic and Socratic philosophies has been made on the supposition that Plato became more the master of his own philosophical thinking and less influenced by Socrates as he matured.

Several approaches to ordering the dialogues chronologically have been attempted. In antiquity, the

orderings were thematic at best and included many works whose authenticity is now disputed or unanimously rejected. Historical evidence for ordering the works chronologically is relatively slight. Aristotle, Diogenes, and Olympiodorus of Alexandria all report that the *Laws* was written after the *Republic*. Beyond this, scholars must speculate about the chronology of the dialogues based on the slight evidence contained within each of Plato's works.

Despite the lack of direct evidence, modern scholars have found sufficient differences in the philosophies articulated in the dialogues to group them into different periods: early—those works written prior to Plato's first trip to Sicily in 387; middle—the dialogues from about 387 BCE to 380 BCE, considered to be early transitional; and late—transitional dialogues beginning about 360 BCE to 355 BCE. In his influential study *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Gregory Vlastos finds ten significant differences between the Socrates in the dialogues of the early period and the Socrates in the dialogues of the middle period. Arguments of this sort have generally found favor among scholars who are inclined to find the differences in Plato's characterizations significant in terms of his movement away from the philosophical methods and preoccupations of the historical Socrates, which these scholars assume to have been represented more or less accurately in Plato's earlier works. Still, each of these differences between the Socrates of the early and middle dialogues will no doubt continue to be hotly debated. Interestingly, the division of the dialogues into groups on the basis of their contents has more recently received support from what is known as stylometry—the careful measure of certain stylistic features of the writings themselves.

While the early, middle, and late groupings are accepted by many scholars, serious debate continues about the exact placement of each dialogue within these groups and even about the merits of the different methods employed to group them at all. Furthermore, a great many other dialogues and some thirteen letters have also been attributed to Plato over the years, but none of these other writings has been regarded by a consensus as authentic. Many were presumed to be so in antiquity and have only relatively recently been removed from the canon. These disputed works are known as the *dubia*. Still other dialogues, called the *spuria*, were attributed to Plato but suspected to be fraudulent even in antiquity.

The majority view among scholars on this issue is that the early Platonic dialogues contain a certain highly coherent set of philosophical positions, so it makes sense to think of this philosophy on its own terms, distinct from the philosophy found in the middle-period dialogues. Scholars often call the philosophy in the early dialogues “Socratic philosophy” and the philosophy of the middle dialogues “Platonic philosophy.” This strategy partly permits an easy shorthand for the distinction between the

two philosophies and partly reflects an acknowledgment that the philosophy of Plato's early dialogues is the most interesting and plausible candidate for the philosophy of the historical Socrates. Indeed, if the philosophy of Plato's Socrates is not the philosophy of the historically real Socrates, then the philosophy of the historical Socrates must be associated with the views attributed to him by other Socratic authors, whose work seems ordinary compared with that of Plato, or the philosophy of the historical Socrates must be considered lost. Any serious philosophical interest in Socrates, then, is to be found in the philosophy of Plato's Socrates in the early dialogues.

Continued Critical Use of Plato's Dialogues

Despite the continued debate about the nature of Plato's writings, they continue to be read in philosophy, justice, and history courses alike because the works pose philosophical problems and questions that remain intricate enough to challenge those who think critically about serious issues. Plato's Socrates asks many of what are considered the quintessential questions of philosophy. He asks them in ways that are readily understood, and Plato has him ask those questions in dramatic settings that make them even more compelling. In short, whether Plato has accurately represented the historical Socrates or not, the dialogues as a starting point for further conversations about important and unresolved issues of justice, piety, science, mathematics, and politics ensure Plato's continued relevance as a leader of philosophical and intellectual awareness.

Responses to Literature

1. Read book seven of Plato's *Republic*. This portion of the *Republic* contains the “Allegory of the Cave,” which describes the necessity of seeing the world in a new way, of opening one's mind up to the truth that hides behind the illusions of this world. Describe your feelings in response to this text. Do you feel optimistic or pessimistic about the world when you conclude the “Allegory”? Do you believe that the world is a kind of illusion that hides other, more profound truths? Why or why not?
2. Research the word *utopia*. What do you think an ideal world would be like? Describe some of this ideal world's key features—for instance, what would this world's art, government, and religion be like? Describe the fashion and sports of this world.
3. Plato's dialogues are famous for their representations of the so-called Socratic method: Socrates's unique style of argument—his way of asking his “opponent” many questions, cleverly establishing definitions of terms, and then guiding his opponent into making his points for him. Choose a controversial issue and write your own Socratic dialogue, in the style of Plato, in which one character plays the Socrates role and argues his point by asking questions of the other.

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Li Po

BORN: 701 CE, China

DIED: 762 CE, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Works of Li Po, the Chinese Poet (1922)



Li Po © The British Library / HIP / The Image Works

Overview

Li Po, one of the most popular Chinese poets, was noted for his romantic songs on wine, women, and nature. His writings reflect the grandeur of the Tang dynasty at the height of its prosperity. Li Po is one of the great figures of Chinese literature, a poet whose adventurous life is mirrored in his verses. Few readers of Chinese literature have been able to resist his charm.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Precocious Youth Li Po was most likely born in central Asia, where his ancestors had lived in exile since the early seventh century. When he was about five, his father, a businessman, and his mother, a washerwoman, successfully petitioned the authorities for permission to move to the city of Chang Ming in Szechwan Province, a more industrialized and cosmopolitan community.

The precocious Li Po started his poetic compositions early in childhood but was bored by formal education. He tended to concentrate on esoteric religious and literary works rather than the Confucian Classics, although he certainly read and was familiar with the latter. He received a diploma from the Taoist master Kao Tien-Shih in recognition of his Taoist studies; Taoism emphasizes a connection with nature, compassion for people and other living things, and self-discipline. In 720, his exceptional abilities were recognized by the governor of his province, who predicted that he would become a famous poet.

Adventure Seeker After a turbulent adolescence, during which he was an adventurer and a sword fighter, Li Po became interested in more contemplative pursuits. Between the ages of twenty and twenty-four, he lived as a recluse in a remote part of Szechwan Province, there acquiring even more of a reputation for wisdom and literary ability. Now emotionally as well as intellectually mature, he resolved to broaden his horizons by seeing what the world outside his native province had to offer.

Except for this period of seclusion in the mountains, Li Po spent his youth in search of adventures abroad. He traveled extensively in Szechwan and, later, in his twenty-fifth year, northward to central China. In 727 he married Hsu Hsin-shih, the daughter of a retired prime minister at An-lu in Hupei, where he stayed the next eight years. Although they had several children and Hsu Hsin-shih seems to have been a model wife, Li's wanderlust was evidently untamed. He continued to ramble about the country, sometimes with his wife and sometimes not, visiting other poets and scholars and becoming something of a legend among his fellow intellectuals. In 735, while traveling in the northern province of Shansi, he saved the life of the soldier Kuo Tzu-i, who would later be pleased to return the favor when he rose in the political ranks.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Po's famous contemporaries include:

Wu Zetian (625–705): Empress who seized the throne and began her own dynasty (the Zhou) in the midst of the Tang dynasty.

Han Gan (706–783): Tang dynasty-era artist best known for his paintings of horses.

Tu Fu (712–770): Friend of Li Po and another of China's great Tang poets.

Charlemagne (747–814): Frankish king who led numerous European conquests and is considered the Father of Europe.

Journeys Abroad and Times at Court In 735 Li started a long journey that took him northward to the central plains of the Yellow River and eastward to the coastal areas of the Yangtze. This was the most flourishing period of the dynasty and the most prolific time of his life. The climax came in 742, when he went to the capital, Ch'ang-an, and was presented to the emperor, Hsüan-tsung, who honored him personally. Li was appointed a member of the Hanlin Academy and was lionized by fellow scholar-officials. At the zenith of his poetic power, he wrote songs for court festivities. He often frequented taverns and got excessively drunk, earning the reputation, together with seven other notables of the court, as the "Eight Immortals of the Wine-cup." He has been mentioned as one of the "Six Idlers of the Bamboo Brook" as well.

Li Po seems, however, to have offended either a powerful member of the court or perhaps even the emperor himself; in 744, ordered to leave the capital, he resumed his earlier pattern of wandering about the kingdom. In the fall of that year, Li Po met the younger poet Tu Fu, and for a period of two or three years they traveled together, studying at remote Taoist monasteries and exchanging ideas about writing. Tu Fu seems to have been a calming influence upon his friend; he encouraged Li to write down his verses rather than simply declaim them to an admiring circle of drinking companions. Since the two were almost polar opposites in terms of poetry as well as personality, the friendship between them came to be held up as a symbol of how artistic ideals can transcend individual differences.

After parting from Tu Fu, Li Po continued his roaming life, spending most of his time in the southern and western provinces of Kiangsi and Kiangsue Fu, in the eastern capital of Loyang. After having settled his family (he had remarried by this time) in Shantung, Li Po journeyed once again for ten years in northern and eastern China. In the poems of this period, he showed even more interest in Taoism, which replaced his youthful ardor for

chivalry. He was beset, however, by worldly troubles; he began to complain of the lack of money and property.

Political Uprisings At the time of the An Lu-shan rebellion in December 755, which shook the Tang empire to its core, Li Po had gone to the Yangtze region, where he had moved his family. He was spared many of the hardships that his fellow poets in the north suffered when the rebels succeeded in capturing Loyang and Ch'ang-an. But a worse fate awaited Li Po.

He was involved for a short while in the unsuccessful uprising of Li Lin, Prince of Yung, who was then commander in chief of the Tang forces in central China. As Li Lin's fleet sailed down the Yangtze, Li Po joined him in Kiukiang in early 757. After the prince's defeat by royalist troops, Li Po was imprisoned and threatened with a death sentence. Eventually, this was lessened to banishment to Yeh-lang (Tsun-i in Kwei-chow) in the remote southwest interior. Li Po traveled slowly to his destination, but amnesty was granted while he was en route. He happily retraced his steps eastward and wandered in the Yangtze area for another two years.

He died in Tang-t'u in southern Anhwei in December 762, and his death, according to legend, was an appropriate one for a lover of wine: drunk in his boat on a beautiful evening, he leaned far over the side to admire his reflection in the water, fell overboard, and drowned. In a culture where the manner of death was just as important as behavior in life, Li Po's passing ensured that he would achieve immortality as both legend and literary genius.

Works in Literary Context

Romance and Spirits An aura of romanticism pervades Li Po's life and poetry. With his fondness for adventure and traveling, his search for alchemy and the elixir of life, and his love of nature, he exemplifies these typical Taoist trends in his poetry. In addition, his work often reflects the kind of melancholy that a man feels when he finds his talents unused and his life wasted.

To drown his sorrows, or just to enjoy himself, Li Po drank heavily. Wine provided him with inspiration for poetry. In those moments of exhilaration, when alone or in company, he would dash off verses without restraint. His finest lyrics are characterized by spontaneity of feeling and lofty imagination. When Taoist recluses discovered that the drinking of wine offered a close approximation of the mental states reached through serious meditation, alcohol soon became a respectable as well as popular means of attuning the senses to the subtle harmonies of nature.

Taoism Li Po's early interest in Taoism was one of the most significant influences upon his poetry. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, respectively, the founder and the chief apostle of this philosophy, emphasized the necessity of living in harmony with the Tao, or Way, giving up the trivial

concerns of conventional life and celebrating instead the virtues of simplicity and directness. Withdrawal from the world was encouraged.

As the poet grew older, however, these mystical expressions gave way to more down-to-earth advice. Just as twentieth-century readers buy self-help books far more frequently than the classic works of religion and philosophy, so did the people of Li Po's day seek practical formulas for attaining peace of mind.

Works in Critical Context

Li Po's poetry has been highly valued for its consummate grace and original choice of words. He wrote during a period when one of China's most revered dynasties, the Tang, was at the apex of its power and prestige, and his verses seemed to catch the spirit of a self-confident and hedonistic age.

Li Po was a sworn enemy of the mindless conformity to sterile traditions that often characterizes imperial dynasties. He has been compared with Henry Miller, George Gordon, and Lord Byron: the pursuit of pleasure, not some quixotic and suicidal act of rebellion, marked both his life and his work. In verses that were the literary equivalent of Taoism's injunctions to accept the universe rather than strive to change it, he sang the delights of wine, women, and song in spontaneous language that appealed to nobles and ne'er-do-wells alike.

The Works of Li Po Among the poems of the Tang period, Li Po's are the most romantic and optimistic, fully reflecting the spirit of his era. Many Chinese children are still taught to recite his five-character quatrain "Quiet Night Thought." The vicissitudes of his life developed his individualism and heightened his ability to empathize with every part of society. His poems display his belief in heroism, his hatred of social injustice, and his desire to remove political power from the hands of the aristocracy. Poems such as "Bring On the Wine" and "Drinking Alone Beneath the Moon" seek to eradicate individual loneliness and foster a sense of identity between the individual and the eternal. Expressing both love for and disappointment with life, these poems can make a reader want to laugh and cry at the same time.

Still, some critics have questioned the depth of Li Po's body of work. Arthur Waley, in *The Poetry and Career of Li Po* (1950), contends that the poet "is like most great poets known to the general reader by a relatively small number of pieces. The rest are indeed worth studying. . . . But much of his work inevitably consisted of slight, complimentary poems addressed to friends at farewell parties or on other social occasions."

Responses to Literature

1. Ezra Pound was a fan of Li Po. See Pound's "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" and decide why Pound chose that poem to translate.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Despite his attention to hedonistic drinking and mystical connection, Li Po is probably most revered for his depictions of nature. Here are some other works that celebrate the natural world and our interaction with the physical realm around us:

Leaves of Grass (1855), poems by Walt Whitman. One of America's first free verse poets, Whitman wrote his most famous collection as a tribute to the wonders of nature and humanity.

The Starry Night (1889), by Vincent van Gogh. Perhaps the Dutch painter's most famous painting, it celebrates the night sky amid a whorl of stars.

The Song of the Earth (1908–1909), a musical composition by Gustav Mahler. This lengthy and celebrated musical piece emphasizes Chinese motifs and Li Po's poetry.

Baraka (1992), a film directed by Ron Fricke. This documentary film set to music highlights various scenic places around the globe.

2. Research the philosophical ideas related to Taoism. Find examples of Taoism in Li Po's descriptions of nature. What is the poet's relationship to the physical world?
3. Do you think it seems odd that Li Po celebrated wine so much? What would we think of that subject matter today?
4. Compare Li Po to his contemporary Tu Fu. Why might the former be better known than the latter?

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❑ Elena Poniatowska

BORN: 1932, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French, Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Lilus Kikus (1954)

Until We Meet Again (1969)

Massacre in Mexico (1975)

The Night Visitor (1979)

Tinisima (1992)

Overview

Elena Poniatowska has devoted much of her fiction and journalism to giving a voice to the anonymous masses that do not have access to the printed word or to other modes of communication. Poniatowska includes women in the category of those without a voice, because the female experience has been traditionally ignored or silenced, especially in societies such as Mexico's, which are overwhelmingly patriarchal. A compassionate humor and subtle irony characterize Poniatowska's style, as does a great adeptness in the use of colloquial language. Early



Elena Poniatowska Poniatowska, Elena, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

on in her writing career Poniatowska became known primarily as a journalist and interviewer, and she has continued her work as a journalist while developing her fiction. Because of this, and because some of her fictional characters have been inspired by real people, her narratives are usually associated with the genre of the testimonial or the documentary novel.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Mix of Cultures Elena Poniatowska was born in Paris on May 19, 1932. Her mother, the former Paula Amor Iturbide, was Mexican, though also born in France; her father, Yvan E. Poniatowski, was of Polish origin. As a result of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 her family on her mother's side lost part of its landholdings and fortune. Upon the outbreak of World War II she and her mother and sister moved to the south of France, where they lived with Yvan Poniatowski's parents. There Elena and her younger sister attended public school. When Elena was eight years old, they moved to Mexico to live with her mother's family, while her father remained in France fighting the Nazis. As a child she spoke French; only after moving to Mexico did she learn Spanish. In Mexico City she began her studies at a British high school, then attended the Liceo Francés de México for a year, and finished her last two years of secondary school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart's Eden Hall, in Torresdale, Pennsylvania.

After studying at Manhattanville College on a scholarship, Poniatowska began her literary career in 1953 in Mexico City, interviewing important Mexican literary and political personalities. She has worked as a journalist for more than thirty-five years, writing first for *Excelsior* in 1954 and, since 1955, for *Novedades*. She recounts that in her years as a reporter she did an interview a day, and that, when she went to work for *Novedades*, she was supposed to produce three articles every week. She has referred in interviews to the difficulties of combining the responsibilities of a mother, a wife, and a professional. She is still a regular contributor to such reviews as *Vuelta* and *Plural*, and is a member of the editorial board of *fem.*, a feminist journal directed by university women.

Delving into Fiction While pursuing a career in journalism, Poniatowska also delved into fiction. Her earliest fictional work, *Lilus Kikus* (1954), is a collection of short stories on the theme of childhood. The main character throughout the collection is a young girl, Lilus Kikus, bothered by feelings of estrangement from her peers because of her aristocratic European background—much like the author's own. The stories are at least in part autobiographical, in particular in their rendition of a young girl's conception of Catholicism. In the late 1960s Poniatowska began to experiment with more unconventional and inventive literary forms, melding

fictional and documentary modes and using methods of investigation derived from her work as a journalist, in particular the interviews. Her first work in this form, *Until We Meet Again* (1969), was a critical success. It defies traditional classifications and has been called an autobiographical novel or a fictionalized biography. Its subject matter is also considered revolutionary because it portrays a wholly unconventional, defiant, yet believable woman. *Until We Meet Again* is based on a real person, Jesusa Palancares, and her struggles through an impoverished life filled with both hardship and adventure. The most remarkable characteristic brought forth by Poniatowska's fictionalized autobiography is the physical and emotional strength of this peasant woman and her complete independence—traits that defy traditional notions of Latin American womanhood. Poniatowska based her book on extended interviews with her subject, modifying certain characters, language, and events to produce a story that fictionalizes the documentary report in certain respects. Her work as a journalist clearly informed her methodology in this novel.

Success as a Journalist During the 1960s and 1970s Poniatowska continued to develop as a journalist. *Crossword Puzzle* (1961) is a collection of her interviews, including conversations with Luis Buñuel, Lázaro Cárdenas, and Fidel Castro, while *It All Began on Sunday* (1963) documents what poor people do on Sundays and was illustrated by Alberto Beltrán. Her journalistic pieces are important documents of oral history; they recount the people's history of Mexico. Among them *Massacre in Mexico* (1971) stands out, as does *Silence So Strong* (1980) and *Nothing, Nobody* (1988), which contains testimonies about the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985.

One of the turning points of her career, *Massacre in Mexico* documents through a multitude of voices the massacre that occurred on October 2, 1968, when the Mexican police and soldiers fired on a peaceful protest crowd in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas after months of conflict between university students and the authorities. Poniatowska's chronicle brings together testimony from many witnesses of different political orientations, including parents and students; statements that appeared in the newspapers; headlines and news items; documents of student organizations; transcripts of tape recordings; army dispatches; and Poniatowska's own comments. In 1970 Poniatowska was awarded Mexico's most prestigious literary award, the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize, for *Massacre in Mexico*, but she refused to accept it. She accompanied her rejection with an open letter to the new president, Luis Echeverría Álvarez, who had been minister of the interior and responsible for security forces during the 1968 events. The sincerity of Poniatowska's political and humanitarian sympathies, as commentators have noted, are manifest in this letter, in which she refuses to allow the incident of the student massacre to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Poniatowska's famous contemporaries include:

- Diego Rivera** (1886–1957): A famous Mexican muralist whom Poniatowska fictionalizes in *Dear Diego*.
- Octavio Paz** (1914–1998): Mexican poet and activist whose family was exiled for their support of the rebel Emiliano Zapata.
- Luis Echeverría Álvarez** (1922–): Mexican president from 1970 to 1976 who honored the victims of the Tlatelolco massacre but also incurred a great deal of national debt.
- Jimmy Carter** (1924–): United States president from 1977 to 1981 and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.
- François Truffaut** (1932–1984): French New Wave filmmaker famous for such movies as *The 400 Blows* (1959).
- Laura Esquivel** (1950–): Mexican novelist most famous for her book full of love and recipes, *Like Water for Chocolate*.

achieve a kind of closure by the bestowing of an award on her book.

Continuing Interest in Politics Poniatowska continued to write fiction and newspaper and magazine articles throughout the 1990s and early part of the twenty-first century. In 2005, she became an outspoken supporter of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the losing candidate in the highly controversial Mexican presidential election of 2006.

Works in Literary Context

Blending Fiction and Nonfiction A brief look at some of Poniatowska's work reveals the originality with which she creates new literary genres. *Dear Diego* (1978) is a novel in which the real-life affair between the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and his Russian mistress, the painter Angelina Beloff, is told through a sequence of heartfelt letters from Beloff to Rivera after he has left her in Paris. Poniatowska uses Beloff's predicament as an implied critique of the social situation of women both within the family structure and in the socially unrecognized position of mistress. In *The Night Visitor* (1979), a collection of Poniatowska's short stories, she uses a variety of modes of communication to convey the experiences of women from many social backgrounds, returning to issues treated in *Until We Meet Again*.

Poniatowska has stated that she sees herself first as a journalist, and a persistent theme when discussing her work has been the ways in which her journalistic outlook

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Poniatowska gives words to those whom she feels have no voice, whether they be females or the poor or the elderly. Here are a few other works that attempt to give voices to marginalized and traditionally “silent” peoples or characters.

The Screwtape Letters (1942), a fictional work by C. S. Lewis. A fictionalized series of sensitive and affectionate letters written by a demon in hell to his young apprenticing nephew.

The Tin Drum (1959), a novel by Günter Grass. Due to his twisted childhood spent in Nazi-occupied Poland, Oskar, the protagonist of Grass’s famous novel, must tell his story with the help of his favorite toy: his drum.

Grendel (1971), a novel by John Gardner. The *Beowulf* tale turned on its ear and retold—sympathetically—from the monster Grendel’s point of view.

Beloved (1987), a novel by Toni Morrison. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, structured much like a traditional slave narrative and based in part on a real person, tells the story of an escaped slave whose past returns to haunt her, literally.

and methods have shaped her more personal and fictionalized writings. She is especially highly regarded in Mexico as an interviewer, and commentators have observed that she has given the interview a new dimension by turning it into a literary genre.

Speaking for the Voiceless Poniatowska’s avowed objective is to give a voice to those in modern Mexico whom she perceives as having no voice—the poor, the socially oppressed, the politically persecuted, students, women (particularly those of the most impoverished classes), and all others who have been marginalized. This is shown in *Until We Meet Again*, in which the main character Jesusa suffers the double stigma of being both poor and a woman. Poniatowska’s 1979 book *Gaby Brimmer* tells the story of a real-life contemporary who suffered from cerebral palsy and faced physical and social barriers at every turn in her life.

Works in Critical Context

It has been observed that humor and irony are frequently used by women writers as subtle means to subvert traditional, patriarchal values. Although Hispanic literature is not especially noted for its humor (indeed the reverse is the case), women writers often make use of this strategy in order to offer a critical perspective on the dominant order. Beneath an appearance of naïveté that would seem to exalt certain traditional feminine characteristics, such as the eagerness to serve others while ignoring one’s own

needs, Poniatowska allows the reader to laugh and celebrate an event that undermines the basis of society, mocking not only the ridiculousness of the double standard in relationships between the sexes, but also the Mexican Revolution, religion, and the law.

Massacre in Mexico Poniatowska writes almost exclusively in Spanish—to date only a few of her books have been translated into English. *La noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral*, later translated as *Massacre in Mexico*, recounts Poniatowska’s experiences in Mexico City during the 1968 student riots. J. A. Ellis explains in the *Library Journal* that the work is “the story of the continuing tragedy of Mexico. . . . The mood ranges from the early heady optimism of the students . . . to shock and despair.” In a *Commonweal* review, Ronald Christ states that *Massacre in Mexico* is a “shatteringly beautiful book. . . . Recording everything she could about the incident and the events that led up to it, Poniatowska has assembled what she calls a ‘collage of voices,’ a brilliantly edited text whose texture is the weaving of anecdote, official history, gossip, placards, graffiti, journalism, eye-witness accounts, agonized interpretation.”

Tinisima After ten years of research, Poniatowska published *Tinisima* in Spanish in 1994. In novel form, it tells the tale of Tina Modetti, an Italian artist and photographer who emigrated from Italy to San Francisco when she was seventeen. She later moved to Mexico and became the photographer Edward Weston’s lover. She also had liaisons with Diego Rivera and other Mexican cultural and political contemporaries and became a Communist militant. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, in *World Literature Today*, writes: “*Tinisima* is a novel that certainly involves the reader. It stimulates much reflection, and the issues it addresses, through its portrayal of a woman, a country, and a time, are disturbingly contemporary.”

Responses to Literature

1. Explain, with examples, how Poniatowska’s writing style gives voice to the poor and oppressed.
2. Contrast the protagonist of *Dear Diego* with Laura Esquivel’s in *Like Water for Chocolate*. Which female character is the more independent? How and why is this character so independent?
3. Whom does Poniatowska seem to blame for the events in *Massacre in Mexico*? Does she imply that it is solely the government’s fault?
4. Poniatowska often fictionalizes real-life artists; what does she gain from taking people out of real life and recasting them as characters?
5. If Poniatowska were an American writer, what events or people do you think she would find interesting enough to write about and fictionalize? Why?

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Alexander Pope

BORN: 1688, London, England

DIED: 1744, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

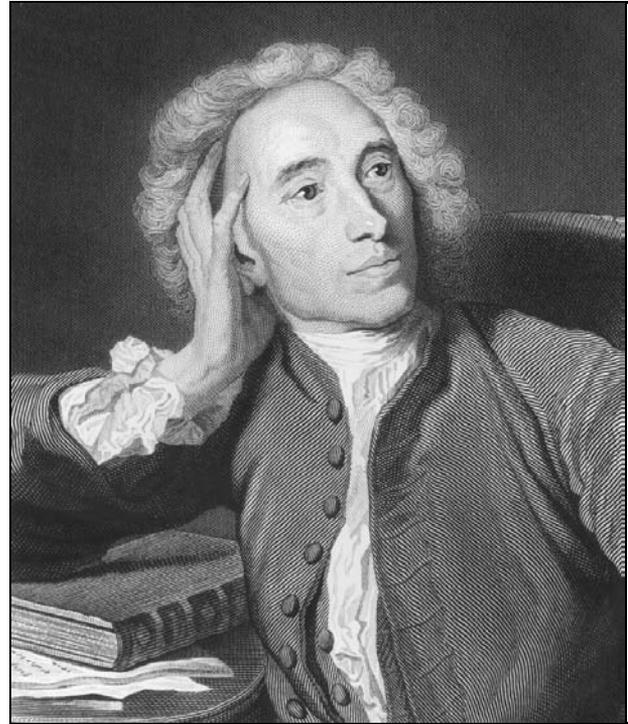
An Essay on Criticism (1711)

The Rape of the Lock (1714)

The Dunciad (1728)

Moral Essays (1731–1735; collected 1751)

An Essay on Man (1733)



Alexander Pope Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

Alexander Pope was a superstar of English neoclassical literature, so much so that the first half of the British eighteenth century is often referred to as "the age of Pope." Pope alternately defined, invented, satirized, critiqued, and reformed almost all of the genres and conventions of early-eighteenth-century British verse. He polished his work with meticulous care, and he is generally recognized as the greatest English poet between John Milton and William Wordsworth.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Catholic Exile Pope's Roman Catholic father was a linen merchant. After a line of Catholic monarchs was excluded from England in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Catholics were barred from living within the city of London, and Pope's family moved to Binfield in Windsor Forest. Pope had little formal schooling, largely educating himself through extensive reading. He contracted a tubercular infection in his later childhood; tuberculosis is a highly contagious disease that generally causes damage to the lungs but can also affect other areas, such as the spine, as it did in Pope's case. Tuberculosis was a widespread concern in Pope's time, since effective treatments for the disease were still two centuries away, and half of those who developed full-blown symptoms would eventually die. Pope lived, but because of his illness, he

never grew taller than four feet six inches, suffering from curvature of the spine and constant headaches. His physical appearance, frequently mocked by his enemies, undoubtedly gave an edge to Pope's satire, but he was always generous in his affection for his parents and many friends.

Early Poems Pope was a child prodigy. His first publication, *Pastorals* (1709), drew on long-established literary conventions but nevertheless announced him as a major new talent. Pope's next major work, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), was much bolder. In the work, Pope finds modern literature largely failing in its responsibility to follow unchanging "nature," the test of which is how well we can recognize basic human truths in ancient classical works (particularly Homer). *An Essay on Criticism* became the manifesto for a major movement in literary criticism: neoclassicism. Pope wrote the entire essay in heroic couplets (pairs of rhymed iambic pentameter lines).

One year later, Pope surprised many by showing he was also a master of humor and satire with *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, two cantos), which immediately made Pope famous. A fashionable young lady, Arabella Fermor, had a lock of her hair cut off without permission by a suitor, and Pope was asked by a mutual friend to soothe the ruffled tempers with a jest. Adopting a mock-heroic style that drew upon Homer and others (who were valorized so seriously in *An Essay on Criticism*), Pope showed how ridiculous it was to treat the event overseriously and simultaneously satirized the vanity and glitter of upper-class society.

Other poems published by 1717, the date of the first collected edition of Pope's works, include "Windsor Forest" (1713), which showed Pope as an "occasional" poet, or one who writes about current events. The collection also included *Eloisa to Abelard*, which shows Pope's turning to a new genre, love poetry.

Translations of Homer Pope's study of, and high regard for, classical literature led him naturally to the art of translation. He had already done poetic imitations, transformations, or translations of Vergil, the Bible, and Chaucer, but his versions of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were his greatest achievement as a translator and, some say, a poet. Pope not only translated Homer's Greek into English, but also recast the lines into powerful, expressive, and flexible heroic couplets.

Pope's translations sold well, making him one of England's first full-time, self-supporting poets. Unlike Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), who was arguably England's first professional writer, Pope was the first poet to become wealthy. In 1716, an increased land tax on Roman Catholics forced the Popes to sell their place at Binfield, but after Pope's father died in 1717, Pope and his mother moved to an expansive villa outside London. He had gardens built there that became famous through-

out Europe, complete with an underground grotto decorated with shells and bright stones.

During these years, Pope became friends with some brilliant writers, including Jonathan Swift, Dr. John Arbuthnot, John Gay, and Thomas Parnell. Together they combined to form the Scriblerus Club, and they planned a series of satires against narrow-minded academics and the popular culture's fascination with "novelty." Together they published *The Memoires of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741), and their discussions contributed to the creation of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Pope's *The Dunciad*.

The Dunciad One of the editorial projects Pope undertook was an edition of Shakespeare's plays (1725). Pope's explanatory notes were uneven, and the edition was attacked by a rival Shakespeare editor, Lewis Theobald. Pope, never one to forget or forgive criticism, made Theobald the head of all dunces in a mock-epic tour de force of bitterly satirical couplets. *The Dunciad* (the title is a pun on Homer's epic *The Iliad*) appeared in 1728. A year later the text increased to include a large collection of notes and commentaries intended as a burlesque on the heavy labor of commentators and textual critics. Pope used *The Dunciad* to settle old scores and to show his distaste for a literary culture that would come to be known as "Grub Street"; on "Grub Street," writers competed with one another to appeal to the lowest tastes of the reading public, which often resulted in untalented and irresponsible writers gaining undeserved literary prominence.

The Epistles and An Essay on Man Late in his life, Pope undertook a series of satires in the classical sense of the term, a collection of serious and sardonic commentaries of culture and ethics. These satires took the form of letters (or "epistles") to his close friends. For example, "The Epistle to Burlington" (1731) illustrates, along with its companion piece "Epistle to Bathurst" (1733), the right and wrong way to use wealth as well as the parallels between artistic taste and moral virtue.

An Essay on Man is Pope's most philosophical work and in some ways his most ambitious. Pope's argument views religion through the lens of the emerging eighteenth-century Enlightenment: seeing God as a rational and balanced creator who, by nature, ensures that everything happens as part of a carefully organized universal plan. "All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee; / All chance, direction, which thou canst not see / All discord, harmony not understood, / All partial evil, universal good," Pope writes. Pope also revives the ancient idea of the "great chain of being," the idea that all species in creation are ranked in a hierarchy with God and the angels at the top, Man in the middle, and the simple organism at the bottom. Presuming for ourselves the authority to blame God for when things do not go our way, Pope says, is therefore an absurd and blasphemous act of pride for stepping out of our place on the chain. In essence, *An Essay on Man* is not so much

philosophy or theology, but a poet's apprehension of unity despite diversity, of an order embracing the whole multifarious creation—a theme that finds expression in Pope's works as various as the *Pastorals*, *The Dunciad*, and “An Epistle to Burlington.”

Works in Literary Context

Pope and Neoclassicism Pope, particularly in *An Essay on Criticism* and “Epistle to Arbuthnot,” contributed to neoclassicism, or the resurgence in ancient ideals in art and literature—particularly the ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. For Pope, the core truth is whatever has lasted longest across many generations of readers; thus we should look to ancient literature for truth. In the epics of Homer, for example, the ethics of heroism, loyalty, and leadership are as true now as they were then. In addition, the balanced and symmetrical structures of classical literature and architecture represent values of reason and coherence that Pope says should remain central to all modern arts.

Comic Satire Pope used his great knowledge of and respect for classical literature to write mock-epics that poked fun at the elite. Essentially Pope believed the upper class possessed an exaggerated sense of its own importance. He also made fun of hack writers, comparing their shoddy work with timeless stories of the past. Pope is credited for proclaiming, “Praise undeserved is satire in disguise.”

Pope and Proverbs Pope's style and personal philosophies have become part of the English language. For example, “A little learning is a dang'rous thing” comes from *An Essay on Criticism*, as does “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” Other well-known sayings from *An Essay on Criticism* include “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread” and “Hope springs eternal.”

Works in Critical Context

Pope's enormous success attracted a great deal of jealousy within the already competitive and vindictive London literary scene. Pope's Catholicism, his conservative politics, and his unusual physical appearance made the literary public even more envious. Pope remembered every literary critic who dared to disapprove of his work or mock his physical appearance, and decades after someone printed a bad review of Pope's poetry, a critic might find their name in the parade of fools in *The Dunciad*. Not satisfied with the level of attack in that work, which was enough to ruin the career of more than one writer, Pope followed it a year later with *The Dunciad, Variorum*, which added mock-scholarly footnotes naming names of even more of the disfavored literary critics and hack writers who, Pope believed, were dragging down the dignity of the entire literary profession and endangering the moral foundation of society.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pope's famous contemporaries include:

Christian Wolff (1679–1754): A philosopher who embodied the Enlightenment ideal in Germany, Wolff is regarded as the inventor of economics and public administration as fields of academic study, and his ideas influenced the American Declaration of Independence.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): A German-born composer who later relocated to England, Handel is most famous for his oratorio *The Messiah*, composed in 1741.

George Berkeley (1685–1753): Berkeley, an Irish philosopher who promoted the idea of “immaterialism,” also contributed to the development of calculus.

John Harrison (1693–1776): This English clockmaker who invented the marine chronometer, a device that accurately determined the longitudinal position of a ship, won a huge prize offered by the British Parliament and made voyages to the New World safer and more efficient.

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755): This French social and political commentator promoted the separation of government powers, an idea that became a cornerstone of the American Constitution.

Pope in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

After his death in 1744, few had anything but the highest praise for Pope's poetic achievement. Joseph Warton and Samuel Johnson, perhaps the most influential critical voices in the late eighteenth century, secured his place in the literary canon. For the Romantic critics of the early nineteenth century, however, Pope was often seen more as a fine poetic craftsman who nevertheless preferred topical satire and petty themes to the higher (to Romantics, anyway) poetic subjects of the natural world and confessional passions. As the mid-nineteenth-century Victorians sought to distinguish themselves with a high moral tone in contrast to their somewhat more coarse and outspoken eighteenth-century ancestors, Pope was respected but largely neglected.

New Critics The New Critics of the mid-twentieth century revived interest in Pope with their emphasis on high literary technique, irony, and the poetic rewards of close reading. A definitive edition of Pope's works in 1963 and a thorough biography by Maynard Mack in 1985 brought about many new enthusiastic and often biographically based interpretations of Pope's work. In recent years, Pope's collected poetry has proven a rich resource for cultural critics interested in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

When tragedy strikes, people of faith often question how a just and good God could allow it to happen. Pope, who had crippling physical ailments and chronic pain for his entire adult life, worked out his own theories in *An Essay on Man*. Many other authors have tackled these difficult questions with alternate answers.

In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (2005). Selected teachings of the Buddha from the Pali Canon, the earliest record of what the Buddha taught, from truths on family life and marriage to renunciation and the path of insight.

The Metamorphosis (1915), a novella by Franz Kafka. In this classic existentialist work, a man wakes up one day and finds he has been transformed into a human-sized dung beetle. No explanation is given, no lessons are learned, and no redemption is given.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People (1983), a nonfiction book by Harold S. Kushner. In this controversial best seller written by a Jewish rabbi facing the death of his own child, Kushner offered a theory that God does not necessarily control everything that happens in his creation.

all aspects of early eighteenth-century values and culture, particularly the influence of colonial ideologies, the role of gender in the poet's imagination, the impact of an emerging print culture, the new emphasis on materialism, and the complex interactions of religion and politics as the Restoration moved into the early eighteenth century.

Responses to Literature

1. Pope did not often appreciate it when other people wrote about him, but he wrote often about himself. Particularly in the "Epistle to Arbuthnot," how does Pope portray himself? What is Pope's image of himself and the conditions of his own life? Jot down a paragraph summarizing your findings.
2. For all of the satire in *The Rape of the Lock*, it is often said that a tone of admiration and even long-ling resonates in the way Pope portrays the kind of upper-class society from which he was excluded as a Catholic, a poet, and the son of a linen merchant. With a classmate, discuss whether you agree or disagree. Then, discuss whether you think Pope manages to balance or combine his admiration of Belinda and her friends with his satire of them.

Point out specific lines from the text to support your ideas.

3. Do some research into the style of gardens in the eighteenth century. Create an audiovisual report discussing why you think landscaping means more than just a pleasing arrangement of plants. Then, research the way Pope made contributions to the theories of gardening during his lifetime, as well as the plants or forms he incorporated into his own garden. Add your findings about Pope to your presentation.

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■ Jean-Baptiste Poquelin

SEE *Moliere*

Terry Pratchett

BORN: 1948, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Colour of Magic (1983)

Interesting Times (1994)

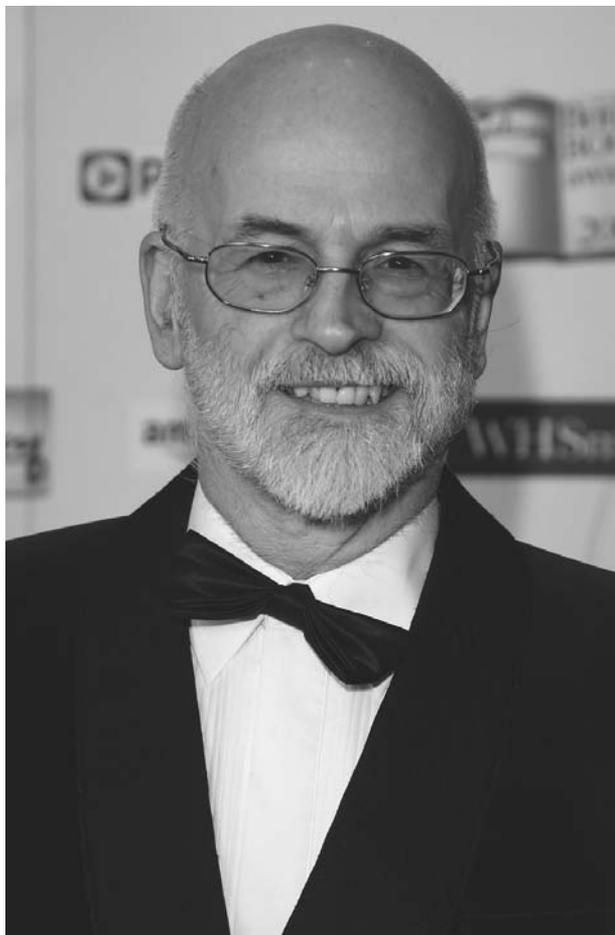
The Johnny Maxwell Trilogy (1999)

The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents (2001)

The Bromeliad Trilogy (2003)

Overview

Terry Pratchett, the author of the increasingly popular Discworld series, is widely known for writing tales of witches, wizards, and sons of Satan—all with a sly sense of humor. Called the “master of humorous fantasy” by a critic for *Publishers Weekly*, Pratchett is also regarded as a



Terry Pratchett Gareth Cattermole / Getty Images

serious craftsman but with an unusual cult following: the second-most-read author in England and the seventh-most-read non-American author in the United States.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Prodigious Beginning Terry Pratchett was born on April 28, 1948, in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England, to David and Eileen Pratchett. He had no siblings. At eleven years of age, he passed his eleven-plus exam and entered High Wycombe Technical High School. Getting what he has said is most of his education from the Beaconsfield Public Library, Pratchett read constantly, turning often to the works of H. G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, and “every book you really ought to read,” he later reported.

Early Interests in Astronomy Pratchett developed an early penchant for space and astronomy. Included in his boyhood collection were Brooke Bond tea cards and a telescope, which he hoped would be a part of a long career in astronomy. However, having weak skills in math, the young Pratchett turned back to reading and, in particular, to science fiction books, including his favorite, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), by Kenneth Grahame. He also began to write; at thirteen he published his first short story, “The Hades Business,” in the school paper. The story was then published by a local magazine, bringing Pratchett his first income. This, according to his official Web site, enabled the young prodigy to purchase his first writing equipment, a secondhand typewriter.

Early Writing Success Pratchett began studying English, art, and history in school, and eventually decided to become a journalist. By age seventeen, Pratchett left school to begin work with Bucks Free Press and wrote his first novel, a humorous children’s fantasy titled *The Carpet People*. The book was published in 1971.

The Discworld Series With the success of his first novel, Pratchett continued to write and publish, delivering to his soon-to-be-fanatic readers *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981). Two years later, his creative efforts launched him into literary stardom: beginning the same year, he became press officer for the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) covering three nuclear power plants and published *The Colour of Magic* (1983). The novel was the first of his “Discworld” works, novels of science fiction and fantasy set in a flat world. The planet is supported on the backs of four gigantic elephants astride the shell of an immense tortoise swimming in space.

Pratchett continued with the comedic and fantastic Discworld series, which features witches and wizards and gnomes and trolls, presenting them to an eager readership. *The Light Fantastic* (1986), *Equal Rites* (1987), and *Mort* (1987) were the first sequels. As the Discworld series grew rapidly in production and popularity, numerous offshoots entertained Pratchett’s avid followers—including Discworld

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pratchett's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Bukovsky (1942–): Russian author and activist, he is most noted for being a former Soviet political dissident.

Hillary Rodham Clinton (1947–): First Lady to the forty-second president of the United States and junior U.S. senator from New York, in 2007 she became the first woman to be a serious contender for the nomination by a major political party for U.S. president.

Ken Follett (1949–): British author of historical and thriller fiction, he has sold more than one hundred million copies of his books.

Robert Haas (1941–): American poet who has served two terms as U.S. poet laureate (from 1995 to 1997) and has contributed greatly to contemporary literature.

Stephen Hawking (1942–): British theoretical physicist who is known for his important work on relativity, black hole, and radiation theory.

J. K. Rowling (1965–): British author famous for her Harry Potter books and the best-selling author in history.

reference books, guides, and maps; short stories; animations and theater productions; and television programs.

Continued Accolades and Awards With the publication and astonishing success of his fourth Discworld volume, *Mort*, Pratchett decided to turn to writing full-time. In addition to writing thirty-six Discworld books, Pratchett started to write graphic novels and comic books for Discworld. Game designers and platforms delivered numerous versions of Discworld role-playing games. By 1989 Pratchett and his Discworld series had been honored with the British Science Fiction Award, a first of several awards the comic author was to receive.

In the early 1990s, Pratchett also delivered another award-winning series featuring Johnny Maxwell. After a trio of successful works dubbed the Bromeliad Trilogy, Pratchett began the Johnny Maxwell trilogy with *Only You Can Save Mankind* (1992), followed by *Johnny and the Dead* (1993) and *Johnny and the Bomb* (1996). All were exceptionally well-received. The second volume won Pratchett the 1993 Best Children's Book award from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. By 1996 he was reportedly the top-selling and highest-earning author in the United Kingdom; by 2003, he was second only to the author of the Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling.

Ongoing Productivity and Popularity Pratchett met and married Lyn Purves at the start of his writing career. Together they raised daughter Rhianna, who was born in 1976. The Pratchett family moved southwest of

Salisbury, Wiltshire, in 1993 and still reside there. In 2007 Pratchett was diagnosed with a rare form of Alzheimer's disease called posterior cortical atrophy. As the disease began to impact his physical efforts at writing, Pratchett has become an active fundraiser, making charitable contributions himself, including the sum of one million U.S. dollars to the Alzheimer's Research Trust. His donation reportedly prompted a mimicking movement online, whereby Pratchett fans began a campaign they call "Match it for Pratchett," in hopes of raising another million for Alzheimer's research.

In 1998 Pratchett was named an Officer of the British Empire "for services to literature." In 2002 he received the esteemed Carnegie Medal from the British Library Association for one of his many popular children's books, *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* (2001). Pratchett's work has been translated into thirty-three languages and has sold more than forty-five million copies.

Works in Literary Context

Classical and Popular Characters Several influences are built into Pratchett's works. As he told James Naughtie at the BBC Radio show *Bookclub*, he leans on characters from ancient history, classic literature, and popular culture, and adds his own brand of humor. Indeed, it is the original sources that provide inspiration for and give impetus to his humorous style.

Satire and Parody The outside influences that inform Pratchett's humorous work became more than inspiration for his humorous style. Satire is apparent in his fantasy and science fiction. Naughtie notes that Pratchett's Discworld series began as a parody of the fantasy genre, but over the course of development, it turned into "a satire on just about everything."

As a critic for *Authors and Artists for Young Adults* adds, "Discworld—as well as most of Pratchett's other works—also offers humorous parodies of other famous science fiction and fantasy writers, such as J. R. R. Tolkien or Larry Niven." Pratchett also spoofs (or parodies) contemporary concerns. For instance, he spoofs death in *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Predictions of Agnes Nutter, Witch* (1990, cowritten by Neil Gaiman). This novel is like several in this genre, a send-up of modern horror themes—particularly *The Omen* series of films and the series' imitators. When the son of Satan is misplaced and raised as a nice child, the schedule of Armageddon is thrown awry, and the powers of heaven and hell must pitch together to work things out.

Works in Critical Context

Pratchett has earned an esteemed reputation with both the public and the critics—most notably for his Discworld series.

Discworld Books (1983–2007) Critical reception for the thirty-plus volumes in the series has been almost unanimously favorable. Critic David V. Barrett made a general

comment in a *New Statesman & Society* review, saying that the novels of Discworld “are works of marvelous composition and rattling good stories.” Making more specific comments, a *Publishers Weekly* critic in a review of the Discworld novel *Interesting Times* (1994) wrote, “Pratchett is an acquired taste, but the acquisition seems easy, judging from the robust popularity of Discworld.” Of *Lords and Ladies* (1992), a dark-side study of elves, *Library Journal*'s Jackie Cassada concluded that the volume shows why Pratchett “may be one of the genre’s . . . most inventive humorists.”

Responses to Literature

1. Pratchett has become one of the rare contemporary novelists who has a cult following. This is evident in the substance and numbers of message boards where fans discuss his works at great length. Visit the message boards at TerryPratchettBooks.com. Read several postings from at least three forums. Then, given the contents of the threads, make an effort to characterize the Pratchett Fanatic, or cult follower. Use critical thinking skills to determine who the “typical” reader is, identifying gender, geographic location, and age.
2. On the Web site *Books at Transworld* (www.booksattransworld.co.uk/) is a quiz titled, “Can You Survive the Discworld Quiz?” Before going to the quiz, work with a partner to come up with your own Discworld trivia quiz. When you finish, go to Transworld (or Trivia Net) and take one quiz. What do your two trivia quizzes have in common? How are they different?
3. Pratchett’s books, especially the Discworld series, have generated a phenomenal collection of cartoons, shows, comic books, guides, and games. As a group, decide on one Discworld book and prepare a small study guide for students. This might include a character guide, a list of important locations and the flora and fauna found there, information from previous Discworld books relevant to the current story, and themes found within the work. To aid in the project, research the many well-developed sites dedicated to games, themes, and other elements of the Discworld series.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Few subjects escape Pratchett’s satire, which mocks the publishing and filmmaking industries, histories, cultures, music genres, philosophies, politics, and religions, among others. Here are a few works by writers who also have fun with satirizing universal concerns or parodying more serious works:

- Animal Farm* (1945), a novella by George Orwell. In this satirical allegory, the farm animals are stand-ins for Bolshevik revolutionaries who plot to take over the human-run farmstead.
- The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. This satirical comedy of errors heavily mocks the etiquette of high society.
- Main Street* (1920), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. In this satirical work, the author makes commentary on contemporary American values.
- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. This play is a modern parody of several elements in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1599–1601).

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Marcel Proust

BORN: 1871, Auteuil, France

DIED: 1922, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Remembrance of Things Past (1913–1927)



Marcel Proust Proust, Marcel, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Marcel Proust is known primarily for his multivolume novel *Remembrance of Things Past*, regarded as one of the most important works of twentieth-century literature. A philosophical meditation on the nature of time and consciousness, Proust's masterpiece offers profound psychological insights into the complicated human soul. In addition, the novel provides a social chronicle of turn-of-the-century Parisian society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Life Marcel Proust was born July 10, 1871, in Auteuil, France, to Adrien, a prominent medical doctor, and Jeanne Weil Proust. His mother was Jewish and later converted to Christianity. Proust attended L'École libre des sciences politiques, graduating in 1890, and the Sorbonne, University of Paris, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1895. Although he suffered severely from asthma, he completed a year of military service in 1889–1890.

Proust was homosexual at a time when it was not spoken of openly, and he sought to hide this part of himself from public view. Before World War I, he was emotionally involved with Alfred Agostinelli, who was

killed in an airplane crash in 1914. The extent of his relationships with other men is unknown.

Early Work In the mid-1890s, Proust was chiefly known as a contributor of short prose to various Paris reviews. In an important work of criticism published posthumously, *By Way of Sainte-Beuve* (1954), Proust presented his conception of literature. Charles Saint-Beuve was a major critic who viewed literature as an expression of the author's life experiences. On the contrary, Proust argued that the author transcends the historical and biographical in the process of writing. He called on writers to create a new literature of impressions by which they convey their subjective selves. These impressions were to be based on involuntary memories, such as those springing from taste and sound.

In 1895 he was appointed to the library of the Institut de France. He seldom performed his duties, annually asked for leave on the pretext of bad health, and was finally dismissed in 1900. Proust's real interest during all of this time was society, which he would examine in his literary masterpiece.

On September 26, 1905, his mother died. While Proust had previously published one novel and abandoned work on another, one of the debts that he felt he owed his mother was to write a great work of literature.

Remembrance of Things Past Started in 1909, *Remembrance of Things Past* originally appeared in seven volumes, three of which were not published until after Proust's death. He never finished revising these final volumes. *Swann's Way*, the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, was published in 1913. Like the other volumes in the series, it is a complete novel in itself. It introduces the many themes and motifs—such as memory, jealous love, social ambition, homosexuality, and the importance of art—that are developed in later volumes. It was greeted with hostility because of the complexity of Proust's style.

The second volume, *Within a Budding Grove*, was published in 1919. Volume three, *The Guermantes Way* (1920), won a national literary prize and brought Proust international recognition. *Cities of the Plain* (1922) explores the themes of homosexuality and corruption.

For most of his last fifteen years, Proust lived as an invalid. He died of a lung infection on November 18, 1922, in Paris.

Three more volumes of *Remembrance of Things Past* were published after his death. *The Captive* (1923) and *The Sweet Cheat Gone* (1925), the fifth and sixth volumes of the series, were not included in Proust's original plan for *Remembrance of Things Past*, and some critics believe that events in Proust's personal life led him to expand his novel to include the themes of jealous love and deception.

Time Regained (1927), the final volume, successfully ties together all of the novel's recurrent themes and motifs. In *Time Regained*, the narrator realizes that memory is the key to the meaning of the past that he has been

seeking and that art has the ability to redeem experience from disillusionment, deception, and the decay of time.

Works in Literary Context

Remembrance of Things Past continues the traditions both of the great seventeenth-century classical writers such as Madame de La Fayette, the Duc de Saint-Simon, and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, and of the nineteenth-century realists such as Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, and Gustave Flaubert. At the same time, it is highly innovative in technique and content.

Marcel Proust was influenced by the British critic and writer John Ruskin who used complicated sentence structures to capture the impressions and experiences furnished by art and nature. Proust translated several of Ruskin's works, although he objected to the writer's moralizing on works of art.

In *Time Regained*, the final novel of *Remembrance of Things Past*, the narrator rejects realism and acknowledges his literary ancestors: founder of French Romanticism Chateaubriand, the Romantic French poet Gerard de Nerval, and the poet Charles Baudelaire, famous for his *Flowers of Evil*.

The Importance of Memory One of the most important elements throughout the entire series of novels is memory and its necessity in the creation of art. The translation of the series' title in French, *In Search of Lost Time*, reflects the author's close association of time and memory, with memories being the tangible legacy of past times and experiences. This is shown most dramatically when Marcel eats a madeleine, a sensory experience that draws him into a world of memory.

Works in Critical Context

In 1936, Proust scholar Leon Pierre-Quint claimed that the fashion for *Remembrance of Things Past* had ended and that Marcel Proust was destined to interest only thesis writers at the Sorbonne. He could not have been more mistaken, for Proust today is almost universally revered as the greatest French author of the twentieth century.

Criticism from the 1970s and 1980s, in addition to a wealth of biographical and critical material from previous decades, attests to the multiple approaches one can take to Proust's work. While textual scholarship is still being pursued, the most recent critical examinations have tended to emphasize either narrative technique or psychological content.

Proust as Narrative Innovator Proust is seen as a great narrative innovator; his manipulations of narrative time and voice, for example, are an early instance of techniques later used by certain New Novelists, as Gérard Genette showed in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, and Proustian technique contributed to creating a new conception of story line and narrator. Other critics view Proust as one of the most creative psychologists of the self; Serge Doubrovsky, in *Writing and Fantasy in*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Proust's famous contemporaries include:

Colette (1873–1954): A French writer who scandalized the public with her affairs with both men and women. Her novels included semiautobiographical elements.

Anatole France (1844–1924): French writer, considered a master of irony. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1921.

Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919): Jewish German political revolutionary who cofounded what became Germany's Communist Party. She was revered by many Marxists and killed by German monarchist soldiers.

Thomas Mann (1875–1955): German novelist awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929. He was well known for his novels *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain*.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): French novelist who was influential in the school of naturalism, which sought to portray life realistically.

Proust, has shown how Proust used language and metaphor to conceal and reveal at once the most intimate obsessions of his psyche.

One of the most important issues in Proust criticism is the role of the character Marcel as protagonist and narrator of *Remembrance of Things Past* and his relationship to Proust himself. There is strong evidence for both identifying Proust with Marcel and for separating the two, and some interpretations of the novel are more autobiographical than others. Perhaps the firmest ground for likening Proust with Marcel is their mutual struggle to realize themselves as artists, with each making art the highest value in their lives. For both, the search for lost time ends in the disillusioned abandonment of life and in the affirmative re-creation of life as a work of art.

Responses to Literature

1. Charles Saint-Beuve argued that literature is “an expression of the author's life experiences.” What does that mean? Write an essay analyzing the meaning of that statement and arguing for or against that point of view.
2. Think about memory as a key to the meaning of the past. Write two or three paragraphs about a significant event in your life. Then rewrite it from someone else's point of view. How does what you choose to reveal in each version influence the reader's perception of what happened?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In Marcel Proust's masterpiece, memory becomes a means of transcending change and death; involuntary memory can transport individuals through time. He finds affirmation in the re-creation of life as a work of art. Here are some other works that deal with similar themes:

House of Incest (1936), a novella by Anaïs Nin. "Incest" here is a metaphor for loving only one's own qualities in another; this surrealistic novel investigates reality by delving into the subconscious.

The Lost World (1965), poetry by Randall Jarrell. This volume of poetry, published posthumously, was inspired by letters Jarrell wrote to his mother as a child and reshapes his childhood memories.

Native Guard (2007), poetry by Natasha Trethewey. These poems examine the author's heritage as a multiracial southerner; the ten sonnets of the title poem tell the story of a Civil War soldier in an all-black regiment and reveal the circularity of life.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), a novel by James Joyce. This semiautobiographical novel follows the young Stephen Dedalus as he questions his religious upbringing and leaves his native Ireland to become an artist.

The Waves (1931), a novel by Virginia Woolf. This novel, following six friends through their lives, is freed from narrative time and explores change and metamorphosis.

3. In *Remembrance of Things Past*, the narrator famously eats a madeleine, a type of cookie, that transports him to his past. Listen to some music that was important to you several years ago. Write two or three paragraphs describing your memory of listening to it before. Be specific—what clothes were you wearing, where were you, who were you with?
4. Marcel Proust argued that people could re-create their lives as works of art. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research other artists who have attempted similar projects—such as Andy Warhol, the New York artist. Write an essay discussing how Warhol or another artist tried to make his or her own life into a work of art.

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Alexander Pushkin

BORN: 1799, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1837, St. Petersburg, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Ruslan and Lyudmila (1820)

The Gypsies (1827)

Boris Godunoff (1831)

Eugene Onegin: A Romance of Russian Life in Verse (1833)

The Captain's Daughter; or, The Generosity of the Russian Usurper Pugatscheff (1836)

Overview

Many extol Alexander Pushkin not only as Russia's greatest poet, but also as one of the most important writers in history to have influenced Russian culture and literature.

Alexander Pushkin *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

During a time when most literature was being written in English and French, Pushkin accentuated the simplicity and beauty of the Russian language, capturing the hearts of his compatriots. In addition, he served as Russia's historiographer under Tsar Nicholas I. While he was inspired by the structural and stylistic characteristics of European authors, such as Voltaire, Lord Byron, and Shakespeare, Pushkin recast them in a uniquely Russian mold. Unfortunately, because his writing has distinctive rhythmic patterns that are difficult to translate, foreign readers do not have the opportunity, as do native Russian speakers, to appreciate the true power and magnificence of his work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Aristocratic Upbringing Pushkin was born in Moscow on May 26, 1799, into an aristocratic family whose noble ancestry could be traced back over six hundred years. As a child, Pushkin was educated informally at home by his nurse, Arina. Arina told him the fairy tales and folk tales he would later incorporate into his writings.

Pushkin was formally educated by private tutors, who borrowed freely from the household's library—a collection that included many French works—for Pushkin's lessons. When he was twelve, Pushkin was sent to the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum near St. Petersburg, a prestigious institution designed to prepare young men of nobility for government posts. There, he read voraciously—especially French literature—and wrote prolifically. Pushkin's first published poem, "Recollections of Tsarskoe-Selo," (1815) was well received by several leading poets. After graduating, Pushkin was given a paid position in St. Petersburg that required little work.

Exile Alternating between periods of carefree socializing and concentrated writing in St. Petersburg, Pushkin finished his first full-length piece, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, in 1820. However, Pushkin was not in St. Petersburg long enough to experience the popular success of his poem, for his all-too-vocal expression of his political views had drawn the attention of officials. Alexander I exiled Pushkin to southern Russia shortly before publication of *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. For Pushkin, censorship remained a lifelong problem. During his four-year exile, he was productive, writing *The Captive of the Caucasus* (1822) and *The Bakchesarian Fountain: A Tale of the Tauride* (1824). These are romantic narrative poems that reflect the influence of Byron, whom Pushkin read during this period.

In the months before leaving Kishinev in 1823, Pushkin began work on his novel in verse and magnum opus, *Eugene Onegin*, which he would publish serially in chapters, beginning in 1825 and continuing over the next seven years (it was published in full in 1833). Pushkin was able to obtain a transfer in the summer of 1823 to Odessa, where he continued writing *Eugene Onegin*. In 1824, a letter was intercepted by authorities in which Pushkin expressed a fondness for atheism. Pushkin found himself exiled to his mother's family estate at Mikhailovskoe, where he stayed until 1826.

Controlled Freedom After the Decembrist Revolt, which took place in 1825, Pushkin petitioned for his return from exile. Tsar Nicholas I allowed Pushkin to return to Russia and to travel with some degree of (but not total) freedom; he appointed himself Pushkin's personal censor. During this new stage in Pushkin's life, he concentrated on writing drama, making efforts that proved to be groundbreaking in Russian theater despite being under strict observation. With the historical play *Boris Godunoff*, Pushkin hoped to end the influence of the French classical style that had dominated the Russian stage for so long. Although Pushkin completed the play in 1825, censors prevented it from being published until 1831, and it was not performed until 1870, more than thirty years after the author's death.

During the years after his exile, Pushkin began writing three of the four short dramas most often referred to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Pushkin's famous contemporaries include:

- Louis Visconti** (1791–1853): This French architect built the tomb of Napoléon and also designed the New Louvre in Paris.
- Benjamin Waterhouse** (1754–1846): Waterhouse was the first doctor to test the smallpox vaccine in the United States.
- Esaias Tegnér** (1782–1846): Known as the greatest Swedish poet, Tegnér was also a scholar, bishop, and politician.
- Margaret Fuller** (1810–1850): In 1840, Fuller joined Ralph Waldo Emerson in founding the *Dial*, an American journal dedicated to promoting transcendentalism.
- Victor Hugo** (1802–1885): Hugo, a French author, wrote the masterpieces *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) and *Les Misérables* (1862).
- Hans Christian Andersen** (1805–1875): Andersen, a Danish author, is most famous for his fairy tales, including “The Little Mermaid” (1837) and “The Ugly Duckling” (1844).

as the “little” or “miniature” tragedies: *The Covetous Knight*, *Mozart and Salieri*, a play based on the supposed rivalry of composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri; and *Stone Guest*. The fourth, *Feast During the Plague*, is a translation of an English play. It was during this time that Pushkin finally brought to completion his novel, *Eugene Onegin*.

Scandal and Death In February 1831, Pushkin married Nathalia Goncharova, and in May of 1832 she bore his first child, Maria. Nicholas was evidently pleased with Pushkin's marriage, apparent stability, and dedication to the state. He reinstated Pushkin in state service as a historiographer with a salary and access to state archives. However, as Pushkin's debts increased, and as more children came, he grew more dependent on favors from Nicholas. Pushkin's presence (and that of his wife) at society functions was made obligatory by his appointment as a minor court official, an inconsequential position that was intended to humiliate the writer. Soon, gossip about an affair between Nathalia and Baron Georges d'Anthés began to circulate and continued even after d'Anthés married Nathalia's sister. Attempting to put an end to the scandal, Pushkin met d'Anthés in a duel with pistols. D'Anthés was slightly wounded; Pushkin was mortally wounded and died two days later on January 29, 1837. Mourned as Russia's national poet, Pushkin was buried in St. Petersburg by Tsar Nicholas I.

Works in Literary Context

French Influence Much of Pushkin's early work, including the verse narrative *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, was based on the folklore he had been exposed to as a child. For example, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the poem that established his reputation, was based on “Orlando Furioso,” a chivalric poem by Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto. Pushkin's style during his early career was influenced by the French writers Voltaire, André Chenier, and Evariste Parny. According to scholar Yuri Druzhnikov, even the characters' names in *Ruslan and Lyudmila* reflect Pushkin's admiration of Parny: “where Parny has Aïna, Pushkin has Naïna; where Parny has Rusla, Pushkin has Ruslan.”

Romantic Roots During the time of his exile, Pushkin was greatly influenced by Romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron. *The Fountain of Bachtshisarai*, *The Robber-Brother*, *The Bohemians*, and other Pushkin poems all portray strong traces of an intimate acquaintance with Byron. They have a similar form; their heroes and heroines resemble those of Byron's poems; the gloomy coloring, the mysterious connection between guilt and fate are the same. Though Byron took his subjects from a foreign world, Pushkin took his subjects from places and a society with which he was thoroughly familiar. Consequently, he was able to give them a distinctly local tone and color.

The Pushkin Sonnet Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* shows that Byron's influence was only temporary. In addition to its pure, expressive language, which is the hallmark of Pushkin's style, the work features character types that appear frequently in later Russian fiction: the “superfluous man,” represented by Onegin, and the idealized Russian woman, characterized by Tatiana.

Eugene Onegin was eight years in the making. The very form of the novel indicates Pushkin's early discomfort with conventional genres, his striving to make his own mark in an original way. First of all he called his work not simply a novel but (and he emphasized this) a “novel in verse” and termed its sections “chapters” rather than “cantos.” While clearly seeking to be innovative, he also showed an awareness of European models.

This new Russian genre, the Onegin stanza, is also known as the Pushkin sonnet. As opposed to the Italian—or Petrarchan—sonnet and the Elizabethan—or Shakespearean—sonnet, the fourteen-line Pushkin sonnet is not obviously divided into smaller stanzas of four or two lines. Furthermore, while Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter, Pushkin wrote his verse-novel in iambic tetrameter. Another distinction the Pushkin sonnet has is an unusual rhyme scheme: aBaBccDDcFFeGG, where lowercase letters represent feminine rhymes (stressed on the next-to-last syllable) and the uppercase represent masculine rhymes (stress on the final syllable). Intellectually combining comedy with seriousness, the Pushkin

sonnet is a compelling form that is easy to read and incredibly difficult to write.

A New Direction for Russian Literature In his prose, Pushkin rejected the literary tradition that considered fiction an inferior genre. Pushkin's movement away from sentimental fiction of the late eighteenth century signaled a new direction for Russian literature. Scholars note that the realistic scenes and characters in *Eugene Onegin* provided a model for his nineteenth-century successors, including the notable writers Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Nikolai Gogol. All have acknowledged their debt to Pushkin, whose work continues to influence even the modern Russian novel.

Works in Critical Context

Although Pushkin is rarely read outside his homeland, many critics recognize him as the greatest and most influential Russian writer in history. Scholars attribute this lack of foreign readership to the fact that Pushkin's style is difficult to translate. For instance, while Pushkin's combination of vernacular speech and Slavic language appeals to Russian readers, his stylistic qualities and subtlety of characterization and plot development deny translation beyond the literal. Pushkin's admirers are quick to point out that while foreign readers might not be directly acquainted with his works, almost every Russian composer of note and several European ones have some work based on one of Pushkin's writings.

Eugene Onegin Critics agree that *Eugene Onegin* is Pushkin's masterpiece, representing, says V. G. Belinsky in *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, "an encyclopedia of Russian life." Because of the novel's literary range and importance, analytical approaches to the work are varied and numerous. Some critics have concentrated on the fundamental symmetries of *Eugene Onegin*, such as the ironic reversals, parallels in plot, and behavior of the characters. Still others examine the meaning of particular specific events, such as Tania's disturbing dream after Onegin rejects her.

Many scholars address the motivations of Onegin. Based on what they have interpreted as Pushkin's disguised critique of Russian social conditions, Soviet critics have promoted the character of Onegin as a conspirator against Tsar Nicholas I. Still other critics have designated Onegin to be an early manifestation of the Russian social type known as the superfluous man, a man alienated by Russian society, who, stifled by social conditions, is prevented from doing anything worthwhile. Less complex are the appraisals of Onegin's potential for love and his accountability in matters of the heart.

Twentieth-Century Criticism At the beginning of the twentieth century, critical evaluation of Pushkin's work focused on his implied negative assessments of character and society. In the later years of the century, interest in Pushkin's fiction, drama, and narrative poetry

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In writing the verse-novel *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin established the Pushkin sonnet, an intricate poetic form. Because of its complexity, most writers choose to compose sonnets in the more traditional Italian or Elizabethan forms. Some modern writers, however, have tried their hand at the Pushkin sonnet with successful results. Below are examples of their works:

The Ghost Writer (2007), a verse-novel by Andy Croft.

Based on *Hamlet*, this detective story features spies, ghosts, poets, and hopeless lovers.

The Golden Gate (1986), a novel by Vikram Seth. A

satirical romance set in San Francisco, this work of fiction is composed of 690 sonnets.

The Hasty Papers: The Millennium Edition of the Legendary 1960 One-Shot Review (1999), reviews of art and literature first collected in 1960 by Alfred Leslie. This fascinating collection, popular within literary and artistic communities for its daring ideas, includes Leslie's poem "The Story of the Hasty Papers," written in Pushkin's sonnet form.

remained strong, with more contemporary scholars examining his body of works through a psychoanalytic approach. In doing so, these scholars tend to devote their attention to elements of irony and parody. Additionally, they often evaluate Pushkin's experiments in narrative structure and technique. Perhaps philosopher and writer Alexander Herzen, whose essay appears in *Alexander Pushkin: A Symposium on the 175th Anniversary of His Birth*, offers the best critical approach to Pushkin's writings: "As soon as he appeared he became necessary, as though Russian literature could never again dispense with him. The other Russian poets are read and admired; Pushkin is in the hands of every civilized Russian, who reads him again and again all his life long."

Responses to Literature

1. Pushkin had success with writing in a variety of literary styles, including verse, aphorism, and drama. Why do you think he experimented with so many different genres? Did any form in particular have a bigger effect than other forms on his success as a writer? Explain why or why not.
2. After reading several examples of Pushkin sonnets, write a Pushkin sonnet of your own on any subject you choose. Follow the rhyme scheme aBaBccD-DeFFeGG, where lowercase letters represent feminine rhymes and the uppercase letters represent masculine rhymes. Why do you think the Pushkin sonnet form is not as widely used as the Italian and Elizabethan sonnet forms?

3. Traditionally, Pushkin is the most revered and most read Russian writer. Even today, most Russians can recite verses of his poetry. What is your concept of a national literature? How did Pushkin contribute to the image of a writer who is also a leading political, cultural, and ideological figure?
4. Research the reign of Tsar Nicholas I. Why was the tsar afraid of Pushkin's work? Prepare your findings and discuss them with your classmates.

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■ **Tao Qian**
SEE *T'ao Ch'ien*

R

❏ François Rabelais

BORN: 1494, Chinon, France

DIED: 1553, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Pantagruel, King of the Dipsodes, with His Heroic Acts and Prowesses (1532)

The Inestimable Life of the Great Gargantua, Father of Pantagruel (1534)

Third Book of the Heroic Deeds and Sayings of the Good Pantagruel (1546)

Fourth Book of the Heroic Deeds and Sayings of the Good Pantagruel (1552)

The Ringing Island (1562)

Overview

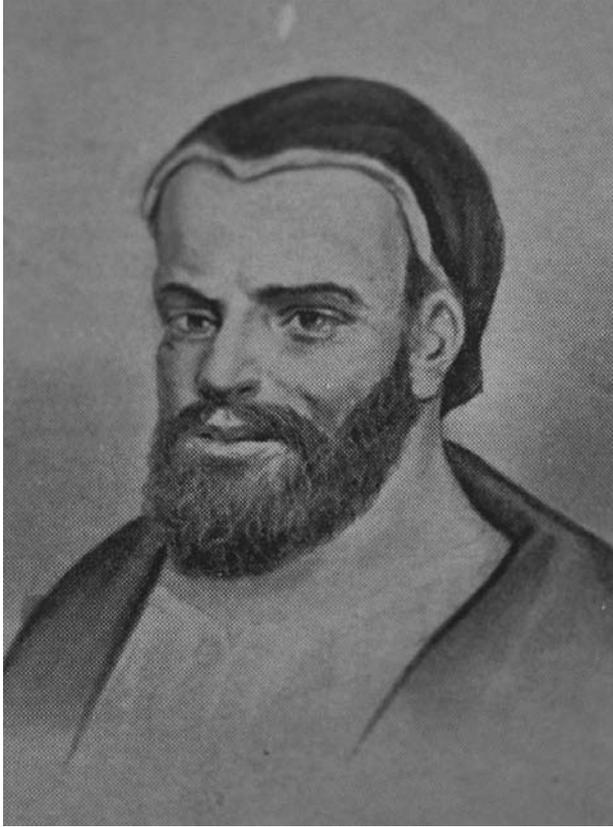
A Renaissance monk, physician, and scholar, François Rabelais is best remembered today for his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–1564), a multivolume narrative comprising comedy, satire, myth, and humanist philosophy and detailing the epic stories of two giants' upbringing, ribald adventures, and journeys toward self-discovery. A prominent influence on writers from Laurence Sterne to James Joyce, Rabelais has been described as “the miracle of the sixteenth century” by Anatole France, and is often considered the French equivalent of William Shakespeare and one of the half-dozen or so giants of world literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Discovery and Confiscation of Secretly Acquired Texts
Although important dates and biographical events of his life remain uncertain, it is believed that Rabelais was born around 1494 into a wealthy family in Chinon and was

tutored at home as a child. He received a formal education at a Franciscan monastery in Poitou. Despite imposition of a severely confined curriculum there, Rabelais and a fellow monk began to independently study many of the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew classics prohibited by the Church. Acquiring in a short time considerable knowledge of secular history, myth, and humanist thought, Rabelais began composing letters in a mixture of Latin and Greek to Guillaume Bude and Desiderius Erasmus, Christian humanists whom he admired for their forthright views and unwillingness to bow to Church dogmatism. He also completed at this time Latin translations of the Greek satires of Lucian, a writer whose style and imagination markedly influenced Rabelais's later prose. Yet, with the monastery's discovery and confiscation of his secretly acquired classical texts, Rabelais's pursuit of scholarly interests as well as his monastic career were seriously threatened. Fortunately, he received the patronage and protection of a high-ranking friend, Bishop Geoffroy d'Estissac, who accepted Rabelais into the Benedictine order at Saint-Pierre-de-Maillzeais in 1524.

Travel and Career as a Physician
As d'Estissac's secretary, Rabelais traveled with the bishop throughout his diocese and became intimately acquainted with rural peoples, acquiring a keen ear for rustic dialects, popular tales, and an appreciation of simple existence—all of which heavily imbued his fictional world. Following two years under d'Estissac, Rabelais set out on his own as a secular priest and aspiring physician who traveled about France teaching and studying. In 1530 he entered the widely esteemed University of Montpellier, where he obtained a medical degree. He soon gained renown as a talented lecturer, doctor, and editor-translator of works by the Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen, proving instrumental in reviving and incorporating their theories into contemporary medical practice. Because of his reputation and accomplishments in the field, Rabelais was appointed chief physician in 1532 to the well-known Hotel Dieu in Lyon.



Francois Rabelais Rabelais, Francois, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Pantagruel: A Sudden Switch in Literary Attention After editing further Latin and Greek texts that year, Rabelais surprised his colleagues by composing and publishing an apparently frivolous narrative in French, a language that at the time was considered undignified, even vulgar, by the Latin-oriented Church and aristocracy. There has been much speculation as to why Rabelais so suddenly switched his literary attention; some thought there was a strictly financial motivation due to personal financial problems while others believed that he had yearned for some time to unleash his convivial wit, cherished by patients, students, and friends in order to entertain as well as educate a wider audience. In any event, *Pantagruel, King of the Dipsodes, with His Heroic Acts and Prowesses* (1532) proved a huge, instantaneous success. First appearing at the annual Lyons fair, and modeled after a recently published, popular chapbook tale of Arthurian giants (*Les grandes et inestimables chroniques du grand et enorme geant Gargantua*), Rabelais's work met with a captive readership, particularly as *Pantagruel*, unlike its predecessor, contained allusions to current events and more vividly portrayed human life under the humorous guise of gianthood—a fantastic realm then in vogue with French readers. This work was soon revised and expanded and accompanied by two shorter works: ludicrous astronomical predictions by Rabelais's narrator

Alcofribas Nasier (an anagram of the author's name) for 1533 and 1534.

Allusions and Allegories in Later Writing In October of 1533, *Pantagruel* was denounced by the Sorbonne for excessive obscenity; however, no immediate restrictions were placed on Rabelais. Early the next year Rabelais left Lyons for Rome as companion and personal physician to bishop and diplomat Jean du Bellay. For the next decade Rabelais periodically assisted du Bellay and his brother Guillaume, governor of the Piedmont region of Italy, in various capacities. Primarily, he served as family physician and intermediary in attempts to reconcile Catholic and Protestant factions, who had been at odds since German monk Martin Luther's revolutionary pronouncements against abuses by the Roman Catholic Church in 1517 sparked the Protestant Reformation. Between his travels and official service Rabelais continued to practice and study medicine. He also honed and expanded his literary skills, publishing sequels to *Pantagruel* in 1534, 1546, and 1552. The first of these, *The Inestimable Life of the Great Gargantua, Father of Pantagruel*, represents Rabelais's attempt to re-create the myth of Gargantua, father of his first fictive hero. Due to the chronological precedence of its story *Gargantua* has been placed first in sequence by editors of Rabelais's work. Next came the *Third* and *Fourth* books, the last to be positively attributed to Rabelais; in these works, the giant element is downplayed and a greater emphasis is placed on the quest for truth and meaning in life. More complex in structure, more copious in allusion and ambiguity, these later books greatly contributed to Rabelais's posthumous reputation as a profound thinker and allegorist. All four books, at the time, were condemned by the Sorbonne, whose members thought Rabelais an immoral Lutheran sympathizer. Rabelais was also censured by the extreme Protestant wing of the Calvinists, who deemed him a dangerous proponent of atheistic values.

Despite such religious opposition, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* remained immensely popular with a wide cross-section of people, from liberal intellectuals to marginally educated laboring classes. Due to Rabelais's several influential acquaintances, the publication and sale of his books were protected by royal edict; however, it is believed that Rabelais was occasionally hounded by various religious authorities because of his works and was forced, from time to time, to leave the country.

Last Years and Unsolved Mysteries In his last years, Rabelais was granted religious offices at Meudon and Saint-Christophe-du-Jambet through the patronage of Jean du Bellay. He resigned these offices for unknown reasons in 1553 and died shortly thereafter. Nine years later *The Ringing Island* (1562) appeared in print under Rabelais's name. The majority of scholars recognize this work as a largely authentic continuation of the *Pantagruel* story. This publication was followed by *The Fifth and Last Book of the Heroic Deeds and Sayings of the Good*

Pantagruel (1564), which included *The Ringing Island* as its first sixteen chapters. The authenticity of the latter portion of this work, given its predominantly unrelieved moralistic tenor, has been seriously questioned, and the issue remains unresolved.

Works in Literary Context

The difficulty of interpreting Rabelais's work is made apparent by the wide-ranging, conflicting analyses it has received. Some critics perceive a dominant comic element, others a decidedly satiric strain, and still others a comprehensive fictional plan that incorporates these and other elements in a highly individual, joyful affirmation of humanity. What can be agreed upon by most scholars is that *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is an overwhelmingly rich and complex narrative mosaic that contains references to Greek philosophy and the Bible, relentless linguistic experimentation, Christian humanism, and an underlying Renaissance concern with the spiritual and intellectual perfection of the individual.

Low Humor and High Concepts There is a central division in Rabelais's work between wise, occasionally profound prose and superficial, rollicking entertainment. Through modern analyses, scholars have shown that despite several bawdy, off-color episodes and seemingly aimless, digressive language, *Gargantua* does move gradually toward higher concerns. In the closing chapter to Book II, Gargantua builds a religious abbey for his aide and confidante Friar Jean. The abbey, for its rules reinforcing equality and adoption of Renaissance principles of education and open-mindedness, is regarded as Rabelais's idealized conception of a new world order. The inscription on one of its cornerstones ("Do what thou wilt") combined with an emphasis on responsible, active participation in God's community on earth, represent ideals that Rabelais returns to throughout the novel in various ways, often cloaking his humanist beliefs in irony, humor, and allegory.

A Master of Language Central to Rabelais's artistic world, and to his humanist conception of life, was the potency, magic, and unlimited appeal of human language itself. Often compared to prose experimentalist James Joyce, Rabelais released in his books a pyrotechnical display of verbal constructs and linguistic games widely considered excelled only by those of *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Yet such inventiveness, and a purported inattention to plot and relevant detail, has provoked some harsh criticism of his work. Many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars took his ribald, seemingly amoral humor and madcap verbiage at face value, and labeled the author a drunken fool with a prolific, profane pen rather than a serious writer with a uniquely organized and effectively expressed message for the world. However, most later critics acknowledge the serious intent of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and accept the wordplay, circuitous narrative,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rabelais's famous contemporaries include:

Francisco Pizarro (1471–1541): Spanish conquistador and conqueror of the Inca. The year that *Pantagruel* was published, Pizarro landed in Peru; within a year, the Incan emperor was dead and Pizarro was master of the former empire.

Suleiman I (1494–1566): Called "the Magnificent" and "the Lawgiver," Suleiman was sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566, during which time the empire reached its zenith in political, military, and economic power.

Anne Boleyn (1501–1536): The second wife of King Henry VIII of England, Anne Boleyn was infamously beheaded in the Tower of London after failing to provide Henry with a male heir.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527): Italian diplomat best known for his works of political philosophy, most notably *The Prince*. His emphasis on realistic appraisal of political gain, and the often cutthroat means needed to achieve it, led to the term *Machiavellian*. Ironically, the book was not published until after Machiavelli's death and is not representative of his writings during his lifetime.

Nostradamus (1503–1566): Michel de Nostradamus—remembered today by his Latinized pen name—was a French apothecary, or pharmacist, who claimed to have prophetic vision. His *Prophecies*, made up of one thousand quatrains written in obscure, arcane riddles, have been claimed by many to predict a variety of major historical events in the ensuing centuries.

and occasional grossness as the natural outpourings of a literary genius artistically intoxicated with life at its fullest, and language at its richest. Rabelais has exerted influence over a wide range of authors including Laurence Sterne, James Joyce, Jonathan Swift, Anatole France, John Cowper Powys, D. B. Wyndham Lewis, Lucien Febvre, Aleister Crowley, Milan Kundera, Robertson Davies, and Maria Theotoky, among others.

Works in Critical Context

Scores of editions of Rabelais's writings have appeared since 1532, including almost a hundred during that first century alone; and while the specific historical context that polarized his early readers has disappeared, his work has continued to fuel controversy, eliciting passionate responses from both admirers and detractors. In the seventeenth century his writings found particular favor with libertine authors such as Cyrano de Bergerac and Paul

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rabelais reveled in experimenting with language use and construction through his writings. Here are some other works that demonstrate such experimentation with language:

Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce. Seventeen years in the making, Joyce's last novel remains controversial to this day due to its combination of stream-of-consciousness style and literary and linguistic allusions, along with a complete lack of traditional conceptions of plot and character development.

HIM (1928), a play by e. e. cummings. An avant-garde poet, cummings also wrote novels, children's books, and plays, all of which experiment with language and structure. Of *HIM*, cummings said, "DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT, LET IT TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOU."

Zazie in the Metro (1959), a novel by Raymond Queneau. The French language remains, in its standard form, highly structured and regulated. Queneau's novel is written entirely in a nonstandard, "colloquial" form.

Tarantula (1966), an experimental novel by Bob Dylan. Part poem, part novel, Dylan's stream-of-consciousness work is as challenging and impenetrable as his song lyrics from the same time.

Scarron, but classical writers, with the exception of Molière and Jean de La Fontaine, were generally less enthusiastic. Jean de La Bruyère called Rabelais's works "a monstrous assemblage of fine and ingenious morality and filthy corruption." Voltaire criticized his "miserable use" of his wit.

Rescued by the Romantics Rabelais's critical fortunes improved dramatically in the nineteenth century, when Romantic writers and critics—enamored of the past, and with a penchant for verbal excess and the grotesque imagination—labeled Rabelais a literary genius. This view has endured in modern times, as evidenced by the wealth of scholarship focused on his texts, and by his influence on authors as diverse as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Raymond Queneau, and James Joyce.

Much earlier than Joyce and before Thomas Urquhart's first translations in 1653, English-speaking readers discovered and came to love Rabelais. According to the *Old English Dictionary*, the terms *Gargantuist* and *gargantuan* date from the end of the sixteenth century. Early modern writers including Sir Philip Sidney, Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, and John Donne either refer to or quote Rabelais, and his influence on Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) and on Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is widely acknowledged.

Modern Interpretation Virtually all scholars of European letters have affirmed Rabelais's immense importance to the development of European literature and thought. As Mikhail Bakhtin has declared: "His place in history among the creators of modern European writing, such as Dante [Alighieri], [Giovanni] Boccaccio, [William] Shakespeare, and [Miguel de] Cervantes, is not subject to doubt. Rabelais not only determined the fate of French literature and of the French literary tongue, but influenced the fate of world literature as well (probably no less than Cervantes)."

Responses to Literature

1. Summarize the spirited philosophy of the Abbey of Theleme in a short essay. How did it differ from real-world abbeys of Rabelais's time?
2. Cite examples of Rabelaisian forms of humor, including pun, jest, joke, satire, hyperbole, sight gag, and incongruity. What are some examples from modern movies or books that use similar forms of humor?
3. Rabelais angered both Catholics and Protestants, albeit for different reasons. Summarize and explain why he was so hated. Why do you think Rabelais rebelled against his Catholic peers' conservatism?
4. Rabelais's maxim "Do what thou wilt" was later taken up by infamous twentieth-century occultist Aleister Crowley as his personal credo. He stated, "Do as thou wilt' shall be the whole of the law." Do you agree with this? What are the advantages and disadvantages to letting everyone do what they please?

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📖 Jean Racine

BORN: 1639, *La Ferte-Milon, France*

DIED: 1699

NATIONALITY: *French*

GENRE: *Drama, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Bajazet (1672)

Mithridate (1673)

Iphigénie (1674)

Phèdre (1677)

Esther (1689)

Overview

Jean Racine has long been held as one of the foremost dramatic writers in the whole of French literature, though his fame rests essentially on ten plays. Most of his plays are still regularly performed, some of them even in translation, in spite of their being exceptionally difficult to translate because of his unique style of poetry. Racine usually borrowed his dramatic subjects from mythology and constructed his plays using a high-style neoclassical tragic form.



Jean Racine *Racine, Jean, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Orphaned but Well Educated Baptized on December 22, 1639, Racine was presumably born a few days before this date in the small town of La Ferté-Milon in the province of Champagne, some fifty miles northeast of Paris, to a lower-middle-class family. His father, also named Jean, occupied a modest and poorly paid position in the tax-collecting bureaucracy. In January 1641, Racine's mother, Jeanne Sconin Racine, died while giving birth to her second child, Marie. In February 1643, the children's father, who had remarried three months earlier, also died, leaving Racine and his sister destitute. Their paternal grandparents took charge of the boy, the maternal grandparents of the girl.

In October 1649, the young Racine was enrolled as a nonpaying student at the "Petites Écoles" (Little Schools) in Cheureuse. The school provided him with a superior education, which, contrary to the then prevailing fashion, was conducted not in Latin but in French and emphasized a close study of the vernacular. It included a sustained study of Latin and Greek—in which Racine soon became remarkably fluent—as well as the modern languages of Spanish and Italian. After his four years at Port-Royal, Racine entered the Collège de Beauvais in Paris, an institution sympathetic to the abbey, where he studied for two years, returning to Port-Royal in the fall of 1655. He spent three more years as a student there before entering the Collège d'Harcourt in Paris, where he studied for a final year (1658-1659), completing an education of virtually unparalleled scope and quality, one far superior to what a destitute and provincial orphan could have hoped for.

Success and Rivalry Several years later, having entered into friendships with writers Molière, Jean de La Fontaine, and Nicolas Boileau, he began writing for the Parisian stage, with the neoclassical theorist Boileau being an especially strong influence upon him. In 1664 Racine's *The Thebans* was produced by Molière, who also launched the young dramatist's second play, *Alexander the Great*, the next year; these works brought their author much acclaim.

When *Alexander* opened, Racine made the first of several key decisions that brought him strained relations with friends—if not influential enemies—throughout his career. Immediately dissatisfied by Molière's production of *Alexander* at the Palais-Royal, he mounted a rival production at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, deeply offending Molière and ending their friendship.

At about the same time, due to a misunderstanding, Racine publicly broke with the Jansenist Catholics of Port-Royal (a particular branch of Catholics whose beliefs centered on original sin and human depravity) by publishing an open letter—which he later regretted—filled with ill-spirited caricatures of and anecdotes about key

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Racine's famous contemporaries include:

Pierre Corneille (1606–1684): Corneille was a French playwright considered one of the greatest French dramatists of the seventeenth century.

John Milton (1608–1674): Milton was an English poet and civil servant best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Molière (1622–1673): Molière, born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, was a French playwright considered one of the masters of the comedic play.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher who contributed to the development of modern economics and social science.

John Locke (1632–1704): Locke was an English philosopher and one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers. He also made significant contributions to American Revolutionary thought.

Louis XIV (1638–1715): Louis became the King of France at age four and ruled until his death over seventy years later. He is also known as Louis the Great and The Sun King.

Isaac Newton (1642–1726): Newton was an English scientist and mathematician who laid the groundwork for classical mechanics, the view that dominated the scientific view of the physical universe for the next three centuries.

Jansenist figures. Having split with the Jansenists and now considered a rising rival of Pierre Corneille, Racine embraced the worldliness of the Parisian dramatic world, took actresses for mistresses, and actively competed in dramatic popularity with the older writer. In the drama *Britannicus* he not only ventured into political drama, at the time considered Corneille's exclusive domain, but he also attacked Corneille himself (though not by name) in his introduction, having come to believe that a plot led by Corneille had sought to undermine his drama's success. He also answered Corneille's *El Cid* with his own *Andromache* (1667) and pitted his superior *Berenice* (1670) against Corneille's *Tite et Berenice*, which appeared almost simultaneously.

Racine's most distinguished plays appeared during the next few years, and in 1674, he was elected to the Academie Francaise, becoming its youngest member. But by the mid 1670s, the ill will he had engendered among his peers and their admirers affected his own career. One of his more powerful enemies, the Duchesse de Bouillon—a niece of Cardinal Mazarin and sister of the Duc de Nevers—learned of Racine's *Phaedra* during

its composition and persuaded a minor dramatist, Jacques Pradon, to write a rival version of the play, which opened two days after Racine's production. Further, it is said that she reserved many of the main seats for the earliest performances of Racine's play, leaving these seats empty on the crucial opening nights. Although *Phaedra* was eventually seen as superior to Pradon's tragedy, Racine was badly shaken by this episode and its aftermath, which included having his personal safety threatened by the Duc de Nevers.

Retirement and Revival At the height of his career, Racine retired from the professional theater; he married, became the devoted father of seven children, and accepted the post of Royal Historiographer, a position he shared with Boileau. For two decades Racine enjoyed access to the most influential political and literary circles; he and Boileau also traveled with Louis XIV on military campaigns, recording the Sun King's exploits.

In 1689, at the request of Louis XIV's wife, Madame de Maintenon, Racine produced a new play, *Esther*, based on the biblical story, which was performed at a religious school in Saint-Cyr. Praised by the king himself, this play was so well received that Racine wrote another biblical drama, *Athaliah*, which was performed at Saint-Cyr two years later. During his remaining years, he wrote four spiritual hymns and a history of Port-Royal. Racine died in 1699 after a long illness.

Works in Literary Context

With Pierre Corneille, Racine was one of the premier authors of French dramatic tragedy during the reign of Louis XIV. Similar to Greek tragedy and Corneille's works, Racine's plays emphasize the exposition of character and spiritual conflict, eliminating nearly everything not central to each drama's theme. His accomplishment was summarized in glowing terms by Anatole France, who wrote that Racine's "period, his education, and his nature, conspired together to make of him the most perfect of French poets, and the greatest by reason of the sustained nobility of his work."

Racine's death marked the virtual demise of the literary genre he had so ably illustrated. In the century that followed, many tragedies were written in emulation of Racine's, but none succeeded in matching his, and almost none have survived, in spite of the talent of some of their authors, Voltaire in particular. Not until the early nineteenth century did critics finally realize that, with Racine, French tragedy had reached both its zenith and the beginning of its decline.

Several scholars note that within Racine's work, the world of Jansenist Port-Royal and the neoclassical world were in constant warfare. But, these worlds were arguably complementary, in both style and in form. The influence of Jansenist teaching, which stressed human depravity and predestined salvation, is evident in Racine's dramatic

characters, who—like their forerunners in classical Greek drama—are undone by their passions and driven to ruin by ungovernable impulses. The simple neoclassical tragic form was well fitted to Racine’s themes and poetic style, which has been praised for its simplicity, harmony, and rhythmic flow; of all his contemporaries, Racine was the first to achieve success within a framework which had been deemed too difficult to master since its inception during the Italian Renaissance.

His style has been described as simple yet polished, smooth yet natural. Robert Lowell has praised Racine’s dramatic verse for its “diamond edge” and “hard, electric rage,” calling Racine “perhaps the greatest poet in the French language.” In most of his plays, Racine employed a basic plot structure in which a monarch demands something of a particular underling, often a prince or princess, who denies this demand. The monarch then attempts to force his subject’s obedience, with tragic results. Launched upon a course of impending doom, Racine’s characters know what must be done to avert disaster but are unable to subdue their desires to take prudent action.

Works in Critical Context

During their author’s lifetime, Racine’s dramas, though popular, were attacked for what some critics considered their crude realism and their focus upon passion. Jean de La Bruyère wrote of Corneille and Racine that “the former paints men as they should be, the latter paints men as they are.” Like La Bruyère, many critics compare the intentions and accomplishments of Racine with those of Corneille, often to Racine’s advantage. “Unlike Corneille,” wrote Irving Babbitt, “Racine moved with perfect ease among all the rules that the neo-classic disciplinarians had imposed upon the stage. Indeed, it is in Racine, if anywhere, that all this regulating of the drama must find its justification,” here speaking of the unities of time, space, and action prescribed by neoclassical theorists.

Over time, Racine’s work grew in critical stature and popularity. In one of the seminal discourses upon Racine’s achievement, *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823–25), Stendhal wrote of Racine—in his preoccupation with passion—as an artist of romantisme, the literary element which satisfies an ever-changing standard of beauty. Several scholars have compared the theatricality of Shakespeare and Racine, with David Maskell observing that they “provide examples of a common visual vocabulary which is the peculiar feature of theatrical language, and which unites dramatists who can exploit its rich potential.”

Other major French critics of Racine’s work have included Jules Lemaître, Ferdinand Brunetiere, Jean Giraudoux, Francois Mauriac, and Roland Barthes, while English-language criticism and translation of Racine’s works has been dominated by Martin Turnell, Geoffrey Brereton, and Kenneth Muir, among others. Many scholars concur in spirit with the judgment of George Saints-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Racine’s works are filled with characters who are undone by their passions and driven to ruin by their ungovernable impulses. Here are some other works with similar characters and storylines:

Oedipus Rex (429 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This play, considered one of the greatest examples of ancient Greek drama, tells the story of one man’s prophesied fall as he kills his father and marries his mother.

Othello, The Moor of Venice (1603), a play by William Shakespeare. This play deals with racism, love, jealousy, and betrayal in a setting of political intrigue.

The Cid (1637), a play by Pierre Corneille. This play tells the story of a man facing the eternal human struggle to balance personal sentiment with duty to family and society.

bury, who wrote of Racine, “Of the whole world which is subject to the poet he took only a narrow artificial and conventional fraction. Within these narrow bounds he did work which no admirer of literary craftsmanship can regard without satisfaction.”

Responses to Literature

1. Racine displays an interest in strong, troubled female characters. In a five-page essay, explain how his depictions are relevant for understanding the women of today. What has changed in society since Racine’s time to make these characters lose their relevance, and what has remained the same to give these characters continued relevance?
2. Racine made use of themes borrowing from ancient Greek drama and popularized during his time. With a group of your classmates, brainstorm Racine’s common themes, then discuss whether or not these themes are still relevant today. Would a revival of literary work based on these themes produce works that a present-day audience would appreciate and admire?
3. Many of Racine’s characters face inner, spiritual conflicts among competing values and impulses. Using one of Racine’s texts as inspiration, write a short story with a main character who faces a similar conflict.
4. Racine’s plays were based on a plot structure centered around the demands of a monarch. Sketch a plot outline to rewrite and update one of his plays, placing the action in the context of a modern, democratic government.

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Terence Rattigan *Rattigan, Sir Terence, photograph. AP Images.*

Terence Rattigan

BORN: 1911, London, England
DIED: 1977, Hamilton, Bermuda
NATIONALITY: British
GENRE: Drama
MAJOR WORKS:
The Winslow Boy (1946)
The Browning Version (1948)
The Deep Blue Sea (1952)
Separate Tables (1954)
Variation on a Theme (1958)

Overview

British playwright Terence Rattigan is best known for his creation of failed middle-class characters who are mired in the mundane conflicts of marriage, family, and work. His forty-year writing career brought critical acclaim as well as derision; his well-crafted dramas, so popular with audiences of the 1940s, would be considered unfashionable during the late 1950s. His most widely praised early stage dramas, *The Winslow Boy* (1946) and *The Browning Version* (1948), represent Rattigan's interest in the class struggles and personal conflicts of the educational system.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Making a Career as a Playwright Terence Rattigan was born June 10, 1911, in London, England, to William Frank Arthur and Vera Houston Rattigan. His father held diplomatic posts around Europe, including stints as acting high commissioner in Turkey and British minister in Romania. While his parents lived abroad, Rattigan and his brother, Brian, lived with their paternal grandmother in South Kensington. Rattigan attended Mr. Hornbye's School at Sandroyd, Harrow, then received a scholarship to Trinity College, Oxford, where he prepared himself for a diplomatic career like his father's. Included in this experience were summers spent at foreign-language schools in France and Germany; however, Rattigan never entered the service, choosing instead to study history, act, and write for the *Cherwell*, an Oxford student newspaper.

While he was still in college, Rattigan had written a play, *First Episode*, that had brief and disastrous runs in London and New York City. Rattigan was undaunted by the failure and quit college to pursue a career in the theater. His father disapproved of his career plans but agreed to finance the aspiring playwright for two years. As his part of the bargain, Rattigan promised his father that if he was still unsuccessful after the two years had elapsed, he would begin a career in diplomacy or

banking. Shortly before the probationary period expired, Rattigan's *French Without Tears* (1936) became a smash hit in London. More success was to follow. Rattigan is the only dramatist to have written two plays that ran for more than one thousand performances apiece in London.

During the 1930s, Rattigan collaborated on a number of productions: *Follow My Leader* (with Anthony Maurice in 1940), *Grey Farm* (with Hector Bolitho, produced in 1940), and an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (with John Gielgud, produced in 1950).

Military Service and War Dramas In April 1940, shortly after the news of Hitler's attack on Denmark and Norway, Rattigan enlisted in the Royal Air Force. He served as a wireless operator and later as a flight lieutenant and gunnery officer. Rattigan was in a new environment, surrounded by men with varied backgrounds. He wrote *Flare Path* (1940), a play about his wartime experiences; it was the first of three dramas about the war. *While the Sun Shines* (1943) and *Love in Idleness* (1944), retitled *O Mistress Mine* when produced in 1946 in New York, complete the trio.

Popular Acclaim After the war, Rattigan's career continued to progress, starting with *The Winslow Boy* (1946) and *The Browning Version*. In these works, Rattigan concentrates on the lives of students and teachers in the academic world. The plays investigate how individuals cope with humiliation and injustice. Andrew Crocker-Harris is typical of these characters. The mediocre schoolmaster of *The Browning Version* watches as his students deride him, his employers fire him, and his wife has an affair with a younger teacher.

The 1950s were golden years for Rattigan. He was adapting his plays as films, and original screenplays were providing ample means for his lavish lifestyle. His most popular works during this period, *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), *Separate Tables* (1954), and *Variation on a Theme* (1958), explored the lives of a variety of mismatched couples who show their unhappiness through a series of ill-fated affairs. These plays also directly confront the homosexuality of characters that had long been only implicit in Rattigan's plays.

Old-Fashioned Playwright In 1956, the Royal Court stage exploded with the production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, an avant-garde play that transformed the theater. Rattigan's next three plays felt the impact of that wave, receiving few positive reviews. Feeling his label as an old-fashioned writer of well-made plays, Rattigan took a leave of absence and traveled the world. He devoted much time to writing for film and television, including the movies *The V.I.P.s* (1963) and *The Yellow Rolls Royce* (1965).

One of Rattigan's last plays, *In Praise of Love* (1973), focuses on the relationships of a terminally ill cancer patient. Rattigan himself contracted bone marrow

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rattigan's famous contemporaries include:

Harry Truman (1884–1972): Thirty-third president of the United States, Truman assumed the office upon the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in April 1945. Four months later he became the first and only world leader to order the use of nuclear weapons in war.

Laurence Olivier (1907–1989): Perhaps the most widely praised English actor of the twentieth century, Olivier maintained widespread popularity and critical acclaim over the course of his five-decade career on stage and screen.

Jesse Owens (1913–1980): An African American track and field athlete, Owens became an international superstar after winning four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, an event that had been turned by Hitler's Nazi regime into a would-be showcase for the supposed superiority of racially "pure" German athletes.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980): Shah (monarch) of Iran from 1941 until he was deposed by the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Pahlavi was a controversial figure in his own country, accused of using torture and imprisonment to silence opponents and promoting Western interests ahead of his subjects.

L. Sprague de Camp (1907–2000): De Camp was a major figure in science fiction and fantasy literature during the twentieth century. Over a five-decade career, he wrote more than one hundred books and chronicled and collected the works of early giants of the genre, from H. P. Lovecraft to Robert E. Howard.

cancer in 1975. His final stage play, *Cause Célèbre* (1977), based on a famous English trial of the 1930s, investigates the desperate yet criminal passion of Alma Rattenbury and her young lover. Though very ill at the time, Rattigan was able to attend the play's opening performance. He died from the disease on November 30, 1977.

Works in Literary Context

Rattigan's works are best characterized as extended and unsentimental examinations of the small victories and defeats that occur in the daily lives of middle-class individuals. Rattigan's predilection for bourgeois characters and middle-class values aroused the disdain of some critics and the approbation of others. Characters rather than ideas are emphasized in Rattigan's plays. He contended that "character makes the play" not only in serious plays but also in farce.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rattigan's plays often discuss the consequences of repressed emotion and unfulfilled desires. Works in a similar vein include:

A Doll's House (1879), by Henrik Ibsen. Highly controversial at the time, this play made a name for Ibsen and continues to be studied and produced today thanks to its unconventional ending and taut characterization of the lies and hypocrisies of married life.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), a poem by T. S. Eliot. This classic poem relays the thoughts of a man seemingly paralyzed by his inability to act on his desires.

Death of a Salesman (1949), by Arthur Miller. Miller explores the failure of the American Dream through the character of Willie Loman, the archetypal pitiful dreamer, full of unrealized dreams and still chasing after a goal that will forever elude him and his doomed family.

The Remains of the Day (1989), a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. In this Booker Prize-winning novel, an aging butler reflects upon a missed opportunity at love with a former coworker.

Rapidly changing times and the interaction of personal lives with the events of those times form the subject matter of Rattigan's dramas. Conflicts between fathers and sons, marital mismatches, the English habit of repressed emotion, sexual hypocrisies, and the right of the most insignificant individual to be heard and understood are themes that recur in his works, regardless of genre. Early comedies, the middle serious dramas, and the later mellowed character studies of his last plays contain these themes from *First Episode* in 1933 through *Cause Célèbre* in 1977.

The Well-Made Play Virtually all commentators concede that Rattigan was a master craftsman. His career is marked by a consistency both of theme and of dramatic structure: he was fond of the two-act, middle-class tragedy. Yet, the traditions of the Scribean well-made play and the English problem play have haunted the reviews and criticism of Rattigan's dramas. What was frequently overlooked was his adaptation of these traditions to serve his own purposes of style and theme.

Rattigan's dramas did not conclude with artificially happy endings but with unresolved or only partially resolved conflicts and ambivalences of the unhappy or tortured characters. The disillusionment his characters experience is countered by the dignity with which they confront their problems and carry on with what remains of their lives. The characters, unsentimentally portrayed,

are the more sympathetic for their flaws. Some proof of their enduring quality is seen in the constant revivals of the plays. To achieve character-centered drama, Rattigan adapted well-made-play conventions to his dramatization of the damaging effects of repressive, intolerant societal attitudes toward aberrant behavior.

Works in Critical Context

During a career that spanned nearly forty years, Terence Rattigan wrote twenty-four dramas for the stage and more than thirty film, television, and radio plays. Though he fell out of favor with the public during the 1950s, his work is regularly counted among the most enduring and well-crafted of the postwar generation.

Early Plays Reviewing productions of *The Winslow Boy* and *A Bequest to the Nation*, Hilary Spurling noted that "both plays are designed to take one back . . . to the days when one was proud to be an Englishman. . . . Pain and fear are discreetly underplayed in favour of the soothing virtues, courage, loyalty and perseverance in face of frightful odds." Ronald Bryden also remarked upon the traditional values espoused in *The Winslow Boy*: "Rattigan's surface self-congratulation is part of an argument that British society is strong enough to tolerate questioning, dissent, individuality. Today we can see that the quantity of reassurance was a measure of British insecurity in those post-war years. . . . But it's possible to envy the confidence still underlying the play that tolerance is something we can afford, that our sameness is sufficient to permit differences."

French Without Tears John Russell Taylor observed that *French Without Tears* "is under the bright, bustling surface, a gentle comedy of character, in which each seems for a moment to be faced with what he has most desired and finds that it is in fact what he most fears." While granting the effectiveness of farces like *French Without Tears*, Frederick Lumley asserted that Rattigan failed in his serious plays of character: "In his farces we do not ask that his characters should be complete individuals, whereas in a serious play that character must be a creation. The main criticism of Rattigan's work, then, is a fundamental criticism, namely, that his characters are wishy-washy creatures with neither nobility in their thoughts nor individuality in their actions. They are types we know exist, and though we might recognise them, they are certainly not people we would want as our friends."

Responses to Literature

1. Define pathos in literary terms. Discuss the sense of pathos Rattigan evokes in *The Winslow Boy*. What techniques does he use to create this feeling?
2. Rattigan has been noted for writing middle-class tragedies. After reading *The Browning Version*, write

an essay in which you identify the plights of Andrew Crocker-Harris and how he confronts his disillusionments.

3. *French Without Tears* is a light comedy that enjoyed considerable success during its run. Research the era and explain why the play was popular and contemporary. Do you think the play has any value in present-day theater?
4. In a short essay, compare and contrast Andrew Crocker-Harris with Frank Hunter from *The Browning Version*.

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Dahlia Ravikovitch

BORN: 1936, Ramat Gan, Israel

DIED: 2005, Tel Aviv, Israel

NATIONALITY: Israeli

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Love of an Orange (1959)

Dress of Fire (1976)

Real Love (1987)

The Window (1989)

Because of Love (1998)

Overview

At the time of her death in 2005, Dahlia Ravikovitch was revered as a champion of Palestinian rights and respected as Israel’s greatest poet. As her translators and biographers Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld note, “No other Hebrew poet, with the exception of the late Yehuda Amichai, was so universally embraced by Israelis, whatever their political convictions.” Ravikovitch’s poems have long been a fixture in Israel—being an important part of the school curriculum, adapted for theater and film, integrated for musical performances and art exhibits, and used for scholarship in several books, articles, monographs, and dissertations.



Dahlia Ravikovitch © ArenaPal / Topham / The Image Works

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Trauma and Despair Dahlia Ravikovitch was born on November 17, 1936, in Ramat Gan, Israel to engineer Levy (Leo) and teacher Michal Ravikovitch. By the age of three, young Dahlia was able to read and write. At four, she was designing patterns for sewing. On September 9, 1940, Ravikovitch and her mother were out doing errands on Pinsker Street when Italy bombed the city of Tel Aviv. As her mother would write to a friend a week later, according to scholar Dalia Karpel, the four-year-old screamed at the sound of what she determined was “Thunder!” Mother and daughter were trapped on the streets, witnessing the deaths of more than one hundred people and the wounding of many more.

In 1942, when Ravikovitch was six years old, her father was killed by a drunk driver. She moved with her mother to live on Kibbutz Geva, a cooperative agricultural community in Jezreel Valley. At age thirteen, Ravikovitch left the kibbutz and lived in several foster homes over the next few years. Air raids, death, abandonment, loss, and displacement came early to her, and she soon came to incorporate all as a writer attuned to despair. Such early traumatic experiences appeared in her poetry

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ravikovitch's famous contemporaries include:

Sylvia Plath (1936–1963): American poet known for her startling verse with bold metaphors and stark, violent imagery.

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech writer and dramatist, he was the ninth and final president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic.

Elgar Howarth (1935–): English conductor and composer, this former trumpet player has contributed his talents the world over.

Joe Orton (1933–1967): English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies that shocked and amused his audiences.

as late as the 1970s, with works such as *Death in the Family* (1976).

Higher Learning and Employment The region Ravikovitch called home was originally a part of Palestine, as defined by British mandate at the end of World War I. Between the two world wars, the area saw substantial waves of immigration from Jewish people wishing to return to what they considered their ancestral homeland. The brutal treatment of Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II—which resulted in the deaths of millions of European Jews—led to increased calls for an established Jewish homeland. In 1948, after approval by the United Nations, Palestine was split into two regions, one of which became the nation of Israel. The area of Ravikovitch's youth became part of this new Jewish nation.

In the 1950s Ravikovitch studied English literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. By the end of the decade she had published her first volume of poetry, *The Love of an Orange* (1959). The debut work was well received by critics and established her, according to Bloch and Kronfeld, “as one of the leading voices of the post-1948 generation, alongside her elders Yehuda Amichai and Natan Zach.”

Working through the next years as a journalist and critic, a teacher, and later an editor of poetry translations, Ravikovitch produced nine more books of verse—among them two books of poetry for children—and three short story collections. She also worked translating several volumes of poetry, including those of Edgar Allan Poe, William Butler Yeats, and T. S. Eliot, among others.

The Bell Jar Shatters In 1982, when Israel invaded the nearby nation of Lebanon, Ravikovitch's personal poetry took on a political weight. In an interview with

Bloch and Kronfeld, Ravikovitch explained what impelled her to write political and war poetry: “Till the invasion of Lebanon, I managed somehow to go on living inside a bell jar. But then suddenly, all at once, when the invasion started, the bell jar shattered. Now there's no wall between the political and the personal. It all comes rushing in.”

Increased Social and Political Activity The invasion prompted Ravikovitch to use her poetic voice as a political tool. In her poem titled “You Cannot Kill A Baby Twice,” Ravikovitch describes the massacre of Palestinians in refugee camps: As the Christian Lebanese army massacred women and children in the Palestinian camps, the Israeli soldiers guarding the camps did nothing to intervene. Ravikovitch, however, could not keep her silence. In another poem, “Get Out of Beirut,” she describes how war reduces the enemy “to people who don't count.” Though showing favoritism for neither side, Ravikovitch's work was viewed as harsh and unpatriotic. In addition to writing, Ravikovitch also participated in organized protests against the displacement of Palestinians.

Highest Accolades Though Ravikovitch's later poems were overtly political, expressing her stand about the oppression of Palestinians and women's rights, she received multiple awards, including the esteemed Shlonsky, Brenner, and Bialik (1987) prizes; the Israel Prize (the highest national honor, 1998); and the Prime Minister's Prize (2005). The same year she was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize, in August, Ravikovitch died suddenly in her Tel Aviv apartment. Initial findings suggested she had committed suicide; however, subsequent investigation and autopsy reports now attribute her death to the likely possibility of “acute heart failure.”

Works in Literary Context

Influences on Classic Style Ravikovitch scholars Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld explain that the poet's early works make use of traditional forms and are highly stylized. The language is “archaic” and resounding with biblical tones. Some of her experimental verse “draws upon surrealist parable and avant-garde opera.” Ravikovitch's early verse contains Jewish undertones and reveals such influences as that of “modernist Anglo-American poetry, particularly Eliot and the early Yeats.”

Ravikovitch's later verse is less adorned with figurative elements, according to Bloch and Kronfeld, in order to “make room for a stark poetry of statement.” The result, her translators suggest, “is an emotionally-charged simplicity and an enhanced focus on lyrical narrative and portraiture.” The emotional range is wide in this poetry, “from savage sarcasm, self-deprecating humor, and pointed irony to restrained pathos and prickly ambivalence.”

The Marginalized and Dispossessed The early poems of Ravikovitch are filled with sorrow, grief, and feelings of loss. But once her voice took on a political tone, she focused on the themes of death, brutality, and violence. An article in *The Progressive* notes that the themes Ravikovitch explored include “the parallels between the plight of the Palestinians, the suffering of Jews in the Diaspora, and the constraints on women in traditional Jewish society.” Bloch and Kronfeld add that besides her political themes and themes on the human condition, “many poems explore questions of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics.”

Works in Critical Context

In the introduction to a 1995 collection of Israeli war poetry, *No Rattling of Sabers*—in which Ravikovitch’s poems are included—editor Esther Raizen writes that anthologies of translated Hebrew poetry “often tend to minimize the inclusion of political poems, considered by many to be an inferior branch of the art.” This is because, Raizen explains, their social messages eclipse the artistic value of the poems. “Because their work is popular with the general public,” Raizen continues, “and possibly because many of their poems were set to music, as is very often the case with war poetry or poetry of protest, these writers have been frequently referred to in Israeli literary circles as ‘versifiers,’ in an apparent attempt to distinguish them from ‘real’ poets.” Raizen adds, however, that political poetry is nevertheless a “legitimate, compelling manifestation of human experience.”

Beloved Israeli Voice From Ravikovitch’s first published work, *The Love of an Orange* (1959), critics were praising not only her content but her style and aesthetic power. As Haaretz writer Dalia Karpel reports, critics such as the demanding Baruch Kurzweil determined Ravikovitch’s poems “bear the seal of originality.” Ravikovitch scholars Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld also assert that she was a “much-beloved poet, widely honored for her artistry and her courage, [who] enjoyed canonical stature from the beginning of her career and was considered a cultural icon in Israel.”

In 1998 Ravikovitch was awarded the Israel Prize (1998), the country’s highest honor. The judges’ accompanying speech noted, “Her poetic style is distinguished by its skillful synthesis of a rich literary language with the colloquial idiom, and of her personal outcry with that of the collective. This has made her the most important—indeed the most distinctive—Hebrew poet of our time. She is the central pillar of Hebrew lyric poetry.”

Responses to Literature

1. Using the library and the Internet, research Israeli life, including the culture, religion, government and politics, education, and worldviews. Select one or more of Ravikovitch’s poems and find evidence of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In much of her poetic work, Ravikovitch expresses her explicit political views. Here are a few works by writers who also wrote on war, politics, and other themes dedicated to their community fellows and homeland:

Collected Later Poems (2003), by Anthony Hecht. In this collection of three volumes of poetry, Hecht’s experiences as a World War II liberator who witnessed the atrocities firsthand take on intense focus and profound sentiment.

Days to Remember (1970), a nonfiction narrative by Carlos Monsivais. This work by a leading political journalist and cultural critic chronicles the 1968 student movement in Mexico against the gross social and political injustices.

Dien Cai Dau (1988), poetry by Yusef Komunyakaa. The poet chronicles his experiences as a Vietnam War journalist in this collection, which includes the much-anthologized “Facing It.”

Heart Mountain (1989), a novel by Gretel Ehrlich. The story focuses on the experiences of Japanese-Americans interned in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming prison camp during World War II.

Three Days and a Child (1970), stories by A. B. Yehoshua. In this work, the author considers contemporary Israel, providing social commentary on present and past generations.

this culture in the text. Discuss your understanding of Israeli culture as it is described by Ravikovitch.

2. Create a timeline of major events in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some events to include would be the British Mandate of Palestine, the formation of Israel, and the Arab-Israeli War. After creating the timeline, write a brief essay explaining how one or more of these events is reflected in the works of Ravikovitch.
3. In *No Rattling of Sabers: An Anthology of Israeli War Poetry* (1995), Ester Raizen writes that people need to “express themselves in the medium of poetry, an inclination that seems to grow at times of national strife.” Consider a Ravikovitch poem that expresses emotions and sensibilities “associated with a virtually permanent state of war.” What attitude does she make readers aware of through her imagery? What words does she use to reveal her attitude toward war?
4. Esther Raizen further discusses the duality of the Israeli citizen during wartime: “Determination to survive, and live by the sword if need be, and going to battle against one’s will have always co-existed in the Israeli psyche.” Consider one of Ravikovitch’s

political poems and look for this duality. How is the speaker pro-war or in favor of patriotism, defending the Israeli cause? How is the speaker antiwar or against having to fight against his or her will?

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■ Erich Paul Remark

SEE *Erich Maria Remarque*

▣ Erich Maria Remarque

BORN: 1898, Osnabrück, Germany

DIED: 1970, Locarno, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: German American

GENRE: Novels, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Dream Room (1920)

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929)

Three Comrades (1937)

Flotsam (1946)

Arch of Triumph (1952)

Overview

German author Erich Maria Remarque was a popular novelist whose *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) was the most successful German best seller on the subject of the soldier's life in World War I. Though his later antiwar novels, especially the 1952 novel *Arch of Triumph*, won high praise from critics, it is for *All Quiet on the Western Front* that he is best remembered.



Erich Maria Remarque *Remarque, Erich Maria*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Interest in Writing, Teaching Erich Maria Remarque was born Erich Paul Remark on July 22, 1898, in Osnabrück, Germany, to bookbinder Peter Franz and mother Anna Maria Remark. But by age sixteen he was well into writing; he composed poems, essays, and the beginnings of a novel he would later complete and publish. Educated in Catholic schools, he was not admitted to college-preparatory courses such as those attended by upper-middle-class youths. Instead, he took courses that would allow him to enter a Catholic teachers' training college. There he went unchallenged academically, and so he read voraciously on his own, eventually studying further at the University of Münster.

Personal Losses During World War I In 1916, in the midst of World War I, the eighteen-year-old was drafted into the German army. Because his mother was seriously ill, he was given frequent leaves to be at her side and was not posted to France until the summer of 1917. Though he was in the army for three years and was often close to the front, he never actually fought. In July 1917, one of his comrades was injured by shell fragments and Remarque carried the man back to safety. Despite these efforts, his friend died, making for one of many personal experiences that he would later incorporate into his works, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Not long afterward, when Remarque himself was wounded in three places by shrapnel from long-range artillery shells, he spent most of the rest of the war reeling from the death of his mother in 1918 and recuperating from his wounds in a Duisburg hospital, until he was deemed fit to return to active duty on October 31, 1918. With the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, he was never posted near the front again.

It was during this enforced convalescence that the persona of Erich Maria Remarque appeared from that of Erich Paul Remark. The author changed both his middle name and the spelling of his last name, taking "Maria" from his mother and the spelling of his last name from that of his French ancestors.

Postwar Years and Pacifism Remarque developed a vision of himself as the outsider and a pacifist, a difficult role in German society, and his soldier's disillusionment with the politicians who had allowed the war to happen became a common theme in his diaries of the period. Also upon his return to Osnabrück, Remarque began exhibiting what friends thought to be odd behavior. Discharged from the army as a private, he nonetheless took to parading the streets of his hometown in the uniform of a lieutenant, bedecked with war medals including the Iron Cross. Though he claimed the latter was awarded to him for carrying his wounded friend to safety, it is unclear whether or not he actually was awarded the

medal. In fact, he felt guilty about not fighting in the war, even though he had been near the front so often.

By 1919, he was back in the Catholic Seminary for Teachers, preparing for an education career. Working as a substitute teacher in several small towns around Osnabrück, he managed to antagonize administrators with his loner attitude and lack of cooperation. He was also falsely accused—according to his diaries—of involvement in a left-wing, pro-Bolshevik revolutionary movement called the Spartacists and finally decided that a career in education was not for him.

After working as a substitute teacher in and around Osnabrück, Germany, for the next several years he worked at various jobs, including as a peddler, a clerk, a gravestone salesman, a stonemason, an organist in an asylum for the mentally ill, a press reader, a test driver for a Berlin tire company, a drama critic, and an advertising copywriter for an automobile company. It was in this last position that he began to refine his writing skills. By 1925, he was working in Berlin as editor of the magazine *Sport im Bild*. It was also during this period that he earned his reputation for loving fast cars and hard living; he married the actress Jutta Zambona and started his literary career with publication of the car-racing story "Stations on the Horizon." Within two years he became a controversial but best-selling author in Germany, with *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Reviled in Germany, Hailed Elsewhere Initially, he could find no publisher for his book, so it came out first in serial form in 1928. But when Ullstein Publishers brought it out in early 1929 as a book, it was an instant success, and it sold more than half a million copies in just three months. Remarque won international fame and fortune, but he was reviled in his native Germany for the book's pacifist sentiments. Nevertheless, foreign-language editions soon appeared—twenty-five in all—and by 1931, worldwide sales totaled 3.5 million copies. Ullstein boosted the phenomenal sales with a promotional campaign that was quite unusual for the staid publishing world in the 1920s, and the book has remained in print and has continued to sell for more than seventy years, inspiring three film versions and influencing several generations of young men and women who were faced with the prospect of going to war.

Remarque would later land in the middle of a political battle, despite the book's huge sales in Germany. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was one of the books publicly burned by the new regime. German critics also attempted to prove that Remarque was exaggerating his own war experience and misrepresenting the realities of World War I. To this day in Germany, Remarque's writing is not considered worthy of serious study.

A Move to Switzerland In 1930, the same year Remarque and his first wife divorced, he finished a sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. *The Road Back*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Remarque's famous contemporaries include:

Cole Porter (1891–1964): Prolific American composer of many jazz standards.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1975): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel prize-winning author.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Famous American writer associated with the post-World War I flowering of the arts in Paris.

Golda Meir (1898–1978): Fourth prime minister of Israel. She was one of the signatories of the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948.

recounts the trials and tribulations of soldiers trying to readjust to life in the civilian world. Once again, he hit the pulse of the times and the book sold well. But the premier of the film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* that same year brought protests in Germany, and as a result, Remarque began spending more time in Switzerland where he had purchased a villa near Lago Maggiore and where, by the end of 1933, he and his former wife—whom he would remarry in 1938—would move.

The third and final installment of what became his World War I trilogy, *Three Comrades*, was published in 1937. Critics like *Saturday Review*'s Bernard DeVoto were favorably comparing Remarque to Ernest Hemingway, noting that he had “an ability to make the commonplace evoke the profoundest emotion, to focus immensities through the smallest and simplest details.”

German Citizenship Revoked, Remarque Moves to United States In 1938, the Nazis revoked Remarque's German citizenship, and he became stateless. Partly through the personal intercession of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Remarque was allowed to enter the United States the following year, where he lived and worked in Hollywood until 1942. There, he became a celebrity, maintaining a gossip-column relationship with Marlene Dietrich, another high-profile German expatriate, and associating with celebrities of the day, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, who wrote the screenplay for the film version of *Three Comrades* and for whom Remarque wrote the screenplay version of *The Last Tycoon*.

After publishing his fourth novel, *Flotsam*, while he was living on the West Coast, Remarque moved to New York in 1943—the same year his sister Elfriede was executed by the Nazis for her part in the White Rose resistance group. There, in the city, he began painting, exhibiting his work in New York galleries, and working

on a fifth book, *Arch of Triumph*. It was an instant best seller and, according to scholars and critics like Hoffmann, is a novel worthy of the author of *All Quiet on the Western Front* with a protagonist who became “the most complex, least one-dimensional hero that Remarque had created to this point.”

Naturalization and a New War Remarque became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1947, thereafter dividing his time between his adopted country and Switzerland. By the end of World War II, he was again detailing the costs of war, with two more books, *Spark of Life*, which describes life in the concentration camps, and *A Time to Live and a Time to Die*, a novel about a soldier who falls in love while on leave from the Russian front toward the end of World War II and who dies on the battlefield upon his return to the front.

Remarque and Jutta Zambona divorced for the second time in 1957. In 1958 Remarque married film actress Paulette Goddard. By that time, he had completed and published his last novel, *The Night in Lisbon* (1964), which reviewers praised highly for its compelling story of those who fled Nazi persecution. He was at work on another book, *Shadows in Paradise*, when he died in a hospital in Locarno, Switzerland, on September 25, 1970.

Works in Literary Context

With his most famous work, Remarque stated a theme that would recur throughout all of his writing: the dislocations caused by the political and military events of the turbulent twentieth century for young men of a lost generation that had lost not only its youth but also its connection to society as a whole.

Influences Remarque read extensively, from works of Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to those of Hesse, Mann, and Proust. Though he began his career during the height of the modernist movement in art and literature, his writing was largely conventional in form. His books are well-crafted novels with clear plotlines; they are easy to read; and they mix adventure, suspense, social comment, and some violence with a central love story. They were mostly popular during his lifetime, but only *All Quiet on the Western Front* has garnered lasting attention.

World War I and the Lost Generation What ensured this particular book's lasting place in literary history was Remarque's ability to create a clear and compelling document of a pivotal moment in history: World War I. Throughout most of his work, Remarque focused on the theme of dislocation and disillusion brought on by the turbulent events of the first half of the twentieth century and the fate of the so-called lost generation—those whose lives were torn apart by World War I. These themes continue to resonate with readers around the world, for whom *All Quiet on the Western Front* remains the preeminent World War I novel.

Remarque was one of the few German writers whose works about World War I and its aftermath came to the attention of non-German readers. His work takes its place among many American and European novels, poems, films, and plays that focus on the horrors of World War I and the difficulties faced by its survivors. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939), and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944) are other prominent novels that explore the war and its toll.

Works in Critical Context

Though most of his books were well received in his lifetime, Remarque's literary reputation today rests almost entirely on *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929) Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Frank Ernest Hill noted that *All Quiet on the Western Front* "will give any sensitive reader a terrific impact," while Joseph Wood Krutch observed in the *Nation* that "Remarque tells his plain tale with a sort of naïvete which is the result not of too little experience but of too much." Henry Seidel Canby, in the *Saturday Review*, called *All Quiet on the Western Front* "the greatest book about the war that I have seen," and in England, Herbert Read of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* termed it "the greatest of all war books." Indeed, the critical consensus was, and continues to be, that *All Quiet on the Western Front* ranks among the very best war novels of all time.

Responses to Literature

1. While reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, consider the military technology of the war, and make note of the way the author describes it. Using your library and the Internet, find out about the military technology of today, and write a paper comparing the two.
2. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, what is Paul Bäumer's personality like when he enters the war? How does the war experience change him?
3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about conscientious objectors to World War I in the United States and Europe. Write a paper summarizing your findings.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers and directors who also take a strong anti-war stance:

Lay Down Your Arms! (1889), a novel by Bertha von Suttner. An antiwar novel that prompted the author's becoming a reputed pacifist leader.

The Good Soldier Svejk (1923), a novel by Jaroslav Hasek. An unfinished, illustrated satire of a precipitated World War I.

A Farewell to Arms (1929), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. The story of Italian-front ambulance driver Frederick Henry's experiences during World War I.

Gallipoli (1981), a film directed by Peter Weir. Set during World War I, this film follows the paths of two young Australian men (one played by a young Mel Gibson) as they set off to fight with the Allied troops in Turkey.

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Mary Renault

BORN: 1905, London, England

DIED: 1983, Cape Town, South Africa

NATIONALITY: British, South African

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Return to Night (1947)

The North Face (1948)

The Mask of Apollo (1966)

Fire from Heaven (1969)

The Praise Singer (1978)

Overview

British writer Mary Challans achieved great success as a writer of historical novels. Using the pen name of Mary Renault, she explored such figures as Dion of Syracuse (408–354 B.C.E.) and such events as the Great War between Athens and Sparta. She is regarded as one of the foremost historical novelists of her time.



Mary Renault © Bettmann / CORBIS

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth Clouded by Parents' Unhappy Marriage

Mary Challans, whom the world would come to know as author Mary Renault, was born on September 4, 1905, in London, England, to Dr. Frank Challans and his wife, Clementine Mary (née Baxter). Though she had an unhappy childhood because of her parents' unhappy marriage, she found solace in literature. Renault was introduced to influential Victorian and Edwardian titles while a student first at Romford House School in London and later at Cliftons Girls' School in Bristol. During her school years, World War I was fought. Beginning over territory in the Balkans and encompassing much of Europe because of entangling alliances, the war saw the loss of millions of lives, including much of a generation of young men in Great Britain.

Trained as Nurse Renault studied languages, mythology, philosophy, and history at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, then an all-women's college. She graduated with a BA in English in 1928. Renault had decided at an early age that she wanted to be a writer. Because she felt that a writer must participate actively in life and because she did not want to follow the traditional professional path of becoming a teacher, she enrolled in a nursing school in 1937.

She took her nurse's training at Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary. There, she met the woman who would become her life-long partner, Julie Mullard. At the time, lesbian-

ism was not socially acceptable in Great Britain, but women could often live together as companions without arousing much suspicion. However, Britain did legally regulate lesbian behavior with a Criminal Law Amendment Act, passed in 1922, which established a minimum age for sexual activities between females.

First Success Renault took a post in the infirmary's brain surgery ward after completing her education. Her experiences as a nurse provided material for her first novel, *Promise of Love*, which she wrote under her pen name. It was published in 1939 under the title *Purposes of Love*, and was well received by the critics.

Nurse During World War II Buoyed by the success of her first novel, Renault decided to become a full-time writer, but World War II intervened. While the war was primarily fought on the European continent during its early days, Great Britain was nonetheless deeply affected by the conflict. As Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, took over more and more territory in Europe, many refugees and people seeking exile came to Great Britain. Britain also faced aerial assaults from the Germans, including the so-called Blitz on Britain in 1940 and 1941, resulting in much damage.

Thousands of British women worked as nurses during the war, and Renault was no exception. She continued her nursing career at Winford Emergency Hospital in Bristol and wrote in her spare time. Her second novel, *Return to Night* (1947), appeared after the war and brought her name to the attention of the American reading public when it received the \$150,000 MGM prize, the largest financial award in the field of literature.

Move to South Africa Following the end of the war, Renault and Mullard moved to South Africa, where they lived for the rest of their lives. As scholar Linda Proud explains, the couple had found in South Africa a circle of fellow gay expatriates who had "escaped the repressive attitudes toward homosexuality in Britain," and they found a place where they could live together without "causing the outrage they had sometimes provoked at home."

Historical Novels After World War II, Renault and Mullard also traveled extensively in France, Italy, Greece, and the Aegean Islands. Renault was most impressed with Greece, and it became the setting for many of her historical novels, including her first historical novel, *The Last of the Wine* (1956). The work earned her much critical praise. Her next two historical novels, *The King Must Die* (1958) and its sequel, *The Bull from the Sea* (1962), also earned accolades from critics.

Renault continued with Greek settings and themes in her last four historical novels—*The Mask of Apollo* (1966) and a trilogy comprising *Fire from Heaven* (1969), *The Persian Boy* (1972), and *Funeral Games* (1978). On December 13, 1983, Mary Renault Challans died at her Cape Town home.

Works in Literary Context

As a historical novelist, Renault's gift lay in her ability to blend fact with fiction, making the reader guess which details are fictitious. Many of her works are historically based, and she especially favored Greece as a setting. Legendary figures are also employed by Renault to great effect.

Influential Power of History In the author's note to *The Mask of Apollo* (1966), Renault writes, "The perpetual stream of human nature is formed into ever-changing shallows, eddies, falls and pools by the land over which it passes. Perhaps the only real value of history lies in considering this endlessly varied play between the essence and the accidents." This "endlessly varied play" is a source of fascination to Renault. In her portrayal of the men of antiquity, she is alive to essential, in-dwelling qualities and to "accidents" by concerning her writing with the circumstances, conditions, and limitations which are peculiar to any life.

Greece as Setting Renault's fictional country is immediately recognizable, and her later works show an intimate understanding of classical and Hellenistic Greece. *The Last of the Wine* (1956) is set in Attica during the Peloponnesian War, and *The Mask of Apollo* is set in Greece and Sicily during the fourth century B.C.E. *The Praise Singer* (1978) takes place in Keos, Samos, Athens, and Sicily in the sixth century B.C.E.

Historical Characters and Related Themes Renault explores the legendary history of Theseus in *The King Must Die* (1958) and *The Bull from the Sea* (1962). *Fire from Heaven*, *The Persian Boy*, and *Funeral Games* testify to Renault's enduring preoccupation with Alexander the Great. In the author's notes to *The Persian Boy*, she explains her fascination, saying, "No other human being has attracted in his lifetime, from so many men, so fervent a devotion. Their reasons are worth examining."

This devotion translates well to Renault's themes: the love of man and man; the clash between justice and expediency; and the power of art—these are concerns that stamp her work. In her earlier novels, it was especially important to Renault to explore the ambiguities or complications of gender identification, whereas in her later novels, she examines the challenges of homosexuality. In *The Charioteer* (1953), for example, the author pursues the efforts of the main character to come to terms with his orientation toward men. An obituary writer for the *London Times* determined that Renault treated such themes "sympathetically, even aggressively—almost as a panacea for the world's ills."

Works in Critical Context

Critics have generally embraced Renault as a writer, respecting her historical novels as a blend of fact and fiction. She was praised for her skill in portraying an

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Renault's famous contemporaries include:

Victor Borge (1909–2000): Danish humorist and musician who earned such nicknames for his talent as "The Clown Prince of Denmark."

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997): The American avant-garde writer who is known as one of the central members of the Beat generation.

Barry Goldwater (1909–1998): The politician was a five-term U.S. senator and the 1964 Republican Party presidential nominee.

Doris Lessing (1919–): English author who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Communist Chilean poet who stirred up much controversy when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

individual's inner thoughts and depicting period detail, as well as their fast pace and accurate detail. In her recreations of the past, Renault is regarded highly for her insights into human character while creating a compelling narrative.

Promise of Love Renault's early works were well received by critics, starting with her first novel, *Promise of Love* (1939). A reviewer for the *New York Times* stated, "On a double count *Promise of Love* strikes me as an unusually excellent first novel. There is a fusion between background and personal drama, between inner and outer reality, which enriches and dignifies both. The story of Mic and Vivian would not be nearly so arresting as it is if one were not so sharply aware of the pressure of their environment. . . . When one adds to this that Mary Renault's style has a sure, fluid quality, that she possesses humor as well as sensitiveness, that even her minor characters are shrewdly drawn—the sum total is quite impressive."

Return to Night Echoing the enthusiasm of many other critics, a *New Yorker* reviewer described her fourth novel, *Return to Night* (1947), as "an expert, vivid novel," explaining that "Miss Renault sets forth the characters of three extremely complex people with a penetrating lucidity and a certain moderate reasonableness, making this not just an impassioned love story but a novel of considerable depth."

The Last of the Wine Renault also provided through her works a challenge for critics and scholars—to appreciate and then to discern where her historical novels are fact-based and where they are fictional. "To read *The Last of the Wine*," wrote a critic in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, "is to walk for a while in the shadow of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also concerned themselves with themes of homosexuality or gender identity through history:

- Forbidden Love: A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan* (2003), a novel by Norma Khouri. In this book, touted as nonfiction but which was actually fiction, an Arabian Muslim woman falls in love with a Catholic man, and the consequences are dire.
- Giovanni's Room* (1956), a novella by James Baldwin. In this story, the author explores through his main characters David and Giovanni such socially controversial themes as homosexuality, homophobia, and misogyny.
- Measuring the World* (2007), a novel by Daniel Kehlman. In this wry historical fiction, two scientific geniuses come together by accident and share some repressed moments in between sharing their discoveries.
- Rubyfruit Jungle* (1980), a novel by Rita Mae Brown. In this much-acclaimed novel, Molly is a bastard child, a tomboy, and a young woman who falls in love with another woman.

Acropolis with Plato and his friends." Observed the *Times Literary Supplement*: "*The Last of the Wine* is a superb historical novel. The writing is Attic in quality, unforced, clear, delicate. The characterization is uniformly successful and, most difficult of all, the atmosphere of Athens is realized in masterly fashion. Miss Renault is not only obviously familiar with the principal sources. She has disciplined her imagination so that the reader ceases to question the authenticity of her fiction."

Responses to Literature

1. Some scholars have suggested that Renault's novels interpret history from a feminist perspective. Consider one or more of the author's works in this context, and set up a debate. Determine whether you think Renault's novels are feminist. Be sure to defend your position with textual examples by citing lines or passages.
2. *The King Must Die* is a historical novel. It is also classified as a Bildungsroman—a building novel, or novel of personal development and growth. Find textual examples that support the notion that the novel is indeed a Bildungsroman.
3. Search the Internet and research some facts about Alexander the Great. What facts are included in Renault's book *Fire from Heaven*? Discuss why Alexander would make a worthy character in a historical novel.

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Samuel Richardson

BORN: 1689, *Mackworth, Derbyshire, England*

DIED: 1761, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Novel*

MAJOR WORKS:

Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded (1740)

Clarissa: or, the History of a Young Lady (1747)

The History of Sir Charles Grandison (1753)



Samuel Richardson Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

Samuel Richardson took familiar romance structures of courtship and gave them a massive new force, direction, and complexity. He is considered the originator of the modern English novel and has also been called the first dramatic novelist as well as the first of the eighteenth-century “sentimental” writers. He introduced tragedy to the novel form and substituted social embarrassment for tragic conflict, thus developing the first novel of manners. Most significantly, Richardson’s detailed exploration of his characters’ motives and feelings, accomplished through his use of the epistolary method—where the narrative is conveyed through letters written by one or more characters—added a new dimension to the art of fiction.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Successful Printer Little is known of Richardson’s early life. He was born in Derbyshire in 1689, the son of a woodworker and his wife. Though his parents had hoped to educate him in the ministry, poverty forced them to abandon such hopes. He received a modest education and was apprenticed to a printer and soon became a freeman.

In 1715 Richardson set up his own business and quickly became one of the leading merchants in London. Through his business, he became a friend and patron of many writers, including Samuel Johnson, Sarah Fielding, and Edward Young. In 1721 he married Martha Wilde, the daughter of his former printing master. His industriousness paid off quickly, and his income and influence rose steadily.

As a printer, his output included works and journals by a number of conservative Tory authors and eventually he became the official printer for the House of Commons. This important commission made Richardson wealthy and professionally secure, and it taught him a great deal about aspects of aristocratic and political life that would become useful in his later novels.

In the eighteenth century, printers were in the center of social transformation: Publications of all sorts were becoming mass-produced and inexpensive enough to reach wide audiences. Consequently, there was a sharp increase in public education and literacy rates. The printing press became an important engine for the emerging Enlightenment throughout Europe. Richardson advocated for useful publications rather than just waiting for business to come to him, and it is not surprising that he became the printer for the Society for the Encouragement of Learning.

Personal Tragedies Richardson’s greatest prosperity occurred during the 1730s, but this was also a desolate time, shaping his religious and personal outlook on life. He was married twice, in 1721 and 1732. All six children from his first marriage died by the age of four. Two other children born to his second wife also died in infancy; four daughters survived. During this decade, Richardson also lost his father in an accident along with two brothers and a close friend.

Richardson became ill, suffering from digestive afflictions, nervousness, and dizziness. Based on modern medical knowledge, it appears that Richardson had Parkinson’s disease. He was so shaky that sometimes he could walk only with a cane, but he continued with tremendous energy to build up his printing business and in late middle age was to take on an exhausting second career as a writer.

From Letter Writing to Novelist At the age of fifty-one, Richardson began writing what would become his first novel, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740). This work was the result of a commission he undertook at the request of two booksellers, Charles Rivington and John Osborn. Both Rivington and Osborn felt that a collection of model letters to be used by people with little formal education would be a prosperous venture, and they proposed the idea to Richardson, who enthusiastically accepted. Two years later the volume was published.

While he was writing this work, Richardson elaborated on a story he had heard about the attempted seduction of a young servant girl by her aristocratic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Richardson's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779): British furniture designer whose name became synonymous with the most valued home artifacts of his era and whose works are still highly sought after today.

Carlo Osvaldo Goldoni (1707–1793): Playwright and librettist from Venice who wrote many of Italy's best-loved plays. He captured the emerging middle class of his time in the colorful and witty Venetian dialect.

Queen Anne (1665–1714): British queen who took the throne in 1702; she became the first monarch to reign over Great Britain when England and Scotland united as a single nation in 1707.

Frances Moore Brooke (1724–1789): A prolific English novelist, playwright, essayist, and poet who traveled with her husband to Canada. Her novel *The History of Emily Montague* is said to be the first novel written in North America.

Tobias Smollett (1721–1771): Scottish novelist best known for his comic novels *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1753), and *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771).

master. She held her ground, and the master was so impressed with her virtue that he fell in love with her and proposed an honest marriage. The result was *Pamela*, and Richardson began his career as a novelist. *Pamela* was a huge success and became the best-selling novel in Britain and created a sensation throughout Europe.

Another Epistolary Novel, Another Tragic Heroine Richardson extended the novel with a sequel volume in 1741 but fell ill again in 1742. Few outside his close circle of friends knew that he was writing a new novel that would dwarf *Pamela* in size, popularity, and literary influence. Richardson tested some of his ideas in a remarkable series of letters with his friends, many of them women, but he remained stubborn about the controversial tragic plan of his masterwork. The first volumes of *Clarissa* appeared in 1747, the last ones in 1748, and substantially different second and third editions were complete by 1751.

Clarissa is remarkable for many reasons, one of the most important of which is the way it established the emerging genre of the novel as a vehicle for psychological insight that can be read on many levels. On one level, it is a somber indictment of bourgeois materialism and family tyranny, as well as an attack on the aristocratic notion of class supremacy. Both the bourgeois Harlowes and the aristocratic Lovelace suffer because they fail to realize the

most important values in life. It is also a revealing portrait of a consciousness doomed to enact its life under the continuous threat of destruction. Clarissa's death is a direct result of those qualities that both the characters in the novel and the reader consider saintly—namely, her purity of body and soul. Clarissa's ultimate moral strength resides in her refusal to compromise these qualities to the physical world of violence, materialism, and sin. Instead, she chooses negation and death as her final salvation.

Structurally, *Clarissa* represents a significant advance over *Pamela*. Although Richardson utilizes the epistolary method once again, he also uses three other points of view—Anna Howe's, Lovelace's, and Belford's—to explore the various implications of the novel's events.

A Virtuous Male Hero Richardson began his third novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, around 1750. The story is about how a good man, in love with two deserving women, balances questions of loyalty and honor. Richardson also addresses several social issues of the time relating to changing concepts of male virtue, including the ethics of dueling and the nature of masculine sentimentality. While also popular in the period—Jane Austen said it was her favorite novel—literary history has not valued *Sir Charles Grandison* as much as *Pamela* or *Clarissa*, mainly because of its lack of a compelling dramatic situation and psychologically complex characters.

Richardson's health continued to decline, with an increase of trembling and dizziness. By the end of 1755, Richardson's health forced him to give up writing, and he suffered a stroke on June 28, 1761. He died on July 4 and was buried in St. Bride's Church beside his first wife and children.

Works in Literary Context

Richardson builds upon the existing genre of the romance—love stories often featuring forced marriages, abductions, and sometimes rape. But in *Clarissa* especially, Richardson replaces the idealism of the romance with both the realism of interpersonal relationships and near-perfect Christian virtue. Clarissa and Lovelace are among the very first modern fictional characters with a full capacity for change and self-analysis. Clarissa and Pamela are among the first characters in English fiction who develop slowly, rather than changing suddenly due to an altering experience.

The Longest Novel in English *Clarissa* is the longest novel in English—a fact loved by some readers, tolerated by most, and mocked by others. Like the works of James Joyce and Marcel Proust, *Clarissa* is meant for those who like reading, and it also is a work that demands rereading. The characters themselves reread, both metaphorically and literally, their own experiences, which is made vivid for the novel's readers at each point it occurs.

Angus Wilson says of the pace of the work, “The journey before the reader will be, for three quarters of the book . . . drawn out and long, but what he is reading at any given moment is sharply felt and quick.”

Class Struggles The plots of Richardson’s novels demonstrate the engagement of literature and culture in the middle of the eighteenth century. Richardson is unique among the many early novelists who build their romance plots around themes of class struggle. The struggle of gender stereotypes in *Pamela* and *Clarissa* serve as a parallel to the class struggles of the middle class asserting its emerging powers against the manipulations of the old aristocratic order.

Pamela, a servant girl, converts the decadent Mr. B. to her more Puritanical strain of working-class virtue. *Clarissa* exhibits the new conflict between the middle-class gentry, rising by colonial trade and coal mining, and the old nobility. While Lovelace represents the worst abuses of aristocratic power, the Harlowe family represents the vulgarity and selfish materialism of the rising middle class. Only the hero and the heroine transcend the limitations of their class and time.

Works in Critical Context

Richardson’s high moral tone was appealing to Victorian readers, although he was often neglected for the length of his novels and his supposedly perverse interest in the sexual persecutions of vulnerable young women. By the early twentieth century, he was largely neglected, but in 1957, Ian Watt’s influential book *The Rise of the Novel* helped restore the reputation of Richardson’s novels with an enthusiastic appreciation of their realism and form. More recently, feminist and cultural critics have found a limitless resource in Richardson’s works with their subtle explorations of emerging and shifting feminine identities and the ways in which sexual dynamics play themselves out in the context of politics, class, and representation.

Pamela *Pamela* was the first novel to become a cultural sensation. Scenes from *Pamela* appeared on fans, ceramic plates, and even in a wax museum. One town rang the church bells when the final volume of *Pamela* arrived to celebrate the main character’s marriage.

It should be noted that Richardson’s reception history is bound up in a tight knot with Henry Fielding’s. Fielding wrote a parody of *Pamela* called *Shamela*, mocking what he saw as the heroine’s moral hypocrisy. Fielding’s much more ambitious novel *Joseph Andrews* also begins as a parody of *Pamela*, and the title character is supposedly her brother. While Fielding did have some kind things to say about *Clarissa*, and Richardson helped to finance a trip to Lisbon that Fielding took for his health, the two spent most of their writing careers in a bitter public rivalry.

Clarissa *Clarissa* earned immediate and lasting respect throughout Europe, sometimes bringing readers

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Epistolary novels have a unique relationship with their readers. Without a narrator, characters speak for themselves, often describing events as they are occurring, and the reader is left to decide which of the competing viewpoints is best. Other works that use the epistolary method include:

The Color Purple (1983), a novel by Alice Walker. This work implements a modern take on the epistolary novel. Set in 1930s Georgia, Walker addresses the challenges, injustices, and triumphs that African American women faced in pre-civil rights America.

Les Liaisons dangereuses (Dangerous Liaisons) (1782), a novel by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos. Directly influenced by *Clarissa*, Laclos created a novel of letters between the vain libertine Valmont and his partner/competitor, the Marquise de Merteuil, as they plot the sexual conquest and humiliation of several prominent and innocent young women.

Dracula (1897), a novel by Bram Stoker. This Gothic vampire story uses journal entries, letters, newspaper clippings, a ship’s log, and phonograph recordings to advance the narrative.

such as Denis Diderot to say in a eulogy for Richardson, “O Richardson! . . . Who is it who will dare to wrest away one line from your sublime works? . . . Centuries, make haste to run and bring with you the honors which are due to Richardson!” *Clarissa* was popular in England, but it was remarkably so in France and Germany, where many imitations and influenced novels were produced well into the nineteenth century, including Laclos’s *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Clarissa has also attracted many postmodern critics, fascinated by the ways in which Richardson uses the epistolary form to push the boundaries of what the novel can and cannot do—throughout Richardson’s long novels, almost everything that can happen to letters happens: They are hidden, burned, forged, exchanged, stolen, and even sewn into the fabric of clothes. Characters are sometimes quite literally literary, writing themselves into power and existence, even after death.

Responses to Literature

1. What are the pros and cons of extraordinary length in a novel like *Clarissa*? What is potentially gained and lost?
2. Read Richardson’s powerful preface to *Clarissa*. Discuss Richardson’s theory of the novel, and explain what his moral purpose is for his readers. What still seems relevant to readers of *Clarissa* today?

- Using library resources and the Internet, research the important ideas and advancements during the Enlightenment. What are some of the era's attitudes that are prevalent in Richardson's novels?

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☒ Mordecai Richler

BORN: 1931, Montreal, Canada

DIED: 2001, Montreal, Canada

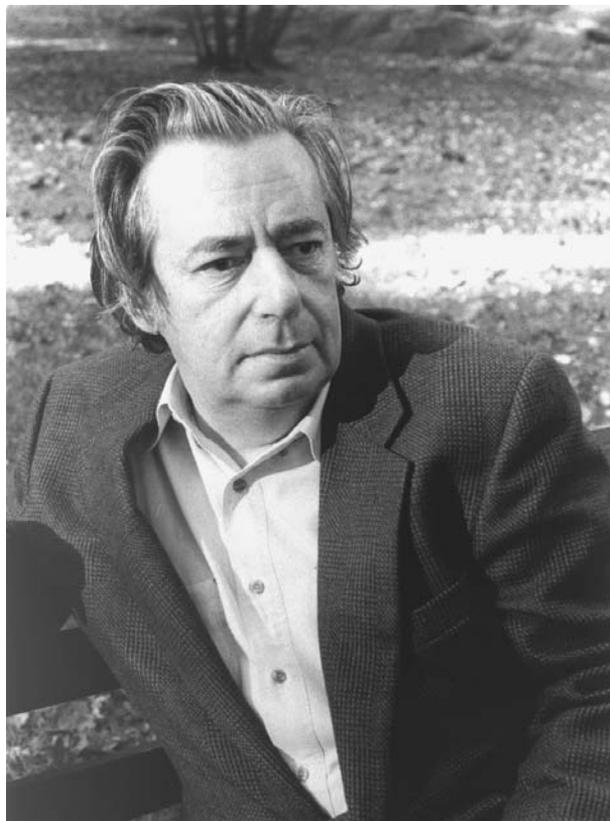
NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Son of a Smaller Hero (1955)

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1959)



Mordecai Richler Richler, Mordecai, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

The Incomparable Atuk (1963)
Solomon Gursky Was Here (1989)
Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case (1995)

Overview

Among the most prominent figures in contemporary Canadian literature, Richler is best known for the darkly humorous novels in which he examines such topics as Canadian society, Jewish culture, the adverse effects of materialism, and relationships between individuals of different backgrounds. Richler left Canada at the age of twenty and lived in Europe for more than twenty years; he usually set his fiction in the Jewish section of Montreal where he was raised, or in European locales. And indeed, it is surely no mistake that in a Europe longing to be reminded of the world before the massive cultural and physical trauma of the Holocaust and of World War II, Richler felt himself compelled to look back to his Jewish roots in Montreal. Although Richler is sometimes faulted for excessive vulgarity and for being overly judgmental of both Canadian nationalism and Jewish culture, he is widely praised for his sense of humor and his skill at blending realism and satire.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jewish Montreal and Cosmopolitan Europe Mordecai Richler was born in the Jewish ghetto of Montreal to a religious family of Russian émigrés in 1931. After a stint at a university, Richler cashed in an insurance policy and used the money to sail to Liverpool, England. Eventually he found his way to Paris, where he spent some years emulating such expatriate authors as Ernest Hemingway and Henry Miller, and later moved to London (in 1954), where he worked as a news correspondent.

Finding a Voice In the same year he moved to London, Richler published his first novel, *The Acrobats*, a book he later characterized as “more political than anything I’ve done since, and humorless.” Richler himself characterized the novel as somewhat derivative. He found his own voice soon after, with novels like *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955), *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), and *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963).

Praise for Novels that Draw on Montreal Roots Richler gained critical acclaim with three of his best-known titles, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), *St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971), and *Joshua, Then and Now* (1980). These books share a common theme—that of a Jewish-Canadian protagonist at odds with society, a theme based loosely on Richler’s own life—and all three novels revolve around the way greed can taint success. The novels also reveal Richler’s flair for dark humor and racy content. Richler’s screenplay adaptation of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* won him an Academy Award nomination in 1975.

A Successful Comeback Novel After *Joshua, Then and Now*, nine years would pass before Richler published another novel (although he was a widely published journalist throughout that period). When he broke the silence in 1989 with *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, several reviewers welcomed the novel as worth the wait, and England’s Book Trust honored it with a Commonwealth Writers Prize. In these years—between 1970 and the late 1990s—Richler also conducted a long-running sort of feud with Québécois nationalists, activists in favor of Québec’s secession from Canada and often in favor of Franco-phone-oriented language laws. Richler has described various Québécois stances as anti-Semitic, with predictably outraged reactions from a number of Québécois commentators and pundits.

Children’s Books and Final Novel Richler introduced his children’s book hero Jacob Two-Two (so called because, as the youngest of five children, he has to say everything twice to be heard) in 1975 with *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*. *Jacob Two-Two and the Dinosaur* appeared in 1987, and Richler rounded out this much-loved trilogy with *Jacob Two-Two’s First Spy Case* in 1995. Jacob was based on Richler’s own youngest son

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Richler’s famous contemporaries include:

Gaston Suarez (1929–1984): A Bolivian novelist and dramatist.

Philip Roth (1933–): An American novelist whose work has both been highly praised and condemned as anti-Semitic, despite the fact that Roth himself is Jewish.

Seamus Heaney (1938–): The Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet who translated *Beowulf* into contemporary English and received much acclaim for making the work accessible to modern readers.

Boris Yeltsin (1931–2007): The first president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Russia), Yeltsin served from 1991 until 1999.

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): The first female prime minister of the United Kingdom, Thatcher served in office from 1979 until 1990.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968): An American civil rights leader whose efforts were critical in helping the United States begin to overcome its institutionalized racism, King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968.

Jacob Richler. Two years later he published his last novel for adults: *Barney’s Version*. The book won that year’s Giller Prize. Richler died in 2001 of complications resulting from cancer.

Works in Literary Context

Full Tilt Toward Satire Two tendencies dominate Richler’s fiction: realism and satire. The first three novels, *The Acrobats* (1954), *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955), and *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), are realistic, their plots basically traditional in form, their settings accurately detailed, and their characters motivated in psychologically familiar ways. Even in these works, as George Woodcock has noted, there is at times a drift toward satiric caricature. At the other extreme, *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963) and *Cocksure* (1968) are pure satiric fantasy along the lines of Voltaire’s long-celebrated *Candide, or Optimism* (1759), their concessions to realism slight. In them Richler indulges the strong comic vein in his writing as he attacks Canadian provincialism and the spurious gratifications of the entertainment media. Beginning with *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) and continuing in *St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971) and in *Joshua, Then and Now* (1980), the two strands of realism and fantasy-satire come together, and this distinctive blend becomes Richler’s greatest narrative strength.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the primary targets of Richler's satire was the entertainment industry. Here is a selection of other works that take aim at the entertainment world:

For Your Consideration (2006), a film directed by Christopher Guest. In this "mockumentary" film—a satirical, scripted film that is made to look like a documentary—the cast of the film *Home for Purim* is nominated for several awards. Ultimately, viewers understand how scheming and selfish the characters are.

The Truman Show (1998), a film directed by Peter Weir. The protagonist of this film, Truman, is a man whose whole life from the time of his conception onward has been the center of a reality television show. But Truman is unaware that he is being filmed and that his friends and family are actors in the drama.

Network (1976), a film directed by Sidney Lumet. This highly acclaimed satire demonstrates the depths to which a fictional network will sink in order to improve ratings. The film won four Academy Awards.

In these highly satirical and highly fantastical novels, Richler's work is in the same vein as his contemporaries Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon, and such later writers as David Foster Wallace.

Works in Critical Context

Although Richler's early work received mixed critical responses—particularly his works of satire—his later work has received almost universal acclaim. Both the early and the late fiction tend to revolve around protagonists on moral quests of one sort or another. As G. David Sheps has observed, Richler's heroes "insist that salvation lies only in the adoption of personal values, but they are not sure which personal values to hold." Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here* is largely considered a deft balance between satire and realism, and the result is a highly readable and enjoyable text that does not lose any of the wit and cynicism of earlier Richler works. Nonetheless, Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* remains his best-known and most highly regarded work.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz Comparing *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* to such other coming-of-age stories as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, A. R. Bevan, in a new introduction to Richler's novel, finds that the book, "in spite of its superficial affinity with the two novels mentioned above, ends with [none of their] affirmation." The character of Duddy, "who has never

weighed the consequences of his actions in any but material terms, is less alone in the physical sense than the earlier young men, but he is also much less of a man. . . . He is a modern 'anti-hero' (something like the protagonist in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*) who lives in a largely deterministic world, a world where decisions are not decisions and where choice is not really choice." In *Modern Fiction Studies*, John Ower describes *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* as "a 'Jewish' novel [with] both a pungent ethnic flavor and the convincingness that arises when a writer deals with a milieu with which he is completely familiar." For the author, Ower continues, "the destructive psychological effects of the ghetto mentality are equalled and to some extent paralleled by those of the Jewish family. Like the society from which it springs, this tends to be close and exclusive, clinging together in spite of its intense quarrels. The best aspect of such clannishness, the feeling of kinship which transcends all personal differences, is exemplified by Duddy. Although he is in varying degrees put down and rejected by all of his relatives except his grandfather, Duddy sticks up for them and protects them."

Solomon Gursky Was Here The story focuses on Moses Berger, an alcoholic Jewish writer whose life's obsession is to write a biography of the legendary Solomon Gursky. Gursky, who came from a prominent Jewish-Canadian family of liquor distillers, may have died years ago in a plane crash, but Berger finds numerous clues that suggest he lived on in various guises, a trickster and meddler in international affairs. Jumping forward and backward in time, from events in the Gursky past to the novel's present, Richler "manages to suggest a thousand-page family chronicle in not much more than 400 pages," observes Bruce Cook for Chicago's *Tribune Books*. The critic lauds the novel's humor and rich texture, concluding, "Page for page, there has not been a serious novel for years that can give as much pure pleasure as this one." Acknowledging the inventiveness of Richler's narrative, Francine Prose in the *New York Times Book Review* nonetheless found the book somewhat marred by predictable or flat characters. Other critics have suggested that there was too much going on in the novel, and that some its humor seemed a bit too black. *Village Voice* writer Joel Yanofsky applauds the book despite its weaknesses: "If the structure of Richler's story is too elaborate at times, if the narrative loose ends aren't all pulled together, it's a small price to pay for a book this beguiling and rude, this serious, this fat and funny." And Jonathan Kirsch, writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, calls it "a worthy addition" to Richler's canon, the work "of a storyteller at the height of his powers."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Cocksure* and watch the film *American Dreamz*. Nearly forty years passed between the publication of *Cocksure* and the release of *American*

Dreamz, yet their topics are very similar. In a short essay, compare the satire of each. What is each making fun of? Why? How do you react to these critiques? In what ways do they seem accurate, and in what ways do they seem exaggerated?

2. Read *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. This novel is considered a “coming-of-age” novel. Generally, in coming-of-age texts, the protagonist must battle through adversity to grow into a mature, well-balanced human being. In what ways does *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* fit this mold—for example, what adversities must be overcome? In what ways does it defy conventions?
3. After having read *Cocksure* and *The Incomparable Atuk*, you should have a good sense of how satire works. Now, write a short story or short film that is a satire of a topic on which you have a strong opinion.
4. *Solomon Gursky Was Here* is considered a kind of family saga. Writing a novel in which all the members of a family seem real—not flat and uninteresting—is very difficult. Some have argued that Richler was unsuccessful in having done that. What do you think? To what extent are his characters in the novel realistic? Support your thesis with detailed analysis of the text.

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Rainer Maria Rilke

BORN: 1875, Prague, Bohemia

DIED: 1926, Montreux, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

New Poems (1907)

The Notebook of Malte Laurids Briggs (1910)



Rainer Maria Rilke *Imagno / Getty Images*

Duino Elegies (1923)

Sonnets to Orpheus (1923)

Overview

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke is considered one of the greatest lyric poets of twentieth-century Germany. He is credited with creating the “thing-poem,” a form that involves describing physical objects in the most precise way possible. Because of his poetry, rich with imagery and intricate symbolism, Rilke has often been considered a mystic or prophet. In addition to poetry, Rilke wrote drama, short stories, and a largely experimental novel, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Briggs*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unhappy Childhood and Preparation for Military Career René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke was born in Prague on December 4, 1875, the only child of an unhappy marriage. (At the time, Prague was under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a dual monarchy ruled by Franz Joseph I, a Hapsburg.) Rilke’s father, Josef, was a retired officer in the Austrian army who worked as a railroad official at the time of his son’s birth. Sophie, Rilke’s mother, was the object of his

hatred, and Rilke blamed her for his miserable childhood, even though she was the one who encouraged him to read and write.

Expecting his son to become an army officer, Rilke's father sent him to military school when he was eleven, beginning what Rilke called "that evil and frightened decade." One year after being transferred to the military upper school in Moravia, Rilke was discharged from the academy in 1891 because of health problems that he claimed were the result of being "exhausted and abused in body and soul." He returned to Prague, where he received private instruction in preparation for university entrance exams.

Early Published Poetry By the time Rilke had enrolled in the philosophy program at Prague's Charles-Ferdinand University in 1895, he had already published his first volume of poetry, *Life and Songs* (1894), written in the conventional style of nineteenth-century German poet Heinrich Heine and rejected by critics and readers alike for its naïve sentimentality. *Offering to the Larvae* (1895) and *Crowned with Dreams* (1896) soon followed, but these works, too, little foreshadow the genius that would emerge several years later. In 1896, Rilke moved to Munich, where he enjoyed the literary scene, had a few plays produced, and, most importantly at the time, was introduced to the Danish writer Jens Peter Jacobson, whose work would influence Rilke throughout his career.

Fatherland and Family Rilke's cultural and personal experiences expanded considerably when he visited Venice in 1897. There he met the writer Lou Andreas-Salomé, who encouraged him to change his name from "René" to the more masculine "Rainer." From 1897 to 1900, Rilke traveled to Berlin, Italy, and Russia with Andreas-Salomé and her husband. In Russia, Rilke met novelist Leo Tolstoy and the peasant poet Spirdion Droschin, whose work Rilke translated into German.

Captivated by both the people and the landscape of Russia, Rilke discovered what he called his "spiritual fatherland," an indication of his transition to a mystical period of writing. During this phase, Rilke composed such collections as *Of Pilgrimage* (1901) and *The Book of Hours* (1905). Also during this time, Rilke wrote a draft of what would become the most popular work in his lifetime: *The Story of the Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke* (1906).

In 1900, Rilke settled in the German artist colony of Worpswede, where he met and married sculptor Clara Westhoff. Just over a year later, only a few months after the birth of their daughter, Rilke left his family and traveled to Paris to write a book about the French sculptor Auguste Rodin. During this time Rilke was Rodin's secretary, and the artist instructed Rilke not to wait for inspiration but to observe material objects for ideas. This advice prompted a significant change in Rilke's writing, culminating in *New Poems* (1907), a collection of

"thing-poems," or lyrical poems capturing the things he had seen and studied.

Wanderer After the 1910 publication of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Rilke did not publish a major work for twelve years. In a state of restless inner turmoil, Rilke traveled from country to country, including Algeria and Egypt, during which time he visited the Castle Duino on the Balkan coast of the Adriatic Sea. While there, Rilke claimed, an angel appeared before him, inspiring him to begin composing a cycle of elegies that would be his ultimate poetic achievement upon its completion in 1922.

During this period, Rilke's native country, like much of Europe, was embroiled in World War I. The heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo by nationalist terrorists in 1914. His death set off a domino effect as most countries in Europe were allied. Austria-Hungary was allied with Germany and Turkey to form the Central Powers against France, Russia, Great Britain, and, later, the United States, known as the Allies. When World War I broke out, Rilke was detained in Germany for nearly five years, mostly in Munich. The war proved destructive and costly to human life for both sides, but the Allies emerged victorious in 1918. In the aftermath, the Austro-Hungarian empire collapsed and Austria was reduced to its German-speaking sections. The new republic of Austria was formed.

After the war, in 1919, Rilke began a lecture tour in Switzerland, where he lived for the rest of his life. In an explosion of creativity, he finished *Duino Elegies* (1922) and wrote *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922) within three weeks, both of which brought him international recognition as a major writer. In bad health, Rilke spent his final years visiting various health spas in Switzerland. In 1926, he died of leukemia at Valmont in Montreux.

Works in Literary Context

Throughout Rilke's life of extensive travel, he was most influenced by Paris, the city where he met sculptor Auguste Rodin and painter Paul Cézanne, artists who inspired him to regard his poems as carefully crafted objects. Encouraged by the visual arts of Rodin and Cézanne, Rilke developed a new style of writing in which he attempted to capture visual techniques in his poetry. At the end of his life, Rilke, inspired by poets Paul Valéry and Jean Cocteau, translated French poetry into German and wrote three short volumes of his own in French. Rilke was also influenced by Danish writer, Jens Peter Jacobson.

Thing-Poems With incredible skill, Rilke uses uncomplicated vocabulary to describe tangible subjects and objects encountered in everyday life. Rilke's thing-poems, sometimes referred to as object poems, describe physical objects as simply and precisely as possible, ideally not as they appear on the surface, but as if the writer inhabits the things from within. Observing Rodin's artistic method,

Rilke learned that the sculptor approached a piece of marble not with a predetermined plan, but with complete openness to the creative possibilities within the stone. Speculating whether this approach could be applied to writing poetry, Rodin and Rilke made a list of things in Paris that could be potential subject matter for Rilke.

Working his way down the list, Rilke visited the Paris zoo, which became the inspiration for many of his best-known thing-poems. Swans, blue hydrangeas, gazelles, flamingoes, the merry-go-round at the zoo—all were transformed into subjects for Rilke. Of the poems written during this time, “The Panther,” is the most famous and demonstrates quite clearly Rilke’s mastery of the poetic form. With beautiful minimalism, he shapes the panther out of words, as if he is a visual artist molding the animal out of clay.

Legacy Though his work was respected by a number of European artists at the time of his death, Rilke was virtually unknown to the general reading public. That anonymity came to an end in 1936, however, when his work was introduced into the English literary world by several translators. In addition to influencing such poets as Stephen Spender, Robert Bly, and W. H. Auden, Rilke’s work has interested several philosophers over the years, including Ludwig Wittgenstein. Because of his striking powers of perception and literary technique, modern scholars consider Rilke to be the greatest lyric poet of Germany.

Works in Critical Context

Because of such underdeveloped collections as *Life and Songs*, Rilke’s early poetry was dismissed as maudlin and immature. In fact, looking back at his early poems from the vantage point of an older, experienced poet, Rilke himself agreed with the judgment of those critics at the beginning of his career. For many years, scholars considered Rilke’s work to be that of a religious dreamer or a mystic prophet, thus lacking literary merit. After World War II, however, Rilke was increasingly acknowledged as a writer of philosophical poetry, as well as one of literature’s first postmodern poets.

Duino Elegies Many literary scholars contend that Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* is one of the twentieth century’s most important works of poetry. *Duino Elegies* “might well be called the greatest set of poems of modern times,” asserts Colin Wilson in *Religion and the Rebel*. “They have had as much influence in German-speaking countries as [T. S. Eliot’s] *The Waste Land* has in England and America.” In the ten elegies of the *Duino Elegies* cycle, Rilke reflects upon the purpose of life and the task of the poet to help reconcile art and life, because art holds the ultimate creative power in the universe. Furthermore, he questions how humankind is supposed to survive in a world that is progressively becoming inhumane.

Many scholars have commended *Duino Elegies* for its acceptance of all facets of life, including the world’s destruc-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rilke’s famous contemporaries include:

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967): American author. Sandburg won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for his multivolume biography of Abraham Lincoln (1940), the other for *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (1951).

Clarence Darrow (1857–1938): American attorney. This lawyer’s most famous case was tried in 1925, when he defended John T. Scopes, a teacher accused of teaching evolution instead of divine creation.

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): Spanish poet and playwright. His work shows his conviction that art is an essential part of everyday life. His plays include *Mariana Pineda* (1927).

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946): American photographer. The husband of artist Georgia O’Keeffe, he helped photography achieve the same status as an artistic medium as painting and sculpting. His pictures include *The Hay Wagon* (1922) and *Equivalent* (1931).

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959): American architect. He developed the Prairie School of architecture in which houses were designed with low-pitched roofs with overhanging eaves, open floor plans, and horizontal lines.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Russian composer. Because of its musical daring, fights broke out in the audience at the premiere of his ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

tive forces. In his *Collected Criticism*, Conrad Aiken notes that “no poet before him had been brave enough to accept the *whole* of [the dark side] of the world, as if it were unquestionably valid and potentially universal.” For Rilke, the darkness was fundamentally part of the light.

Feminist Perspectives More recent criticism comes from a feminist perspective, which analyzes Rilke’s attitude toward women. Several feminist critics argue that although Rilke’s view of women is kind, he confines them to the same idealistic pedestal as his predecessors. His depiction of mother figures, as well as the female/male relationship in general, continues to be of interest to scholars such as poet Adrienne Rich, who, in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, calls attention to the fact that “the young woman is to mediate for [the male] in his ‘monstrous’ inner life, just as the mother mediated in his childhood.” Overall, feminist critics contend, Rilke gives female characters stereotypical virtues, including selflessness and an unconditional—often unrealistic—capacity to love, virtues that he would never assign to men.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In the latter part of his life, Rilke carried on a five-year correspondence with Franz Xaver Kappus, a young poet who had sent Rilke some poems of his own, seeking the older man's advice. Collected and published after Rilke's death, *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929) provides insight into what Rilke believed necessary for Kappus—or anyone—to be not only an artist, but also a complete person. Listed below are other works that use correspondence as a way to gain insight into a person's life and work:

Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963 (1975), a collection of letters by Sylvia Plath, edited and selected by her mother, Aurelia Schober Plath. Written when she was in college, Plath's letters to her mother reveal both her drive for success and her periods of deep depression.

The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, 1845–1846, Part One (2005), correspondence between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. The eloquent love letters exchanged between these two significant writers resulted in a passionate marriage that lasted until Barrett's death.

Letters from Iwo Jima (2006), a film directed by Clint Eastwood. This movie is based on letters home from General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the commander in charge on the island of Iwo Jima when it was attacked by American troops in 1944.

Responses to Literature

1. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Poems are, with the best knowledge and intention, not to be translated without losses. I always think one should stick with the original." Given this statement, why do you think Rilke chose to translate works by the French poets André Gide and Paul Valéry? Find two different translations of one of Rilke's poems and write a paper that addresses questions like the following: What differences do you see between the two translations? What do you think caused these differences?
2. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke writes to Kappus that young people "are not yet capable of love." In the context of our own cultural habits and expectations, do you find this a shocking statement? What does Rilke mean when he says that society provides "conventions" as "life-preservers" for the common disillusionments of love? Write an essay in which you address these issues.
3. Select three everyday objects and make lists for each one in which you note sensory details and as much physical description as possible. Next, choose the one

object you feel most familiar with and write your own thing-poem of at least fifteen lines.

4. In the essay "On Transience," Sigmund Freud describes a walk with two unnamed companions—who might have been Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé, Freud's former love, as well as Rilke's. The trio is discussing human creativity from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. Drawing on what you know about Rilke's stance on art and the artist, write a script for the conversation that might have taken place among Rilke, Freud, and Andreas-Salomé.

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Arthur Rimbaud

BORN: 1854, Charleville, France

DIED: 1891, Marseilles, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

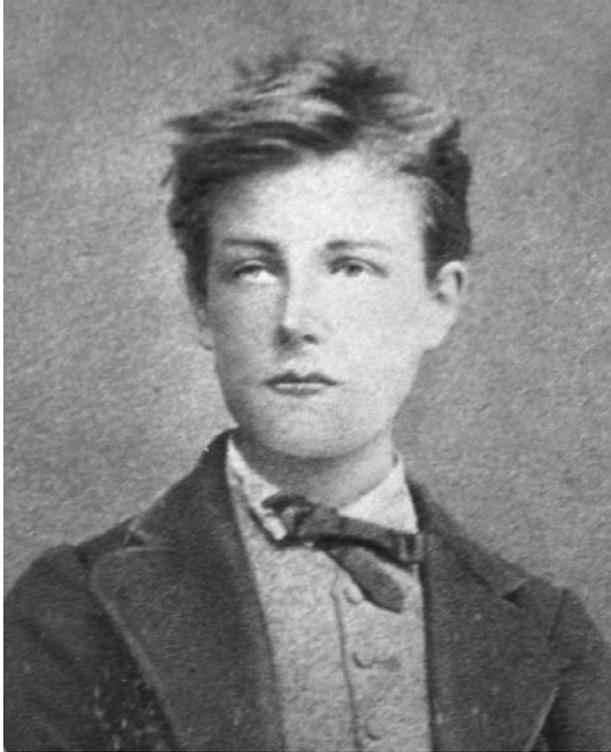
A Season in Hell (1873)

Illuminations (1886)

The Drunken Boat (1920)

Overview

Arthur Rimbaud is considered one of the most influential poets in the history of French letters. Although his writing career was brief and his output small, Rimbaud's development of the prose poem and innovative use of the unconscious mind as a source of literary inspiration influenced the symbolist movement and anticipated the



Arthur Rimbaud *Rimbaud, Arthur, engraving. The Library of Congress.*

freedom of form characteristic of much contemporary poetry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood with an Absent Father and Authoritarian Mother Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud was born in Charleville in northeastern France on October 20, 1854, the second son of an army captain, Frédéric Rimbaud, and Marie-Cathérine-Vitalie Rimbaud. Rimbaud's father was absent during most of his childhood. Rimbaud's difficult relationship with his authoritarian mother is reflected in many of his early poems. His parents separated when he was six years old, and Rimbaud was thereafter raised by his mother in a strict religious environment. An overprotective woman, she accompanied her child to and from school, supervised his homework, and would not allow him to associate with other boys. While enrolled at the Collège de Charleville, Rimbaud excelled in all his subjects and was considered a brilliant student. His rhetoric professor, Georges Izambard, befriended the boy, and under his tutelage Rimbaud avidly read the Romantic and Parnassian poets and strove to emulate their work.

Run Away Attempts, Arrest, and Suspected Abuse Between 1870 and 1871, Rimbaud ran away from home three times. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in

July 1870, which ultimately ended the Second French Empire, led to the closing of his school, ending Rimbaud's formal education. In August he went to Paris, but was arrested at the train station for traveling without a ticket and was briefly imprisoned. He spent several months wandering in France and Belgium before Izambard eventually rescued the youth and brought him home. Rimbaud's growing disgust with provincial life drove him away again a few months later. Scholars believe that his experiences as a runaway may have included at least one brutal incident that strongly altered both his personality and the tone of his work. Some biographers suggest that Rimbaud may have been sexually abused by soldiers. After the incident, Rimbaud renounced his sentimental early verse and wrote poems in which he expressed disgust with life and a desire to escape from reality. In February 1871 he ran away again to join the insurgents in the Paris Commune, a sort of anarchist, proto-communist society that controlled Paris in the wake of France's defeat. He returned home three weeks later, just before the commune was brutally suppressed by the army.

Fidelity to an Aesthetic Ideal and Unconscious Inspiration

In 1871 Rimbaud created an aesthetic doctrine, which he articulated in several letters—two to Izambard and another to a friend, Paul Demeny. The letter, now known as the “lettre du voyant,” or “letter of the seer,” lays out Rimbaud's concept of poetry and of his own role as a poet. After tracing the history of the genre, Rimbaud concluded that only the ancient Greeks and the French poets Louis Racine and Charles Baudelaire had created verse of any value. Castigating such authors as Alfred de Musset and Victor Hugo for their rigid and archaic writing, Rimbaud declared that the poet must “derange” his senses and delve into his unconscious in order to create a language accessible to all the senses. Rimbaud acknowledged that while this painful process involved much suffering and introspection, it was necessary to the development of vital and progressive poetry. Soon after writing the “lettre du voyant,” Rimbaud returned again to Charleville. Feeling stifled and depressed, he sent several poems to the renowned poet Paul Verlaine, whose works Rimbaud admired. Verlaine responded with praise and an invitation to visit him in Paris. Before he left, Rimbaud composed *The Drunken Boat* (published posthumously in 1920), a visual and verbal evocation of a savage universe in which a drifting boat serves to symbolize Rimbaud's fate as a poet. Although the versification in *The Drunken Boat* is traditional, Rimbaud's daring images and complex metaphors anticipated the philosophical concerns of his later works and his fascination with alchemy.

Paul Verlaine, Drug Use, and Travel In Paris, Rimbaud was warmly received by Verlaine's family, but the young poet found them representative of the bourgeois values he disdained and quickly alienated them with

his flagrantly antisocial behavior. However, Verlaine himself was strongly drawn to Rimbaud, and the two writers began a notorious and stormy homosexual relationship. They drank absinthe (a strong liquor reputed to cause hallucinations) heavily, claiming that the liquor was “an enlightened nectar from God.” At first, Rimbaud was admired by the Parisian writers who gathered in the city’s cafés—Victor Hugo called him “a young Shakespeare”—but the youthful poet left Paris when his consistently drunken and rude behavior made him increasingly unpopular. Verlaine, after unsuccessfully attempting reconciliation with his wife, pleaded for Rimbaud to return, declaring that he could not live without him. Rimbaud complied, and the two poets traveled through England and Belgium from 1872 to 1873.

Rimbaud believed that his dissipated lifestyle was a form of artistic stimulation, and his creativity flourished during this period. He studied Eastern religion and alchemy, denied himself sleep, and took hallucinogenic drugs. During this time he also wrote *La chasse spirituelle*, a work speculated to have later been destroyed by Verlaine’s wife. According to Verlaine, this work was Rimbaud’s intended masterpiece.

Violent Relationship Termination and Farewell to Poetry As his literary output increased, Rimbaud began to find his relationship with Verlaine tiresome. After a series of quarrels and separations, Rimbaud, overwhelmed by Verlaine’s suffocating affection, demanded an end to the relationship. In desperation, Verlaine shot Rimbaud, wounding him in the wrist. Verlaine was imprisoned in Brussels for two years, and Rimbaud went to his family’s new home in Roche, a small village near Charleville. There he finished *A Season in Hell*, a volume composed of nine prose poems of various lengths. Although some commentators have characterized *A Season in Hell* as a chronicle of Rimbaud’s tumultuous relationship with Verlaine, others contend that the work conveys Rimbaud’s admission that his early theory of poetry was false and unattainable. Despite controversy concerning whether the book was written before or after *Illuminations*, *A Season in Hell* is often considered Rimbaud’s “farewell to poetry.”

Chaotic Poetic Visions In 1873, Rimbaud returned to Paris, where he completed *Illuminations*, a work thought to have been written over the course of two years. In this collection of prose poems, Rimbaud abandoned the rules of syntax, language, and rhythm, and sought to express the chaos of his poetic vision. While several critics have interpreted the childlike awe and wonder exhibited in these poems as an expression of Rimbaud’s Catholic faith, most contend that Rimbaud was attempting to recapture the innocent exuberance of youth.

Retirement, Cancer, and Death Upon completing these poems, Rimbaud gave the manuscript to Verlaine and ceased to write. After ending his literary career,

Rimbaud decided to become “a real adventurer instead of a mystic vagabond” and traveled throughout Europe and Africa. He finally settled in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) where he was believed to have worked as a gunrunner and slave trader. In 1886, Verlaine, assuming his friend to be dead, published the manuscript Rimbaud had given him as “*Les illuminations* by the late Arthur Rimbaud.” Though Rimbaud later learned of its popular reception and of the Rimbaud “cult” that was developing in Paris, he expressed no interest in returning to his former life. Instead, in an abrupt change from his earlier beliefs and practice, Rimbaud spoke enthusiastically of marrying and having a son. These dreams went unrealized, however, for he developed cancer in his right knee and was forced to return to France for medical treatment. Rimbaud’s leg was amputated, but the cancer continued to spread and he died soon afterward in 1891.

Works in Literary Context

Rimbaud’s pursuit of a new poetic language is the defining and enduring aspect of his artistic career. After initially seeking to imitate the Romantic and Parnassian poets he read during his early education, only the work of Louis Racine and Charles Baudelaire earned his respect. His essential thematic preoccupations—the journey of discovery, the world of the child, the phenomenon of revolt—are developed in conjunction with his ambition to redefine the poetic word, to liberate it from the shackles of debilitating forms and rules, and to arrive at a much more supple and flexible medium of expression, free from convention and characterized by a vitality and an exciting “otherness” that permit endless innovation and surprise.

Revolution of Form The “alchemist of the word,” as he liked to style himself in youth, was committed to experiments of all sorts. One can scarcely explain what a full bag of tricks he seemed to have and with what eagerness he played them. He was one of the first to employ distortions and dissociations systematically. He used verbs, instead of adjectives, to lend violence to his page; he used adjectives chiefly to summon up precise colors. He sought a great variety of meters, ranging from that of the quick, nervous lyric to that of pompous oration; he also broke from regular meter to experiment with free verse. He would use the tones of direct vulgar speech or technical and scientific language, depending upon his purpose. And significantly he would use repetition or “recapitulation,” of phrases or images, in the way of a sonata or a symphony, scorning the sequence of common-sense, informative literature, as no one had dared before him. “His form was musical,” poet Paul Claudel observes.

Fairy Tales and Riddles A prominent source of inspiration in all of Rimbaud’s poetry is the fairy tale, which is clearly linked with his preoccupation with the child and the child’s imagination. In *Illuminations* “Tale,” “Dawn,” and “Royalty” are obviously based on

the structure of the fairy tale. Each poem has a distinctly narrative development, and “Tale” and “Royalty” include regal characters (prince, king, and queen) involved in the pursuit of happiness on a personal or public level. Rimbaud, however, tends to subvert the traditional fairy-tale happy ending by setting up an apparently happy outcome and then destabilizing it.

Other poems that might be loosely grouped under a common heading are those that seem to constitute riddles, puzzles, and enigmas. In these poems Rimbaud poses problems for his readers and often uses the finale of the text to tantalize, disconcert, or confuse them. A master of beginnings and endings, he frequently deploys an isolated final line to set a problem or issue a challenge; these final lines are a most original feature of *Illuminations*. Other sequences in the collection enhance a sense of mystery and the unknown. For example, in “Childhood III,” “Childhood IV,” “Vigils I,” “Sale,” and “Fairy,” a grouping of linguistic units bound together by the same linguistic formula perplexes the reader as to just what is being described.

Influence Rimbaud continues to be one of the most widely studied poets in world literature. Although he himself abandoned poetry after a literary career of less than five years, Rimbaud’s influence on Verlaine and the subsequent symbolist movement is considered to be lasting and profound.

Works in Critical Context

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of Arthur Rimbaud’s poetry on subsequent practitioners of the genre. His impact on the surrealist movement has been widely acknowledged, and a host of poets, from André Breton to André Breton, have recognized their indebtedness to Rimbaud’s vision and technique.

Illuminations For many critics, *Illuminations* is Rimbaud’s most important and technically sophisticated work. Literary critic Enid Starkie asserts:

[We] find in *Illuminations* all the things which had filled [Rimbaud’s] imaginative life as a child—all the characters and stage properties of the fairy-tales and novels of adventure which had been his chief reading. These now mingled with his recent study of alchemy and magic, the subject matter of which . . . was of the same legendary and mythical nature.

These and many other ingredients have created a sense of bewilderment in some readers of the poems; the critic Atle Kittang has even referred to the “illisibilité” (unreadability) of the collection. Critic C. A. Hackett, however, writes of Rimbaud’s work, “We experience an intense exhilaration as we move through Rimbaud’s imaginary world where objects and people are seen as poetic essences, and the elements themselves—earth, air, fire, water—appear to be transformed and made new.”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rimbaud’s famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): English naturalist poet and novelist. Best remembered for his novels *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, Hardy considered himself a poet first and foremost.

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?): American journalist and satirist. Bierce was a man ahead of his time, often displaying a cynicism and wit more typical of later twentieth-century writers and critics. He disappeared while traveling with rebel troops during the Mexican Revolution.

Levi Strauss (1829–1902): German immigrant Strauss moved to San Francisco in 1853, where he founded Levi Strauss & Co. and began making a new type of hardwearing, riveted pants manufactured from denim cloth. The new “jeans” were an immediate sensation, launching one of the best-known American entrepreneurial success stories.

Thomas Nast (1840–1902): Nast is considered the first modern political cartoonist. His cartoons created many enduring icons, among them the modern images of Santa Claus and Uncle Sam as well as the Democratic donkey and Republican elephant.

Karl Benz (1844–1929): In 1879 German engineer Karl Benz filed the first patent for a gasoline-powered internal combustion engine. In 1885 Benz built the first commercial automobile, the *Motorwagen*. He also invented many of the key components of the automobile: the accelerator, the spark plug, the clutch, the gear shift, and the carburetor.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the use of symbolism in *A Season in Hell*.
2. Rimbaud was a major influence on other symbolists. What differentiated symbolism from realism? How did symbolism influence modernism?
3. Rimbaud was the archetypal angry young artist. Do you believe it is necessary to suffer for art? Can art of importance be created without leading a life filled with pain, drug abuse, and the usual litany of sins ascribed to the artistic lifestyle?
4. Rimbaud’s poetry was influential on rock lyricists from Bob Dylan to Jim Morrison to Kurt Cobain. Research these lyricists and some of their songs. How is Rimbaud’s influence felt in their lyrics? Did Rimbaud’s lifestyle influence their behavior as well?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rimbaud's poetry is placed within the symbolist school, a nineteenth-century artistic movement that rejected the earlier realist movement. Below are some other examples of symbolist works:

Sagesse (1880), a poetry collection by Paul Verlaine. A transitional work between symbolism and modernism, this collection deals with themes of maturation and change.

Les amours jaunes (1873), a poetry collection by Tristan Corbière. Corbière was an obscure poet until Paul Verlaine included his work in his gallery of "accursed poets," after which he was quickly recognized as a leading symbolist poet. Unfortunately Corbière did not live long to enjoy his newfound success, dying at age twenty-nine of tuberculosis.

The Afternoon of a Faun (1876), a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé. One of the seminal symbolist works, this poem inspired theatrical adaptations by the likes of Claude Debussy and Vaslav Nijinsky and was a tremendous influence on later modernists.

Salomé (1891), a play by Oscar Wilde. A one-act symbolist play that tells the story of the murder of John the Baptist. The "Dance of the Seven Veils" and the climax featuring John the Baptist's severed head scandalized London society at the time.

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Augusto Roa Bastos

BORN: 1917, Asunción, Paraguay

DIED: 2005, Asunción, Paraguay

NATIONALITY: Paraguayan

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Thunder Among the Leaves (1953)

Son of Man (1960)

I the Supreme (1974)

The Prosecutor (1993)

Overview

Augusto Roa Bastos is Paraguay's most widely acclaimed author. His fiction reflects the political oppression, violence, and material hardship of life in his native country. Drawing freely from the history and folklore of Paraguay, his prose is a blend of myth, fantasy, and realism that expresses the author's social concerns as well as his belief in the redemptive power of suffering and sacrifice. He is best known for his two novels, *Son of Man* (1960) and *I the Supreme* (1974), both of which employ unconventional narrative structures and the stylistic techniques of magic realism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

War-Marred Teen Years Roa Bastos was born in Asunción, Paraguay, on June 13, 1917, a time when his country's economy was stagnating and a large influx of immigrants from Italy, Spain, Germany, and Argentina were coming in to replace the male population lost in the bloody War of Triple Alliance (1865–1870). He was raised two hundred kilometers south in Iturbe, where his father helped run a sugar plantation. He grew up bilingual, speaking both Spanish and the Paraguayan indigenous language, Guaraní. With the encouragement of his mother, he began to write short stories at the age of thirteen.

Roa Bastos grew up in one of Latin America's poorest and least developed nations. In 1932, Bolivia attacked Paraguayan soldiers in the frontier region of Chaco because oil had been found there, sparking a war that lasted until 1935. Roa Bastos, still in his teens, joined the military and was assigned to guard prisoners and record deaths during the so-called Chaco War. Despite being outnumbered three to one, the Paraguayans had higher morale, were brilliantly led, and were better adapted to the climate of the region than were their Bolivian attackers. Paraguayans conquered about 75 percent of the disputed territory, most of which they retained when a



Augusto Roa Bastos *Roa Bastos, Augusto, photograph. AP Images.*

peace treaty was reached in 1938. Roa Bastos's wartime experience led him to become a pacifist.

Launched Writing Career After the war, Roa Bastos worked as a journalist and began writing poems and plays. He won a Paraguayan literary prize in 1941 for a book that was never published. In 1942, he published a book of poetry, *El ruisenor de la aurora, y otros poemas*, though he later renounced this work as insignificant. That same year, he started working for the daily newspaper *El País*, eventually rising to the post of editor in chief.

Toward the end of World War II, Roa Bastos went to London on a journalism fellowship. As war correspondent for a daily newspaper in Asunción, he witnessed the city's devastation by German bombardment and interviewed General Charles de Gaulle, the leader of France, in Paris. During World War II, Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, was able to fulfill territorial ambitions by conquering much of Europe. Extensive bombing of Great Britain was believed to be, in part, preparation for a Nazi invasion. The invasion never came and the British together with the American and other Allies, were able to defeat the Germans in the mid-1940s.

Roa Bastos went home to more war. In 1947, a popular revolt against the oppressive regime of General Higinio Morínigo led to civil war in Paraguay. Morínigo's troops shut down *El País* and destroyed its presses. Along with half a million Paraguayans, Roa Bastos fled the country into neighboring Argentina. His exile would last more than forty years. Though Morínigo retired in 1948,

he was replaced by another oppressive dictator, General Alfredo Stroessner, who ruled for four decades.

Publishing during Exile Roa Bastos settled in Buenos Aires, where he did his most successful writing. He ultimately came to feel that exile was beneficial to his artistic expression since it allowed him to see his own country from other points of view. He told the *New York Times Book Review*: "I try to see exile not as a political sanction, as a punishment or restriction, but as something that has forced me to open to the world, to look at it in all of its complexity and breadth."

He turned to writing fiction after moving to Buenos Aires, publishing a collection of short stories, *Thunder Among the Leaves* (1953). The stories cover themes Roa Bastos would later explore in his novels. They deal with the social, political, and economic injustices plaguing Paraguay—the nation had endured six more revolts in the late 1940s—and depict the contrast between the culture and values of the country's indigenous people and those of its European upper classes. Some critics have suggested that the dismal conclusions of works like "The Excavation" reflect Roa Bastos's belief at the time that rampant oppression would dominate life in Paraguay indefinitely.

Critical Acclaim Roa Bastos achieved critical success with his first novel, *Son of Man* (1960). The novel chronicles the struggle between the rich and the poor over more than two decades of Paraguayan history, from the early twentieth century through the Chaco War. It interweaves multiple narratives with legends tracing Paraguay's history back to the dictatorship of Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia, which began in 1814. Roa Bastos explores the relation between history and myth by linking events in the novel to distant historical episodes, and transforming the same events into folklore as the novel unfolds. The author also adapted *Son of Man* into his first screenplay in 1960. Several of his later screenplays, such as *Alias Gardelito* (1961), were made into landmark works of Argentina's *nuevo cine* movement.

Subversive Writings Roa Bastos published his masterpiece, *I the Supreme*, in 1974. The complex and unusual novel is a fictional treatment of the final days of the despot Francia, who called himself "The Supreme." After the Argentine military took over the government by a coup in March 1976, sales of *I the Supreme* were banned in the country, and Roa Bastos was once more exiled. He moved to France, where he became an associate professor of Guaraní and Spanish American studies at the University of Toulouse. He made several surreptitious visits to his native country during the 1970s. On a similar trip in 1982, he was discovered by Paraguayan officials, summarily expelled, and forbidden to return. Then in 1989, Stroessner was finally deposed after thirty-five years in power. The incoming leader, General Andrés Rodríguez, gave

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bastos's famous contemporaries include:

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Mexican novelist known for intertwining myth, legend, and history to examine his country's roots. His novels include *Aura* (1962).

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican novelist, essayist, poet, and diplomat was the first Mexican to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. His books include *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950, rev. ed. 1975).

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet, Communist diplomat, and Nobel Prize winner noted for his innovative techniques in modern poetry. His poetry collections include *Book of Twilights* (1923).

José Lezama Lima (1910–1976): Cuban poet who was an influential figure in Latin American literature and who wrote in a baroque style. His novels include *Paradiso* (1966).

Gore Vidal (1925–): American historical novelist and social critic, is known to millions as a witty and wicked talk show guest and a two-time political candidate. His novels include *The City and the Pillar* (1948).

Juan Perón (1895–1974): Argentine colonel and politician who served as president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955 and from 1973 to 1974, being exiled in Paraguay in between.

more freedoms to his people and invited the distinguished literary figure to return home after forty-two years in exile.

Return to Paraguay During the 1990s, Roa Bastos continued to produce fiction that addressed dictatorship and political power. *Vigil of the Admiral* (1992) is a historical novel about Christopher Columbus, published amidst commemorations of the five hundredth anniversary of the explorer's first voyage. *The Prosecutor* (1993) concerns two Paraguayan military dictators: Carlos Antonio Solano Lopez, who controlled the country during the 1860s, and Stroessner. The author considered *The Prosecutor* the final work of a political trilogy, along with *Son of Man* and *I the Supreme*. Roa Bastos continued to write until his death on April 26, 2005, in Asunción.

Works in Literary Context

Roa Bastos's literary education began at the age of ten when his parents sent him to live with his uncle in Asunción and attend school. In his uncle's library, Roa Bastos discovered classical Spanish literature, works that became the first models for his own writing. Notable precursors to Roa Bastos include: the seventeenth-century Spanish explorer Ruy Diaz de Guzman, who wrote about the

geography of Paraguay; Rafael Barrett, an obscure Spanish anarchist who wrote in Paraguay at the turn of the twentieth century; and the Uruguayan fiction writer Horacio Quiroga. Miguel de Cervantes's classic *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) is a model for the structure employed in *I the Supreme*. In addition to the classics, Roa Bastos's experience with the Guaraní (indigenous people found in Paraguay and other parts of South America) influenced both the cultural context and the sensitivity to social injustice found in his work.

Neobaroque Style Roa Bastos wrote in a neobaroque style common to Latin American literature of the mid-twentieth century. This style is found in the early works of Jorge Luis Borges, the novels of Alejo Carpentier, and the poetry of Pablo Neruda. The well-known Latin American genre of magical realism is an outgrowth of this literary school. Roa Bastos employs magical realist techniques while drawing on indigenous folklore and Christian mythology to underscore the force the past exerts over the present. His use of the Guaraní language—one of the few indigenous languages that remains in widespread use in South America—grounds his writing in the specific cultural experience of the Paraguayan people, and allows him to incorporate the silenced voices of indigenous people in his stories.

Thematic Concerns All of Roa Bastos's mature writing concerns the oppressive power structure of Paraguayan society, from its historical roots through contemporary times. Many of his stories portray human endurance in the face of injustice or hardship and feature Christlike characters whose sacrificial suffering is intended to free their countrymen from political oppression. *Son of Man* is rich in Christian metaphors, including the figures of Christobal Jara, an uneducated peasant who becomes a Christlike leader, and Miguel Vera, the middle-class narrator who takes on the role of Judas.

Literary Impact Roa Bastos's novels have been influential in the development of Latin American historical fiction and its use as a vehicle for social commentary. *I the Supreme* was partially responsible for the flourishing of a genre called the "dictator novel," along with *Reasons of State* (1974) by Alejo Carpentier, and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975) by Gabriel García Márquez. Critics regard Roa Bastos as one of the leading writers of the Latin American "boom." His influence is visible in the work of postboom writers such as Isabel Allende and Antonio Skarmeta. Roa Bastos remains the leading literary figure in Paraguay and a significant influence upon contemporary Paraguayan literature.

Works in Critical Context

On the strength of *I the Supreme*, a universally acclaimed work, critics often place Roa Bastos in the front rank of twentieth-century Latin American novelists. Roa Bastos

was awarded Spanish literature's most valuable award, the Miguel de Cervantes Prize, in 1989, the year of his return to Paraguay. *Son of Man* is also highly regarded, particularly as a work of literary regionalism. Roa Bastos never achieved great commercial success outside Paraguay, and his work is not widely known in the English-speaking world, despite a highly praised English translation of *I the Supreme*, published in 1986.

Dictator Novel *I the Supreme* was a literary success when it was first published. The story is based on Francia, a former revolutionary, who ruled Paraguay absolutely from 1814 until his death in 1840. The novel offers a hypothetical account of a dying Francia's attempt to justify his obsessive use of power. Critics consider *I the Supreme* a complicated novel, as Roa Bastos employs many unconventional narratives. He uses fragmented dreams, excerpts from actual historical documents, extended soliloquies, comments by the narrator (referred to in the text as the Compiler), and fantasy-like material (such as a conversation between Francia and his dog) to blur reality with fiction. Many critics concur with Mexican author Carlos Fuentes in calling *I the Supreme* "one of the milestones of the Latin American novel." *Washington Post Book World* contributor Paul West concurred, proclaiming: "Augusto Roa Bastos is himself a supreme find, maybe the most complex and brilliant . . . Latin American novelist of all."

Responses to Literature

1. Research the early history of Paraguay and the Guaraní language. What unique features of Paraguayan society does Roa Bastos highlight in his fiction? Write a paper that outlines your findings.
2. *I the Supreme* is often linked with *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, by Gabriel García Márquez, as early examples of the "dictator novel." Compare the psychological and social perspectives in the two works in an essay.
3. Would you consider *Son of Man* a Christian work? Why do you think Roa Bastos employs Christian metaphors and images? Create a presentation of your findings for the class.
4. Would you consider Roa Bastos a political novelist? In a group discussion, find examples in which Roa Bastos advocates a particular cause, party, or policy.
5. Write an exploratory essay about the relationship between history and mythology in Latin America, as viewed through the novels of Roa Bastos.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The "dictator novel," an important genre in the Latin American literary tradition, has become a worldwide phenomenon. The following works all examine the psychology of absolute power and its profound social impact.

- El Señor Presidente* (1946), a novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias. This early work of magical realism, by a Nobel Prize-winning author, is inspired by the twenty-year reign of Manuel Estrada Cabrera in Guatemala.
- Reasons of State* (1974), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. A satirical novel about a Latin American dictator who attempts to control insurrections from his home in Europe.
- The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. The eternal dictator portrayed in this novel, "El Macho," is said to be two hundred years old as the tragedy of despotism unfolds over and over again.
- The Last King of Scotland* (1998), a novel by Giles Foden. A fictional account of the rise of Ugandan president Idi Amin, made into a film in 2006.
- The Feast of the Goat* (2000), a novel by Mario Vargas Llosa. Vargas Llosa, himself a presidential candidate in Peru, spins a tale interweaving the stories of Dominican tyrant Rafael Trujillo, his assassins, and the daughter of one of the dictator's close advisers.
- Downfall* (2004), a film written by Bernd Eichinger and directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. This film, set mostly in Hitler's bunker, depicts the final days of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich.

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▣ Alain Robbe-Grillet

BORN: 1922, Brest, France

DIED: 2008, Caen, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Novels, screenplays, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Erasers (1953)

The Voyeur (1958)

Jealousy (1957)

Last Year at Marienbad (1961)

Snapshots (1962)

Overview

French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet is among the foremost proponents and theoreticians of *le nouveau roman*, also referred to as the new novel or antinovel. He strives for pure objectivity in his fiction, making camera-like use of point-of-view by spontaneously recording events without imposing subjective interpretation. He favors disjointed narratives, characters with vague or shifting identities, metafictional situations, and *chosisme*, the precisely detailed description of inanimate objects. Robbe-Grillet purposely leaves meanings ambiguous or contradictory to allow readers to exercise their individual perceptions, yet his fiction is not devoid of meaning, as objects elicit symbolic associations in the minds of readers. The major interest of Robbe-Grillet's work lies in the collaboration between author and reader, the process by which objective reality acquires subjective meaning.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Sent to Germany by Vichy France Alain Robbe-Grillet was born on August 18, 1922, in Brest, Finistère, in northwestern France, to Gaston Robbe-Grillet, the owner of a small manufacturing business, and Yvonne Canu Robbe-Grillet. He was educated at the Lycées Buffon



Alain Robbe-Grillet Robbe-Grillet, Alain, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

and St. Louis in Paris and at the Lycée de Brest, where he initially studied mathematics and biology.

In 1940, during World War II, France was invaded by German forces. This resulted in the German occupation of much of France, with the rest of the country remaining "free" under a provisional government approved by the Germans and based in the city of Vichy. The Vichy government, in an effort to appease the Germans, sent hundreds of thousands of French citizens to Germany as forced laborers intended to aid Germany in their war efforts. Robbe-Grillet was one such worker, spending time in a German tank factory.

Wide Travels as an Agricultural Scientist After returning to France, and having received his engineering degree from the National Agricultural Institute of France in 1944, he pursued a scientific career as an officer at the National Institute of Statistics in Paris from 1945 to 1948.

From 1948 to 1951 he worked in Morocco, Guinea, Guadeloupe, and Martinique for the Institut des Fruits et Agrumes Coloniaux, or Colonial Fruit Institute, but fell ill and had to be repatriated on health grounds. He never returned to his career as an agricultural scientist, becoming a full-time writer instead.

Literary Interests Robbe-Grillet joined the publishing house Les Editions de Minuit as a literary consultant in 1955. Under the direction of the esteemed Jérôme Lindon, the company drew a select literary group of such writers as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Butor, Jacques Derrida, Nathalie Sarraute, and Claude Simon. Like Robbe-Grillet, they each possessed a distinctive style and voice, but together agreed the nineteenth-century social novel was on its way out.

Robbe-Grillet wrote his first, and one of the first, “new novels,” *The Regicide* (*Un Régicide*), as he worked in his sister Marie-Claire’s biology laboratory in 1949—though it would not be published until 1978. His next novel, however, would make him what most consider the leader of the *nouveau roman* movement.

Novel Form Innovation Robbe-Grillet and his literary group opposed the bourgeois, or Balzacian (after nineteenth-century novelist Honoré de Balzac), novel of humanist tradition. Instead, they preferred the geometrical precision and clinical exactitude of a scientific-literary approach. Known as the first “cubist” novelist and a “chosist,” for his obsessive focus on inanimate objects (*choses* is the French word for “thing”), Robbe-Grillet initially described the *nouveau roman* and became the leading exponent of the New Wave in contemporary French literature. His revolutionary theories are based on the premise that man’s perception of his surroundings is distorted by his bourgeois background and its resulting emotionalism. Characterized by an objective accuracy in its detailed descriptions, Robbe-Grillet’s writing is free of intangible, inferential adjectives. It is bare and concrete instead, with little or no dialogue and with the objects in repetition as the central focus and movers of plot.

The Erasers (*Les Gommages*, 1953), for example, initially appears to be a conventional detective thriller. Instead, it reworks the themes of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Written when Robbe-Grillet fell ill in 1951, the work is intended as a comic parody, with a narrative that illustrates the *chosist* technique in its intense focus on the India rubber of the title. That rubber serves as an antisymbol for the author. Similarly, *The Voyeur* (*Le Voyeur*, 1955) explores the psychology of a rapist, but does so without either conversation or interior monologue. The exaggerated realism of the physical descriptions create a dreamlike air of surrealism in this work.

The next novels—*Jealousy* (*La Jalousie*, 1957) and *In the Labyrinth* (*Dans le labyrinthe*, 1959)—would confirm Robbe-Grillet’s place in literary history. *Jealousy* won the Prix des Critiques and the praise of fellow writers such as the eminent Vladimir Nabokov, who called the work one of the greatest novels of the century.

Parallel Careers After marrying actress and photographer Catherine Rstakian in 1957, and after accepting a post as a member of the High Committee for the Preservation and Expansion of the French Language, the then forty-year-old Robbe-Grillet embarked on a parallel career as screenwriter and director.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Robbe-Grillet’s famous contemporaries include:

Daphne du Maurier (1907–1989): British novelist known for “sensation” novels like *Rebecca* (1938).

Ian Fleming (1908–1964): British writer famous for creating the spy hero James Bond.

Ronald Reagan (1911–2004): Former Hollywood actor who served as president of the United States from 1981 to 1989.

Jean-Luc Godard (1930–): French-Swiss filmmaker best known for being one of the pioneers of French New Wave cinema.

Norman Lear (1922–): American television writer and producer who has become a legend for producing such iconic shows as *All in the Family*, *Good Times*, *Sanford and Son*, and *Maude*.

Robbe-Grillet’s finest film effort may be *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). The film, directed by Alain Resnais, created considerable critical controversy and captured the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival. The surprising commercial success of the film permitted its author to undertake other cinematic efforts, notably *The Immortal* (1963), winner of the Louis Delluc prize, and the first film Robbe-Grillet both wrote and directed, *Trans-Europe Express* (1967).

Robbe-Grillet was a professor at New York University from 1971 to 1995. He died in 2008 from heart problems.

Works in Literary Context

The New Novel The name Alain Robbe-Grillet is tied to the French avant-garde literary form known as the *nouveau roman*, or the New Novel, which he helped propagate. As the acknowledged leader and spokesman of the New Novelists in France, Robbe-Grillet had denounced those who talk of the novelist’s social responsibility; for him the novel is not a tool and probably has little effect on society. “For us,” he once wrote, “literature is not a means of expression, but a search. And it does not even know for what it searches. . . . [But] we prefer our searches, our doubts, our contradictions, our joy of having yet invented something.”

Deconstructing Genre Conventions *The Voyeur* is widely regarded as Robbe-Grillet’s finest work, an impressive and moving piece of fiction in which the technique of narration is exactly appropriate to the subject, a novel that owes something of its form, manner, and tone to the traditional detective story but that transcends its model. It handles a serious and emotional topic—rape followed by murder—without sensationalizing or trivializing it. In

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The New Novelists, Robbe-Grillet among them, introduced experimental concepts into the French novel. Occasionally described as “the school of sight” or “the pen camera,” the form of writing Robbe-Grillet helped develop concentrates on vision and gives minute descriptions of matter-of-fact objects. Here are a few works by writers who also wrote in the style of or were associated with the movement of *nouveau roman*:

Hiroshima Mon Amour (1959), a screenplay by Marguerite Duras. The classic French New Wave screenplay that is rich in themes and innovative in its early use of the flashback device.

Hopscotch (1963), a novel by Julio Cortázar. A stream-of-consciousness novel that often defies categorization to the point of being called the “novel without a genre” as it plays with readers’ minds and turns on itself.

The Flanders Road (1960), a novel by Claude Simon. A *nouveau roman* novel of thousand-word sentences and stream-of-consciousness style and a conspicuous absence of punctuation.

The Voyeur he handles the protagonist’s death with black humor, perhaps, but in such a way that the basic seriousness of her murderer’s sick mentality is not ignored.

If *The Voyeur* is Robbe-Grillet’s masterpiece, his next novel, *Jealousy* (1959), is the one by which he is perhaps best known. The title itself provides a key to the double meaning that lies at the heart of the book: in French, *la jalousie* not only means jealousy but also is the ordinary word for slatted shutters or blinds. In this novel a jealous husband spies on his wife from the wide balcony of their house as she sits behind the blinds in her bedroom; the blinds give him an uneasy sense of security and yet also a voyeuristic thrill. Thus *Jealousy* takes up where *The Voyeur* left off: the narrator and the voyeur are now one.

Influences Robbe-Grillet claims as the inspiration for his novels “the first fifty pages of Camus’ *The Stranger* (1942) and the works of Raymond Rousset” (the latter a little-known author who died in the 1930s). Critical analysis has also recognized the profound impact of the novels of Franz Kafka and Graham Greene on his work.

Works in Critical Context

Robbe-Grillet’s literary preoccupation with inanimate objects has led critics, notably François Mauriac, to suggest that the author dehumanizes literature. Moreover, confusion for many readers results from the lack of dis-

inction between a seen object and one that is imagined; reality for Robbe-Grillet is always flowing from one state to another. Descriptions are repeated with slight variations, leading to charges of obscurity and tedium. Nevertheless, of the early Robbe-Grillet novels, works such as *Jealousy* garner much respectful attention.

Jealousy *Jealousy* is regarded by many critics as one of the writer’s more important efforts. Set on a tropical banana plantation (harkening to the author’s early vocation), the book involves an untrusting husband who spies on his wife, referred to as A, in an effort to confirm his suspicion that she is having an affair with a neighboring man. All indications of the subjective eye of the author are removed, resulting in a new literary mode. In the tradition of *chosisme*, noted Ben Stoltzfus in a *Symposium* essay, *Jealousy* “confines itself for the most part to situating, describing and defining objects and events in space.” And, adds John Fletcher in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the husband’s descent into perversity is what makes *Jealousy* “a tour de force as a psychological novel.”

Responses to Literature

1. Make note of all the associations you thought of while reading *The Erasers* and compare your list to how erasers are used in the novel. If the *nouveau roman* style of the novel “dispenses with traditional elements such as plot and character,” what sensations do you get from the erasers? What sensations do you get from the other objects? What human sensations do you think they take the place of?
2. Using the Internet and library sources, research the *nouveau roman* style and write a paper about its history. What literary style came before it? How did that style affect the *nouveau roman* style? In your paper, be sure to name *nouveau roman* writers and their major works.
3. Look up the word *bourgeois* in the dictionary. Why do you think Robbe-Grillet and fellow writers of his time objected to bourgeois values? Do you agree with their assessment of the bourgeoisie?

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❑ T. W. Robertson

BORN: 1829, Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire, England

DIED: 1871, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Society (1865)

Ours (1866)

Caste (1867)

Play (1868)

M. P. (1870)



Thomas William Robertson Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

Thomas William Robertson (known professionally as T. W. Robertson) was a dramatist best known for his romantic comedies. He is associated with the transitional period in English theater when playwrights working in an extravagant, artificial, and melodramatic style began to move toward greater realism. Robertson's plays feature realistic characterizations and dialogue and are known today for their meticulous details in stage direction.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Flair for the Dramatic Robertson was born in 1829 in Newark-upon-Trent, Nottinghamshire, to a theatrical family. His parents were both actors—his father was a stage manager as well—and his youngest sister became a leading Victorian actress under the name Madge Kendal. Robertson made his stage debut at the age of five in the musical drama *Rob Roy*. In 1836, he began his formal education at a boarding school, but he returned to Newark after only seven years to help support his family. Working as an assistant to his father, he learned much about various aspects of the theater, including scene painting, prompting, stage-managing, acting, singing, and song-writing. In 1849, Robertson's father's theater company disbanded, and Robertson went to London, where he began writing plays while continuing to act in minor pro-

ductions. By 1851, he was producing such plays as the farcical *A Night's Adventure* at the Olympic Theatre in London. The production was not successful, however, so Robertson continued acting and began writing, contributing to the local newspapers of the day.

From Actor to Playwright and Drama Critic In 1856, Robertson married an actress named Elizabeth Burton, and together they performed at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, where Robertson also worked as stage manager. In the late 1850s, he gave up acting and began writing dramatic reviews with W. S. Gilbert for the periodical *Fun*. He also contributed to the *Illustrated Times*, *London Society*, *Comic News*, and other publications, eventually becoming the drama critic for the *Illustrated Times* under the pseudonym "Theatrical Lounger." He gained additional writing experience adapting and translating French plays, most of which were sold to Thomas Haile Lacy, the leading theatrical publisher of the nineteenth century.

In the 1860s, Robertson was working as an editor and writing on the side. He wrote a novel that was later adapted for the stage as *Shadow-Tree Swift*, performed in 1867. Robertson also wrote a second farce, *A Cantab*, which was performed at London's Royal Strand Theatre in 1861. This play earned him little profit, and he considered giving up writing to become a tobacconist. But the comedy also brought Robertson attention from the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Robertson's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist best known for her book *Little Women* (1868). She was also a seamstress, servant, teacher, and Civil War nurse before becoming an author.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880): French writer best known for his novel *Madame Bovary* (1857).

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): American civil rights advocate and leader, she was instrumental in the securing of women's rights, including the 1919 right to vote.

Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862–1931): African American civil and women's rights advocate who cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1919.

Norman Pogson (1829–1891): English astronomer, he became India's government astronomer, initiated the Madras Catalogue of stars, and made several important discoveries.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1891): Russian novelist, essayist, dramatist and philosopher, he is known for his masterpieces, *Anna Karenina* (1873–1877) and *War and Peace* (1865–1969).

writers at *Fun* and he began to build a reputation in the theater.

First Minor Hit Robertson first achieved minor success with *David Garrick* (1865), an adaptation of a French play by Melesville (the pseudonym of Anne-Honore-Joseph Duveyrier), which was performed at Haymarket Theatre, featuring Edward Sothorn in the lead role. Robertson was soon introduced to Squire Bancroft and his wife, Marie Wilton, actors who owned the Prince of Wales's Theatre. The Bancrofts produced and acted in Robertson's most successful plays between 1865 and 1870.

Eventual Success By 1865, Robertson was gaining popularity and even critical acclaim, beginning with *Society*, produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1865. Wilton's management of the production made popular the new "box-set" stage, which housed the popular drawing-room drama. Robertson's fresh approach began a new kind of play called the "problem play." The novelty of the production had great appeal, and the small and intimate Tottenham Street house was packed.

Robertson, with health compromised, nevertheless repeated the success of *Society* with several more of these innovations—the most popular among them including

Ours, produced in 1866; *Caste*, produced in 1867; *Play*, first performed in 1868; *School*, produced in 1869, and *M. P.*, first performed in 1870. The last of his plays he would see to the stage, *War*, was produced at the St. James's Theatre in early 1871. Robertson died of heart disease on February 3, 1871, at the height of his career.

Works in Literary Context

Theatres Act of 1843 Robertson's dramatic writing was considered revolutionary in both style and subject matter. His "problem plays"—sensitive to the serious issues of Victorian people—moved theater toward a more realistic method of drama. Robertson was among the first English dramatists to benefit from the Theatres Act of 1843, which amended previous legislation that severely limited artistic freedom. In contrast to his contemporaries who, in spite of the act, did not stray from theatrical comedy and machine-made melodrama, Robertson took advantage of the new freedom afforded to playwrights and introduced naturalism into drama.

Social Class Themes Intended as entertainments for a middle-class audience, most of Robertson's plays are romantic comedies that treat social issues of the day in an idealized manner. Many concern issues of class: They satirize the pretensions of the aristocracy and the nouveau riche, and they ultimately uphold the values of the middle class.

Society (1865), for example, depicts a poor but honest man who achieves a title, property, and a seat in Parliament as the result of his moral character. His morality is sharply contrasted with that of the upper class, which is depicted as valuing only money and status. Similarly, in *Caste*, Robertson's best-known play, a young actress earns the respect and affection of her aristocratic husband's family by patiently enduring hardship and criticism. In other plays, Robertson depicted conflicts between the aristocracy, with its devotion to tradition, and the rising middle class, which favored social change.

Realistic Style Although conventional in sentiment, Robertson's plays were markedly different from those of his predecessors in terms of dialogue, characterization, and staging. These drawing-room dramas featured meticulous directions concerning details of staging and production, realistic characterization, and realistic dialogue.

Seeking to avoid the exaggeration and posturing of earlier Victorian acting methods, Robertson created characters that spoke in a realistic manner and provided his actors with elaborate directions concerning facial expression, hand gestures, and vocal intonation. Especially innovative, his dialogues are composed of short speeches that require the actors to address one another, thus avoiding the prevailing oratory style.

Robertson enhanced this dramatic realism by insisting on authenticity in his stage sets: he included furniture

and backdrops that clearly depicted the settings of his plays, and he made extensive use of props, including real food. Robertson's combination of stage realism with a focus on themes drawn from English life of the period is considered his most significant contribution to the English drama. His innovations prompted a trend which later culminated in the works of Henrik Ibsen, W. S. Gilbert, and George Bernard Shaw and are widely viewed as a significant contribution to the development of modern drama.

Works in Critical Context

Robertson was recognized as one of the first English dramatists to bring timely social issues to the stage. Yet, the critics have been divided on his treatment of those issues. Some earlier critics judged his plays to be “cup-and-saucer comedies” and derided them for their absurd realism. These nineteenth-century critics bemoaned the commonplace representations and the realistic attention to physical detail. Others note that Robertson's treatment of common, everyday Victorian concerns was similar to that of earlier Romantic dramatists—his treatment relying too heavily upon the redeeming power of worthwhile sentiments.

Some critics, however, praised Robertson's attempt to mirror reality on the stage. His unique use of stage directions was appreciated by later playwrights, who acknowledged their debt to his innovations. W. S. Gilbert, for example, offered this tribute: “Most pieces are now stage-managed on the principles [Robertson] introduced. I look upon stage-management, as now understood, as having been absolutely invented by him.”

Many earlier critics praised Robertson's contributions to dramatic production methods, yet did not see any literary value in the plays, which were rarely performed after the 1890s. In addition, the dramatic changes subsequently brought to the stage by such Realists as Ibsen and Shaw overshadowed the efforts of Robertson and many of his contemporaries. Recent scholarship, however, has brought renewed awareness of Robertson's contributions to the theater. William Tydeman echoes these modern sentiments: “[Robertson's] plays do convey something of the quality of everyday existence where meals are eaten, watches consulted, pipes smoked, peas shelled, half-crowns borrowed, and galoshes fetched. . . . In introducing even a hint of these factors into his pieces Robertson cautiously unbolted a door which bolder spirits were to fling wide.”

Critical Reaction to *Caste* Contemporary critics such as John Oxenford applauded Robertson's *Caste*, comparing its quality with that of his other popular works. With regards to the reaction of Robertson's contemporaries to the work, Oxenford notes that “the success of *Caste* [was] indubitable.” Writing in 1879, critic W. Wilding Jones agreed, saying that *Caste* was “in the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Robertson's plays often addressed differences in social status. Here are a few works by writers who have also considered the themes of social class and class values:

An American Tragedy (1925), a novel by Theodore Dreiser. This book explores the troubles of a young Clyde Griffiths, who is challenged by his relationships with both rich and poor girls.

Man-servant and Maid-servant (1947), a novel by Ivy Compton-Burnett. In this novel, English author Compton-Burnett examines the underbelly of the serving class, poking harsh and mocking fun at the classes the central characters serve.

Where I'm Calling From (1988), a short-story collection by Raymond Carver. This collection of contemporary short stories, set in the Pacific Northwest, involves the simple but miserable lives of common working-class Americans.

The World of Malgudi (2000), a collection of four short novels by R. K. Narayan. In this work, the author expresses the values and mores of domestic life and explores what it means to be East Indian in modern times.

opinion of many Robertson's *chef-d'oeuvre* [masterwork], and in this opinion I concur.” Later, George Bernard Shaw called Robertson's play “epoch making” and referred to Robertson's innovations as a “theatrical revolution.” Modern scholars have recognized the play's popularity, and often cite it as an example of Robertson's innovations in realistic drama.

Responses to Literature

1. While a playwright named Eugène Scribe is credited with creating the theatre genre known as the well-made play, Robertson was known as a playwright who met the conventions of that genre. Research the elements that make this kind of well-made play and match the list of criteria against one of Robertson's works. Report back to a group to discover Robertson's important techniques of action, characterization, and plot.
2. Go online to literary sites and databases and find one aspect of Victorian literature to investigate. This could be Victorian literary style, esteemed Victorian writers, lesser-known Victorian writers, publishing venues of the period, differences in the Victorian writing of other continents, or even the events and concerns that influenced Victorian themes. When you have printed out examples, return to share your new area of expertise with the group and discuss the

influence of Victorian values or standards of behavior on Robertson's plays.

3. Besides appealing to a middle-class audience, Robertson's plays share common themes. Compare and contrast the themes in such plays as *Play*, *School*, and *M. P.* What do the similarities tell you about the audiences in Robertson's time? What, if anything, might still appeal to audiences today?
4. Robertson was known for his innovations with the realistic "drawing-room drama." Research the genre, making careful note of what was required to produce such a play. Then, choosing a favorite Robertson work, create your own drawing-room drama. You might even decide to do a "cup-and-saucer comedy" by deciding on the characters to include in the scene, the right Victorian drawing-room drink and food to have as props, and the costumes and set you might use. Be prepared to also justify your choices—in context of how closely they imitate Victorian era, drawing-room culture.

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✠ Pierre de Ronsard

BORN: 1524, *Couture-sur-Loir, France*

DIED: 1585, *Tours, France*

NATIONALITY: *French*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Amours de Cassandre (1550)

Odes of Pierre de Ronsard (1552)

La Franciade (1572)



Pierre de Ronsard *Ronsard, Pierre de*, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Overview

Pierre de Ronsard is considered by many scholars to be the greatest poet of the French Renaissance. He founded and led a small group of like-minded writers known first as the Brigade and later as the Pléiade who sought to create a French literature. Ronsard's body of literary works shaped French poetry long after his death, giving direction to the idealistic voices of the nineteenth-century romantics.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Prominent Family Pierre de Ronsard was born at La Poissonnière on September 11, 1524, the youngest of the four surviving children of Jeanne Chaudrier and Louis de Ronsard. Jeanne was the daughter of a Poitevin family with ties to several prominent bloodlines of sixteenth-century France; Louis was a country gentleman whose distinction as a knight in the Italian campaigns of Charles VIII and Louis XII earned him the position of royal diplomat and maître d'hotel. As Louis was frequently absent, Ronsard was strongly influenced by his relation with his cleric uncle, Jean de Ronsard. Thought to have played an important role in his nephew's earliest education, Jean de Ronsard was a writer of verses, and he possessed a substantial library to which Ronsard became heir upon his uncle's death.

In 1533 Ronsard left his home to receive formal instruction in Paris at the academically and religiously conservative Collège de Navarre. In spring 1534, after only one semester of study, the boy was peremptorily withdrawn from the school and returned to the paternal manor. This departure has been ascribed both to the young Ronsard's homesickness and to his father's fear that his son might become associated with the position taken by the college against the reformist leanings of the king's sister, Marguerite de Navarre.

Cruel Fortune and the Inevitability of Death Louis took advantage of his office in the royal household to secure his son a position as page to the dauphin Francis. A mere six days after joining Francis in the Rhône Valley, the dauphin died, and Ronsard, not yet twelve years old, found himself attending the prince's autopsy—an event he recalled, some thirty-nine years later, among the verses of his *Le Tombeau de tres-illustre Princesse Marguerite de France, Duchesse de Savoye* (1575; *Tomb for the Most Illustrious Princess, Marguerite de France, Duchess of Savoie*).

This shocking experience was followed by others. While in Lyon on October 7, 1536, Ronsard was witness, on orders from a vengeful Charles V, to the quartering of the dauphin's foreign-born squire, who was wrongly convicted of poisoning his master. On July 2, 1537, barely a month and a half after arriving in Scotland as a page in the service of Madeleine de France, Ronsard watched as the ravaging effects of tuberculosis, a highly contagious and often deadly disease, extinguished the lady's life

before she reached her seventeenth birthday. Biographers and literary critics have speculated that these encounters with human mortality at an early age account for the themes of cruel fortune and the inevitability of death throughout Ronsard's poetry.

Career in Diplomacy Cut Short by Illness Ronsard became a page in the royal house, where he attended briefly Francis I's eldest son and then the third son, Prince Charles. When James V of Scotland married Madeleine of France (1537), Charles gave the young page to his sister. Ronsard accompanied Scotland's new queen to her country but appears not to have stayed there more than a year.

During his travels abroad, Ronsard learned to speak English. He was eventually promoted from page to squire and assigned to military training. However, Ronsard's life took a different path after his return to France in August 1540. Struck by a high fever that permanently impaired his hearing, he had to abandon his pursuit for a military career and retreat to La Possonnière. The three-year convalescence afforded him an opportunity to deepen his admiration for the natural beauty of the French countryside and to peruse his uncle Jean's library. The result was an awakening to his inner calling, a discovery that led to his decision to write.

A New Direction By early 1543 Ronsard had recovered from his fever and was confronted with supporting himself in his new vocation. The surest option for a gentleman of the day in his situation was to enter the church. In March 1543 Ronsard was tonsured, or had his head shaved in the manner of those entering the priesthood. The act did not make the future poet a priest, but it did permit him to receive income from certain ecclesiastical posts—potentially an important source of revenue, and one he would exploit.

With the deaths of his father in June 1544 and his mother in January 1545, Ronsard found the independence to devote greater attention to his poetic ambitions. Especially valuable was the time he began dedicating to his studies under the eminent Hellenist, Jean Daurat, a scholar whose analyses of Homer captured the imagination of Ronsard and his fellow pupils. When Daurat became principal of the Collège de Coqueret in 1547, he took his pupils with him. The students followed a strict but enlightened discipline that brought them into intimate contact with the languages, forms, and techniques of the ancient poets. In this way, the nucleus of that school of French poets known as the Pléiade was formed.

Prince of Poets Ronsard's first works inscribe his fascination with the lore of antiquity as evidenced in poems such as "Song of Folly to Bacchus" and "The Deflowering of Leda." During the following years, Ronsard continued to expand his poetic portfolio. In January 1550, the twenty-five-year-old Ronsard published his first major

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ronsard's famous contemporaries include:

Henry II of France (1519–1559): Succeeding Francis I, Henry II ruled as king of France from 1547 until his death. Under his rule, France warred with Austria and persecuted the Protestant Huguenots for heresy.

James V of Scotland (1512–1542): During his rule as the king of Scots, he married Madeleine de Valois, the daughter of Francis I of France. This was made possible by his renewal of the Auld Alliance with France.

François Rabelais (1494–1553): An avant-garde author of the French Renaissance, Rabelais influenced many modern writers including Jonathan Swift, Milan Kundera, and Anatole France.

Jean Daurat (1508–1588): This French poet and scholar was named "The King's Poet" by King Charles IX and held membership in the group La Pléiade with Pierre de Ronsard.

Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532–1589): Although nearly a decade younger than Ronsard, Baïf was able to assist him in his use of Greek during their shared membership in La Pléiade.

Jacques Peletier du Mans (1517–1582): As an accomplished poet, mathematician, and humanist of the French Renaissance, Mans played a significant role in encouraging Pierre de Ronsard in his literary endeavors.

work, *The Odes of Pierre Ronsard* (1550). Ronsard was determined to open his career brilliantly and chose to imitate the long, difficult odes of Pindar written in praise of Olympic heroes. The subjects of Ronsard's odes are the royal family and court dignitaries, but the length and difficulty remain.

Ronsard's next major accomplishment came in 1552 with the *Amours*. Ronsard attempted to prove his ability to rival yet another great poet, Petrarch (1304–1374). Some of the sonnets seemed to be obscure and poorly constructed. In 1553, Ronsard published a second edition of *Amours*, hoping to improve reception by elucidating the obscure literary and mythological references that had frustrated readers of the initial version.

Ronsard's success and productivity grew considerably in the three-year period from 1554 through 1556. Notable among the pieces of the 1554 *Bocage* are the ode "A Pierre de Pascal," presenting an autobiography of the Pléiade leader through 1550. The last major work Ronsard published, in the fall of 1555, was *Hymns*.

Return to the Court Though Ronsard continued writing, he returned to the court in the 1560s, serving Charles IX and Marguerite. In addition to filling his

duties as a royal poet, Ronsard was able to publish new versions of his existing collections, reorganizing the order, revising old poems, and adding new pieces.

During the final eight years of his life, Ronsard was markedly less engaged in matters of the court. His diminished presence in society notwithstanding, during the months following the appearance of the fifth edition of *Amours*, Ronsard's praises were enthusiastically sung by several writers of the new generation, including Henri III's secretary, Clovis Hestean, and the Angevin poet, Pierre Le Loyer. In September 1584, Ronsard even began work on a seventh edition of *Amours*. The "prince of poets, poet of princes" died in his bed on December 27, 1585.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired by the lessons of contemporary classicists, such as Jean Daurat, Ronsard set out to break away from the stale conventions of his contemporaries by infusing his verse with the spirit, wisdom, and mythological legacy of antiquity. That influence fueled experiments with major and minor ancient genres ranging from the ode to the dithyramb; moreover, supported by the theories of poets such as Horace and Virgil, it emboldened him to ascribe a potential prophetic quality to verse.

Antiquity was not the only source of Ronsard's creative flow. He also drew upon the writings of early modern Italian and neo-Latin poets such as Francesco Petrarca and Michael Marullus. The result was a voluminous corpus of poetry as diverse as the worlds Ronsard aspired to represent—a body of literary works that shaped French poetry for decades after his death and gave direction to the idealistic voices of the nineteenth-century romantics. His works provide literary critics and cultural historians of today with insight into the dominant aesthetic, philosophical, and social concerns of France during the second half of the sixteenth century.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Ronsard's work received an incredibly positive reaction from his contemporaries. However, toward the end of his life and, more so, after his death, his work became increasingly disliked and eventually fell into obscurity for a period of several hundred years. Then, in the nineteenth century, his work reentered scholarly debate and grew in popularity well into the twentieth century, rebuilding the reputation he lost in the intervening years between his death and present day.

The Amours of 1552 With *Amours de Cassandre* (1552), Ronsard attempted to prove his ability to rival another great Italian poet, Petrarch. Indeed, the *Amours*, addressed to Cassandre (identified as a Cassandra Salviati), so seek to capture the traits of the Italian's famous love poems to Laura that the existence of a woman

named Cassandra at that time must be considered as incidental. Poetry in the sixteenth century was an affair of imitation and skill but rarely biography. The sonnets, in decasyllabic verse, are highly conventional, and although some critics find an appealing baroque quality in certain of them, many poems are so obscure, poorly constructed, and basely derivative that even Ronsard's contemporaries found fault with them. Other, modern critics have been kinder; J. Middleton Murray, writing in 1919, asserted, "It would be hard to find in the whole of . . . *Les Amours* a single piece which has not its sufficient charge of gusto." Scholar I. D. McFarlane, writing in 1974, notes that in the *Amours* "some of Ronsard's major qualities are already present: a fine gift of organizing imagery, a mastery of rhythms, with timely *enjambements* and an acute sense of the links between metrical and sentence structure, an ability to communicate a feeling of vital force."

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the reception of Ronsard's poetry in the sixteenth century. Why was his work controversial? How does this compare to the literary controversies of today?
2. Read several of Ronsard's sonnets aloud. Discuss what the speaker is saying about love. What attitudes about love have changed since Ronsard wrote these sonnets?
3. Compare and contrast Ronsard's sonnets of 1578 with those of 1552 in terms of their style and emotional impact on you, the reader.
4. In addition to writing poetry, Ronsard also wrote essays for the court, providing opinions about politics, religion, and nationality. Read his address, *Remonstrance*, and discuss Ronsard's attitude towards Calvinism. What is his stance on the principles of "one king, one law, and one faith"?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among Ronsard's themes is the importance of acting or seizing the moment. He often uses imagery representative of the human life cycle in order to emphasize the inevitability of death. Other works that explore this theme include:

"To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (1648), a poem by Robert Herrick. In this poem, Herrick emphasizes the *carpe diem* or seize the day, theme with his opening line "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

"To His Coy Mistress" (1649–1660, exact date unknown), a poem by Andrew Marvell. This work is often cited as a literary argument to *carpe diem*.

Twelfth Night (1601), a play by William Shakespeare. The song "O Mistress Mine" is sung by a clown in the second act of this famous play; its content is interpreted to be in the spirit of seizing the day.

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Christina Rossetti

BORN: 1830, London

DIED: 1894, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Verses (1847)

Goblin Market, and Other Poems (1862)

The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems (1866)

Commonplace, and Other Stories (1870)

A Pageant, and Other Poems (1881)

Overview

One of the English language's best-known female poets, British author Christina Rossetti is remembered for her literary inheritance as much as for her literary contributions. Rossetti, whose work gained renewed interest with the dawn of feminist criticism, was an important member of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, an artistic and literary



Christina Rossetti Hulton Archive / Getty Images

group that aspired to recapture the aesthetics of Italian religious painting before the Renaissance painter Raphael. In her exploration of themes including death, female creativity, sisterhood, and unrequited love, Rossetti became the voice of Victorian womanhood. Her work is now celebrated as much for its innovation and beauty as for its feminine perspective.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Artistic Family Christina Georgina Rossetti was born on December 5, 1830, in London, England. The daughter of a half-Italian mother and an Italian poet father, Rossetti was encouraged to indulge in the family passions for language, poetry, and art. She had a distinctly artistic family: her two older brothers, William Michael and Dante Gabriel, were active in literary circles of the time, and Maria, her sister, was a published author.

As a girl, Rossetti was educated at home by her mother, who blended a love of learning with devout religious beliefs, introducing her daughter to literary works in the tradition of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Rossetti's Anglo-Catholic faith colored the remainder of her life. Equally influential were her parents' efforts to subdue her high-spirited, fiery personality.

Began Writing Poetry In love with words and influenced by dramatic novels and legends such as *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (c. 800), Rossetti began writing poetry by age eleven, collaborating with her siblings on a family magazine and developing other artistic interests. When Rossetti's father, an exiled poet and Dante Alighieri scholar, was forced to resign from his teaching position due to ill health, Rossetti and her siblings contributed whatever they could to the family income. In this time in Great Britain, there were limited career choices for respectable women, with teaching as a governess the most common. Rossetti, however, devoted herself to writing for extra money, remaining at home with her ailing father while her sister, brother, and mother worked outside the home.

Ill Health The family's financial situation continued to be dismal between 1843 and 1848, when Rossetti herself physically collapsed. The reason for her decline in health has never been fully explained and continues to interest historians. One of these scholars, Jan Marsh, has suggested that Rossetti was sexually abused by her father during his illness, leading to her attempt to escape her family obligations through the life of an invalid. Whether or not this was the cause of her health problems, Rossetti remained in delicate health for the rest of her life.

First Publications Rossetti had collected over fifty poems by the age of sixteen, thirty-nine of which were privately printed as *Verses* in 1847. Encouraged by her brothers, Rossetti sought wider publication and began to experiment with a blend of allegory and fantasy. Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel was involved in the growing Pre-Raphaelite movement—in which artists, testing and often defying all conventions of art, emphasized eroticized medievalism with symbolism that produced a moody atmosphere—and Rossetti followed his lead, even sitting for portraits in the Pre-Raphaelite style and experimenting with medieval themes.

Preoccupied with religious questions, Rossetti continued to write poetry, even venturing into prose for her 1850 novel *Maude: A Story for Girls*, which was published after her death. Meanwhile, her family's fortunes continued to suffer. By the time her father died in April 1854, she was dependent on her brother William for support.

Around this time, Rossetti volunteered at an institution for fallen women (such as prostitutes, unmarried mothers, and homeless women), where she became interested in the fates of women with compromised morals, a subject she explored in her later poetry. The Victorian era in England, so named because of its long-serving monarch, Queen Victoria, was marked by a spirit of reform and social justice. Reform laws of the period enfranchised the new middle class and the working class, while humanitarian legislation did away with some of the more outrageous abuses of the poor and improved conditions for

those who worked in factories. The reformation of fallen women was part of such concerns.

Literary Fame Though some of her poems were published in magazines during the 1850s, most of Rossetti's work was not commercially published until 1862, when her most famous work, *Goblin Market, and Other Poems*, appeared. The book's namesake, "Goblin Market," is a long poem that depicts two sisters' struggle with teasing goblins who drive them mad with forbidden fruit. The poem has become Rossetti's most famous, drawing feminist, Marxist, social, and psychoanalytic analyses from various critics. Other poems in the collection grapple with questions of vulnerability, femininity, and sisterhood. *Goblin Market, and Other Poems* gained Rossetti fame and praise and has remained popular due to its skill and subject matter.

Its publication did not interrupt Rossetti's life. In the years following the publication of *Goblin Market, and Other Poems*, she turned down her second marriage proposal on religious grounds, recovered from a lung disease later thought to be tuberculosis (a contagious lung disease that was often fatal at that time), and began work on her next collection. *The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems* appeared in 1866 with illustrations provided by her brother Dante Gabriel. Her next work, *Common-place, and Other Short Stories* (1870), marked her first experiments with short fiction. Though the book of sophisticated literary fairy tales failed commercially, critics still find stories like "Nick" and "Hero" notable.

Popular Books for Children After battling Graves' disease, an autoimmune disease that causes overactivity of the thyroid gland, Rossetti was weak and exhausted. Nevertheless, she kept writing, this time producing a book of children's poetry called *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872). The book, which was accompanied by Pre-Raphaelite illustrations by Arthur Hughes, is considered one of the most significant works of nineteenth-century children's verse. Spurred on by the book's popularity, Rossetti next published *Speaking Likenesses* (1874), a collection of warped, terrifying fairy tales.

Though many critics dismiss *A Pageant, and Other Poems* (1881) as one of Rossetti's weakest works, the book represented a break for Rossetti. In her "Monna Innominata" love sonnets, Rossetti explored love with a sense of regret and sadness that some consider to be characteristic of Victorian womanhood. (During the Victorian era, there were many pressures placed on women to live up to an impossible ideal.) As a woman writing in a field dominated by men, Rossetti explored love in unconventional ways, combining questions about romance with speculation about a romantic union with God.

Later Life and Death Rossetti, who had always combined her literary output with religious devotion, became even more committed to spiritual service during her later years. After acting as caretaker to her sickly

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rossetti's famous contemporaries include:

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861): British poet who was known for her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

William Holman Hunt (1827–1910): British painter who was one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His paintings include *The Light of the World* (1853–1854).

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): American politician who served as the sixteenth American president during the American Civil War.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): American poet who was reclusive and employed unconventional dashes, capitalization, and broken rhyming rhythm in her work. Her complete and mostly unaltered poems were first collected in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955).

Nellie Bly (1864–1922): American journalist who was known for her sensationalistic work, including an undercover exposé in which she faked a mental illness to study a mental institution from the inside.

Anne Sullivan (1866–1936): American educator known for her work with the blind and deaf Helen Keller.

relatives, she turned her mind to religious writing, continuing to pray and attend church services daily. In 1892, Rossetti was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy. The cancer recurred the next year, and, after months of suffering, she died on December 29, 1894.

Works in Literary Context

Rossetti has long been considered one of the Victorian era's most important female poets. She drew inspiration from the religious writing of such poets as Dante and Milton, as well as influenced writers as diverse as Algernon Charles Swinburne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Charlotte Mew, Virginia Woolf, and e. e. cummings. Aligned with the Pre-Raphaelite movement during her lifetime, Rossetti was considered to be one of her age's greatest poets and was praised as England's new female laureate when Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in the 1860s. While readers have generally judged Rossetti's poetry to be less political and intellectual than that of Barrett Browning, they do recognize Rossetti as the more talented lyricist, her poetry displaying precision in diction, form, and tone.

Pre-Raphaelite Connections While Rossetti was closely aligned with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, her work differs from theirs in several key ways. First of all,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rossetti's writings for children retold popular fairy tales in imaginatively different ways. Here is a list of other fairy tales, legends, and children's stories that have been reworked from diverse perspectives:

The Penelopiad (2005), a novella by Margaret Atwood.

Atwood retells the events of the Greek epic the *Odyssey* from the point of view of Odysseus's wife Penelope.

Grendel (1971), a novel by John Gardner. In this novel, Gardner retells the Anglo-Saxon story of Beowulf the warrior from the point of view of Grendel, one of the "monsters" that Beowulf fights.

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (1995), a novel by Gregory Maguire. This novel presents the story of the early life of the Wicked Witch of the West of *The Wizard of Oz* (1900).

Enchanted (2007), a film directed by Kevin Lima. Through the story about a modern-day princess's search for love in New York City, this movie satirizes traditional "beautiful princess" interpretations of fairy tales.

The Stinky Cheese Man, and Other Fairly Stupid Tales (1992), a collection of stories by Jon Scieszka. This assortment of fractured fairy tales is filled with sarcastic humor.

Rossetti's deep religious convictions diverged from those of Pre-Raphaelite artists and writers. Second, her use of fantastical elements clashed with the realism embraced by the Pre-Raphaelites. Furthermore, Rossetti's style is almost deceptively simple. She favored nursery rhymes and fairy tales, filling them with complex symbolism and allegorical elements. In spite of these artistic variations, Rossetti remained close to the Pre-Raphaelites for much of her life.

Religious Connections Having faced several serious illnesses during her lifetime, Rossetti often believed she was close to death, and her work reflects themes of both religious devotion and mortality. For example, she wrote the prose piece *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892) after she recovered from Graves' disease. Although critics often claim that her religious prose is inferior to her verse, Rossetti's strong faith inspired some of her finest poetry.

Religious conviction controlled Rossetti's personal life as well as her writing. As a young woman, she rejected two separate marriage proposals because the men's beliefs did not conform to the tenets of the Anglican Church. In the sonnet sequence "Monna Innominata," included in *A Pageant, and Other Poems*, she explores the denial of human love for the sake of religious purity.

Feminist Connections Though Rossetti was unsure about her own positions regarding women's suffrage and feminism, her subject matter focuses extensively on issues of sisterhood, sexual oppression, and gender roles, making her one of the most important feminists of the nineteenth century. The revival of interest in Rossetti's work during the feminist movement of the 1970s introduced her ideas to a new generation of writers.

Works in Critical Context

Rossetti's poetry and stories enjoyed critical success during her lifetime, earning her comparisons with eminent female poets of the day such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning. One reviewer in the October 1876 *Catholic World* called her the "queen of the Pre-Raphaelite school." However, more recent critics have remarked that the Pre-Raphaelite elements in Rossetti's work have been overemphasized.

Rossetti's literary reputation declined as modernist works gained more popularity. After fading into relative obscurity throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Rossetti's literary reputation was restored once her work was rediscovered by feminist critics. These critics appreciated Rossetti's honesty about a woman's place in Victorian society, her social commitment to fallen women, and her attention to issues of sisterhood and gender identity. Largely because of feminist critiques of her work, Rossetti has been restored to the canon of important Victorian-era poets.

Goblin Market, and Other Poems Rossetti's 1862 poem "Goblin Market" is her most famous work. Featuring a nursery-rhyme style and a ghoulish story of temptation, seduction, and salvation, the poem has gained attention for its exploration of sisterhood (feminist critiques), its sexual content (psychological critiques), its exploration of fallen women (social and cultural critiques), and even its vision of women as goods in a marketplace (Marxist critiques). It appeared to general praise, garnering a reputation as a work of literary genius and receiving wide attention in the newspapers and literary journals of its time.

Today, critics ignore Rossetti's insistence that she intended no allegorical meaning in "Goblin Market" and offer a range of interpretations for the two sisters' responses to the temptation of the goblin fruit. Some read the work as a moral allegory of temptation, indulgence, sacrifice, and salvation. The poem has also been approached from a specifically Christian viewpoint, with its reenactment of the temptation in the Garden of Eden and a Christlike offer of redemption through sacrifice.

Feminist interpretations of "Goblin Market" focus on its image of sisterhood, while psychoanalytic readings consider the sisters as two aspects of one psyche and emphasize the poem's sexuality. Marxist critics call attention to the separation of domestic and commercial areas and to the sisters' attempts to do business in a market system that regards women as exchangeable objects.

Other scholars have seen Lizzie's redemption of Laura as a direct critique of the Victorian cultural view of the fallen woman.

Responses to Literature

1. Rossetti's deep religious sentiments affected not only her work, but also her life; so much so that she spurned two romantic relationships. Research the primary characteristics of the Anglo-Catholic revival practiced by Rossetti and her family. Write an essay in which you share your findings, while also addressing how your spiritual beliefs affect the friendships you have.
2. Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is her most famous piece of poetry, earning her comparisons with another eminent female poet of the day, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Using your library and the Internet, write a paper about Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life and poetry.
3. Rossetti's work was largely forgotten throughout the twentieth century. However, the dawn of feminist criticism brought a revitalized interest in her work. What facets of feminist criticism might be responsible for this renewed interest? Create a presentation with your findings.
4. The figure of Dante Alighieri was influential in Rossetti's family. Her father was an important scholar of Italian literature, and every one of her siblings went through a Dante phase. If you were a writer, who would be your most important literary influence? Write a response paper to this question.
5. Rossetti is known for presenting complex ideas through seemingly simple fairy tales. Reinterpret your favorite fairy tale in short-story form.

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti

BORN: 1828, London, England

DIED: 1882, Birchington, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems (1869)

Ballads and Sonnets (1881)

Overview

Equally renowned as a painter and a poet, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists and writers who sought to emulate the purity and simplicity of the medieval period. Both his painting and writing are characterized by mysticism, filled with rich, sensuous imagery and vivid detail. Although the subjects of his verse are often considered narrow, Rossetti is an acknowledged master of the ballad and sonnet forms.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Bilingual Childhood Born Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti on May 12, 1828, in London, the eldest son of



Dante Gabriel Rossetti © Hulton-Deutsch Collection / CORBIS

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rossetti's famous contemporaries include:

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American author and naturalist best known for his writings on philosophy and natural history.

Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893): English painter known for his distinctively graphic style and the moral and historical nature of his subjects.

Jules Verne (1828–1905): French author who pioneered the genre of science fiction with such books as *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864).

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906): Norwegian playwright who is often credited with contributing to the rise of modern realistic drama. He wrote such dramas as *A Doll's House* (1879).

John Everett Millais (1829–1896): English painter and illustrator who served as president of the Royal Academy.

William Morris (1834–1896): English artist, writer, and socialist who was one of the founders of the British Arts and Crafts movement.

Gabriele Rossetti and his wife, Frances Polidori. An Italian expatriate, Rossetti's father came to England four years before Rossetti's birth. Gabriele Rossetti was a Dante scholar, who had been exiled from Naples for writing poetry in support of the Neapolitan Constitution of 1819. (Secret groups such as the Carbonari, who supported the constitution sought to bring self-government to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies—which included Naples—in place of the Austrian-backed monarch, Ferdinand, but failed.) He settled in London in 1824. Frances Polidori had trained as a governess and supervised her children's early education. Gabriele Rossetti supported the family as a professor of Italian at King's College, London, until his eyesight and general health deteriorated in the 1840s. Frances then attempted to support the family as a teacher of French and Italian and an unsuccessful founder of two day schools.

Consequently, Rossetti was bilingual from early childhood and grew up in an atmosphere of émigré political and literary discussion. From childhood, Rossetti intended to be a painter, and he addressed literary subjects in his earliest drawings. He was tutored at home in German and read the Bible, Shakespeare, Goethe's *Faust*, *The Arabian Nights*, Charles Dickens, and the poetry of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron. At the age of eight, he entered Mr. Paul's day school in Portland Place and a year later began studies at King's College School, which he attended from 1837 to 1842.

From 1842 to 1846, Rossetti was a student at Cary's Academy of Art to prepare for the Royal Academy, which he entered in July 1846. He then spent a year in the Academy Antique School. By this time, Great Britain was well into the reign of Queen Victoria, a time of economic prosperity, expansion of the middle class, and a cultural revival often called the second English Renaissance. The theater, literature, and arts were particularly emphasized, drawing on the Gothic and classical ideals as well as modern ideas.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood After leaving school, Rossetti apprenticed himself to the historical painter Ford Madox Brown, who later became his closest lifelong friend. Rossetti continued his extensive reading of poetry (Edgar Allan Poe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, John Keats, Robert Browning, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson) and romantic and satiric fiction (Charles Maturin, William Makepeace Thackeray, Wilhelm Meinhold, Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, Charles Wells). In 1845, Rossetti began translations from Italian (Dante's *Vita Nuova* and British Museum volumes of Dante's little-known predecessors) and German medieval poetry.

In 1848, Rossetti joined John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt in founding the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Their name honored Carlo Lasinio's engravings of paintings by Benozzo Gozzoli (an Italian Renaissance painter from Florence) and others who decorated Pisa's Campo Santo (originally used as a cemetery for Pisa's illustrious citizens). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood sought to introduce new forms of thematic seriousness, high coloration, and attention to detail into contemporary British art. They were opposed to the stale conventions of contemporary academy art, which drew on classical poses and the compositions of the Italian High Renaissance painter Raphael.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brothers provided each other with companionship, criticism, and encouragement early in their careers and defended each other against initial public hostility. Rossetti quickly became the leader of the group and shaped the group's literary tastes, but the life of the group was short-lived. Meetings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood became sporadic by 1851, and by 1853 the group had disbanded. It had served its purpose, however, which was to provide initial professional encouragement to its members.

Success as a Poet Rossetti first received recognition as a poet in 1850, when he published "The Blessed Damsel" in the Pre-Raphaelite journal the *Germ*. Written when he was only eighteen, this poem is characteristic of much of Rossetti's later poetry, with its sensuous detail and theme of lovers, parted by death, who long for reunion. That same year, Rossetti met Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, who modeled for many of Rossetti's drawings and paintings and became his wife in 1860.

Rossetti painted steadily, saw publication of his *The Early Italian Poets*, and cofounded the firm of designers

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co. His wife suffered from consumption (a popular name for tuberculosis, a contagious lung disease that was common in this period), and after two unhappy years of marriage, she died from an overdose of laudanum (an opium-based pain killer regularly prescribed by doctors in Victorian England), which she had been taking regularly for her illness. In a fit of remorse and guilt, Rossetti buried the only manuscript of his poems with his wife. At the urging of friends, he allowed the manuscript to be exhumed in 1869.

The following year, Rossetti published *Poems*, (1869) which established his reputation as a leading poet. Containing much of Rossetti's finest work, *Poems* includes "Eden Bower," "The Stream's Secret," and "Sister Helen," which is regarded by many as one of the finest Victorian literary ballads.

Decline and Death By 1868, Rossetti was in ill health, suffering from physical and mental complaints that burdened him for the rest of his life. His unreliable eyesight, headaches, and insomnia led him to become dependent on whiskey and chloral (a depressant drug developed in the 1830s specifically for inducing sleep). This precipitated a gradual decline in health, though he continued to paint and write even after a personal change and mental breakdown caused by an attack on his poetry by Robert Buchanan in *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day* (1872). Rossetti's poetry collection, *Ballads and Sonnets*, appeared in 1881, and he died the following year at the age of fifty-four.

Works in Literary Context

Painting to Poetry The dual nature of Rossetti's artistic endeavors led to crossover between them. Just as his literary background influenced his choice of mythological, allegorical, and literary subjects for his paintings, his Pre-Raphaelite love of detail, color, and mysticism shaped much of his poetry. The influence of Rossetti's painting is particularly felt throughout *Poems*.

Evolution of Style and Theme It is difficult to date Rossetti's work or to divide it into periods, since he continually revised poems begun as a young man. Nonetheless, some divisions are possible. When Rossetti was young, his bright pictorialism, concrete detail, archaisms, and sublimated sexuality reflected rather conventional aspects of contemporary poetic sensibility. By the late 1860s, his sense of failure had evolved into an oppressive fear about identity. In Rossetti's middle and later poetry, sexual love became a near-desperate desire to transcend time. By comparison, the final sonnets of Rossetti's life are tranquil, even celebratory.

His writings can perhaps best be viewed as an expression of Victorian social uncertainty and loss of faith. Rossetti's poetry on the absence of love is as bleakly despairing as any of the century, and no poet of his period conveyed more profoundly certain central Victorian anxieties: metaphysical uncertainty, sexual anxiety, and fear of time.

Influence on Other Writers and Artists It is also difficult to compare Rossetti's achievement with that of the other Victorian poets. For its modest size, Rossetti's poetic work is wide in manner and subject. He was a talented experimenter, and his heightened rhythms and refrains influenced other mid- and late nineteenth-century poetry. He was also an important popularizer of Italian poetry in England and a major practitioner of the sonnet. Certainly, he lacked the strong, confident range and subtle lyricism of Tennyson and Browning, but his erotic spirituality and gift for the dramatic were his own. Rossetti was perhaps as significant for his effect on others as for his own work, a judgment that he himself came to make with growing bitterness. His critical remarks on Romantic and contemporary literature were often convincing and influenced all around him.

Rossetti's attempt to create a unified composition of poetry and painting was also pioneering and extended conceptions of both arts. Through such painters as Edward Burne-Jones, Frederick Sandys, and John William Waterhouse, Rossetti had a further indirect influence on the literature of the Decadence. He also conceived the idea of the *Germ*, the first little magazine of literature and art, and with Ford Madox Brown, William Morris, Burne-Jones, and Philip Webb helped cofound the movement to extend the range of decorative art and improve the quality of book design. Rossetti's poetry is not as important as that of Tennyson, Browning, or Gerard Manley Hopkins, but it would be difficult to name others who clearly surpassed him at his best and even more difficult to imagine later nineteenth-century Victorian poetry and art without his influence.

Works in Critical Context

Poems Following the publication of *Poems*, numerous reviews appeared praising Rossetti as the greatest poet since Shakespeare. However, in 1871, critic Robert Buchanan pseudonymously published a venomous attack against Rossetti, in which he claimed that Rossetti's only artistic aim was "to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense."

Rossetti published a convincing reply called "The Stealthy School of Criticism." Buchanan then expanded his views in *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*. In this work, he added a lengthy attack on "The House of Life" as a "hotbed" of "nasty phrases," which virtually "wheel[ed]" the poet's "nuptial couch into the public streets."

Almost all the reviews of Rossetti's *Poems* were favorable, and the book sold unusually well. Few in Rossetti's actual or potential audience were likely to share Buchanan's extreme prudery. Rossetti was deeply proud

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rossetti's poetry is characterized by its mysticism, its rich and sensuous imagery, and its vivid detail. Here are some other works which have similar themes:

Idylls of the King (1856–1885), poems by Alfred Tennyson. This cycle of twelve narrative poems retells the legend of King Arthur with vibrant descriptions of nature derived from the author's own observations of his surroundings.

The Eve of St. Agnes (1820), by John Keats. This long poem tells the story of Madeline and Porphyro, whose romance "falls" from innocence to experience.

American Primitive (1984), poems by Mary Oliver. This Pulitzer Prize-winning collection allows the reader to devour luscious objects and substances through powerful recurring images of ingestion.

The Burning Alphabet (2005), poems by Barry Dempster. This collection combines a sense of humor with sensuous writing.

of the originality of his best work, and his friends admired his work, as well. William Morris wrote in the *Academy* of his friend's work:

To conclude, I think these lyrics, with all their other merits, the most *complete* of their time; no difficulty is avoided in them: no subject is treated vaguely, languidly, or heartlessly; as there is no commonplace or second-hand thought left in them to be atoned for by beauty of execution, so no thought is allowed to overshadow that beauty of art which compels a real poet to speak in verse and not in prose. Nor do I know what lyrics of any time are to be called great if we are to deny that title to these.

Critics have differed in assessing the quality of Rossetti's poetic achievement and in their preferences for different periods of his work. Following his death, Rossetti's works suffered somewhat from critical neglect. However, with the renewed interest in Pre-Raphaelitism, numerous studies have appeared. Rossetti is now recognized as a distinguished artist and verbal craftsman.

Responses to Literature

1. The Pre-Raphaelite Brothers (PRB) was an important group that helped launch Rossetti's career. Using the Internet and your library resources to research the goals and objectives of the PRB, write a bulleted list outlining your results.
2. Rossetti was criticized by some contemporaries for focusing on physical attributes rather than the soul. Would Rossetti's poems draw similar criticism today?

In small groups, discuss the subject matter in Rossetti's poems and explain how his poems would be critiqued by modern society.

3. Rossetti was explicit about being influenced by poets and artists from an earlier time. Write an essay reflecting on your own artistic and literary influences.
4. The sonnet was one of Rossetti's favored poetic forms. Write a sonnet that describes a moment of peace and silence that you have had. Include details that you observed while being quiet.

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Edmond Rostand

BORN: 1868, Marseilles, France

DIED: 1918, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Romancers (1894)

Cyrano de Bergerac (1897)

Chantecler (1910)

Overview

That Edmond Rostand is still known throughout the world today is due almost solely to his much-loved play *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897). Since its first performance,



Edmond Rostand Branger / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

Cyrano de Bergerac has been translated from its original French into many languages, including English, Spanish, Russian, and Hebrew, making its long-nosed title character beloved worldwide. Rostand wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and is credited with briefly reviving the popularity of romance and heroism on a turn-of-the-century French stage dominated by realism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Stellar Student Rostand was born in Marseilles, France, on April 1, 1868, to wealthy parents. His father was the prominent economist Eugene Rostand, a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences of Marseilles and the Institut de France, who wrote poems and translated the works of the ancient Roman lyric poet Gaius Valerius Catullus. His aunt Victorine Rostand wrote poetry, and his uncle Alexis Rostand was a composer and music critic. Living with a literary and musical family, it is not surprising that Edmond was recognized for his talent as a translator and poet as early as the age of sixteen, while studying at the Lycée Marseilles. When he continued his studies at the Collège Stanislas in Paris from 1884 to 1886, he was considered the best student in French composition, history, and philosophy.

Following a brilliant academic career, Rostand made efforts to please his father by studying law in Paris for two years, but these attempts to prepare for the legal profession were secondary to his growing literary interests. During the time of his legal studies, Rostand won the 1887 literary essay competition held by the Marseilles Academy for an essay that he had written on Honoré d'Urfé and Guy de Maupassant. In 1888 Rostand's first play, *Le Gant rough* (*The Red Glove*), written in collaboration with Henry Lee, was performed at the Cluny Theater, but it did not meet with much success. Rostand also began to write a collection of poetry that he published in 1890 under the title *Les Musardises* (*Daydreams*).

Marriage, Success, and an Early Death In 1890 Rostand married Rosemonde Gérard, to whom he dedicated *Les Musardises*. Rosemonde, herself a poet, was a great and harmonious influence on Rostand. Her collection of poems, *Fibs*, received special mention from the Académie Française. After the wedding, however, Rosemonde dedicated herself to her husband's career and often helped him work through difficult passages, lending her poetic sensibilities to his. Many years after Rostand's death, Rosemonde wrote a memoir-biography of her beloved husband, *Edmond Rostand* (1935).

The decade of the 1890s was a period of great success, both personal and professional, for Rostand. During a four-year period beginning in 1893, he wrote and produced an incredible succession of dramatic works: *The Romancers* (1894), *The Princess Far-Away* (1895), *The Woman of Samaria* (1897), and *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

He retired to his country estate, and in 1901 he was elected to the Académie Française, the youngest member ever inducted. Rostand published a third volume of poems, *The Flight of the Marseillaise*, in 1914, which has been dismissed by most as unredeemed sentimental patriotism. Rostand probably saw writing these poems as his duty because his health prevented him from serving France in World War I. He reportedly often visited the trenches, however, wanting to see the suffering and devastation, even though it distressed him greatly and added to his decline in health. He continued to write plays and poetry when his health permitted, leaving his final play, *The Last Night of Don Juan*, unfinished at the time of his death. Rostand died of pneumonia in Paris on December 2, 1918.

Works in Literary Context

When Rostand's plays first appeared, some critics believed that they would inspire a return to verse drama and romanticism. However, his dramas merely stood in contrast to the naturalist and symbolist literary movements of his time, rather than causing them to be supplanted. Recent evaluators of Rostand's work have praised his skillful verse and consummate theatricality but find that his plays lack the thematic complexity and depth necessary to be considered great. Nevertheless, his dramas, particularly *Cyrano de Bergerac*, have maintained their popularity and continue to be performed to enthusiastic reviews.

Romance and Courtly Love In his first play, *The Romancers*, Rostand rejected the sordid realism of the naturalistic plays then in fashion, creating a lighthearted satire about two young lovers in search of romance and adventure who discover that romantic love can exist without the excitement of danger or obstacles to overcome. Rostand further developed the theme of courtly love in *The Princess Far-Away*, which relates the story of the troubadour Joffroy Rudel, Prince of Blaye, whose love for the Countess of Tripoli, whom he has never seen, inspires him to travel to see her before he dies. In this play, Rostand introduced the theme of tenacious

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rostand's famous contemporaries include:

Henry James (1843–1916): An American-born fiction writer who took British citizenship shortly before his death, James is considered by many to be the master of the novella and novel alike.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Leader of the Italian Fascist party and primary European ally of Adolf Hitler's Germany during World War II.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): An Irish playwright and literary critic working in England, he is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Oscar (1938).

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945): U.S. president for much of World War II, Roosevelt was the only U.S. president voted into office for four terms, serving from 1933 until his death in 1945.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924): Russian revolutionary and theorist of revolution and communism, Lenin was a leader in the October Revolution and the first de facto head of state of the Soviet Union.

adherence to unattainable ideals that would become characteristic of his works.

Rejection of Realism *Cyrano de Bergerac* is considered Rostand's dramatic masterpiece, successfully combining humor, romance, and heroic action in expert verse. Based on the life of the seventeenth-century soldier and author Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, the play recounts the hero's faithfulness to his ideals despite his recognition that he will never be rewarded for them. For example, he upholds his artistic principles by refusing to bowdlerize, or modify, his plays to have them performed or to cater to a patron to live comfortably. Adhering to his principles of friendship, he refuses to compete with his friend Christian for the attention of Roxane, the woman they both love, and refrains from destroying Roxane's false image of Christian when he dies, even though it means foregoing his own chance to achieve happiness with her. In its idealism and high romantic approach, *Cyrano de Bergerac* marked a departure from the realist style then *en vogue* in French theater. Sadly, perhaps, the play did not spark a larger trend, and Rostand's own follow-up efforts never quite measured up to the promise that play contained.

Works in Critical Context

Significant for his revival of romantic verse drama at a time when naturalism and symbolism dominated the French stage,

Rostand combined an excellent sense of theatrical effect with a keen wit. In *The Romancers*, Rostand delivers romantic verse on stage, while his optimistic idealism is best expressed in the comedy *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

The Romancers Rostand's first taste of popular success came with the 1894 production of *The Romancers*. Novelist Henry James commented that in *The Romancers*, the "action takes place in that happy land of nowhere—the land of poetry, comedy, drollery, delicacy, profuse literary association . . . and if the whole thing is the frankest of fantasies . . . it is the work of a man already conscious of all the values involved." Though he complained that *The Romancers* is also "really too much made up of ribbons and flowers," James concluded that "we note as its especial charm the ease with which the author's fancy moves in his rococo world." Similarly, in the *Fortnightly Review*, G. Jean-Aubry saw *The Romancers* as a balanced example of both Rostand's writing talents and his deficiencies. There is in the play, he claimed, "the germ of all that is best and least good in Rostand; a very great technical cleverness, a facility for making his personages live and move, a tendency to complicate the simplest situations by play of words, and a real charm . . . in making his rhymes 'sing.' . . . Already he writes verses that are supple, natural, unforced, and others that are tortured and wrung out with difficulty."

While most critics have concluded that *The Romancers*, as a comedic satire on love, is lighter than Rostand's later plays, Alba della Fazia Amoia asserted that it "contain[s] a moral also: we must have faith in what we are doing and we must remain faithful to love." Rostand received the Toirac prize from the Academie Française for the play at the time. And, indeed, *The Romancers* continues to be performed in its 1960 adaptation as a popular Off-Broadway musical, "The Fantasticks."

Cyrano de Bergerac By the end of 1897, the curtain had risen on the drama that most critics agree eclipses the rest of Rostand's oeuvre: *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Though *Cyrano de Bergerac* was to be Rostand's greatest success and was to win him lasting fame, before its debut the theater community had serious doubts about its value. Rostand had to pay for the play's costumes himself, and a few minutes before the curtain rose on *Cyrano* for the first time, he was begging forgiveness of its star, Constant Coquelin, for having involved him in such a fiasco. But when the curtain had fallen, Amoia reports, there was "overwhelming applause . . . for the poet who finally had dissipated the atmosphere of sadness and futility with which young Frenchmen had lived for so long. . . . *Cyrano* marked a complete reaction against the Realism of the problem plays then in vogue. It was a new and fresh Romantic poem, with a folk hero . . . whose identity was shared by all."

Not all critics agreed, however, on the importance or even on the theme of *Cyrano*. Virginia M. Crawford felt that while nothing "could be more noble and

beautiful . . . than Cyrano's love for his cousin Roxane . . . the whole motif of the play is . . . radically false, and consequently lacking in any permanent interest." A contemporary *Poet Lore* reviewer did not take the play's idealism seriously and saw it as a "satirical extravaganza," saying that it would be "naive . . . to take such double-edged fooling as all this for unvarnished tenderness and fresh-born romance." The critic also claimed that to do so would leave the work "bare of any literary distinction worth mentioning. If it is to be considered as a serious dramatic or poetic work, it must be perceived that its structure is of the lightest and most casual."

This point was challenged by Hugh Allison Smith in his 1925 *Main Currents of Modern French Drama*. There, he argues that *Cyrano* should not "be judged . . . by realistic criteria. It is more proper to ask if it is artistic, beautiful, noble or poetic than it is to determine if it is practical, probable, typical or informative." Similarly, an *Edinburgh Review* critic found the play large enough to successfully explore many themes, declaring that to "say of *Cyrano* that it is too elaborate is like objecting to some vigorous forest tree that its leafage is confusing. And the comparison holds good on this point—that *Cyrano de Bergerac* is as structural and organic as a noble tree." This reviewer concluded, "In France, it is necessary to go back to Moliere and to [Pierre Augustin Caron de] Beaumarchais to find anything of equal dramatic fullness of conception, of equal reach and lightness of touch."

Responses to Literature

1. Define honor from the point of view of Cyrano de Bergerac. Is this sort of honor valuable in the world today? Explain your definition with detailed reference to the play.
2. Research and explain the system of patronage that Rostand despised and discredited. In considering one of his plays, would you say he was effective in discrediting this system? Why or why not?
3. Consider the figure of Cyrano de Bergerac as a representative of the flawed romantic ideal. Physically "imperfect," he is spiritually or morally almost without defect. Write an essay in which you compare Cyrano with two to three other figures from world literature who suffer conflicts between physical appearance and inner reality. What do the authors seem to be suggesting about the relationship between external appearances and inner realities?
4. Rostand is particularly admired for his humor, for the joyous laughter that seems to stand ready in the wings throughout his work, waiting to burst out. Using your library and the Internet, research at least one major theory of humor—what it is, how it works—and determine the extent to which that theory seems to be valid. Support your thesis using one of Rostand's plays as a model.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The protagonist of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a man of the most consummate principle, though also a ridiculous man in certain ways. It is a credit to Rostand's artistry that he is able to portray the absurdity of idealism in such a way that the audience roots for him anyway. Here are a few other works with absurd but admirable protagonists:

Don Quixote (1605–1615), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. This tale of a would-be knight errant, a dreamer with his head in the clouds dashing off to fight windmills, has been hailed by many as the first novel.

Candide, or Optimism (1759), a novel by Voltaire. This Enlightenment-era satire presents the haplessly and helplessly optimistic Candide.

The Adventures of Augie March (1953), a novel by Saul Bellow. This novel's eponymous protagonist is buffeted by seemingly random winds of chance as he strives mightily to prove to himself the validity of his own belief in the power and possibility of the individual.

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☒ Jacques Roumain

BORN: 1907, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

DIED: 1944, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

NATIONALITY: *Haitian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Masters of the Dew (1944)

Ebony Wood (1945)

Overview

Jacques (Jean Baptiste) Roumain was a leader of a group of young Haitian intellectuals who, during the late 1920s and the 1930s, sought Haitian autonomy and an end to the American military occupation of Haiti. His writings support his belief in “art for people’s sake” and in negritude—a defense of black culture and an exploration of the “black perspective” of the world. He is best known for the militant, racially conscious poetry of *Ebony Wood* and the coalescence of Marxist theory and artistic expression in the novel *Masters of the Dew*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Introspective and Melancholy Youth Roumain was the oldest of eleven children of a landowner, and the



Jacques Roumain *Roumain, Jacques, photograph.*

grandson of former Haitian president Tancrede Auguste. A member of the upper-middle class, he attended school in Port-au-Prince and in 1921 was sent to Grunau, Switzerland, to complete secondary school. There he read works by Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Charles Darwin, and Heinrich Heine and studied the art and philosophy of the Near East. An introspective and sometimes melancholy student, he wrote poetry but also participated in athletic activities, observing that sports satisfied something of the “excess of life which I have.” From Grunau he went to Zurich and prepared for advanced studies in engineering, but somewhat abruptly he decided to study agronomy in Spain to prepare himself to develop his grandfather’s land in Haiti. By 1927, mounting Haitian opposition to American occupation lured Roumain home to join activists fighting for Haitian nationalism.

Politics, Literature, and Prison In 1927 Roumain helped found the Haitian reviews *La trouée* and *La revue indigène* with the goal of educating Haitian youth about politics and culture. *La trouée* proposed to confront national issues, but Roumain found its literary standards weak and its expression of political ideas to run counter to its stated orientation, so he resigned by the journal’s second issue. *La revue indigène* was more successful: It published poetry and fiction by Roumain and other Haitians as well as French and Latin American literature in translation. Roumain also contributed to the leftist newspaper *Le petit impartial*, published by George Petit, who, with Roumain, helped unite divergent social levels of Haitian youth. After an article highly critical of the French clergy appeared in *Le petit impartial*, Roumain and Petit were arrested and held for seven months.

Release from Prison and Escape to Belgium A series of strikes and civil disorders in Haiti during 1929 and 1930 led the U.S. government to appoint a commission to arrange a peaceful transition to a new government. Recognized as a nationalist leader, Roumain was among a group of opposition representatives who met with the commission and chose Eugène Roy as the new provisional president of Haiti in 1930. Roy appointed Roumain head of the Department of the Interior, a position he resigned within a few months to campaign for Stenio Vincent, who won the first presidential election in late 1930 and reappointed Roumain to his former post.

During this period Roumain published frequently, and these works evidence Roumain’s strong sense of the division between the mixed-race Haitian middle class into which he was born and the black masses with whom he sympathized and identified. His disenchantment with the nationalist government, which had effected no appreciable change in the economic and social conditions of the peasants, reinforced his growing attraction to Marxism. He met with American Communist Party officials in the United States; this, along with his refusal to accept another government post, brought Roumain

under government suspicion, leading to surveillance of his movements and inspection of his mail and packages.

Late in 1932 a letter by Roumain detailing a proposed strike by Haitian laborers against the American Sugar Company was confiscated by government officials. Roumain's subsequent imprisonment was given wide press coverage, inspiring strongly negative sentiment toward him and others who promoted communist ideology. Upon his release, Roumain declared his allegiance to communism and founded the Haitian Communist Party. In 1934 he was arrested on grounds that he had participated in an antigovernment communist conspiracy; a military tribunal sentenced him to three years in prison. Communism was outlawed in Haiti in 1936, and after his release from prison Roumain fled with his wife and son to Belgium.

Asylum Abroad In Belgium Roumain studied pre-Columbian art and history; after moving to Paris in 1937, he studied ethnology and related subjects. While in Paris he associated with such antifascist journalists and intellectuals as André Gide, Romain Rolland, and Louis Aragon and wrote articles and fiction for European journals. In 1939 Roumain left Paris for the United States. He began graduate courses in anthropology at Columbia University but soon left for Cuba at the invitation of the communist poet and journalist Nicolas Guillen. After working for a short time as a journalist in Cuba, he returned home to Haiti, which was now under a new government that had offered amnesty to political exiles. In 1943, the new president made Roumain chargé d'affaires to Mexico, a job that gave him the financial support and opportunity to complete his two major works, the poetry collection *Ebony Wood* and the novel *Masters of the Dew*.

Roumain died at the age of thirty-seven in 1944 of an apparent heart attack.

Works in Literary Context

Negritude Negritude was an artistic and political movement established in the 1930s that attempted to identify a unified black identity and culture in opposition to French colonial control. Roumain was a major participant in the movement. Other key figures included Senegal's Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire of Martinique.

In his revolutionary and militant poetry, Roumain became almost obsessed with linking nationalism and negritude to Creole patois and rhythms and images based on African music and dance. Roumain sought to evoke Haitian idioms in his later poetry as well, looking to other black poets, such as America's Langston Hughes, for ways to transform indigenous musical forms and folk material into verse.

Works in Critical Context

Roumain is primarily remembered and praised for introducing to literature a particularly Haitian voice and for

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Roumain's famous contemporaries include:

Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968): Italian poet who, in 1959, won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Alan Paton (1903–1988): South African author and political activist whose best-known work is *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Anne Frank (1929–1945): German-born Jewish girl who died during the Holocaust in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, but whose posthumously published diary became one of the best-known personal accounts of World War II.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): Thirty-seventh president of the United States of America who resigned from office in 1974 to avoid impeachment.

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): Cuban novelist and one of the first practitioners of the "magical realist" style of Latin American literature.

invoking the rhythms of Haitian culture and language effectively. However, given Roumain's intense political views and his frequent brushes with the law because of those views, it is no wonder that his work is imbued with politics and, indeed, has been criticized for being a mere vehicle for Roumain's ideals. Answering critics who consider Roumain's works nothing more than ideological tracts, J. Michael Dash stated:

[Roumain's] concern with the individual will and the quest for spiritual fulfillment show the extent to which he was very much a Romantic individualist rather than an ideologue whose main interest was conformity to Marxist ideals. It was really his strong moral conscience that drove him to the secular creed of Marxism. . . . Ultimately Roumain emerges as a modern artist concerned with the fate of the creative imagination in a world of broken continuities.

Masters of the Dew Dash remarked that during the last four years of Roumain's life the writer abandoned "the early iconoclasm" and pronouncements for "idealistic revolt," becoming "more capable of compromise." *Masters of the Dew*—considered by many the best work of fiction to come out of Haiti—was written during that time; unlike earlier Roumain protagonists incapable of action, its hero, Manuel, rallies feuding villagers to work together and irrigate their drought-stricken land. Although eventually killed by a jealous rival, the leader refuses to name the murderer as he dies, safeguarding the peasants' fledgling unity. Touching on a number of themes important to Roumain—nationalism, communism, romantic love, effective leadership, agricultural

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Roumain used Haitian music to help inform his work and explain black Haitian culture. Other works that combine music and literature to evoke a culture include:

The Souls of Black Folks (1903), a collection of fiction and nonfiction by W. E. B. DuBois. This groundbreaking sociological work by civil rights leader DuBois features bars of African American hymns and other music throughout, and an unprecedented, in-depth discussion of spirituals.

Jazz (1992), a novel by Toni Morrison. Morrison translates several jazz conventions, including the improvised solo, into literary form in this novel set in 1920s Harlem.

Coming through Slaughter (1976), a novel by Michael Ondaatje. Ondaatje's novel covers the last years of the life of jazz pioneer Buddy Bolden. Ondaatje uses a style and organization reminiscent of early New Orleans jazz.

reform, and true friendship—*Masters of the Dew* is admired for its masterful synthesis of indigenous Haitian language, music, and folklore. “The novel is a beautiful, exact and tender rendering of Haitian life, of the African heritage, of the simple, impulsive, gravely formal folk, of the poetry and homely bite of their speech, of Congo dances, tropical luxuriance, the love of a land and its people,” stated B. D. Wolfe in a critique for the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Review*.

While manifestly a communist novel (“You have the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the summons of the exploited to class solidarity, the martyr who dies for the cause,” enumerated Edmund Wilson), *Masters of the Dew* transcends its political parameters. Writing in *L'Esprit createur*, Beverly Ormerod remarked that “strong elements of myth and ritual . . . underpin the novel. . . Earth and *coumbite*, dew and water, dust and drought are the recurrent symbols through which the hero's adventure is invested with a legendary quality.” Allusions to Manuel as a Christ-figure are frequent, as are references to pagan vegetation gods Tammuz, Attis, and Adonis. Roumain scholar Jacques-Stephen Alexis called such writing “symbolic realism.” “In theme and outline *Masters of the Dew* is a fairly conventional proletarian novel; in style, imagination, observed detail it is a work of unusual freshness and beauty,” judged R. G. Davis in the *New York Times*. Calling the work “charming, vivid, and original,” a *New Yorker* critic concurred that it is “a routine, almost commonplace story . . . but one that is so freshly told and has so highly colored a background that it achieves the glowing effect of a tropical blossom.”

Responses to Literature

1. Some have criticized Roumain, saying that his writings are merely vessels for his ideals and have no merit as works of art. Read *Ebony Wood*. Do you agree or disagree with the criticism Roumain has received? Are Roumain's beliefs clear after reading the work? Cite examples from the text to support your response.
2. In what ways does Roumain utilize African music and dance in his text *Ebony Wood*? How does this use of African music and dance affect your reaction to the collection? In your response, make sure to mention specific passages to help explain your thinking.
3. *Masters of the Dew* attempts to capture Haitian culture and language. The way people speak—the rhythms of their language and the actual vocabulary they use—say a lot about them, and it is difficult to represent dialects effectively in writing. To understand how dialect works, in a short essay, compare how you would describe a date with your boyfriend or girlfriend to a friend through a text message and how you would say the same thing to your mother or grandmother. In your essay, compare the different meanings conveyed in the different ways you say the “same” thing.
4. In *Masters of the Dew*, Manuel is sometimes described as being a Christlike figure. In what ways does Roumain complicate this understanding of Manuel? In what ways does the text support this interpretation? Reference specific examples to support your response.

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❏ Jean-Jacques Rousseau

BORN: June 28, 1712, Geneva, Switzerland

DIED: July 2, 1778, Ermenonville, France

NATIONALITY: Swiss, French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, philosophy

MAJOR WORKS:

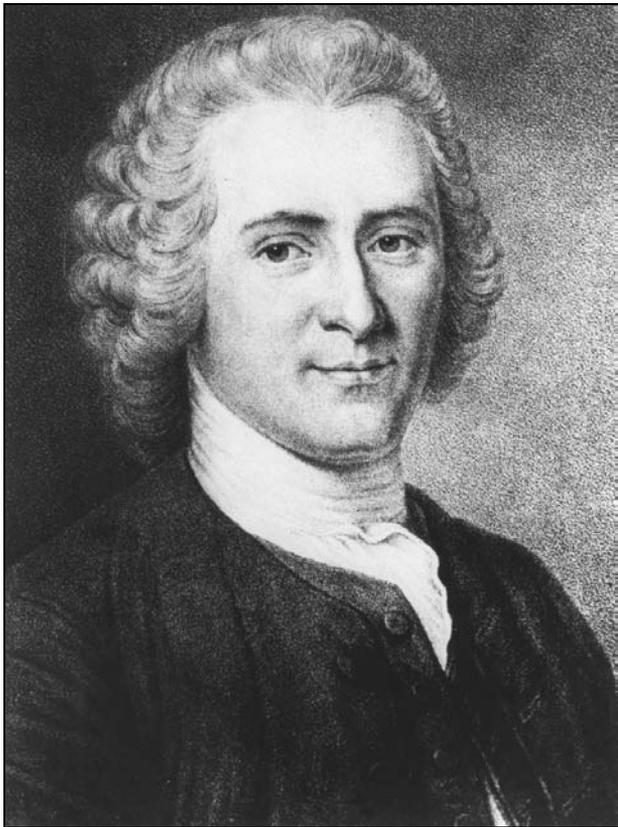
Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts (1750)

Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men (1755)

Julie; or, The New Héloïse (1761)

Émile; or, A Treatise on Education (1762)

Confessions (1781–1788)



Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is widely viewed as the greatest social and political philosopher of the French Enlightenment. That his work spans an incredibly wide range of subjects—ethics, religion, sociology, language, fiction, political theory, music, drama, biology, botany, and anthropology—is only part of the problem of trying to summarize his life and contributions. Rousseau has been labeled the “father” of the French Revolution, romanticism, socialism, anarchism, totalitarianism, and even movements for environmental protection. Though his work addressed various issues, Rousseau’s main concern was the question of where “civilization” was leading mankind. His view was that civilization had taken a wrong turn and lost the essence of what really mattered in life. It was still possible to set it right, Rousseau argued, through dedication to the rule of law, individual liberty, and bold innovations in education. In the words of R. A. Leigh, Rousseau “is not only the most original, the most profound and the most controversial of all the great eighteenth-century writers: he is also the most topical. . . . He will always remain both the prophet and the critic of modern times.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Poorly Educated, Locked Out, and On the Road

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in the Calvinist stronghold of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1712, the second son of a watchmaker and his wife (who died ten days after Rousseau’s birth). Later he was brought up by a puritanical aunt who (he admitted in the *Confessions*) did much to warp his sexuality. In 1722, the poorly educated Rousseau had to be apprenticed, first to a notary, then to an engraver.

In March 1728 Rousseau missed the Genevan city curfew, found himself locked outside the gates, and wandered on foot to Annecy in Savoy, where he was taken in by Françoise-Louise de Warens, who became his protector and then (from 1733 to 1740) his lover. Rousseau began to acquire the education he had lacked in Geneva, and the free-minded and controversial works of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, Nicholas de Malebranche, Isaac Newton, and John Locke made a particular impression.

Catholicism, Enlightenment, Music, and Writing

Mme de Warens, who specialized in finding Catholic converts, sent the young Rousseau to Turin, Italy, where he renounced Calvinism; he even briefly attended a seminary for priests until a Catholic ecclesiastic attempted to seduce him. Rousseau returned to de Warens and completed his education. In 1740 he moved to Lyon, France, to serve as a tutor for the children of M. de Mably. There he met de Mably’s two elder brothers, Étienne Bonnot and the Abbé de Mably. This was the beginning of Rousseau’s connection to the Paris philosophes, a group of thinkers and writers who were spreading

enthusiasm for the new Enlightenment thought that suspected traditional authorities, favored education for all people, and valued reason over superstition or blind allegiance to religious faith.

At this same time Rousseau became a considerable composer and theorist of music; in later years he would represent himself as a simple Swiss musician. In 1742 Rousseau moved to Paris, carrying with him a new system of musical notation, a comedy, an opera, and a collection of poems. Rousseau made a precarious living by tutoring, writing, and copying music; for a brief period (1743–1744) he served, not very happily, as secretary to the French ambassador in Venice. He also met and befriended Denis Diderot, soon-to-be editor of the philosophes' monumental undertaking, the first great French *Encyclopedia*. Diderot commissioned Rousseau's first great writing on the motives for civic participation, *Discourse on Political Economy* (1755).

Gaining International Renown as a Philosophe

It was while visiting Diderot in prison (held for alleged impiety) in 1749 that Rousseau decided to write an essay for a prize competition sponsored by the Academy of Dijon, dealing with the question of whether morals had been harmed or advanced by the rebirth of the arts and sciences. Rousseau won the prize with *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, in which he defended Spartan-Roman civics against the Athenian literary “tyranny” of poets and orators. This made his European reputation, even attracting the attention of the king of Poland.

In 1752 his opera, *The Village Soothsayer*, was performed at the court of Louis XV at Versailles; at roughly the same time his black comedy *Narcissus, the Lover of Himself* was given in Paris at the Theatre Français. Still calling himself a citizen of Geneva, Rousseau refused a royal pension, and he offended some establishment figures by publishing his *Letter on French Music* (1753) where he defended Italian simplicity against French elaboration.

Against Inequality, and a Return to His Roots

Rousseau published the most radical of his works, *A Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men*, in May 1754. It argues that the existing aristocratic government is a kind of trick on the part of the rich, who persuade the poor that it is universally and equally advantageous to be subjected to their laws and priorities. In June 1754 Rousseau left Paris for a visit to his native Geneva, where he reconverted to Calvinism, had his civic rights restored, and where he published his *Inequality and the Political Economy* (1755). In 1756 he moved to the countryside, taking up residence at l'Hermitage, the country estate of Mme d'Epinau, a move that marked the start of the weakening of Rousseau's ties to the philosophes.

In 1758, Rousseau began *The State of War*, his scathing critique of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, accusing Hobbes of making broad generalizations about “natural” men by observing only badly socialized, ill-educated Englishmen. In the late 1750s Rousseau also

labored on (but never published) the *Moral Letters* and then produced his vast epistolary novel, *Julie; or, The New Héloïse* (1761), with its celebrated account of a small ideal society. The novel was a runaway best seller.

Rousseau the Educator Arouses (F)Ire In May 1762 Rousseau brought out two of his greatest but most ill-fated works: *The Social Contract* and *Émile; or, A Treatise on Education*, both focusing on transformative, “denaturing” education. Both were condemned and publicly burned in Paris at the behest of Archbishop Christophe de Beaumont (and with the approval the Parlement of Paris); Rousseau, under order of arrest, fled to Geneva (only to find the same works condemned and burned there). Against charges of impiety leveled by the Genevan public prosecutor—alleging the danger of Rousseau's “natural” theology—Rousseau composed and published his *Letters Written from the Mountain*, in which he defended ancient “civic” religion and insisted that Christianity produces good men whose otherworldliness makes them “bad citizens.” This of course only increased the furor against him, and he took refuge in the Prussian enclave of Neuchâtel.

Renouncing his Genevan citizenship definitively, Rousseau occupied himself by writing a constitution for recently liberated Corsica; increasingly threatened, his paranoia fueled by genuine danger, Rousseau accepted the offer of British refuge given by the philosopher David Hume, although he soon came to see even him as part of the “league of malignant enemies” bent on his destruction. After an unhappy period in England, Rousseau returned incognito to France, living under the assumed name of Renou. While living under this name, Rousseau finally married his longtime companion, Thérèse Levasseur, by whom he had fathered—if the *Confessions* are to be believed—five children, all supposedly abandoned by Rousseau to an orphanage.

Spending His Last Years in Introspection The *Confessions*, Rousseau's scandalously honest and sexually graphic autobiography, occupied much of Rousseau's time. In 1772 he produced *The Government of Poland* as part of an effort to avert partition of that country by Prussia, Austria, and Russia; the book combines intelligent constitutional reforms with Rousseau's most glowing account of Spartan and Roman republican civic virtue. In the same year he wrote (without publishing) the innovative and narratively complex *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques (Dialogues)*, in which he had one half of himself comment on the other half. The *Dialogues* portray Rousseau's broodings and show a distinct touch of madness. He decided to give the manuscript to God by placing it on the high altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, where, perhaps, the king might also notice it. He carefully prepared to carry out this task, but when he arrived at the church, a railing with locked gates that he had never seen before surrounded the chancel.

Stunned, Rousseau wandered aimlessly all day, now certain that God, too, had joined men against him.

In 1777 Rousseau wrote his last great confessional work, *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, which begins with the celebrated words, “Here I am, then, alone on the Earth, no longer having any brother, or neighbor, or friend, or society except myself.” A year later, while in refuge on an aristocratic estate at Ermenonville (north of Paris) and while engaging in his beloved botanical studies, Rousseau died quite suddenly on July 2, 1778—two years after the beginning of the American Revolution that was in part a response to his writings, and a little more than a decade before the French Revolution founded more directly on his writings. He was originally buried in a quasi-Roman tomb on the Isle of Poplars, but at the height of the French Revolution in 1794 his ashes were relocated, in a dramatic torchlight procession, to the Panthéon in Paris and placed next to the remains of his one-time rival Voltaire.

Works in Literary Context

Enlightenment Ideals Rousseau was profoundly shaped by, and in turn profoundly shaped, an intellectual and cultural movement that began in France and went on to sweep the rest of Europe and the American colonies throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century. Known even then as the Enlightenment, it was in many ways a reaction against an era of civil warfare, religious fanaticism and intolerance, aristocratic decadence, and increasing social inequality that marked the end of the seventeenth century in England and elsewhere. The proponents of Enlightenment thought were not all philosophers, but they called themselves the philosophes, and their leader in France was Denis Diderot. Diderot became an early patron of Rousseau upon the latter’s arrival in Paris, encouraging him to publish his writing and contribute to the massive French *Encyclopedia* that became a platform for the philosophes’ ideas.

An encyclopedia can be seen as a perfect Enlightenment project. Enlightenment thinkers wished to see the world through the eyes of reason, science, and empirical observation. An encyclopedia organizes all of human knowledge into categories and family trees, then presents in the equalizing and non-prioritized order of alphabetization. It values no reader over another—it is written for general readers, and no one is prevented from accessing any kind of learning (including taboo subjects such as human anatomy or heretical religious thought). The Enlightenment assumption, seen throughout Rousseau’s political works, was that a well-informed public motivated by “enlightened self-interest” could be trusted to run their own government and make the best decisions for the common good.

Republican Politics Part of Rousseau’s contribution to Enlightenment ideas was his dedication to republican

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rousseau’s famous contemporaries include:

Edward Young (1683–1765): An English poet and playwright. Young wrote poetry in defense of Christian orthodoxy and against “free-thinkers” such as Rousseau. As a country clergyman, Young also wrote satires, dramatic tragedies, and essays promoting originality in writing.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762): Montagu was an early patron of her relative, novelist Henry Fielding, and a friend and correspondent of poet Alexander Pope and others. Her lively and sharply intelligent letters and poetry appear in several collections. Her most lasting legacy, however, is her introduction of the smallpox vaccine to England after a trip to Constantinople.

Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771): A French philosopher who argued that humans are born with a mental *tabula rasa*, a “blank slate” and that, therefore, proper education is crucial. The Catholic Church and the French parliament alike burned his works for the heretical idea that the public interest, not religion, provides the strongest framework for morality.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): A German composer, one of the pillars of Western classical music—on par with Mozart and Beethoven. Bach dominates the baroque movement, a style of music with elaborate counterpoint, multiple musical lines, and highly complex organization. Bach was able to combine all of these with intense spirituality.

Flora Macdonald (1722–1790): Macdonald lived in America with her husband, Allan Macdonald, a general in the British army during the American Revolution. She was nevertheless instrumental in the failed Scottish effort to restore the Catholic line of Scottish rulers to the British throne, helping Prince Charles Edward Stuart (“the Young Pretender”) escape after his defeat in the Battle of Culloden (1746).

politics. “Republican” in this sense means a government run not by a king or tyrant with a supporting network of hereditary aristocracy (as had been the case in Europe for centuries, since the ancient Greeks), but rather by representatives chosen on the basis of the rule of law, personal liberty, and civic virtue. As the American revolutionary John Adams put it, a republic is to be “a government of laws, and not of men.” Republican values are found throughout Rousseau’s many works, including the overtly political *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, and *The Social Contract*. In each of these works, Rousseau argues

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rousseau famously argued that “civilization” as it existed in his time had an adverse effect on humankind. Following are some other works that consider the effects of civilization:

The Tempest (c. 1610), a play by William Shakespeare. In this play, the sorcerer Prospero and his daughter Miranda have been stranded on an island for years. A monstrous character named Caliban, a resident of the island, complains of the unwelcome effects of the civilization Prospero brings.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), a novel by Mark Twain. The young adventurer Huckleberry Finn vigorously resists all attempts by well-meaning adults to “civilize” him and pursues his dreams of “lighting out” to the untamed territories of the American West.

The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980), a film directed by Jamie Uys. A Coca-Cola bottle falls from an airplane and is found the Sho people of the Kalahari Desert, who have no familiarity with the world beyond their homeland. They decide that one of the young members of the tribe must take the artifact, presumed to belong to the Gods, to the end of the world to destroy it.

that every man’s highest calling is civic virtue: active participation in the community for the benefit of the common good, based upon individual liberty and the impartial rule of law.

In the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men*, for example, Rousseau claims that the rich ruling class has duped the public into thinking that the nobility’s self-interested form of government is best for everyone. So long as there is private property, says Rousseau, there will be inequality masking itself as “civilized” society. “Don’t listen to that imposture; you are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and the earth to no one,” he wrote. Man’s greatest ills, said Rousseau, are not natural but made by man himself; the remedy lies also within man’s power. Words like these helped form the basis for the Declaration of the Rights of Man (liberty, equality, fraternity), which was the rallying cry for the French Revolution (1789–1799).

The “Noble Savage” Many philosophers of Rousseau’s day considered intellectual questions about the family and the individuals in it: What was a family like before the advent of “civilization”? How were children raised? Deeply critical of his society, Rousseau believed that social and political inequalities corrupted people. As a result, he endorsed a view of mankind that found pockets of popularity throughout the eighteenth century, the idea that primitive man is superior to modern man since

he is free of this corruption. Primitive man’s instincts were more accurate, his religion more sincere, his emotions more intense and pure, and his societies more reasonable. As reports came back from voyagers about Native Americans, South Sea Islanders, and Africans, these Europeans often had their opinions validated. Authors such as Voltaire, François Châteaubriand, and James Fenimore Cooper all used Noble Savage characters, but Rousseau was the writer who most systematically wove the ideals through many of his works in multiple genres.

Traditional Gender Roles and Libertine Sexuality

Rousseau’s novel *Émile* is an excellent example of how Enlightenment philosophers, who were liberal in many regards about questions of human rights and individual liberty, were often conservative in their views about relationships between men and women. While Enlightenment thinkers criticized many other aspects of European culture and society, they tended to consider the traditional gender relations of their time as natural and preferable. In *Émile*, Sophie, Émile’s future partner, is smart, but not too intelligent for Émile, and her skills lie in the domestic duties for which Rousseau believed women were naturally suited: sewing, cooking, and housekeeping. Rousseau wrote that a woman’s natural sphere of influence was the home, while a man’s was the government.

For all his traditionalism in the realm of gender roles, Rousseau was a champion of sexual liberation and experimentation. In an era when the Marquis de Sade was also considered an Enlightenment thinker, sexual freedom was sometimes seen as an expression of radical individual liberties. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau admitted to, and defended, such publicly shocking but privately common “peculiarities” as exhibitionism, masochism, masturbation, and numerous casual affairs. The *Confessions* were originally written as an elaborate self-defense against what Rousseau perceived to be his many persecuting enemies, but they set off a fashion for shockingly confessional autobiography throughout the Romantic era in the early nineteenth century, including Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822).

Works in Critical Context

The closest thing to a consensus to be achieved by more than two hundred years of scholarship on Rousseau is that his work must be analyzed as a whole in order to even begin to understand him and that, even then, synthesis is almost impossible. His influence is vast and uneven. Although Rousseau always insisted on the fundamental unity of his thought, he was frequently ambiguous and deliberately cultivated paradox in his writing.

Rousseau’s work was predictably controversial at its first appearance; it found the extremes of critical opinion and not much in between. In 1790 Edmund Burke wrote that Rousseau gave rise to “new and unlooked-for strokes in politics and morals” and declared that “the writings of

Rousseau lead directly to shameful evil.” Sir James Mackintosh, on the other extreme, saw Rousseau as one “who unshackled and emancipated the human mind.” In France, particularly during and immediately after the French Revolution, Rousseau was extremely popular: “Him they study, him they meditate; him they turn over in all the time they can spare,” wrote Burke. And he goes on: “Rousseau is their canon of holy writ; in his life he is their canon of *Polyclitus*, he is their standard figure of perfection.” Rousseau was widely read in England well into the 1800s, but once Napoléon’s power was established, British enthusiasm for all things French diminished dramatically. According to Edmund Gosse, Rousseau’s influence “was like a snow man in the sun; it melted and dripped from every limb, from all parts of its structure.” Rousseau was usually read in secret if he was read at all throughout much of the nineteenth century. John Morley’s appreciative biography *Rousseau* (1873) was a rare exception.

As the bicentenary of Rousseau’s birth approached and the Napoleonic wars seemed like a distant memory, with World Wars I and II taking shape (where England and France were close allies), English critics began to catch up with other European scholars in their more balanced views of Rousseau. His paradoxes began to seem more of a challenge than a frustration. J. Middleton Murry wrote that Rousseau’s paradoxes are an “unremitting endeavour to express an intuitive certainty in intellectual terms... He seems to surge upwards on a passionate waver of revolutionary ideas, only to sink back into the calm of conservative or quietist conclusions.”

The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts Criticism has often been dominated by studies of how Rousseau “founded” certain movements and events, but more recently, more attention has been paid to the actual content of Rousseau’s writing and ideas. For instance, Sally Campbell and John Scott note that “Rousseau’s arguments often turn on a correct understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. Cause and effect are easily confounded, and he criticizes his predecessors for their errors in reasoning.” Campbell and Scott go on to argue, however, that “the principal cause-effect argument of the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* is actually the opposite of the one Rousseau initially seems to posit in his work. Whereas he first suggests that the sciences and arts themselves corrupt morals, his ultimate argument is that the corruption of morals is the cause of the advancement of the sciences and arts and of their corrupting effect.” Even the most dedicated of Rousseau’s scholars, however, find it difficult or impossible to read everything that Rousseau wrote and to synthesize it all into a single coherent interpretation.

Responses to Literature

1. How do you reconcile the traditional morality and gender relationships found in Rousseau’s novels, *Julie; or, The New Héloïse* and *Émile*, with the radical

politics of individual liberty found in his political writing? Do you find Rousseau to be paradoxical, hypocritical, or flexible? Are these positive or negative qualities?

2. Research the reasons why Rousseau was controversial or offensive to many people in the eighteenth century. Are these the same reasons why Rousseau may be controversial or offensive today? What is mainstream about Enlightenment values today, and what is still problematic?
3. We are surrounded by “confessions” today—on television talk shows, in blogs and social networking sites, best-selling memoirs, and even game shows. How is today’s confessional culture like and unlike what Rousseau was doing in his *Confessions*? How did Rousseau’s pioneering work help establish the model for later confessional literature?
4. As a social thinker, Rousseau was convinced of the essential innocence of the human being “in a state of nature.” Read several of his writings on this subject and either formulate an attack on his position or defend him from detractors. It may be useful to formulate your thoughts as a sort of debate, in which both sides make specific reference to and offer explanations of Rousseau’s various positions on the subject.

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📖 J. K. Rowling

BORN: 1965, Chipping Sodbury, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (1997)

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2000)

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2003)

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2005)

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (2007)

Overview

J. K. Rowling is widely acclaimed for her novels depicting the adventures of the beloved character Harry Potter, a brave young wizard. She caused a sensation with her first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), which sold out of its first edition quickly and has been reprinted many times. The first Harry Potter book established a firm reputation for Rowling, both within literary circles and in the minds of the reading public. With seven Harry Potter books appearing in sixty-three languages, Rowling is one of the best-loved and most-read contemporary authors.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in the Countryside Joanne Rowling was born on July 31, 1965, in Chipping Sodbury, in South-west England. She grew up with a younger sister and a distinct inclination toward storytelling. Rabbits played a large part in her early tales, for Rowling and her sister



J. K. Rowling *Rowling, JK, photograph. David Cheskin / EPA / Landov.*

badly wanted a rabbit. Her first story, at age five or six, involved a rabbit dubbed, quite logically, Rabbit, who got the measles and visited his friend, a giant bee named Miss Bee.

Two moves took the Rowling family to the town of Tutshill near Chepstow in the Forest of Dean along the border of England and Wales. This brought a long-time country-living dream to fruition for Rowling's parents, both Londoners, and the nine-year-old Rowling learned to love the countryside in this new abode. She and her sister could wander unsupervised amid the fields and play along the River Wye.

From Tutshill Primary, Rowling went to Wyedean Comprehensive School. Rowling confided to Roxanne Feldman in an interview in *School Library Journal* that the character of Harry's friend Hermione is loosely based on herself at age eleven. English was her favorite subject. She created serial stories for her friends at lunchtime, and writing became more a compulsion and less of a hobby in her teenage years.

Rowling attended college at Exeter University, where she studied French and the classics. Upon graduation, she moved to London and found work as a

researcher and secretary. During this time, she used the computer to type up her own stories during quiet times. At age twenty-six, Rowling gave up her office job to teach English in Portugal. It was there that she began yet another story that might become a book, about a boy who is sent off to wizard school. All during the time she spent in Portugal, Rowling took notes on this story and added bits and pieces to the life of her protagonist, Harry Potter. In Portugal she also met Jorge Arantes, the man who became her first husband and with whom she had a daughter; Arantes and Rowling divorced in 1995.

Harry Potter Brings Success In late 1994, Rowling returned to the United Kingdom with her daughter and settled in Edinburgh. Unemployed and poor, the single mother used this time to complete her first novel, working on the manuscript in local coffee shops. Rowling sent her manuscript to several publishers before Bloomsbury published *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997.

Even before its British release, publishers in the United States were vying for rights to the book. Scholastic won the bid, paying one hundred thousand dollars, the most ever for a first novel by a children's book author. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (released as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States) rose to the top of the children's best-seller lists in 1998 and was later made into a popular movie. Its sequel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), went to the top of the adult best-seller lists in England shortly after its release, and consumer demand in the United States for the book ushered in a new era in Internet sales of books internationally, fueling concern over publishing rights. Rowling continued her saga of seven Harry Potter books, spinning a magical blend of wit and fantasy.

From Rags to Riches Rowling has won numerous awards and is now employed full-time in her life's ambition as a writer, earning an estimated \$1 billion for her stories about the boy wizard. Rowling remarried in 2001 and now lives in a mansion in Scotland with her husband and three children.

Works in Literary Context Fantasy and a Special Hero

Rowling's work follows a long tradition in literature that uses fantasy worlds to explore morality and human frailty in real life. Perhaps the archetypal novel for the negotiation of morality in the realm of fantasy is Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, while more recent examples would include the fiction of authors ranging from Isaac Asimov and Ursula Le Guin to Kurt Vonnegut. Accordingly, it is through the adventures of a romantic hero, Harry Potter, who is caught in the conflicts between good and evil, that Rowling expresses her views on morality in a sociocultural context.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rowling's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Putin (1952–): This Russian politician succeeded Boris Yeltsin and served as second president of the Russian Federation from 2000 until 2008.

George W. Bush (1946–): This Republican politician served as the forty-sixth governor of Texas and the forty-third president of the United States.

Stephen King (1947–): An immensely popular American author of horror fiction who blends elements of the traditional gothic tale with those of the modern psychological thriller, detective, and science fiction genres.

Orhan Pamuk (1952–): This Turkish author was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his writings, which explore tension between the Eastern and Western worlds.

In explaining the nearly universal appeal of Rowling's books, critics cite common archetypal themes. Harry Potter is a young version of the classic romantic hero. He is an orphan who has led a miserable life with the Dursley family, his maternal aunt and uncle. Ever since Harry arrived unannounced at their doorstep, the Dursleys have been put out, as has their vile son, Dudley. Harry has taken up residence in a broom closet under the stairs, been bullied at school, and mistreated by the Dursleys. Small, skinny, and bespectacled, Harry is an unlikely hero. The only thing physically interesting about Harry is the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead.

In each novel Harry faces a quest, although the quest often reveals itself slowly throughout the course of the book. Harry encounters adversaries and helpers along his way—some human and some magical. While he is at times outsmarted, he rarely fails to rebound and is consistently aided by his friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Some critics have asserted that the books are formulaic because of these basic and universal themes, but Rowling's writing style and imaginative plot twists have maintained readers' interest.

Works in Critical Context

From the first volume, critics have been nearly unanimous in their praise of the Harry Potter books. With each subsequent novel, and concurrent with the aging process for the main characters, Rowling's themes have become darker and her plots more challenging to follow. Intricate plotlines and more mature subject matter parallel the growing complexity of Harry and his relationships with friends as they move through adolescence toward adulthood.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Harry is a young romantic hero. In each novel he faces a quest, battles evil, and ultimately succeeds. Other works that feature romantic heroes include:

Candide (1759), a novel by Voltaire. Considered by many to be part of the Western canon of great literature, this work explores the human condition and contains themes of travel and quest.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), a novel by L. Frank Baum. In this story, Dorothy, a girl from Kansas, undertakes a journey down the yellow brick road to find her way home after a tornado lands her house in another dimension.

The Lord of the Rings (1954 and 1955), a novel trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien. In this high-fantasy epic, the story's protagonist and romantic hero, Frodo Baggins, embarks on a quest to destroy a ring, an artifact of malevolent power.

The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759), a novella by Samuel Johnson. In this novella, an adventurous prince sets off with his sister and an adviser in search of happiness.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone Most critics have been approving of Rowling's novels. According to *Contemporary Authors*, Amanda Craig from *New Statesman* "loved" the first Harry Potter book and hailed Rowling's tale as full of "zest and brio." Lee Siegel of the *New Republic* found the book appealing because of Rowling's "wholehearted absorption in her universe." Siegel also praised Rowling's characterization, noting, "Harry and his friends Hermione and Ron Weasley are good kids, but they are not innocent, Wordsworthian kids. They usually do the right thing, and they always feel bad when they do the wrong thing." Other critics believe the appeal lies in the rich imaginary world that Rowling creates. As the children of this generation read these books with fascination and love, they will pass the stories on to their children.

Responses to Literature

1. Compare and contrast the nonmagical human Muggles and the magical members of Hogwarts School in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. What role do the similarities and difference between these two worlds play in furthering the novel's themes?
2. Recall the role of the Sorting Hat in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. What do you learn about Harry during his encounter with it? Support your conclusions with evidence from the text.

3. Discuss the prejudice against the members of the house of Slytherin in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. What problems does this prejudice cause, and why?
4. Many of the characters in the Harry Potter series have names that seem to describe their personalities in some way. Make a list of ten names you think are especially fitting for their characters and, using examples from the texts, explain how you made your choices. Now make up a name for yourself. Explain the process you went through to choose the name and why it fits you.

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Tadeusz Rozewicz

BORN: 1921, Radomsko, Poland

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Anxiety (1947)

Collected Poems (1957)

The Card Index (1960)

Birth Rate (1968)

White Marriage (1974)

Overview

Tadeusz Rozewicz is a Polish writer who earned a high reputation at home and abroad for his innovative poetry, drama, and prose works. The horrors he witnessed during World War II and its aftermath sufficed the form and content of his early writing. His later works address more universal themes, always reflecting the alienation and disenchantment of modern life. His work is avant-garde and experimental, blending diverse forms and challenging many artistic conventions.



Tadeusz Rozewicz. Rozewicz, Tadeusz, photograph by Layle Silbert. Reproduced by permission of Layle Silbert.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Murdered Brother and Literary Footsteps to Fill Rozewicz was born October 9, 1921, in Radomsko, Poland, a small provincial town isolated from the country's larger cosmopolitan centers. His father was a minor judicial officer. His older brother, Janusz, a promising poet murdered by the Gestapo in 1944, was an early literary influence. With Janusz, Rozewicz cowrote a play in his teens and coedited a school newspaper. Shortly before Hitler's invasion in 1939, he withdrew from school and was forced to seek work as a physical laborer.

Fighting the Nazis and a Disillusionment in Humanity Rozewicz spent the first years of World War II in Radomsko, then under German occupation, at various jobs—messenger, factory worker, and building superintendent. For a year, he served in a peasant battalion of the underground “Home Army.” The experience gave him a firsthand view of the cataclysm that nearly leveled Poland and destroyed one fifth of its population. While a partisan, in 1944 he published his first writing under a pseudonym. After the war, Rozewicz was twice decorated for his military service.

Following the conclusion of hostilities, the twenty-four-year-old survivor moved to Kraków. From 1945 to

1949, he studied art history at the Jagiellonian University, and he began publishing satirical prose in various journals. Several of these pieces, along with his poems, appeared in Rozewicz's first postwar collection, *In a Spoonful of Water* (1946). In Kraków, Rozewicz decided to become a professional writer.

The Nazi occupation and the carnage of war had undermined the young author's faith in humanity. Having survived the Holocaust, his generation now found itself living under Stalinist Communism. Consumed with outrage and feeling guilty to have survived, Rozewicz channeled his frustration into a distinctive artistic response. His first significant volume of verse, *Anxiety* (1947), brought instant acclaim. Its stark, antipoetic diction and innovative verse arrangements seemed an appropriate poetic answer to the Auschwitz death camp and its bleak aftermath.

Rejecting Both Communist and Capitalist Ideologies Rozewicz's poetry filled eight collections in nine years. These works are devoid of ornament, stripped of form, and expressively blunt. Juxtaposing the feelings of a victim and a perpetrator of violence, Rozewicz described a human race with little faith and with a bleak future. Suspicious of all ideology, he perceived Western culture as a massive, deceptive spectacle. In 1949, Rozewicz left the more urbane Kraków for a crowded flat in Gliwice, a working-class city in southern Poland. He and his wife, Wiesława Kozłowska, another former partisan, stayed for two decades, raising two sons in relative poverty.

The Polish Communist regime politicized all aspects of life, mandating that art reflect socialist ideals and dogma. At a literary convention in 1948, Rozewicz openly ridiculed a Marxist journal that advocated adherence to socialist realism, and he was subsequently shunned by the writers' union. Because he refused to let his writing serve official policy, he was called an “internal émigré.” For a short time, Rozewicz relented, penning some sunny poems in conventional verse structures, which he later disowned.

In the mid-1950s, Rozewicz turned to creative prose. Some of his stories were satirical or surrealistic. One poignant prose work, “Excursion to a Museum” (1959), follows a boorish working-class group that takes a day trip to Auschwitz, and returns disappointed by its lack of entertainment value.

The Shift to Playwriting In 1957, at the age of thirty-six, Rozewicz became the first Polish writer of his generation to be honored with a collected edition of his poetry. The accolade not only made his work an instant classic but also gave a sense of closure to his verse. In the next two decades, he staged more than a dozen plays, many of them innovative and controversial. He made a splash in 1960 with the Warsaw premiere of his first major dramatic work, *The Card Index*. The play rejects plot, narrative logic, and characterization. The central figure is a nameless man who lounges on his bed

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rozewicz's famous contemporaries include:

Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004): The Polish American poet and translator who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980.

Günter Grass (1927–): A German novelist and Nobel Prize winner, most famous for his novel *The Tin Drum*.

Wisława Szymborska (1923–): The Polish poet and essayist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996.

Andrzej Wajda (1926–): A Polish film director and friend of Rozewicz, Wajda is one of the most prominent members of the Polish Film School.

Pope John Paul II (1920–2005): The first Polish pontiff (1978–2005) and first non-Italian pope since the sixteenth century.

throughout the play, contemplating his fingers and toes, and ignoring the other characters who question him. This outrageous work closed after nine performances, but has since become a staple in school curricula.

Several plays followed in rapid succession. *The Witnesses* (1962) took aim at the materialistic consumerism Rozewicz perceived in a society whose foundations, despite surface normality, had been seriously undermined. In *The Interrupted Act* (1964), Rozewicz constructed a play that resists performance. He left it incomplete, with disjointed stage directions, the value of which can only be determined by a director and cast.

His efforts to write an antiplay continued with *Birth Rate* (1968). Concerned with overpopulation, it features a subway train that fills up with more and more people. Several explosions follow, then the characters start flirting with each other, and end up cooing like pigeons. The title character of his next play, *The Old Woman Broods* (1970) sits as garbage accumulates around her. Again Rozewicz leaves the play deliberately unfinished so that it can be presented with different results and meanings.

Independence, before and after the Fall of the "Iron Curtain" By the 1970s, Rozewicz was one of Poland's most published and discussed writers. During a slight relaxation in censorship, he aroused controversy with the drama *White Marriage* (1974). The frank sexuality in this comedy of manners proved immensely popular with Polish (and non-Polish) audiences, but the establishment and the church both condemned it as pornographic. Rozewicz explored the life of one of his literary heroes, Franz Kafka, in the loosely biographical play *The Trap* (1982). The play also depicts the demise of artistic creativity, played out against visions of the impending "final solution"—Hitler's largely executed

plan for the systematic murder of all Jews in Europe. *The Trap* is Rozewicz's only drama to deal explicitly with the Holocaust.

Poland began undergoing a dramatic political crisis in the 1980s. The imposition of martial law in 1981 failed to deter the defiant Solidarity labor union, around which resistance to Soviet-supported authoritarian rule had coalesced. In 1989, the nation elected a non-Communist Parliament, as citizens' movements across Eastern Europe swept the Communists from power. Rozewicz, however, fell into an artistic silence, publishing only a few sporadic poems between 1983 and 1991. An ardent defender of his artistic independence, he refused to respond to the political and social ferment transforming Central and Eastern Europe. His brief flirtation with socialist realism in the early 1950s had made him wary of placing his art in the service of ideology—no matter whose ideology it was. While Poland was under martial law, Rozewicz had also declined the prestigious Juliusz Słowacki Prize (in 1982). By 1991, though, Rozewicz's self-imposed artistic withdrawal ended. He published five collections of poetry in the 1990s, and produced a memoir of his brother Janusz, *Our Elder Brother* (1992). In 2008, his volume of *New Poems* was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. He continues to live and write in Poland.

Works in Literary Context

Ever since his youth in the remote provincial town of Radomsko, Tadeusz Rozewicz has been an outsider, estranged from the establishment and impervious to literary trends. His work rejects both classical and avant-garde traditions, making literary influences on his work difficult to trace. While fighting in the Polish underground, Rozewicz intensively read Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and the nineteenth-century Polish bard Juliusz Słowacki. Some of the disturbing images in his work are reminiscent of Franz Kafka; his plays *The Hunger Artist Departs* (1976) and *The Trap* spring from Kafka's life and work. As a young writer in Kraków, Rozewicz met Julian Przybos, a leading avant-garde poet of the interwar period who became Rozewicz's editor, mentor, and an important creative influence. Aside from Przybos, however, Rozewicz shunned Kraków's literary community.

Society Unmoored A constant motif in Rozewicz's writing, across all genres and stages of his career, is a ferocious attack on the premises of Western civilization. Without a doubt, the harrowing experience of the Nazi occupation, followed by decades of totalitarian Communist rule, convinced the author that modern society had lost all ethical and spiritual coordinates. This perspective accounts for the absurdism in his drama, the depictions of violence and depravity in his poetry, and recurrent themes of nostalgia for an idealized past, longing for an unrealized utopia, and reverence for the wisdom of the elderly.

Antipoetry and Impure Form Rozewicz's disdain for the very foundations of culture is the basis for his approach to artistic expression. He rejects the formal conventions of poetry, such as meter, rhyme, and metaphor, and re-creates the poetic through subversive, contrary strategies. His early verse is minimalist, stripped of all pretense, and skeptical of the legitimacy of poetry itself, or of the ability of language to express reality. His experimental plays similarly subvert theatrical norms, conventions, and expectations. His body of work has fused prose, poetry, and drama into one idiosyncratic artistic whole, a strategy that some critics call "impure form." Alongside Wislawa Szymborska and Zbigniew Herbert, he is one of the most influential contemporary Polish poets and dramatists.

Works in Critical Context

Censorship and Celebration Tadeusz Rozewicz is critically regarded as one of the most talented and influential literary figures of post-World War II Poland. Critics, however, react quite divergently to his style. While some admire the spareness of his poetry, others contend that it makes the writing uneven. Rozewicz achieved recognition early in his career, but his standing in Poland wavered along with the politics of the times. He thrice won the State Award for poetry, and he was voted the nation's most distinguished living poet in 1971. At other times, however, his work was censored. Both the government and the opposition kept him at a distance, carefully assessing his work for covert political messages. Rozewicz's strict apolitical stance, and the increasingly provocative themes of his writings, fueled his notoriety in the 1960s. Critics attacked him as a nihilist, his former mentor Przybos denounced him, and prominent clergy referred to his work as "smut."

Internationally, his profile has risen steadily over the decades. His verse has been translated into numerous European and Asian languages, and his plays have been performed throughout Europe and North America. He has read his work many times overseas, and received numerous international prizes. In this time, his rejection of traditions both poetical and political has garnered him much admiration. Teresa Halikowska-Smith writes approvingly of "his famous 'anti-poetry' programme in which he re-stated Adorno's contention that poetry after Auschwitz was no longer possible," describing him as one of Poland's three best-known poets.

Responses to Literature

1. Analyze some of the ways Rozewicz addresses the subject of war in his poetry.
2. How does Rozewicz's poetic style underscore the message and meaning of his poetry?
3. In your opinion, is Rozewicz a nihilist—a person who believes in nothing? What underlying

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The dramas of Tadeusz Rozewicz mercilessly mock reality, society, and the theater itself. Here are some other works in the same deeply critical vein.

The Breasts of Tiresias (1947), an opera by Francis Poulenc. This surrealist opera begins with a woman becoming a man as her breasts turn into floating balloons.

The Bald Soprano (1950), a drama by Eugene Ionesco. In this play, two families engage in a nonsensical conversation that seems to demolish language itself.

Endgame (1957), a play by Samuel Beckett. A master who cannot stand up and his servant who cannot sit down are the protagonists of this classic play from the Theater of the Absurd.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972), a film written and directed by Luis Buñuel. A group repeatedly gathers and fails to dine together in this sly and hilarious attack on middle-class behavior.

Bus Stop (1983), a play by Gao Xingjiang. People wait for years as buses go by without stopping in this absurdist play by the Nobel Prize winner.

ethical or philosophical values are present in his writing?

4. Citing one or two of Rozewicz's plays, write an essay explaining how and why he aims to subvert theatrical conventions.
5. Rozewicz frequently writes about the need to construct new roles for poetry in society. What roles does he have in mind, and how does his work strive to do this?

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☒ Juan Rulfo

BORN: 1918, Apulco, Mexico

DIED: 1986, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Burning Plain and Other Stories (1953)

Pedro Páramo (1955)

The Golden Cock, and Other Film Scripts (1980)

Overview

Although Mexican author Juan Rulfo's literary production was meager, it has had an impact on Latin American narrative fiction. His popularity, not only in Latin America but also in Europe, may be explained by the fact that his collection of short stories *The Burning Plain, and Other Stories* (1953) and his novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) capture the essence of rural Mexico and its people in a powerful way.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Marred by Loss Born Juan Nepomuceno Carlos Pérez Rulfo Vizcaíno on May 16, 1918, in Apulco, Mexico, he was the son of Juan Nepomuceno Pérez, a civil servant, and María Vizcaíno Arias de Pérez. Soon after Rulfo's birth, his family moved to nearby San Gabriel, the city that left an indelible image in his mind and was later integrated into his fiction.

In San Gabriel, Rulfo attended elementary school with his two brothers and experienced the Cristero revolt (1926–1927), a religious war that broke out in central Mexico between armed Catholics and the anti-Catholic Mexican government over anticlerical provisions of the



Juan Rulfo Rulfo, Juan, photograph. AP Images.

1917 Constitution of Mexico. His father was assassinated in 1925, which left a profound emotional wound in the young boy, and two years later his mother died of a heart attack. In 1928, Rulfo and his brothers were sent to Guadalajara and were placed in the Luis Silva School for orphans, where Rulfo remained until 1932. Though Rulfo's life was unstable, the Mexican government had become politically stable with the formation of what became known as the Industrial Revolutionary Party.

Moved to Mexico City Wishing to continue his education, Rulfo registered at the Universidad de la Guadalajara, but on the same day he entered school, a strike was declared by the students and the university was closed. Because of the strike, he went to Mexico City early in 1934, where he attended the national university to study law. As soon as his financial aid provided by an uncle stopped, Rulfo abandoned the university and began to seek employment. From 1935 to 1945, he worked in the Department of the Interior as an immigration agent.

In Mexico City, Rulfo soon wrote a novel, of which little is known except the title, *Son of Affliction*, and a short fragment, "A Piece of Night," dated January 1940 but not published until 1959. Although this fragment seems to be a chapter of a longer work, it has the

structure of a short story. The fragment reflects the style and narrative technique of later stories by Rulfo, such as the aura of vagueness that hovers over the identification of people and things, as well as the indecisiveness of the characters, who are surrounded by a sense of mystery.

First Publications Rulfo had the good fortune to have as an immigration coworker Efrén Hernández, an accomplished short-story writer from whom he learned a great deal about the art of writing. Hernández introduced Rulfo to Marco Antonio Millán, the editor of the literary periodical *América*, where in 1945 Rulfo published his first story, “Life Is Not Very Serious about Things.”

The story, at one time rejected by Rulfo as unworthy of his ability, can only be considered inferior when compared with the two others he published the same year, 1945, while visiting Guadalajara. There he joined Juan José Arreola and Antonio Alatorre in the publication of the literary periodical *Pan*, where two of Rulfo’s best stories, “Macario” and “They Gave Us the Land,” appeared in July and November of that year. In these two stories Rulfo demonstrates a mastery of technique and style not present in his earlier efforts. These two *Pan* stories are his first significant works.

Balanced Work, Family with Writing In 1947, Rulfo married Clara Aparicio, with whom he had three sons, Francisco, Pablo, and Juan Carlos, and a daughter, Claudia. Back in Mexico City that same year, he took a job as a publicist, a position he held until 1954. Meanwhile, in 1952 he received a fellowship from the Centro de Escritores Mexicanos, which made it possible for him to dedicate more time to writing. It was around this time that he decided to collect his stories, both published and unpublished.

This first book, which was an immediate success, was published the following year under the title of one of the stories, *El llano en llamas, y otros cuentos* (*The Burning Plain, and Other Stories*) (1953). The Centro fellowship was extended for another year, and it is assumed that during this period he wrote the novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955). In 1955, he accepted a position with the government to develop the Papaloapan River basin in southern Mexico. The project was discontinued in 1956, and Rulfo was back in Mexico City. Two years later, he returned to office work, this time in charge of the archives of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística. He apparently liked this type of work, which was suitable for his rather quiet, withdrawn nature.

Brief Foray Back to Guadalajara Dissatisfied, though, with life in metropolitan Mexico City, in 1959 he went back to Guadalajara with his family in search of peace and tranquility. However, in this state capital, things went from bad to worse, his life being complicated by his heavy drinking and ill health. While working at Televisión, he found time to write a short novel, *The Cockfighter*, which he did not publish, and the script for a

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rulfo’s famous contemporaries include:

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): Swedish film and stage director widely recognized as one of the greatest and most influential filmmakers of modern cinema. His films include *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955).

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine writer responsible for the “Boom,” a literary movement of which Rulfo was part. His short-story collections include *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941).

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990): American conductor, composer, author, music lecturer, and pianist best known for his long conducting relationship with the New York Philharmonic. He wrote the music for Broadway musicals such as *West Side Story* (1957).

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): One of the most well known Latin American fiction writers, Márquez has cited Rulfo as a major influence. His novels include *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985).

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Mexican writer with whom Rulfo collaborated on his screenplay for *The Golden Cock*. Fuentes’s novels include *Aura* (1962).

short film, *The Plunder*. But in 1962, he went back to Mexico City, this time to stay for the rest of his life.

The public had to wait until 1980 to read another new book of fiction by Rulfo. *The Golden Cock, and Other Film Scripts* is a slender volume of only 143 pages that consists of his two major works of fiction and his film scripts. It is not clear whether these texts were reconstructed from the films, from the original scripts, or if they are the original versions written by Rulfo during the early 1960s.

Skilled Photographer In 1980, Rulfo also published *Inframundo*, which includes his photographs that primarily focus on the countryside of his native region, the southern, bare, arid, economically deprived part of the central Mexican state of Jalisco. While Mexico had become politically stable, expanded economically, and seen the rise of the middle class after World War II, there was still general neglect of the poorest segments of the population. Many peasants, like those who lived in Jalisco, were not much better off than they had been in 1910.

Suffering from lung cancer since 1985, Rulfo died of a heart attack in Mexico City on January 7, 1986.

Works in Literary Context

Rulfo’s favorite authors were novelists, especially the leading Russians, Scandinavians, Italians, Americans, and Brazilians. His interest in literature, and above all fiction,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is about a town full of dead people. The ghosts in this novel are seeking to tell their tales of death and betrayal. Here are a few other stories that feature ghosts as important characters:

Hamlet (1599–1601), a play by William Shakespeare. The ghost of Prince Hamlet's father returns one night to tell Hamlet he was murdered by his brother, King Claudius.

The Changeling (1980), a film directed by Peter Medak. In an eerie Victorian mansion, a man must unravel the mystery of a child poltergeist and determine what he wants.

Beloved (1987), a novel by Toni Morrison. In this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, a ghost comes back to haunt her mother, an escaped slave.

The Others (2001), a film directed by Alejandro Amenábar. This story of a woman and her children who move into an old mansion spirals out of control when supernatural events begin happening inside the house.

had its roots in his early years in San Gabriel. The local priest had left Rulfo's grandmother a small library that Rulfo utilized. The first novels he read were the books of adventure by Emilio Salgari and Alexandre Dumas. He then became interested in English, American, and northern European novelists. Among the contemporary French writers, one of his favorites was Jean Giono; among the Germans, Günter Grass; and among the Italians, Vasco Pratolini.

The Importance of Place and History in Pedro Páramo
Rulfo said that the idea of writing a novel about San Gabriel, the town where he had spent his boyhood, came to him "from an earlier period. It was, it can be said, almost planned about ten years before. I had not written a single line when it was already turning in my mind." The setting, the characters, the tone, and the narrative devices found in his short stories appear in the novel. The great difference is that in the novel all the people are dead. The idea of creating a ghost town where the inhabitants continue living after they have died came to Rulfo after a visit he made to San Gabriel, where, instead of finding the idealized town he had carried in his mind for years, he found a ghost town. The novel, *Pedro Páramo*, is the result of a desire to bring this town back to life.

Death In the novel *Pedro Páramo* the presence of death predominates. This preoccupation with death as a theme is also characteristic of most of Rulfo's short stories. In the town, the dead talk about killings and death, and in their graves, they continue their conversations

about death. Rulfo's preoccupation with death and violence was perhaps due to the many encounters he himself had with death—the revolution, the Cristero revolt of the late 1920s, and the violent deaths of some of his relatives. Both his father and his uncle were assassinated, and his grandfather was strung up by his thumbs and lost them.

Works in Critical Context

Although critics frequently categorize him as a regional writer, many commentators have acknowledged that his work transcends strictly regional concerns, embodying universal themes as well as metaphysical, social, and political questions. His literary reputation is based only on the stories in *The Burning Plain, and Other Stories* and the novel *Pedro Páramo*. Both garnered critical and popular praise, first in Mexico, then abroad.

Pedro Páramo Critics are in agreement that with the publication of *Pedro Páramo* the Mexican novel reached a high degree of perfection. In his essay "Landscape and the Novel in Mexico," Octavio Paz writes, "Juan Rulfo is the only Mexican novelist to have provided us an image—rather than a mere description—of our physical surroundings. Like [D. H.] Lawrence and [Malcolm] Lowry, what he has given us is not photographic documentation or an impressionist painting; he has incarnated his intuitions and his personal obsessions in stone, in dust, in desert sand. His vision of this world is really a vision of another world." In *The New Spanish-American Novel*, Carlos Fuentes writes, "The work of Juan Rulfo is not only the highest expression which the Mexican novel has attained until now: through *Pedro Páramo* we can find the thread that leads us to the new Latin-American novel."

Responses to Literature

1. In a group, discuss which ghosts in *Pedro Páramo* are most helpful and which are not. Why might this be?
2. Research San Gabriel, Mexico, the place that Rulfo most often wrote about. What do you think attracted him to the area? Write a paper that offers your findings and conclusions on the matter.
3. Does *The Golden Cock* seem like a film or a story? What's the difference? Write an essay that answers these questions.
4. In an essay, compare *Pedro Páramo* to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. What do the towns have in common?

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Rumi

BORN: 1207, *Balkh*

DIED: 1273, *Konya*

NATIONALITY: *Persian*

GENRE: *Poetry, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Mathnawi (1260–1273)

Diwan-i Shamz-i Tabriz (1244–1273)

Overview

Persian poet and Sufi mystic Jalal ed-Din Rumi (1207–1273) was a brilliant lyrical poet who founded his own religious order, the Mevlevi. His poetry showed original religious and wonderfully esoteric forms of expression, and his greatest work, the *Mathnawi*, has been compared to the Koran.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Young Traveler Born in Balkh (present-day Afghanistan), Jalal ed-Din Rumi left with his father at a young age, fleeing the Mongol invader of his day, Genghis Khan. On this trip in the city of Nishapur, the young Rumi was presented to the famous old poet Attar, who, according to legend, predicted his future greatness and gave him his *Book of Secrets*. Then, Rumi and his father traveled through Baghdad, Mecca, Damascus, and Erzincan, finally reaching present-day Turkey around 1217. They settled in Konya, where Rumi resided for most of his remaining life. His father was appointed to a high post

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rumi's famous contemporaries include:

Temüzin (1162–1227): Better known by his official title—Genghis Khan—Temüzin united many of the nomadic tribes of northeast Asia to found the Mongol Empire. His descendants would go on to conquer much of Eurasia, making the Mongol Empire the largest geographically contiguous empire in history.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): An Italian Catholic priest, Aquinas is best known today for his contributions to moral philosophy and theology. Many regard him as the Catholic Church's greatest theologian and philosopher.

Sheikh Saadi (1184–1283): An important Persian poet of the Middle Ages, Saadi is admired for both his poetry and his proto-sociological observations. A quote from one of his poems, emphasizing the oneness of all human beings, adorns the entrance of the United Nations Hall of Nations in New York City.

Roger Bacon (1214–1294): Also known as Doctor Mirabilis (wonderful teacher), the English philosopher and natural scientist Bacon was one of Europe's early advocates of empiricism and of what would become the scientific method.

Louis IX (1214–1270): The only canonized king of France, Louis IX was a great patron of the religious arts and a fervent crusader, though both his crusades (in Egypt and the Middle East) were near-complete disasters.

in the empire of the Seljuks of Rum (now in Turkey). With his father's death in 1231, Rumi inherited his post, becoming a man of means. As such, he could devote his efforts to more esoteric fields: poetry and mystic theology or philosophy. He pursued his muse in these fields until his death in 1273.

Religious Inspiration The event that had the greatest influence on Rumi's intellectual and moral life was his meeting with the Sufi mystic Shams al-Din Tabrizi. Shams was a believer in spirituality and inspired Rumi with a religious fervor. As a result of this friendship, Rumi dedicated most of his writings to this wandering Sufi. Another result was Rumi's founding of the Mevlevi order of dervishes—the dancing dervishes—to celebrate the mysteries of Divine Love. The unique trait of this order was that, contrary to general Muslim practice, Rumi gave a considerable place to music (the drum and reed) in the ceremonies. Rumi's followers, however, were intensely jealous of Shams, and their abuse and threats of violence forced him to flee Rumi's presence on more than one occasion. When Shams disappeared in 1248—murdered by Rumi's disciples, according to some reports—the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The inadequacy of language to communicate the deepest sorts of ecstasy or joy or pain or fear has often resulted in poetry that works on a more or less religious level, even when it is not explicitly religious poetry. Here are some examples of nonreligious poetry that become mystical in this way:

Leaves of Grass (1855), a collection by Walt Whitman. American poet Whitman's monumental lifework, this collection suggests a fundamentally different way of understanding and organizing human experience, an expansion of logic to allow for the perspective embodied in his famous lines: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes."

The Tao Te Ching (c. fourth century BCE), by Lao Tzu. Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's classic work of poetic philosophy, offers an understanding of the world around us as both unimaginably complex and also, somehow, intimately accessible and tangible.

Hymn to Aphrodite (c. sixth century BCE), a poem by Sappho. Regarded in antiquity as one of the greatest of lyric poets, Sappho's poetry (of which only fragments today remain) prompted the Roman writer Horace to write that her lyrics are worthy of "sacred admiration."

distraught Rumi began writing both poetry and philosophy at a frenetic pace.

Rumi's first work during this time is expressed as the voice of Shams. But, soon, Rumi found his own voice as evidenced in his work *Mathnawi*. This work is a collection of poetic narratives—poems, tales, anecdotes, and reflections—that illustrate the Sufi doctrine. His subject matter ranges from the saints of Islam to mystical interpretations of life, as well as commentaries on the Koran, all done in his clear and ecstatic prose verse.

A Poet of the First Order Rumi was a poet of the first rank. His style was simple and colloquial. His tales possessed diverse qualities: variety and originality, dignity and beauty, learning and charm, depth of feeling and thought. Taken as a whole text, though, the *Mathnawi* is rather disjointed; the stories follow one another in no apparent order. But it is filled with lyrical inspiration. Each small tale may be read separately, and one cannot help but be impressed by their succinctness.

Rumi died on December 17, 1273, in Konya. He was so well known in his lifetime that representatives of all major religions attended his funeral. He was not the first great Sufi poet, but his reputation for a wholehearted embrace of spiritual passion set him apart.

Works in Literary Context

Rumi's thousands of writings treated subjects ranging from love and sexuality to sadness and loneliness, from eternal beauty to human friendship. His *Mathnawi* is a staggering collection of over twenty-five thousand different pieces, which Rumi worked on for forty years. The anecdotes and stories in *Mathnawi* come from a variety of modes of Islamic wisdom—ranging from the Koran itself to common folktales—and are intended to illustrate and inspire others to emulate the Sufi way of life. On the other hand, Rumi's first collection of verses, *Diwan*, contains mystical poems focusing on ecstatic religious love and spiritual intoxication, among other things.

One Part Poet, Two Parts Spiritual Leader

Regarded by many as having provided the second-most important spiritual text of Islam, second only to the Koran, Rumi embarked on the path of Sufi mysticism at a relatively mature age. Chief in driving his development in this arena was first his relationship with the Sufi mystic Shams, and then Shams's somewhat mysterious disappearance. The general idea underlying Rumi's poetry is that God is absolute, ecstatic love. With his skillful evocations of this idea in its human contexts, he gained many devotees—and even disciples—during his lifetime. He may truly be understood as having been a spiritual leader, and the religious ardor with which his texts have been criticized and espoused by both contemporaries and followers attests to his importance in the cultural formation of a Persian-language, Sufi spirituality.

Works in Critical Context

Rumi's critical reception has varied widely over the centuries, and is most consistent perhaps only in its endurance. In particular, Western readers have often found themselves confused or puzzled by what seem like unsystematic narrative structures in the *Mathnawi*, complaining that the stories themselves do not cohere. At the same time, however, Rumi has long been acknowledged as a genius in the non-Western world, with many commentators considering his *Mathnawi* as second only to the Koran in both religious and literary significance.

Although some contemporary detractors found fault with his reliance on anecdotes and what they saw as a lack of metaphysics in his work, he was revered by many during his lifetime. Even presently, the Western world has come to acknowledge the historical and human importance of his work, with scholarship on Rumi proliferating from the late nineteenth century onwards. Indeed, Charles Haviland wrote in 2007 for the BBC News that Rumi had become the "most popular poet in America."

Divine Love for Sale

R. A. Nicholson, one of Rumi's early translators into English (1926), observed some time ago that Rumi was "the greatest mystical poet of any age," asking, "Where

else shall we find such a panorama of universal existence unrolling itself through Time into Eternity?” More recently (1994), John Renard has argued that “Rumi the teacher uses the prophets and their stories as a convenient reservoir of familiar and attractive images with which he catches the ear of his listener, and as the come-on with which he entices the prospective buyer into his shop. Leaving himself open to the charge of bait-and-switch merchandizing, what Rumi is really selling is a vision of the relationship of the divine to the human and of a way homeward.”

Responses to Literature

1. One of the central preoccupations of Rumi’s poetry is love, both divine and human. Analyze the messages Rumi is offering about love in one to three of his poems. To what extent is Rumi’s work relevant to modern life?
2. Preview Rumi’s *Mathnawi* and consider the structure of the verses. Why do you think many readers have found it difficult or confusing. Structure your response as an essay.
3. Examine some of Rumi’s writings on Sufi mysticism. Discuss the meditations Rumi offers on the meaning of life and God. Explain why you think his message is still popular with modern Western readers.
4. Rumi was a spiritual leader, a philosopher, and a poet. Compare and contrast his philosophy with that of a Western writer, such as Walt Whitman or Ralph Waldo Emerson. Structure your response as a thesis-driven essay.

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Salman Rushdie

BORN: 1947, Bombay (now Mumbai), India

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Midnight’s Children (1981)

Shame (1983)

The Satanic Verses (1988)

East, West (1992)

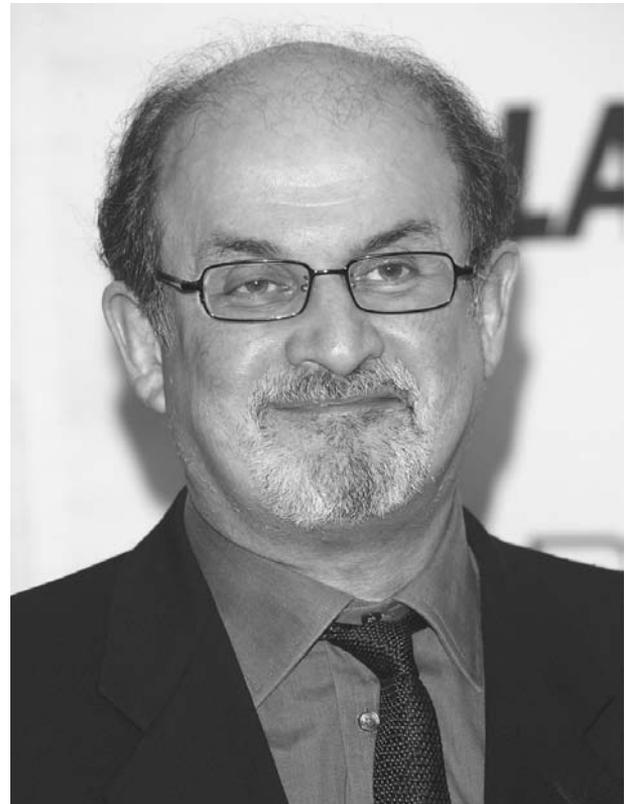
The Moor’s Last Sigh (1995)

Overview

Salman Rushdie began his writing career quietly, but he quickly became one of the twentieth century’s most well-known writers, not only for the ire he attracted from Islamic fundamentalists after the publication of his 1988 work, *The Satanic Verses*, but also for his thought-provoking examinations of a changing sociopolitical world landscape in works like *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up with India Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947, into a middle-class Muslim family



Salman Rushdie Evan Agostini / Getty Images

in Bombay (now Mumbai), India. His birth occurred just two months before India achieved its independence from England, a coincidence that later inspired his novel *Midnight's Children*. He is the only son of Cambridge University-educated lawyer and businessman Anis Ahmed Rushdie and teacher Negin Butt Rushdie. After attending the Cathedral Boys' High School, at fourteen he continued his education in England at the Rugby School. Speaking of his time there, Rushdie told *New Yorker* contributor Ian Hamilton he "had a pretty hideous time from my own age group: minor persecutions and racist attacks which felt major at the time. . . ." Rushdie's family joined him in England in 1962, though two years later they would move to Karachi, Pakistan to start a family business. In 1965 Rushdie enrolled at King's College, Cambridge. After earning a master's degree with honors in 1968, he pursued acting at the Fringe Theatre in London. In 1969 and into the 1970s, Rushdie worked as an advertising copywriter for Ogilvy & Mather and for Ayer Barker, but by 1975 was well into work as a full-time novelist.

Confident First Novel Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus*, initially attracted attention among science fiction readers. In a *Times Literary Supplement* review, Mel Tilden called the book "engrossing and often wonderful" and dubbed it "science of the word. . . , one of those novels some people will say is too good to be science fiction, even though it contains other universes, dimensional doorways, alien creatures and more than one madman." Though critics variously described the work as fable, fantasy, political satire, or magic realism, most agreed with *Times Literary Supplement's* David Wilson, who determined it "an ambitious, strikingly confident first novel."

In 1976 Rushdie became an executive member of the Camden Committee for Community Relations, which assisted emigrants from Bangladesh, and served until 1983. The experience of dealing with others' cultural displacement, along with other incidents about this time, sensitized him to the problem of racism in Britain, where he "saw the fractured identity of exiles, emigrants, and expatriates, their sense of loss. . ." and whereby he also "became sensitive to his own designation as 'Indian,' which simultaneously place[d] him inside and outside of British culture."

It is the Indian culture that informed his second book, *Midnight's Children*, an allegory which chronicles the history of modern India through the lives of 1,001 children born within the country's first hour of independence from Great Britain on August 15, 1947. Among these 1,001 is the novel's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, who tells his story in the context, wrote *New York Times* critic Robert Towers, of the country's "stupendous Indian past, with its pantheon, its epics, and its wealth of folklore. . . while at the same time playing a role in the tumultuous Indian present."

Winner of the Booker Prize *Midnight's Children*—which was then favorably compared to several important works, from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to V. S. Naipaul's *India: A Wounded Civilization* and has since made such lists as The Modern Library's 100 Best Novels at number ninety—was almost unanimously well received and won England's most exalted literary award, the Booker McConnell Prize for fiction, in 1981.

Rushdie's third book, *Shame*, also blends history, myth, politics, and fantasy in a novel that is both serious and comic but extends further with its exploration of such issues as the uses and abuses of power and the relationship between shame and violence. The idea for the novel, reported scholar Ronald Hayman, grew out of Rushdie's interest in the Pakistani concept of *sharam*—conveying a hybrid of sentiments, including embarrassment, modesty, and the sense of having an ordained place in the world. In developing this concept, Rushdie told Hayman, he began "seeing shame in places where I hadn't originally seen it."

Human Nature and Politics In discussing *Shame*, Rushdie also explained how he would "be thinking about Pakistani politics and. . . find there were elements there that [he] could use," having as he did a "feeling of stumbling on something quite central to the codes by which we live." These central themes would inform his next works, a nonfiction account of the political and social conditions Rushdie observed during his 1986 trip to Nicaragua, and his fourth novel, one which would make his name known even to nonreaders.

Exceptionally Controversial Fourth Novel *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie's fourth novel, outraged Muslims around the world. They pronounced it an insult to their religion. It caused demonstrations and riots in India, Pakistan, and South Africa, during which a number of people were killed or injured. The book was banned in several countries, and bookstores the world over were firebombed. Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini charged Rushdie with blasphemy, and proclaimed that the author and his publisher should be executed. Multimillion-dollar bounties were offered to anyone who could carry out this *fatwa*, or decree, and several people involved with the book's publication were subsequently attacked, seriously injured, and even killed, as was Rushdie's Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, who was stabbed to death at the university where he taught in Tsukuba, Ibaraki.

Rushdie's wife of thirteen months, author Marianne Wiggins, went into hiding with him when the death threat was announced. She soon emerged and indicated that their marriage was over. The first *fatwa* was delivered via radio on February 14, 1989. Although Rushdie began making public appearances again in 1996, every February 14 since, says Rushdie, he receives a "sort of Valentine's card" from Iran, reminding him they have not forgotten.

In 1990 Rushdie released the fantasy novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a bedtime story written for his son Zafar but one that also is said to have an important underlying message for adults. Critics interpreted the message as being not only a prescient call for global environmentalism but a suggestion that artistic freedom not be stifled. Richard Eder, in his *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, suggested, “Rushdie defies the Ayatollah’s curse. It is he, not his persecutor, who is the true defender of the Third World.”

Transitions to Shorter Fiction In 1995, six years after the *fatwa*, Rushdie published the collection *East, West*. Nine short stories sectioned into three different locations—India, Europe, and England. Its central theme is what the author described to *Newsweek* interviewer Sarah Crichton as “cultural movement and mongrelization and hybridity,” a reflection of Rushdie’s own background, a “heritage . . . derived from the polyglot tumult of multi-ethnic, post-colonial India,” wrote *Washington Post Book World’s* Shashi Tharoor. Each story in *East, West* contains characters embodying diverse cultures who interact on a variety of social and emotional planes, all of which, wrote John Bemrose in *Maclean’s*, “beneath their infectiously playful surfaces, ponder the imponderables of human fate.”

Likewise, in another 1995 work, Rushdie was not only back on the best-seller lists but again blending caricature, satire, and politics. *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is an undisguised parody of the politics and powerful fundamentalist leaders of India. Almost a mirror to *Satanic Verses*, the book was immediately pulled from Indian bookstores and subjected to an embargo by the Indian government.

While many like Paul Gray of *Time* asserted that *The Moor’s Last Sigh* “is much too teeming and turbulent, too crammed with history and dreams, to fit into any imaginable category, except that of the magically comic and sad,” Rushdie told Maya Jaggi in *New Statesman* that the novel was a “completion of what I began in *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*—the story of myself, where I came from, a story of origins and memory. But it’s also a public project that forms an arc, my response to an age in history that began in 1947 [when India became democratic socialist]. That cycle of novels is now complete.”

A Switch to Mainstream Fiction After publishing *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, which many found too complicated and too layered, Rushdie tried for more mainstream fiction. *Fury* appears initially to be more straightforward than many of his previous novels, but millennial paranoia, the Internet, American consumerism, and civil war in a small third world country are all themes that find their way into the work. Some critics commended Rushdie’s scathing view of American society; others concentrated on singularly successful elements of the work. Still others showed dismay, calling it instantly “obsolete.”

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Rushdie’s famous contemporaries include:

William Henry (Bill) Gates III (1955–): American entrepreneur and founding head architect and chief executive officer of Microsoft, named the richest man in the world by *Forbes* between 1995 and 2007.

Florence Griffith-Joyner (1959–1998): American track-and-field Olympic medalist who set world records in the 1980s.

Tony Kushner (1956–): American playwright most famous for his play *Angels in America*, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

Azar Nafisi (1955–): Iranian academic and writer best known for her best-selling book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*.

Jerry Seinfeld (1954–): Award-winning American comedian, actor, and comic writer whose show, *Seinfeld*, was named by *TV Guide* “the greatest American television program of all time.”

In late 2005 Rushdie recovered with *Shalimar the Clown*, the story of a former U.S. ambassador to India who is murdered by his Muslim driver. Mixing elements from the *Ramayana*, a classic work of Indian literature, Rushdie creates what one critic for *Kirkus Reviews* called “a magical-realist masterpiece.” Rushdie also published a number of essay collections. Some, such as “One Thousand Days in a Balloon” and “Why I Have Embraced Islam” were written after he was forced into hiding; others, showing a writer gradually forming his own concepts of truth and beauty in literature, date from before the *fatwa*. These works, *Commonweal* reviewer Paul Elie elaborated, “serve as a reminder that once upon a time”—before the wrath of fundamentalist Islam fell upon on the author’s head—“he was just another middling British writer, holding forth on this and that with more intelligence and enthusiasm than was required of him.”

Works in Literary Context

The Symbolism of Common Items Rushdie’s opus has contributed to the literary, cultural, and political world in many ways. Rushdie has primarily made a career out of poking fun at religious fanatics of every stripe. One technique of Rushdie’s to further this aim was to infuse common objects with enormous symbolic significance. In *Midnight’s Children*, for instance, pickled chutney is one of the main images for India’s cultural and social maelstrom; in *The Satanic Verses*, bad breath plays a vital role in telling good from evil. Few other writers dare to found

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also succeeded in publishing some of the most socially or politically controversial works of all time:

The Anarchist Cookbook (1971), a nonfiction work by William Powell. Written as a Vietnam War protest, this book contains “recipes” for bombs, drugs, and other contraband.

The Jewish Peril: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (1903), an opinion work by an unknown author. In this work, conspiracy theories are presented that urge anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and world dominance by way of media and other control.

Lolita (1955), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. The tragicomic Humbert Humbert in love with a preadolescent girl made critics violently oppose the “pornographic” implications and the book—as one of the “filthiest ever”—was often banned from publication.

entire symbolic structures on items as replaceable as a sheet with a hole in the middle, but to Rushdie it undoubtedly seems a worse exercise in illogic to kill people over the contents of a so-called “holy” book. Rushdie is known to take influence from a range of creative minds including Jorge Luis Borges, James Joyce, and Gabriel García Márquez.

Works in Critical Context

The Controversial Satanic Verses (1988) Rushdie’s habit of using the outrages of history made *The Satanic Verses* (1988) a book of frightening precognition. In the novel, a complex narrative that tells several stories within a story in a manner that has been compared to *One Thousand and One Nights*, Rushdie has a writer sentenced to death by a religious leader. The writer in the book is a scribe meant to chronicle the life of a prophet who—as the writer of the book enjoys riddling—both “is and is not” Mohammed. Creating this character, who exists within a psychotic dream of one of the two men who fell from the airplane, was a natural extension of Rushdie’s personal horror at fundamentalist Islamic rule. It is this dream sequence that ignited fatal riots in India and prompted Ayatollah Khomeini’s death sentence.

Religious objections to the novel stem from sections of the book that concern a religion resembling Islam and whose prophet is named Mahound—a derisive name for Mohammed. Many Muslims claim that Rushdie repeatedly makes irreverent use of sacred names throughout the book. For his part, Rushdie has argued that *The Satanic Verses* is

not meant to be an attack on the Islamic religion, but that it has been interpreted as such by what he called in the *Observer* “the contemporary Thought Police” of Islam who have erected taboos in which one “may not discuss Muhammed as if he were human, with human virtues and weaknesses. One may not discuss the growth of Islam as a historical phenomenon, as an ideology born out of its time.” *New Republic*’s Michael Wood noted, however, that “the pervading intelligence of the novel is so acute, the distress it explores so thoroughly understood, that the dullness doesn’t settle, can’t keep away the urgent questions and images that beset it. This is Rushdie’s most bewildered book, but it is also his most thoughtful.”

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Satanic Verses*. Think about who the narrator is. What does he say that helps identify him? How does he treat the people he speaks about in the book?
2. Also, as you read, consider what makes this book so provocative that someone or some group would want to censor it and hurt (or even kill) its author. Make note of anything you see as possibly objectionable (to yourself or others).
3. In *The Satanic Verses*, what clues reveal that Satan is the narrator? What do you think Rushdie is hinting at by having the devil tell a story of “holy” content? How do you think the book offends? Why, for example, do you think Muslim people would protest the work?
4. After you have made notes and discussed the narrative point of view and provocative content, take a partner from class. Each of you choose a side and set up a debate: One of you take the side of Salman Rushdie. One of you take the side of Ayatollah Khomeini. Before the debate, make a list of at least four reasons to support your side of the argument. Once you have your lists, exchange them. As you read your opponent’s list, choose one reason that you understand to some degree, and write that down on a side sheet of paper. You do not have to agree with that one supportive point. Just write it down.
5. Return your original lists to each other. Develop a short argument in your favor (as either Rushdie or Khomeini). Create a brief introduction that states your case, then bring in the reasons you listed. You may want to embellish with facts, metaphors (comparisons), authoritative quotes, or other important details to support your side. Add your opponent’s reason to the end of your argument. Precede it with a signal word or phrase—granted, true, understandably—to show your audience you are respecting your opponent’s way of thinking. This is called a concession. You do not give in or agree completely, but you acknowledge the opposition. Then, you return to your concluding points in your favor: “I still say. . . .”

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🏰 Thomas Sackville

BORN: 1536, *Sussex, England*

DIED: 1608, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Drama, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Tragedy of Gorboduc (1562)

“Induction” (1563)

“Complaint” (1563)

Overview

Thomas Sackville was by no means a prolific poet. Only four of his poems have survived, and one of those was only very recently discovered. Yet Sackville’s fellows and followers in the art of poetry were in no doubt as to the quality and importance of his work. Edmund Spenser himself, the arch-poet of Elizabethan England, praised Sackville’s “golden verses.” Spenser was particularly impressed by Sackville’s “Induction,” one of the two poems he contributed to the second edition of William Baldwin’s compilation *A Mirror for Magistrates* in 1563. This is the poem that is best known and most appreciated today as a pinnacle of Elizabethan poetry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Royal Ties and Inherited Wealth Throughout the sixteenth century, England underwent a number of cultural and artistic transformations, often collectively referred to by scholars as the English Renaissance or the golden age in English history. During this time of change, William Shakespeare composed his now famous plays and the Protestant Reformation became the dominant religious trend among the people. Sackville was born in 1536 in the Sussex village of Buckhurst, from which he took the title Baron Buckhurst when Queen Elizabeth I raised him to the peerage in 1567. Queen Elizabeth I

described Sackville as her “beloved kinsman,” for indeed Sackville was related to the queen; her mother, Anne Boleyn, was a cousin of his father, Sir Richard Sackville. It was this royal connection and the wealth that he inherited upon his father’s death in 1566 that confirmed him in his career as a courtier and statesman. In this role, first under Elizabeth and then James I, Sackville was named the first Earl of Dorset in 1605. It was a career for which his birth and breeding had always intended him, but as a young man—indeed, as a boy—he seems to have intended for himself the career of a poet.

Oxford Education and the Inns of Court Very little is known of Sackville’s education, but he attended Oxford before settling, at about age seventeen, in London in 1553. The next year he was married to Cecily, daughter of Sir John Baker, and a year later he was admitted to the Inner Temple, where his father was one of the governors. The Inner Temple was one of the Inns of Court, institutions that functioned both as law colleges and finishing schools for young gentlemen intending the sort of political career that Sackville was eventually to take. The Inns of Court were also the center of literary life in mid-Tudor London. Jasper Heywood, in his translation of Seneca’s *Thyestes* (1560), includes Sackville among the best of the Inns of Court writers. In Heywood’s work “Sackville’s sonnets, sweetly sauced” are singled out for praise. These sonnets were probably about love: in “Sackville’s Old Age” the poet tells the reader that his “lusty pen” has written many a “sweet complaint of woeful lover’s wrong.” But none of them are now extant, and it is on his “tragical” poetry that Sackville’s reputation now stands.

Commentator on Literature: A Protector of the Arts After having written a number of poems by the year 1559, Sackville wrote little, apart from the last two acts of *Gorboduc* (1562), during the rest of his life. In 1561, he contributed a commendatory sonnet to Sir Thomas Hoby’s translation of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*. It returns to the old theme of



Sir Thomas Sackville Archive Photos / Getty Images

worldly pomp that fuels the tragedies in “Bochas,” and Sackville demeans the gorgeous palaces that “royal kings” erect and elevates the virtues of good courtiership: “what in Court a courtier ought to be.” More important, one sees here Sackville taking up a marginal position in the literary world: a praiser of other men’s works who does not undertake anything considerable himself. So, for example, in 1571 he wrote a commendatory letter regarding Bartholomew Clerke’s translation of Castiglione’s book into Latin. Indeed, later poets praise Sackville for his support of literature and learning. In 1602 Thomas Campion dedicated his *Observations in the Art of English Poesy* to Sackville, calling him “the most honorable protector of all industrious learning.” And in 1608 Joshua Sylvester dedicated to him part of his translation of Guillaume de Salluste, Seigneur du Bartas’s *Divine Weeks and Works*, including him among the “noble host/Of learned friends to learning.”

Farewell to Poetry But Sackville had bade farewell to poetry long before. His last poem, written between 1566 and 1574, is the recently discovered “Sackville’s Old Age.” Here he returns to the theme of the transience of life. He also discusses his reading habits as a younger man (he was still only in his mid-thirties) and lists his favorite English authors: Chaucer, “my guide, my master”; Surrey, especially his “English Virgil”; and Wyatt’s translations of the Psalms. But, he wrote, it was time to say

good-bye to poetry: “O trifles past, adieu, I ye forsake.” He was good to his word, and no other poems of his have been discovered. Characteristically, Sackville died while working at the Council Table in London on April 19, 1608.

Works in Literary Context

Although Sackville’s overall literary production is small, since he opted instead for a career in diplomacy and statesmanship, his works are recognized for their historical, if not literary, value. His only play, *The Tragedy of Gorboduc* (1565), cowritten by Thomas Norton, is considered the first English neoclassical tragedy, and the opening sequence of his poem “Induction” established a humanistic model for a *hiemal chronographia*, or description of winter, which succeeding generations of writers sought to emulate.

Tragedy as Drama The idea that tragedy was a kind of drama was still a new one in mid-Tudor England. In fact it was Sackville himself, in collaboration with a fellow Inner Templar, Thomas Norton, who wrote the first neoclassical tragic drama in English, *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, which was performed at the Inner Temple in 1562. *Gorboduc* is an important milestone in the history of English “vernacular humanism,” the enrichment of the native literary tradition by incorporating into it material and forms from classical literature, in this case the plays of the Latin tragic dramatist Seneca.

The drama as tragedy is an extremely important development in literature, if for no other reason than that it was the preferred form of William Shakespeare. Some of Shakespeare’s most highly acclaimed works—*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and a slew of others—are all considered dramatic tragedies, a form that did not really exist in English literature before Sackville collaborated on *The Tragedy of Gorboduc* with Thomas Norton.

But throughout the sixteenth century the word *tragedy* was also used in its medieval sense to refer to a short narrative poem dealing with the fall of some great man or woman into misery. This conception of tragedy found its fullest expression in John Lydgate’s translation of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum illustrium* as *The Fall of Princes* (1431–1438). And it was with this kind of tragedy, and indeed this book, that Sackville’s short poetic career began.

In the early part of 1555, the printer John Wayland determined to bring out a new edition of Lydgate’s “Bochas” and procured Baldwin and seven others to undertake an appendix dealing with English princes. The book, which appeared in 1559, has a notoriously difficult publishing history, but it seems that the young Sackville—a lad of nineteen years or so at the time—was appointed to write the tragedy of Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, one of the henchmen of Richard III. Baldwin collected nineteen tragedies, and the book went

to press, but it was halted in mid-print on orders from the government.

Hiemal Chronographia The “Induction” begins with a traditionally medieval description of a winter landscape, in which the poet Sackville wanders, and where, overtaken by the sudden fall of night, he muses on the mutability of fortune. It was these three stanzas that most haunted the minds of Sackville’s Elizabethan followers. The opening description of a winter landscape, with its “blustering blasts,” “small fowls flocking,” and “naked twigs . . . shivering all for cold,” is in itself entirely conventional; every detail can be traced to several earlier poems. But the skill and sensitivity with which these details were knit together made Sackville’s three stanzas the “classic” example of a hiemal chronographia, the one that later poets imitated when they wished to write their own descriptions of winter. Spenser, to take only the most prestigious of Sackville’s imitators, for example, modeled the landscape of his “January” eclogue (1579) on Sackville’s poem.

Works in Critical Context

Although critical evaluation of Sackville’s body of work has varied greatly throughout the four and a half centuries since his productive period, it is difficult to challenge the importance of Sackville in the history of English literature. While some modern critics find his verse artificial, his influence on esteemed authors such as Shakespeare and Spenser, in addition to the laudatory comments of his contemporaries, mark it as exceptional. Sackville’s *Gorboduc* shares much the same fate: admired by his contemporaries for its innovation and appreciated by scholars for the same, it is now rarely considered an outstanding piece of literature outside of these considerations of its revolutionary form.

Gorboduc Even so, *Gorboduc* is the first English drama to receive serious literary criticism. Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie* praised its “stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca’s style, and full of notable morality.” However, deploring its lack of unities of place and time, he declared it could not be “an exact model” for all tragedies. Nonetheless, Sackville’s *Gorboduc* has come to be esteemed as a landmark in the history of English literature. Irby B. Caughen Jr. noted that “not only is it the first ‘regular’ English tragedy (one that follows classical rules), but it is marked by innovations that were to become traditional.”

“Induction” Sackville’s contemporaries enthused about his literary contributions; for instance, Edmund Spenser lauded Sackville’s “golden verses.” However, in light of the small quantity of Sackville’s writings, some twentieth-century critics have questioned the value of his literary achievement. “Sackville’s reputation owes too much to an interpretative treatment of literary history,” wrote J. Stewart. “Whether such a treatment regards his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sackville’s famous contemporaries include:

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): English dramatist and poet who utilized the tragedy drama frequently in his body of work.

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616): Spanish author whose *Don Quixote* is often regarded as the first novel.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592): French author who pioneered the essay as a genre of writing.

Elizabeth I (1533–1603): Queen of England and of Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603.

Takeda Shingen (1521–1573): Prominent Japanese feudal lord who sought control over all of Japan during the “warring states” period.

Andrea Andreani (1540–1623): Italian wood engraver who was among the first to use chiaroscuro, a technique in which light colors are contrasted with darker ones.

work as the last flower of medievalism or as a prelude to Spenser, is immaterial.” Nonetheless, Sackville’s “Induction” remains most appreciated today as “one of the first truly great Elizabethan poems,” according to Alan T. Bradford.

Responses to Literature

1. Although Sackville helped pioneer the tragic drama, he did not define its limitations nor even produce the most notable examples of the form. Read *Gorboduc* and, in a short essay, compare it in style, theme, and content with another popular tragedy—something from Shakespeare or Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. Can you find elements of Sackville’s work that seem to have influenced Shakespeare and Marlowe?
2. Thomas Sackville was in his mid-thirties when he considered himself an old man. Indeed, Shakespeare, too, wrote about being an old man when he was also in his thirties. Using the Internet and the library, research life expectancies and living standards during Thomas Sackville’s lifetime. Then, in a short essay or story, explore the following question: What role does an author’s life expectancy play in shaping his or her work? How would your life be different if you viewed your thirties as “old age”? Would your plans for the next ten years change? If so, how?
3. The hiemal chronographia—the description of winter—at the beginning of Sackville’s “Induction” inspired a number of poets after Sackville. Read

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of tragedy in the history of literature. Only forty years after Sackville helped write *Gorboduc*, Shakespeare wrote what is arguably the premier example of the form, *Hamlet*. Here are a few more examples of literary tragedies:

Death of a Salesman (1949), a play by Arthur Miller. In this work, Miller describes the slow and painful demise of title character Willy Loman under the weight of the "American Dream."

A Doll's House (1879), a play by Henrik Ibsen. In this work, Ibsen explores and, indeed, criticizes the norms of marriage in the nineteenth century.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (1604), a play by Christopher Marlowe. In this work, Faust (whose Latin name is Faustus) sells his soul to the devil for knowledge and power.

"Induction." One of the marks of effective poetry is that it enables you to see clearly what is being described. Do the opening lines of "Induction" qualify? Try it out. When you read these lines, what do you picture? Now, make a drawing, painting, or sculpture of what you see when you read these lines. Then, in a short essay, reflect on the connection between the written words and what you've produced—think about which descriptions inspired which images.

4. Critics have argued that as Sackville's career advanced, his work decreased in literary merit. Read *Gorboduc*, "Induction," and "Complaint," then respond to this criticism of Sackville's work. Do you agree or disagree? In your response, cite examples from the texts to support your argument.

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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

BORN: 1900, Lyons, France

DIED: 1944, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Southern Mail (1929)

Night Flight (1931)

Wind, Sand, Stars (1939)

The Little Prince (1943)

Overview

While best known in the United States for what has become a classic in children's literature, the fable *The Little Prince* (1943), Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is recognized in his native country of France for the humanism and reflection shown in his adventurous tales of aviation. Largely autobiographical, his work depicts not only the freedom and dangers of flight but also the importance of comradeship and dedication to duty. With a distinctive lyrical, poetic prose style, Saint-Exupéry shares his philosophy of life: individuals should always endeavor to reach their true potential.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged Upbringing Saint-Exupéry was born in Lyons, France, on June 29, 1900, into an aristocratic family. After his father, an insurance salesman, died of a stroke in 1904, Saint-Exupéry's mother moved with her children to Le Mans in 1909. As a child, he attended a Jesuit school in Le Mans, followed by two private schools, one in France, the other in Switzerland. After failing his final exam at a university preparatory academy, he entered the École des Beaux Arts to study architecture.

Seeking Flight A turning point in Saint-Exupéry's life came in 1921, when he began military service in the second regiment of Chasseurs (a French military unit, usually light infantry) and began training as a pilot. Flying was not entirely new to him. He had flown for the first



Antoine de Saint Exupéry © Mary Evans Picture Library / Alamy

time when he was twelve. After making his first solo flight in July 1921 and receiving his pilot's license in 1922, Saint-Exupéry studied at the school for air cadets and at Avord Air Base. That same year he had a serious crash, the first of many.

During the time of his flight training, Saint-Exupéry had become engaged to Louise de Vilmorin, later known as a writer in her own right for such novels as *Madame de* (1951). Because Vilmorin's family objected to his career in the air force, Saint-Exupéry took a position with a tile manufacturing company in Paris, a job his fiancée's family procured for him. After Vilmorin ended their engagement in 1923, Saint-Exupéry held various jobs over the next several years—bookkeeper, journalist, and truck salesman. In the meantime, his first work, "L'Aviateur," was published in a small-press magazine in 1926. Already evident in this story are what would become recurring aviation themes in Saint-Exupéry's work: the connection between a pilot and his plane and his fellow aviators.

Flying Postal Flying a postal route for the commercial airline Aéropostale, Saint-Exupéry was instrumental in establishing mail routes across the African deserts and the Andes Mountains in South America. By 1928, Saint-Exupéry became the director of the remote post at Cape Juby in the Spanish Sahara, surrounded by rebel tribes.

This experience proved to be of utmost importance to his development as a writer, as the desert would become the background for *The Little Prince* and *The Wisdom of the Sands* (1948). During these years at Cape Juby, Saint-Exupéry wrote his first novel, *Southern Mail* (1929), which celebrated the postal pilots who regularly flew dangerous missions as quickly as possible so as to win a commercial advantage over railway and steamship mail carriers.

On July 14, 1929, Saint-Exupéry and a friend broke the transatlantic speed record. That same year, Saint-Exupéry received a French Legion of Honor Award for peaceful negotiations with the Moors and Spaniards in Morocco. He assumed a post in South America, where he met his future wife, Consuelo Suncin, widow of an Argentine journalist whose literary friends included French playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio. In 1931, Saint-Exupéry published *Night Flight*, a novel that praises the heroism of those pilots who pioneered flying at night on the South American postal routes.

Crashes By 1934, Saint-Exupéry was a publicity agent for Air France and, beginning in 1935, served as a foreign correspondent for an assortment of newspapers. Toward the end of 1935, the Air Ministry sponsored a contest to reward the pilot who could break the time record between Paris and Saigon. Saint-Exupéry took to the air with his mechanic, André Prévot. On the leg from Benghazi to Cairo, the duo was disoriented by a head wind that slowed their progress, and they crashed in the Libyan desert. Near death, they were found by Bedouins five days later. One of the best-known sections of Saint-Exupéry's memoir *Wind, Sand, and Stars* (1939) recounts their struggle to survive without provisions. In 1937, Saint-Exupéry and Prévot were seriously injured in yet another plane crash, this one in Guatemala, an additional experience captured in *Wind, Sand, and Stars*.

Wartime By the time *Wind, Sand, and Stars* was published, Europe was being engulfed in what would become World War II. Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, expanded its military and expressed territorial ambitions beginning in the mid-1930s. While countries like France and Great Britain practiced a policy of appeasement when Germany annexed parts of Czechoslovakia and Austria in 1938, they declared war after Germany invaded Poland and took it over in 1939. Hitler and Germany's imperial ambitions became clearer in 1940, when many other European countries were conquered by Germany. France was one of the countries that came under Nazi control, though free French forces fought on the side of the Allies (Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States and the Soviet Union).

After the fall of France in World War II, Saint-Exupéry was decorated with the Croix de Guerre for his part in a reconnaissance mission over German-occupied territory. At the end of 1940, he lived in self-imposed exile in New York for two years, a time of productivity during

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Saint-Exupéry's famous contemporaries include:

Amelia Earhart (1897–1937): Earhart was the first woman to pilot a plane over the Atlantic Ocean. She disappeared over the Pacific Ocean while attempting to circumnavigate the earth in 1937.

George Orwell (1903–1950): Novelist Orwell exhibited a contempt for authority in his books. His most popular works are the political satires *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949).

Louis Armstrong (1901–1971): A gifted jazz trumpeter and singer, Armstrong pioneered the scat technique, a method of singing in which meaningless syllables are improvised, often in imitation of the sounds of a musical instrument.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Exploring time and reality, Borges wrote fiction of imagination, philosophy, and dream that changed Latin American literature. His publications include the short story collections *Ficciones* (1944) and *The Aleph and Other Stories* (1949).

Charles Lindbergh (1902–1974): American pilot who rose to international fame after making the first solo transatlantic flight in 1927.

Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989): Japan's longest-reigning emperor (1921–1989), Hirohito oversaw his country's military invasion of China and defeat in World War II as well as Japan's postwar transformation into an economic superpower.

which he worked on *Flight to Arras* (1942), *The Little Prince* (1943), *Letter to a Hostage* (1950), and *The Wisdom of the Sands* (1950). All four of these works reveal Saint-Exupéry's belief that moral values were necessary for the rebuilding of Europe. Saint-Exupéry returned to active duty with the army in 1943. On July 31, 1944, he was reported missing in action, presumably shot down somewhere over the Mediterranean. In 2004, divers found the tailpiece of the plane Saint-Exupéry was flying three miles off the French coast between the cities of Marseille and Cassis.

Works in Literary Context

Diverse Influences Influenced by André Gide, Henri Bergson, and André Breton, Saint-Exupéry nevertheless is recognized as an innovator in literature due to a distinctive vision that transcends ordinary perception. The effect that reading Plato had on Saint-Exupéry's life and writing is also clear. He agreed with the philosopher that courage is the basest virtue, as it is composed of vanity, anger, and stubbornness. Saint-Exupéry's greatest inspi-

ration, though, was his experience as a pilot. Multiple crashes, defying death in the desert, the exhilaration of flight, and connecting with other pilots all form the foundation for his work.

Universality Characterized by a childlike altruism and a universal approach to the purpose of life, Saint-Exupéry's works surpass their immediate topics. Although much of his writing focuses on aviation, a deeper humanistic message is nonetheless recognizable. Saint-Exupéry shuns psychological jargon, thereby avoiding an overly moralistic tone. Instead, truth subtly appears in his stories, almost as if it is there by accident, which is most likely what Saint-Exupéry, believing that essential things are invisible to the eyes, intended.

Personal Enlightenment In *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry presents his recurring theme of personal enlightenment through the exploration of both the outside world and one's inner world. Saint-Exupéry warns against being narrow-minded and judgmental, as these qualities can only result in ignorance. From the story's onset, the narrator emphasizes the fact that adults are uninteresting, superficial, and self-righteous in their assumption that their limited perspective is the only one possible. Children are clearly more imaginative because they are open-minded and receptive to the beauty and mystery of the universe. As the little prince travels from planet to planet, the grown-ups he meets reveal characteristics that are contradictory and shallow, and it is the little prince who points out their shortcomings. Through the symbolic little prince, Saint-Exupéry shows that a willingness to seek what is unknown and unseen in the world is the key to understanding life itself.

Introspection and spiritual growth, too, require honest exploration of not only the physical world but also one's own feelings. A most important lesson to be learned from *The Little Prince* is at once simple and complex: recognizing one's responsibilities to the world as a whole leads to one's understanding of the responsibilities involved in maintaining a relationship with another person. When, for example, the fox asks to be tamed even though he knows how to tame himself, he explains to the little prince that being willing to give a part of oneself to another person makes the recipient, as well as everything associated with that person, more valuable to the world and to the self. The essence of man, Saint-Exupéry writes in *Flight to Arras*, is a "knot of relationship with others." Despite the emotional commitment involved, creating ties with another person enriches the meaning of the world.

Works in Critical Context

At the time of their publication, Saint-Exupéry's books were generally acclaimed by critics. Much of what he wrote, however, with the exception of *The Little Prince* fell out of favor with critics and scholars after his death. Since the 1950s, *The Little Prince* has been treated by

critics and the general public alike as a work of children's literature, while his novels and nonfiction have been relegated to the categories of "aviation history" or "World War II literature." Thus, his works have generally been overlooked in the canon of twentieth-century literature. Since the 1980s, there has been a renewed, though still limited, interest among English-speaking critics in the author and his books. Since the mid-1980s, critics have gradually returned to the assessment made by the author's own countrymen during his lifetime: that Saint-Exupéry wrote in a style and voice both distinctive and impressive and that his observations and metaphors have an enduring relevance and power beyond their historical setting.

The Little Prince When *The Little Prince* was published, Saint-Exupéry's fans were dismayed by what one critic described as "his sudden trajectory into absurdity." Years later, however, even the harshest critics of *The Little Prince* began to consider it Saint-Exupéry's most insightful work due to the sophisticated philosophical concepts that are wrapped in a seemingly simple package.

Evaluating the story's autobiographical components and Saint-Exupéry's concern for the fate of Europe under fascist control, scholars have commented on his motives for writing the fable. While some critics have argued that such political elements place *The Little Prince* in a category other than children's literature, others generally recognize it as an allegory that can be enjoyed by children as well as adults. Maxwell A. Smith has commented:

Because of its poetic charm...its freshness of imagery, its whimsical fantasy, delicate irony and warm tenderness, it seems likely that *The Little Prince* will join that select company of books like La Fontaine's *Fables*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, which have endeared themselves to children and grown-ups alike throughout the world.

Responses to Literature

1. Saint-Exupéry wrote *The Little Prince* after France had been captured by the Nazis during World War II. What symbols of war and exile can you find in the fable? Research major occurrences that took place during World War II. Create a timeline showing events that were occurring in the United States during Saint-Exupéry's lifetime.
2. Investigate the disappearances of famous aviators during flight. What are some explanations you can think of that would account for their vanishing? Choose one of these individuals and write a newspaper article reporting his or her disappearance. Also, write a newspaper obituary for the person you chose. Because your purpose for each piece is different, make sure you use appropriate diction and style in both.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

For Saint-Exupéry, flight was more than a feeling of exhilaration. It provided spiritual enlightenment. Other works that feature aviators who find freedom and divinity in the air are:

I Was Amelia Earhart (1996), a novel by Jane Mendelsohn. In this book, Mendelsohn writes in the voice of Amelia Earhart, who tells what happened after Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, disappeared off the coast of New Guinea in 1937.

The Spirit of St. Louis (1953), a nonfiction book by Charles A. Lindbergh. Lindbergh won a Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for his account of his adventurous journey across the Atlantic in his single-engine plane.

West with the Night (1942), a memoir by Beryl Markham. British-born adventurer Markham was a horse trainer on her family's farm in Kenya before becoming the only female bush pilot in Africa. In 1936 she achieved fame for being the first woman to fly across the Atlantic solo from west to east.

3. What distinguishes children from adults in *The Little Prince*? Do you think the difference is based on age or on something else? Why do you think the little prince wants to return home instead of remaining with the pilot, especially given their friendship? Create a presentation based on your findings and conclusions.
4. While some characters in *The Little Prince* see Drawing Number One as a hat, others think it illustrates an elephant inside a boa constrictor. What is the meaning and significance of these different perspectives? What view do you have? Write a paper that offers your interpretation.

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Saki

BORN: 1870, Akyab, Burma

DIED: 1916, Beaumont-Hamel, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Reginald in Russia (1910)

The Chronicles of Clovis (1912)

Beasts and Super-Beasts (1914)

The Watched Pot (1914)

Overview

The reputation of Hector Hugh Munro (pen name: Saki) rests primarily on his short stories, which convey whimsical humor, fascination with the odd and eerie, and



H. H. Munro, also known as, Saki *Munro, H. H., aka Saki, photograph. Source unknown.*

worldly disillusionment with hypocrisy and banality. Written between the end of Queen Victoria's reign and the beginning of World War I, Munro's works memorialize the luxurious world of the upper class. The stories present characters who, through capriciousness or eccentric behavior, get into odd situations from which they usually escape by means of their quick wits; at the same time, their clever remarks and cynical views expose the arbitrariness and artificiality of their society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From the Far East to Victorian England Munro was born in the Far East, where his father was a colonel in the British military police. Upon the death of his mother, Munro and his two siblings were sent to live with their grandmother and aunts in Devon, England. The aunts, Charlotte and Augusta, squabbled endlessly over trivialities, involved the children in their petty jealousies, and enforced on their young charges a strict Victorian regimen. Munro, being the youngest, quite delicate and pale, escaped the worst of the aunts' tyranny, and he soon became adept at devising ways to bend their inflexible and contradictory rules. *Reginald*, *Clovis Sangrail*, and *Comus Bassington*, witty and self-absorbed comic heroes in Munro's future work as Saki, clearly developed from his own experiences.

Government Service When Munro was seventeen years old, his father retired and returned to England to look after his nearly grown children. Over the next few years, they traveled as a family throughout the Continent. Munro followed in his father's footsteps and subsequently spent about a year as part of the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He returned to England in 1894 because of failing health. He worked at the British Museum and published only a short story, "Dogged," during the next six years. Munro wrote a historical study, *The Rise of the Russian Empire*, in 1900 and, from 1902 to 1909, was a foreign correspondent for the *Morning Post* in the Balkans and Paris.

Career as a Writer While working as a foreign correspondent, Munro published his first collection of stories, titled *Reginald* (1904). In 1910, his second collection of short fiction was published, misleadingly titled *Reginald in Russia*—only the title story concerns *Reginald*. The rest of the tales continue Saki's satiric examination of upper-class country life or venture into fable-like lessons. This successful collection was followed by *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1912), which introduced two of his more popular characters, *Clovis Sangrail* and *Bertie Van Tahn*.

In 1912, Munro published a novel, *The Unbearable Bassington*, whose hero, *Comus Bassington*, resembles *Reginald* with an undeniable mean streak. Munro continued writing stories for newspapers. These works were

collected in *Beasts and Super-Beasts* (1914); as the title suggests, animal stories take up a large part of the collection. Munro's second novel, *When William Came: A Story of London under the Hohenzollerns* (1914), is a fantasy about life in England under German occupation led by Kaiser Wilhelm. It is one of the first examples of "invasion literature," a genre that emerged with the onset of World War I and dealt with the anxieties of invading foreign powers.

The Watched Pot and Other Drama Although he is best known for his fiction, drama seems to be the genre best suited to Munro's abilities. His plays show his strengths—witty dialogue, complexity of plot, and energetic pace—to advantage, while his weaknesses, which appear in his fiction as gratuitous witticisms and pompous asides in the narrative, are absent. For example, in 1914, he wrote *The Watched Pot*, a comedy of manners centered on several women who are determined to marry a wealthy man and are thwarted by his territorial aunt.

World War I Less than a month after war was declared in early August 1914, Munro enlisted in the cavalry. Munro saw the declaration of war as a chance to act nobly and heroically in an unquestionably good cause. Hoping to get into the fighting more quickly, Munro transferred into the infantry, joining the Royal Fusiliers. He enjoyed being a soldier, hiking for miles with heavy backpacks, serving long hours as camp orderly, and expressing contempt for those who had not enlisted. Proud of his ability to keep up with much younger men, Munro rose to the rank of corporal and eventually lance sergeant, but he refused offers of a commission as an officer, content to be a simple soldier among his comrades.

He was shipped off to France in 1915, and his wit and macabre sense of humor survived the horrific conditions he found on the battlefield. In her "Biography of Saki," Ethel Munro recalled that at Christmas 1915 her brother sent her this version of a carol: "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night / All seated on the ground / A high-explosive shell came down / And mutton rained around."

In June 1916, Munro spent a short leave in London with his sister and brother. He then returned to the front to fight in several battles, during which time he suffered a return of his old malaria. On November 14, he received a fatal wound while in no man's land during a night march. Two collections of Munro's stories appeared posthumously, *The Toys of Peace* (1919) and *The Square Egg* (1924).

Works in Literary Context

Respected as a master of the short story during his own lifetime, Munro has been ranked with the Frenchman Guy de Maupassant and the American O. Henry as a craftsman of the first order. As A. J. Langguth has pointed out in *Saki: A Life of Hector Hugh Munro, With Six Short Stories Never Before Collected*, some of Munro's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Saki's famous contemporaries include:

Wilhelm II (1859–1941): The last German kaiser (emperor), Wilhelm reversed the careful diplomacy of his grandfather Wilhelm I and his advisor Otto von Bismarck in favor of a more forceful, bellicose policy. These changes upset the diplomatic of the European powers and led to the outbreak of World War I. At the end of the war, he abdicated the throne and lived out his life in exile.

L. Frank Baum (1856–1919): American author of children's fantasy, Baum is most noted for the Oz series, which began with the classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900).

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919): The twenty-sixth President of the United States and a leading Progressive politician, Roosevelt made a name for himself with his exploits as a soldier and naturalist. His larger-than-life personality made him a popular and much-admired public figure; the teddy bear was created in his honor.

Hermann Hesse (1877–1962): A German author, Hesse wrote about the pursuit of enlightenment in such books as *Siddhartha* (1922) and *Journey to the East* (1932). These themes led to a revival of interest in his work among American counterculture readers during the 1960s.

W. B. Yeats (1865–1939): The first Irishman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Yeats stands as one of the central figures of Irish literature in the twentieth century. Both his poetry and his work with the Abbey Theatre as dramatist and manager were hugely influential in their respective fields.

efforts reflect the influence of the master of the trick ending, O. Henry. However, Saki's stories are not innocent or sentimental like O. Henry's, but mix wit with outrageousness, humor with seemingly justified malice.

Wit and Irony, with a Touch of Lyric Epigrammatic wit, a strong dramatic sense, and a satiric concern with the ironies of social life mark Munro's stories, in which the traditions of the comedy of manners give dialogues central importance. However, in turning to the uncanny, Munro at times moved beyond satire altogether, yet even then he often returned to irony and further extended the comedy of manners by transforming the supernatural and the animal into subjects of a social wit. The descriptive developments in Munro's later fiction likewise accommodate a pervasive sense of the ironies of human life—even if a lyrical voice emerges briefly, at the end, from the battlefield.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

These works, like those of Munro/Saki, are considered by many critics to be paragons of the short-story genre:

"Big Blonde" (1929), a short story by Dorothy Parker. One of the icons of the Jazz Age, Parker turned her famous caustic intellect towards examining the role of women at the end of a decade that supposedly saw their liberation, instead finding sadness and bitterness.

"Gift of the Magi" (1906), a short story by O. Henry. This story features a classic O. Henry "twist ending" and a moral message on the power of love and the transient importance of material possessions.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. The first of Borges' works to be translated into English, this story of espionage and literary adventures through time-space anticipates later theories in quantum mechanics.

"Bernice Bobs Her Hair" (1920), a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Before he made his name as a novelist, Fitzgerald developed a following as a short story author; this tale, which was a featured cover story in *The Saturday Evening Post*, anticipates Fitzgerald's later tales of flappers and "liberated women."

Suppressed Sexuality Significantly, women in Munro's work are usually hateful guardian aunts or elderly duchesses; they only rarely are young attractive girls of sexual interest to the main characters. Munro remained a bachelor throughout his life, and this fact, plus some suggestiveness in his work, has led modern readers to conclude he was homosexual. Moreover, rumors of Munro's homosexuality circulated in publishing circles during his lifetime. But sexuality is kept far below the surface in Munro's work. While the artist in Munro learned much from Oscar Wilde's writing, he also may have learned from Wilde's notorious trial and imprisonment in 1895—which concerned Wilde's homosexuality—what kind of public behavior would not be tolerated by English society.

Fairy Tale Cruelty? Readers and critics often mention the apparent cruelty and heartlessness in Munro's stories. Writing in 1940 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Elizabeth Drew explained and justified this lack of fellow feeling: "The cruelty is certainly there, but it has nothing perverted or pathological about it. . . . It is the genial heartlessness of the normal child, whose fantasies take no account of adult standards of human behaviour, and to whom the eating of a gypsy by a hyena is no more terrible than the eating of Red Ridinghood's grandmother by a wolf. The standards of these gruesome tales

are those of the fairy tale; their grimness is the grimness of Grimm. . . . He deliberately chose a pseudonym for his writings—Saki, the cupbearer whose 'joyous errand' was to serve the guests with wine in the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. He never sought intimacy with his readers, or gave them his confidence." To see the cruelty in Saki as fantasy, and to set it next to the unsparing details of nursery rhymes and fairy tales, is to understand that even though in Saki's stories terribly unfair things happen, he provides a satisfying sense of justice done and human decency restored that can appeal to children and adults alike.

Influence Popular and respected as a master of the short story during his lifetime, throughout the twentieth century Saki has been ranked with the Frenchman Guy de Maupassant and the American O. Henry as a craftsman of the first order. Funny, original, sometimes bizarre, and at times creepily frightening, Saki's work clearly has left its mark on the British writer P. G. Wodehouse, whose farcical stories of well-heeled, empty-headed young men about town are reminiscent of the Reginald stories. The world of Wodehouse's characters Bertie and Jeeves is essentially the same as that of Reginald and Clovis. In these worlds, it is always about the turn of the century; England is the unquestioned center of the universe; life has been made comfortable for one by others; and a young man need only think about his social life, the quality of the food, drink, and entertainment provided, and the fun he can dream up.

Works in Critical Context

Some literary critics in the 1960s and 1970s argued that there is a serious side to Munro that goes beyond mere entertainment to explore weighty moral issues. Certainly some of his stories can be analyzed to discover serious concerns. But it would be misleading to maintain that Saki's greatness rests on the breadth of his moral imagination. For better or worse, his genius resides in his stories, in which the qualities defined by Coward as "the verbal adroitness of Saki's dialogue and the brilliance of his wit" shine most brightly.

Perhaps responding to the strain of seriousness in Munro's writings, the English critic J. W. Lambert, in a 1956 essay in the *Listener*, noted Saki's affinities to Kipling and to two other English writers, William Makepeace Thackeray and, surprisingly, George Orwell: "All four had Anglo-Indian backgrounds and divided childhoods. They were all fascinated by the social display and organization of life 'at home'; their works [express] the colonial mentality, a little disappointed, sometimes more than a little embittered. Thackeray's self-conscious moralizing bubbled up often in Saki; so did Kipling's emotional afflatus. . . . The same feelings, in different generations, drove Orwell to prodigies of bleak panache and turned his snobberies upside down, and drove Saki in 1914 not only to join the Army when well over age but consistently to refuse a commission."

Responses to Literature

1. Contrast Munro's use of irony to that of O. Henry's. Choose a story from each author that features an ironic twist or ending and, in an essay, discuss how their literary techniques—in both the build-up to and the payoff of the ironic twist—are similar and different.
2. With a classmate, discuss how Munro's journalistic experience seems to inform his literary style. Use examples from a text to support your ideas.
3. Choose two Munro stories that feature eerie or supernatural elements. In an essay, analyze his use of these elements in his story and compare them to supernatural elements used in two stories by H. P. Lovecraft, another master of short horror.
4. With a classmate, discuss the significance of the hyena in Munro's "Esme." What do you feel the author is satirizing in this tale? Report your findings to the rest of the class.

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George Sand

BORN: 1804, Paris, France

DIED: 1876, Nohant, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS: *Consuelo* (1842) *The Devil's Pool* (1846) *La Petite Fadette* (1849) *She and He* (1859) *Le Marquis de Villemer* (1860)

Overview

George Sand was a celebrated yet controversial French writer whose personal life oftentimes overshadowed her creative production. Known for its blend of romance and realism, her writing was effortlessly spontaneous and prolific without sacrificing style and form. Sand stated that the primary happiness in life was to be in love, and so she focused on relationships in most of her novels as she tackled the complexities of politics, society, and gender.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Aristocratic Upbringing in Berry Sand was born Armandine Aurore Lucille Dupin in Paris on July 1, 1804, to parents from very different backgrounds. Her father, Maurice Dupin, was an aristocratic soldier, while her mother, Sophie Delaborde, was the daughter of a bird trainer. After her father's death, the four-year-old Sand was entrusted to her paternal grandmother at the family estate of Nohant in Berry, a historical region in France that would later be the setting of several of her novels.



George Sand Mansell (Time Life Pictures / Getty Images)

Reached Maturity in Paris When her grandmother died, Sand, then seventeen, was reclaimed by her mother and taken to Paris. At eighteen, Sand married Casimir Dudevant, a local army officer, and later gave birth to two children. Unmoved by her coarse, unromantic husband, Sand grew restless and left her husband and children in 1831 to pursue aspirations of a literary career in Paris. Because divorce in France was illegal at this time, she battled in court for a legal separation that included property rights and custody of one of her children. She eventually prevailed, and Michel de Bourges, who advised her during her legal proceedings, became her lover. Supportive of her strength of character, Bourges persuaded Sand to express herself politically. His influence colored the remainder of Sand's writing, which increasingly reflected her feminist and political concerns.

The failure of the 1830 revolution in France had coincided with the failure of Sand's marriage. The three-day 1830 revolution saw the removal of King Charles X, an ultraroyalist who had ruled since 1824. Charles wanted to restore the absolute powers of the monarchy and the supremacy of the Catholic Church. Leftist forces allied with the upper bourgeoisie to replace Charles with Louis Philippe of the house of Orléans as a "citizen-king," who agreed to be ruled by the desires of the rising industrial plutocracy.

An Unconventional Woman Free from the social restrictions of marriage, Sand actively pursued life as a writer, moving in literary circles, selling articles, and being mentored by writers, such as Henri de Latouche and Charles Sainte-Beuve. Sand began an affair with Jules Sandeau, a young intellectual who embraced an exciting life that took advantage of Paris's cultural offerings. Encouraged by her daring partner, Sand began dressing as a man to gain access to venues that were usually closed to women.

Though the identity of the young cross-dresser was soon public knowledge, Sand enjoyed shocking the Parisian cultural scene and continued to elicit gossip with her dress and her habit of smoking in public (considered scandalous for a woman). While these actions endangered her reputation, they also gained her literary and social fame. Inspired by Sandeau's own literary output, she continued to write, collaborating with Sandeau and eventually publishing her first solo novel, *Indiana* (1832), under the male pseudonym George Sand.

Failure in Love Affects Writing Jealous of her success, Sandeau broke with Sand, who was thrust into a period of despair. Disillusioned with men and love, she wrote *Leila* (1833), a novel exploring women's inability to follow their true desires. Soon after, she began a relationship with a young poet, Alfred de Musset, and joined him in his travels throughout Italy.

Sand, a would-be anarchist, candidly admitted that she hated all political factions and said that had she been

born a man, she would be dangerous. Shortly after the failed 1830 revolution she wrote *Une Conspiration en 1537*, in which she dramatized the anarchist she herself could not be: the Renaissance prince Lorenzo de Medici, who assassinated his cousin Duke Alexander de Medici of Florence in 1537. When Sand gave Musset *Une Conspiration en 1537* as a gift in 1833, Musset rewrote the play into his masterpiece, *Lorenzaccio* (1834), preserving Sand's main characters and events.

Lovers Abroad Though her liaison with Musset ended when she fell in love with the doctor who was tending to Musset during an illness, Sand's time in Italy with Musset sparked her first autobiographical writing, a series of Italian travel vignettes published as *Letters of a Traveler* in 1847. With a talent for observation, Sand explored the nature of travel and the customs of Italy through a series of vivid portrayals of cultural life abroad.

For nine years, Frédéric Chopin was Sand's next famous lover. During Sand and Chopin's time together in relative seclusion in Majorca, Spain, both artists enjoyed a period of great creative productivity. Sand completed another novel before turning to a literary investigation of socialism, a growing movement in the nineteenth century that criticized the Industrial Revolution for creating inequality and poverty while advocating for the even distribution of wealth. Her dream for a more egalitarian society was reflected in *Horace* (1842). Sand, who believed that country people had a better understanding of democracy, idealized provincial life, an approach that would influence writers from Thomas Hardy to Leo Tolstoy. However, her provincial idealism also gained criticism for its patronizing tone and its rustic, historically inaccurate portrayals.

Autobiographical Novel Sand's next work demonstrated a more autobiographical feel. Though she denied it was drawn from her own life, her 1859 novel *She and He* depicts her tumultuous relationship with Musset. The work was immediately attacked for its depiction of Musset, who had died two years earlier, and Sand was criticized for using men to her advantage. *She and He* even provoked Musset's brother to write a novel in response, and *Lui et Elle* (He and She) appeared just six weeks after Sand's book.

Though Sand was criticized for her "unfeminine" affairs and her carefree, dismissive attitude toward convention, she was still held in high regard, and her 1860 novel *Le Marquis de Villemer* appeared to great fanfare. Along with several of Sand's other works, it was later adapted for the stage. As a result, Sand began writing plays with rustic settings, creations that were extremely popular and reinvented Sand in the eyes of French society.

Retired to Nohant After her 1872 retirement from the world of Paris theater, Sand settled at the family estate in Nohant. There, she spent time caring for her granddaughters, for whom she wrote several stories and novels

emphasizing self-confidence, acceptance, and change. She grew less concerned with politics, preferring to enjoy the company of family and friends, including authors Gustave Flaubert and Ivan Turgenev. After suffering from a stomach ailment that was most likely cancer, Sand died in her bedroom on June 9, 1876.

Works in Literary Context

Social Explorations Sand is best known for bold statements about the rights of women in nineteenth-century society, her exploration of contemporary social and philosophical issues, and her depiction of the lives and language of French provincials. Each period of her literary career focused on specific themes and had its own set of influences. Her rustic novels are perhaps the truest representation of her form as an author.

Rebellion Against Marriage The works of her first period reflect her rebellion against the bonds of marriage and deal largely with the relationships between men and women. Clearly influenced by English poet Lord Byron and French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sand wrote romantic novels full of passionate personal revolt and ardent feminism, attitudes that went against societal conventions and outraged her early British and American critics. These early novels, including *Indiana*, *Lélia*, and *Jacques* (1834), were extremely successful and established Sand as an important literary voice for her generation.

Philosophical Concerns The works of Sand's second period—such novels as *Consuelo* (1842–1843) and *The Miller of Angibault* (1845)—reveal Sand's increasing concern with contemporary social and philosophical problems. These novels were strongly influenced by French philosopher and politician Pierre Leroux and deal specifically with humanitarianism, Christian socialism, and republicanism. Considered by many to be her least credible works, their tone is often didactic and their plots obviously contrived.

Pastoral Novels Sand's pastoral novels, which depict rural scenes and peasant characters, form the last phase of her career. Set in Berry, where she grew up, *The Haunted Marsh* (1846) and *Francis the Waif* (1847–1848) were inspired by her love of the French countryside and her sympathy with the peasants. Realistic in background detail and distinguished by their gentle idealism, these pastoral works are considered by many critics to be Sand's finest novels. Although she continued writing until her death, few of the works written after her pastoral period are remembered today.

Influence Sand's work is recognized as an important step in the development of the French novel, influencing writers like George Eliot and Thomas Hardy with their provincial idealization and portrayal of rustic lifestyles. An admired colleague of Victor Hugo and Alexandre

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sand's famous contemporaries include:

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880): Author of *Madame Bovary* (1856), the story of an adulterous woman in provincial Normandy, this French novelist carried on a lengthy correspondence with Sand.

Jenny Lind (1820–1887): Lind was a Swedish opera singer known as the "Swedish Nightingale." Her first acclaimed role was Agathe in Weber's *Der Freischütz* at the Swedish Royal Opera in 1838.

Matthew Brady (1822–1896): The celebrated American photographer is credited with the creation of photo-journalism. He took famous photographs of the American Civil War as well as well-known people of the era.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902): Stanton was the leader of the early American women's rights movement as well as a social activist. She wrote the "Declaration of Sentiments," which was read at the first women's rights conventions in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York.

Georges Bizet (1838–1875): Bizet was a French composer and Romantic pianist. He wrote the opera *Carmen*, which premiered in 1875.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881): This Scottish writer was famous for his work *The French Revolution, a History* (1837). He also wrote *Past and Present* (1843) and *Frederick the Great* (1858–1865).

Dumas, Sand was also an inspiration to Gustave Flaubert, with whom she had a meaningful literary friendship. Opposites in most every regard, she and Flaubert shared ongoing intellectual arguments over their conflicting literary philosophies.

Works in Critical Context

Considering the moral climate during her lifetime and her open defiance of social standards, it is not surprising that Sand became better known for her personal life than for her literary accomplishments. From the onset of her career, Sand's flamboyant lifestyle colored serious critical evaluation of her work. Reception to Sand's literature was oftentimes hostile, with critics dismissing her "adolescent" work based on what they perceived to be her lack of morality.

Criticism through the Years When several of her novels were adapted for the stage, Sand enjoyed great popular success, and many of her books were reissued to a receptive audience. In spite of this, much of Sand's work was dismissed as autobiographical and beneath literary notice. After her death in 1876, Sand's literary popularity declined. There is evidence that Sand's most

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sand's novels idealized country life as simple, democratic, and egalitarian. Here are other works of literature and art that explore pastoral life:

Lyrical Ballads (1798), a poetry collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Wordsworth and Coleridge were major figures in the Romantic movement. Romantic poetry often featured pastoral figures such as milkmaids and shepherds.

So Big (1924), a novel by Edna Ferber. Ferber's novel, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1925 and has been adapted for film multiple times, follows the life of a young woman of Dutch descent living in an Illinois farming community.

Sunrise (1927), a film by F. W. Murnau. This movie shows a man's reconciliation with his country wife after his affair with a city woman.

ardent attackers could have been motivated by gender bias, professional or personal jealousy, or genuine aversion to her art and politics. Whatever their driving force, Sand's critics succeeded in diminishing her accomplishment, and she fell into obscurity. Sand's work was rediscovered in the 1950s and began to receive serious attention from feminist critics who have since redefined her place in the French literary canon.

Indiana Marked by Sand's critique of marriage and her incipient feminism, *Indiana* outraged some early British and American critics, but was extremely popular with the general reading public, prompting early reviewers to speculate about the author's sex by identifying both masculine and feminine qualities in the novel's language and characterizations. More recently, critics have argued the extent to which *Indiana* can be interpreted as a feminist novel, and many have studied Sand's manipulation of conventional gender categories through her transformations of Ralph and Raymon. The work has also been read as a critique of bourgeois domesticity and its circumscription of women within the household or private sphere. Modern scholarship has also noted that Sand crafted the central personalities in *Indiana* from stock characters of romance. Raymon, for example, is a Don Juan type.

Many critics have offered interpretations of the novel, including Carol V. Richards. In *George Sand Papers: Conference Proceedings, 1978*, Richards interprets the novel as "not the failure of love . . . but the triumph of an ideal love which wins for the heroine the happiness she missed in her loveless marriage."

Responses to Literature

1. Sand's scandalous personal life often influenced public reception of her novels. Can you think of other public figures who are known more for their lifestyles than their work? Write an essay that compares such figures to Sand.
2. Sand's childhood in rural France doubtlessly influenced her pastoral novels. In what ways does Sand's work fit into the broader tradition of pastoral art? Create a presentation that demonstrates this link.
3. Though Sand publicly denounced marriage and scorned tradition in her personal life, she was ambiguous as to whether women should have the right to vote. In a paper, address the following questions: Do you think this fact influences whether Sand should be considered a feminist writer? Why or why not? What reasons can you think of for Sand's ambivalence in regard to this monumental issue in women's rights?
4. Sand's pen name was adopted from the last name of her lover. Research the origins of other famous pen names such as Lewis Carroll or Mark Twain. Create a pseudonym for yourself and explain why you chose that particular name in a paper.
5. Sand's personal relationships with literary and cultural figures influenced her work and life. In an essay, address these questions. Can you find common characteristics that her lovers shared? Why do you think Sand seemed not to stay in love with one person for long? How is such behavior classified in the realm of psychology?

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❏ Sappho

BORN: *Between 630 and 612 BCE, Lesbos, Greece*

DIED: *c. 570 BCE, Lesbos, Greece*

NATIONALITY: *Greek*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

Sappho: A Garland; the Poems and Fragments of Sappho (1993)

Overview

Regarded by ancient commentators as the equal of Homer, the ancient Greek poet Sappho expressed human emotions with honesty, courage, and skill. Sappho has been the subject of controversy, and most of her work has been lost over the centuries or deliberately destroyed. It is clear from the existing verses, however, that she deserved her reputation, and her work warrants continued study and appreciation.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Native of Lesbos Very few details of Sappho's life survive, and many classicists note that these accounts have



Sappho *Sappho, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

been thoroughly interwoven with legend, myth, and supposition. The only standard—but unreliable—source of information about Sappho is the *Suidas*, a Greek lexicon compiled at around the end of the tenth century. Based on earlier lexicons, scholarly commentaries, and excerpts from the works of historians, grammarians, and biographers, the *Suidas* records that Sappho was a native of Lesbos, an island northeast of Athens in the Aegean Sea, and that she was probably born in either the city of Eresus or Mytilene. Her father's name is given as Scamandronymus and her mother's as Cleis. Evidence also suggests that Sappho had three brothers and that her family belonged to the upper class. According to traditional accounts, she lived briefly in Sicily around 600 BCE, having been forced into exile by political strife on Lesbos.

After returning to her homeland, Sappho married a wealthy man named Cercylas, had a daughter named Cleis, and spent the rest of her life in Mytilene. There she organized and ran a *thiasos*, or academy for unmarried young women. The school was devoted to the cult of Aphrodite and Eros, where beauty and grace were held as the highest values. Ancient commentary attests that this *thiasos* ranked as one of the best, and Sappho enjoyed great renown as its dedicated teacher and spiritual leader. Some legends of Sappho's life indicate that she lived to old age, but others relate that she fell hopelessly in love with Phaon, a young sailor, and, disappointed by their failed love affair, leaped to her death from a high cliff—a story that has been largely discredited by modern scholars.

The Tenth Muse In antiquity, Sappho was regularly counted among the greatest of poets and was often referred to as “the Poetess,” just as Homer was called “the Poet.” Plato hailed her as “the tenth Muse,” and she was honored on coins and with civic statuary. Her principal work consisted of nine books, which the grammarians of Alexandria arranged according to meter. The earliest surviving texts date from the third century BCE. Because the first book contained 1,320 lines, it can be surmised that Sappho left approximately 12,000 lines, 700 of which have survived, pieced together from several sources. Only one complete poem remains, quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the rest ranging in completeness from several full lines to one word. Many of the lines lack beginning, middle, or end because they have survived on mummy wrapping in Egyptian tombs, the papyrus having been ripped crosswise of the roll, lengthwise of the poem. The long rolls of papyrus, made from the stalks of a water plant, also survived in battered condition in the dry Egyptian climate in garbage dumps and as stuffing in the mouths of mummified crocodiles.

In 1898 knowledge of Sappho's works increased dramatically when scholars discovered third-century BCE papyri containing additional verse fragments. In 1914 archaeologists excavating cemeteries in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, unearthed papier-mache coffins composed of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sappho's famous contemporaries include:

Nebuchadrezzar II (630–562 BCE): The Babylonian king who plays a significant part in the biblical *Book of Daniel*. Nebuchadrezzar II is also remembered for the construction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Solon (638–558 BCE): Credited with laying the foundations of Athenian democracy, Solon's reforms were brought about by a crisis in the Athenian city-state during the 590s. Solon opened up Athenian politics to a wider range of citizens and strengthened the city's economic and social structures.

Zedekiah (sixth century BCE): The last king of Judah, Zedekiah was installed by Nebuchadnezzar II as a puppet ruler but led his country in revolt against Babylon.

Anaximander (610–546 BCE): A Greek pre-Socratic philosopher, Anaximander was one of the first Greek thinkers to place primary importance on science and mathematics; his teachings would bear fruit in his protégé Pythagoras, who would espouse a philosophy that "all was number."

scraps of paper containing fragments of literary writings, including some by Sappho. These findings sparked renewed interest in Sappho and inspired new critical studies of her texts.

Scandalous Love Poet Sappho's works have been admired for their stylistic merit from her own time onward, and while her literary merit remains secure, Sappho's personal reputation has been controversial even to the point of sometimes overshadowing her status as a poet. Her passionate verses and attitudes toward love have attracted a great deal of attention and garnered rumors about her sexual preference. In fact, the opinion that Sappho's sexual orientation was lesbian is so entrenched that the term itself is derived from the name of her homeland.

Works in Literary Context

Lyric Poetry Sappho wrote poetry at a time when Greek literature was dominated by the influence of Homer and the epic narrative. Yet the tradition of lyric poetry was even older and had played an important part in Greek history. During Sappho's time, lyric poetry enjoyed a successful revival. Sappho seems to have been not only familiar with Homer but also with the poets Terpander and Alcaeus, both from Mytilene, and Archilochus, a poet from the nearby island of Paros. As was typical of Greek lyric poetry in general, Sappho's verses

were highly personal, conveying deeply felt emotion in a simple, translucent style. Her emphasis was on emotion, on subjective experience, and on the individual.

Sappho's Love Songs Music, too, as in all early Greek lyric poetry, served an important function in her works: Most of Sappho's poems are monodies, songs composed for solo singers and intended to be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre. Much of Sappho's poetry commemorated a certain event taking place in her *thiasos*, but she also composed narrative poetry, hymns, and epithalamia, or marriage songs. Sources from antiquity have recorded that Sappho was especially famous for the latter and that she was a frequent guest at weddings where she would sing a song composed especially for the couple. Scholars contend that Sappho's epithalamia raised this ancient folk tradition to a new level of artistic excellence.

Highly Personal Voice Most commentators regard her eloquence, the individual voice revealing itself and communicating with the reader, as the hallmark of Sappho's style. The speaker in the poems, generally assumed to be Sappho herself, displays a wide range of emotion, from tender protectiveness and friendship to erotic longing and jealousy; from playful chiding of her pupils to extreme anger toward those who have proven disloyal; and outright vilification of the headmistress of a rival *thiasos*. Scholars also praise Sappho's ability to analyze her feelings even as she is enacting them, sacrificing none of the immediacy and intensity of the moment but demonstrating remarkable insight into her own situation. Commentators emphasize, however, that the spontaneous tone of Sappho's verse is deliberate rather than accidental.

Sapphic Meter Although she employed a less refined language, Sappho's poetry evinces an innate verbal elegance, the result of her writing in the melodic Aeolic dialect and of her development of the graceful Sapphic meter. Consisting of four lines, the Sapphic verse form calls for three lines of eleven syllables each and a fourth line of five syllables. This construction dictates the use of three spondees (a foot composed of two accented syllables) in each line, with variations allowed in the fourth and eleventh syllables of the first three lines, and in the final syllable of the fourth line. It is unknown whether Sappho invented the meter that bears her name, but she probably perfected and popularized it; thus, it clearly came to be connected with her.

Works in Critical Context

Many critics consider Sappho the greatest female poet of the classical world and the most accomplished and influential of a group of lyric poets who were active in Greece between 650 BCE and 450 BCE—a period often designated the Lyric Age of Greece. Although little remains of her work, Sappho's poetry has been acclaimed since antiquity for its emotional intensity, directness, simplicity, and

revealing personal tone. It has also been the subject of much critical controversy, however, with various scholars debating the precise nature of the eroticism typical of Sappho's verses.

Influential Muse Throughout the centuries, Sappho has remained a fascinating subject for poets, novelists, dramatists, and biographers. David M. Robinson claimed, "[N]early every thought in her fragments . . . has been borrowed or adapted by some ancient Greek or Roman poet or some modern poet in English, Italian, French, German, or modern Greek." Despite the fact that only a minuscule portion of Sappho's canon remains, fragments of her verses continue to have a powerful effect on readers and critics alike. Guy Davenport, one of Sappho's most prominent translators, remarked that "many of the fragments are mere words and phrases, but they were once a poem and, like broken statuary, are strangely articulate in their ruin."

Willis Barnstone, another eminent translator of Sappho's works, observed that "there is no veil between poet and reader. . . . Sappho makes the lyric poem a refined and precise instrument for revealing her personal and intense experience of life." For example, unlike her literary counterparts, who mainly depict their immediate natural surroundings, Sappho concentrates instead on how such scenes affect her emotionally and on the associations it calls forth in her. She uses the same direct and personal tone in frankly portraying her attraction to some of the young women in her *thiasos*. While some readers have lauded her passion, eroticism, and lack of self-consciousness, others have faulted it as grossly indelicate.

Modern Reputation In the nineteenth century, Sappho emerged as the symbol of passion, especially among the Romantics. In 1816 the German classicist Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker published "Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreit," an essay that laid to rest controversies surrounding Sappho's personal life and redirected the focus of criticism to her works. During the last two centuries, scholars have concentrated on analyzing the elements of Sappho's style, and studies by such critics as John Addington Symonds, C. M. Bowra, and Hilda Doolittle, among others, now complement the exegeses of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and Longinus, who, centuries earlier, acknowledged the extraordinary qualities in Sappho's poetry. Yet all assessments of her work remain intrinsically inconclusive because so few of her poems survive. Addressing this difficulty, Peter Green commented that "all study of [Sappho's] work is, must be, a frantic raking over the scapheap whence some verbal splinter may shine out golden before the darkness closes in once more." As scholarly speculation about the circumstances surrounding Sappho's poetry continues, so does critical admiration and appreciation. Critics unanimously praise Sappho's sincerity, intensity, simple yet effective style, and ability to communicate intimately with the reader. Sappho, as

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sappho's love poetry was part of a movement in ancient poetry that began in the sixth century BCE in which attention was turned away from heroic epics and focused on images and metaphors of love. Here are some other works with the same theme:

Love's Season (sixth century BCE), a poem by Ibykos. A transitional work, this love poem does not focus on personal experience but rather describes the actions of the god Aphrodite (here called Kypris) and her son Eros, combining erotic and mythical themes.

Eclogue II (42–35 BCE), a poem by Virgil. The Romans carried forward the tradition of Greek love poetry, as in this, one of the famous Roman poet's well-known bucolic poems, the story of unrequited love between two shepherd boys, a not uncommon theme in ancient poetry.

"Negress" (270 BCE), a poem by Asklepiades. Third-century Alexandria was as cosmopolitan as modern-day Manhattan, with people of many different races and creeds intermingling freely. In this love poem, Asklepiades considers his love for an African woman, rejecting the traditional ancient Greek prejudice against dark skin, turning it into a positive attribute.

Bowra concludes, "stands in her own right as the most gifted woman who has ever written poetry."

Responses to Literature

1. In small groups, read several of Sappho's poems aloud. Then discuss the author's attitudes toward love and intimacy.
2. Express Sappho's veneration of friendship with other women, particularly her daughter.
3. Comment on Sappho's influence on Catullus, Ovid, and other Roman poets.
4. Select at least two or three translations of Sappho's poem "Hymn to Aphrodite" and compare the translations. Note the differences in word choice and discuss the varying connotations that are created with different translations.

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☒ José Saramago

BORN: 1922, Azinhaga, Portugal

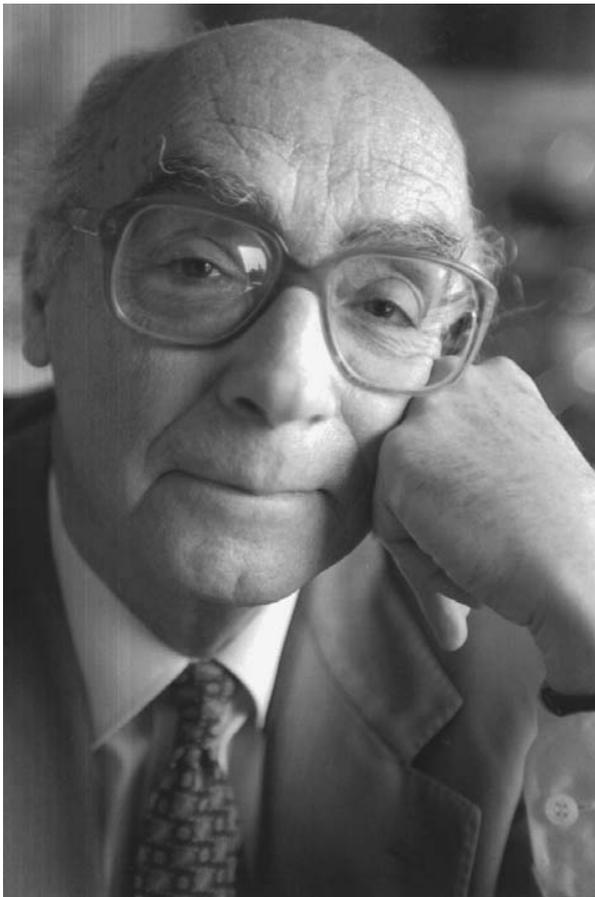
NATIONALITY: Portuguese

GENRE: Novels, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis (1984)

The Stone Raft (1986)



José Saramago Saramago, Jose, photograph. AP Images.

- Blindness* (1995)
- All the Names* (1997)
- The Double* (2004)
- Seeing* (2006)

Overview

José Saramago is a Portuguese author of fiction, poetry, plays, and essays. An accomplished writer and storyteller, he is most highly regarded for his novels, which vary in theme and subject matter and tend to explore the values and priorities in modern society. Saramago, an outspoken Communist and atheist, is known as the voice of the common person, a role he undertakes with newspaper and radio commentaries as well as in his fiction. He is the first Portuguese-language author to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A "Wild Radish" of Portugal José Saramago was born on November 16, 1922, to José de Sousa and Maria de Piedade in the provincial town of Azinhaga, Portugal. "Saramago," which is Portuguese for "wild radish," was actually a nickname of his father's family, and it was accidentally included in his name in the registry of births. In 1924, the family moved from the province to the city of Lisbon, which gave Saramago the rare opportunity to receive an education. While in school, where he excelled in all of his subjects, he made time for his grandfather's farm back in Azinhaga, helping to take care of the land. After attending Lisbon's grammar schools, unfortunately, Saramago was forced to drop out due to the family's dwindling finances.

During his teen years, Saramago attended a technical school for mechanics that offered other academic courses on the side. Saramago took full advantage of the opportunity and studied literature and French with the aim of mastering the art of literary translator. Though he never finished formal schooling, he later obtained several honorary doctorates from various universities.

In 1944, Saramago met Ilda Reis, one of Portugal's best engravers, and they had one daughter, Violante. While working mechanical jobs, he wrote and published a short novel, *Land of Sin*. He later traded in his mechanical jobs and worked as an editor for a small Lisbon newspaper. When he lost his job, he turned to translating French manuscripts, and it was not long before he returned to writing his own stories.

Literary Success In 1977, Saramago published what he considers to be his first novel, *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy*. This was followed by two more books in quick succession: *Quasi Objects* (1978) and *Raised from the Ground* (1980). *Raised from the Ground* was well received in literary circles and in the press, earning Saramago some degree of recognition. His 1982 novel, *Memorial do convento* translated into English as *Baltasar*

and *Blimunda*, was the first of his works to be translated and is often ranked foremost among his artistic triumphs.

During the 1980s, Saramago dedicated his time to several more novels: *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* released in 1984, *The Stone Raft* (1986), and *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989).

Offending the Church In 1991, Saramago published *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, a novel that was condemned by the Catholic Church. Portugal's conservative government contested the novel's entry into the running for the European Literary Prize under the pretext that the book was offensive to Catholics. Saramago and his second wife, whom he married in 1988, left Lisbon and moved to Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. In 1995, he published the novel *Blindness* and in 1997 *All the Names*. His hard work and perseverance paid big dividends as he went on to win several awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998, cementing his reputation as one of Europe's most highly regarded literary figures.

Works in Literary Context

Although Portuguese is spoken in three continents by between 140 million and 200 million people, Saramago was the first writer in that language to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1998, the Nobel Committee presented the award to the seventy-four-year-old Saramago, "who with parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony continually enables us once again to apprehend an elusory reality," according to the official Nobel Foundation Web site.

Free-Flowing Prose

With his engaging storytelling and a unique style of writing, Saramago has carved himself a niche as one of Europe's most important literary figures. Saramago uses a distinctive narrative voice that is undeniably his own. Stylistically, he uses run-on sentences and pages of endless paragraphs, refusing to follow conventional rules of punctuation. Thematically, he balances dread and hope and portrays human resilience amid unbearable misery.

Fantasy and Parable

Saramago's works often rely upon fantastic elements to tell a tale that illustrates a point or delivers a message. In *The Stone Raft*, for example, the peninsula that contains Spain and Portugal breaks free from Europe and begins drifting across the Atlantic Ocean. In *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, a fictional persona of Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa continues living after the poet himself has died. In *Blindness*, nearly all the citizens of an unspecified city are struck by a plague that results in blindness; the novel deals largely with the aftermath, and how the afflicted adjust to a society without sight. In each of these tales, the setting is clearly a realistic world in which an element of fantasy has been introduced.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Saramago's famous contemporaries include:

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Hailing originally from Colombia, García Márquez is one of Latin America's most famous authors; he was recognized for his contribution to twentieth century literature in 1982 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): This Argentine author was one of Latin America's most original and influential prose writers and poets; his short stories revealed him as one of the great stylists of the Spanish language.

Harold Pinter (1930–): English playwright and author of *The Birthday Party* who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005.

Julio Cortázar (1914–1984): Argentine author famous for his influential postmodern novels and stories, especially *Hopscotch* (1963).

Works in Critical Context

Through the years, José Saramago's works have had a place in Portuguese—and European—literary history, starting with *Raised from the Ground*, which was one of Saramago's first works to earn considerable literary recognition in Portugal. With regard to *Blindness*, Andrew Miller of the *New York Times Book Review* has called it "a clear-eyed and compassionate acknowledgment of things as they are, a quality that can only honestly be termed wisdom." The novel helped Saramago gain the respect of readers and critics alike, laying the foundation for the awards he received later. *The Library Journal*, meanwhile, praised *All the Names*, saying it is "in turns claustrophobic, playful, farcical, and suspenseful." The world immediately took notice of Saramago's unique writing talent, which won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998.

The Double Critical reception of the novel *The Double* was also favorable, with Merle Rubin of the *Los Angeles Times* praising the way it "[intrigues] us, proceeds to entertain, charm and engage, and ultimately manages to disturb." Amanda Hopkinson, writing for *The Independent*, even called it "his most practiced and polished" work, that it is "philosophy and thriller rolled into one with—as ever—a tight cast of characters." Finally, Philip Graham of the *New Leader* considers it as "a deft reworking of a timeless theme and a virtuoso exercise in voice—from a writer who seems to produce masterpiece after masterpiece like clockwork."

Seeing *Seeing* also gained the respect of critics, although some thought that its storytelling "is so hazy that it's hard to see the point," according to Troy

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Identity formation, or the way in which an individual comes to distinguish his or herself as a separate entity, is a key theme explored in Saramago's novel *The Double*. Other works that explore this theme include:

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759–1767), a novel by Laurence Sterne. Considered by some to be the first postmodern novel, this work purports to tell the story of the protagonist's life, although Tristram struggles to explain himself so much so that the telling of his birth is not reached until the third volume of the work.

Invisible Man (1952) a novel by Ralph Ellison. This story is about the travels of a narrator, a nameless African American. In the novel, Ellison explores the influences of various cultural and political forces, particularly with regard to race, on identity formation.

Identity (1998), a novel by Milan Kundera. In this short work, Kundera explores the questions of identity within the context of romantic love.

Patterson of *Entertainment Weekly*, and that, in the words of *Publishers Weekly*, “[t]he allegorical blindness/sight framework is weak and obvious.” Jack Shreve of *Library Journal* countered by saying that “Saramago’s clear eye for acknowledging things as they are barrages us with valuable insights suggesting that the dynamics of human governance are not as rational as we like to think.” Also, Sarah Goldman of *Salon* maintains that Saramago “is a deliberate, attentive writer; he knows exactly what his words mean, and all of them—despite what he may have thought more than a half-century ago—are completely worthwhile.” Finally, Julian Evans of *The Independent* recalled that no novel has told more “with such arresting humor and simplicity, about the imposture of the times we live in” as *Seeing* did.

Responses to Literature

1. What questions does Saramago's *The Double* raise about identity while following Tertuliano Maximo Afonso's search for his double? Cite specific examples from the novel.
2. Discuss the role of namelessness in *Blindness*. How is namelessness important to the theme?
3. What role does “stream of consciousness” play in *Blindness*? Why does Saramago choose this particular technique to include in this work?
4. How does Saramago's unconventional use of sentence structure and punctuation affect you as a reader? In a small group, discuss why Saramago would want to break the rules of punctuation. How does his writing style contribute to the themes he addresses?

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☒ Jean-Paul Sartre

BORN: 1905, Paris, France

DIED: 1980, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: *Nonfiction (philosophy), novels, drama, criticism*

MAJOR WORKS:

Nausea (1938)

Being and Nothingness (1943)

No Exit (1944)

The Roads to Freedom (1945, 1947, 1949)

Critique of Dialectical Reason (1960)

Overview

French philosopher and man of letters, the versatile writer Jean-Paul Sartre ranks as the dominant influence in three decades of French intellectual life. As scholar Lynn-Dianne Beene noted, “Sartre challenged not only con-

temporary ideas about freedom and human liberation, but also the oppression he found in Western capitalism. His relentless search for freedom gave rise to a process of existential inquiry and reflection.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Sartre’s literary and philosophical careers are inextricably bound together and are best understood in relation to one another and to their biographical and historical context.

Defiant, Precocious Beginnings Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris on June 21, 1905. His father Jean-Baptiste, a naval officer, died while on a tour of duty in Indochina (then part of the French colonial empire) before Sartre was two years old. His mother took her young son to live at her parents’ house, where she and her son were treated as “the children.” Later Sartre would describe his unnatural childhood as a spoiled and precocious boy. Lacking companions his own age, he found “friends” exclusively in books. Reading became



Jean-Paul Sartre Sartre, Jean-Paul, photograph. AP Images.

his first passion, and he soon decided to be a writer. According to *The Words*, the autobiography of his youth, this decision was made in conscious opposition to the wishes of his grandfather.

School and Simone de Beauvoir When his mother remarried, Sartre moved from Paris to La Rochelle with her and his stepfather, a solemn professional man with whom he felt little in common. There Sartre followed the path of a professional, finishing his studies at Lycée Henri IV in Paris, and entering the École Normale Supérieure in 1924. While there he became a student of and was influenced by Émile Auguste Chartier, a humanist and materialist philosopher and essayist. It was also at Normale Supérieure where he met feminist intellectual novelist Simone de Beauvoir, who would become Sartre's lifelong companion, though by no means his only love interest. Sartre earned his doctorate, taking first place in the *agrégation* of philosophy in 1929. De Beauvoir finished second, affirming the pair's intellectual bond and sealing their emotional one.

Introduction to Phenomenology After completing compulsory military service as a conscript in the French army from 1929 to 1931, Sartre took a teaching job at a school in Le Havre, and from 1933 to 1935 he was a research student on a grant at the Institut Français in Berlin and in Freiburg. Having read over the years philosopher Henri Bergson's works as well as those of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, and Immanuel Kant, he began to form his first philosophical writings with respect to phenomenology, the philosophical examination of the nature of individual consciousness. A series of works on consciousness resulted. He also wrote his first novel, *Nausea* (1938), which some critics have called the century's most influential French novel, and produced *The Wall* (1939), a first-rate volume of short stories.

World War II and the Resistance World War II intervened, and Sartre was called up by the army. He served briefly on the Eastern front as a meteorologist. Captured by Germans in 1940 at Padoux, he was taken prisoner to Nancy and then *Stalag 12D*, Trier. There he wrote his first play and read more Heidegger, which would inform his first major work on phenomenological thought, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). After nine months, in April 1941, he secured his release by noting his bad eyes interfered with his balance. He returned to teaching at *Lycée Pasteur* near Paris, moving into the Hotel Mistral near Montparnasse. While he was given a new position at Lycée Condorcet, Sartre joined with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, and others to form the underground intellectual resistance group, Socialisme et Liberté. The coalition, begun in May of 1941, was finished by August due to lack of support by the undecided André Gide and André Malraux and others.

Sartre returned to writing, penning the now classic dramas *The Flies* (1942) and *No Exit* (1944), contributing to literary magazines, and evading German censorship for both plays and legitimate and underground writings. *No Exit* was clearly molded by Sartre's experiences in occupied France. It is a serious, disturbing play about personal accountability in an irrational world, a theme that resonated with Parisian audiences forced to live under Nazi rule. In fact, the play's one-act structure is a direct response to that rule: Sartre had to make the play short so Parisian audiences could watch it and still get home before the German-imposed curfew.

The Role of the Intellectual After the war, Sartre abandoned teaching altogether, determined to support himself by writing. Intellectuals, he thought, must take a public stand on every great question of their day. He thus became fundamentally a moralist, both in his philosophical and literary works, and subsequently would be considered by critics and scholars alike as the greatest philosopher of his time. He wrote full time, creating the influential trilogy *The Roads to Freedom* (1945–1949), a number of comedies, and more plays. He founded and edited *Les Temps Modernes* (*Modern Times*), a literary and political monthly. And he became an active contributor to *Combat*, the newspaper created covertly by the eminent philosopher and author Albert Camus.

Though never a member of the Communist Party, Sartre usually sympathized with the political views of the far left. Whatever the political issue, he was quick to publish his opinions, often combining them with public acts of protest. He, de Beauvoir, and Camus shared sympathies, and thus maintained a close camaraderie—until 1951 when Camus had clearly turned away from communism. Criticized by Camus for being a writer who resisted and not a resistor who wrote, and by other philosophers for his lack of political commitment, Sartre returned to philosophy in 1960.

In *Being and Nothingness* he declared man to be “a useless passion,” condemned to strive for meaningless freedom. But now his new interest in social and political questions and his reestablishment with Marxist thought led him to more optimistic and activist views. He published his first volume of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), a modified version of his existentialism by way of Marxist ideas.

A Change of Mind About the Futility of Life In his early work, Sartre pointed to the futility of life. His actions in the 1960s show a change of mind. Sartre was a vocal supporter of the Algerian efforts to be free of French colonial rule. Likewise, he was a vocal critic of U.S. actions in Vietnam, which many saw as imperialist rather than anti-Communist. Sartre headed the Organization to Defend Iranian Political Prisoners, beginning in 1964. He also sought out audiences with Cuban president Fidel Castro and Marxist revolutionary leader Ernesto “Che” Guevara. It is evident Sartre began to

believe human actions mattered. In another about-face, Sartre seemed to ease the strict atheism of his early career as he neared the end of his life. In a 1974 interview with de Beauvoir, Sartre mused that he did not feel like “a speck of dust in the universe” and said that perhaps a “Creator” had a role in mind for him.

As Sartre worked on his final major efforts, including *The Family Idiot* (1971), his failing eyesight progressed to blindness and his health deteriorated. In Paris on April 15, 1980, Sartre died.

Works in Literary Context

Sartre was primarily influenced by the works of philosophers Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger. His work and thought was also profoundly influenced by his contemporaries, such as Merleau Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir, and was informed and driven further by revolutions and several wars, which pushed his political philosophies and antagonized his themes of freedom and choice. In turn, Sartre was one of the most influential intellectuals of the twentieth century, doubtless the greatest of his immediate generation in France.

Existentialism Existentialism is the term used to describe a philosophy that holds that there is no meaning in life other than what individuals create for themselves. This somewhat bleak perspective is associated with fiction that portrays characters coming to grips with reality and experiencing feelings of malaise, boredom, and alienation. Perhaps no writer is as strongly associated with existentialism as Sartre, but he was by no means the first writer to posit the idea of humankind’s essential meaninglessness. Critics point out that existentialist tendencies can be seen in the work of nineteenth-century Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky as well. Dostoevsky’s early fiction, particularly his “Petersburg” tales, exhibit strong existentialist traits in keeping with the antireligious radical philosophy he espoused. His characters feel alienated from both society and themselves. Existentialism, as Sartre proposed it, stresses the primacy of the thinking person and of concrete individual experience as the source of knowledge. It also emphasizes the anguish and solitude inherent in the individual’s freedom and responsibility in making choices.

Works in Critical Context

Of Sartre’s body of work in general, the scholars and critics agree: Sartrean scholars Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka called him, “uncontestably the most outstanding philosopher and writer of our time.” Scholar Henri Peyre described him as “the most powerful intellect at work . . . in the literature of Western Europe,” the “Picasso of literature.” And author Iris Murdoch explained that “to understand Jean-Paul Sartre is to understand something important about the present time.”

Sartre’s comedies, critics like Henry Peyre claimed, “reveal . . . him as the best comic talent of our times.” His letters, compiled in several different volumes, illuminate

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sartre’s famous contemporaries include:

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Philosophical writer, second-youngest Nobel Prize recipient who, while associated with existentialism, actually rejected the title for, more accurately, “nihilism.”

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize-winning author.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): French author and philosopher best known for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American writer known for his spare, modernist style.

Hiroshi Inagaki (1905–1980): Japanese filmmaker best known for his *Samurai* trilogy.

the private life and pre-novel thoughts of the philosopher, relate to the early years of such interpersonal dynamics as the unconventional Sartre–de Beauvoir love relationship, and reveal what America’s Peter T. Conner identified as “an intimate portrait of the precocious philosopher emerging into a kind of intellectual and spiritual maturity.” Sartre’s most telling writing, however, affirming all the critical commentary, is in such works as *Nausea*.

Nausea (1938) Sartre’s first fiction work, *Nausea*, is what many critics have called the century’s most influential French novel. The title indicates the hero’s reaction toward existence: when he discovers that life is absurd, he feels repulsed. Nothing, it would seem, can save him, except the discovery that he might be able to write a novel that would have internal necessity and be a rival to life. Thus, he proposes to save himself through an act of aesthetic creation. Sartre said in *The Words*: “At the age of thirty, I executed the masterstroke of writing in *Nausea*—quite sincerely, believe me—about the bitter unjustified existence of my fellow men and of exonerating my own.”

Nausea was received with praise and had considerable success. In *Esprit*, reviewer Armand Robin called *Nausea* “undoubtedly one of the distinctive works of our time.” While it illustrates what de Beauvoir dubbed Sartre’s “opposition aesthetics”—his desire to use literature as a critical tool—the work also later prompted critics like Anthony Richards Manser to call it “that rare thing: a genuinely philosophic novel.”

Responses to Literature

1. Sartre said he would choose *Critique of Dialectical Reason* to be remembered by. As you read it, try to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few titles by writers whose work includes existential themes or thought:

City of Glass (1986), a novel by Paul Auster. Playing with language, scene, and structure, Auster brings readers one of the earliest postmodern novels to combine detective fiction, existentialism, and intellectual literature.

Rhinoceros (1959), a play by Eugene Ionesco. Ionesco's bizarre, somewhat comical play shows the inhabitants of a French town turning, one by one, into rhinoceroses.

Notes from the Underground (1864), a novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky's book is considered by many literary historians to be the first existential novel.

Fight Club (1996), a novel by Chuck Palahniuk. A profound study of doubles in a questionable reality marked by violence and moral murkiness.

find reasons why Sartre chose this particular book as a testament to his decades of philosophical writing.

2. What areas of thought (philosophical, social, psychological, etc.) does Sartre cover in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*? Where do these areas come together? Where do they diverge?
3. In *Nausea*, the idea of sex and sexuality disgusts the main character, Roquentin. Why do you think this is? Do you think Roquentin is a misogynist, or woman-hater? Examine his relations with women and write about how you think those affect his attitude toward sex.
4. In *Nausea*, Roquentin is unmarried and lonely. How does his loneliness influence his perception of the outside world? Do you think he would feel the same way if he were married?

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☒ Siegfried Sassoon

BORN: 1886, Brenchley, United Kingdom

DIED: 1967, Warminster, United Kingdom

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Old Huntsman, and Other Poems (1917)

The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon (1919)

Memoirs of an Infantry Officer (1930)

Sherston's Progress (1936)

Overview

Best remembered for the angry, compassionate poems that chronicled World War I, British poet Siegfried Sassoon became internationally famous for his satiric tone and his antiwar beliefs. Though the war was a topic of many great poets of the age, Sassoon's verse avoids sentimentality and patriotism, instead mocking the officials whose blind obedience led to one of the most violent wars in history. While his later poems were not as widely appreciated as his early work, Sassoon won major awards and acclaim for a fictionalized semiautobiographical work that is widely recognized as an outstanding portrait of his time.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged Upbringing Sassoon was born in Brenchley, Kent, England, on September 8, 1886. Born into a wealthy Jewish family who had made their fortune in colonial India, Sassoon was the child of a marriage



Siegfried Sassoon George C. Beresford / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

between a Gentile mother and a Jewish father. Though the couple eventually separated and Sassoon's father died young, Sassoon enjoyed the cultured, comfortable life of a country gentleman in the years leading up to World War I. He was taught at home by private tutors and attended law school at Marlborough College before going to Cambridge, where he studied history.

Interest in Poetry Sassoon left school without taking a degree, however, preferring to focus on his new pursuit: poetry. When his mother introduced him to several of society's literary figures, including Rupert Brooke, Edmund Gosse, and Edward Marsh, Sassoon soon began to publish his poems privately. Sassoon's early poetry reflects the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, characterized by romance, melodrama, and old-fashioned language. Literary critics have generally dismissed this work as unimportant and too similar to that of John Masefield, one of Sassoon's literary influences.

War As Sassoon reached maturity, World War I engulfed Europe. The war began when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated by a Bosnian terrorist in Serbia. Ferdinand's death had a domino effect as much of Europe was divided by entangling alliances. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been marred by increasing tensions over control of territory and sovereignty issues,

particularly in eastern Europe. The alliances aligned as war was declared. Britain fought on the side of Russia and France, with the United States joining them later. They fought against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey).

When World War I broke out, Sassoon was one of the first British poets to enlist, leaving for France with the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1915. Although his poetry would later attack the brutality and destruction of war, Sassoon earned a reputation as a courageous soldier. Nicknamed "Mad Jack" by his fellow fighters, he received a Military Cross for his actions on the battlefield, which included saving a wounded soldier during a battle. Sassoon was considered for another medal of honor after he captured a German trench position single-handedly. (Much of the war was fought in trenches on the Western front.)

Joined Antiwar Movement Sassoon himself was wounded several times, and while recuperating in England, he met individuals who were active in the antiwar movement. Their views soon infiltrated his opinion of combat. Believing "this War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it," Sassoon made a public protest in 1917 against the continuation of the war by throwing his Military Cross into a river and, in what Sassoon called a "wilful defiance of military authority," writing an open letter to the War Department that was published in newspapers and read in the British House of Commons at the urging of pacifist philosopher Bertrand Russell. Sassoon expected to be court-martialed for his actions. Because fellow poet Robert Graves insisted that Sassoon was ill and in need of hospitalization, Sassoon's open act of defiance was believed to be the result of shell shock (what would be called combat stress reaction today), and charges were not brought against him. Instead, he was sent to the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he became close friends with Wilfred Owen, another war poet.

Sassoon's volume of poetry *The Old Huntsman, and Other Poems* (1917) had been published the year before and began to receive increased notice due to his public stand against the war. His next book, *Counter-Attack, and Other Poems*, appeared in 1918 to fierce public reaction. The book, which contained war poems inspired by Sassoon's experience in combat and in the hospital, was graphically violent and realistic. Sassoon was criticized for being unpatriotic and extreme, and even his influential pacifist friends complained about the explicit details of the verses. Critics and authors of the time disliked Sassoon's shocking methods and complained that he was writing propaganda, not poetry. Nevertheless, the book sold well, and Sassoon became well-known for both his poetry and his political stance.

Postwar Work Sassoon, who had been sent back to battle in 1918 despite his protests, was shot in the head and discharged before the war came to an end. By the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sassoon's famous contemporaries include:

E. M. Forster (1879–1970): This English novelist and essayist wrote *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Howard's End* (1910), both successfully adapted as films.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914): The assassination of this heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary led to the outbreak of the First World War.

Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977): This British-born comedic actor was known for his humorous silent roles. His films include *The Kid* (1921) and *The Great Dictator*.

Vaslav Nijinsky (1889–1950): This Polish ballet dancer and choreographer is known as one of the greatest dancers of all time. He choreographed ballets, such as *Jeux* (1913).

Marie Curie (1867–1934): This Polish-born French physicist and chemist discovered radium and polonium. In 1932, she founded the Radium Institute in Warsaw.

Margaret Sanger (1879–1966): American activist Sanger was an advocate for birth control and founded the American organization eventually known as Planned Parenthood.

conclusion of World War I, more than eight hundred thousand Britons had been killed, and many more were injured. Following the war, Sassoon became involved in politics, supporting his pacifist friends and lecturing on pacifism. Though he continued to write, critics widely acknowledge that his work had lost the relevance and prophetic quality that it had displayed during the First World War. Sassoon's anger and his hatred of combat did not resound with the new set of social and political problems facing England and Europe in the 1920s and beyond. In Great Britain, for example, the economic and human losses brought on serious disturbances in society. By the 1930s, the United Kingdom, like many countries in the world, was immersed in the a deep economic depression resulting in the unemployment of millions of workers.

In the meantime, Sassoon was achieving success as a prose writer. He published a trilogy of semiautobiographical novels, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), *Memoirs of an Infantry Soldier* (1930), and *Sherston's Progress* (1936), published together as *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* in 1937. In addition to relating a barely fictionalized account of Sassoon's experiences during World War I, these works contrast the pleasures of country life with the brutality of war. The novels were well received, with some readers asserting that Sassoon's

prose was better than his poetry. In 1948, Sassoon also wrote a respected critical biography of Victorian novelist George Meredith, titled *Meredith*.

Later Life After a period in which his spiritual life became of increasing concern, Sassoon converted to Catholicism in 1957. Though his religious poetry is considered inferior to his other writing, his book *Sequences* (1956), which appeared soon before his conversion, is considered among the century's most impressive religious poetry. Sassoon's later life was solitary, though he married (and quickly divorced) Hester Gatty in 1933 and had a son, who visited him often during his later years. He died on September 3, 1967.

Works in Literary Context

The Modern Epoch Though Sassoon had a varied literary career, he is best remembered for his striking portraits of life in World War I, an event that affected nearly the whole of his output. His works depict a generation's transformation from the pastoral simplicity of the past to the violent uncertainty of a modern epoch. Sassoon was among the ranks of other war poets, such as Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke, Isaac Rosenberg, Edmund Blunden, and Robert Graves.

Early Verse Unlike his wartime poetry, Sassoon's early verse is written in the Georgian style, a return to the pastoral literary tradition in reaction to the reason and realism of the Victorian age. Sassoon was influenced by an expansive reading list, which included classic literature, the Romantic poets, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the plays of William Shakespeare. In general, Sassoon's early poems favored conventional romantic themes and archaic language. "The Old Huntsman" is appreciated for its serene, humorous reminiscences of the changes undergone by both the title character and the world. Overall, however, the poetry from Sassoon's early career is considered inferior to his later work.

"Happy Warrior" Poetry Even in *The Old Huntsman, and Other Poems*, which is regarded as the epitome of Sassoon's romantic poetry, one can see signs that Sassoon belongs to a generation of realistic war poets, as this volume also contains several short poems that express his anger toward the war. Before Sassoon had been in the trenches himself, he had remarked, after reading Robert Graves's war poems, that war should not be depicted so realistically. The war poems in *The Old Huntsman, and Other Poems* are sometimes referred to as "happy warrior" verse because they are idealistic and employ the same language and structure as his pastoral work.

War Poetry World War I inspired the production of poignant and terrifying poetry that captured the awfulness of trench warfare and death, often experienced firsthand by the poets themselves. Indeed, it was Sassoon's

experiences during World War I that changed not only his poetic style but also his outlook on life forever. The harsh realities of death, destruction, injury, and desperation that Sassoon faced in the trenches gave immediacy to his war poetry, which was characterized by some readers as a shocking assault on the senses—clearly a break from the romantic idealization found in most Georgian poetry. “Deliberately written to disturb complacency,” Sassoon said of his writing during this time, which became satirical, unsentimental, frank, and stylistically colloquial and informal. Occasionally, though, he had the ability to transcend his anger. During such a period, for example, he wrote “Everyone Sang,” a joyful lyric expressing relief at the armistice ending World War I.

Influence In documenting the era of the First World War, Sassoon’s satiric mockery of warfare established an influential model for other writers in the twentieth century, many of whom became lifelong friends.

Works in Critical Context

War Protest Combined with the influence of his pacifist friends, Sassoon’s aversion to warfare resulted in emotionally charged pleas against a war he thought would never end. His poetry about combat has been recognized as a chronicle of his times, almost documentary in presentation. As is the case with any form of protest, Sassoon’s war poetry elicited mixed reactions, though it is generally regarded as the highlight of his career. His ability to capture the nuances of emotion experienced by a whole generation of soldiers in a few biting lines earned him much admiration in his time. However, Sassoon has never received as much critical attention as other great poets of the twentieth century, perhaps due to his strong identification with antiwar poetry.

War Poetry While some critics praise Sassoon’s controversial war poems for their common language, human interaction, concrete details, and sarcastic self-mockery, they are simultaneously criticized for their unpatriotic antiwar messages and shocking nature. Designed to convey the disturbing brutality of combat, Sassoon’s poems were abrasive, filthy, and morally ambiguous, presenting images of suicide, cowardice, and horror that contrasted sharply with pro-war propaganda of the time. Many critics, including some of Sassoon’s friends and fellow poets, have condemned his presentation of warfare, maintaining that his poetry deals with only the immediate, startling aspects of war without any attempt toward artistic value. These critics contend that Sassoon’s rage appeals exclusively to the senses, to visceral response. The *Times Literary Supplement* critic wrote, for example, “The dynamic quality of his war poems was due to the intensity of feeling which underlay their cynicism.”

A number of scholars throughout the years have felt that Sassoon’s need to express the ugly reality of war

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Siegfried Sassoon’s poems address the horrors of war. Here are other antiwar pieces of art:

The Red Badge of Courage (1895), a novel by Stephen Crane. In this book, a young man struggles with the horrors of war—and his desire to flee from battle—during the American Civil War.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. This work delivered such a powerful antiwar message that it was banned in Nazi Germany. *Gallipoli* (1981), a film directed by Peter Weir. This film, starring Mel Gibson, follows the fate of two young Australian men who both serve in the disastrous Battle of Gallipoli during World War I.

Three Kings (1999), a film directed by David O. Russell. Depicting innocents who suffered the effects of chaotic and random combat, this movie questions the rationale of Operation Desert Storm.

overshadowed his own poetry. According to fellow war poet Wilfred Owen, Sassoon’s poems limit the reader to a momentary reaction instead of translating the intensity and horror of war into a universal human context. John Middleton Murry agreed with Owen that Sassoon’s work is typified by a negativity that terrifies and then numbs readers to the extent that they are denied any aesthetic quality, the result of which is “a lack of finished artistry.” Virginia Woolf concurred, stating that Sassoon “deserted art in a compulsion to express the intolerable.”

Responses to Literature

1. Sassoon’s antiwar sentiments almost had him arrested. Instead, he was hospitalized for “shell shock” (or what today is called combat stress reaction) an ailment similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research shell shock and PTSD, including their effects, treatment, and how many people are estimated to suffer from them, and summarize your findings in a PowerPoint presentation.
2. Sassoon is known for his barely fictionalized novels of British country life. This genre is sometimes known as “roman à clef.” Research the characteristics of this kind of literature and write a paper on your findings. Do you think this genre is merely entertaining or does it have deeper implications?
3. Sassoon’s war poetry is known for its brutal portrayal of death, suicide, cowardice, blood, and gore. Why do you think these images were so controversial to English audiences during World War I? Consider the

videos the United States receives from terrorist organizations showing the beheading of Americans they have captured. Compare public reaction to these videos with the images presented in Sassoon's poems in a paper. Do you feel that our society has become too desensitized to violence as a result of our country's movie and video game industries?

4. Sassoon was a friend and mentor of Wilfred Owen, who eventually became more well-known than his teacher. How would the friendship between Sassoon and Owen have affected both poets' work? Find other examples of students whose work surpassed that of their mentors and create a presentation of your findings. What reasons can you give for this success? How do you think the mentors reacted?

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- Times Literary Supplement*, July 11, 1918; June 3, 1926; November 1, 1947; September 18, 1948; January 4, 1957; December 7, 1973.

☒ Marjane Satrapi

BORN: 1969, Rasht, Iran

NATIONALITY: Iranian, French

GENRE: Graphic novels, children's stories

MAJOR WORKS:

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003)

Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2004)

Overview

Marjane Satrapi is an Iranian graphic novelist, illustrator, animated film director, and children's book author based in France. She is critically acclaimed for her graphic novels *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*, where she artistically narrates her childhood and teenage experiences of growing up in Iran and later immigrating to Europe.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Girl in the Revolution Born on November 22, 1969, in Rasht, Iran, Marjane Satrapi grew up in Tehran



Marjane Satrapi *Satrapi, Marjane, photograph. AP Images.*

in a progressive upper-middle-class family. The early years of her youth were spent under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who sat on the throne from World War II onward and oversaw dramatic changes in the form of modernization and relaxation of Muslim influence on the government. These changes included voting rights for women and the transfer of land ownership from the wealthy to individual farmers. While the Shah was arguably regarded by the Western world as a positive force in Iran, opposition within the country—particularly among religious fundamentalists led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who saw the Shah's efforts at modernization as an affront to Islamic traditions—continued to grow throughout his rule. As the economic situation in Iran worsened during the 1970s, opposition forces gained the support of the public in their attempts to overthrow the Shah. This happened in 1979, and although there was general agreement that the end of the monarchy was a positive event, there was much dispute over what should take its place. Khomeini and his followers, some of whom used tactics of violence against those who opposed them and came to be known as the Hezbollah, assumed control of the

government and instituted stricter adherence to Muslim traditions, such as the wearing of headscarves by females and the prohibition of alcohol. Khomeini's regime purged thousands of government employees that it viewed as too Westernized, or that were suspected of rejecting Islam. It was this transition to a fundamentalist climate that Satrapi experienced as a girl and later documented in her graphic novels.

To Europe and Back Satrapi studied at the Lycée français, and then moved to a boarding school in Vienna to finish high school. She returned to Iran for college, where she met her first husband, a man named Reza, and married him at the age of twenty-one. They were divorced a year later and she went on to study visual communication, gaining a master's degree from the School of Fine Arts in Tehran's Islamic Azad University. In 2001 she received an Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award for the original French version of *Persepolis*, and an Angoulême Prize for Scenario for *Persepolis 2* the following year. *Poulet aux Prunes*, or *Chicken with Plums*, received an Angoulême Best Comic Book Award in 2005. *Persepolis* was adapted into an animated movie in 2007 and was awarded a Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

Satrapi currently lives in Paris with her husband, Mattias Ripa, working as a graphic artist, illustrator, children's book author, and a contributor to various magazines and newspapers worldwide, including the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*.

Works in Literary Context

In contrast to the majority of graphic novels that are published by large comic companies, Satrapi's memoir was published in graphic novel form by mainstream publishing houses. As a result, Satrapi's graphic novels are among the most popular of the genre, with *Persepolis* selling more than 450,000 copies worldwide. Its success ultimately led to the adaptation of the story to animated film. In 2007 *Persepolis* was released, despite objections from the Iranian government, at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Jury Prize.

The Persian Culture Virtually all of Satrapi's works focus on Persian culture, its traditions, and its place in the modern world. Both *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* deal with the event of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a country that was once known as Persia. The titles of these works refer to the ancient city of Persepolis, which was the capital of the Persian Empire. The characters in *Persepolis* make up a broad spectrum of Persian culture and provide different perspectives on the modern history of Iran. *Chicken with Plums* concerns an Iranian man—the author's great-uncle—who stops eating after his *tar*, an Iranian lute, is destroyed and cannot be replaced.

Women's Issues Another important theme in Satrapi's work is the concerns and rights of women. In *Persepolis*,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Satrapi's famous contemporaries include:

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980): Exiled during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, this monarch of Iran was the second of the Pahlavi House and the last shah of Iran.

Gulruksor Safieva (1947–): This highly regarded artist is Tajikistan's national poet and particularly known for her modern Persian folksongs and poetry.

Simin Daneshvar (1921–): In 1949 this Iranian author became the first woman in Iran to publish a book of short stories and, later, in 1969, the first woman to publish a novel, *Mourners of Siyavosh*.

Margaret Atwood (1939–): An award-winning Canadian fiction writer, Atwood is known best for her novels, poetry, and feminist activism.

Art Spiegelman (1948–): American comic author and artist who won the Pulitzer Prize for his stylized graphic memoir *Maus* (1973–1991), which told the tale of his father's experiences as a Jew during the Holocaust and his later life.

Khaled Hosseini (1965–): American author born in Afghanistan who drew upon his childhood knowledge of his native country for his novel *The Kite Runner* (2003).

Marji's mother protests against the newly instituted rule requiring women to wear headscarves—a protest that ends in violence. Marji herself dares to rebel against the fundamentalists who police the streets by wearing Western clothes. *Embroideries* (2006) focuses exclusively on the lives and concerns of Iranian women. The book centers on a gathering of women at the home of the author's grandmother; there, they share stories about their lives.

Works in Critical Context

With only a handful of works to her credit, Marjane Satrapi's reputation rests largely on her first graphic novel, *Persepolis*, and its sequel. The critical response for these works was overwhelmingly positive, and mainstream popular success followed—an unusual occurrence for works that some might view as “comics.” Although her follow-up works have not attained the same level of success, they have still enjoyed great popularity and have drawn many new readers into the realm of the graphic novel.

Persepolis Known as “the most significant new talent in the world of the graphic novel,” Satrapi has wooed critics and received largely positive attention for

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among Satrapi's themes is the cultural changes brought to Iran by the Islamic Revolution, during which the monarchy ruled by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was overthrown and replaced by an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. For example, as the narrator explains in *Persepolis*, shortly after the revolution in 1979, women were ordered to wear veils in schools. Other works that explore the cultural impact of political change include:

The Tempest (1610–11), a play by William Shakespeare. In this classic tragedy, argued by some scholars to be about the moment of revolution in the colonies, the "good servant" Ariel and the rebellious Caliban trade arguments about the projected effects of a revolt against Prospero.

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (1852), a nonfiction study by Karl Marx. Political philosopher Karl Marx's famous consideration of the successes and, mostly, the failures of France's revolution of 1848; he was particularly dismissive of Louis Bonaparte's role, noting that great historical events occur for the first time as tragedy and the second as farce.

The House of Spirits (1982), a novel by Isabel Allende. This novel concerns the lives of a Trueba family during major sociopolitical upheavals of postcolonial Latin America.

Persepolis. London's *Independent* called her the "Princess of Darkness" for her trademark monochrome style in graphic novels. Luc Sante in the *New York Times Book Review* commented that "the graphic form, with its cinematic motion and its style as personal as handwriting, endows it with a combination of dynamism and intimacy uniquely suited to a narrative at once intensely subjective and world-historical." *Publishers Weekly* added that the novel was "a universally insightful" bildungsroman. Also, Satrapi has followed such notables as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in proving that graphic novels can be of serious content. As noted in a *USA Today* article, "The fact that [Satrapi] is able to portray such a vast range of emotions with a few simple strokes of a pen is impressive. That she does this consistently for 153 pages is a mighty achievement."

Chicken with Plums "Satrapi's deceptively simple, remarkably powerful drawings match the precise but flexible prose she employs in adapting to her multiple roles as educator, folklorist, and grand-niece," the *New Yorker* noted in a review for *Chicken with Plums*. *Harvard Book Review*'s Noah Hertz-Bunzl, however, believes otherwise, arguing that though the piece is "full of charming incidents and anecdotes, it lacks clear direction and pur-

pose." Critics may be divided on accepting the novel, but its Angoulême Best Comic Book Award in 2005 certainly indicates that the Iranian artist has created yet another significant piece of literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the ways in which people struggle for freedom in *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. Paying particular attention to specific acts of rebellion, identify the different kinds of freedom that are valued by the people in Satrapi's memoir.
2. How important is gender to the people in *Persepolis*? Compare and contrast the ways in which gender influences several different characters in this story.
3. What role does story-telling play in the lives of Satrapi's narrators? Compare and contrast the concept of a "national history" with that of a "personal history." What is the author communicating to readers about them and their relationship with one another? Support your answer using specific examples from the text.
4. Consider Satrapi's choice to use the graphic novel to communicate her story. How significant are the illustrations? Why do you think she chose this medium over others?

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Friedrich von Schiller

BORN: 1759, Marbach, Germany

DIED: 1805, Weimar, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Robbers (1781)

Intrigue and Love (1784)

Wallenstein (1800)

Maria Stuart (1801)

Wilhelm Tell (1804)



Friedrich von Schiller Schiller, Friedrich von, engraving. The German Information Center.

Overview

To this day, many regard Friedrich Schiller as the greatest dramatist in all of German history. More brilliantly than any of his predecessors, he revealed the power of drama and poetry in expressing a philosophy that emphasized both his idealism and his concern for human freedom. Schiller was also esteemed as an adept lyricist and theoretician whose works are informed by his conviction that the writer should strive not only to entertain, but also to instruct and improve his audience.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Birth and Education Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller was born on November 10, 1759, in Marbach, Germany, to an army captain and an innkeeper's daughter. He initially wanted to be a clergyman and enrolled in the Latin School at Ludwigsburg in 1766. Against his parents' wishes, however, Schiller was drafted into the Karlsschule, an elite military academy, in 1773. Karlsschule was located in Stuttgart (a city in Württemberg) and was a rigidly disciplined academy established to train the sons of German army officers for public service. At the time, Germany remained fragmented into more than three hundred principalities, bishoprics, and free

cities, including Württemberg. By this time, Prussia had emerged to first rank among the German territories, especially through the military brilliance of Frederick the Great, who ruled Prussia from 1740 until 1786.

At the Karlsschule, Schiller was educated in an intensely disciplined atmosphere, and, although he was being trained in medicine, Schiller spent much of his time secretly reading the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Seneca, and William Shakespeare, along with the revolutionary works of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. Even before he graduated in 1780 and was appointed a medical officer in the military of Duke Karl Eugen (who ruled Württemberg with an iron fist), Schiller had begun writing *The Robbers* (1781), his first dramatic work.

Poverty and Early Plays Though Schiller had completed his play, he was unable to find a publisher and eventually self-published despite his pitiful salary, beginning a cycle of debt that would characterize his entire career. In 1782, Schiller attended the performance of *The Robbers* at a theater in Mannheim, a production that earned him both public acclaim and the wrath of Duke Eugen, who insisted that he work only on medical texts from then on. This conflict forced Schiller to flee Stuttgart in 1782, launching a period of financial deprivation and uncertainty.

Schiller was financially desperate, but not without acquaintances. A friend gave him a post at the Mannheim Theater in 1783, and he was offered generous financial assistance by patron and friend Christian Gottfried Körner. His appointment at the Mannheim lasted a single year because the management wanted drama that avoided the extravagances of Schiller's *The Robbers* and *Intrigue and Love* (1784), his next major play. Around the same time, Schiller founded the literary journal *Rheinland Thalia*. Appearing in the publication was his poem "An die Freude" (1786), which would later inspire Ludwig van Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" (from the last movement of his Ninth Symphony).

Literary Friendships Schiller continued his dramatic pursuits, publishing and producing several plays and completing *Don Carlos, Infante of Spain* in 1787. With its historical setting and its use of blank verse to explore a theme of love versus duty, this play would prove important to Schiller's dramatic development. It featured a noblewoman character based on his friend, Charlotte von Kalb. When Schiller visited Frau von Kalb at her Weimar home in 1787 after publishing the play, he met Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a dramatist and poet of growing importance, who became his close friend and collaborator in classicism. Schiller launched into a period of productivity that ensured his fame and social position. Schiller's historical work on the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain (the 1568–1648 revolt of seventeen provinces in the Netherlands against the Spanish Empire, which controlled them), as well as Goethe's support, earned him a professorship in history at the University

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Schiller's famous contemporaries include:

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): This German poet and philosopher was Schiller's close friend. It was Schiller who encouraged Goethe to continue with his work on *Faust* (1808, 1832) after he had abandoned the future masterpiece.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): This Austrian composer was hailed for his large musical output as well as his musical genius. His compositions include the "Paris" Symphony (1778) and the opera *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786).

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): A founding father of the United States, Franklin was also a prolific writer and inventor. His publications include *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1733–1758).

Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813): The German author wrote both the educational novel *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766–1767) and the romantic poem *Oberon* (1780). He also collaborated with both Goethe and Schiller in Weimar.

Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718–1799): This Italian mathematician was known for her solution to an algebraic equation and wrote the first book that discussed both differential calculus and integral calculus. Her books include *Instituzioni analitiche ad uso della gioventu italiana* (1748).

Denmark Vesey (1767–1822): This West Indian slave plotted a rebellion in Charleston, South Carolina, and along the Carolina coast, which was supposed to happen on July 14, 1822. The plan failed, and he was convicted and hanged for his role in the conspiracy.

of Jena in 1789, a position he would hold for the next decade.

Early in 1790, Schiller married Charlotte von Lengefeld, also a gifted writer. He was named a nobleman in 1803. Around this time, he became interested in Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy. He began to write philosophical treatises and poems, including "The Artists" (1789), a work in which he celebrates art as a power that could create world harmony, overcome human desire, and awaken the artist to the mystery and beauty of the universe. His 1796 essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" is considered the basis for modern poetry criticism. These philosophical musings would affect the remainder of Schiller's work and have a lasting impact on criticism and literature itself.

Late Work and Death After completing a tragic trilogy based on the Thirty Years War (the 1618–1648)

war of religion between Protestants and Catholics fought mainly in Germany but involving most of the major powers in Europe) that critics have compared with the dramas of Shakespeare, Schiller's correspondence with Goethe flourished, and Schiller eventually joined Goethe in Weimar, which was known as the "German Athens" because its ruler, Karl August, had succeeded in making it a center of art and culture. Schiller's most popular play, *Maria Stuart*, was completed in 1800, and he wrote several other important plays during this time. In 1804, Schiller published his greatest literary achievement, *Wilhelm Tell*, a powerful blend of history and heroic fiction. Although he completed other works before his death, Schiller's literary output was interrupted by illness, and he died in Weimar on May 9, 1805.

Works in Literary Context

German Significance Though the reverence Germany has bestowed upon Schiller might seem excessive, the cultural, artistic, and historical opinion of the country that influenced his writing during the eighteenth century helps provide an explanation. Schiller's work surfaced at a time when art and literature were dominated by the immense accomplishments of English, French, and Italian artists and writers. Even the German language itself was the cause of considerable debate, as some scholars asserted that the German tongue was not fit to be an agent of literary expression. Schiller, however, proved that Germany could compete with—and in some ways surpass—the creative and intellectual achievements of any other country. He was greatly influenced in his work by the writers he favored while in school (Rousseau, Seneca, Shakespeare, and Klopstock), the German theater, history, and ideas of natural philosophy as well as his friendship with Goethe.

Sturm und Drang The overemphasis on reason in the Age of Enlightenment led to a reaction in favor of the emotional and imaginative aspects of human personality and personal freedom. The result was the Sturm und Drang, or "Storm and Stress," movement that swept German literature in the late eighteenth century. This literary tendency, characterized by passion, turbulence, and melodrama, was embraced by both Schiller and Goethe early in their writing careers.

Central to Schiller's first three dramas is the question of freedom: *The Robbers*, in which the play's hero escapes corrupt society by fleeing to the Bohemian forests and becomes a type of German Robin Hood; *Fiesco; or, The Genoese Conspiracy* (1783), a tragedy with the theme of struggle against oppression; and *Intrigue and Love*, another tragedy that calls for freedom of the individual amidst political and social opposition. Schiller's Sturm und Drang work, however, mellowed with age, and his later pieces are well-planned, reasoned, and articulate

expressions of neoclassical ideals and philosophical exploration.

Innovations in Drama Published in 1787, *Don Carlos* marks Schiller's break with his youthful rebellion and his movement toward German classicism. During this shift, Schiller established the tradition of a new type of drama, the *Ideendrama*, or drama of ideas. *Don Carlos* also set a precedent for the verse form of the German classical drama: Shakespearean blank verse. Schiller's intent in the play was to concentrate his passion for morality in a more theatrically dramatic—as opposed to reactive—fashion in order to present the tragic defeat of idealism by conspiracy and deception. While *Don Carlos* does contain Sturm und Drang subject matter, it is overshadowed by the play's elements of classical tragedy.

Legacy Though Schiller has tended to fall under the shadow of Goethe, his famous friend, he continues to hold an important place in German literature. Schiller's intellectual superiority and creative passion were cause for national pride; for instance, his birthday was declared a national holiday, streets and schools were named after him, and his works were adopted as part of Germany's educational curriculum. Schiller's appeal has continued in part because of his association with great music, having inspired Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" and operas by Rossini and Verdi. Thinkers such as Carl Gustav Jung, Friederich Nietzsche, Friederich Hegel, and Karl Marx were also indebted to the ideas Schiller set forth in his philosophical and aesthetical works.

Works in Critical Context

National Icon Schiller's reputation as a boldly original thinker and artist was established with his controversial but highly successful first play, *The Robbers*. With the production of *The Minister*, he was recognized as one of the great masters of German drama. During his lifetime, he was lauded as one of the figures who raised the stature of German literature. Critics marveled at his ability to portray with immediacy and complexity human suffering and the triumph of the human spirit. He was regarded as a national icon on his death, and the attention paid to his works by German literary critics is comparable to Shakespeare in the English-speaking world.

In the nineteenth century, critics admired Schiller's taste and feeling and his concern for human freedom. Contemporary critics have suggested that Schiller's dramas are less accessible to modern readers due to their flamboyant, sometimes bombastic language. Nevertheless, most commentators agree that Schiller's themes and concerns, including political and individual freedom, and the complexity of human endeavor, and the struggle between the rational and sensual aspects of the self are remarkably prescient of twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns. Contemporary critics also tend to stress the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Schiller's plays often drew on historical events for both content and emotion. Here are a few examples of other writings based on historical events:

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens.

This well-known classic portrays human involvement in the events leading up to the bloody French Revolution.

Kristin Lavransdatter (1920), a novel by Sigrid Undset.

Filled with dramatic events, romantic intrigue, and political conspiracy, this work helped win its author the 1928 Nobel Prize.

The Other Boleyn Girl (2003), a novel by Philippa Gregory.

This work of historical fiction is told from the perspective of Anne Boleyn's sister Mary, who was King Henry VIII's mistress before he married Anne.

Braveheart (1995), a film directed by Mel Gibson. This

movie depicts life and war in thirteenth-century Scotland.

philosophical underpinnings of Schiller's plays and poetry as well as the political themes in his works.

Wilhelm Tell Since its debut in 1804, *Wilhelm Tell* has remained a work that is frequently performed and read. Critic H. B. Garland believes that *Wilhelm Tell* is "probably Schiller's most popular play, rich in qualities which no other of his works displays in equal degree," although, according to W. G. Moore, evaluation of the work "really rests upon a decision as to whether Schiller was predominantly a thinker, writing to present an argument about freedom, or a dramatist, presenting a case of notable conflict and a revelation of the mystery of life." Whatever their approach, critics continue to praise Schiller's ability to control the dramatic action of *Wilhelm Tell* through characterization, setting, and language.

Responses to Literature

1. Though Schiller's importance is now widely recognized, he was better known as Goethe's contemporary for many years. Select another famous literary friendship and analyze in an essay how the relationship affected each writer's work, as well as how each other's work affected their relationship.
2. Schiller's work inspired important pieces of music, from Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" to Rossini's *William Tell Overture*. Find at least three other pieces of music—any style, any time period—that were inspired by literature and create a presentation of your findings. Do you think adapting an existing text to song form makes for a successful piece of music?

- Schiller's discovery of Immanuel Kant greatly influenced his later work. What were Kant's primary beliefs? How might these have influenced Schiller's writings? Write an essay that outlines your conclusions.
- Schiller moved from romantic poetry to a quieter and more measured style as he grew older. Compare the early and later works of one of your favorite authors in a paper. What criteria would you use to assess the different bodies of work?
- Schiller was rescued from poverty by the patronage of a friend. In a paper, address these questions: How would the lack of a patron affect an author's literary output? What benefits does patronage provide? What solutions would you suggest for an aspiring artist who does not have a patron?

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📖 Olive Schreiner

BORN: 1855, South Africa

DIED: 1920, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Story of an African Farm (1888)

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland (1897)

Woman and Labour (1911)

From Man to Man (1927)

Overview

South African author Olive Schreiner was an important feminist and social critic. Her fiction, set in her native South Africa, brought that country's natural beauty, people, and racial problems to the world's attention. Modern feminists consider Schreiner one of the most important voices of the movement's early days. Her pioneering essays on the repressed plight of women and South African blacks have influenced many writers around the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Child of Missionaries Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner was born on March 24, 1855, at a remote Wesleyan mission station, Wittebergen, on the border of



Olive Schreiner Schreiner, Olive, 1901, photograph. Mansell / Mansell / Time and Life Pictures / Getty Images.

Basutoland in Cape Colony, South Africa. (At the time, Cape Colony was controlled by the United Kingdom, which annexed much of the territory that became South Africa in the nineteenth century.) The ninth of Gottlieb and Rebecca Lyndall Schreiner's dozen children, Olive was one of the seven who survived to adulthood. To supplement the meager salary he earned as a missionary, her father resorted to private trading, a violation for which he was expelled from the London Missionary Society. Financially unable to provide for his family as a storekeeper, Gottlieb Schreiner sent his two youngest children, eleven-year-old Olive and her nine-year-old brother, Will, to live with their older brother Theo, a school headmaster in Cradock. With her family dispersed, Schreiner boarded with relatives and friends until 1874, when she began to work as a governess for up-country Boer farming families. (Boers were Dutch farmers. The Dutch had begun settling what became South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century and soon began establishing farms. Boers and British settlers sometimes came into conflict over territory.)

Launched Writing Career Self-educated and well read, Schreiner took five teaching posts in the Cape Colony over the next seven years. She began writing fiction and saving her wages for a trip abroad, hoping to find a publisher and to study medicine. In 1881, at the age of twenty-six, Schreiner traveled to London with

three manuscripts, including one she at first called *Thorn Kloof*, then *Lyndall*, before finally deciding on *The Story of an African Farm*. Writer George Meredith, a reader for the publisher Chapman & Hall, recommended its publication. The novel appeared to acclaim in January 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Iron. Critics soon revealed that the best-selling work had been penned by a woman, making the ideas it espoused all the more controversial.

Breaking with Tradition Prevented from studying medicine by worsening asthma, Schreiner forged a career as a writer, moving in progressive political and literary circles, planning an edition of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and agitating for suffrage. At the time, women did not have the right to vote in Great Britain, though the Isle of Man had granted property-owning women the right to vote in 1881. Despite her upbringing by missionary parents, she gradually repudiated their traditional religious and social beliefs and formed friendships with freethinkers like Havelock Ellis, Eleanor Marx, and Karl Pearson.

Schreiner had little regard for prevailing fashions. With her marked disdain for hats, gloves, and restraining undergarments, Schreiner endured the constant disapproval of those who adhered to the rigid code of Victorian decorum. Her apparent disregard for appearances and adoption of the New Woman's reformed dress stemmed from more than a desire for comfort in her native South African climate. It was a deliberate statement on the severely limited boundaries of the woman's sphere. By emphasizing her "strong square figure" in shapeless suits, Schreiner physically asserted the feminist beliefs that formed the basis of her writing.

Return to South Africa In 1889, Schreiner returned to South Africa and, five years later, married farmer-politician Samuel C. Cronwright. Defying tradition, she retained her maiden name, while he hyphenated his to Cronwright-Schreiner. Their marriage was intermittently happy, marked by frequent and lengthy separations and marred by the death of their only child soon after her birth in 1895. As the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth century began, Great Britain cemented its power in South Africa after winning the second Boer War in 1902. The British fought the Boers, largely farmers of Dutch descent, who were concerned that the British wanted to exert total dominance over the Boer states of Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which had been annexed by Great Britain after the First Boer War in 1877, but enjoyed limited self-government; it turned out they were right to be concerned. The war was unpopular even in Britain, where the military's brutal actions in South Africa were viewed as naked imperialism. Great Britain gained control of the region with the signing of the Treaty Vereeniging.

During her marriage, she published collections of allegories and stories, articles on South African politics,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Schreiner's famous contemporaries include:

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): Anthony was a civil rights leader in the United States who also helped get women the right to vote.

George Meredith (1828–1909): English novelist and publisher's adviser who recommended that Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* be published. His novels include *The Egoist* (1879).

Havelock Ellis (1859–1939): This controversial British psychologist was a friend of Schreiner. His books include *The New Spirit* (1890) and *Sexual Selection in Men* (1905).

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): This British author wrote the extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), an important feminist work.

and her most influential writing on women's lives, *Woman and Labour* (1911). Gathering evidence from the animal world and women's history, Schreiner argued that the roles played by men and women were "neither universal nor innate." In the future, she maintained, both sexes would shed outer pretenses and emerge as equal "comrades and co-workers." As a result, Schreiner rejected the prevailing Victorian doctrine of separate spheres for the sexes and emerged as an advocate of egalitarian cooperation.

Yet in a society with such a fixed social and political hierarchy, she was by and large an outsider often unwell, and frequently short of funds. Schreiner feared at times that she was "only a broken and untried possibility" as a writer, citing her literary gifts, her unfinished works, and her difficult private life.

Novels Published after Death Throughout her life, Schreiner worked in spite of ill health and self-doubt to expose and remedy what she called "the desolating emptiness and barrenness of the majority of middle-class women's lives," paving the way for feminists who followed. After a return to England in 1914, she went back to South Africa shortly before her death in 1920. Schreiner's other novels—*From Man to Man* (1927) and *Undine* (1929)—had feminist themes and appeared posthumously.

Works in Literary Context

Questioning Established Beliefs Schreiner's experiences growing up in South Africa as the daughter of Christian missionary parents provided much inspiration to her writings and her life. While she eventually rebelled

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Schreiner is often associated with the feminist movement. Her literary portrayals of women who were equal partners with the men in their lives were inspiring and, at the time, uncommon. Here are some other works that focus on the role of women in difficult times:

A Room of One's Own (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf.

In this extended essay, Woolf claims that women must have money, time, and space if they want to write.

The Feminine Mystique (1963), a nonfiction book by Betty Friedan. This popular book challenged the idea that women mainly belong in the home.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In Atwood's futuristic society, women's main purpose is to produce children or to be wives.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café (1987), a novel by Fannie Flagg. In this novel, which was made into a popular film, a group of southern American women explore their various social and sexual roles and try to change them.

against these beliefs as well as many of the values of Victorian society, the background gave her something to react against. Schreiner was also self-educated, and the many books she read also influenced her as a writer.

Women and Children All of Schreiner's novels are concerned with women's search for equality, love, and fulfillment. They share characteristics common to Victorian fiction: the tendency to ramble and to appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Schreiner drew credible characterizations of children, but her depictions of adults, and especially her male characters, are often considered unrealistic. In her *Story of an African Farm*, however, the characters are sketched so vividly, so concretely, that most readers will remain attentive when the farm's isolation or the descriptions of nature lead a character to some philosophical or mystical musing. Clearly the young children's attempts to think through the demands of conventional religion are touching; the children are stunted and controlled by these restrictions.

The Natural World and the World of Mind Set in the landscape of Schreiner's childhood, *The Story of an African Farm* recounts the tale of two orphaned cousins, one a domestic, unimaginative sort, the other the most outspoken feminist to appear until then in British fiction. The novel combines several haunting, evocative descriptions of nature with many explorations of each character's own point of view. Many of the philosophical musings on religion, life, death, sexual roles, and the purpose of life

may have seemed profound to Schreiner, who was only twenty when she began to work on the isolated Fouche farm, Klein Ganna Hoek, in the Cape Colony.

Influence Modern feminists consider Schreiner one of the most important voices of the movement's early days. Her role as an influence upon other writers is also widely acknowledged. D. H. Lawrence's early novels owe much to Schreiner's daring treatment of human sexuality.

Works in Critical Context

Pioneer An unconventional woman, Schreiner was a pioneer in her treatment and depiction of women and in her vivid portrayal and use of the African landscape. As a novelist, short-story writer, and political essayist, she was both acclaimed and derided during her lifetime for her pioneering views on the role of women, her rejection of Christian convention, her anti-imperialist stance, and her pacifism during World War I.

Many critics contend that Schreiner is best appraised as something other than a fiction writer. In her novels, the artist often gives way to the social reformer, and Schreiner's bold, lively, and realistic style takes on a quasi-biblical aura in her short stories. These stories offer vibrant, optimistic visions of life, contrasting sharply with her novels in style and tone. Based upon readings of Schreiner's stories, some critics have described her as essentially a poet and a prophet and not a fiction writer. Today, Schreiner's works are read and studied by a new generation of feminists who ascribe to her a leadership role in the advancement of women's rights.

The Story of an African Farm When the public discovered that the author of *African Farm* was a woman, Schreiner's fame turned to notoriety, and the book was reassessed as un-Christian and antifeminine by many critics. While Henry Norman of the *Fortnightly Review* believed the novel was written by a woman despite the male name on the title page, he found much to praise. Norman called the novel "remarkable," and noted "in spite of its occasional youthful lapses, the whole story is of fascinating interest, and, what is more, of great moral power."

After its publication, Schreiner moved back to her homeland and continued to pursue a writing career, putting her energies into nonfiction dealing with a variety of social concerns. Schreiner published several other novels, including *From Man to Man* and *Undine*. Although her later novels contained feminist themes similar to *African Farm* and found critical favor for their depiction of the exotic African landscape, they were deemed, on the whole, inferior to Schreiner's first published work of fiction.

Woman and Labour *Woman and Labour* is considered Schreiner's most important piece of writing and social statement. The book attacks the economic and personal oppression of working women and was hailed

throughout the Western world as a persuasive, timely document. In *Woman and Labour* she used scientific observation to argue that gender roles are “neither universal nor innate.” Rather, she believed, future eras would find men and women living side by side as “comrades and co-workers.” In *Olive Schreiner: Her Friends and Times*, D. L. Hobman called *Woman and Labour* “one of the noblest books which have ever appeared in defense of feminism.”

Responses to Literature

1. Critics have claimed that Schreiner is more of an activist than a writer. Using examples from some of her works, write a short essay explaining why you agree or disagree.
2. Compare Schreiner’s writings about South Africa with more modern writers from the same region, such as J. M. Coetzee and Alan Paton. In a paper, address the topic and include the answers to these questions: Who seems to know more about the landscape? How can you tell?
3. Research the Boer War and create an oral presentation explaining Schreiner’s involvement.
4. *Woman and Labour* and Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* have similar themes, but Woolf’s is usually the more well regarded of the two. With a group of your classmates who are familiar with Woolf and Schreiner, discuss why that might be true.

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Bruno Schulz

BORN: 1892, Drohobycz, Galicia, Austria-Hungary

DIED: 1942, Drohobycz, Poland (now Ukraine)

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Street of Crocodiles (1934)

Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass (1937)

Overview

Schulz is considered one of twentieth-century Poland’s greatest writers, though he was hardly prolific. His reputation rests on a small body of extant work: the short-story collections *Sklepy cynamonowe* (*The Street of Crocodiles*) and *Sanatorium pod klepsydra* (*Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*). An amalgam of autobiography, fantasy, and philosophy, Schulz’s stories are often compared to the dreamlike works of surrealism, symbolism, and expressionism. Such comparisons notwithstanding, Schulz was not a member of any of these schools, and his work represents a significant departure from the dominant tenets of each.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Unhappy Teacher Longing to Write Schulz was born in Drohobycz, a provincial town that became part of Poland when that country regained independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. The youngest son of a Jewish textile merchant, Schulz studied architecture for three years at Lvov Polytechnikum. While he did not attain a degree at the Polytechnikum, his proficiency in graphics later earned him a teaching post at a high school in Drohobycz. According to his biographer, Jerzy Ficowski, Schulz loathed his job and devoted his spare time to writing and drawing.

Imagination Flowing in Letter Somewhat reclusive, Schulz rarely left his hometown and relied on correspondence for much of his communication with other writers and artists. Among his correspondents was Deborah Vogel, a poet who edited the literary journal *Cusztar*. In his letters to Vogel, Schulz included strange and fantastic narratives based on his childhood experiences. At Vogel’s suggestion, Schulz shaped these stories into his first book, *The Street of Crocodiles*. Published in 1934, this volume impressed the Warsaw literati and won

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Schulz's famous contemporaries include:

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Famed Argentine author, internationally recognized as one of the most important Latin American writers and thinkers of the twentieth century.

Léopold Senghor (1906–2001): Senghor, a poet and cultural theorist of international repute, was even better known as Senegal's first (and longest-serving) president after independence from France, which he helped negotiate. Senghor remained in office from 1960 to 1980.

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963): One of the most celebrated American poets of all time, Williams was associated with both modernism and imagism, and was also a practicing physician for many years.

James Joyce (1882–1941): One of the most highly regarded literary figures of the twentieth century, this Irishman is best known for his famous short stories and novels; these include *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Dwight Eisenhower (1890–1969): Eisenhower was the thirty-fourth president of the United States, from 1953 to 1961; prior to his presidency, he presided over the Allied forces' defeat of the Axis powers in Europe during World War II.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Ruthless dictator of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death in 1953, Stalin was responsible for the murder of millions of his citizens as well as for the rapid industrialization of Russia and other member-states of the Soviet Union.

a golden laurel from the Polish Academy of Letters. Schulz published only one more book in his lifetime, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, although he had been working on a novel titled *Mesjaz* (*The Messiah*) when he was fatally shot by a soldier in Nazi-occupied Drohobycz in 1942. The manuscript is believed to have been lost or destroyed during World War II.

Works in Literary Context

In the thirty-two short stories that constitute his entire body of work, Schulz offered his readers an original presentation of a world whose character transcends politics, psychology, or philosophy. The vision of subtle spirituality that he created owes a great deal to a sublime imagination that reveals and evokes, through kaleidoscopic change and metaphoric language, hidden realms of reality. In addition to being a writer, Schulz was also an artist. His many drawings and sketches can thematically

be divided into Drohobycz sketches, self-portraits, erotic scenes, and illustrations for his short stories. Though these works share certain elements with his fiction, the latter far surpasses them in pure imagination and originality.

Childhood and the Grotesque *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* have been compared to the fiction of writers such as Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust. In their fiction, both Kafka and Schulz transform banal places, people, and events into highly symbolic and often grotesque narratives. For example, in *The Street of Crocodiles*, the narrator tells of his father's physical and mental deterioration through symbolic metamorphoses into a bird, a cockroach, and a crab. Many critics contend, too, that Schulz's writing resembles Proust's in its obsession with childhood and time. In his stories Schulz devotes much attention to the narrator's impressions of his past and to the process of memory itself.

Oneself in the Past and One's Dead in the Future Unlike *The Street of Crocodiles*, which focuses primarily on the narrator's peculiar father, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* deals mostly with the experiences of the narrator himself, who resides in a quasi-magical world where time and space are malleable. In this world it is possible to move through both time and space as though neither existed fully independent of one's movement. In one episode, for instance, the narrator visits his dead father in a strange sanatorium, where the older man carries on a posthumous existence.

Of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, Emil Breiter observes that “[Schulz] tears the mask off the world by depriving it of the principle of causality, both temporal and spatial. In the apparent chaos that rules in ‘supernumerary time’ or in illusory space, the writer preserves such discipline in reasoning, shaping, and observation that one would think he existed in the clearest of realms, one perfectly ordered and free from contradictions.” This “tearing the mask off the world,” however, should not be mistaken for a refusal of some reality principle. Rather, Schulz is tracing out what it might mean to understand the world not simply as a function of some external and eternal set of natural laws, but also as something that comes into being for us depending on where we stand.

Works in Critical Context

Bruno Schulz is widely considered one of twentieth-century Poland's greatest prose stylists, though his body of work was small indeed. The two volumes of short stories he published have generated and played host to a broad range of criticism from essayists around the world. In the *Boston Review*, Benjamin Paloff writes, “Schulz's stories, phantasmagoric portraits of small-town life during the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, are told in a lush, lyrical prose that is widely credited with

reinvigorating the Polish literary language of the 1930s.” Further, Schulz’s biographer Jerzy Ficowski writes in his definitive study, *Regions of the Great Heresy*, “In a small provincial town, Bruno Schulz, a modest drawing teacher, undertook the lonely creation of a new world. He created a personal and disquieting bible: two collections of stories in which the object of worship is the secret essence of things which transcend their own limitations—the magic of creation.” In short, Schulz was profoundly concerned with reality, but it was reality’s essence—creation and invention themselves—not its external appearance, that concerned him. And what could be more at the heart of reality than, as Schulz himself put it in the story “The Book,” “this sense of things beyond name whose first taste on the tip of the tongue exceeds the capacity of our admiration”?

Responses to Literature

1. Why do so many authors, poets, dramatists, and others work so hard to offer visions of the world that are not “reality” as we know it but that readers will nonetheless find plausible? Why do you think readers identify with these visions? Structure your answer as an essay responding to the structure and elements of fiction in one or more of Schulz’s stories, analyzing both Schulz’s rationale for his craft and your own response to it.
2. One theme that frequently arises in Schulz’s work is the relationship of a child with his or her father. Compare and contrast three of Schulz’s short stories with regard to the way they treat relationships with parents. What overall trends do you see in Schulz’s treatment of this theme?
3. Research the short story as a genre, considering at least two prominent definitions. Compare and contrast two of Schulz’s short stories with regard to what a short story “should be” or “really is.” In what ways does Schulz’s work confirm and/or challenge the definitions with which you are working? Are there ways in which his writing asks you to rethink these definitions? If so, how would you redefine the short story in a way that accounts for his work?
4. Consider the processes of disintegration that Schulz describes in his short stories. What trends do you see in his descriptions? Look closely at word choice and sentence structure, at the elements of language that Schulz mobilizes to evoke a fuller sense of loss and disarray. Do you also see opposing tendencies in the same stories? What do these stories communicate, overall, with respect to the themes of loss and disintegration?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Schulz was an author who treated normal reality as fantastical. This practice situates his work within the broad-reaching genre of magic realism. Here are a few other texts that are magic realist in orientation, being set in the world we know but asking us to believe that it follows a set of rules different from those we are used to:

The Tin Drum (1959), a novel by Günter Grass. This German author’s postwar novel about Oskar Matzerath—ostensibly an autobiography written from memory while its narrator (though not its actual author) is in a mental hospital—traces the life of a boy who not only remembers his own birth but who also deliberately stopped growing at the age of three and whose screams shatter glass.

Paradise (1998), a novel by Toni Morrison. This novel explores the history and tensions of the fictional town of Ruby, Oklahoma, an all-black town near which a women’s commune has recently been established in an old convent. In following the lives and deaths of the women from this convent, Morrison makes use of several reality-bending elements of magic realism.

The Satanic Verses (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. This much-maligned novel earned Rushdie a fatwa, or edict of death, from the Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran at the time of the book’s publication. The novel centers on two Indian Muslim actors who survive the midair explosion of a hijacked airplane, and afterwards transform: one into an angel, and one into the devil.

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Walter Scott

BORN: 1771, Edinburgh, Scotland

DIED: 1832, Abbotsford, Scotland

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Lady of the Lake (1810)

Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since (1814)

Ivanhoe (1820)

Overview

Modern scholars consider Scottish author Sir Walter Scott both the inventor of the historical novel and the first best-selling novelist. In addition to elevating the novel to a status equal to that of poetry, Scott single-handedly created the genre of historical fiction, vividly bringing to life both Scottish and English history.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Illness Scott was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on August 15, 1771, into a prosperous middle-class family. His father, also named Walter, was a lawyer with strong ties to the Scottish Border country,



Sir Walter Scott Scott, Sir Walter, photograph. AP Images.

the area on the border of Scotland and England. His mother was Anne Rutherford Scott, daughter of a professor of medicine.

When he was eighteen months old, Scott contracted polio (an infectious virus that can cause paralysis in the arms and legs due to lesions to the central nervous system), which left his right leg permanently crippled. Despite his illness, Scott was an active child, and his parents often sent him to the countryside to stay with his paternal grandfather, hoping the fresh air and country living would improve Scott's health. Interested in Scottish history and literature during his childhood, Scott also developed an appreciation for the natural scenery that became such a defining characteristic of his writing.

Embraced Scottish Culture Scott enrolled in Edinburgh High School in 1778, and five years later entered Edinburgh University, where he studied history and law. In 1786, he was apprenticed to his father's legal firm and became a lawyer in 1792. During his apprenticeship, Scott traveled a good deal in the Scottish Border country and Highlands, gathering folk ballads and enjoying the oral tradition of simple farmers and shepherds.

In 1797, Scott married Charlotte Carpenter, with whom he had two daughters and two sons. Scott read widely in politics and history, and soon he was composing his own versions of traditional oral ballads. In 1798 he was appointed sheriff of Selkirkshire, Scotland, in the Border country. Shortly thereafter, the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland was passed. Thus, in 1800, the United Kingdom, which included Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland, formally came into being. Scotland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, was ruled by King George III of the House of Hanover at this time.

Poetic Success In *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), his first publication, Scott's interests as a poet, an antiquarian, and a Scottish cultural nationalist came together for the first time. This work contained the Scottish ballads he had collected over the years, many of which had never before appeared in print. Encouraged both by praise from friends and by the popularity of this collection, Scott wrote the highly successful narrative poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), a work Scott intended to illustrate the customs and manners of inhabitants on both sides of the Scottish-English border during medieval times.

Around this time, Scott quit practicing law full time and entered into a longtime relationship with the printer James Ballantyne, purchasing a third share in the business that would publish many of his works throughout the years. Scott followed the success of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* with a series of highly popular poems featuring Scottish backgrounds and themes. *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808), for example, tells of a famous—and disastrous—Scottish battle against the English. In 1810, Scott published his best-known long poem, *The Lady of the Lake*, set in the Scottish Highlands.

The Waverly Novels The triumph of the first two cantos of Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold* in 1812 convinced Scott that he could not compete with the younger poet. By the time Scott's next work, *Rokeby*, appeared in 1813, readers were beginning to lose interest in his poetry. Anxious to keep his audience and income, Scott decided to revise and complete a fragment of a novel that he had begun ten years before about the Jacobite revolution in Scotland, an attempt to restore the old Stuart line to the Scottish and English thrones. Published in 1814, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* quickly became the most successful work of its kind ever to appear, and the novel brought huge profits to Scott and his publisher.

Over the next seventeen years, Scott wrote more than two dozen novels and stories in a series now known as the Waverly Novels. Because he never worked out his plots ahead of time, rarely revised his manuscripts, and followed strict work habits, Scott was able to maintain an impressively prolific pace. Through the speech, manners, and customs of past ages, most of the Waverly Novels describe the lives of ordinary individuals who become involved in historical events. This body of work is often divided into three groups: the "Scotch Novels," including *Old Mortality* (1816), which deal with Scottish culture and history; the novels that focus on medieval history in England and Europe, such as *Ivanhoe* (1820); and those that are concerned with the Tudor-Stuart era in England, including *Woodstock* (1826).

Because writing novels was considered less respectable than writing poetry during this time, Scott published the Waverly Novels anonymously. Even when the success of this series increased general public appreciation for novelists, Scott chose to remain anonymous—most likely a result of his perception that the mystery surrounding the novels contributed to their sales. The Waverly Novels were published as "by the Author of *Waverly*," and the author was often referred to simply as the Great Unknown. Although the Waverly Novels were published anonymously, many readers and critics alike knew Scott's identity, and he became not only the most popular writer in contemporary English literature, but also a highly esteemed personality throughout Europe. In 1818, Scott was made a baronet and thereafter was known as Sir Walter Scott.

Personal Tragedies In 1826, a dual tragedy struck. His wife, Charlotte, died in May of that year, followed by Scott's financial ruin when the Ballantyne printing company went bankrupt. His debt was well over one hundred thousand pounds, an enormous sum. The following year, so that he could begin putting his affairs in order, Scott publicly acknowledged authorship of the Waverly Novels and turned with renewed urgency to his writing. Eventually, the debt was paid, but at a terrible cost to the author's health. Despite suffering a stroke in 1830, Scott continued to write and travel. Everywhere he trav-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Scott's famous contemporaries include:

Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821): The French military commander and self-appointed emperor conquered much of Europe until he was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo.

Robert Burns (1759–1796): Regarded as the "national poet of Scotland," Burns wrote extensively in the Scottish vernacular. His poems include "Auld Lang Syne" (1788), traditionally sung on New Year's.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824): An English Romantic poet who was known for his scandalous life and who died while fighting for Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire. His poems include *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (c. 1812).

William Clark (1770–1831): An American explorer, he was coleader of the Lewis and Clark expedition through unexplored overland territory to the Pacific coast.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828): An Austrian composer who wrote symphonies and chamber music. His works include *The String Quartet in D Minor* (1926).

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): Although deaf for much of his life, this German composer and musician was one of the world's greatest classical composers. The *Symphony No. 9 in D Minor* (1824) is among his best known works.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): One of the Lake Poets, this English Romantic poet was poet laureate of England from 1843 until his death in 1850. Among his best-known poems is *The Prelude* (1850).

eled, he was received as a celebrity, one of the first authors to enjoy international fame. During his travels, however, he was forced to return home after another stroke, and he died on September 21, 1832.

Works in Literary Context

Influenced by History Scott's reading of the works of Edmund Spenser and Torquato Tasso and Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) did much to shape his later poetry, as did his many expeditions to the countryside, where he spent time collecting ballads, local legends, and folklore. Scott was greatly influenced by the history and life of people who lived in his native Scotland.

Novel Incorporations Scott worked a number of ballads, songs, and other lyrics into his novels. Gothic writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis had revived the convention of interspersing lyric poems in prose narratives that was characteristic of earlier English

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Scott essentially invented the genre of historical fiction, a genre that still flourishes today. Here are some more recent works of historical fiction:

Gudrun's Tapestry (2003), a novel by Joan Schweighardt.

Set in the fifth century, this story vividly brings to life Attila the Hun and an ancient Norse saga.

I, Mona Lisa (2006), a novel by Jeanne Kalogridis. The author creates the life of a young woman in fifteenth-century Florence, Italy, who is the model for Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting.

Joshua's Bible (2003), a novel by Shelly Leanne. This novel follows a young African American man in the 1930s who goes to South Africa as a missionary and confronts the early days of apartheid.

Night of Flames (2007), a novel by Douglas W. Jacobson. In this novel, a married couple is separated while fleeing Nazi-occupied Poland during World War II.

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan (2006), a novel by Lisa See. This novel, set in nineteenth-century China, examines women's roles in rural China.

The Sugar Cane Curtain (2000), a novel by Zilia L. Laje. This novel explores the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba.

romances such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590, 1593) and Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590). Scott used this device to much greater effect than his Gothic predecessors did. His early mastery of song and ballad forms enabled him to establish atmosphere and character, and his use of lyrics to comment on or foreshadow the action of the novels is often quite subtle and effective.

Influence Twentieth-century critics have emphasized Scott's important role in English literary history, as well as his considerable impact on nineteenth-century European literature. Literary historians have traced his influence on the masterpieces of novelists as diverse as Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and William Makepeace Thackeray. Scholars have also explored Scott's significant contribution—through his invention and development of the historical novel—to the history of ideas, specifically with respect to the modern concept of historical perspective.

Works in Critical Context

Influence on Historical Perspective The novelty of Scott's writing style, as well as his compelling subject matter, captivated his early audience. Most early reviewers of his poetry and novels noted the superiority

of his works, citing their originality, vivid portrayal of history, and lively characters. Throughout the nineteenth century, Scott's reputation among readers and critics alike had progressively declined to the point that by the turn of the century, many conceded that Scott was no longer a major literary figure. Many contemporary critics observed such flaws as careless plotting, prolixity, and bad grammar, especially in his shorter fiction, but the critical tide turned in the mid-twentieth century. Modern scholars have acknowledged Scott's seminal influence on the development of the European novel genre, particularly with regard to historical perspective and the realization of the effects of social change on the lives of ordinary people.

Waverly; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since The first in the *Waverly* Novels series, *Waverley* (1814), proved a popular sensation when first published and quickly became the most successful work of its kind ever to appear. Contemporary critical reaction, though also positive, did cite certain deficiencies in the work, including careless construction and prolixity. Yet most early reviewers quickly acknowledged the strengths of the novel, noting its originality, vivid portrayal of history, and lively characters.

Like most of Scott's novels, *Waverley* has fallen out of favor, although it continues to attract the attention of scholars interested in the view of history it offers. In the late 1960s, Robert C. Gordon wrote in *Under Which King? A Study of the Scottish Waverly Novels*, "*Waverly*, then is one of the most distinguished innovations in literary history. It is also a splendid work in its own right. Scott found his solution to the problems of dealing with Jacobitism in the story of an immature, vain yet fundamentally proper young hero who becomes a warrior."

Other studies have been greatly influenced by the criticism of Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel*. In this work, Lukács examined Scott as a dialectical historian, claiming that he "endeavors to portray the struggles and antagonisms of history by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces." Numerous critics have taken up Lukács's idea and applied this thinking to Edward Waverley as he represents a significant moment of cultural transition in Scottish and English history.

Responses to Literature

1. In an essay, address the following questions: Do you think that novels are worth reading even if they are not considered "great literature"? When you read something, do you think about how well it is written, or do you simply enjoy the story? Who should define what "good" literature and music are—the critics or ordinary people? Why?

2. Since 1999, Scotland has had its own governing body, although it is still part of Great Britain. There is a movement toward Scotland's breaking its union with England and establishing complete independence. Research the independence movement and write an essay that analyzes the pros and cons of Scottish independence.
3. Historical novels and movies can make history come alive in a way that textbooks often cannot. Choose a period or movement that you have studied in school, and find a novel or movie about it. Read the novel or watch the movie and write a short essay analyzing it. Did it engage you or make you think differently? Did it contain historical inaccuracies in order to enhance dramatic effect?
4. Research the history of the state you live in. When was it established, and what were the conflicts in its early days? Do any of those conflicts continue today? Choose one event from your state's history, and write a short story patterned after the historical fiction of Scott. Develop your characters in such a way that captures the language, clothing, and settings of the past.

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Eugène Scribe

BORN: 1791, Paris, France

DIED: 1861, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

A Night at the National Guard (1815)

The School for Politicians; or, Non-Committal (1833)

The Glass of Water (1840)

Adrienne Lecouvreur (1849)

The Ladies' Battle (1851)

Overview

Eugène Scribe was one of the most prolific and popular French dramatists of the nineteenth century. Although his works are seldom produced today, Scribe is remembered for his mastery of the "well-made" play, which profoundly influenced the works of his contemporaries and successors. Scribe is known for plays that feature elaborate plots full of clever twists and light, witty dialogue. In addition, he wrote music and librettos to accompany his own stage plays and the operas of the time.



Eugène Scribe *Scribe, Eugène, engraving.*

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Prodigy Augustin Eugène Scribe was born in Paris on December 24, 1791. At this time, France was undergoing a period of social and political upheaval; the ten year French Revolution (1789–1799), which began shortly before Scribe's birth, transformed the government according to the principles of the Enlightenment, paving the way for changes in the literary arena. Scribe's father, a silk merchant, died when Eugène was an infant but left enough for his widow to raise their son without financial worries. She was able to send him to good schools, and he was a brilliant student at the Collège Sainte-Barbe, where he finished with a first prize in his last year. He received his prize under the dome of the Académie Française and, coincidentally, from the hands of Vincent-Antoine Arnault, whose seat at the Académie Scribe eventually inherited.

Rejecting Law for Theater Following his university education, Scribe's mother placed him with a prominent attorney, expecting him to demonstrate his talents in the field of law, but the young Scribe had developed a passion for the theater, and neither his mother's nor his employer's efforts could keep him away from it. When his mother died in 1807, his inheritance provided him an adequate living, and he devoted himself fully to the theater. He soon graduated from merely watching plays to writing them in collaboration with his former classmate, Germain Delavigne, among others.

Early Failures, Eventual Successes The first of Scribe and Delavigne's plays to be staged, on January 13, 1810, was *The Accidental Suitor; or, Opportunity Makes the Thief*, which did not make it through its first performance. Over the next five years more plays followed, none of which were successes. After several failures Delavigne gave up, but Scribe struggled on, and eventually his persistence was rewarded. In November 1815, he achieved his first hit with *A Night at the National Guard*, which introduced themes (such as virtue versus vice) that he would pursue for the rest of his career.

Prolific Career Although *A Night at the National Guard* was followed by several failures, it did not take long for the successes to mount as Scribe's prolific pen churned out more than a dozen works a year. Many were written with collaborators, which was a frequent practice at the time, and Scribe was always generous with his colleagues, sharing both credit and profits even though in many cases he did more than his share of the work.

Théâtre du Gymnase The opening of the new Théâtre du Gymnase in 1820 added to the prominence of Scribe. He provided its first play and was bound to the theater by a long-term contract. Over the next decade he wrote more than a hundred plays for the Théâtre du

Gymnase, which did not keep him from filling other theaters with more than forty more. His production included not only vaudevilles but also full-length dramas for the Théâtre-Français and librettos for the Opéra-Comique and the Opéra. He showed that he could be serious as well as humorous and that he understood the special needs of the musical genres, which made him much in demand as a librettist.

Important Contributions Scribe's popularity made him an invaluable member of the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, which he helped found in 1827. Writers had little leverage in dealing with theater managers and often had to settle for nominal payments for their work even if it went on to make a fortune for the theater. The new organization was able to establish fairer practices that set minimum payments and allowed those in great demand, such as Scribe, to negotiate upward from the base payments.

Académie Française In 1834, Scribe entered the Académie Française, replacing Arnault in the seat that had once belonged to Jean Racine. The next year he used the English court for a character study on the love of power in *The Ambitious* (1835) and a few years later chose the same locale for what is probably his best-known play, *The Glass of Water* (1840).

Late Marriage and Slowed Production Scribe remained single until he was forty-eight, when he married Madame Biollay, the widow of a wine merchant. It appears that she managed to do what his mother could not—get him to think at least occasionally about something other than the theater. His productivity after his marriage decreased significantly. It was the ideal bourgeois marriage that he favored so consistently in his plays—comfortable and harmonious. Scribe did continue to work, however, up until his death, which claimed him without warning on February 20, 1861, as he rode home in his carriage after a meeting. He was sixty-nine years old. Thousands turned out to watch his funeral cortège pass.

Works in Literary Context

A "Well-Made" Style Scribe was influential as the author who perfected the well-made play: he took forms and devices from the theater of earlier periods, like the recommendations made in Aristotle's *Poetics* for example, and combined them in inventive and systematic ways that formed a new type of play adaptable to various styles and genres. This new form, with its clarity, logic, and intriguing combination of inevitability and surprise, seldom failed to please the public.

The main plot, and the real subject of the play, might involve events and themes from history, politics, or various social issues of the day, but the focus of the play was action rather than philosophy. In many of Scribe's plays the structure centers around a single character whose

actions and decisions vitally affect the lives of the other characters. Often this character makes a decision and then changes it several times, provoking appropriate reactions from the other characters before the final decision brings about the play's resolution, or denouement.

Whatever the basic structure, Scribe obviously believed that the audience wanted the action to keep moving. Each scene makes a definite contribution to the development of the plot. Lyrical interludes and development of character beyond what is needed for the plot or for engaging the interest of the audience are considered unnecessary; they interrupt the flow of the action, so they are kept to a minimum, if not eliminated entirely.

Another major element of the construction of the well-made play is the arrangement of the entrances and exits and the onstage combinations that result. The scenes are usually tightly linked together, and each scene leads into the next; Scribe makes sure that each scene has a combination of characters that will permit the action to move forward according to a plan.

Scribe often linked a love interest to the principal plot. Most of his plays, however, have at least one subplot (and sometimes as many as seven), usually solidly connected to the main plot. In *The Glass of Water* (1840), for example, the love plot of Masham and Abigail and the struggle of Bolingbroke to overthrow the duchess become interdependent when the first three characters join forces. The subplot may be minor or nearly as important as the main plot, and it may stretch from beginning to the end of the play or just occupy a part of it, but it must be satisfactorily resolved before the final curtain. There can be no loose ends in a well-made play.

Human Virtue and Vice as Theme Scribe chose a wide variety of subjects for his plays. Many are linked to historical events in various times and places, including England, Russia, France, and even the United States during the American Revolution. They are only in a limited sense historical plays, for they tend to emphasize private lives against a historical backdrop rather than to portray political history for its own sake.

The values Scribe expresses consistently include the standard virtues and values that are generally called bourgeois. He opposes the old aristocratic prejudices against earning a living and favors individual merit above class origin. He shows the consequences of gambling, adultery, and a variety of character weaknesses. His characters speak constantly of money, reflecting its importance in society, but he repeatedly shows those who are excessively concerned about it in an unfavorable light, especially those who sacrifice their happiness, or that of others, to it. *Marrying for Money* (1827), for instance, puts primary emphasis on a theme that appears as a secondary consideration in many of his plays—the role of money in marriage. Scribe's most frequently represented form of happiness is a good marriage, one in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Scribe's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Babbage (1791–1871): British mathematician, philosopher, and mechanical engineer. Babbage is credited with originating the concept of a programmable computer.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish writer of the popular novels *Ivanhoe* (1820) and *Rob Roy* (1818).

James Buchanan (1791–1868): The fifteenth president of the United States of America, who was also the only bachelor president in the country's history.

John Keats (1795–1821): English poet and a central figure in the Romantic movement in literature.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851): English novelist, playwright, essayist, biographer, and short-story and travel writer who in addition edited the writings of her husband, poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): German poet, playwright, and philosopher.

which there is enough money for a modicum of comfort and a genuine affection between the partners.

He was widely imitated by playwrights as different as Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, Émile Augier, and Georges Feydeau, to name but a few, many of whom denied their debt to him and joined his detractors, who had almost from the beginning loudly proclaimed his supposed faults. Such sustained criticism and a vogue for new forms led to his eventual eclipse. A few of his plays have been produced in modern times, but today few among the theatergoing public even know his name although the techniques he used so masterfully continue to permeate the theater and made their way into the cinema and eventually into television.

Works in Critical Context

When Scribe took the seat at the Académie Française in 1894, his election was by no means universally acclaimed. Many critics, especially those associated with the Romantic movement, had long decried his “lack of style,” as Théophile Gautier put it. They placed primary emphasis on the literary value of dramatic works, and they forgave him neither his preference for realistic dialogue nor the commercial success he enjoyed and that was denied more “literary” authors. Scribe, following his usual practice when attacked, did not bother to respond.

Although many critics and playwrights recognized Scribe's mastery of dramatic construction and technique, few made more than a cursory attempt to explain it. Such an omission may be the result of disdain, since for some

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Scribe, focused on the consequences of greed, selfishness, ambition, and other vices in their work:

Othello (c. 1603), a play by William Shakespeare. In this classic tragedy, ambition is combined with jealousy and greed to destroy a marriage, a political relationship, and a life.

The Miser (1668), a play by Molière. In this comic drama, grown children seek to get away from their miserly father.

Wuthering Heights (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. In this classic novel, the two main characters have grown up together, love each other deeply, and are torn apart by the choices one makes based on selfishness and a sense of superiority.

Forbidden Love: A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan (2003), a novel by Norma Khouri. In this book an Arabic Muslim woman must face the dire personal and cultural consequences of falling in love with a Catholic man.

the phrase “well-made play” indicated inferior, lowbrow culture. But it may also have been with some amount of envy that his critics derided the playwright. Scribe was the first French playwright to make a fortune solely by writing plays. He was proud to acknowledge the source of his income and went so far as to have inscribed over the gate of his country estate: “The theater funded this rustic retreat. Thanks, traveler! I may owe it to you.”

The Glass of Water *The Glass of Water* played a key role in the career of a man who was both, as literary critic Philip G. Hill puts it, “hailed and acclaimed during his lifetime as a playwright wildly popular with the public” and “vilified and derided since his death, blamed for all the shortcomings of the playwrights who came after him.” “Neither position,” Hill concludes, “is completely fair.” What Scribe accomplished, in *The Glass of Water* perhaps above all, was “the structuring of theatrically effective plots out of nearly any subject matter that came to hand, so that the ‘well-made play’ became almost a formula.” From another perspective, scholar Stephen S. Stanton notes that “the reason the social dramatists adopted Scribe’s technique was that he had evolved a very tricky, though essentially mechanical, method of dealing with lightly social and moral themes, so as to make them seem amusing to a jaded and blasé society.” Stanton also observes that at times *The Glass of Water*, “for all its dependence on a hand prop and its skilful timing, seems more credible [than other, more ‘literary’

dramas] and not just another variation of a standard farce plot.”

Responses to Literature

1. Eugène Scribe is credited with creating the theatre genre known as the well-made play. Discuss the elements that make this kind of play and match the list of criteria against one of Scribe’s works. What are Scribe’s important techniques of action, characterization, and plot?
2. The term “well-made play” had negative connotations by the mid-nineteenth century. Yet several writers of the time and at the end of the 1800s refused to give up the convention. Study a play by Anton Chekov, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, or Émile Zola and, using the list of criteria for the well-made play, try to identify the elements that survived criticism. Defend your findings with examples from the text.
3. *Libretto* is Italian for “little book,” and is a text created for the production of, usually, an opera. Scribe was considered both a playwright and a librettist. Giuseppe Verdi and Jacques Offenbach were famous librettists. Investigate the history of the libretto. With an idea of the necessary components needed in a script for an opera, write a modern libretto: Choose a favorite short story or scene from a novel; decide on the best music to use; and add some action and dialogue set to music. Consider the reasons for your choices. For instance, why would a certain song fit with a moment in the opera? How would the best parts of the prose text be played out musically on stage? How can you cater to your audience as carefully as Scribe did?
4. Citing specific examples from the text, compare and contrast the conflicts in *The Glass of Water* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. Comment on these tensions with regard to aspects of the well-made play.

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George Seferis

BORN: 1900, Smyrna, Asia Minor

DIED: 1971, Athens, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Turning Point (1931)

The Cistern (1932)

Tale of Legends (1935)

Logbook III (1955)

Three Hidden Poems (1966)

Overview

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963, George Seferis is one of the most important poets and literary critics of Greece; his views on the Greek demotic, or common, folk tradition and literary canon determined the course of modern Greek letters for the better part of the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Son of a Law Professor George Seferis, pen name of Giorgos Seferiadis, was born on March 13, 1900, in Smyrna (now Izmir), Asia Minor (now Turkey), the son of Stelios and Despo Seferiadis. The family left Smyrna in 1914 for Athens, where Stelios Seferiadis taught law at the University of Athens.

Successful Experiments with Poetics While Greece Was in Turmoil After Seferis finished his secondary schooling in Athens, he pursued a law degree in Paris from 1918 to 1924, briefly visiting London from 1924 to 1925. Spending the formative years from the ages of

eighteen to twenty-five abroad, he remained attentive to the literary movements of the day, especially those of symbolism and surrealism. Meanwhile, Greece was torn apart by political struggles. After World War I (1914–1918), the centuries-old Ottoman Empire (which controlled much of eastern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa), began to collapse. This left a power vacuum in the areas that are now Greece and Turkey. Ethnic Greeks and ethnic Turks fought each other to win territory. The Greeks got half-hearted support from Britain other allies, who were drained and weary after World War I. The Turkish got the upper hand in the Greco-Turkish war, and the Greek population fled Asia Minor (now part of Turkey). After chasing them across the country, the Turks had hundreds of thousands of refugees cornered in the port city of Smyrna. Despite orders from the Turkish leaders not to harm noncombatants, the Turkish army massacred the Greeks and burned the city to the ground while British ships in the port refused to help or even take in the refugees. The event looms large in Greek history.

In 1931, with the publication of his first poetry collection, *Turning Point*, Seferis embarked on his career as a poet. In this work and in his later poetry collections—*The Cistern* (1932), *The Mythical Story* (1935), *Logbooks I–III* (1940), *The Thrush* (1947), and *Three Secret Poems* (1966)—he solidified his status as one of the most revered national poets of Greece. Seferis's experimentation with symbolist and modernist poetics and his exclusive use of demotic, or common, Greek as the language of choice earned him a privileged place in the collective body of work produced by his generation of poets, known in Greek literary criticism as "the Generation of the 1930s."

Advancing Literary Criticism Along with others of the "Generation of the 1930s," Seferis also published his literary criticism extensively in some of the most important literary journals in Greece. He is credited with advancing the genre to a new level of rigor and sophistication, the influence of which was felt for the better part of the twentieth century. Seferis was also an accomplished translator, publishing his translation of T. S. Eliot's poetry in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (1936) as well as *Antigraphes* (1965), a volume of translations of poets primarily of the symbolist and modernist traditions, such as William Butler Yeats, Paul Valéry, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, André Gide, and W. H. Auden.

Astute Political Writings By virtue of the various diplomatic positions he had held in the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs during his lengthy career from 1926 to 1962, Seferis was an astute observer of Greece's most tragic national crises, including the terrible aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War. The Albanian campaign of 1940 and 1941 was immediately followed by the Nazi occupation of Greece from 1941 to 1943. The ensuing Greek

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Seferis's famous contemporaries include:

Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong (1901–1971): American jazz trumpeter, he was an innovative and therefore primary influence in the advancement of jazz music.

Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957): Greek novelist best known for *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1951) and *Zorba the Greek* (1946).

Luis Buñuel (1900–1983): Spanish filmmaker who worked mainly in Mexico and France. Buñuel is considered one of the most important directors in the history of cinema.

Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949): American author who won the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Gone with the Wind*.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): English-American poet, dramatist, and literary critic, he was instrumental in advancing literary theory and contributed one of the most definitive and representative works in history with *The Waste Land* (1922).

civil war from 1946 to 1949 was followed by the Cyprus conflict during the 1950s. Reactions to these crises abound in Seferis's private, political, and autobiographical journals, such as his *Political Journals and Manuscript Sept. '41*.

Political Crisis Reflected in Poetry Seferis's poetry also reflected the crises. In the aftermath of the destruction of Smyrna and the displacement of more than a million refugees into Greece, Greek society was burdened by a great sense of defeat and loss. The twenty-four poems that make up the collection *The Mythical Story* (1935) were written in the context of this psychological defeatism. Although Seferis does not explicitly refer to the evacuation of Smyrna, his birthplace, fleeting images in the poem recall scenes from this tragic episode in recent history that had become embedded in Greek popular memory. In *Logbook II* (1944), written in the period of World War II (during which Seferis was in exile) and thereafter, he presents a cluster of poems that thoughtfully deal with the theme of the destructiveness and futility of war.

The Nobel Prize and Other Honors Seferis won the Nobel Prize in 1963, the first Greek national to win any of the five annual prizes since the Swedish Academy began issuing the awards in 1901. Seferis received several honorary doctoral degrees from Cambridge (1960), Oxford (1964), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (1964), and Princeton University (1965). Seferis also

become an honorary foreign member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and was appointed honorary fellow of the Modern Language Association in 1966. He was invited to become Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard for the academic year 1969–1970. Although he was honored by the invitation, he declined because he was uncomfortable with the idea of lecturing at Harvard at a time when exercising the freedom of expression had been prohibited in Greece. At the time, Greece was under the control of a repressive military junta.

After he returned to Greece, because of mounting public pressure, Seferis issued his first public statement condemning the junta in what had hitherto been two years marked by the regime's repressive measures, including widespread censorship, political detentions, and torture. Seferis's statement was made on March 29, 1969, on the BBC and distributed to every newspaper in Athens. Defying martial law, he called for an end to the dictatorship. He regarded the widespread curbing of liberties a national "humiliation" and concluded that "We have all learned that in dictatorial regimes the beginning may seem easy, yet tragedy lurks, inexorably in the end."

George Seferis, however, did not live to see the end of the junta. He died in Athens, after extensive hospitalization, on September 20, 1971. His funeral in Athens drew a vast crowd and was linked to the protest movement against the dictatorial regime of his native Greece. The junta fell from power in 1974.

Works in Literary Context

In his early years abroad, Seferis was exposed to the work of many influential writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, and T. S. Eliot. In early collections like *Turning Point* (1931), Seferis also presents a diction that pays homage to his literary predecessors: Homer, seventeenth-century Cretan Renaissance poet Vincentzos Kornaros, and nineteenth-century poet Ioannis Makryannis. It is Makryannis's *Memoirs* that Seferis went on to hold in his lectures and literary criticism of the 1940s as an exemplary model of demotic Greek folk tradition. It is in his themes and style, however, that Seferis returns to being a symbolist taking much influence from modernist poets like Eliot.

Themes of Recovery of the Antique Past The idea of the need for a recovery of antiquity permeates Seferis's poems. It is both the textual tradition (the study of history) and the preserving of collective consciousness (group awareness) of history that concern Seferis. His poems "The King of Asine" from the collection *Logbook I* (1940) and "Mycenae" from the collection *Gymnopaedia* (1935) best illustrate his interests. "The King of Asine," for example, is based upon an obscure textual reference in Homer's *Iliad* and features the contemporary

poet in search of the lost king, walking among ruins at an archaeological site. The poet attempts to interpret these broken fragments, to give meaning in his present to the archaeological ruins of the past.

Seferis recalls how the understanding of the ancient past underlying the discourse of European Hellenism since the nineteenth century was founded upon the reading of fragments. In this case, he deciphers stone fragments to contemplate the existence of those who had once lived there. But those ancient peoples remain remote and inaccessible now. The stones instill in him a void, and he concludes that only through nostalgia can the past revive: “nostalgia,” as Seferis puts it, “for the weight of a living existence” brings the fragments back to life and renders them meaningful to modern consciousness.

Preoccupation with History and Myth Seferis’s preoccupation with history and myth in his poetry and his translation and explication of Eliot’s work in his literary criticism of the 1930s and 1940s prompted many critics of his day to proclaim the so-called influence of Eliot on Seferis. His early poems, for instance, convey a use of literary devices that were often closely associated with Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Imagery of broken stones and fragments and arid landscapes were interpreted as metaphors for the spiritual emptiness and emotional vacuity of the narrators of the poems.

Modern Symbolist Style Seferis’s early poetry shows his affinity for symbolism. Though he remained critical of the avant-garde artistic movements that relied heavily on symbolism, which he viewed as “facile poetry,” what particularly distinguishes his style is his use of symbols. Throughout his work there are both readily decipherable ones (“stones,” “statues,” “landscape”) and obscure ones intelligible only to himself (“swans,” “angelic and black light”). Scholars and critics considered this trademark practice to be associated with the symbolist movement in European and Anglo-American literary and artistic circles.

In its adherence to such principles, symbolist poetry, just as many other modernist texts, lent itself to multiple interpretations. These elements were most closely considered part of a “pure poetry.” They were also closely associated with the ever-changing definitions of symbolism, as represented in the work of contemporaries. These connections linked Seferis’s experimentation with symbolist practice to Valéry, to Yeats, and again to Eliot.

Works in Critical Context

When Seferis won the Nobel Prize in 1963, the critical appreciation of his poetry concerning his nation and its past and present was clear: in awarding this prize, the academy was paying “tribute to the Greece of today, whose rich literature has had to wait, perhaps too long, for the Nobel laurels.” Much of Seferis’s work demon-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also included themes of the past within the context of their own cultures:

Hunger of Memory (2004), an autobiography by Richard Rodriguez. In this nonfiction work, the author revisits his Mexican American background experiences, particularly in American Catholic schools.

Morning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography (1994), an autobiography by Morning Dove (Christine Quintasket). In this sprawling narrative, the author revisits life with the Colville Confederated Tribes and explores what “kept us going.”

Nisei Daughter (1979), an autobiography by Monica Itoi Sone. In this tender and often humorous account, Japanese American author Sone revisits her prewar and World War II days as a resident of Seattle and as an internment camp evacuee.

The Republic of Poetry (2006), poems by Martín Espada. These poems explore the politics of Latin American loyalty and freedom.

strates how deserving he was of this praise for his “tributes” to Greece, including, for example, “Mycenae.”

“Mycenae” In this poem from the collection *Gymnopaedia*, Seferis acknowledges the continuing relevance of the model of Aeschylean justice. The narrator, presumably a modern-day Orestes, refers to the stones at the ancient archaeological site in Mycenae and conveys their overwhelming impact on him, “Whoever lifts these heavy stones sinks / I lifted these stones for as long as I could / I loved these stones for as long as I could.” The “stones” in these lines have been interpreted by critics over the years to signify the burden of the ancient past on modern Greek consciousness. The consciousness (of the speaker) in “Mycenae” looks upon antiquity as being inextricably linked to modernity. That is its fate. Yet, it remains a past that is enigmatic and virtually unidentifiable.

At the Nobel Prize Awards banquet in his presentation speech, the permanent secretary of the academy, Anders Österling spoke to the key symbols that distinguish Seferis’s poetry by saying that the poet had astutely interpreted “the mystery of the stones, of the dead fragments of marble and of the silent, smiling statues.” And echoing the reception of critics and citizens alike Österling added, “Seferis’s poetic production is not large, but because of the uniqueness of its thought and style and the beauty of its language, it has become a lasting symbol of all that is indestructible in the Hellenic affirmation of life.”

Responses to Literature

1. Seferis made a connection with history by observing the ruins of his ancient Greece and considering how they represented the past. Find an object at your school, home, or local museum that is from the distant past. Using all of your senses (first make sure you have freedom to touch the item), except maybe taste, describe the object. Then decide what you believe this object “represents” from the past.
2. Seferis was considered a symbolist poet at numerous periods in his writing life. Before researching further, consider one important object in your life (or consider what one single tattoo you would get if you could). Why did you choose this object or image? What did it make you think of? What feelings come from the object/image for you? What does your choice say about who you are? That is, how does your choice represent your personality? You may even wish to research a symbolism Web site or a dream meaning Web site to see what someone else thinks the item says about you.
3. Research the symbolist movement. What was the philosophy of the symbolists? How were you a symbolist when you completed one of the above tasks? How is Seferis a symbolist? What items does he use in his poetry and what are the associations connected to these objects?

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Jaroslav Seifert

BORN: 1901, Prague, Austro-Hungary

DIED: 1986, Prague, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech

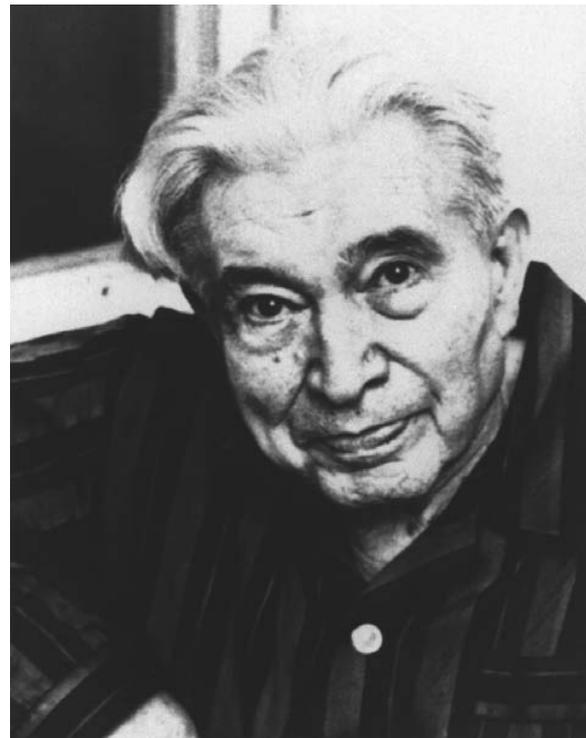
GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, essay

MAJOR WORKS:

Halley's Comet (1967)

Casting of Bells (1967)

The Plague Column (1970)



Jaroslav Seifert Seifert, Jaroslav, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

The winner of the 1984 Nobel Prize in Literature, Seifert is widely considered to be the Czech national poet as well as one of the foremost Czech literary figures of the twentieth century. Respected for his courage and integrity in the face of the political repressions of both the Nazi and the Communist eras, Seifert was a prolific author, publishing more than thirty volumes of poetry over a span of sixty years. His verse, thought to embody the spirit of the Czech people, is infused with Czech history, literature, and culture and frequently pays homage to Seifert's hometown, the Czech capital city of Prague.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Former Communist Resists the Nazis Seifert, son of a working-class family, published his first volume of poems in 1921 and, together with other young intellectuals, joined the newly formed Czechoslovakian Communist Party. In 1929, when that party's leadership changed its course to reflect developments in the Soviet Union—most notably the rise to power of Joseph Stalin—seven of the foremost writers among its members, including Seifert, protested publicly and were expelled. After his break with the Communists, Seifert worked as a literary editor, mostly on social democrat periodicals, and published one collection of poems after another. During the Munich crisis of 1938—when the great powers of Europe essentially gave Hitler free rein in “reclaiming” the Sudetenland, a largely German-speaking portion of Czechoslovakia—and the subsequent catastrophes that shattered the country, leaving its people dominated by Nazi Germany, Seifert became a spokesman for Czechoslovakian nationalism and penned many poems urging resistance.

Disloyalty and Treachery—or an Independent Mind? During the immediate post-World War II period, Seifert directed an eclectic review, the *Bouquet*, but this was shut down in 1948 when the Communists seized power. The new authoritarian government silenced Seifert and many other writers for failing to promote the slogans of social realism. A series of poems by Seifert in 1950 honoring his native village and rural novelist Božena Němcová, a greatly admired Czech novelist and female rebel of the classic period of Czech literature, earned him the denunciation of official critics as “disloyal,” “bourgeois,” “escapist,” and “a traitor to his class.” Seifert then turned to writing children's literature, a genre to which his direct, simple style was well suited. One of these efforts, *Maminka*, has become a classic of Czech literature, epitomizing, according to Alfred French in *Czech Writers and Politics, 1945–1969*, “a whole trend of literature away from the monumental to the humble; from public themes to private; from the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Seifert's famous contemporaries include:

- Jacques Roumain** (1907–1944): The Haitian poet and novelist credited with introducing the “Afro-Haitian” voice to literature.
- Ernst Jünger** (1895–1998): A German author who details his experiences as an officer during World War I in the memoir *Storm of Steel*.
- Vladimir Nabokov** (1899–1977): A Russian American novelist most famous for his extremely controversial novel *Lolita*.
- Erich Fromm** (1900–1980): A renowned German American social psychologist.
- Joseph Stalin** (1878–1953): The dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union from the late 1920s until his death in 1953.

pseudoreality of political slogans to the known reality of Czech home life which was the product of its past.” This turn to the private, in a way, prefigured the “apolitical politics” that would characterize the resistance to authoritarian rule that developed with the Charter 77 group in 1977 and thereafter.

The Dean of Czech Letters In 1956, when the Soviet regime in Czechoslovakia tightened controls on artistic freedom, Seifert spoke out at a writers' association meeting on behalf of imprisoned and silenced writers. His speech had little immediate effect beyond infuriating the establishment sufficiently to suspend publication of his new works, but the poet was from that time on generally regarded as the dean of Czech letters, a man from the old days whose contemporaries were almost all dead, who could always be counted on to speak the truth.

Seifert reemerged in the mid-1960s at the forefront of the drive among Czech writers to support the liberalization and de-Sovietization of the Communist regime, a national movement known as the Prague Spring. The liberalization of the Prague Spring, however, was cut short by a Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, assuring that Soviet rule would continue until the bloodless revolution of 1989. The following October, the National Writers Union elected Seifert president to replace the exiled Eduard Goldstucker, but the country's leaders dissolved the union in 1970. Seifert refused to join a new government-backed writers union and was one of the first to sign the Charter 77 human rights manifesto. Consequently, the poet was again out of favor, and for a decade the Czech authorities published no new work of his.

His new writings were published mainly privately or abroad, the best known of which was *The Plague*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Even though Seifert experienced many problems in his native Czechoslovakia, including a fair bit of political disfavor, his entire body of work demonstrates his love for his country. He frequently invokes the characters, places, and traditions of Czechoslovakia in order to enliven his poetry and to honor his heritage. Here are a few other examples of art that expresses or addresses national feeling:

This Is the Army (1943), a musical play directed by Michael Curtiz. This American musical was designed to boost morale during the long and difficult World War II years. Future president of the United States Ronald Reagan was one of the stars of the film.

"This Land Is Your Land" (1940), a folksong by Woody Guthrie. This song by the famed American folksinger celebrates the beauty of the American landscape and the sense of community he feels in sharing it with his compatriots.

Jingo (1997), a novel by Terry Pratchett. The title of this novel, about a war between two countries over a newly formed island, refers to "jingoism," or belligerent patriotism.

Column, published in Czech in 1977 by the émigré publishing house Index in Cologne, West Germany, and later translated into English. A single, long poem, it celebrates the monument erected by the people of Prague soon after the end of the Thirty Years' War in thanks for deliverance from the plague.

The Nobel Prize In view of Seifert's great popularity and the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Czech officials relented and allowed the publication of an edition of *The Plague Column* in 1981. A year later, they also allowed Seifert's memoirs, *All the Beauties of the World*, to be released. Two years after that, in 1984, Seifert was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In fact, during the last years of his life, Seifert enjoyed a unique position among his fellow writers: He had been a dissident and published abroad, yet he was, at the end of his long career, acceptable to the Prague regime. "He is not liked by the state, but they cannot silence him because he is so famous," exiled Czech poet Pavel Kohout told United Press International on the day of the Swedish Academy's announcement of the 1984 Nobel Prize winner, adding, "He's really a voice of the people." Seifert died in relative seclusion in 1986, three years before the monumental shift in Czechoslovakia and other Eastern bloc countries that has been termed the "Revolution of 1989"—a shift that signaled the end of Soviet hegemony and, indeed, the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union itself.

Works in Literary Context

Seifert's career as a poet ranged from an intensely lyrical period when he began writing in the 1920s, to a surrealist phase in the 1930s, to vehement patriotism during the Nazi occupation, and, finally, to a meditative, philosophical stage toward the end of his life. But throughout, his themes remained constant: celebration of his homeland and his native Prague, a deep concern for the suffering of others, and a sensuous delight in the beauty of the physical world and the love of women. Critics credit his appeal as a poet to his work's utter simplicity and unpretentiousness and its haunting and lyrical qualities.

From Proletarian Poetry to Pure Poetry and Beyond As a young man, Seifert passed through the then-dominant phase of "proletarian" poetry, as revealed in his first two collections, *The City in Tears* and *Nothing but Love*; these were celebrations of the common person and the bright future of socialism. He also embraced the succeeding "pure poetry" phase, with its emphasis on exotic and playful imagery, as evidenced by *On Radio Waves* and *The Nightingale Sings Badly*. Seifert's poetic maturity reputedly began with the cycle of poems *The Carrier Pigeon* and peaked with *Jablko z klína*, a collection in which the clever manner and fireworks of earlier works had been abandoned for a new style, one notable for its sincerity and directness and for its cultivation of natural, unaffected images rendered in fresh, at times almost colloquial, language. Love, including its sensual aspects, a frequent theme in Seifert's earlier collections, is his main subject in *An Apple from the Lap* and continues to dominate his next collection, *The Hands of Venus*.

In the years leading up to and following the Prague Spring, Seifert published the trilogy that is perhaps his best-known work: *Halley's Comet*, *Casting of Bells*, and *The Plague Column*. These poems evoked themes that had called to Seifert from the beginning of his poetic career; yet, within the new poetic environment of free verse and an abstinence from ornament, Seifert's lyric takes on a stronger ethical challenge and a more meditative tenor than it had before. As a result, the trilogy represents the strongest, most effective, and most critically acclaimed work of Seifert's long and prestigious career.

Patriotism The national catastrophe at Munich in 1938 and the Nazi occupation that followed brought out Seifert's deep patriotism, reflected in some of his most acclaimed collections. These include *Put Out the Lights*, which expresses the poet's anxiety after the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich, *Dressed in Light*, a poetic tribute to Prague written by Seifert during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, and *The Helmet of Clay*, several cycles of patriotic verses published after the war, celebrating in particular the Prague uprising against the remnants of the occupying Nazi army in May of 1945. In *The Helmet of Clay*, a tremendously popular

collection that is generally credited with establishing Seifert as a national poet, he pits the brief violence and the eerie excitement of improvised barricades against the startling beauty of the lilacs, the acacias, and the chestnuts in bloom.

Works in Critical Context

Many commentators have found it difficult to understand the implications of Seifert's work in its translated form. Critics note that what Seifert called his poems' "inner rhythms"—as well as the many ethnic nuances and allusions—have not been captured adequately by translators. Nevertheless, his poetry has been widely praised, and is described in his Nobel Prize citation as work that, "endowed with freshness, sensuality, and rich inventiveness, provides a liberating image of the indomitable spirit and versatility of man."

With his patriotic poems, writes fellow Czech poet Josef Skvorecky in the *New Republic*, "full of both linguistic beauty and encoded messages—clear to the Czechs, impenetrable to the Nazi censor, the poet boosted the morale of the nation." These were poems that, in the words of *Listener* contributor Karel Janovicky, "plucked the secret strings of the nation's soul while the Nazi censor looked on bewildered."

Halley's Comet, Casting of Bells, and The Plague Column Seifert's stylistic innovation in the impressive and imposing collections *Halley's Comet*, *Casting of Bells*, and *The Plague Column* showed, as critics have noted, that, though he was installed as a national icon, he was by no means a fixed, static entity but a flexible poet with artistic currency. The poetry of this trilogy was haunted by the dual and dueling themes of the wages and rewards of being human: death, war, and loss on the one side, and the vital and immortal power of poetry, love, and sensuality on the other. Prague—the city of nostalgia and trauma—was the background against which these forces were examined. Like earlier readers of Seifert's trilogy, more recent critics have tended to respond at least in part to Seifert's tremendous political integrity. Zdenek Salzman, for instance, describes Seifert's role in Czechoslovakia, expressed in these volumes, as "a symbol of courage and political incorruptibility." Meanwhile, critics such as Dana Lowey have lamented the "damaging translations" that have resulted in "misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and downright misrepresentations of Seifert's art." Coming in for particular criticism in this regard is an early rendering of *Casting of Bells* by translators Paul Jagasich and Tom O'Grady.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Plague Column*. How does Seifert both use and examine Czech history and culture in his poetry? Analyze specific passages in your response.

2. Seifert's poetry has been praised for its simple, straightforward style, but it has also been said that Seifert is sometimes difficult to understand for non-Czech readers. Read *Casting of Bells*. Evaluate Seifert's style in terms of the seemingly contradictory assessment that his poetry is both extremely accessible and yet difficult to understand. Do you think it is more important for a writer to reflect the culture in which he or she works or to appeal to readers on a more universal level? Why?
3. Using the Internet and the library, research patriotism. Then, read a couple of examples of patriotic literature. In a short essay, examine the following question: How does your school's fight song compare to patriotism and the patriotic literature you have read, in terms of its expressions of love and devotion for a place and the people who inhabit it? What are the potential problems posed by such patriotism?
4. Using the Internet and the library, research the treatment of other writers in Czechoslovakia during the heyday of Communism and Nazism. How does Seifert's treatment compare with these other writers' treatment?

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Seneca

BORN: 4 BCE, Corduba (now Córdoba), Spain

DIED: 65 CE, Rome

NATIONALITY: Roman

GENRE: Nonfiction, drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

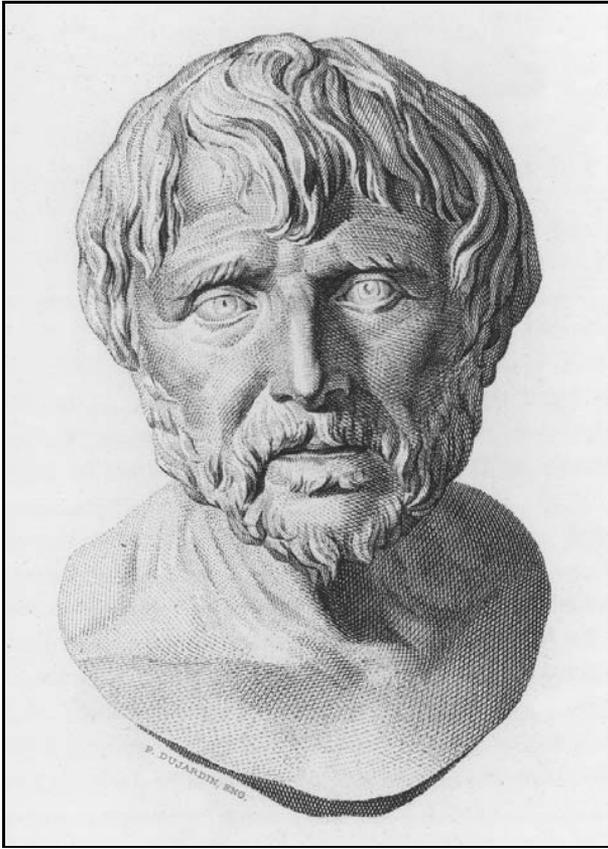
Medea (composition date unknown)

Thyestes (composition date unknown)

On Favors (63 CE)

Natural Questions (63 CE)

Moral Epistles (64 CE)



Seneca Archive Photos / Getty Images

Overview

Seneca (known as Seneca “the Younger”) is the principal Stoic philosopher, essayist, and tragedian of imperial Rome. A prolific and versatile writer, Seneca was a respected man of letters who also fully and actively participated in the politics of his time. Serving as tutor and advisor to the young emperor Nero, Seneca helped to direct Nero’s political policies between the years 54 and 62 CE, ensuring a greater measure of tolerance and justice in Rome. Seneca’s tragedies—alternately lauded for his powerful portrayals of extreme circumstances and mental states and criticized for his presentation of lurid onstage violence—left a permanent mark on English drama and are considered his most enduring contribution to literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Studies, Travel to Egypt, and Tuberculosis

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in 4 BCE, or shortly before, in Corduba (modern Córdoba) in southern Spain, the second son of Seneca the Elder, a famous rhetorician and teacher. Brought to Rome by his maternal aunt when he was a small child, Seneca embarked on the study of

grammar and rhetoric, eventually turning to philosophy. During that period, he traveled to Egypt, where his aunt and uncle were living, while his uncle served as provincial governor. Seneca experienced a serious illness during this stay, and scholars agree that he probably suffered from ill health for most of his life due to a tubercular condition.

Exile, Return, and Rise to Power When he returned to Rome in 31 CE after a long convalescence in Egypt, he held the government post of quaestor (magistrate) and was eventually admitted to the Roman Senate. He rose to fame as both an orator and an author. His popularity and stature, as biographers speculate, aroused the jealousy of the emperor Caligula. He survived the brief rule of Caligula (37–41 CE) only to be exiled to Corsica in the first year of Claudius’s reign (41 CE). The charge was adultery with Caligula’s sister, Julia Livilla, brought by the new empress, Claudius’s young wife, Messalina.

Seneca’s exile came at a time of great personal distress—both his father and his son had recently died. For much of these eight tedious years, Seneca devoted his time to literary compositions, including his treatise *On Anger* (41 CE). By this time, his Stoic philosophy was well developed. Stoics regarded emotions as unhealthy effects of the unnatural condition they called “vice.” In his elaborate exposition, Seneca defines anger as “the burning desire to avenge a wrong,” and represents it as the most hideous of all the emotions. He then offers prescriptions on how to prevent and extinguish anger.

In 48 CE, Messalina was executed. The following year, Seneca, through the agency of Agrippina, Claudius’s new wife, was allowed to return to Rome in order to work as tutor to her son Nero and to assume the office of praetor (a high ranking magistrate and army commander). His literary and philosophical reputation was now well established, and this appointment as Nero’s tutor placed Seneca again at the center of the Roman world. When Agrippina poisoned her emperor-husband, and Nero ascended the throne in 54 CE, Seneca suddenly wielded immense power and influence.

Political Power For the first eight years of Nero’s reign, Seneca and the commander of the praetorian guard, Afranius Burrus, acted as his chief ministers and political counselors, shaping and substantially controlling his policies. Historians assert that during these years Seneca’s influence on Nero was a tempering one, for he encouraged the young ruler to work toward a more enlightened and socially beneficent state. They also note, however, that Seneca must have bowed to many of Nero’s wishes in order to preserve his position in the court and that he may have aided, or helped to cover up, Nero’s murder of his mother, Agrippina, in 59 CE.

Between Seneca’s return from exile in 49 CE and his effective retirement in 62 CE, he wrote most of his philosophical dialogues. These works espouse Stoic positions on ethical issues: They advocate virtue, endurance, and

self-sufficiency; they condemn evil, emotions, and the false values of wealth and power; they praise reason, wisdom, and poverty; they show contempt for the fear of death. To this period too are dated *On Mercy* (55–56 CE), written as advice to Nero, and *Pumpkinification* (54 CE), a sharp satire deriding the deification of Claudius, designed to reflect well on the image of the new potentate.

As Nero's rule progressed, Seneca became increasingly subject to criticism for the gap between his Stoic exhortations and Nero's tyrannical tendencies, which included the murder of his stepbrother, Britannicus, in full view of the imperial court. Seneca also drew attacks for hypocrisy; his praise of poverty did not prevent him from amassing a huge fortune through his position in the court. His treatise *On the Happy Life* (c. 58 CE), in which wealth is justified as a potential instrument of virtue, was probably written as a personal apologia.

Seneca's Moral Epistles One of Seneca's longer philosophical works, *On Favors* (c. 61 CE), illuminates Roman social and moral codes by examining, in detail, the complexities surrounding individual acts of kindness. Its composition late in Seneca's political career—as the monstrous acts of the former pupil he no longer controlled began to breach Roman codes—is but one of many ironies defining Seneca's life.

Following the death of Burrus in 62 CE, Seneca retired from public life. His last works include a scientific volume on *Natural Questions* (c. 62 CE), and the letters addressed his friend Lucilius, known as the *Moral Epistles* (c. 62–65 CE). The latter became Seneca's most popular prose work from antiquity to the present day, and its popularity is easy to understand. The fictive pose of correspondence enables Seneca to cover an enormous range and variety of subject matter, addressed in an informal manner that strikes readers as authentic and sincere. The epistles have been called the forebears of the modern discursive essay.

In 65 CE, Seneca was accused of participating in an unsuccessful conspiracy against Nero. The emperor ordered him to commit suicide, and Seneca obeyed, dying in a highly theatrical manner with self-conscious allusions to the death of Socrates and to his own place in history. His final act, judged a heroic one, was recorded by Tacitus in his *Annals*.

Senecan Drama A good portion of Seneca's body of writing survives to the present day; among his lost works are writings on science, geography, and philosophy, as well as all of his speeches. In addition to his prose, he is today remembered for his contribution to the Roman stage. At least seven complete tragedies can be assigned to Seneca. Two others may be his, but their authorship is disputed; one more, *Phoenissae*, exists in fragments, suggesting that it was never finished. Scholars surmise that the tragedies were written between 45 and 55 CE.

Most of his plays, such as *Medea* and *Oedipus*, are based on existing works by the Greek dramatists Euripi-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Seneca's famous contemporaries include:

Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE): influential Roman poet, author of the *Metamorphoses*.

Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE): Roman naval commander and naturalist.

Petronius (c. 27–66 CE): Roman humor writer, author of the *Satyricon*.

Claudius (10 BCE–54 CE): Emperor of Rome, 41–54.

Jesus of Nazareth (c. 4 BCE–30 CE): Jewish teacher; central figure of Christian religion.

des and Sophocles, respectively; however, they differ from their Greek models in two main respects: their style is highly rhetorical, filled with sophisticated wordplay and verbal argumentation, and their atmosphere is gloomy and larded with portents of horror.

Seneca's tragedies reflect more vividly than the philosophical works the cultural and moral turbulence of early imperial Rome. Born during the reign of Augustus and committing suicide three years before Nero's similar fate, Seneca was encompassed by the social and moral convolutions of his era. Power resided essentially in one man, who could be (as Caligula was) violent and cruel. In Rome, and especially at the court itself, nothing and no one was secure. Political and personal freedoms were nullified. The themes of Seneca's tragedies—vengeance, madness, passions, murder, incest, and hideous death—were the stuff of his life experience. The most frequently cited example of Senecan gore is from *Thyestes*, where Atreus exacts vengeance on his brother, who seduced the former's wife, by serving him a meal made of his own children. Over and over again in these plays, passion leads to madness and chaos, and the natural universe responds by giving way to disorder and preternatural happenings.

Works in Literary Context

The scholarly consensus is that as a thinker, Seneca was not very original; his teachers were disciples of the Roman Stoic philosopher Quintus Sextius, and Seneca rarely strayed from their beliefs. As for his literary endeavors, the soundness of Seneca's education gave him a wide variety of models on which to base them: the epics of Homer; Greek poets and dramatists, as well as his fellow Romans Horace, Virgil, and Ovid; the early Stoics, Plato, Aristotle, and the entire spectrum of Hellenistic philosophy; and Roman rhetoricians from Cicero to Caesar. The copious references to other texts in his dramas reflect his absorption of these literary traditions.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Seneca's tragedies are an integral part of a theatrical tradition that encompasses the entirety of Western history, from ancient Greece to the present day. Here are some examples of great stage tragedies:

The Trojan Women (415 BCE), a play by Euripides. This tragedy follows the characters of Helen, Cassandra, Hecuba, and Clytemnestra after the sacking of Troy.

The Jew of Malta (1589), a play by Christopher Marlowe. The protagonist of this revenge tragedy, Barabas the Jew, was the model for Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

Coriolanus (1623), a play by William Shakespeare. Shakespeare deftly explores the choice between democracy and autocracy in this bloody tragedy, set in Rome during the fifth century BCE.

Phedre (1677), a play by Jean Racine. This masterpiece of the French stage depicts a story from Greek mythology, Phaedra's unrequited love for her stepson Hippolytus.

Textuality and Theatricality Senecan tragedy engages in a constant counterpoint with the dramatic and poetic tradition. This intertextuality underscores one of the recurrent themes of Senecan tragedy, the recycling of the past as the present. The world of early imperial Rome was indeed dominated by the forms of its own past—political, social, religious, and legal—and by the playing out of conventional rituals and roles. Inevitably, in this theatrical world, Senecan tragedy frequently draws attention to its own theatricality. Medea requires Jason as an audience to give meaning to her own murderous play; the Trojan dead are summoned as “spectators” to Cassandra’s recited play in *Agamemnon*. The recurrent focus on action as spectacle, and behavior as role-playing, show Seneca’s interest in drawing attention to the conventions and artifice of the stage.

Rhetoric Part of what made imperial Rome theatrical was its love of rhetoric, and Seneca’s tragedies, like his philosophical dialogues, are highly rhetorical. Seneca is a master of both expansive declamation and the compressed or “pointed” style of discourse. Seneca’s tragedies and prose works are the product of a sensibility informed by rhetoric, at a time when rhetoric was the controlling principle of both education and literary composition. Contemporary audiences responded fully to all kinds of dialectical and verbal ingenuity. Senecan tragedy is rhetorical, as Elizabethan tragedy is rhetorical; both are the product and index of an age.

Influence on Elizabethans Seneca’s works were approved by the early Christian Church and studied by medieval writers such as Francesco Petrarch, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Dante Alighieri. Even more than his prose and philosophical writings, Seneca’s tragedies influenced European, and especially Elizabethan, literature in a profound manner. The introduction of Seneca to English audiences—through a performance of the *Troades* at Cambridge University in 1551—marked an important event in the history of English drama. Many later playwrights, including such luminaries as Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare, eagerly modeled their works on Seneca’s style and themes. Scholars list the tragedies of Seneca among the most significant influences on the Elizabethan theater, noting that many stock characters and situations derive directly from Seneca’s plays. On the continent, Seneca served as a model for seventeenth-century playwrights Pierre Corneille and Jean Baptiste Racine.

Works in Critical Context

Seneca is admired for the elegant presentation of ideas in his prose and for the powerful influence he exerted on Elizabethan and later drama. Critics have praised the prose style of his essays, letters, and treatises as one of the foremost examples of the “pointed,” or epigrammatic, style of the Latin Silver Age, noting its didactic yet accessible tone and skillful use of colorful figures of speech.

Moral Epistles: A Hit for Two Thousand Years Seneca has remained a popular literary figure for nearly two millennia. The early Christian writers admired his philosophical writings, finding in them many similarities to Christianity and judging Seneca the most Christian of the pagan authors. In the Middle Ages, his works figured very prominently, along with Cicero’s, among the main educational texts used. His essays and epigrams, incorporated into commonplace books and termed “Seneks,” served as an important tool for teaching morality. His epistles were a major influence on Montaigne, regarded as the founder of the modern essay form. His drama, through its profound impact on Elizabethan theatre, has remained influential to the present day.

Seneca was defended in the eighteenth century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot. Writing in 1893, critic John W. Cunliffe wrote extensively of Seneca’s influence on Elizabethan tragedy, labeling him “the most modern of the ancients.” Twenty-first-century critics continue to debate the issues that have been at the center of Seneca studies since his own time. Some grant him the status of a major thinker, while others see his philosophical concepts as superficial. Dialogue continues on the question of whether Seneca’s dramas were intended to be performed or simply declaimed to an audience. The relationship between the tragedies and the philosophical works, particularly the degree to which

the plays express a Stoic perspective, continues to be a subject of debate. Some contemporary scholars have closely scrutinized Seneca's historical context; others have become interested in his handling of character portrayal and psychology. For instance, in his discussion of grief in his book *Everything Has Two Handles* (2008), Tufts University psychologist Ronald Pie judges Seneca's works from this modern perspective. He writes, "Seneca was hard-nosed but not completely insensitive when it came to grief and mourning," and goes on to state that "many psychologists and psychiatrists would disagree with Seneca" on some of his views.

Responses to Literature

1. Analyze the qualities of dialogue and rhetoric in one of Seneca's tragedies. How does Seneca's rhetorical style affect the way you understand the play?
2. Studying one of Seneca's philosophical dialogues; discuss how the author uses the text to accomplish underlying political motives. Why do you think Seneca's work was favored by the Church and used as a teaching tool during the Middle Ages?
3. Respond to the philosophical content in Seneca's prose or letters. What is your attitude toward Stoicism? Can you trace any modern group of thinkers or artists that adopt a Stoic attitude? How are their modern ideas alike or different from Seneca's?
4. Choose one of Shakespeare's well-known tragedies—perhaps *Othello*, *Hamlet*, or *King Lear*—and compare it to a play written by Seneca. What do the works have in common in terms of style and theme? Can you identify why the Elizabethans were drawn to Seneca's works?

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❏ Léopold Sédar Senghor

BORN: 1906, Joal, Senegal (French West Africa)

DIED: 2001, Normandy, France

NATIONALITY: Senegalese, French

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Songs of Shadow (1945)

Black Hosts (1948)

Ethiopiennes (1956)

Nocturnes (1961)

Overview

Léopold Sédar Senghor served as president of the Republic of Senegal for twenty years following its independence from France in 1960. This popular statesman was also an accomplished poet and essayist whose work, written in French, affirms the rich traditions of his African heritage. Along with Aimé Césaire, he is best known for developing "negritude," a wide-ranging movement that influenced black culture worldwide. As the chief proponent of negritude, Senghor is credited with contributing to Africa's progress toward independence from colonial rule, and he is considered one of the most important African thinkers of the twentieth century. His career represents the successful fusion of apparent opposites: politics and poetics, intellectual and folk traditions, and African and European culture.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Education and Negritude Senghor was born October 9, 1906, in the predominantly Islamic province of Joal, in what was then French West Africa. Raised as a Roman Catholic, he attended French missionary schools in preparation for the priesthood. At the age of twenty, he abandoned religious studies for a European education at a French secondary school in Dakar. Upon his



Léopold Senghor Senghor, Léopold, photograph. The Library of Congress.

graduation in 1928, he earned a scholarship to study at the Sorbonne in France.

Senghor received an elite education amid the intellectual scene of Paris. He met the West Indian writers Aimé Césaire and Leon Gontran Damas, who introduced him to African American literature of the Harlem Renaissance. Senghor came to recognize the impact of African expression on modern European art, especially in music and the visual arts. With Césaire and Damas, Senghor launched *The Black Student*, a cultural journal.

In the early 1930s, Senghor, Césaire, and Damas began to speak of “negritude,” a term coined by Césaire to give a positive connotation to a word often used as a racial slur. Senghor credits Jamaican poet and novelist Claude McKay with having supplied the values promoted by the new movement: to seek out the roots of the black experience and to rehabilitate black culture in the eyes of the world. For Senghor, negritude exalted the intuitive and artistic nature of the African psyche, qualities that white Europeans masked with reason and intellect.

Senghor became the first black African to graduate from the Sorbonne with a grammar aggregation, the highest degree granted in French education, and he began teaching in Parisian schools. As fascism and racial prejudice swept through Europe in the 1930s, Senghor

angrily rejected European culture, but he soon softened his position.

Poetry in Wartime The poems Senghor wrote in the late 1930s were published after World War II in the collection *Songs of Shadow*. Although largely traditional in structure and meter, these pieces evoke the intricate rhythmic patterns of songs from Senghor’s native village. These poems express Senghor’s nostalgia for Africa, his feelings of exile and cultural alienation, and his native culture’s sense of dignity. The poems also lament the destruction of African culture under colonial rule.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Senghor was immediately drafted to protect France as an infantryman at the German border. France fell to the German assault in June 1940, the same month Senghor was captured and taken prisoner. He spent two years in the Nazi camps and wrote some of his finest poems during that time. These poems later formed the core of Senghor’s second published collection, *Black Hosts*.

Black Hosts explores the poet’s sense of unity with blacks as an exploited race, and especially with other blacks fighting for Europe, such as those from the United States and the West Indies. The poems “Prayer for the Tirailleurs of Senegal” and “Despair of a Free Volunteer” celebrate the humility and endurance of Senegalese soldiers, whose battlefield experiences Senghor equates with the sufferings of their ancestors under colonialism.

Overlapping Political and Literary Careers

After his release in 1942, Senghor resumed teaching in suburban Paris and joined the Resistance movement. He became dean of linguistics at the National School of Overseas France. After the war, he was elected as a Senegalese representative in the French National Assembly. He founded the Senegalese Democratic Bloc (BDS) in 1948. With a socialist platform and a strong base among the peasants, this party rose to dominance in Senegalese politics. Senghor was reelected to the assembly in 1951, and again in 1956. That year, he became the mayor of the Senegalese city of Thies.

During this time, Senghor continued his literary pursuits as well. In 1947, he cofounded the literary journal *African Presence*, which became a powerful vehicle for black writing worldwide. The following year, he edited a book with a powerful introduction by French intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre that became a manifesto of the negritude movement: an anthology of French-language poetry from the black diaspora—a scattering of people with a common origin or background.

A collection of poems Senghor had been working on since 1948 was published as *Ethiopiennes* in 1956. These poems reflect Senghor’s growing political involvement and his struggle to reconcile European and African allegiances. One long poem in *Ethiopiennes*, “Chaka,” is a dramatic adaptation of Thomas Mofolo’s historical novel about a Zulu warrior king of the nineteenth century. In reality, Chaka was a ruthless killer and a tyrant; Senghor,

however, is less interested in the leader's exploits than in his state of mind.

The Poet-President As Algeria battled French forces for independence in the late 1950s, the colonies of French West Africa also pressed for freedom from their colonial rulers. Senghor advocated a path toward national or federal governments for African states. Although he helped bring several territories together into the Mali Federation in 1959, this structure did not last long. Senegal became an independent republic in 1960, and Senghor was elected its first president.

During Senghor's years in power, Senegal enjoyed relative political stability. Senghor survived an attempted coup d'état staged in 1962 by his rival, prime minister Mamador Dia, and afterward Senegal rewrote its constitution to give the president more power. He was reelected in 1968 and 1973, and resigned in 1980, before the end of his fifth term. No previous African president had voluntarily left office.

After 1960 Senghor mainly wrote political prose, especially that promoting African democratic socialism. He wrote a series of five books on political theory under the omnibus title *Liberty*. Poems Senghor wrote before his election as president of Senegal were published in 1961 as *Nocturnes*. This collection discusses the nature of poetry and the role of the poet in contemporary society. *Nocturnes* also reprints in its entirety Senghor's previously published volume *Songs for Naett*, a series of lyrical love poems written to a woman who represents the African landscape. In 1964, Senghor's most significant verse became available in English translation.

Later Career After retiring from Senegalese politics, Senghor divided his time between Paris, Normandy, and Dakar. He continued writing poetry, and he penned a memoir, *What I Believe: Negritude, Frenchness, and Universal Civilization* (1988). He died in Normandy in 2001.

Works in Literary Context

During his years as a student, first in French West Africa and later in Paris, Senghor read widely in the canon of French literature. Some authors whose influence is apparent in Senghor's poetry include Arthur Rimbaud, the surrealist André Breton, the Catholic poet Paul Claudel, and Saint-John Perse, winner of the 1960 Nobel Prize for Literature. Not coincidentally, both Claudel and Perse were professional diplomats whose work reflects an immersion in the social currents of the world beyond European shores.

However, it was Senghor's exposure to the African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance—writers such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, W. E. B. DuBois, and Zora Neale Hurston—that helped him find his voice as a modern African. In Paris, Senghor was exposed to political movements such as socialism and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Senghor's famous contemporaries include:

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): A French author and philosopher known for his existentialist works.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): A French-Algerian existentialist author and philosopher. Camus was the first African-born winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and diplomat who won a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Richard Wright (1908–1960): African American novelist and essayist who immigrated to Paris.

James Baldwin (1924–1987): African American novelist, essayist, and activist who immigrated to Paris.

Julius Nyerere (1922–1999): The first president of Tanzania (1964–1985).

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): A French military leader during World War II, de Gaulle served as president of France from 1959 to 1969.

humanism, ideologies that are apparent throughout his literary and political work.

Voice of His People Senghor has said that his poetry bears a kinship to folk poetry, yet his work is also very clearly the result of a modern, cosmopolitan sensibility. No tradition of modernist African poetry—certainly not in French—existed when Senghor began his career. He drew on his African heritage and European education to forge something new. Under the French colonial policy of assimilation, Senghor's advanced French education placed him in a position of potential leadership among his people. Senghor's poetry and his development of the theory of negritude represent cultural and intellectual leadership, which led to his political achievements.

Other men of letters have entered the political arena, such as the Czech playwright Vaclav Havel and the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. Senghor's career is exceptional in that the poet and the politician are nearly impossible to separate. Even in his early work, there is little distinction between the personal and public aspects of his expression. Poems that explore the tension between the Africa of his youth and his later experience in the colonial center reveal a deep awareness of the broader forces involved. Quite easily, a reader can discern that the poet aspires to speak for his people as a whole. This type of representation, even in work with no explicitly political content, became more palpable in Senghor's poetry as his political profile grew.

Negritude and Black Consciousness Aside from his achievements as president of Senegal, Senghor's most

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Senghor's most well known book is probably the *Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in French*, which became a touchstone of the negritude phenomenon. Here are other landmark literary anthologies that brought attention to emerging social movements:

The New Negro (1925), an anthology edited by Alain Locke. Known as the Harlem Renaissance, the flowering of African American art and literature in the 1920s is brilliantly displayed in this collection.

Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro American Writing (1968), an anthology edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal. This anthology of essays, poems, and short stories captures the aesthetic component of the Black Power movement of the 1960s.

Sisterhood Is Powerful (1970), an anthology edited by Robin Morgan. This anthology is one of the first widely available publications from the Second Wave of the women's movement.

This Bridge Called My Back (1981), an anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. Moraga and Anzaldua have selected an influential collection of writing "by radical women of color."

enduring contribution is probably the theory of negritude with which he is associated. Launched as a creative response to French colonialism, negritude provided a basis for proclaiming a cultural commonality throughout the African diaspora. Under the mantle of negritude, new generations of black artists in Africa, Europe, and the Americas transcended the limitations that European traditions and norms had placed on their expression. Influenced itself by the creative fervor of the Harlem Renaissance, negritude is an important precursor to Afrocentricity and other movements in black culture.

Works in Critical Context

For all its influence, the theory of negritude, as articulated by Senghor, has attracted considerable criticism. Some intellectuals have condemned its emphasis on skin color as the single basis of cultural distinctions. Many take issue with its simplistic, somewhat stereotypical formulations, such as the claim that European reasoning is analytical and African reasoning is intuitive. Examining Senghor's theoretical prose, some critics detect an unspoken acceptance of certain assumptions of European superiority.

Biographers and commentators on Senghor, such as Sebastian Okechuwu Mezu, have noted the close connection of his poetic and political identities, often assessing the former through the lens of the latter. As for

Senghor's literary style, it has been characterized as serenely and resonantly rhetorical. While the lush sensuality of his verse has many admirers, there are those who view his efforts to reconcile African and Western cultural idioms as only partly successful. Some scholars detect a lack of dramatic tension in Senghor's poetry. Instead of conforming to European styles of narrative verse, his is a poetry of affirmation rather than explanation, declaration rather than argumentation, and celebration rather than observation.

Many critics, such as his principal English translators, John Reed and Clive Wake, compare Senghor to the nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman. Using intensely rhythmic free verse, each of these writers looked deep within themselves to capture and communicate the experience of a people giving birth to a new nation.

Responses to Literature

1. Research the French colonial policy of assimilation, in which colonial subjects were encouraged to abandon their native languages and adopt French culture and customs. How does the life of Senghor represent the impact of this policy?
2. Reading *Songs of Shadow* and *Black Hosts*, what hints and evidence do you find that their author would assume a position of political leadership?
3. Compare and contrast the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Walt Whitman.
4. Read the essay "Black Orpheus" written by Jean-Paul Sartre to introduce *Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in French*, the book of black poetry that Senghor edited. Citing Sartre's essay, explain the relationship between postwar French intellectual culture and the negritude movement.
5. Assessing Senghor's controversial poem "Chaka" from *Ethiopiennes*, determine how the poem reflects its author's attitudes toward the acquisition and use of political power. Keep in mind that the real Chaka was a ruthless killer and tyrant. To what extent do you think Senghor depended on Thomas Mofolo's historical novel about a Zulu warrior king of the nineteenth century?

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William Shakespeare

BORN: 1564, Stratford-upon-Avon, England

DIED: 1616, Stratford-upon-Avon, England

NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Romeo and Juliet (1595–1596)

Sonnets (1590s)

Hamlet (1600–1601)

King Lear (1605)

The Tempest (1611)



William Shakespeare Shakespeare, William, illustration. The Library of Congress.

Overview

William Shakespeare drew upon elements of classical literature to create distinctly English forms of poetry and drama. His work was hardly limited to strict classical idioms, however; he successfully utilized a much broader range of literary sources than any of his contemporaries. Moreover, his extraordinary linguistic abilities—his gift for complex poetic imagery, mixed metaphor, and brilliant puns—combined with a penetrating insight into human nature, are widely recognized as the makings of a unique literary genius. Over the centuries Shakespeare's works have obtained an unparalleled critical significance and exerted an unprecedented influence on the development of world literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Life William Shakespeare was probably born on April 23, 1564, though the precise date of his birth is uncertain. He was the eldest of the five children of John Shakespeare, a tradesman, and Mary Arden Shakespeare, the daughter of a gentleman farmer. It is thought that Shakespeare attended the local grammar school, where the main course of instruction was in Latin. There is no evidence that he attended college.

In 1582, he married Ann Hathaway of Stratford; they would have three children together. Shakespeare's life from this date until 1592, when he became known as a dramatist, is not well documented.

Early Work Shakespeare's first plays, the three parts of the Henry VI history cycle, were presented in 1589–1591. He also wrote a pair of narrative poems directly modeled after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). These works, which acknowledged the contemporary fashion for poems written with mythological themes, were immensely successful, and established Shakespeare as a poet of the first rank.

Success as Actor and Playwright Shakespeare further enhanced his reputation as a professional actor and playwright when he joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a well-regarded acting company formed in 1594. The success of the Lord Chamberlain's Men is largely attributable to the fact that after joining the group in 1594, Shakespeare wrote for no other company. In 1603, shortly after his accession to the throne, James I granted the Lord Chamberlain's Men a royal patent, and the company's name was changed to the King's Men to reflect the king's direct patronage.

Surviving records of Shakespeare's business transactions indicate that he benefited financially from his long career in the theater. By 1610, with his fortune made and

his reputation as the leading English dramatist unchallenged, he appears to have largely retired to Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Trinity Church in Stratford.

Publication History The publication history of Shakespeare's plays is extremely complex and the subject of much scholarly debate. The earliest collected edition of his dramas, known as the First Folio, was compiled by two fellow actors and published posthumously in 1623. The First Folio, which classifies the dramas into distinct genres of comedy, history, and tragedy, contains thirty-six of the thirty-seven plays now believed to be written by Shakespeare. Of the works included, thirteen had never before been published.

Shakespeare's Comedies The "early" comedies, as the name implies, are among the first works Shakespeare wrote. The plays in this group, such as *The Comedy of Errors* (1592–1594), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593–1594), and *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594–1595), generally adhere closely to established comedic forms. The "romantic" comedies, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–1596), *The Merchant of Venice* (1596–1597), *As You Like It* (1599), and *Twelfth Night* (1601–1602), display a consistency in style and subject matter and focus on themes of courtship and marriage. As a group, the "romantic" comedies comprise his most popular and critically praised comedies.

Shakespeare's "dark" comedies, including *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602–1603) and *Measure for Measure* (1604), are characterized by marked seriousness in theme, somberness in tone, and strange, shifting narrative perspectives. This group, which also includes *The Tempest* (1611), is characterized by an emphasis on themes of separation and loss. These plays typically include a wandering journey that ultimately results in a reunion amid a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Shakespeare's History Plays The most immediate "source" of the English history play in Shakespeare's time appears to have been the heightened sense of national destiny that came in the wake of the British Royal Navy's seemingly God-sent victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. Eight of the ten history plays collectively trace the English monarchy from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. They are commonly grouped in two tetralogies: The first contains the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* (1592–1593); the second, depicting chronologically earlier events but written later in Shakespeare's career, includes *Richard II* (1595), the two parts of *Henry IV* (1596–1598), and *Henry V* (1599). This last work presents the king as the triumphant leader of his people in a glorious battle against the French. Within the history plays Shakespeare demonstrated his capacity for investing plot with extraordinary dramatic tension, and demonstrated his flair for original characterization through the use of subtle, ironic language.

Shakespeare's Tragedies Shakespeare's tragedies, like his comedies, are commonly divided into separate though related categories, the "Roman" tragedies and the "great" tragedies. The Roman plays drew their inspiration from histories of classical antiquity. The major tragedies of this type, *Julius Caesar* (1599) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–1607), explore the themes of political intrigue and personal revenge and are distinguished by their clear, poetic discourse and ironic representation of historical incidents.

The four great tragedies are *Hamlet* (1600–1601), regarded by many critics as Shakespeare's finest work, *King Lear* (1605), *Macbeth* (1606), which explores the issue of regicide, and *Othello* (1604), a story of domestic intrigue set in the Venetian Republic. In these works Shakespeare characteristically presents the fall of the heroes in terms that suggest a parallel collapse of all human values or a disordering of the universe itself.

Although frequently judged by critics to be of a lesser rank than the great tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* (1595–1596) remains one of the most frequently performed of Shakespeare's dramas.

Shakespeare's Sonnets The *Sonnets* are also considered a central work in the Shakespeare canon. Shakespeare's sonnets are arranged in a narrative order. They consist of a series of metaphorical dialogues between the poet and two distinct personalities: Sonnets 18 to 126 are addressed to a fair young man, or "Friend," and are concerned with the themes of beauty, friendship, and immortality; Sonnets 127 to 154 are addressed to a "Dark Lady" who is described as sensual, coarse and promiscuous. Their brilliant versification and subtle analysis of human emotion are together regarded as the work of a unique poetic genius. Consequently, scholars often place the *Sonnets* on an equal level with Shakespeare's dramas.

Works in Literary Context

Dramatic Influences Shakespeare's approach to drama was eclectic. He appropriated stylistic elements from Roman classicism (specifically comedy as defined by Plautus and Terence and tragedy by Seneca), medieval morality plays, French popular farce, and Italian drama such as the improvised comedic forms of the *commedia dell'arte*. Shakespeare's use of these sources was not purely imitative, however; he experimented with traditional forms in an original way. Of the three genres, the comedies reveal the closest affinity to the themes of Italian Renaissance literature. If Shakespeare's earliest efforts in the dramatization of history derived from his response to the political climate of his day, his first experiments in comedy seem to have evolved from his reading in school and from his familiarity with the plays of such predecessors on the English stage as John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Greene, and Thomas Nashe.

King Lear is structurally without parallel in the Shakespearean canon. Written in the tradition of the Old Testament book of Job, which focuses on proving the presence of spiritual grace in the presence of evil, *King Lear* has been thought by many to evoke more existential terror than all of Shakespeare's other tragedies combined. The experiences of Lear can be seen as comparable to that of another long-suffering king, the protagonist in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Historical Epic Tracing the monarchy in his history plays gave Shakespeare a theme of epic proportions, similar to the subject matter in ancient Greece and Rome that had inspired such classical authors as Homer and Virgil in narrative genres and Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca in dramatic genres. It accorded with the biblical treatment of human destiny that Shakespeare's age had inherited from earlier generations, an approach to historical interpretation that had been embedded in such didactic entertainments as the morality play (allegorizing the sin, suffering, repentance, and salvation of a typical member of mankind) and the mystery play (broadening the cycle to a dramatization of the whole of human history according to the Bible). As with the earlier English history plays, *Richard II* and the three *Henry* plays that followed derived in large measure from the 1587 second edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. In all probability, they were also influenced by, and possibly even inspired by, the 1595 publication of Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars*.

The Sonnet Form Like the dramas, the sonnets are patterned after a literary model widely imitated in Shakespeare's age: the sonnets of Petrarch. The sonnet sequence was a highly self-conscious form. The sonnet speaker was an example—partly to be repudiated, partly to be admired, partly to be emulated—whose eloquence permitted him to articulate the stages of some emotional or personal crisis. Shakespeare's speaker, however much he may recall King David of the biblical Psalms, Ovid, Horace, or Petrarch, is steeped in the English tradition. Readers in 1609 would have noticed similarities between Shakespeare and poets such as Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Watson, and Michael Drayton.

Works in Critical Context

The Tragedies The four great tragedies display the greatest intensity of tragic pathos of all Shakespeare's dramas. Scholars have suggested that such vividly portrayed upheavals reflect a generalized anxiety among Shakespeare's contemporaries that underlying social, political, and religious tensions would upset the hierarchical order of the Elizabethan world.

Romeo and Juliet was the subject of little scholarship or critical attention in the decades after Shakespeare's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Shakespeare's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Elizabeth (1533–1603): Known as the Virgin Queen because she never married, this queen of England and Ireland gave her country a long and stable reign.

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593): English playwright, translator, and poet; known for his blank verse, he is considered the chief Elizabethan playwright before Shakespeare.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English playwright, actor, and poet; known for his satirical works, such as *Volpone*.

Francis Drake (1540–1595): English politician, pirate, and navigator; influential in the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Italian astronomer and physicist who was forced by the Inquisition to recant some of his knowledge of science, such as that the Earth revolves around the sun, as it went against a literal interpretation of the Bible.

death. Diarist Samuel Pepys wrote of his experience viewing a production of the play on March 1, 1662: "Thence my wife and I by coach, first to see my little picture that is a drawing, and thence to the Opera, and there saw 'Romeo and Juliet,' the first time it was ever acted; but it is a play of itself the worst that ever I heard in my life, and the worst acted that ever I saw these people do, and I am resolved to go no more to see the first time of acting, for they were all of them out more or less." The play has been criticized for its dependence on coincidence and on causes external to the protagonists for the conditions that bring about the tragic outcome—an emphasis implicit in the play's repeated references to fortune and the stars. Critics have also encountered difficulty in their attempts to reconcile the purity of Romeo and Juliet's devotion to each other with the play's equal insistence that their relationship is a form of idolatry, ultimately leading both lovers to acts of desperation that audiences in Shakespeare's time would have considered far more consequential than do most modern audiences. But it is not for its revenge elements that most of us remember *Romeo and Juliet*, but for the lyricism with which Shakespeare portrays the beauty and idealism of love at first sight.

The Sonnets John Benson's *Poems: Written by Wil. Shakespeare. Gent* (1640) was part of an attempt to "canonize" Shakespeare, collecting verses into a volume that could be sold as a companion to the plays. However, this met with little success; the fashion for sonnets was

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

William Shakespeare's plays have appealed to audience throughout the centuries and are still influential and relevant today. Here are some contemporary adaptations of his works:

The Merchant of Venice (2004), a movie directed by Michael Radford. This close adaptation of Shakespeare's play stars Al Pacino as Shylock, portraying the character as a tragic hero rather than a villain.

Shakespeare in Love (1998), a movie directed by John Madden. Winning multiple Academy Awards and making no claim to historical accuracy, this film follows Will Shakespeare as he falls in love with Viola, a noblewoman who longs to act.

10 Things I Hate About You (1999), a movie directed by Gil Junger. This movie adapts *The Taming of the Shrew*, setting it in an American high school.

West Side Story (1961), a movie directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins. Considered a Broadway classic, this musical translates *Romeo and Juliet* into the story of doomed love between members of rival New York City gangs.

long over. For the next century and a half, they were regularly excluded from editions of Shakespeare. After 1780, however, Edmond Malone published a critical edition of the *Sonnets* based on Thorpe's quarto, and included a detailed introduction and commentary. Ten years later he included them in his great edition of the *Plays and Poems*; thus, the sonnets became "literature" in the heyday of the romantic poets and the new vogue for literary biography. Thereafter, they were assumed to be highly personal writings.

Responses to Literature

1. Many people believe that Shakespeare's sonnets are thinly veiled autobiographical writings. Does it matter to you if a poem or song reflects the artist's own life? Why or why not? Why would an author use this method of writing?
2. William Shakespeare's plays were highly popular in his day and critically praised. Are there any filmmakers or directors today with a similar reputation? Do you think they will remain equally popular as time goes by?
3. Shakespeare's history plays, in which he traced the lives of the British monarchy, were inspired by current political events. Pretend that you are going to write a play about some part of American history, based on recent events. Write two or three

paragraphs outlining what your play would be about, using specifics, and what prompted your choice.

4. Shakespeare based some of his plays on classical myths. Choose a myth of your own by researching online or in your library, and rewrite it in contemporary terms.
5. Because Shakespeare came from an ordinary background, some critics do not believe that he wrote the plays he is known for. Research both sides of the argument at the Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable (www.shakespeareauthorship.org/) and How We Know That Shakespeare Wrote Shakespeare (<http://shakespeareauthorship.com/howdowe.html>). Write an essay comparing and contrasting the arguments for each side. Which do you find most convincing?

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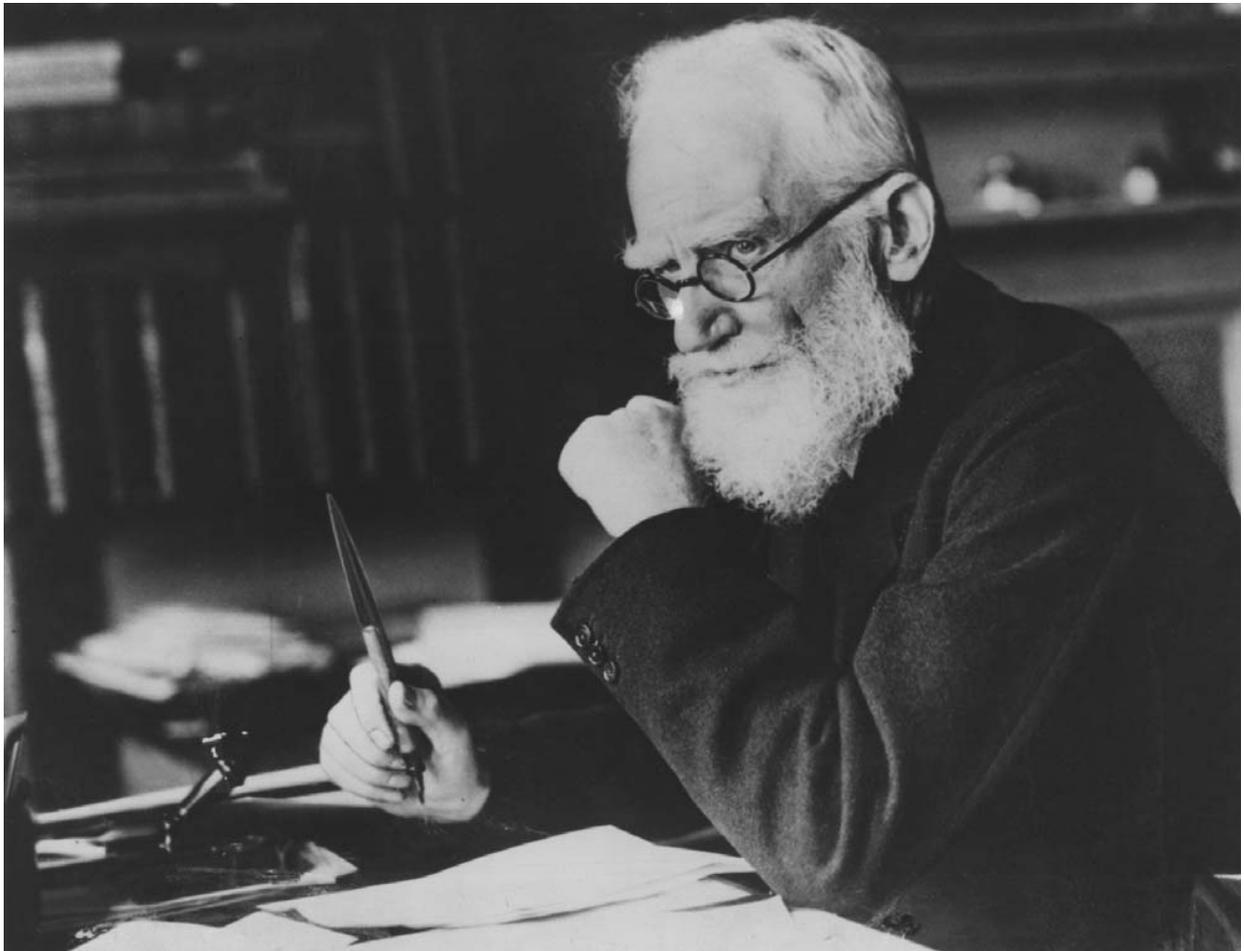
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▣ **George Bernard Shaw**

BORN: 1856, Dublin, Ireland
DIED: 1950, Ayot St. Lawrence, England
NATIONALITY: *British*
GENRE: *Drama, fiction, nonfiction*
MAJOR WORKS:
Mrs. Warren's Profession (1893)
Man and Superman (1901–1902)
The Doctor's Dilemma (1906)
Pygmalion (1912)
The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism (1928)

Overview

The British playwright, critic, and pamphleteer George Bernard Shaw produced more than fifty-two plays, three volumes of music and drama criticism, and one major volume of socialist commentary. Shaw is generally



George Bernard Shaw Shaw, George Bernard, photograph. AP Images.

considered the greatest dramatist to write in the English language since William Shakespeare. Following the example of Henrik Ibsen, he succeeded in revolutionizing the English stage, disposing of the romantic conventions and devices of the “well-made” play, and instituting a theater of ideas grounded in realism. During his lifetime, he was equally famous as an iconoclastic and outspoken public figure. Essentially a shy man, Shaw created the public persona of G. B. S.: showman, satirist, pundit, and intellectual jester, who challenged established political and social beliefs.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Young Socialist Born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 16, 1856, George Bernard Shaw was largely an academic failure in school. Part of his nonacademic training was handled by his mother, a music teacher, and Shaw grew up with an excellent ear and good musical taste. After school, he sought to make something of himself in business, but, in March 1876, gave up on this career and joined his mother and two sisters in London, where they conducted a music school. Shaw spent the next nine years supported by his parents, reading constantly and widely, writing music and drama reviews for newspapers, and occasionally singing for hire at London society parties.

During this time Shaw also wrote five novels, some of them reflecting the socialist politics that he had become committed to in London. *Immaturity*, the first, remained unpublished, and the other four, after a series of rejections from London publishers, appeared in radical periodicals. At the age of twenty-eight, Shaw joined the socialist Fabian Society, and he served on the executive committee for the next twenty-seven years. The Fabian Society was a socialist movement comprised largely of British intellectuals and had the aim of bringing about a socialist state by degrees rather than by revolution, as was advocated by contemporaries such as Russians Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin (the architects of the Russian Revolution of 1917). *Fabian Essays* (1887), edited by Shaw, emphasized the importance of economics and class structure; for him, economics was “the basis of society.” Shaw’s politics also inform *Common Sense About the War* (1914), a criticism of the British government and its policies during the early part of World War I. *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism* (1928), which came much later, supplied a complete summary of his political position and remains a major volume of socialist commentary to this day.

True-to-Life Drama and Prodigious Productivity Shaw wrote drama between 1892 and 1947, when he completed *Buoyant Billions* at the age of ninety-one. In 1893, preoccupied by the current issues of women’s rights centered on the suffrage movement (granting women the right to vote), Shaw wrote *The Philanderers*.

He also wrote in 1893 his most famous play, *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, which was not produced until 1902 because of British censorship. It remains a powerful play in the history of literature about the rights of women. Shaw’s dramas are opposed to the mechanical comic plots of conventional dramas and also against the nineteenth-century tendency to idealize Shakespeare and drama in general. Like the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, whom he helped to promote in England, Shaw preferred a more true-to-life drama that substituted realism and political engagement for sentimentality and nostalgia.

Starting in 1901, Shaw’s political and literary theories propelled him into a remarkable period of productivity. *Man and Superman* (1901–1903) and *Major Barbara* (1905) are both “dramas of ideas,” posing challenging questions about poverty and capitalism. *Androcles and the Lion* (1911) takes on religion, *John Bull’s Other Island* (1904) deals with the political relations between England and Ireland, and *Heartbreak House* (1913–1916) analyzes the domestic effects of World War I. Sometimes Shaw’s plays carry long prefaces that are not directly related to the drama itself, exploring such topics as marriage, parenthood, education, and poverty; these essays form an important part of his oeuvre. It was for his drama in particular, though, that Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925.

Written during a timespan that included both World Wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945) and began the separation of the world into a communist East and a capitalist West, Shaw’s plays express a complex range of impulses, ambitions, and beliefs. Reflecting on his life and his work, he explained at seventy:

Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my kingdom was not of this world: I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at ease only with the mighty dead. Therefore I had to become an actor, and create for myself a fantastic personality fit and apt for dealing with men, and adaptable to the various parts I had to play as an author, journalist, orator, politician, committee man, man of the world, and so forth. In all this I succeeded later on only too well.

Shaw’s death in 1950 in England was a loss not only for literature, but also for the working class for which he had done battle over so many years.

Works in Literary Context

Shaw was in many ways the product of Victorian England, although in other ways he helped to make the transition away from its literature into that of Modernism. The Victorian period, named for the long-reigning Queen Victoria (1837–1901), was a time of great literary creativity that resists easy categorization. Nevertheless, the parts of it that influenced Shaw were its tendencies toward realism, its confident championing of self-reliance and inner strength, its moral earnestness, its advocacy of charity and social reform, and its patriotic British nationalism. The

authors who perhaps best embody all of these things would be the novelist Charles Dickens, the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and the critic Matthew Arnold.

Naturalist Ideals Shaw took from Victorianism its moral earnestness and commitment to social reform, but he left behind its nationalism and its confidence that core British values would steer a sure path to a brighter future at home and around the world. Shaw felt that the Victorian version of “realism” was too idealized—it turned a blind eye to controversial issues, it glorified heroes for the wrong things, and it packaged life too neatly into “well-made” stories with predictable structures and sentimental conclusions. Shaw is more in line with the “naturalism” movement which began in late nineteenth-century France, culminating in the novels of Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) and Émile Zola (1840–1902) and aiming to represent a “slice of life” marked by a detached, objective description of society with careful accuracy of detail and historical background. People who had been neglected in earlier literature, such as housewives, the poor, or criminals, were given priority. Whereas naturalist writers often showed individual freewill to be ineffective against the powerful forces of history, society, or biology, however, Shaw strongly believed that creative adaptability, powered by the strength of human willpower, is the “life force” that ensures our evolution as a species.

Evolution The idea of “evolution” was highly charged in Shaw’s day. Charles Darwin had published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, detailing the evidence for his conclusion that species (including man) evolved from lower-order animals through a process of natural selection and random mutations. The idea that God might not be the sole guiding hand in creation, especially the creation of mankind, scandalized the nineteenth century and still reverberates today. Shaw was an early supporter of Darwinian evolution, applying the ideas to socialism, women’s rights, and other reformist political ideas. Literature and other arts, he strongly felt, could play a part in mankind’s evolution to a higher state.

Socialist Ideals The other figure that scandalized the late nineteenth century, and whose influence also reverberates today, was Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx was German, but he developed his socialist theory after observing the lives of factory workers in the north of England. Marx wrote that economics is the engine of history, and the unfairness of a capitalist society—where business owners are motivated to pay workers as little as possible, and workers do not own the products of their own labor—can only be changed by revolution. Marx’s ideas were quickly assimilated into literature and literary criticism, and Shaw consistently applied socialist ideas in his plays, prefaces, and essays. Shaw’s socialism shared with Marxism its commitment to social change via economics but remained committed to political reforms within the system and not by revolution from outside it.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Shaw’s famous contemporaries include:

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906): Norway’s most famous playwright helped to establish, along with Shaw, an entirely new way of approaching drama. Gone was the “well-made play” with an orderly plot and conventional moral; in its place were highly symbolic, character-driven plays that dealt with controversial issues and current events.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): Perhaps the most influential philosopher of the late twentieth century, German philosopher Nietzsche rejected anything irrational and supernatural, including religion, saying that it leads us away from coping with the realities of earthly life.

Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945): A Chicago novelist who was a leader in American naturalism, a movement that tried to study characters in fiction in the same objective way scientists study their subjects.

Gustave Klimt (1862–1918): An Austrian painter involved in the art nouveau movement, creating decorative murals, paintings, and posters with naturalistic figures appearing within elaborately ornamented backgrounds.

Fritz Lang (1890–1976): An innovative filmmaker born in Austria but who worked in the United States, successfully making the transition from silent to sound motion pictures. His expressive films often deal with the psychology of crime and death, and they set a high standard for the emotional depth and artistic potential for early cinema.

That said, Shaw did not shy away from celebrating the effects of revolution. After a visit to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in the 1930s, when he met long-time Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, he returned to England convinced that the Soviet Union was leading the world to a brighter future. This conviction, held by many leftist artists and intellectuals of the time—most of whom saw the Soviet experiment as a truly socialist project, rather than the façade for authoritarianism that it ultimately became—was unshaken by evidence of Stalin’s “pogroms,” or slaughter of countless of his own citizens in order to achieve “state security.”

From Ibsen to the Postmodern Stage The playwright who had the most influence on Shaw was the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, who wrote realistic and intellectual dramas about pressing social issues that had never before been discussed on the stage. Shaw details his debt to Ibsen, in the context of Shaw’s own socialism, in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891, rev. 1913).

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Shaw wrote often about women's rights, most famously in his play *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893). Influenced by Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Shaw demonstrated how the few options available for women to lead a life of culture and refinement come at a very high cost. He also rebelled against the trend in nineteenth-century dramas and novels that emphasized plot over character. His dramas were sometimes criticized for being too "talky," finding their dramatic tension not so much in story or romance as in debate and discussion of important ideas. Here are some other works that focus on ideas and on female independence:

My Fair Lady (1956), a novel by Alan Jay Lerner and musical by Frederick Loewe. This enormously popular stage musical, made into an equally popular movie in 1964, set the record for the longest theatrical run in history up to its time. Based upon Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1913), the cultured professor Henry Higgins takes on the lower-class flower girl Eliza Doolittle as an experiment in linguistics—he teaches her how to speak with a proper British accent, and she learns how to become, not just imitate, a proper lady.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), a novel by Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston was a leader in the Harlem Renaissance, an explosion of artistic creativity in the African American community during the 1920s–1930s. This realistic novel shows the struggles of a poor black woman in the south as she gains, loses, and regains a life of love, fulfillment, respect, and freedom.

Travesties (1974), a play by Tom Stoppard. Here, Stoppard imagines what would happen if the intellectual dynamos of 1917 were to all be in the same room together talking about whatever passed through their iconoclastic minds: Vladimir Lenin (Russian leader), James Joyce (novelist), and Tristan Tzara (Dada artist). Weaving through the sparkling dialog and some zany plot twists borrowed from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Stoppard addresses important questions about the function of politics in art and the role of the artist in society.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (c. 1601), a play by William Shakespeare. While certainly not sacrificing anything in terms of plot and action, this single most influential play in the history of theater was the first to make extensive and integral use of the "dramatic monologue," or speech made directly to the audience that reflects a character's inner thoughts. Through the use of this technique, Shakespeare made *Hamlet* the first play primarily about thinking as such.

Immediately after Shaw's time, his influence on drama was eclipsed by the more symbolic, avant-garde, and impressionistic (although no less politically challenging) work of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) and Samuel Beckett (1906–1989). In recent years, however, "post-modern" British and American stages have seen a great deal of "Shavian" drama, which are plays that contain intellectual discussion, are based more upon character than plot, and engage the audience with important social issues. It is easy to imagine Shaw applauding heartily for two of the most ambitious and important plays in the last several decades, Tony Kushner's two-part "Angels in America" (dealing with AIDS) and Tom Stoppard's trilogy "The Coast of Utopia" (dealing with the Russian Revolution).

Works in Critical Context

It has been easy for critics to point out that despite his allegiance to realism, Shaw's characters sometimes seem more like intellectual concepts rather than real people, especially when compared to the characters in Ibsen or August Strindberg (1849–1912). Other critics locate this as one of Shaw's strengths: that ideas come alive at the center of his dramas.

Saint Joan Shaw's early plays were very popular, but when he began questioning England's participation in World War I, he was suspected of being a German sympathizer and his support quickly evaporated. Shaw kept writing about the war, however, and as World War II was starting he only increased his attacks on capitalist democracy and was again suspected of aiding the enemy. His reputation benefited from *Saint Joan* in 1923, a play about the martyr Joan of Arc that suggested criticism of England's cruel treatment of Ireland, propelling him toward the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

Pygmalion After the wars, Shaw's criticisms began to seem more like prophesies, and his critical standing and popularity improved. The huge success of *My Fair Lady*, a musical adaptation of Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, also helped to renew affection for Shaw's work. Some critics denounced Shaw's plays for their preachiness and unsympathetic characters, while others applauded his efforts to raise the tone of British drama, while his depiction of independent women characters found an attentive audience with feminist critics starting in the 1960s. Contemporary observer Sunder Katwala describes Shaw as "a persistent pioneer of both feminism and racial equality," and notes, "Shaw's genius cannot be doubted. Nor his astonishing range, from his major contribution to music criticism to his being the only Nobel laureate to also bag an Oscar."

Shaw is now seen as one of the most significant British dramatists of the modern era, and at least until the 1970s with the rise of Tom Stoppard, he is often recognized as the greatest British dramatist since Shakespeare. Perhaps, though, he is most important for the

example he sets of what it can mean to “speak truth to power.” Biographer and commentator Michael Holroyd remarks on the particular need we have for Shaw in a world obsessed with fear, writing, “In such a climate of terrified legislation, we have need of Bernard Shaw—need of his stimulating incorrectitudes, need of his ability to show where dishonour truly lies and of his power to ridicule such absurdities out of court.”

Responses to Literature

1. Is a “drama of ideas” a contradiction in terms? What assumptions are you making about each term as you come up with your answer?
2. Situate Shaw’s artistic achievement with respect to the other great dramatists of the twentieth century. In what ways did his work contribute to and/or work against the Modernist aesthetic that developed in literature during his heyday?
3. Some of the films and television series that have received the most critical praise over the last decade have been ones that address controversial topics and give a human dimension to some of the urgent political and social issues of today. Do you think that Shaw’s strongest legacy today may not be in the theater at all, but in film and television? How have the issues changed from Shaw’s day to ours?
4. Read one of the plays, such as *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, to which Shaw added a long preface discussing problems he wanted to see reformed. What do you think of this practice? Are the prefaces unnecessary distractions, or do you find that they help to set up interpretations of the play that you may not have had otherwise?

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Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

BORN: 1797, London

DIED: 1851, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818)

The Last Man (1826)

Lives of the Most Important Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal (1835–1837)

Overview

British author Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was a skilled editor and critic, an influential travel writer, a literary historian, and a dabbler in verse as well as short stories. By the age of nineteen, Shelley had created the greatest and what many believe to be the first science fiction novel in history: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). This one novel has risen above the gothic and horror genres to gain recognition as a work of psychological and philosophical depth. Although she wrote several other novels, along with respected nonfiction pieces, Shelley’s legacy lives on through *Frankenstein*.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unhappy Childhood Born in London on August 30, 1797, Shelley was the daughter of two great intellectual rebels of the 1790s: Mary Wollstonecraft, an early feminist who wrote the renowned *Vindication of the Rights of*



Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, illustration. Source unknown.

Women (1792), and William Godwin, a novelist and political philosopher. Ten days after Shelley was born, her mother died from complications related to her birth, leaving Godwin to care for Shelley and Fanny Imlay, Wollstonecraft's three-year-old daughter from a previous relationship. Although her father was not particularly affectionate or attentive, Shelley did not grow up alone.

After Godwin remarried in 1801, Mary gained more siblings. Her stepmother, Mary Jane Clairmont, favored her own two children and the son she and Godwin shared over Wollstonecraft's daughters. Mary's childhood was not happy. At one point, she was sent to live with family friends in Scotland for two years, probably because of conflict between her and her stepmother. Although Shelley received no formal education—which was somewhat common for British girls at this time—she found consolation in intellectual pursuits, especially books.

Married Percy Bysshe Shelley Shelley's father hosted many of the prominent intellectuals and writers of the day, including poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy

Bysshe Shelley. Percy met Mary when she was fourteen. However, they were not romantically interested in one another until two years later. At this time, Percy Shelley was married, his wife pregnant with their second child. Nevertheless, he and Shelley felt that matters of the heart were more significant than legal ties, and the couple ran away together in July 1814, a month before Shelley's seventeenth birthday.

Love and Loss The couple spent the subsequent years traveling in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy even though Percy Shelley's father, a wealthy baronet, discontinued his son's substantial allowance after Percy Shelley abandoned his family. (Until 1858, a divorce could only be obtained by an act of Parliament, an expensive and formidable task.) These years were marked by personal tragedy as well. Their first child died eleven days after she was born, and Fanny, Shelley's half-sister, and Harriet, Percy's wife, both committed suicide in 1816.

Ghost Stories The couple spent most of the summer of 1816 in Geneva, Switzerland, with Lord Byron, a poet, and John Polidori, a writer and physician. That year was an auspicious one; because of the weather, 1816 became known as "the year without a summer." Probably because of the effects of several major volcanic eruptions that caused an extreme buildup of atmospheric dust, there was essentially no extended summer that year in much of the northern United States, parts of Canada, and northern Europe as well as other parts of the world. Temperatures shifted between typical summer warmth and near freezing within short amounts of time. Because of the atypical summer, most crops were lost and the areas hardest hit suffered from food shortages. In Switzerland, for example, there was widespread famine that led to food riots and the government's declaring a national emergency.

During a June snowstorm in Geneva, the group read aloud a collection of German ghost stories that inspired Byron to challenge the others to write their own ghost stories. While Percy Shelley wrote an inconsequential story, Byron wrote a fragment of a story, and Polidori began "The Vampyre" (1819), what some view as the first modern vampire tale. Shelley, inspired by a vivid nightmare, began writing *Frankenstein*.

Married Life In part because they sought custody of Percy Shelley's two children, Percy and Mary married in London in December 1816. Still, custody was denied. After two more of the couple's own children died before the age of three, Mary Shelley fell into a deep depression until the 1819 birth of their only surviving child, a son, Percy Florence. Despite marital problems caused by Shelley's depression and her husband's involvement with other women, including his sister-in-law Claire Clairmont, both Shelleys were prolific writers and were dedicated to their studies of European literature and Greek, Latin, and Italian language, art, and music. Intelligent

and remarkably gifted, Shelley completed *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* at the age of nineteen.

Percy Shelley's Death The Shelleys settled near Lenci, Italy, on the Gulf of Spezzia. Sailing to meet fellow poet Leigh Hunt in 1822, Percy Shelley drowned during a storm. Grief-stricken, Shelley remained in Italy for a year and then returned permanently to England with her son, where she struggled to support the two of them. When Percy Shelley's father offered her a small stipend on the condition that she keep the Shelley name out of print, she published her works anonymously. Besides writing four novels in the years after Percy's death, she contributed a series of biographical and critical essays to *Chamber's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, in addition to submitting occasional short stories—pieces she considered hackwork—to literary journals.

As Shelley's son got older, her father-in-law increased the boy's allowance, providing the resources for mother and son to journey to Italy and Germany, travels Shelley describes in *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844). She spent the last years of her life focused on editing her late husband's work and writing his biography. In 1848, Shelley began showing symptoms of the brain tumor that would eventually kill her, and by the time of her death in London on February 1, 1851, she was almost completely paralyzed. She died without completing Percy's biography, which had become her most treasured project.

Works in Literary Context

Gothic and Biblical Influences Through the years, Shelley's influences have been well documented by scholars. Without a doubt, the Gothic tradition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries played a role in Shelley's creation of *Frankenstein*. Other sources of inspiration included the myth of Prometheus, the Bible, and the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, along with discoveries regarding electricity, chemistry, and anatomy made during Shelley's lifetime. Especially evident in Shelley's work is her familiarity with John Milton's biblical epic *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Science Fiction In the genre of science fiction, *Frankenstein* is viewed as an archetype, its premise commonly used by authors intent on illustrating how destructive the relentless pursuit of scientific knowledge can be. The foundation of Shelley's story is simple and familiar: A scientist rejects accepted theories and turns instead to his own research, which leads to deadly consequences. However, in many ways *Frankenstein* is unlike much science fiction published since.

In style and structure, it is much closer to its eighteenth-century predecessors: an epistolary novel told in increasingly tightening circles or frames and interspersed with poetry (including that of Shelley's husband). It also differs from much science fiction in its use of Gothic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Shelley's famous contemporaries include:

Washington Irving (1783–1859): American writer Irving wrote "Rip Van Winkle" (1819). Based on a Germanic folk tale, this short story is an Americanized version that has been a popular favorite since its publication.

Stendhal (1783–1842): An advocate of French liberalism, author Stendhal (the pen name of Henri-Marie Beyle) believed that man, basically reasonable, requires a society where talent can be expressed in whatever intellectual, political, or economic manner deemed appropriate by the individual. His works include *The Red and the Black* (1830).

Jane Austen (1775–1817): British novelist Austen captured the constraints of society with such works as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), in which human relationships are determined by wealth and class.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851): American novelist Cooper wrote the internationally best-selling novel *The Spy* (1821) as well as his Leatherstocking tales (including *The Last of the Mohicans* [1826]) that feature the character Natty Bumppo.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873): English utilitarian philosopher Mill wrote the essay, *On Liberty* (1859), considered one of the most important statements on individual freedom in the history of Western democracy.

King Ferdinand VII (1784–1833): During the Napoleonic Wars, this Spanish king was imprisoned in France by Napoléon for almost seven years after being forced to abdicate his throne in 1808. Ferdinand returned to the Spanish throne in 1813 and ruled Spain during the tumultuous loss of its empire.

conventions. While Shelley departed from many of the characteristics of the mode, with its haunted castles and threatened maidens, she nonetheless successfully conveys a Gothic atmosphere, which, in its sense of the strange and the irrational, stands in sharp contrast both to Enlightenment rationality and to the scientific objectivity of modern science fiction.

The novel is about a driven doctor, Victor Frankenstein, and his desire to bypass God and create human life in the laboratory. Like a character in ancient Greek tragedy whose fatal flaw is hubris, or excessive pride, Frankenstein is punished for his arrogance by the very forces he has unleashed upon the world. The principal reason scholars have identified *Frankenstein* as an influential work of science fiction is the result of Victor Frankenstein's reliance on natural or scientific means to create his man. Ultimately, nature becomes a mechanized force with the ability to create and destroy.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Shelley, like other Romantic writers, often wrote of isolated individuals in a fallen world. The theme of being alone after the destruction of the world is one that writers have explored for centuries, as shown by the works listed below:

Robinson Crusoe (1719), a novel by Daniel Defoe. Shipwrecked off the coast of Trinidad, Crusoe develops the survival skills necessary for living alone on an island.

I Am Legend (2007), a film directed by Francis Lawrence. Robert Neville, a military scientist who thinks he may be the lone survivor after a man-made virus infects the world, works to discover a cure while living in a city inhabited by bloodthirsty victims of the virus.

A Gift upon the Shore (2000), a novel by M. K. Wren. Surrounded by complete devastation from a nuclear holocaust and its aftermath, two women dedicate their lives to collecting and preserving the great books of Western culture.

Alas, Babylon (1959), a novel by Pat Frank. With tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union at an all-time high, Frank published his novel about the survival tactics of a small Florida town after all the major cities in Florida are destroyed in a nuclear war.

Shelley's Legacy Few literary works have had such a profound impact on the genres of fantasy and horror, the development of science fiction, and the Western world's conception of both. Inspiring plays, an opera, movie and television adaptations, numerous sequels, and countless imitators, *Frankenstein* has taken on a life of its own. In fact, Shelley's novel often surprises those modern readers whose knowledge of the story is limited to movie versions that are not faithful to the story itself.

Works in Critical Context

Literary Value With *Frankenstein* dominating critical discussions of her writing, Shelley's other fictional works have received little attention. Critics generally agree that her five later novels are characterized by awkward plotting and verbosity; all the same, most of them have some element of literary value. For instance, scholars consider *The Last Man*, Shelley's best-known work after *Frankenstein*, to be an early prototype of science fiction, with its description of the destruction of the human race in the twenty-first century. Thought by many to be autobiographical, the novels *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837) have been studied for clues to the lives of the Shelleys and their circle of literary friends. In regard to Shelley's nonfiction, critics admire the intelligent, insight-

ful essays she wrote for *Chamber's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, as well as her enlightening notes on Percy Shelley's poetry.

Frankenstein Having been adapted for a variety of media, the *Frankenstein* myth has become part of modern culture. However, when *Frankenstein* was first published, critics typically looked upon the novel as another addition to Gothic fiction, a genre unworthy of serious literary analysis. Early Victorian critics held the same viewpoint, though later scholars began to appreciate the psychological depth beneath the horror in *Frankenstein*. Critics have also focused on the prometheanism in the novel, an aspect that Shelley herself highlighted in the book's subtitle. This line of inquiry, which continues to engage critics, likens Dr. Frankenstein to the Greek mythic figure who wreaks his own destruction through abuse of power. Since then, generations of critics have delved into the novel, discovering the complexities overlooked by early scholars.

Modern critics agree that Shelley's depiction of a godless world in which science and technology have gone awry continues to be a powerful metaphor for the modern age. The monster, who is often the focus of criticism, has been interpreted as representing issues ranging from the alienation of modern humanity to the oppression of women. On the other hand, his maker must confront his sin against the moral and social order. George Levine, for example, comments on the novel's conflict between individual desire and social responsibility: "*Frankenstein* spells out both the horror of going ahead and the emptiness of return. In particular, it spells out the price of heroism."

In describing Frankenstein's efforts to bring his creature to life by scientific rather than supernatural means, Shelley fuses Gothic atmosphere with philosophical allegory. Critic Bonnie R. Neumann points out the fact that *Frankenstein* illustrates a common theological theme, the "initiation—or fall—from . . . innocent, happy illusions . . . into the reality of [life] with its knowledge of loneliness, pain, and death." Farsighted and relevant, *Frankenstein* has presented to the world Victor Frankenstein, a scientist whose name has become synonymous with the reckless use of science and technology—and its potential for catastrophe.

Responses to Literature

1. As the monster in *Frankenstein* develops, he learns to speak and read and eventually comes to understand how he was created. Most film versions of *Frankenstein* depict the monster as mute or vocally incoherent. How do the monster's verbal skills and powers of persuasion in the novel evoke a different reaction toward his existence? Compare and contrast the monster from the novel to the monster in film versions in a paper.

2. In a critical essay, analyze the importance of narrative shifts in *Frankenstein*. Explain the differences in foreshadowing in the narratives of Victor, the monster, and Walton. How does the novel's shift in narrative perspective add to or detract from the overall message of the novel?
3. Although written by the daughter of a famous feminist, *Frankenstein* is noticeably lacking in strong female characters. As you read the novel, take notes about the following female characters: Justine, Elizabeth, and Caroline Beaufort. Discuss the role of women in *Frankenstein*. Do Victor and the monster have differing views of women? Why do you think Shelley chose to create weak female characters? Create a presentation of your findings.
4. From her mother's legacy to her scandalous elopement with a married man to her famous husband's death, Shelley's personal life has often overshadowed her literary work. Research what the critics say about Shelley's personal life and write a related essay. Why do you believe critics and general readers alike are so attracted to details unrelated to actual textual analysis?

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Percy Bysshe Shelley

BORN: 1792, near Horsham, Sussex, England

DIED: 1822, off the coast of Livorno, Italy

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Revolt of Islam (1818)

The Cenci (1819)

Prometheus Unbound (1820)

Adonais (1821)

A Defence of Poetry (1840)

Overview

Percy Shelley was a poet, literary theorist, translator, political thinker, pamphleteer, and social activist. An extensive reader and bold experimenter, he was a major English Romantic poet. His foremost works, including *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), *Adonais* (1821), and *The Triumph of Life* (1824), are recognized as leading expressions of radical thought written during the Romantic age, while his odes and shorter lyrics are often considered among the greatest in the English language. In addition, his essay *A Defence of Poetry* (1840) is highly valued as a statement of the role of the poet in society.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Elder Son of a Noble Family Born on August 4, 1792, Percy Bysshe Shelley was the son of Timothy and Elizabeth Shelley. As the eldest son, Percy stood in line not only to inherit his grandfather's considerable estate but also to sit in Parliament one day.



Percy Shelley Shelley, Percy B., photograph. AP Images.

While in school at Eton, Shelley began two pursuits that he would continue with intense fervor throughout his life: writing and love, the two often blending together so that the love became the subject matter for the writing. Although Shelley began writing poems while at Eton, some of which were published in 1810 in *Original Poetry; by Victor and Cazire* and some of which were not published until the 1960s as *The Esdaile Notebook*, his first publication was the gothic novel, *Zastrozzi* (1810).

Oxford When Shelley went to University College, Oxford in 1810, he was already a published and reviewed writer and a voracious reader with intellectual interests far beyond the rather narrow scope of the prescribed curriculum. Timothy Shelley, proud of his son and wanting to indulge his apparently harmless interests in literature, could not have foreseen where it might lead when he took Shelley to the booksellers Slatter and Munday and instructed them as follows: "My son here has a literary turn; he is already an author, and do pray indulge him in his printing freaks."

Shortly after entering Oxford Shelley met another freshman, Thomas Jefferson Hogg. The two young men immediately became fast friends, each stimulating the imagination and intellect of the other in their animated discussions of philosophy, literature, science, magic, religion, and politics. In his biography of Shelley, Hogg recalled the time they spent in Shelley's rooms, reading, and discussing, arguing, with Shelley performing scientific experiments.

Ousted for "Atheism" During his brief stay at Oxford, Shelley wrote a prose pamphlet, *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), which was to have a disastrous effect on his relationship with his family and a dramatic effect on his life. Indeed, Shelley's decision to publish *The Necessity of Atheism* and send copies of it to the conservative Oxford dons, seemed more calculated to antagonize and flaunt authority than to persuade by rational argument. Actually the title of the pamphlet is more inflammatory than the argument, which centers upon "the nature of belief," a position Shelley derived from the skeptical philosophies of John Locke and David Hume. Nevertheless, the Oxford authorities acted swiftly and decisively, expelling both Shelley and his cohort Hogg in March of 1811. The two could probably have been reinstated with the intervention of Shelley's father, but they would have had to disavow the pamphlet and declare themselves Christians. Shelley's father insisted upon the additional demand that they should not see each other for a stipulated period of time. The result was a complete break between Shelley and his father, which led to financial distress for Shelley until he came of age two years later.

Harriet and Mary After his expulsion from Oxford, Shelley courted Harriet Westbrook, an attractive young woman of sixteen. Toward the end of 1811 the couple

eloped to Scotland. The three years they spent together were marked by financial difficulties and frequent moves to avoid creditors. Despite these pressures, Shelley was actively involved in political and social reform in Ireland and Wales, writing radical pamphlets in which he set forth his views on liberty, equality, and justice. He and Harriet enthusiastically distributed these tracts among the working classes, but with little effect.

The year 1814 was a pivotal one in Shelley's personal life. Although their marriage was faltering, he remarried Harriet in England to ensure the legality of their union and the legitimacy of their children. Weeks later, however, he fell in love with Mary Godwin, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the radical English philosopher William Godwin and his first wife, the feminist author Mary Wollstonecraft. Shelley and Mary ran away together and, accompanied by Mary's stepsister, Jane (Claire) Clairmont, spent six weeks in Europe. On their return, Shelley entered into a financial agreement with his family that ensured him a regular income. When Harriet declined to join his household as a "sister," he provided for her and their two children, but continued to live with Mary.

Byron and the "Satanic School" In the summer of 1816, Shelley, Mary, and Claire traveled to Lake Geneva to meet with Lord Byron, with whom Claire had begun an affair. Though Byron's interest in Claire was fleeting, he developed an enduring friendship with Shelley that proved an important influence on the works of both men. Shortly after Shelley's return to England in the fall, Harriet drowned herself in Hyde Park. Shelley thereupon legalized his relationship with Mary and sought custody of his children, but the Westbrook family successfully blocked him in a lengthy lawsuit. Citing his poem *Queen Mab* (1813), in which he denounced established society and religion in favor of free love and atheism, the Westbrooks convinced the court that Shelley was morally unfit for guardianship. Although Shelley was distressed by his separation from his daughter and infant son, he enjoyed the stimulating society of Leigh Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock, John Keats, and other literary figures during his residence at Marlow in 1817.

Death and Posthumous Success The following year, however, motivated by ill health and financial worries, Shelley relocated his family in Italy. Shelley hastened to renew his relationship with Byron, who was also living in Italy, and the two poets became the nucleus of a circle of expatriates that became known as the "Satanic School" because of their defiance of English social and religious conventions and promotion of radical ideas in their works. The years in Italy were productive for Shelley, despite the deaths of his two children with Mary and the increasing disharmony of their marriage.

In 1819 and 1820 Shelley wrote two of his most ambitious works, the verse dramas *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*. *Prometheus Unbound*, on its surface a reimagining of a lost, ancient Greek play by Aeschylus,

is also a statement of Shelley's revolutionary political ideas. In Shelley's version of the play—which was meant to be read, not performed—the leader of the Greek gods, Zeus, is overthrown and the Titan Prometheus, who had been condemned to eternal punishment for providing humanity with fire, is set free. Shelley based the tragedy of *The Cenci* on the history of a sixteenth-century Italian noble family. The evil Count Cenci rapes his daughter, Beatrice; she determines to murder him, seeing no other means of escape from continued violation, and is executed for parricide, or the killing of a close relative.

One of Shelley's best-known works, *Adonais*, an elegy on the death of fellow poet John Keats, was written in 1821. Drawing on the formal tradition of elegiac verse, Shelley laments Keats's early death and, while rejecting the Christian view of resurrection, describes his return to the eternal beauty of the universe.

Death and Posthumous Success Shortly before his thirtieth birthday in 1822, Shelley and his companion, Edward Williams, drowned when their boat capsized in a squall off the coast of Lerici. Shelley's body, identified by the works of Keats and Sophocles in his pockets, was cremated on the beach in a ceremony conducted by his friends Byron, Hunt, and Edward John Trelawny. His ashes, except for his heart, which Byron plucked from the fire, were buried in the Protestant cemetery in Rome.

Mary Shelley took on the challenge of editing and annotating Shelley's unpublished manuscripts after his death. Her 1840 collection included Shelley's greatest prose work, *A Defence of Poetry*. Writing in response to *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), an essay by his friend Peacock, Shelley details his belief in the moral importance of poetry, calling poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." In addition to several other philosophical essays and translations from the Greek, Shelley's posthumous works include the highly personal odes addressed to Edward Williams's wife, Jane. "To Jane: The Invitation," "To Jane: The Recollection," and "With a Guitar: To Jane" are considered some of his best love poems. At once a celebration of his friends' happy union and an intimate record of his own attraction to Jane, these lyrics are admired for their delicacy and refined style.

Works in Literary Context

Much of Shelley's writing reflects the events and concerns of his life. His passionate beliefs in reform, the equality of the sexes, and the powers of love and imagination are frequently expressed in his poetry, and they caused much controversy among his conservative contemporaries.

Controversial Subject Matter Shelley's first mature work, *Queen Mab*, was printed in 1813, but not distributed due to its inflammatory subject matter. It was not until 1816, with the appearance of *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude, and Other Poems*, that he earned recognition as a serious poet. In *Alastor*, a visionary and sometimes autobiographical poem, Shelley describes the experiences

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Shelley's famous contemporaries include:

John Keats (1795–1821): Critically savaged during his short life, Keats found posthumous fame for his Romantic poetry.

Lord Byron (1788–1824): George Gordon, Lord Byron was one of the leading founders of Romanticism, almost as well known for his debauched lifestyle as for his poetry.

Simón Bolívar (1783–1830): Inspired by the ideals of the American Revolution, and along with Jose de San Martín, Bolívar was the key leader in the ultimately successful liberation of Spain's Central and South American colonies.

Charles Babbage (1791–1871): Recognized today as the world's first computer engineer, Babbage designed, beginning in 1822, an analog computer that he dubbed "the difference engine." Although he never completed the project, a working model built exactly to his plans was constructed in 1991, proving the soundness of his designs.

Francisco Goya (1746–1828): Painter of the Spanish court, Goya also displayed a loose, subversive style in his personal fine art that was to prove highly influential on generations of painters.

of the Poet who, rejecting human sympathy and domestic life, is pursued by the demon Solitude.

Shelley also used a visionary approach in his next lengthy work, *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City* (1818), written in friendly competition with Keats. An imaginative account of a bloodless revolution led by a brother and sister, the poem deals with the positive power of love, the complexities of good and evil, and ultimately, spiritual victory through martyrdom. *Laon and Cythna* was immediately suppressed by the printer because of its controversial content, and Shelley subsequently revised the work as *The Revolt of Islam*, minimizing its elements of incest and political revolution. Even the author's attempts at more popular work met with disapproval: Although Shelley hoped for success on the English stage with his play *The Cenci*, his controversial treatment of the subject of incest outraged critics, preventing the play from being produced.

Lyrical Poetry and the Core of Shelley's Themes Throughout his career Shelley wrote numerous short lyrics that have proved to be among his most popular works. Characterized by a simple, personal tone, his minor poems frequently touch on themes central to his more ambitious works: The "Hymn to Intellectual

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Shelley was the prototypical sensitive, misunderstood poet, whose musings on nature and beauty have been much imitated in the centuries since his death, particularly among the Romantic and transcendentalist poets he helped inspire.

Leaves of Grass (1855), a poetry collection by Walt Whitman. Revised in several editions over the poet's lifetime, the poems contained in this collection for the most part celebrate nature, the role of humans in it, and the sensual experiences of the material world.

The Poems of Emily Dickinson (1999), a collection by Emily Dickinson. Although she only published a dozen poems during her lifetime, Dickinson wrote over eighteen hundred, many of which touch upon a recurring theme of the beauty and serenity of gardens and flowers.

Nature (1836), an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. This work formed the cornerstone of transcendentalism; in it, Emerson asserts that Nature is not a thing to be learned, but a primal force that is understood at a primal level by all of us.

Beauty" and "Mont Blanc" focus on his belief in an animating spirit, while "Ode to the West Wind" examines opposing forces in nature. In other lyrics, including "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," "Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples," and "Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici," Shelley explores his own experiences and emotions. Political themes also inspired several of his most famous short poems, among them "Ode to Liberty," "Sonnet: England in 1819," and *The Masque of Anarchy* (composed 1819; published 1832).

Works in Critical Context

The history of Shelley's critical reputation has been characterized by radical shifts. During his lifetime he was generally regarded as a misguided or even depraved genius; critics frequently praised portions of his poetry in passing and deplored at length his atheism and unorthodox philosophy. In addition, because of their limited publication and the scant critical attention given his works, he found only a small audience. Those few critics who voiced their admiration of his talents, particularly Hunt, who defended him vigorously in the *Examiner*, were ironically responsible for further inhibiting his success by causing him to be associated in the public mind with the despised "Cockney School" of poets belittled by John Gibson Lockhart and others in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Nevertheless, Shelley was known and admired by his great contemporaries: Byron, Keats, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey regarded his works with varying degrees of sympathy and approval.

Legacy After his death, Shelley's reputation was greatly influenced by the efforts of his widow and friends to portray him as an angelic visionary. Biographies by Trelawny, Peacock, and Hogg, though frequently self-serving, inaccurate, and sensationalized, succeeded in directing interest toward Shelley's life and character and away from the controversial beliefs expressed in his works. Critics in the second half of the nineteenth century for the most part ignored Shelley's radical politics, celebrating instead the spiritual and aesthetic qualities of his poetry. In the Victorian age he was highly regarded as the poet of ideal love, and the Victorian notion of the poet as a sensitive, misunderstood genius was largely modeled after Shelley.

Shelley's works, however, fell into disfavor around the turn of the century. Many critics, influenced by Matthew Arnold's assessment of Shelley as an "ineffectual angel," objected to his seemingly vague imagery, nebulous philosophy, careless technique, and, most of all, his apparent intellectual and emotional immaturity. In the late 1930s Shelley's reputation began to revive: As scholars came to recognize the complexity of his philosophical idealism, serious study was devoted to the doctrines that informed his thought. Since that time, Shelley scholarship has covered a wide array of topics, including his style, philosophy, and major themes. In examining his style, commentators have generally focused on his imagery, use of language, and technical achievements. His doctrines of free love and sexual equality have also attracted commentary on the poet as an early proponent of feminism. Recent criticism of Shelley's works is generally marked by increasing respect for his abilities as a poet and his surprisingly modern philosophy.

Prometheus Unbound Shelley knew that *Prometheus Unbound* would never be popular, but he thought that it might have a beneficial influence on some already enlightened intellects. In letters to his publisher Charles Ollier, Shelley proclaimed that although this was his "favorite poem," he did not expect it to sell more than twenty copies and instructed Ollier to send copies to Keats and Byron, among others. The reviewers were predictably harsh in their condemnation of the poem's moral and political principles, with the reviewer for the *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres* quipping that "no one can ever think [*Prometheus*] worth binding," but there was also praise, with words such as "beauty" and "genius" used in various reviews.

The Cenci In his hope that the play would be read widely and staged, Shelley again misjudged the predominance of conservatism in the literary world of pre-Victorian England. The taboo theme of incest, the horror of parricide, the "blasphemous" treatment of religion, the implicit attack on the family and all patriarchal institutions, and Shelley's own dangerous reputation—all broke the rules of British society and ensured *The Cenci* would be condemned by

all but a few reviewers and friends, such as Leigh Hunt, to whom the play is dedicated. One reviewer's response in the *British Review* is typical: "The ties of father and daughter . . . ought not to be profaned as they are in this poem." The play was staged only once in the nineteenth century, by the Shelley Society in 1886.

Responses to Literature

1. Many feel that Shelley's dramatic power was informed in large part by his wild and reckless lifestyle. Do you think artists must "live on the edge" in order to produce works of dramatic power? Why or why not? How do you think Shelley's work would differ if he had led a more conventional lifestyle?
2. Shelley's reputation in his own time suffered from his lifestyle choices. How has his reputation changed since his death? Do you think artists' lifestyles still have an effect on how we judge their work? Try to think of a modern example of a famous artist—such as an author or an actor—who is judged by lifestyle choices as much as by his or her body of work.
3. Compare and contrast Shelley's "A Dirge" with his contemporary John Keats's "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be." How do the two poems address the subjects of life, death, and loss?
4. Shelley wrote an "Address to the West Wind." Read the poem, then write the West Wind's response. What type of letter would the Wind write? Would it be formal or informal?

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Richard Brinsley Sheridan

BORN: 1751, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1816, London, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

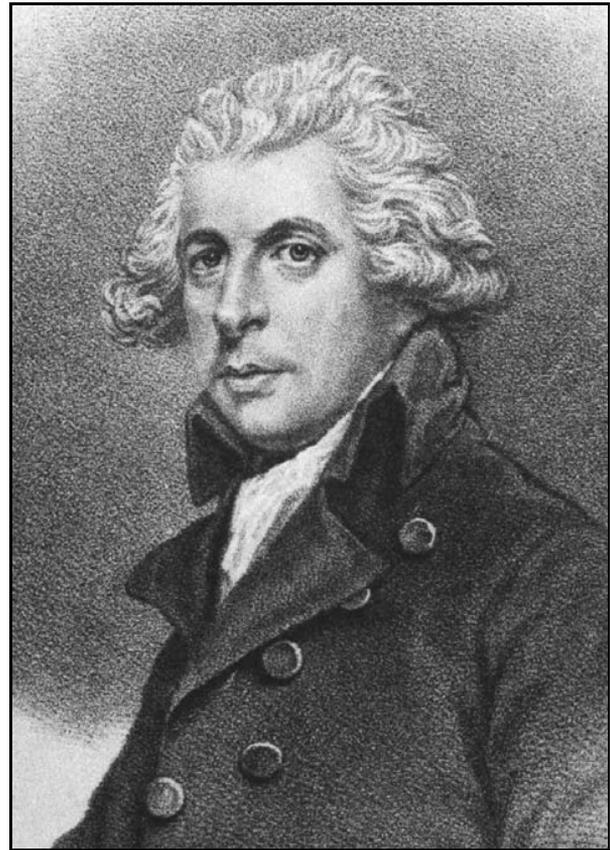
GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Rivals (1775)

The School for Scandal (1777)

The Critic (1779)



Richard Brinsley Sheridan Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Irish author Richard Brinsley Sheridan was both a dramatist and a statesman. He is best known for his contribution to the revival of the English Restoration comedy of manners, which depicts the amorous intrigues of wealthy society. His most popular comedies, *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777), display his talent for sparkling dialogue and farce. Like other writers of the genre, Sheridan satirized society, though his dramas reflect gentle morality and sentimentality.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Literary Family Sheridan was born in October of 1751 in Dublin, Ireland, the son of a prominent actor and a noted author. His mother, Frances Chamberlaine Sheridan, wrote one fairly successful play and one respected novel. She died while he was an adolescent. His father, Thomas Sheridan, was a playwright, actor, theater manager, orator, and also a scholar of English elocution who published a dictionary. Sheridan's paternal grandfather, Thomas Sheridan, spent many intimate years with Irish author Jonathan Swift, who wrote *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

Drama and Marriage When Sheridan was eight, the family moved to London, where he attended the prestigious boarding school, the Harrow School. Though he disliked school, he proved to be an excellent student and began writing poetry at an early age. After composing dramatic sketches with friends, Sheridan considered becoming a playwright. His father, however, intended him to study law, and he began an informal program of legal studies after leaving the Harrow School in 1768.

When the family moved to Bath in 1770, Sheridan met Elizabeth Linley, an outstanding singer and famed beauty, with whom he eloped three years later. Shortly after their marriage, Sheridan abandoned his legal studies in order to devote himself to writing. Soon, Sheridan found himself living in London during the 1773–1774 season without an income and with a child on the way. Sheridan would not permit his wife to sing for money, even though she could command as much as fifteen hundred pounds for a series of concerts.

While Sheridan was not yet successful writing dramas, the theater had widespread popularity in this period in Great Britain. Theater appealed to the upper, middle, and even lower classes. Upper gallery seats could be purchased for as little as one shilling, allowing for the poor to attend on occasion. The repertoire performed in this period reflected all genres, including comedies, melodramas, farces, tragedies, and dramas.

First Success as Playwright Success for Sheridan began with *The Rivals* in 1775. Initially, the performance of the play failed because of miscasting and the play's excessive length. Undaunted by the poor reception, Sher-

idan recast several roles, abbreviated sections of the play, and reopened it ten days later to a unanimously positive response. The success of *The Rivals* derived from the use of one of comedy's oldest devices: the satirizing of manners.

The favorable reception of *The Rivals* led immediately to other opportunities for Sheridan. At Covent Garden on May 2, 1775, his two-act farce *St. Patrick's Day; or, The Scheming Lieutenant* appeared and earned for itself a minor place in the afterpiece repertoire. The farce contains many of the elements of *The Rivals*: idiosyncratic but essentially good-natured characters, scenes of disguise and of revelation, quick, verbal strokes, and a farcical starring role rich in numerous assumed disguises for the principal male actor.

Continued Popularity In *The Duenna*, first performed at Covent Garden on November 21, 1775, Sheridan once more rose beyond competence to brilliance. *The Duenna* played an unprecedented seventy-five nights that first season and was praised by audiences and critics alike.

Sheridan earned a small fortune in this first year and a half of dramatic penmanship and directing. When famed actor and director David Garrick retired as part-owner of the Drury Lane Theatre, Sheridan, in concert with his father-in-law, Thomas Linley Sr., and wealthy physician James Ford, purchased Garrick's share. In the following two years, Sheridan revived a number of Restoration comedies, and wrote and produced his most successful comedy, *The School for Scandal*, which debuted on May 8, 1777.

End of Playwriting Career In 1779, Sheridan produced his last successful work, *The Critic; or, Tragedy Rehearsed*. His last play was *Pizarro* (1799). A historical drama, *Pizarro* met with popular acclaim but was soon forgotten. Critics today consider it a disappointing conclusion to Sheridan's theatrical career.

Political Career In 1780, Sheridan made a career change. He was elected to the House of Commons, where he excelled as an orator. His speeches are considered brilliant masterpieces of persuasion and verbal command. At the time, Great Britain was facing challenges to its empire and supremacy. The ongoing American Revolution, which did not completely end until 1783, resulted in the loss of many of Britain's North American colonies. However, Britain soon began settling Australia and New Zealand, adding again to its colonial empire. At home, the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland resulted in the formal creation of the United Kingdom in 1800.

During his time in Parliament, however, Sheridan's interest in politics kept him from his theatrical endeavors, and his management of Drury Lane became haphazard. In an attempt to beautify the aging theater, he rebuilt the interior, but it burned down shortly thereafter. Left without resources, Sheridan was unable to finance another

parliamentary campaign. His last years were spent in poverty and disgrace.

Sheridan died in London on July 7, 1816, in the sixty-fifth year of his life. Though Sheridan expired in poverty, he was mourned widely and was buried at Westminster Abbey, in the Poets' Corner.

Works in Literary Context

Scandal as Theme A product of his time, Sheridan's plays showed the influence of William Shakespeare's plays (consciously or unconsciously). It is also believed that Sheridan was greatly influenced by his contemporary William Congreve and Sir John Vanbrugh as well as the comedies of the David Garrick era. Sheridan also reacted to the tenor of his times by including in his plays a tolerance of human nature that he believes will support social good rather than individual self-interest. Sheridan's originality was to dramatize the agents of scandal and slander more vividly than any purely decorative comic wits or would-be wits had been represented since the time of Congreve.

Influence Plays like *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* were believed to be principally responsible for an English revival of comedy, though some later scholars disagreed. *The School for Scandal* in particular affected British playwrights who followed. Through his partial interest in Drury Lane—though he was a distracted manager for much of his tenure—Sheridan was also able to play an influential role in the course of British theater.

Works in Critical Context

Frequently Performed Sheridan wrote and produced three plays that have been performed more frequently than the works of any other playwright between Shakespeare and Shaw. *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic* entered the performing repertoire immediately upon their first appearance in the 1770s, and one or more of them is still performed every year. Since their debut, both *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* have been popular with critics and audiences alike. Modern critics have focused on Sheridan's skilled use of dialogue and manipulation of character in his major dramas.

The Rivals Tom Moore, Sheridan's biographer and first systematic critic, wrote, "The characters of *The Rivals*...are not such as occur very commonly in the world; and, instead of producing striking effects with natural and obvious materials, which is the great art and difficulty of a painter of human life, [Sheridan] has here overcharged most of his persons with whims and absurdities, for which the circumstances they are engaged in afford but a very disproportionate vent." Subsequent critics have attributed the comedy's greatness to its exuberant play with language and with language's power to obfuscate reality, but this language emanates from, as

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sheridan's famous contemporaries include:

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): This English writer was best known for his dictionary and witty aphorisms. His works include *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

King George III (1738–1820): This controversial king ruled England and Ireland during most of Sheridan's life. George III suffered from mental health issues and oversaw the loss of the American colonies.

William Hazlitt (1778–1830): This British writer and literary critic occasionally supported and praised Sheridan. His books include *The Spirit of the Age* (1825).

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824): This scandalous British poet and writer was often ostracized from society for his misdeeds, despite his wealth and charm. Among his best-known works was the narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1818).

well as serves to form, distinctly drawn, wonderfully absurd characters. One of Sheridan's recent critics argues persuasively that the twenty-three-year-old playwright, who denied plagiarism in the preface to the first edition of *The Rivals*, depended heavily upon Shakespeare.

The School for Scandal Few disputed the artistry of *The School for Scandal* in its time. It has been presented on stage to paying audiences every year since its premiere. Henry James and George Bernard Shaw, a century after its first appearance, found fault with its sentimentality. But a century after James and Shaw, critics have rediscovered Sheridan's greatest play and found it worthy of serious attention.

With *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan answered the expectations many had for his management of Drury Lane after Garrick. There were detractors, including his father, Thomas Sheridan, who remarked: "Talk about the merit of Sheridan's comedy, there's nothing to it. He had but to dip in his own heart and find there the characters both of Joseph and Charles." Most critics welcomed Sheridan's greatest comedy and hoped the playwright would produce more of them.

Responses to Literature

1. List the types of humor in *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. Create a presentation of your lists using examples from the plays.
2. In a short essay, analyze Sheridan's view of love and marriage as revealed in his plays.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sheridan was adept at using the “reversal of fortune” plot line to comic effect. Here are some other works that contain the reversal-of-fortune plot, sometimes known as peripeteia:

Great Expectations (1860–1861), a novel by Charles Dickens. Things change for the poor orphan Pip when he learns of a large fortune coming his way.

The Little Princess (1905), a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett. A young girl whose father has died in the jungle grows up in poverty, until one day she realizes she is the lost heir to a vast fortune.

Reversal of Fortune (1990), a film by Barbet Schroeder. In this movie based on the true events surrounding husband and wife Claus and Sunny von Bülow, a large fortune is to be gained if a lawyer can wrangle the appeal.

Trading Places (1983), a film directed by John Landis. In this Academy Award-nominated comedy, two wealthy brothers make a bet on whether or not a poor man will be affected by instant wealth.

3. How did Sheridan’s involvement in the theater community affect his plays? See *The Critic* in particular. Write an essay about your conclusions.
4. In a group discussion, highlight the different classes in Sheridan’s plays. Which class does he seem to understand and empathize with the most?
5. Sheridan’s Mrs. Malaprop is responsible for a literary term. Discuss in an essay why audiences find Mrs. Malaprop amusing. Then research *malapropism* and find your own examples of such usage.

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Mikhail Sholokhov

BORN: 1905, Kruzblino, Russia

DIED: 1984, Veshenskaya, Rostov-on-Don, Soviet Union

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Quiet Don (1928)

Virgin Soil Uplifted (1932)

“The Fate of a Man” (1957)

Overview

Russian author Mikhail Sholokhov is one of a few Soviets who wrote fiction for the Communist Party. *The Quiet Don* (1928), a four-book epic about life in a Cossack village from 1912 to 1922, and *Virgin Soil Uplifted* (1932), his story of collective farming, were part of the curriculum in all Soviet schools. Sholokhov’s body of work is not large, but his works have been translated into more than forty languages and have sold millions of copies.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cossack No More Sholokhov was born Mikhail Stepanovich Kuznetsov on May 11, 1905, on a farm near the River Don in Russia. This region was dominated by the Cossacks, a privileged group of people who were required to serve in the Russian Army. Neither of Sholokhov’s parents were Cossacks, but he was registered as a Cossack at his birth, due to his mother’s marriage to an elderly officer who was not Sholokhov’s father. After the old man died in 1912 and Sholokhov’s father and mother were officially married, Mikhail lost his Cossack status.



Mikhail Sholokhov Imagno / Getty Images

Effects of Revolution Sholokhov attended a quality regional school in the town of Boguchar, Voronezh Province, but he was forced to leave because of the German invasion in 1918 near the end of World War I. Russia fought in the conflict on the side of France, Great Britain, and the United States against Germany, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. Unlike its allies, Russia's battles against Germany often ended in defeat and Russia lost considerable territory to Germany when a peace treaty was created between the two countries.

During World War I, Tsar Nicholas II and his autocratic rule became increasingly unpopular. Though he allowed elected Dumas (legislatures) beginning in 1906, Nicholas and his ministers had firm control of the government. This situation came to a head in 1917 and 1918 as several groups vied for control of the country, including the Tsar, until he abdicated in November 1917; the Mensheviks (socialists); the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin; and several other groups. The resulting civil war saw Lenin and the Bolsheviks gain control of the government, though the conflict lasted until the early 1920s as Lenin and his followers fought to retain control of Russia.

In the civil war that followed the Bolshevik revolution, Sholokhov's family lived in territories controlled by the White Russian armies, which were fighting the Soviet

Red Army. Sholokhov witnessed the brutal conflict and later described it in realistic detail in *The Quiet Don*.

Early Affinity for Communism At the age of fourteen, Sholokhov was forced to make a decision that influenced the rest of his life. He joined the Communists (as the Bolsheviks came to be called) and went to work for the Revolutionary Committee. For a time, he served as a machine gunner with a Red Army supply detachment and volunteered to fight in a special forces unit. He also took part in the cultural life of the Don region, helping produce a daily newspaper and organize the local theater. Captured and interrogated in 1920, Sholokhov was spared from execution.

Once the fighting had stopped and Soviet power was established, Sholokhov went to Moscow to continue his education. He worked at various jobs from 1922 to 1924 before he turned to writing. Sholokhov published his first work in 1923 and wrote stories that later appeared in the book *Tales from the Don* (1926).

In Moscow, he befriended numerous writers and became a member of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, an arm of the Bolshevik Party. Unable to make ends meet in Moscow, however, Sholokhov and his wife returned to the Don region, where he lived until his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sholokhov's famous contemporaries include:

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): Author of *Doctor Zhivago* (1957), this Russian novelist and poet won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958.

Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895–1958): Zoshchenko was a popular Soviet novelist and satirist whose books include *Nervous People* (1927).

George Orwell (1903–1950): This English novelist and essayist is the author of the political classics *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949), depicting the consequences of totalitarianism.

Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966): Many novels by this English satirical novelist parody British aristocracy and high society, including *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).

Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948): Eisenstein was a Soviet film director famous for his use of montage in silent cinema. His films include *Strike* (1925) and *October* (1927).

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): From 1964 until 1982, Brezhnev was general secretary of the Communist Party, the leader of the Soviet Union.

death. He knew by then that his literary subject would be the people and places he had known since birth.

Wrote *The Quiet Don* By the end of 1926, Sholokhov had two short-story collections in print and was gaining recognition for his writing. Working on his first novel in 1927, he realized that it needed more of a historical context for the average reader to understand it. Consequently, he began a description of the Don Cossacks prior to World War I, and this work became the starting point for *The Quiet Don*. Depicting Cossack life up to the Bolshevik Revolution, the first two segments of the epic were published serially in the journal *October* in 1928.

Reviewers and readers responded positively, but publication ceased after Communist officials objected that the book was insufficiently proletarian in outlook. When Joseph Stalin (who gained power in the Soviet Union in 1928, four years after the death of Lenin and after defeating other top Communist officials for the post) and the Communist Party endorsed the work in 1930, Sholokhov applied for party membership. After Sholokhov was accepted into the party, he proudly described himself as a Communist first, a writer second.

Completed *Epic* An English translation of the first two books of Sholokhov's epic, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, appeared in 1930. The author ran into censorship

problems with the third book, which describes the actual events of the 1919 uprising. According to the most cited version of events, Stalin ordered that publication proceed following a meeting with Sholokhov and leading Soviet author Maxim Gorky. Part seven of *The Quiet Don* was serialized in 1937 and 1938. Stalin held up the final installment, insisting that the hero convert to Communism by the end. Sholokhov objected and surprisingly won the standoff. Part eight was published, its ending unchanged, in 1940.

A Survivor Because Stalin believed that the Soviet Union had to be able to feed itself, he mandated the transformation of Soviet agriculture from individual farms into a system of large collective farms. With Stalin's help, Sholokhov published the first book of his novel *Virgin Soil Uplifted*, a powerful yet objective account of Soviet collective farming. At risk of being named an enemy of the Party, Sholokhov courageously pointed out both benefits and detriments of collective agriculture, presenting the stories of dispossessed Cossacks and peasants. Still, he remained a party loyalist and believed that collectivization would ultimately benefit Russia.

Sholokhov became a member of the Supreme Soviet in 1936 and an elected delegate to all Communist Party Congresses from 1936 to 1984. Sholokhov's service to the Soviet state earned him many accolades. He was among the first recipients of the Stalin Prize, shortly before the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941 during World War II. He quickly enlisted in the army as a war correspondent. In 1943, *Pravda*, the official state newspaper, began featuring chapters from Sholokhov's patriotic novel, *They Fought for Their Country*. Although new chapters appeared over the course of Sholokhov's post-war career, the novel was never completed, most likely because his role in political affairs greatly reduced his literary productivity.

A Communist Nobel Prize While some renowned Soviet literary figures became targets of vilification, Sholokhov's position in the party grew stronger. He served publicly as a government spokesperson, even while his own writing was embroiled in censorship battles. He was forced to revise *The Quiet Don* drastically; amended versions appeared in 1952 and 1953. After Stalin's death in 1953, the original text was mostly restored.

Sholokhov was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965, despite being a controversial figure. He was a loyal Communist who fervently accused other writers of treason, while maintaining that literary freedom in the Soviet Union was unrestricted. Western intellectuals condemned him as an agent of the totalitarian state. In the 1970s, the expelled Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn charged that Sholokhov had plagiarized *The Quiet Don*, reviving allegations dating back to the 1920s. Despite official commissions and even scientific investigations confirming Sholokhov's authorship, the issue was

not fully resolved at the time of his death in 1984 and is still debated today.

Works in Literary Context

Sholokhov formed his ideological and artistic identities at an early age. During his school years in Boguchar, he lived in the home of a priest, who introduced him to such important writers as Aleksandr Ertel, a nineteenth-century master of the colloquial Russian language; Maxim Gorky, who later became known as the father of Soviet socialist realism; and the Ukrainian-Russian writer Vladimir Korolenko. Sholokhov's writing reflects these influences, as well as that of Aleksandr Serafimovich, a Don Cossack who became his mentor and sponsor. The subject matter and epic sweep of *The Quiet Don* resembles that of Serafimovich's novel *The Iron Flood* (1924). Some critics have also likened Sholokhov's novels to those of Leo Tolstoy.

Regional Interest Sholokhov's feeling for the history, geography, and culture of his particular region around Rostov-on-Don is evident from his earliest stories. Lyrical landscape passages and abundant Cossack folklore give his work a sense of locality that is rare in Russian literature. In the *New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley observed that in addition to his passion for the land, Sholokhov "also has a sense of people that is somewhat commoner in Russian fiction, though rare enough in the literature of any country. He writes about them as if he had always known and loved them and wanted the outside world to understand just why they acted as they did."

Socialist Realism Sholokhov's artistic success within Soviet society has much to do with his application of the conventions of socialist realism, the required genre of all literature under Stalin. *The Quiet Don* demonstrates the principle of historical inevitability, in which people must either adapt to or be destroyed by historical forces. Sholokhov championed socialist realism, claiming in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech that "it expresses a philosophy of life that accepts neither a turning away from the world nor a flight from reality." At the same time, Sholokhov resisted efforts to alter the political ideas in his work and did not shy away from objectively describing the problems and even tragedies that accompanied the Soviet revolution. In his best work, political doctrine is artfully fused with the requirements of his narrative. At other times, rigid adherence to the party line is seen as compromising his work's literary merit.

Works in Critical Context

The Best and the Worst In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party's efforts at social control meant that literature and all the arts took place in a highly politicized cultural context. The early reception of Sholokhov's epic demonstrates this. Since Sholokhov was not yet a party

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don*, an epic vision of a people overtaken by crisis and war, takes its place in a broad, global literary tradition that includes the following works:

The Iliad (eighth century BCE), an epic poem by Homer.

Relating events of the Trojan War, *The Iliad* is considered by many to be the oldest work of European literature.

Les Misérables (1862), a novel by Victor Hugo. Hugo's famous sentimental novel follows several French characters through the Napoleonic Wars and subsequent years.

War and Peace (1865–1869), an epic novel by Leo Tolstoy. This massive, triumphant work of literature encompasses the story of Russian society during the Napoleonic era.

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. A masterpiece of Latin American magical realism, this novel depicts a century in the life of a town and its founding family.

The Red Wheel (1971–1991), novels by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This cycle of historical novels covers moments in Russian life during the First World War.

member, he was open to political attack. The more orthodox Communist critics branded Sholokhov a peasant writer who did not sufficiently highlight the plight of proletarians. They questioned why he took the perspective of the defeated White Army and not the victorious Bolsheviks.

In 1928, Sholokhov's authorship officially came under question. Sholokhov had to submit his notes and drafts to the offices of *Pravda* to prove the texts were his. The official response silenced critics but did not put suspicions to rest.

Ever since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Sholokhov's name has remained mired in controversy. Public opinion is divided between his attackers and defenders. For some, he is an emblem of everything that was vile and destructive in the old Soviet system. A more diplomatic assessment, voiced by critic David Hugh Stewart, is that Sholokhov represents both the best and the worst aspects of Soviet literature.

The Quiet Don Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don* is at the center of much of the controversy over his legacy. Solzhenitsyn as well as many Soviet literary experts like Herman Ermolaev and R. A. Medvedev, believe the book was plagiarized to greater or lesser degrees. Solzhenitsyn wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "From the time when it first began to appear in 1928 *The Quiet Don* has posed a whole series of riddles which have not been satisfactorily answered even today... A twenty-three-

year-old beginner had created a work out of material which went far beyond his own experience of life and his level of education.” Away from this controversy, critics acknowledged that this novel had merit. Ernest J. Simmons of the *New York Times Book Review* concluded, “He reached artistic heights only in his great novel *The Quiet Don*. . . . Gregor Melekhov, perhaps the most fully realized and sympathetically portrayed tragic figure in Soviet fiction, remains in the end a complete individualist, alien to the Bolshevik cause that ultimately destroys him.”

Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think Stalin relented and allowed Sholokhov to publish part eight of *The Quiet Don* without revising the work so that the hero converted to Communism by the end? When you consider the fact that writers and artists were often executed for challenging the Communist regime, what is more important: ignoring the censorship of socialist realism and remaining true to one’s art, or complying with the edicts of such tyrannical rulers as Stalin? Write a paper that outlines your conclusions.
2. Sholokhov’s Communist critics objected that the author wrote *The Quiet Don* from the perspective of the White Russians rather than the Bolsheviks. What does the work gain or lose as a result of Sholokhov’s decision? What might have happened—critically, socially, politically—if Sholokhov had written from the Bolshevik point of view? Create a presentation of your findings.
3. Aside from an allegiance to Communism, what specific social or political values does Sholokhov champion in his prose? What distinctions can you make by assessing Sholokhov’s work on purely literary terms, leaving aside political considerations? Write an essay that outlines your views.
4. Research the collectivization of Soviet agriculture under Stalin for a presentation. Does *Virgin Soil Upturned* fairly portray the impact of this Soviet policy? Do you agree with socialized farming? Explain your answers.

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■ Zhou Shuren

SEE *Lu Xun*

◻ Nevil Shute

BORN: 1899, Ealing, England

DIED: 1960, Melbourne, Australia

NATIONALITY: *British and Australian*

GENRE: *Novels*

MAJOR WORKS:

What Happened to the Corbetts (1939)

A Town Like Alice (1950)

In the Wet (1953)

On the Beach (1957)

Overview

Nevil Shute lived, in some ways, as two very different people: Nevil Shute Norway, the successful airplane engineer and business entrepreneur, and Nevil Shute, the author of escapist adventure novels and science fiction. He was careful to keep the two separate, writing under a shortened version of his full name, fearing that his reputation as a best-selling novelist would undermine his credibility as an engineer whom people would trust with their lives in his airplanes. By the end of his unusual and successful career, however, he had made significant and enduring contributions to both aeronautical design and popular fiction—a claim that few others, if any, can make.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Taste for Adventure Nevil Shute Norway was born on January 17, 1899, in Ealing, west of London.



Nevil Shute Central Press / Getty Images

He spoke with a stutter, a problem he never completely overcame. His father became the head of the postal service in Ireland, and in 1912 the family moved to Dublin. Shute served in the medical corps during the Easter Rebellion in Ireland, during which Irish rebels supporting independence from England occupied some key government offices; in the ensuing conflict, Shute's father's post office was burned. He enlisted in the infantry just before World War I ended.

Shute began work as an engineer at the de Havilland Aircraft Company in 1922, where he learned to fly. While at de Havilland, Shute bought a typewriter, perhaps encouraged by the writing activities of his family: His grandmother had been a writer of children's books, his father had published travel books, and his mother edited a volume of correspondence about the family's experiences in the Irish rebellion. All of these genres influenced his later novels—the simple adventure narratives owe a debt to adolescent fiction, travel and life abroad is represented throughout Shute's novels, and the experiences of determined individuals confronting violence and the threat of death appear in many of Shute's stories.

An Amusing Pastime In 1923 and 1924 Shute's first two novels were rejected by publishers, but he had learned that he enjoyed writing and could do it quickly,

and he was determined to keep at it. He later spoke of his early work as not being particularly good, but Shute's novels come from the perspective of someone who found writing to be mostly a relaxing and amusing pastime to do after work. The many novels Shute wrote between 1924 and 1930 are often easy-to-read adventure stories about pilots, as Shute often flew a small plane himself during this time. Some of them did address serious issues, however, such as *So Disdained* (1928), which expressed his concern for pilots who, after serving in World War I, were now poorly paid. The American edition was published as *The Mysterious Aviator*.

Wartime Efforts and Inspiration After 1938, Shute's novels began to show the political tensions of the period. When the war began, Shute was highly critical of America's refusal to come to the aid of Great Britain and its European allies. *Pied Piper*, about an elderly British lawyer who rescues refugee children from France just before the German invasion, was one of the books Shute aimed at American readers, hoping that the United States would end its isolation.

After the war, Shute traveled to Burma to briefly work for the ministry of information, and he returned to England and his full-time writing career in 1945. *The Chequer Board* (1947) grew out of his time in Burma. In 1947 Shute traveled by car around the United States, seeking a firsthand glimpse into the real America so he could better describe it in several of his novels (written with an eye toward the American movie industry).

Futuristic Visions In 1950 Shute and his family moved permanently to Australia. During this period, in spite of his stammer, Shute began to lecture on professional writing. Among the topics he discussed were the elements he believed fiction readers want: information, romance, heroism, and a happy ending—even if it involves death. As Julian Smith points out, Shute's next novel, *In the Wet* (1953), supplied those four things, plus a fifth element—relevance to current events, in particular the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Moreover, *In the Wet* includes a vision of the 1980s, in which Australia is the center of a thriving British Empire free of socialism.

The 1950s saw the rise of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and with it the constant threat of nuclear annihilation. In his best-known work, *On the Beach*, Shute takes up his most ambitious subject yet: the destruction of the world in a nuclear holocaust. The novel tells how in 1962 a nuclear war begins with the bombing of Tel Aviv and ends thirty-seven days later, presumably in total devastation. Southern Australia is the last part of the world to be affected by the spreading deadly radioactivity. The novel depicts the things people focus on in their final weeks and days—alcohol, auto racing, church attendance, vegetable gardens, and suicide drugs. *On the Beach* was not the first novel to address this topic, but Shute's treatment of the subject was noteworthy, both for the vividness of his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Shute's famous contemporaries include:

Amelia Earhart (1897–1937): Famed pilot and the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. During an attempt to fly around the world in 1937, her plane disappeared over the Pacific near Hawaii. It has never been found.

Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950): Author of over seventy novels, most of them fantasy adventures or science fiction. His best known work, *Tarzan of the Apes*, has been adapted in countless sequels, films, and television shows.

Harry S. Truman (1884–1972): The thirty-third president of the United States. Just four months into his administration, he ordered the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, which effectively ended World War II.

Howard Hughes (1905–1976): An eccentric, brilliant, and enormously innovative multimillionaire who designed and built several experimental aircraft and broke many speed records, later moving to commercial aircraft and founding Trans-American Airlines.

Glenn Miller (1904–1944): One of the best-selling musicians of the World War II era. He joined the army in 1942 so he could lead a band to entertain the troops and raise morale. His plane disappeared over France in 1944 and was never found.

depiction of the war's human consequences and for the remarkable popularity of the book. It was made into a star-studded movie in 1959, although Shute was unhappy with certain changes made to the story and characters.

Shute finished only two novels in his last four years, returning to subjects that had sustained him throughout his long career: *The Rainbow and the Rose* (1958), about a pilot reviewing the life of his mentor, and *Trustee from the Toolroom* (1960), which opens in Shute's birthplace of West Ealing, and is about an accomplished engineer. His work on the latter was impaired somewhat by a stroke he suffered in December of 1958. He began a new novel that was to metaphorically depict the Second Coming of Christ in the southern Australian wilderness, and he was working on it when he died on January 12, 1960.

Works in Literary Context

Shute did not write "literary" novels, so academic critics and Shute have largely ignored one another. According to Julian Smith, the leading authority on Shute and his works, "If Nevil Shute ever influenced another writer or the course of English literature, there is no evidence to that effect." Still, Shute was very much a product of his

times. Best sellers can often reveal aspects of popular culture that wider literary trends cannot—for example, while literary authors of the world-wars era such as Virginia Woolf and Graham Greene were exploring complex characters and lyrical prose styles, Shute was content to just tell good stories that let people escape from their troubled times for a few hours. "His prose was never exciting, nor was it ever dull," writes Smith. "It was simply as functional as the aircraft he built in his engineering days."

Aviation As a pilot and aeronautical engineer himself, it is not surprising that many of Shute's characters are pilots, and the majority of his tales deal with flying in some respect. For example, his first several novels are all adventures centered on pilots. The main character of *In the Wet* is a member of the Royal Australian Air Force, while the narrator of *No Highway* is an aeronautics engineer. The main character of *Round the Bend* is an engineer and pilot who becomes something of a religious leader.

Pulp Fiction Conventions The trends in popular fiction of the 1930s–1950s tended toward heroic adventure stories, westerns, mysteries, and (from the 1950s onward) science fiction. These novels, and the short stories that filled the sensationalistic magazines of the era, are often called "pulp fiction" after the cheap wood-pulp paper on which they were printed. While Shute did not write westerns, he did set some of his novels in the Australian outback and in the American Rockies. He did not write mysteries, but his novel *Requiem for a Wren* (1955) does tell the story of a young lawyer investigating the supposed suicide of a parlor maid. What Shute does share with the pulp fiction tradition is an attraction to stories of noble middle-class heroes winning success through hard work and commitment, grand adventures to exotic locations, and futuristic tales of impending disasters.

Human and Societal Ideals The future, for Shute, was a setting that allowed him to consider how the world could be a better or worse place as a result of moral and political decisions that we make today. For example, while it is true that *On the Beach* is about a nuclear holocaust, it is mostly about the ways in which the best aspects of human nature—especially tolerance for other races and religious beliefs—are a key part of mankind's redemption from our primitive instincts for violence and revenge. Similarly, *In the Wet* explores a unique idea for maintaining the spirit of democratic ideals: a government that allows its citizens to earn more than one vote by meeting certain conditions, such as achieving higher education or raising a family without divorcing.

Works in Critical Context

Shute did not attract much literary attention while he was alive, but after he died, critics began to assess the role he

had been playing in popular culture. There were relatively few serious book reviews of his works as they came out, but when he died in 1960, there was a flurry of respectful obituaries such as the one in *Time* magazine that concluded that “later years may find [his novels] a remarkably reliable portrait of mid-20th century man and his concerns.” Edmund Fuller wrote in the *Saturday Review*: “Nevil Shute will be missed. He was one of our most prolific and diversified storytellers. His twenty novels varied widely in tone and pace, as well as in scene, and time, ranging from his own Australia, where he lowered the curtain on the human race, to England and America, and from a little into the future back to the Vikings.”

Shute did attract the attention of several important literary figures. George Orwell appreciated *Landfall: A Channel Story* (1940), saying that it brought out “the essential peculiarity of war, the mixture of heroism and meanness.” C. P. Snow wrote in 1970 that Shute was a rare bridge between two very different cultures, engineers and general readers.

In recent years more has been written about Shute, including a book-length study by Julian Smith in 1976. The most attention is given to *On the Beach* because of its treatment of nuclear war and role in the history of British science fiction. Other recent critics are more interested in Shute’s later novels and their portrayal of Australia and South Asian locales.

Responses to Literature

1. Is someone who is able to design a good airplane likely to be able to design a good novel, too? Are there basic thinking skills common to all construction, whether it be something mechanical or something literary? What assumptions are you making about engineers and novelists as you form your answer?
2. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was unusual for novels to emphasize how personal and political actions at home can have far-reaching influences all the way around the world. How does Shute deal with this theme in his novels? Is this theme more or less relevant today, in the age of the Internet and instant communications?
3. Research some of the government propaganda about nuclear war created during the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. (The film *The Atomic Café* is a good place to start.) Does Shute’s treatment of nuclear holocaust in *On the Beach* seem more or less extreme to you when seen in this wider cultural context?
4. Read one of the books by Shute that was adapted into a film, and then watch the film. How faithful is the movie to the book? What was added or left out, and to what effect? What did the critics, and Shute himself, have to say about the movie?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The prospect of nuclear war, and the possible total annihilation of the human species that could very easily come with it, have cast a haunting shadow over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here are some works that consider the aftermath of nuclear attacks, both fictional and nonfictional:

Hiroshima (1946), a nonfiction work by John Hersey. At 8:15 AM on August 6, 1945, nearly one hundred thousand people in this Japanese city died suddenly in an attack like no other. The book chronicles the lives of six ordinary survivors, tracing their will to survive, lifetime plights, illnesses, and fears.

A Canticle for Leibowitz (1960), a novel by Walter M. Miller Jr. This science fiction classic and Hugo Award winner is set in a monastery in the aftermath of an apocalyptic nuclear war.

The Day After (1983), a made-for-television movie directed by Nicholas Meyer. The broadcast of this movie was a huge television event at the time. It gives a small-town perspective on the possible aftermath of a nuclear war.

The Great Fire (2003), a novel by Shirley Hazzard. The “great fire” of the title is the bombing of Hiroshima. The novel by National Book Award winner Hazzard centers on a British soldier in Japan after the Allied victory to study the effects of the bomb on the country.

If You Love this Planet (1982), a documentary directed by Terre Nash. This short film won an Academy Award for its illustration of the potential medical and social results of a nuclear war.

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had been playing in popular culture. There were relatively few serious book reviews of his works as they came out, but when he died in 1960, there was a flurry of respectful obituaries such as the one in *Time* magazine that concluded that “later years may find [his novels] a remarkably reliable portrait of mid-20th century man and his concerns.” Edmund Fuller wrote in the *Saturday Review*: “Nevil Shute will be missed. He was one of our most prolific and diversified storytellers. His twenty novels varied widely in tone and pace, as well as in scene, and time, ranging from his own Australia, where he lowered the curtain on the human race, to England and America, and from a little into the future back to the Vikings.”

Shute did attract the attention of several important literary figures. George Orwell appreciated *Landfall: A Channel Story* (1940), saying that it brought out “the essential peculiarity of war, the mixture of heroism and meanness.” C. P. Snow wrote in 1970 that Shute was a rare bridge between two very different cultures, engineers and general readers.

In recent years more has been written about Shute, including a book-length study by Julian Smith in 1976. The most attention is given to *On the Beach* because of its treatment of nuclear war and role in the history of British science fiction. Other recent critics are more interested in Shute’s later novels and their portrayal of Australia and South Asian locales.

Responses to Literature

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that had been dedicated to Sidney without his knowledge or approval.

Dissatisfaction at Court Meanwhile, Sidney's situation at court was not entirely satisfactory. He had for some years been regarded as a young man of promise and importance, but he was still without any steady paid position. Sidney had for some time known and admired the "Stella" of his sonnets, Penelope Devereux, the daughter of the Earl of Essex, but she married someone else in 1581. Two years later Sidney married the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham and was knighted the same year.

Death in the Battle of Zutphen Sidney had been a leader of the strong Puritan faction promoting English involvement in the wars of the Protestant Dutch against their Catholic Spanish rulers. This conflict, known as the Dutch Revolt or Eighty Years' War initially began as a fight for Dutch independence. In 1585, after Elizabeth I finally acceded to this faction's demands and sent an army to the Netherlands, Sidney was named governor of Flushing, one of the towns that the Dutch had ceded to the queen in return for her support. For several months he fought and commanded troops at the side of his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, in Flanders. At the battle of Zutphen on September 22, 1586, he was fatally wounded. A biography written by his friend Greville tells how Sidney was vulnerable because he had generously lent a part of his protective armor to a fellow knight.

Works in Literary Context

The Romance and the Pastoral *Arcadia* has examples of many dominant genres of the day, and taken as a whole, it becomes an innovative genre of its own. It is mostly a romance, a long prose fiction that is a prototype of the modern novel. Romance, however, makes no attempt to maintain the connections to real life or the illusions of reality that novels generally try to keep. Romances build upon the medieval stories of King Arthur and his questing knights—by Sidney's day the dragons and wizards are gone, but the heroism, atmosphere of magic, and passionate love stories remain. Sidney frames his romance in the context of a pastoral, a highly idealized vision of country life populated by lovelorn and elegant shepherds and disdainful shepherdesses. Woven throughout are songs, poems, a highly complex intrigue plot that we see in some Renaissance dramas, and a high-flown baroque writing style, making *Arcadia* quite different from anything that had appeared before or would appear after it. It was popular throughout the 1600s and provided ample material for dramatists, although later generations often found it unbearable: William Hazlitt called it "one of the greatest monuments of the abuse of intellectual power upon record."

The Sonnet Sequence Sidney's was the first English sonnet sequence—a series of sonnets, each of which can

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sidney's famous contemporaries include:

Thomas Nashe (1567–1601): Nashe was one of the "university wits," a group of displaced intellectuals who dominated the emerging theater scene in London immediately prior to Shakespeare. Only one of Nashe's plays—*Summer's Last Will and Testament*—survives, although he collaborated on other plays with Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.

Francisco Vásquez de Coronado (1510–1554): Based in Mexico, this Spanish explorer led an expedition to conquer the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. On his many difficult travels he laid claims to territory in modern-day Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

Etienne Pasquier (1529–1615): Pasquier was the first French literary historian. Using scholarship that still holds up today, Pasquier made influential observations on medieval and Renaissance French literature that shaped the tastes of his era.

Nicholas Udall (1504–1556): This British schoolmaster was the author of *Ralph Roister Doister*, considered the first comedy written in English. It was presented to Queen Mary as an entertainment in 1553.

Richard Burbage (1567–1619): Burbage and his brother inherited one of their father's London playhouses, The Theatre, and moved the building to a new location where it was renamed The Globe. They brought in a new manager, business partner, and playwright who soon made the theater his own: a newcomer from Stratford named William Shakespeare.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert (1539–1583): As the navigator for his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh's voyages, Gilbert urged exploration of the Arctic Ocean to discover a passageway between Europe and North America.

stand on its own but when arranged in order tell a loose story of the progress of an affair. Sonnet sequences immediately became a fashion throughout the Renaissance. The sonnets in *Astrophel and Stella*, first printed in 1591, expressed varying moods and intensities of passionate love in smooth, confident, and flexible verse. Sidney was influenced, as were all Renaissance sonneteers, by the emotionally wrought Italian poetry of Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374).

Literary Criticism Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry* (1595) was the first major critical essay during the Renaissance, an era when England was first starting to become self-conscious of its literary tradition. Sidney condensed the classical defense of "poetry" (by which he meant all forms of creative writing), and he insisted

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The sonnet sequence is a demanding genre. Sonnets themselves are highly compressed poems, each following a set structure in both the meter and the ordering of ideas in fourteen lines. Each sonnet needs to be substantially different from all the others, able to make sense on its own but tell part of a story when arranged in a sequence. Sonnet sequences are less like coherent novels than an emotional scrapbook of a passionate, usually unrequited love affair. Below are some other notable examples of sonnet sequences.

Song Book (c. 1374), a sonnet sequence by Francesco Petrarca. Petrarch, who wrote his verse in Italian, is considered by many to be the father of the sonnet sequence. A large section of this collection amounts to a sonnet sequence concerning his love of a woman named Laura.

Pamphilia to Amphilanthus (1621), a sonnet sequence by Lady Mary Wroth. Wroth was a relative of Sidney's, and this sequence of forty-eight sonnets was the only significant set composed by a woman during the Renaissance.

The House of Life (1870), a sonnet sequence by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti said this set of 101 sonnets was about life, death, and the ideals of art and beauty, but many other readers see the poems biographically as representing Rossetti's complex emotions over the death of his wife and his unrequited passion for the wife of a friend.

Fungi from Yuggoth (1930–1947), a sonnet sequence by H. P. Lovecraft. This work contains unusual themes for a sonnet sequence: it is a tale of science fiction and horror. In it, the narrator discovers a book that allows him to travel to distant planets, where he meets unusual races of creatures.

on the ethical value of art, which aims to lure men to “see the form of goodness, which seen they cannot but love ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries.” It establishes the idea, now the familiar creed to millions of English literature majors, that imaginative literature is worth studying because it “teaches while it delights.” Sidney goes so far as to argue that this is why poetry is a more worthwhile subject of study than philosophy (too dry) and history (where sometimes the villains have to win). Literature alone is free to alter reality to show us all varieties of virtue; at the same time it makes learning persuasive by making the lessons delightful and memorable. Even apart from its bold ideas, the *Apologie* is seen as a classic work of literature itself for its masterly rhetorical control. Two hundred years later, one of the other great literary critics of English literature, Samuel

Johnson, would borrow heavily from its ideas to place William Shakespeare once and for all into the ranks of the world's great dramatists.

Works in Critical Context

Idealized Portrait As soon as Sidney died, biographers began the process of mythologizing him as an English hero. Edmund Spenser began calling him “Astrophel,” after the lover in Sidney's sonnet sequence. Fulke Greville wrote a highly laudatory biography in 1610 that used several dubious stories to heighten Sidney's reputation. Throughout the rest of the seventeenth century, Sidney's influence was very strong both as a writer and as a personal role model. Material from *Arcadia* regularly appeared in Renaissance dramas, and the sonnet sequence became a literary fad.

Cherished by nostalgic Victorians in the nineteenth century, the idealized portrait of Sidney the gentleman-warrior, a fulfillment of mythic aspirations, continued to obscure his merits as a poet and theorist well into the twentieth century. Nineteenth-century critic Edmund Gosse cautioned against inflating Sidney's merits as an author: “Sidney is most interesting as a radiating centre of sympathy, intelligence, brightness. . . . As a great author, surely, we must never venture to regard him.”

Apologie for Poetry In the eighteenth century, literary tastes swung away from the highly decorative prose style of *Arcadia*, although Sidney's poetry was still much admired. Most influential was his *Apologie for Poetry*, however. Samuel Johnson's “Preface to Shakespeare” repeats some of Sidney's points about the classical “unities.” Sidney's and Johnson's eras both shared a high regard for the literature of classical Greece and Rome, and one of their literary values was that dramas should stay consistent and unified in their setting, action, and the parallel timing between the events of the plot and the time it takes to perform the play. Sidney claimed that imaginative literature has no need to follow these restrictions, and Johnson agreed, using them to make a widely influential claim about Shakespeare's superiority to all other playwrights, including Sophocles.

Today, while Sidney is perhaps the least studied of all the major Renaissance writers (and all of them are dwarfed by the attention given to Shakespeare), much excellent scholarship has been undertaken to separate the actual life of the man from the legend created after his death. While a less distinguished, experienced, favored, and rational Sidney has emerged, he is for many a more authentic and compelling figure.

Responses to Literature

1. Where do you see *sprezzatura*—the “easy grace” of doing difficult things with apparent ease—reflected in the style and/or content of the *Apologie for Poetry*?

- Summarize the “plot” of the sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the story’s being as sketchy as it is? Do you think it is helpful, or unnecessary, to know the events of Sidney’s courtship of Penelope Devereux as you read the sonnets?
- The characters in *Arcadia*, even the shepherds, speak in a convoluted, exaggerated, and high-flown literary style. How can we, or should we, take this at all seriously? Is *Arcadia* just too “out there” for modern tastes, or do you feel that its fantasies can make it more appealing today than it has been in a long time?

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Alan Sillitoe

BORN: 1928, Nottingham, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1958)

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1959)

The Open Door (1989)

Overview

British writer Alan Sillitoe is often classed as one of the “Angry Young Men” of 1950s England, a group of novelists and playwrights whose stark portrayals of working class people served as sharp social criticism. Sillitoe is best known for the novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and the short story collection *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Hard-Knock Childhood in Nottingham Sillitoe’s fiction is frequently based on his personal life. The son of a functionally illiterate man, Sillitoe was raised in



Alan Sillitoe Granville Davies / Writer Pictures / drr.net

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sillitoe's famous contemporaries include:

Fidel Castro (1926–): The Cuban revolutionary and Communist who was head of state from the Cuban revolution in 1959 to his retirement in 2008. Castigated by various U.S. administrations as a terrible dictator, Castro was a key player in the Cuban missile crisis, in which the world came as close to all-out nuclear war as it ever has, as well as in the modernization of his country's health-care and employment systems.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): A key leader in the Indian independence movement and close associate to Mohandas Gandhi, Nehru became India's first prime minister after independence from British rule was secured in 1947.

Albert Finney (1936–): Eminent British actor who first achieved fame for his starring role in the 1960 film adaptation of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

John Osborne (1929–1994): British playwright famous for the 1956 work *Look Back in Anger*. Like Sillitoe, he was considered one of the "Angry Young Men" of the 1950s.

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963): Kennedy's brief presidency was an eventful one, including the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban missile crisis, the beginning of America's military involvement in Vietnam, the beginning of the space program, and the civil rights movement. Highly popular and charismatic, his term was cut short by an assassin in 1963, a turning point in American history.

Nottingham, England, where unemployment was widespread prior to World War II. To help ease his family's financial burden, Sillitoe left school at age fourteen to work in a bicycle plant, then escaped the tedium of factory work by joining the Royal Air Force four years later, in 1946. He served as a wireless radio operator in Malaya (then controlled by the British) just after World War II, contracting tuberculosis while there and thus participating in the long tradition of British colonists and soldiery who have come down with pernicious diseases while stationed in the tropics. Two years after completing his military service, and much travel later, Sillitoe married American poet Ruth Fainlight and relocated to France, where he found the necessary detachment to write about the social injustices of his own country.

A Life Told in Novels Sillitoe's best-known characters, the Seaton, mirror his own family and are instilled with the resilient spirit Sillitoe acquired during his harsh childhood. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) follows the life and loves of Arthur Seaton, a bored young factory

worker whose life is composed of good wages, sexual adventures, and wild weekends at the neighborhood pub.

The title story of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959), a collection for which Sillitoe received the Hawthornden Prize, is set in a boys' reformatory, and revolves around a cross-country race that becomes a battle between subjection and independence. Both "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* were adapted for film. Although critics first identified Arthur Seaton as Sillitoe's fictional counterpart, the author actually expressed an affinity with Brian Seaton, Arthur's older brother.

Southeast Asian Experiences Find Expression Written during the early moments leading up to the Vietnam War, the novel *Key to the Door* (1961), looks at Britain's own history in Southeast Asia. It concentrates on soldier-protagonist Brian's military experiences in Malaya, where he is gripped with uncertainty about the war (World War II) and repelled by England's political system. This protagonist also appears in several short stories. In 1989, Sillitoe published *The Open Door*, a continuation of Brian's story written as a stream-of-consciousness narrative. The work is largely autobiographical.

Sillitoe lives and writes still in London, England. He recently published a memoir account of his travels in Russia, *Gadfly in Russia* (2007).

Works in Literary Context

Regionalism and the Spirit of the Outsider On a thematic level, Sillitoe seems to draw inspiration from both the old and the new. As is true of many contemporary writers, he often centers his stories on an individual isolated from society, studying what the *Guardian*'s Roy Perrot calls "the spirit of the outsider, the dissenter, the man apart." But instead of limiting himself strictly to the psychological confines of this one person and allowing the rest of the world to remain somewhat shadowy, Sillitoe places his rebellious outsider in a gritty, distinctive milieu—Nottingham, an English industrial town (and the author's birthplace) where, as Charles Champlin explains in the *Los Angeles Times*, "the lower-middle and working classes rub, where breaking even looks like victory, and London is a long way South." This strong regionalism, reminiscent of the regionalism common in nineteenth-century British fiction, is one of the most striking features of Sillitoe's writing.

The Jungle and Brutality In all Sillitoe's fiction, the world is seen as a jungle, yet the nature of the jungle changes. In the earliest fiction, like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," society and the exterior world are jungles in which the protagonist, himself neutral, must survive through a combination of luck and shrewd skill. But, starting with *Key to the Door* (1961), the jungle is both the exterior worlds of Nottingham and Malaya and the

questions, uncertainties, false starts, and violence within the protagonist himself.

The theme of brutality, in Sillitoe's world, is also treated in its rationalized and institutionalized version, the military. Although many of the working-class characters deride the military and none is patriotic, Sillitoe demonstrates, particularly in the novel *The Widower's Son* (1976), the use of the military career as the conscious focus for working out all the stresses of the individual and social jungles within modern man.

Works in Critical Context

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner and Beyond

Upon the publication of his first two major works, critics associated Sillitoe with the Angry Young Men, a group of writers whose literary output reflected the social consciousness of post-World War II England. Reviewers contended that both books powerfully evoke the country's prosperous yet bitter postwar atmosphere, and many commentators have characterized the title story of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* as a masterpiece of short fiction. Critics also commended Sillitoe's humorous, perceptive portrait of his protagonist in *The Open Door*. Brian Morton notes, "*The Open Door* is an extraordinary, almost symphonic development of deceptively familiar materials, and confirms [Sillitoe's] standing as one of Britain's most powerful and sophisticated fiction writers." The conclusion of *Her Victory* (1982), however, in which Pam returns pregnant and subservient to Tom, elicited negative critical reaction. Several reviewers considered *Her Victory* to be a chauvinistic treatment of the feminist movement, impugning the lack of emotional growth in an "emancipated" character. Although his later collections of short fiction have not achieved the enormous success of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, Sillitoe's short stories are usually considered superior to his longer works of fiction. Eric Moon argues, "The background of Sillitoe's stories is generally as unrelieved as that of his novels, but in the stories he is more able to vary his pace and his attitudes. He often reveals humor and a greater compassion, and sometimes he achieves a curiously convincing blending of his usual realism and passion with a lyrical romanticism."

Angry Young Man or Throwback? What reviewers cannot agree upon in their evaluations of Sillitoe's work is whether he writes in the tradition of an earlier age (notably the American proletarian novelists of the 1930s) or in the tradition of certain British authors of the 1950s and 1960s whose bitter attacks on the political and social establishment earned them the name Angry Young Men. Stanley Kauffmann, for one, feels Sillitoe is a victim of the cultural "timelag" that exists between the United States and England and is therefore merely rediscovering the themes that once preoccupied American writers such as John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, Theodore Dreiser,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sillitoe is often linked with a group of British authors known collectively as the "Angry Young Men." Other works by writers in this group include:

- Look Back in Anger* (1956), a play by John Osborne. The archetypal work of the Angry Young Men—indeed, the very phrase was coined in a review of this play—Osborne employed a certain harsh realism in his tale of a love triangle, a stark contrast to the previously popular escapist fare that had dominated the London stage.
- The Less Deceived* (1955), a selection of poems by Philip Larkin. The first major poetry collection of one of Britain's greatest living poets, the poems in this book address England's place in the postwar world and its movement away from the previous heights of Empire.
- The Outsider* (1956), a philosophical treatise by Colin Wilson. Published when Wilson was just twenty-four, this philosophical work addresses the role of the "outsider" in literature, from Albert Camus to Ernest Hemingway, and in culture and the arts, citing such examples as Vincent van Gogh and T. E. Lawrence.

and John Dos Passos. Saul Maloff shares this view, commenting: "Sillitoe is a throwback. . . . His protagonists are profoundly rooted in their class, and draw such strengths as they possess—or come finally to possess—from that identification." This, he adds, makes Sillitoe very different from other postwar writers. "[He] is a historical surprise. In the utterly changed circumstances of the fifties and sixties, he has partially validated as art the 'proletarian novel' of the thirties; and standing eccentrically against the current driven by his defter contemporaries, he has made possible a working-class novel."

John W. Aldridge suggests that part of Sillitoe's inspiration may date back even earlier than the 1930s. States the critic: "Sillitoe stands as a comforting reminder to the English that the grand old roistering 'low life' tradition of [Henry] Fielding and [Charles] Dickens may have lost its sting, but is not yet dead. . . . Although [the author] does have his grievances, he seems basically content to keep the working man in his place, and as a writer he evidently wants to remain a working man." Aldridge indicates, however, that other writers "did all that he has done first and better than he. . . . There is little virtue in repeating the discoveries or the mistakes of one's predecessors, or in trying to make literature out of a cultural lag that merely social reform and the payment of some money can rectify."

On the other hand, some critics see nothing but youthful anger in Sillitoe's writings. Commenting in the

New York Times Book Review, Malcolm Bradbury notes that “if the heroes of some . . . English novels are angry young men, Mr. Sillitoe is raging.” Although John R. Clark of the *Saturday Review* also sees Sillitoe as an Angry Young Man, he feels that “his anger and fictions have altered with time. In [his] early work there was something single-minded and intense in the actions and scenes, particularly in the shorter novels.” On the other hand, “Later novels reveal a broader social and political horizon. Sillitoe’s characters not only privately rebel but become dedicated to larger ‘movements.’”

Responses to Literature

1. In your opinion, is Sillitoe’s early work a “throw-back” to the work of American authors of the 1930s like John Steinbeck, or a part of the new existentialist Angry Young Man movement? What evidence can you provide from Sillitoe’s writing to support your position?
2. Discuss how madness and freedom are interrelated in Sillitoe’s stories. Do you think Sillitoe believes madness is necessary to achieve freedom?
3. Sillitoe has been accused of antifeminist characterization in *Her Victory*. Do you think this accusation is accurate? Why or why not? What evidence from the text can you use to support your interpretation?
4. Analyze the question of identity in Sillitoe’s love stories.

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Georges Simenon

BORN: 1903, Liège, Belgium

DIED: 1989, Lausanne, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Belgian, French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Intimate Memoirs (1984)

Maigret and the Tavern by the Seine (1990)



Georges Simenon *Simenon, Georges, 1986, photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

With over five hundred titles to his credit and translations of his work into more than forty languages, Belgian novelist Georges Simenon, who wrote in French, is probably best known for his series of detective novels featuring French police inspector Jules Maigret. Through this protagonist, Simenon introduced to detective fiction the exploration of character as the primary means for solving a crime. Simenon’s non-Maigret novels, also highly regarded, feature characters who are compelled to commit crimes due to some kind of psychological crisis. The detail of atmosphere his writing possesses sets him apart from his European contemporaries.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Callings Georges Simenon was born in Liège, Belgium, on February 13, 1903, to insurance accountant Désiré and homemaker Henriette Simenon. A bright pupil, he was determined to become a writer. When his father died, Simenon’s schooling was cut short, and he was apprenticed to a pastry chef to learn a trade. Simenon abandoned his apprenticeship after one year, and at the age of seventeen he began his career as a writer by taking a newspaper job with the *Liège Gazette* as an assistant night police reporter. It was also at the age of seventeen that he published his first novel, *Au pont des arches* (*Aboard the Ark*, 1921), under the pen name Georges Sim.

Prolific Output Between 1921 and 1934 he wrote nearly two hundred novels, which he published under more than a dozen pseudonyms. Simenon moved to Paris in 1924, and in 1930 he began the famous Maigret series of detective novels, which he published under his own name.

For many critics, however, Simenon's best novels are those that lie outside the Maigret series. In the 1930s he wrote many other thrillers, a notable example being *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By* (*L'Homme qui regardait passer les trains*, 1938). *Pedigree*, written during the war years and published in 1948, is a largely autobiographical novel that presents a powerful and convincing picture of the life of a boy and his parents in Liège from 1903 to 1918. Subsequently, Simenon wrote novels in which the psychological analysis of the leading character, exceptional in some way, forms the center of interest. Examples include *The Heart of a Man* (*Les Volets verts*, 1950), which portrays the closing stages in the life of a great actor, and *The Little Saint* (*Le Petit Saint*, 1965) about the formative years in the life of a great artist.

Simenon's desire to be known as an earnest novelist was tempered by his lack of self-confidence as a writer and his distrust of the intellectual community. He therefore formed "a theory of the 'semi-literary' novel, or, more earthily, 'semi-alimentary,'" according to one critic, who continued, "The theory was that he wrote pulps to make money, was aiming at 'straight' novels but felt insecure about 'high' literature, and took up the detective story as a midway step." In an article titled "Simenon on Simenon" for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Simenon illuminated the man behind the writer who believed that humility was the grandest virtue one could hope to possess. "Simenon," he wrote about himself, "is truly a modest man. He knows his own limitations and does not make for himself the claims that have sometimes been made for him by some of his more florid admirers. He describes himself as a craftsman, has a healthy distrust of intellectuals . . . of literary occasions and intellectual conversations, feels ill at ease at social functions, and is quite unambitious in conventional terms: recognition, decorations, and so on. He can, it is true, well afford to be."

Final Output Simenon retired from writing fiction in 1974 after producing a range of novels, short stories, diaries, and other works. In 1978, the author suffered the greatest tragedy in his life when his daughter, Marie-Georges, committed suicide in her apartment. Devastated by his loss, Simenon felt the need to write about it. The result was his lengthy *Intimate Memoirs* (*Memoires intimes*, 1981), an exhausting book for the writer to compose. It was his last work.

Although he described himself as a craftsman, Simenon's popular Maigret novels, as well as his more serious works, came to be admired by distinguished French crit-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Simenon's famous contemporaries include:

Ella Josephine Baker (1903–1946): Baker was a leading African American civil rights activist who worked behind the scenes alongside Dr. Martin Luther King and several others.

Agatha Christie (1890–1976): A popular mystery/detective writer with record-breaking book sales, she was dubbed "Queen of Crime" in the twentieth century.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1975): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize-winning author.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): He is best known as the famous expatriate writer whose name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.

Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961): Hammett wrote *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), which introduced the famous detective Sam Spade.

ics. Nobel laureate André Gide called him "perhaps the greatest and most genuine novelist of today's French literature." Simenon died in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1989.

Works in Literary Context

Plain Style Simenon is above all a storyteller. His style is deliberately simple, as he aims at a kind of "universal vocabulary." He builds compelling action and atmosphere through careful, subtle touches, and his readers are immediately gripped by their desire to know what happens next. Simenon's themes are particularly focused on the inner workings of the human mind. Commenting on the astonishing range of characters that move through his world, Simenon said, "Some people collect stamps; I collect human beings." In this respect he excludes politics, religion, history, and metaphysics from his books and instead concentrates on psychology and on the minor, yet often extraordinary, details of human existence.

Maigret Because of the dozens of novels in which he appears, as well as the many films and television adaptations starring his character, Inspector Maigret, of police headquarters in Paris, has become almost as well known as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Though recognizable to fans, Maigret is unlike any other fictional detective. A man with simple tastes who is sensible and tolerant but not brilliant, Maigret puzzles his way to the solution of his cases by intuition, as opposed to deductive reasoning or by relying on stereotypical clues such as

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Maigret is one of the most famous fictional detectives in world literature. Other famous fictional detectives appear in these works:

A Study in Scarlet (1887), a novel by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Legendary detective Sherlock Holmes makes his first appearance in this novel.

Murder Must Advertise (1933), a novel by Dorothy L.

Sayers. In this murder mystery, Lord Peter Whimsey tracks down the murderer of the copywriter Victor Dean.

The Maltese Falcon (1930), a novel by Dashiell Hammett.

Hard-boiled detective Sam Spade appears in this novel about the fate of a mysterious black bird.

A Is for Alibi (1982), a novel by Sue Grafton. The first of the Kinsey Millhone Alphabet Mysteries, this novel picks up where Sam Spade left off.

fingerprints or lab reports. An element of immeasurable importance in Maigret's investigations is his extraordinary patience; sometimes he spends weeks simply observing the scene of a crime. He attempts to understand the victim and suspect completely by immersing himself in their lifestyles and by examining the psychological reasons that provoked the crime. This added psychological dimension enhances the reader's typical interest in learning the solution to a mystery. A surprising trait for a detective to have is compassion for the criminal; Maigret often feels sorry after he catches the perpetrator he has sought.

Unconventional Detective Stories In the same way that Inspector Maigret is unlike most famous fictional sleuths, Simenon's crafting of the stories themselves differs from the traditional form of the mystery and detective genre. Anthony Boucher observed that Simenon's work in this area departed "from the well-shaped plot and the devious gimmick (though he could be very good at these when he chose) to lay stress on the ambience and milieu of the crime and on the ambivalent duel... between the murderer and Maigret." Devotees of mystery and detective fiction agree that the Maigret stories do not strictly adhere to the conventional features of the field. In the introduction to their *Catalogue of Crime*, Jacques Barzun and W. H. Taylor stated that "anyone who says, 'I can't bear detective stories, but I love Simenon' is saying that he prefers the art" of Simenon's mysteries, a quality which is atypical of the detective genre. Because the usual Simenon novel "is often of the highest order" artistically, Barzun and Taylor contend that "it is not detective fiction. True, Maigret, like any

other policeman, wants to get his man, and he knows where to wait for him—he has had previous information. But what he contributes is the patience of a god. And what his readers enjoy is his boredom, fatigue, wet feet, and hunger."

Works in Critical Context

Attesting to the uniqueness of Simenon's mystery fiction in general and his Maigret series in particular, novelist and critic Julian Symons wrote in his *Mortal Consequences: A History—from the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*, "The Maigret stories stand quite on their own in crime fiction, bearing little relation to most of the other work done in the field. (Simenon is not much interested in crime stories and has read few of them). . . . There are no great feats of . . . [logical reasoning or deduction] in them and the problems they present are human as much as they are criminal."

Serious Novels Although Simenon "attempted to persuade critics and publishers that he should be taken seriously as an author of . . . serious novels," observed *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Catharine Savage Brosman, "sales figures suggest that the Maigret series and a few other books in the same vein have the most appeal, and his fame continues to rest principally on them." Brosman later explained, "His serious novels do not offer wisdom or illumination, and, despite the strong characterization, the reader does not enter into their world. . . . In the detective mode, however, his work sets the standard, rather than following it."

Delicate and Refined Readers André Gide, an admirer and long-time critical correspondent of Simenon asserted that there is a "profound psychological and ethical interest "in all of Simenon's books," not just the serious novels. Gide stated, "This is what attracts and holds me in him. He writes for 'the vast public,' to be sure, but delicate and refined readers find something for them too as soon as they begin to take him seriously. He makes one reflect; and this is close to being the height of art."

Responses to Literature

1. Research the psychological profiles of at least three infamous criminals from the past fifty years. Do you notice any characteristics these people have in common? Pretend you are an attorney defending one of these criminals. How would you argue his/her case from a psychological perspective? Write an opening statement for the trial.
2. Make a "Wanted" poster for the suspects in two or more of Simenon's novels. Use character descriptions from the texts to visually portray the suspects. You may draw the characters on posterboard; take photos of people you know or cut out pictures from magazines of people who fit the descriptions; or

create a poster using the computer program of your choice. Underneath each picture, include a short paragraph describing both the physical characteristics of the characters and the characters' alleged roles in the crimes for which she or he has been accused.

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☒ Claude Simon

BORN: 1913, Tananarive (now Antananarivo), Madagascar

DIED: 2005, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

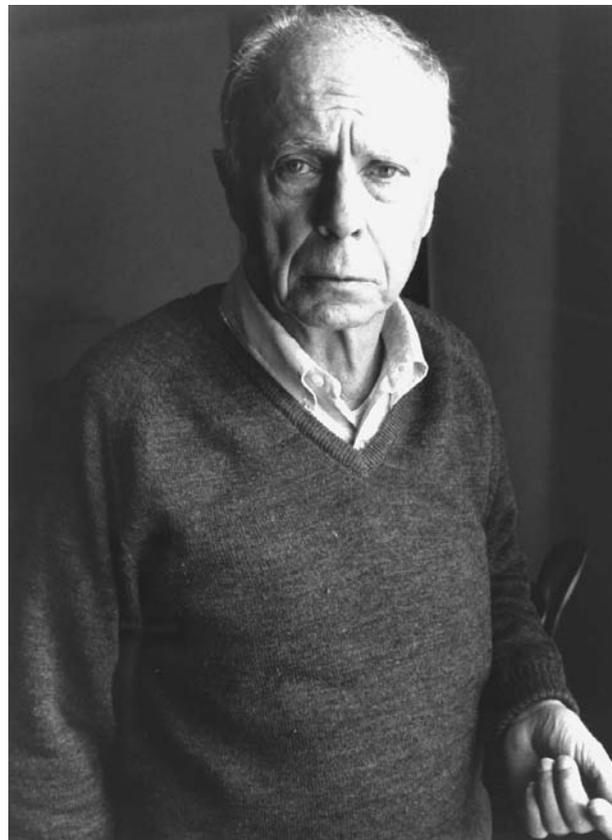
The Wind (1957)

The Flanders Road (1960)

The Palace (1962)

Histoire (1967)

The Invitation (1987)



Claude Simon *Simon, Claude*, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Claude Simon is commonly identified as one of the first of the French New Novelists. Like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, and others connected with the New Novel movement that emerged after World War II, Simon does not attempt to impose artistic order on the chaos of human experience. Instead, his works reflect the fragmented nature of reality. In his major novels, including *The Wind* and *The Flanders Road*, Simon dispenses with conventional narrative structures and concentrates on the essential processes of language, memory, and perception. The destructive effects of war, as well as the ravages of time itself, are themes repeated throughout his work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born in Madagascar, Raised in France On October 10, 1913, Claude Eugene Henri Simon, son of Louis and Suzanne Denamiel Simon, was born in Tananarive (now Antananarivo), Madagascar, then a French possession where his father was an army officer. Because Simon was only six months old when he left Africa to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Simon's famous contemporaries include:

Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929): Prime minister of France and promoter of the Treaty of Versailles, the truce that ended World War I but contributed to the development of World War II.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): French writer most known for his *Remembrance of Things Past*, an autobiographical book that focused on what some might call the mundane details of everyday life.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist who often used a complex, disjointed literary style to emphasize Southern hypocrisy.

Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922–2008): French writer and filmmaker responsible for the "new novel" movement.

return to the ancestral home of his mother's family in the south of France, it is not surprising that his novels contain little in the way of exotic colonial experiences other than evocations of the fragmentary scenes on postcards that Simon's own father, like the father in *Histoire*, sent back to France from his travels. Soon after Simon returned to France, however, his father volunteered to serve as a cavalry officer in World War I and was killed in one of the early battles of the conflict. Though Simon would spend many summers of his youth visiting with his father's relatives, he would be raised primarily by his mother and her family, explaining perhaps why the theme of the maternal plays such a large role in his works.

After his father's death Simon was brought up in the ancient family residence under the supervision of his maternal uncle, the model for Uncle Charles in several of his novels. For most of his life, Simon spent part of the year living in Salses, situated in Roussillon between Perpignan and Les Corbieres, in close proximity to the location of his maternal family's vineyards and ancient home. Many biographical details connected with that location are relevant to his novels.

Art and War Simon's secondary studies took place in Perpignan and then at the prestigious College Stanislas in Paris. He successfully completed his baccalaureate studies in Paris with the final year of study being devoted not to philosophy, as he has often pointed out when questioned by critics on philosophical matters, but to mathematics. In response to family pressures, he began studies for a naval career at the Lycée Saint-Louis, but his lack of interest was manifest from the start, and he was dismissed shortly. His family then agreed to allow him to study painting, which he did for a time in Paris with Andre Lhote, a master of constructions that Simon character-

ized as carefully designed but overly cerebral and lacking in a sense of color. Those studies were eventually abandoned because of what Simon described as a lack of "plastic talent."

Simon's involvement in major historical events left a profound mark on his work. After having served as a cavalryman in the Thirty-first Dragoons at Luneville in 1934–1935, he joined up as a volunteer in the Spanish civil war on the Republican side, acting for a time as a gunrunner. His participation was centered in Barcelona, the location of the Hotel Colon described in *The Palace* and other works. He then served again as a cavalryman in the French army in 1939–1940, barely escaping death in May 1940 during the battle of the Meuse. Captured at Solre-le-Chateau near Avesnes and sent to a German prison camp in Saxony, he managed to be transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp in France, from which he escaped in November 1940. He then spent the remainder of the war years participating in the resistance movement in Perpignan, in contact with Raoul Dufy and others. He painted during the day, while pursuing his literary career in the evenings. By 1941 he had completed not only *The Cheater*, which was not published until 1946, but also other works that he later destroyed.

A Microscopic Illness Another decisive influence in Simon's life came in the postwar years when he was bedridden for months with tuberculosis, a highly contagious and potentially deadly disease that usually affects the lungs. While ill, he was unable to do anything but look out the window: Vision and memory were all he had. Simon claimed that this confinement was a turning point that enabled him to appreciate fully the simple, nonintellectual pleasures of such favorite objects as stones, which he kept on his desk. It was then that he fully developed his enduring fascination with matter seen through a microscope. Working steadily and peacefully, removed from the bustle of Parisian intellectual life, Simon gave simple but stirring expression to man's day-to-day experience.

Simon was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1985, and continued writing until his death in 2005. During one speech, when asked why he wrote, he said simply: "Because I was not capable of doing anything else."

Works in Literary Context

Cubist Words Simon, who studied art in his youth, claimed to have adapted the methods of proto-cubist painter Paul Cézanne for his own literary experiments. Indeed, critics frequently point out the influence of visual aesthetics, such as those borrowed from painting or cinema, in his novels. Simon disregarded linear plot in favor of evocative descriptions full of sensory details. His later novels take Simon's exercises in literary cubism even further, as Simon adopted a new method of composition.

Working from separate visual images, Simon wove a series of associations between them, to form a unified narrative. In order to organize these complex word tapestries, Simon reportedly uses colored pencils, color-coding each narrative strand as he wrote.

Horses Perhaps paying homage to his father's career as a cavalry officer, the descriptions in *The Flanders Road* and several other novels focus on the key motif of horses. Air and water, whose fragmented forms merge with hoofbeats, are symbolic of the human perception of time during war. Horses on a racing field, decorated with bright colors such as coral, evoke Corinne. The cavalrymen return on four occasions to a spot where a dead horse lies decaying, its physical deterioration symbolizing the same invisible change as the growth of the grass in *The Grass*. Simon described the pattern formed by the repeated descriptions of the dead horse as a cloverleaf drawn by beginning at a certain point and, without lifting pencil from paper, returning to it three times.

Works in Critical Context

The critical reception of Simon's works over the decades has passed through various stages. Though considered one of the most important New Novelists in France, Claude Simon has been slow to gain recognition in the United States. Because at first glance Simon's writing "seems incoherent, merely a series of disconnected fragments, a lyrical but meaningless collection of images," observed Morton P. Levitt, "even a reasonably conscientious reader is apt to be confused by what appears to be, in the worst modern tradition, a narrative experiment without meaning or substance."

Histoire Superficially, *Histoire* (1967) is "the history of the narrator's story of his family as it is captured on the page by reminiscences of intimately evocative material possessions: the ancestral home, bits of furniture, family portraits, faded album photos and postal cards," stated the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. But Georges Schlocker noted that "the essence of the book lies in the confrontation of its characters with passing time and in the states of mind resulting therefrom." "The past often invades the present without the usual typographical warnings of a new sentence or paragraph," Leo Bersani observed, "and the mixture is made even more confusing by the fact that the whole novel is written in past tenses. The 'he' referred to in one line may not be the same person as the 'he' mentioned in the next line."

Responses to Literature

1. Simon's style has often been compared to those of William Faulkner and Marcel Proust. Choose one of these writers and read either one of their stories or an excerpt from their novels. Do you see similarities or differences? Has Simon used or developed their techniques?
2. Look up the word "minutiae" and think about why small objects and items resonate through Simon's

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though creative and innovative, Simon wrote primarily autobiographical novels, relying on incidents from his life to give his work honesty and originality. Here are some other works based primarily on real life events and experiences:

The Sun Also Rises (1926), a novel by Ernest Hemingway.

The main character of this novel is an injured war veteran who journeys to Spain with several friends, all of whom are emotionally lost or damaged in different ways.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This novel chronicles a cross-country road trip where the characters are thinly disguised versions of the major figures of the Beat Generation.

The Bell Jar (1963), a novel by Sylvia Plath. Based on her real-life experience with depression, this book was Plath's only novel.

Ham on Rye (1982), a novel by Charles Bukowski. From the name of the protagonist—Henry Chinaski—to the events based in Los Angeles, this novel is highly true to the life of its author.

work. How do characters react to these objects? Why does Simon focus on the physical world instead of the spiritual world?

3. Simon's work can be divided into three periods. What do you think defines these periods? How do the themes of the works in these periods relate to the historical events of the times?
4. Do you think Simon writes effectively about war? Why or why not? Does he make distinctions between the experiences of World War I and those of World War II? If so, what are they? How do they affect the characters in his novels?
5. Simon has resisted the idea that he is one of the New Novelists. Research this literary movement and the beliefs of those involved with it. Why did Simon deny association with these writers? Do you think he can be categorized with the movement regardless?

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Edith Sitwell

BORN: 1887, Scarborough, England

DIED: 1964, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Mother, and Other Poems (1915)

Gold Coast Customs (1929)

The Song of the Cold (1948)

The Outcasts (1962)

The Queens of the Hive (1962)

Overview

An eccentric, controversial figure in English literature, Edith Sitwell was best known for avant-garde verse emphasizing the sound and rhythm of poetry. With her brothers she created a literary circle whose satirical, experimental poetry signaled the demise of Victorianism and the onset of modernism. Despite the fact that early contemporaries condemned Sitwell's poetry as pretentious, inaccessible, and devoid of substance, she later received critical accolades when she moved away from strict experimentalism toward verse that explored universal human experiences through religious, mythical, and natural imagery. While Sitwell's position in English letters remains controversial, her poetry is increasingly valued for its spontaneous vitality and moral vision.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Pampered Upbringing Edith Sitwell was born in Scarborough, England, on September 7, 1887, into a family of landed gentry. She was the daughter of Sir George and Lady Ida Sitwell, an unhappily married cou-



Dame Edith Sitwell Baron / Getty Images

ple who disliked their daughter's awkward physical appearance and willful manner. Educated by governesses, she resented the fact that she was not given what she considered a proper education. She was close to her younger brothers, Osbert and Sacheverell.

Making Connections Sitwell experienced her first major transition in 1914 when, at the age of twenty-seven, she moved to London to share a flat with Helen Rootham, her former governess, and gained prominence as the sharp-witted editor of *Wheels*, an annual anthology of verse she and her brothers founded. She published her first book of poems, *The Mother, and Other Poems* in 1915. Two years after she published her first book of poems, Sitwell gave her first reading in December 1917. Sitwell's interest in spoken poetry reached its full expression in the sequence of poems titled *Façade* (1922).

During the 1920s, the period of her greatest creative activity, Sitwell lived in a flat with Rootham in Bayswater, London. She and her brothers participated in the literary life of the capital. Their friends included T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley, although there was a break with Huxley in 1922, following the publication of a story by him that included a very unkind portrait of Osbert. Sitwell was an admirer of Eliot's work, but she was also concerned by the fact that his poem *The Waste Land* (1922) got far better reviews and far more critical attention than her

books. Although an acquaintance of Virginia Woolf's, she was never more than on the fringes of the Bloomsbury Group (English intellectuals who met for discussion in the Bloomsbury area of London from the early 1900s until the 1930s). Sitwell thought the group too close knit for her rather independent tastes; even so, there were affinities between the Sitwells and Woolf's associates, including their strong opposition to war.

Sitwell lived mostly in Paris with Helen Rootham from 1932 until Rootham's death in 1938. In Paris she met, through Gertrude Stein, the great love of her life, the surrealist painter Pavel Tchelitchew. Since Tchelitchew was homosexual, the love remained unfulfilled, and Sitwell often felt betrayed by him. Nonetheless, she remained a constant friend and supporter over many years as she attempted to find buyers for Tchelitchew's paintings.

In 1948 Edith and Osbert Sitwell undertook a lecture tour of the United States that lasted almost six months. It was highly successful and contributed greatly to her reputation in America. She made a new recording of *Façade*, and she was the guest of honor at a party given by the Gotham Book Mart, attended by Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Bishop, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, and W. H. Auden, among other notable writers. The success of this tour led to a second one in 1950, which included a visit to Hollywood, where she read from *Macbeth*. Her interest in Shakespeare had grown considerably during the late 1940s, and several of the plays, particularly *King Lear*, had a marked influence on her work. Her interest in the Elizabethan period included a fascination with Elizabeth I, which gave rise to her book *Fanfare for Elizabeth* (1946) and the ill-fated plans for a Hollywood film based on it, to be directed by George Cukor.

Kudos and Catholicism Largely unrecognized or scorned during her earlier years, Sitwell was lavished with honors in her last years. In 1951 she received an honorary doctorate in letters from Oxford. Three years later, she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire by the queen. Her seventieth birthday was celebrated by a luncheon given by the *Sunday Times*, her seventy-fifth by a concert at the Royal Festival Hall, which included a performance of *Façade*. From the time she discovered the poetry of Wilfred Owen as an editor at *Wheel*, Sitwell was an avid supporter of young artists. In the 1950s, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, and James Purdy were among her favorites.

In the meantime, Sitwell's religious beliefs had intensified, and she converted to Roman Catholicism in 1955. The church provided consolation for her during her last years of ill health, and Sitwell received the last rites of the church before her death in London on December 11, 1964.

Works in Literary Context

In the introduction to *The Canticle of the Rose* (1949), Sitwell wrote: "At the time I began to write, a change in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sitwell's famous contemporaries include:

Marianne Moore (1887–1972): Besides winning such awards as the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, this American modernist poet contributed to the naming of Ford's Edsel automobile.

James Hubert "Eubie" Blake (1887–1983): A popular American composer, lyricist, and pianist of jazz and ragtime music, Blake created one of the first musicals written and directed by an African American.

Elizabeth II (1926–): Queen Elizabeth II has reigned over the United Kingdom, as well as sixteen commonwealth countries, for over fifty years.

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): Pound, an expatriate American poet, was a major figure of the modernist movement in poetry.

James Jones (1921–1977): Author of the popular *From Here to Eternity* (1951), Jones based his books on his World War II army service.

the direction, imagery and rhythms in poetry had become necessary, owing to the rhythmical flaccidity, the verbal deadness, the dead and expected patterns, of some of the poetry immediately preceding us." Her early work was often experimental in creating melody and used striking conceits, new rhythms, and confusing private allusions. As her technique evolved, she came to use sound patterns as an element in the construction of philosophic poems that reflect on her period in time and on the human condition.

Antiwar Poems While her anti-World War II poems—such as "Still Falls the Rain," based on the air raids on England at the beginning of the war, and "Three Poems of the Atomic Age," based on the bombing of Hiroshima—would make her a legend of the literary period, they were initially dismissed because of her unorthodox manner of presenting them. These early poems intermingle startling images of demonic, mechanical, and natural worlds to present an elaborately distorted picture of a world gone mad. They also reflect the richness of color and sensuality that had stirred her as a child and influenced her poetry throughout her life. Finally, these poems exhibit an extraordinary sense of rhythm which, with other experiments in sound, proved to be Sitwell's most marked and controversial gift to contemporary poetry.

Singing Poetry Public readings became important for establishing Sitwell's reputation, and much of her early poetry owes its character to the presumption that it

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The manner in which Sitwell chose to present her works was so genuinely avant-garde that in 1923 the audience at the first public theatrical presentation of *Façade* thought itself the victim of a hoax. Here are a few works by other writers who have also succeeded in delivering unique and innovative poetry:

I Love Artists (2006), poems by Mei-mei Berssenbrugge.

Berssenbrugge's poetry incorporates the New York school of poetry, phenomenology, visual arts, sensual science, and more.

The Dancers Inherit the Party and Glasgow Beasts (1997), poems by Ian Hamilton Finlay. Finlay's poetry is tactile and joins type, line, and sculpture for an experience of the senses.

The Book of Disquiet (2002), poems by Fernando Pessoa. Metaphysical poetry is conveyed through the writer's many heteronyms, or words that appear the same in written form but sound different when pronounced aloud and have different meanings.

Tender Buttons (1914), an experimental text by Gertrude Stein. Stein's experiments with language manipulation made her a pioneer in style and method.

would be read aloud. It was Sitwell more than anyone else who realized the importance of sound and texture in modern poetry, and she introduced a poetry designed to take full advantage of the flexible rhythms of the spoken voice. She did not invent the idea of reciting poetry set to music, but her performances of *Façade* gave it its most distinguished form. Sitwell's interest in modern art was considerable, and *Façade* should be considered an integral part of the international movement that embraced poetry, painting, and dance. Half of the poems that eventually found a place in *Façade* were composed earlier, while the others were written specifically for music by William Walton.

The poems were recited through a Sengerphone, a large megaphone with a mouthpiece. Since the Sengerphone and the reciter were concealed behind a curtain, the spoken voice achieved simultaneous clarity and impersonality. Sitwell considered the poems abstract; to her they were patterns in sound. She saw them as explorations of the qualities of rhythm, in which meaning was secondary. Sitwell was also exploring the possible application of the means of one medium to another. While this practice had already become frequent in the poetry of the French symbolists and their successors, nothing quite like it had been seen in English verse. The poems were not sung but read, thereby emphasizing the inherently rhythmic quality of spoken verse. Sitwell explored the possibil-

ities of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and what she termed "colour."

Influences on Art Sitwell's manner of dress—flowing gowns, turbans, amulets, and silver nail polish—generated as much attention as her unconventional poetry, and she became a sought-after subject of painters and photographers. Her influence among artists has continued into the twenty-first century. For example, she has appeared in literary and musical compositions by Kingsley Amis, Saul Bellow, and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Grateful Dead's Robert Hunter drew from Sitwell's "Polka" when writing the song "China Cat Sunflower" and the punk-pop-rock British band Shakespeare's Sister borrowed from Sitwell's "Hornpipe" for their song "I Don't Care." Clearly, Sitwell's lasting influence has justified her career, that of a poet who had as many early detractors as she now has devotees.

Works in Critical Context

Sitwell's Work as a Whole The *Times* of London stated of Sitwell in 1955 that "she writes for the sake of sound, of color, and from an awareness of God and regard for man." Sitwell believed that "poetry is the deification of reality, and one of its purposes is to show that the dimensions of man are, as Sir Arthur Eddington said, 'half way between those of an atom and a star.'" Admiring critic John Lehmann, author of *Edith Sitwell and a Nest of Tigers: The Sitwells in Their Times*, admitted that "her tendency has always been rather to overwork her symbolism; by a certain overfluid quality in her imagination to make the use of the symbols sometimes appear confused and indiscriminate." This elaborate quality has its admirers, however. In *Poetry in Our Time*, Babette Deutsch wrote: "Like the medieval hangings that kept the cold away from secular kings and princes of the Church, the finest of [Dame Edith's] poems have a luxurious beauty that serves to grace the bareness, to diminish the chill of this bare, cold age." Writing in the *Times* of London, Geoffrey Elborn commented that Sitwell's best work was written in the 1920s. "These . . . [poems were] written with a highly individual use of language still unsurpassed for its peculiar, inimitable artifice. Far from being trivial, these early poems by one 'a little outside life' should now find a greater acceptance in an era more concerned with Sitwell's concepts than her own age, earning her the deserved and secure reputation for which she herself so earnestly but recklessly fought."

Gold Coast Customs Sitwell's body of work contains rare political poetry in an equally rare format and style for the period in which she wrote. One such example is *Gold Coast Customs*, the culmination of Sitwell's development toward a position as a poet of social commentary. Marxist critic Jack Lindsay noted that *Gold Coast Customs* represented "the deepest—almost the only—political poetry" of the age in England. Technically, for many critics, *Gold*

Coast Customs is a major accomplishment. It interweaves the funeral customs of the African Ashantee nation with contemporary society life of London—Sitwell's contemporary figure, Lady Bambergher, is a symbol of the moral and social corruption that lies beneath the surface of fashionable life. It illustrates an almost complete abandonment of a straightforward narrative; instead, it is structured around a series of contrasts. The poem's strong beat and clear voice give a striking portrayal of historical patterns of decay and betrayal. In keeping with other works of Sitwell's that are accompanied by religious imagery of rebirth at a time when religious faith in poetry had become unpopular, *Gold Coast Customs* concludes with a vision of transformation and salvation.

Criticism through the Years Sitwell's career has undergone a great deal of reevaluation through the years. In light of her eccentric personality and literary friendships, several critics continue to agree with F. R. Leavis's early estimation that Sitwell belongs "to the history of publicity rather than poetry." However, others regard her as a formidable figure whose career traces the development of English poetry from the immediate post-World War I period of brightness and jazzy rhythms through the political involvements of the 1930s and the return to spiritual values after World War II. Dilys Powell asserted, "The fact remains that she was one of the writers who bridged the gap between the sterile years of the early war and the post-war years of excited experiment; that she helped keep interest in poetry alive when it was near extinction." She should be remembered as the angry chronicler of social injustice, and as a poet who has found forms adequate to the atomic age and its horrors.

Responses to Literature

1. Imagine you are in charge of setting the stage for a Sitwell poetry performance. What props would you include to enhance the meaning of her work? Create a visual representation of what the stage would look like. You may draw, paint, make a collage, use computer programs, photograph people or objects, etc.
2. Research writers in the twentieth century who converted to Catholicism as adults. What can you infer both from their writing and from events of the 1900s that might have led to their conversion?
3. Read some of Osbert Sitwell's poetry. How does his work compare/contrast with that of his sister?

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Josef Skvorecky

BORN: 1924, Nachod, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Canadian, Czech

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Cowards (1958)

The Engineer of Human Souls: An Entertainment of the Old Themes of Life, Women, Fate, Dreams, the Working Class, Secret Agents, Love, and Death (1977)

Dvorak in Love (1991)

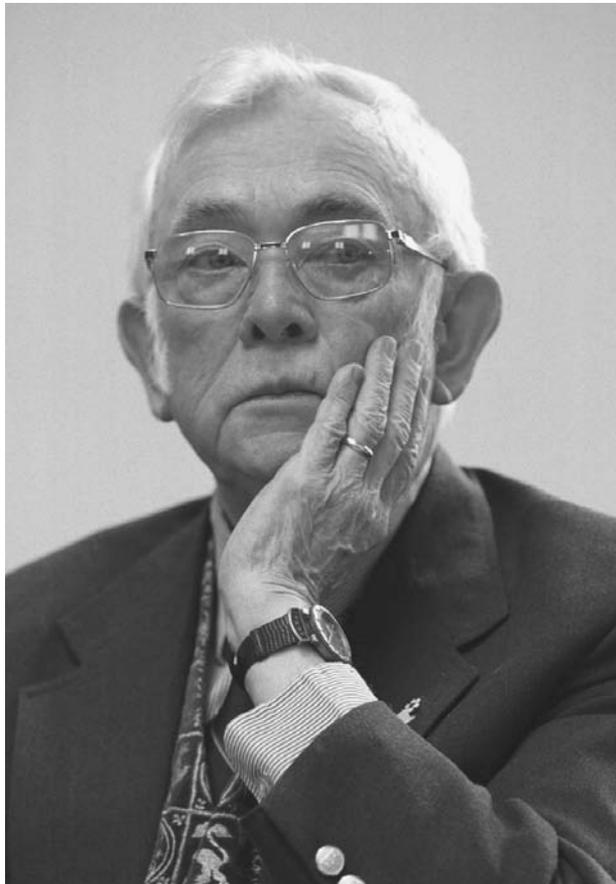
When Eve Was Naked (2002)

Overview

Josef Václav Skvorecky, who writes and publishes primarily in Czech, has resided in Canada since he fled Czechoslovakia after the 1968 Soviet invasion. Although he initially gained notoriety in his native country for his first published novel, *The Cowards*, which was condemned by government officials, Skvorecky remained virtually unknown outside Czech-speaking communities until the 1984 English publication of *The Engineer of Human Souls: An Entertainment of the Old Themes of Life, Women, Fate, Dreams, the Working Class, Secret Agents, Love, and Death*. Writing in several genres, including the novel, the detective story, and the essay, Skvorecky questions all notions of ideology and emphasizes literature's significance to the development of cultural history and liberal thought.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Life of Resistance: From Early Mistrust to Adult Rebellion Skvorecky was born and raised in Nachod, a small town on the northeastern border of the Bohemian province. During his forty-four years in Czechoslovakia, Skvorecky lived through the Nazi occupation, the postwar era of Stalinist communism, and the Soviet invasion of 1968, after which he immigrated to



Josef Skvorecky Sean Gallup / Getty Images

Canada. As an adolescent, Skvorecky attended the local grammar school, a traditional institution that emphasized such classical subjects as Latin and mathematics. During the Nazi annexation, most subjects, especially geography and history, were taught in German so as to indoctrinate Czechoslovakian youth into Nazi social theory. Skvorecky explains: “It was the Nazis who introduced the term ‘ideology’ into our vocabulary; can anyone wonder why ever since I have mistrusted that word and all the varying contents it signified?”

Although he passed his college entrance examinations, Skvorecky, along with all other able-bodied Czech men and women, was mobilized by the Nazis to serve in the armament industry. Working fourteen-hour shifts alongside students, businessmen, and lawyers, Skvorecky was exposed to a wide array of experiences and opinions that were expressed in the privacy of the factory wash-room: “The discussions were profound, lively, and on many subjects; sometimes the shitting room resembled a philosophy seminar.” After World War II, Skvorecky enrolled at Charles University in Prague. Following one semester at the University Medical Facility, Skvorecky decided to study English and philosophy, receiving his doctoral degree in 1951. Due to the government’s

increasing use of censorship and intimidation, Skvorecky, along with many other writers, became actively involved in the Prague literary underground.

Suppression of *The Cowards* Although Skvorecky wrote *The Cowards* shortly after Czechoslovakia’s Communist Party gained control of the country in 1948, he did not submit the novel for publication until 1958 for fear that party members would object to its presumably bourgeois elements. Satirically describing the events that transpire during eight days in a small Czechoslovakian village in May of 1945, *The Cowards* is told from the viewpoint of Danny Smiricky, a young saxophone player who watches conservatives and liberals scramble for power as a new political era begins. Garnering widespread attention in Czechoslovakia because of its irreverent examination of Marxist ideology and its seemingly sympathetic attitudes toward Western music and literature, this work was quickly condemned by government officials for ignoring the tenets of socialist realism.

All copies of *The Cowards* were seized from Czechoslovakian bookstores, but, ironically, the book attained underground cult status as a result. After the publication and the subsequent suppression of *The Cowards* Skvorecky lost his post as deputy editor in chief of *Svetová literatura* and survived for almost five years in official disfavor in his earlier position as a book editor. Skvorecky was not taken off the list of banned authors until 1963. He translated American fiction into Czech and wrote detective stories, first under the name of his collaborator, the poet and translator Jan Zábřana. For the rest of his literary career he remained faithful to detective literature.

Effectively Exiled Skvorecky’s literary reputation was rising in the second half of the 1960s: His writing was praised; his short stories and scripts were made into successful movies (in which he even played cameo roles); he had a regular jazz-music radio program; and in 1966 Gallimard published *La Légende d’Emoke* in French. Together with many well-known authors, who had by that time become public figures in Czechoslovakia, Skvorecky took an active part in the Prague Spring of 1968, a movement that attempted to democratize the Czechoslovak Communist regime—although his own political thinking had always been more radical than the reformism that prevailed at that time. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, cut short the high hopes of the reformers, and Skvorecky and his wife left their native country for Canada on January 31, 1969. On the North American continent, Skvorecky spent some time at Cornell University and the University of California at Berkeley, but in the end he settled in Toronto, where he became writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto and later joined the Department of English as a full-time member. He continued to write and publish, with *Dvorak in Love* appearing in 1991—just as the Soviet Union was dissolving and the

Iron Curtain falling (and two years after the bloodless revolution that had brought democracy and an era of constitution-building to Czechoslovakia). He continues to teach in Toronto today, and his recent volume of short stories, *When Eve Was Naked* (2002), has garnered high accolades from critics.

Works in Literary Context

Using such elements as nostalgia, irony, and sentimentality, Skvorecky explores themes of displacement, the misrepresentation of history, and the relationship between art and reality in a manner that reveals the joy and despair in individual lives. Recognized for his vivacious, melodic narrative style and his extensive use of colloquial dialogue, Skvorecky frequently examines the harshness of life under authoritarian regimes and the fanaticism he associates with political dogma. Skvorecky has particularly found himself drawn to so-called popular fiction or “genre” fiction, writing many detective stories and, later, working on historical fiction.

Detective Stories and the Nature of Truth Shortly after the success of *The Cowards*, Skvorecky began to question the role of the writer in society and, therefore, the quality and purpose of his own work. After reading numerous detective stories and realizing that this genre “may not be much of an art, but it is a hell of a craft,” Skvorecky began to write crime fiction. Skvorecky also discovered that, in addition to its providing him with financial stability, “this debased genre may be useful. . . . I realized I could tell quite serious things through [it].” The stories in *The Mournful Demeanor of Lieutenant Boruvka* feature a morose civil police lieutenant as their title character and are comically ironic; the protagonist is reluctant to fire a gun and tends to solve crimes through accident and coincidence rather than logic. As Stewart Lindh observed:

A reader can choose to treat these narratives as parodies of mystery stories, but lurking at the side of every story is the following question: How can a detective find truth in a society concealing it? He can't. This, too, is perhaps part of Lt. Boruvka's gloom. He lives in a society that itself is guilty of a monstrous crime: the murder of truth.

Historical Fiction In addition to writing extensively in the detective story genre, Skvorecky also dabbled in historical fiction, a genre in which an author takes a moment or person from history and creates fictional characters and events to surround it. *Dvořák in Love: A Light-Hearted Dream*, for instance, is a historical novel about the Czechoslovakian composer Antonín Dvořák, who directed the National Conservatory of Music in New York City from 1892 to 1895. Although another piece of historical fiction, *The Miracle Game: A Political Whodunnit*, was originally published in Czech in 1972, the novel did not appear in English translation until 1990. Set in Communist Czechoslovakia, this work

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Skvorecky's famous contemporaries include:

Elie Wiesel (1928–): Romanian Nobel laureate whose work deals with his survival of the Holocaust.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and critic famous for *Things Fall Apart*, the most widely read African novel ever written.

Robert Altman (1925–2006): American film director most famous for *M*A*S*H*.

Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995): Israeli prime minister who was assassinated while in office in 1995.

Roger Bannister (1929–): English athlete famous for being the first person to run a mile in under four minutes.

is based on an actual incident in which Communist government officials purportedly tried to discredit Catholicism.

Works in Critical Context

To say that critical response to Skvorecky's work has always been strong—either positive or negative—would be an understatement. Skvorecky's first novel, *The Cowards*, caused a flurry of excitement that led to “firings in the publishing house, ragings in the official press, and a general purge that extended eventually throughout the arts,” according to Neal Ascherson in the *New York Review of Books*. The book was banned by Czech officials one month after publication, marking “the start of an incredible campaign of vilification against the author,” a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer reports. Skvorecky subsequently included a “cheeky and impenitent Introduction,” Ascherson notes, in the novel's 1963 second edition. “In spite of all the suppression,” the *Times Literary Supplement* critic explains, “*The Cowards* became a milestone in Czech literature and Joseph Skvorecky one of the country's most popular writers.”

The Cowards Ascherson explains why *The Cowards* caused so much controversy: “It is not at all the sort of mirror official Czechoslovakia would wish to glance in. A recurring theme is . . . pity for the Germans, defeated and bewildered. . . . The Russians strike [the main character] as alluring primitives (his use of the word ‘Mongolian’ about them caused much of the scandal in 1958).” The *Times Literary Supplement* writer adds, “The novel turned out to be anti-Party and anti-God at the same time; everybody felt himself a victim of the author's satire.” The narrator, twenty-year-old Danny Smiricky, and his friends—members of a jazz band—observe the flux of power, human nature, and death around them

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Skvorecky is known for putting his own twist on the detective novel genre. Some other works that play on detective novel conventions include:

The Yiddish Policemen's Union (2006), a novel by Michael Chabon. Pulitzer Prize winner Chabon here sets a detective novel in an imagined world in which U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt had established a temporary Jewish homeland in Alaska.

"The Garden of the Forking Paths" (1941), a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. Postmodernist master Borges here delivers a "deconstruction" of the classic detective novel.

The Club Dumas (1993), a novel by Arturo Perez-Reverte. Spanish author Perez-Reverte creates a mystery novel in which the characters seem to be re-creations of figures from the fiction of Alexandre Dumas.

Gun, with Occasional Music (1994), a novel by Jonathan Lethem. Lethem blends science fiction and the hard-boiled detective genre in this novel set in a not-so-distant dystopian future.

while devoting their thoughts and energies to women and music. "These are, by definition, no heroes," states Stuart Hood in the *Listener*. "They find themselves caught up in a farce which turns into horror from one minute to the next." The group may dream of making a bold move for their country, but, as Charles Dollen notes in *Best Sellers*, "they never make anything but music." All the same, Skvorecky often employs jazz "in its familiar historical and international role as a symbol (and a breeding-ground) of anti-authoritarian attitudes," according to Russell Davies, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

The Engineer of Human Souls *The Engineer of Human Souls*, winner of the 1985 Governor General's Literary Award, remains Skvorecky's best-known work in English-speaking countries. The novel reintroduces protagonist Danny Smiricky who, reflecting Skvorecky's own fate, is now a professor of literature at the University of Toronto. Interweaving Smiricky's experiences with those of his students and members of the Czech community in Toronto and with letters from dissidents and émigrés, Skvorecky conveys impressions about both the injustices of totalitarian states and the naïveté of Western political values. Though literature is the unifying motif in *The Engineer of Human Souls*, jazz music appears as a metaphor for individualistic, antiestablishment attitudes. While some commentators castigated Skvorecky for his frequent shifts between past and present, others considered the

book a convincing and potent means by which to examine the cyclical nature of history. James Lasdun explains, "[Unfettered] by the demands of a linear plot, Skvorecky is free to jump back and forth in time, grouping disparate incidents for the sake of the patterns they reveal in human affairs."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Engineer of Human Souls*. In this text, Skvorecky is said to have made keen observations about both Czech and Western culture. What role do Skvorecky's stylistic choices play in making these observations more or less accessible and potent?
2. Read *The Cowards*. Then, using the Internet and the library, research what really happened to prisoners of war after the end of World War II. In a short essay, compare the history you discover on the topic to the fictional reality Skvorecky presents. In what ways does Skvorecky's fiction seek also to evoke something true?
3. Skvorecky has written in the "historical fiction" genre. Pick a character or event from history. Then, imagine how you might go about writing a fictional story based on that person or event. Which elements do you think would most likely be made up? Which would be based on reality?
4. Skvorecky is not the first and will not be the last author to be pushed into exile for his writings. What is it about the word in literature that makes it so threatening to figures of authority? What power, in fact, do words have? Ground your answer in a detailed analysis of passages from Skvorecky's writings.

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❏ Christopher Smart

BORN: 1722, Shipbourne, Kent, England

DIED: 1771, London, England

NATIONALITY: Welsh, British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being: A Poetical Essay (1752)

Hymn to the Supreme Being, on Recovery from a Dangerous Fit of Illness (1756)

A Song to David (1763)

Jubilate Agno (1939)

Overview

Known primarily for his 1763 *A Song to David* and the posthumously discovered poem *Jubilate Agno* (discovered in 1939), Christopher Smart is regarded as one of the most influential—and eccentric—writers of the eighteenth century. Although he suffered mental instability and frequent poverty throughout his life, Smart produced poems marked by narrative innovation and spiritual fervor. He is often characterized as a proto-Romantic; his combination of visionary power, Christian ardor, and lyrical virtuosity, however, was unappreciated in his own



Christopher Smart Smart, Christopher, photograph of a painting.

age. Beginning with Robert Browning in the nineteenth century, poets rather than critics have been the warmest and most perceptive admirers of the poetry of Christopher Smart. In a 1975 radio broadcast in Australia, Peter Porter spoke of Smart as “the purest case of man’s vision prevailing over the spirit of his times.”

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

School and City Life Christopher Smart was born on April 11, 1722, at Shipbourne in Kent, the youngest of three children of Peter and Winifred Griffiths Smart. His father was a steward for a large estate, and as a boy, Smart spent long hours outdoors observing nature. On his father’s side, Smart belonged to an established family from the north country of England; he was extremely proud, however, of his mother’s Welsh lineage and its folklore.

After distinguishing himself in classical studies as a youth, Smart attended Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, at the age of seventeen, with the help of an annual allowance from the duchess of Cleveland (Henrietta Fitzroy). As an undergraduate, he earned acclaim both for his classical learning and his abilities as a poet. In 1742 he was awarded the coveted Craven scholarship. He graduated the following year, celebrating the occasion with an ode. Two years later, he was elected to a fellowship at Pembroke.

By 1744 he had begun to frequent London; soon he was spending more time in town than in college, competing for recognition as a poet, enjoying the pleasures of the city, and running up tailor’s bills. At Cambridge, he showed little inclination to settle down to the tranquil seclusion of college life. Nevertheless, during this period Smart’s first original publication appeared: Smart enhanced the second edition of his Latin version of Alexander Pope’s ode with his own “Ode for Musick on St. Cecilia’s Day.”

Smart’s career at Cambridge effectively ended in 1749 when he was granted a leave of absence from college and moved to London, though he retained his fellowship until his subsequent marriage to Anna Maria Carnan, stepdaughter of the publisher John Newbery. Initially, the marriage seems to have been happy. His daughters, Marianne and Elizabeth, were born in 1753 and 1754, respectively. Despite his rich family and social life, he never lost sight of his serious ambitions as a poet in these busy years from 1749 to 1756.

The Onset of Illness Smart continued throughout the early 1750s to pour out a stream of poems: songs, epigrams, epitaphs, fables, complimentary addresses, verse epistles, and one full-dress satire, *The Hilliad* (1753). His writings for the periodical *The Universal Visiter* began with the January 1756 issue, but Smart’s contributions were soon cut short: twice since leaving

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Smart's famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): British satirist famous for his translations of Homer and his mock-epic poem *The Rape of the Lock*.

Henry Fielding (1707–1754): English author most famous for his novel *Tom Jones*.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): Witty English critic and dictionary writer.

William Blake (1757–1827): Mystical poet and pre-Romantic writer.

Cambridge he had suffered bouts of dangerous illness, and in 1756 he had an attack of such severity that his family feared he would die. Some historians argue that these bouts were mental breakdowns, but such evidence as there is points rather to an acute and recurrent fever of some kind, no doubt accompanied by delirium. Whatever the cause, the third and gravest of the attacks was, by his own account, a turning point in Smart's life, which he commemorated with *Hymn to the Supreme Being, on Recovery from a Dangerous Fit of Illness* (1756). The poem describes the course of his illness in terms of a spiritual crisis. At the height of his sufferings, he relates, reason, sense, and religious faith all failed him.

Less than a year later, Smart was admitted to the curable ward of St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics on Windmill Hill in London. What Smart described in his hymn was a classical conversion experience; the cause of his insanity has been much debated, but contemporary evidence is clear on one point: The form it took was religious mania, with a compulsion to pray in public. Samuel Johnson's brisk and charitable comments on the subject were: "My poor friend Smart shewed the disturbance of his mind, by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place." In the light of modern psychiatric theory, Sir Russell Brain diagnosed Smart's condition as manic-depressive—a verdict that has not subsequently been challenged.

Despite all the suffering he endured, the "well-nigh sev'n years" (as he counted it) of his incarceration brought forth an astonishing quantity of brilliant and original poetry. Between 1757 and 1763, he wrote *A Song to David*; most if not all of *A Translation of the Psalms of David* and "Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Fasts and Festivals of the Church of England" (published together in 1765); and the lengthy manuscript of *Jubilate Agno*, the surviving fragments of which, amounting to more than seventeen hundred verses, represent only about a third of what he actually wrote.

Financial and Legal Troubles This period was soured, however, by quarrels with his critics and self-imposed alienation from his family. Within three years of Smart's release from the madhouse he was again in danger of imprisonment, this time for debt. In December 1765 he was arrested and was never again wholly out of trouble over money, in spite of diligent efforts on the part of his friends to secure employment or support for him. The last five years of Smart's life were spent in increasing poverty and need: Most of his surviving letters after 1766 are concerned with money troubles. When Newbery died in 1767, provisions in his will ensured that none of the money left to Anna Maria Smart should be "subject or liable to the debts power or control of her present husband"; and in 1769 Smart was disappointed in the hope of benefiting from the Durham estate of his cousin, Francis Smart.

By the time *Hymns, for the Amusement of Children* reached the printers, Smart was in prison. He was arrested for debt in April 1770 and committed to the King's Bench Prison, where he remained until his death a year later. Even in jail, Smart's affectionate disposition earned him friends among his fellow prisoners. Smart died on May 20, 1771, after a short illness.

By the time of his death, Smart's reputation as a poet had suffered a drastic eclipse. From being the pride of Cambridge he sank in estimation into "poor Smart the mad poet," as Thomas Percy described him in an October 17, 1786, letter. But a turning point came with the discovery in 1939 of *Jubilate Agno*, the work which, even more than *A Song to David*, has captured the interest of poets including Allen Ginsberg, Alec Hope, Jeremy Reed, and Wendy Cope—many of whom have paid him the tribute of imitation and parody.

Works in Literary Context

Praise and Prophecy *Jubilate Agno*, even in its fragmentary form, is Smart's "prophetic book": an evangelical and philosophical manifesto, personal diary, and commonplace book all in one, as well as a remarkable experiment in poetic form. The sections were probably intended to be related in the same fashion as the Anglican liturgy. The *Let* verses—so named because they each begin with the word "let"—are invocatory and mostly impersonal, calling on the universal choir of creation to glorify the Lord; the *For* verses (each beginning with the word "for") add comments, reflections, topical references, and details of Smart's private life and feelings. At the same time, each series of verses is sequentially ordered or linked, thus yielding a complex pattern (not consistently maintained) of vertical and horizontal connections.

The poem is primarily intended as a work of praise and thanksgiving, in accord with Smart's belief in the primacy of gratitude: "For there is no invention but the gift of God, and no grace but the grace of gratitude," he declares. He envisages himself, the poet, as "the Lord's News-Writer—

the scribe-evangelist,” spreading the Word and adventuring in the name of the Lord to combat the evil influence of atheistic philosophy and scientific materialism by renewing the spirit of Christian worship in England.

... *And Cats* In Smart’s belief, as Marcus Walsh observes in *Christopher Smart: Selected Poems* (1979), “every creature worships God simply by being itself, through its peculiar actions and properties. . . . The well-known lines on Smart’s cat Jeoffry, far from exemplifying a childlike naivety of vision, are an elaborate demonstration of how each closely observed act may be taken as part of the cat’s divine ritual of praise.”

Works in Critical Context

Overall Reception In 1936 William Butler Yeats singled out *A Song to David* in the introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* as the inaugural poem of the romantic period, in which man, “passive before a mechanized nature,” began to beat against the door of his prison. Even without knowledge of *Jubilate Agno*, Yeats recognized that *A Song to David* was more than a religious poem of unusual scale and splendor; as Browning also recognized, it was a reaffirmation of spiritual realities in an age of scientific materialism, of the conjunction of nature and super-nature in an age of natural theology.

A Song to David In its own time, *A Song to David* was received with more perplexity than either admiration or hostility: “a very curious composition, being a strange mixture of dun obscure and glowing genius at times,” wrote James Boswell on July 30, 1763 to a friend, Sir David Dalrymple. *The Critical Review* (April 1763) hinted at the impropriety of “a Protestant’s offering up either hymns or prayers to the dead,” conceding, however, that “great rapture and devotion is discernable in this extatic song” and concluding that it was “a fine piece of ruins.” Contemporary readers regarded as regrettable what modern critics have seen as daring originality.

Jubilate Agno When *Jubilate Agno* was first published in William Force Stead’s edition under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb*, it was understandably regarded mainly as a fascinating curiosity, at best the incoherent outpourings of a mad genius, although showing remarkable gifts of observation and expression and flashes of spiritual insight. Elizabeth Scott-Montagu, who reviewed Stead’s edition in *Nineteenth Century* (June 1939), was exceptional among early critics in her recognition of a powerful and consistent vision behind the seemingly insane disorder of the work. Donald Greene, however, was the first to recognize the far-reaching and subversive implications of Smart’s philosophical and scientific ideas, claiming him as “the earliest of the outright rebels against Newtonian and Lockean ’rationalism’” and arguing that his criticism of Newtonianism was as radical as William Blake’s and conducted with “rather more philosophic precision.”

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Smart’s poetry mainly focused on the word of God according to the Bible. Here are some other works, like *A Song to David* and *Jubilate Agno*, that have a pronounced ideological agenda:

Secrets of the Self (1915), poetry by Allama Iqbal. This collection, written by one of Pakistan’s most famous poets, explores the relationship of Muhammad and the individual Indian Muslim.

Dulce Et Decorum Est (1920), a poem by Wilfred Owen. This poem, written by a soldier who later died in action, questions the nobility of war and suggests that fighting is not so honorable after all.

Reds (1981), a film by Warren Beatty. This movie, based on real events, sympathetically centers around John Reed, a Communist and chronicler of the Russian Revolution.

The Satanic Verses (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. This novel, which includes a nontraditional view of the life of Muhammad, is so controversial that Rushdie still receives death threats for its publication.

Responses to Literature

1. Compare some of William Blake’s poems to Smart’s. Why do you think Blake is usually regarded as the better poet?
2. Smart wrote at a time when the Protestant Church of England was falling out of favor. Do you think his poems may have restored people’s faith?
3. Some say that Smart’s religious zeal is a result of a brain anomaly. Can you find any evidence of this in *Hymn to a Supreme Being*? Does it matter?
4. Think about something you believe strongly in, and write a dramatic, enthusiastic poem about your topic. Do you feel a sense of relief afterward?

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☒ Alexander McCall Smith

BORN: 1948, Bulawayo, Rhodesia

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (1998)

Portuguese Irregular Verbs (2003)

The Sunday Philosophy Club (2004)

44 Scotland Street (2005)

Overview

The diverse accomplishments of Alexander McCall Smith include a distinguished career as a legal scholar and more recent fame as a best-selling novelist. A professor of medical law at Edinburgh University, Smith has published many works on medical ethics and criminal law. For example, he has written about the duty to rescue and the impact of medical advances on parental rights. Smith also had in print numerous books of fiction for children and short-story collections before he published a series of detective stories set in Botswana. The first installment, *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (1998), became a best-selling novel in the United States after it was popularized by word of mouth. Readers and critics have been charmed by the stories, which are more about relationships, customs, and informal justice than sleuthing.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Africa Smith was born on August 24, 1948, in Bulawayo, Rhodesia (later known as Zimbabwe), where his father worked as a public prosecutor in what was then a British colony. His mother wrote a number of unpublished manuscripts. The youngest of



Alexander McCall Smith *McCall Smith, Alexander, photograph. Juda Ngwenya / Reuters / Landov.*

four children, Smith spent the whole of his childhood in Bulawayo and attended the Christian Brothers College there. He left Africa when he was seventeen years old to continue his education in Scotland.

Law and Teaching After completing his education, Smith began teaching law at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He then went back to Africa—first to Swaziland to teach and then, by 1980, to Botswana. He assisted in creating Botswana's first law school, taught law at the University of Botswana, and wrote a criminal code for Botswana. Many years later, he would publish *The Criminal Law of Botswana* (1992). The book interested critics with its discussion of how the country's criminal law is unlike others in southern Africa and how it resembles the Queensland Criminal Code of 1899.

Smith eventually returned to Scotland, where he became a professor in medical law at the University of Edinburgh. Over the years, he wrote a number of significant articles and books about law and related questions in medical ethics. In 1983, he cowrote with Ken Mason *Law and Medical Ethics* which was updated every few years. In 1987, he coauthored *Butterworths Medico-Legal*

Encyclopedia with John Kenyon Mason. One interesting title was *Forensic Aspects of Sleep* which considered, among other topics, the legal culpability of those who committed an alleged crime while sleepwalking.

As Smith's reputation as an expert in medical legal ethics grew, he was granted many prestigious positions. He did several year-long professorships abroad, including a stint at the law school at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. He also served as the deputy chairman of the Human Genetics Commission for the British government. In addition, Smith served as Great Britain's representative on the bioethics commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). He regularly traveled around the globe in his UNESCO position, helping answer questions about issues such as how to manage DNA databases and protect the information therein.

Serial Writing By the late 1990s, Smith branched out into adult fiction. After a visit to Botswana, he was inspired to write the 1998 novel *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. Following *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, Smith wrote five more books featuring Precious Ramotswa and other central characters. While the success of the series was satisfying for Smith, he began writing other series of fiction for adults. The protagonist of the *Sunday Philosophy Club* series is Isabel Dalhousie, a moral philosopher who faces various ethical dilemmas that arise in each book. This more "traditional" mystery series was generally praised, and the British Broadcasting Corporation bought the rights to turn it into a television series.

Intellectual concerns were the center of another series written by Smith that was published in the early 2000s. Originally written in 1997 and self-published at that time, *Portuguese Irregular Verbs* was a collection of short stories focused on the odd world of three German professors and their inability to function in everyday life. Poking fun at academics, Smith wrote the book after being inspired by a German professor he met at a conference in the 1980s. The original work was passed around among these intellectuals who appreciated the joke, and the author wrote two more books with the same characters and in the same lighthearted manner.

The prolific Smith had other ideas for series, starting with *Fatty O'Leary's Dinner Party* (2004) and another less traditional series, *44 Scotland Street*. The *Scotsman* commissioned Smith to write *44 Scotland Street* as a serialized novel to be published five days a week for six months in 2004. This approach was highly stylized, yet at the same time was modernized, using reader input to steer the direction of the narrative.

Smith's book contracts required him to produce a certain number of books a year, and despite his prolific writing abilities, Smith needed time to focus on his writing. In early 2004, Smith decided to take an unpaid leave of absence from teaching for the next three years. Also in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Smith's famous contemporaries include:

Richard Burton (1925–1984): Welsh actor who was known for being outspoken, being the highest paid actor in Hollywood (at one time), and marrying actress Elizabeth Taylor twice.

Peter Matthiessen (1927–): This American naturalist and Zen Buddhist writes both historical fiction and nonfiction.

Peter Sellers (1925–1980): Sellers was a British comic actor best known for the movies *Dr. Strangelove* and *Being There*.

John Updike (1932–): This American author has won the Pulitzer Prize twice.

2004, he resigned as vice chairman of the Human Genetics Commission and relinquished his duties with UNESCO.

Currently, Smith lives in Edinburgh with his wife Elizabeth, who is a doctor, and his two daughters. He is the cofounder of an amateur orchestra called "The Really Terrible Orchestra," in which he plays the bassoon.

Works in Literary Context

While Smith has been likened to the British comic author P. G. Wodehouse, creator of the Jeeves and Wooster series of novels, he cites as a chief literary influence the late but eminent Indian novelist R. K. Narayan. More important influences, though, are people and their environments, especially those of non-Western cultures. Much of his fiction, especially *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, contains powerful descriptions of both the countryside of Africa and the kinship of its people because it has remained so much a part of him throughout his life.

Children's Books Smith's books for children reflect both Western and non-Western cultural influences and are mostly written for beginning readers. One example showing Smith's African background is "The White Hippo," a story set in Gambia about the unsuccessful efforts of villagers who want to protect an albino hippo from a white man claiming to be a photographer. The twenty-seven stories in *Children of Wax: African Folk Tales* (1991) are more suited for older children and storytellers. Smith collected the tales from old and young members of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Featuring shape-changing animals and supernatural powers, they nevertheless contain realistic portrayals of hardship and danger. The stories often serve to condemn bad behaviors such as greed and unfounded

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Smith has a particular gift for creating detective fiction laced with humor. Here are some other works that combine mystery and humor:

The Thin Man (1933), a novel by Dashiell Hammett.

Hammett, original master of the hard-boiled detective genre, introduces the witty married couple of Nick and Nora Charles in this novel, which inspired several "Thin Man" films.

The Mousetrap (1952), a play by Agatha Christie. This is the longest running play in theatrical history by the best-selling mystery writer of all time.

Lean Mean Thirteen (2007), a novel by Janet Evanovich. The latest volume in the Stephanie Plum "number series" finds bounty hunter Stephanie and her sidekick Lula in search of what has happened to Stephanie's ex-husband.

Deathtrap (1978), a play by Ira Levin. Levin's play was the longest running comedy-thriller in Broadway history. It was adapted into a 1982 film starring Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve.

trust and show that justice does not always follow wrongdoing.

Adult Fiction The collection *Heavenly Date and Other Stories* (1995) is comprised of original stories by Smith that are international in scope. Among them, "Intimate Accounts" is set in a fictional world, "Bulawayo" happens in Southern Rhodesia, and others take place in Zurich, Switzerland; Lisbon, Portugal; and Northern Queensland, Australia. The dark and funny pieces relate all kinds of strange dates, meetings, and exchanges between men and women.

An African Woman's Perspective? Critics and readers alike have noted that Smith entered uncharted territory with *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. In fact, some readers have found it hard to believe that a white Scottish man could understand African women so well. With more than 1 million copies in the series having been sold, readers have apparently accepted Smith's gift of perspective. He has made Africa and its people accessible around the world. In a statement explaining the novel's setting, Smith said, "In Botswana, ties of kinship, no matter how attenuated by distance or time, linked one person to another, weaving across the country a human blanket of love and community." According to Allison Block in *Booklist*, "It is those ties and that sense of community that continue to make this series so appealing to both genre and nongenre readers."

Works in Critical Context

The Importance of Kindness Although a few critics have dismissed his works as too gentle and unassuming, Smith has consistently believed in his work. He told Sarah Lyall of the *New York Times*, "There is a role for books that say to people that life is potentially amusing and that there are possibilities of goodness and kindness—that kindness needn't be dull, that it can also be elevating and moving."

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Precious (Mma) Ramotswa, and Smith's novels about her, have charmed reviewers, who have found the novels fresh, amusing, and affecting. In *BookLoons*, G. Hall described the first installment as "truly unique," explaining that "the best part of the book is, in fact, not the mysteries but the stories of Precious and her father." Mahinder Kingra of the *Baltimore City Paper* judged that in this "deceptively frivolous" novel there is "as honest and sympathetic a portrait of contemporary African life as [Nigerian writer Chinua] Achebe's." Kingra commented that the book is "one of those rare, unassuming novels that seems to contain all of life within its pages, and affirms life in telling its story." Christine Jeffords noted on the Best Reviews Web site that Smith "succeeds in giving his story a lilting, lyrical flavor that makes the reader feel almost as if she is listening to a story being spun by a native tale-teller." Comments on the first three novels by Anthony Daniels in the *Spectator* credit Smith with an admirably simple writing style and the remarkable feat of "creating fictional characters who are decent, goodhearted but not in the least bit dull." In addition, the critic said that "for all their apparent simplicity, the Precious Ramotswa books are highly sophisticated."

When Alida Becker reviewed the first three books for the *New York Times*, dubbing Mma Ramotswa the "Miss Marple of Botswana," it dramatically increased public awareness of the series. As Becker noted, film rights for the series had already been sold to Anthony Minghella, director of *The English Patient*. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Matthew Gurewitsch found *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* to be no less than "one of the most entrancing literary treats of many a year."

Nonfiction Works Most of Smith's legal scholarship treats subjects relating to medical and criminal law issues. He served as coeditor for and contributor to *Family Rights: Family Law and Medical Advances* (1990), which contains seven essays about the legal and ethical implications of new medical capabilities that affect the creation of life as well as the extension of life. The essays consider the impact of laws on a family's ability to make their own medical decisions. Reviewers of *Family Rights: Family Law and Medical Advances* described the book as an in-depth treatment suitable for both specialists and general readers. In the *Sydney Law Review*, Belinda Bennett recommended it as "a very readable collection" that avoids

jargon and explains the necessary medical and scientific terminology. Jenny L. Urwin wrote in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* that it provides “interesting and thoughtful analysis” on a previously neglected subject. The book’s “interdisciplinary and comparative flavour” was noted in *Family Law* by Andrew Bainham, who also wrote, “The scholarship in this volume is, for the most part, as original as it is provocative and the two most impressive contributions are by the editors themselves.” Writing for *Nature*, Andrew Grubb commented on the context of Smith’s essay, saying, “Faced with this largely interventionist judicial attitude, it is left to Sandy McCall Smith to challenge its basis and to sound a note of caution.”

Responses to Literature

1. In *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*, how does Smith depict his female protagonist and other female characters? How does he depict the men in the novel? What are the female views of the males in the book? Given the title and the gender treatments, would you say this is a “woman’s” book? Why or why not?
2. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the history of Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. Write a paper describing British involvement in Rhodesia, the development of the independent country of Zimbabwe, and recent events in Zimbabwe.

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☒ Mario Soldati

BORN: 1906, Turin, Italy

DIED: 1999, Lerici, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

America First Love (1935)

The Commander Comes to Dine (1950)

The Confession (1955)

The Real Silvestri (1960)



Mario Soldati Slim Aarons / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

Mario Soldati achieved success in various genres. As an essayist, he was engaging and provocative; he is best known as the author of *America First Love*, a collection of essays that has been reprinted six times since it was first published in 1935. As host of a television series that ran for two years, *Voyage in the Po Valley in Search of Genuine Wines*, (1955–1956), he became one of Italy’s most popular figures. When his other television series, *In Search of Genuine Food*, ended in 1959, he had the fame of a movie star. Soldati was also active in the motion picture industry as a director and critic, as well as a screenplay writer. His most successful movie was *Little Old-Fashioned World*. He wrote twelve novels, three of which were awarded major literary prizes. Six were best sellers. Soldati investigated the self in relation to inherited values and scrutinized good and evil, honesty and dishonesty, and truth and fraud to reveal the invalidity of absolute judgments.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Influenced by Jesuits and Art Soldati was born in Turin on November 17, 1906, into an old and prosperous

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Soldati's famous contemporaries include:

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine master of the tangled, surreal short story.

Federico Fellini (1920–1993): Italian director known for his experimental, avant-garde films, including *Satyricon* and *8½*.

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): Italy's most translated fiction writer.

Sophia Loren (1934–): Famous Italian actress and international icon.

family that had been known in the city since the eighteenth century. He was educated at the Jesuit Istituto Sociale, the most fashionable private school in Turin at the time. When he expressed a desire to join the order of the Jesuits, he was told to contemplate the decision for a year—which was, as it turned out, time enough for him to change his mind. Although many of his characters rebel against the religious morality imparted by the Jesuits, Soldati spoke fondly of their moral integrity and intellectual rigor and remained grateful for their introducing him to Greek, Roman, and French culture. More important is the impression that his Jesuit teachers left on Soldati: The relentless probing in which he engaged in his works suggests the Jesuits' style of argumentation, epitomized by their motto "Grant little; deny often; distinguish always."

Soldati earned a degree in art history at the University of Turin in 1927 and continued his studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Art History in Rome. He published his first volume of short stories, *Salmace*, in 1929. That same year he left for the United States, having won a fellowship in art history at Columbia University. While there, he also served as an instructor. Unable to obtain a regular university teaching appointment, he returned to Italy in January 1931. In May of that year he married a former student, Marion Rieckelman. They had three children, but the marriage ended in 1934. Soldati visited the United States in 1932 and 1933; his experiences on these trips are related in his *America First Love*. In 1941, Soldati began a relationship with Giuliana Kellermann. They married and had three children. From 1946 to 1960, Soldati lived in Rome. In 1960, he and his family moved to Milan.

Success with Thrillers In 1937, Soldati published his first novel, a psychological thriller titled *The Truth About the Motta Case*, as a serial in the literary magazine *Omni-bus*; it appeared in book form in 1941. The mystery of

Motta's disappearance seems to unfold in the usual fashion of the whodunit, but the novel suddenly enters a world of fantasy, magic, and horror: The missing lawyer is living in the sea with an enormous, Felliniesque (as if from a Federico Fellini film of fantasy images) siren queen.

Seventeen years later, Soldati completed a second, more complex novel, *The Capri Letters*. It received the Strega Prize and became one of the first post-World War II best sellers in Italy, though many critics found the work's intricacies, tricks, and surprises rather excessive.

Creating Across Genres During the 1930s, Soldati began scripting scenarios for several of the most distinguished Italian directors, like Alessandro Blasetti and Mario Camerini. He then graduated to direction, serving as codirector with F. Ozep. However, after the success of his later 1930s fiction, he turned increasingly to fiction writing, publishing works like *The Motta Affair*. But Soldati did maintain his contacts with the film industry. As a film director he proved to be particularly good at handling adaptations of literary texts, especially those with a nostalgic bent. In the 1950s and 1960s, Soldati became very active in television and continued to pursue his writing and film career until his death in Italy in 1999.

Works in Literary Context

Surreality of Language In Soldati's work, an intriguing mixture of the real and the surreal, the banal and the fantastic, the mundane and the bizarre, the pleasant and the horrific tantalizes the reader. This dynamic, stylistic layering explains why writer Italo Calvino, himself the creator of invisible cities and nonexistent knights, would express his appreciation of *Lo smeraldo* (*The Emerald*, 1974) on the dust jacket, but even the realist Pier Paolo Pasolini admired the work's language, lack of "viscosità" (viscosity), and its "assoluta leggerezza" (absolute lightness).

Writing the Self Much of Soldati's writing appears to have a strong autobiographical dimension, as demonstrated in his early nonfiction work such as *America First Love*, as well as in a much later novel, *The American Bride* (1977). The former, rooted in the observations of his postgraduate years in the United States, sifts myth and reality through European conceptions of the American way of life. *The American Bride*, one of his last novels, reexplores some of the issues of cultural difference he had examined from various perspectives in a number of stories and is a sensitive account of irresolvable tensions and misunderstandings in a marital relationship. Themes rooted in childhood and adolescent experience, more particularly the personal and moral implications of a sexually repressive education, inform some of his best work. Translation of such experience into fictional terms is seen in *The Jesuit Friend* (1943) and *The Confession*.

Love and Lies Many of Soldati's works are concerned with self-deception in relationships. The tightly written novella *The Real Silvestri* juxtaposes the views held of a mutual friend by a middle-class lawyer and an attractive working-class woman. For the latter, Silvestri is a cheat and blackmailer, while the former remembers him only as the very model of kindness, consideration, and personal honesty. Gradually, the lawyer appreciates how impossibly idealized the memory of his friend was, but comes to understand and feel for him all the more by accepting his human flaws.

Although his plots can exploit the bizarre and the extraordinary, Soldati chronicles the human ordinariness in the romantic deceptions and misunderstandings of friendship, marriage, and other love relationships. Additionally, a strong element of the erotic permeates his work, the more powerful for never being overt or exploitative. This romantic, even titillating dimension, reinforced by the sure sense of the storyteller, helped to win him a wide readership in Italy and abroad.

Works in Critical Context

Overall Reception Dubbed "one of the most gifted of all living Italian storytellers" in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Soldati, in his films as well as his writings, reveals a special talent for description and narrative. His writing did not appear in English translation until the publication of *Dinner with the Commendatore* in the early 1950s. The three stories in that book, wrote Charles J. Rolo of the *New York Times Book Review*, "are somewhat reminiscent of the long short stories of Somerset Maugham. While Soldati's plots are not, perhaps, as arresting as Maugham's, he deals more subtly with the mysteries of the human heart and mind. . . . This is storytelling in the great tradition."

The Real Silvestri *The Real Silvestri* divided the critics. A few accused the author of artificiality: Carlo Bo, in his review for *La stampa*, felt compelled "to solve a difficult problem of a literary nature: up to what point is the writer sincere with himself; where does the game begin?" Emilio Cecchi, however, was among those who thought that this novel was one of Soldati's most authentic works and that Aurora was one of his most genuine characters.

The Real Silvestri attacks fundamental problems of character, as a man learns from his dead friend's mistress about his friend's real personality. Notes Helene Cantarella in the *New York Times Book Review*, "This incisive study of adult personalities, with its skillful insights into the complexities and bitter ironies of adult emotional life, is the work of a mature mind. In its unusual amalgam of wry, sophisticated humor, brittle analysis, and elementary human compassion, it is Soldati at his best." Alice Ellen Mayhew of *Commonweal* observed that *The Real Silvestri*, like Soldati's other work, "suggests the trained,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mario Soldati was known for including some surreal elements in his work. Here are some other works with surrealist touches.

8 1/2 (1963), a film directed by Federico Fellini. Fellini's film consistently rates near the top of film critics's list of the best movies of all time. In the movie, a filmmaker struggles with a project, as dream and fantasy are interwoven with reality.

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. This novel chronicles the small village of Macondo for several generations via many bizarre hardships and miracles.

Volver (2006), a film by Pedro Almodóvar. For most of this film, the main character suspects that her mother has come back from the dead.

methodical, quick-clever eye of the cinema artist. . . . His style is naturalistic: the camera/narrator moves listlessly about among the characters. . . . It is the problem, as well as the method, of *The Real Silvestri*, to discover the real motives of the characters. . . . [but] Soldati's method breaks down in posturing and mannerism. . . . The voices drone, the camera wanders, becomes silly and vague, the pictures blur off into placid idiocy."

The American Bride Having lived and worked in the United States, Soldati had a special interest in encounters between American and Italian cultures and sensibilities. In his 1977 novel *The American Bride*, he writes about an Italian professor married to an American woman and about the professor's affair with his wife's Italian American friend. Anthony Thwaite of the *U.K. Observer* called *The American Bride* "a disappointment from one of the most senior and most respected Italian novelists." Thwaite found the book lacked a "thorough sense of a particular world," and he objected to what he called "a good deal of wooden authorial signalling . . . and limp gestures toward emotion." But Fantazzi, writing in *World Literature Today*, praised Soldati's "subtle if not always profound psychology and . . . cruel analysis of the fine distinction between sincerity and pretense."

Responses to Literature

1. Read one of Soldati's essays and then watch a film that Soldati directed. Write a brief, informal essay discussing how you see Soldati's style of writing reflected in his directing style. Compare the essay with the film. Do they have a similar tone? Setting? Perspective?

2. With a classmate, discuss how Soldati distorts the traditional mystery in *The Truth About the Motta Case*.
3. Soldati often writes about romantic relationships with candor. Make a poster on which you chart a comparison between some of the marriages and relationships in *The American Bride* and *The Real Silvestri*. Be prepared to explain your findings to the class.
4. Using resources in your library or on the Internet, research magic realism. Write a report about the genre, using selections from Soldati as supporting examples.
5. Think about a Soldati book you are assigned and write an essay on how Soldati's studies in visual art manifest in his writing and directing. Use examples from the text to support your idea.

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❑ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

BORN: 1918, Kislovodsk, Russia

DIED: 2008, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

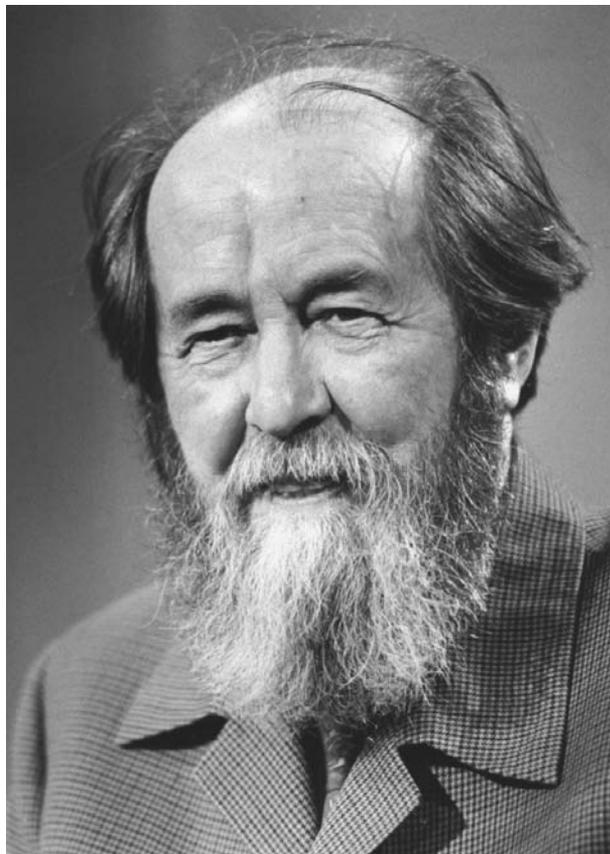
MAJOR WORKS:

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962)

The First Circle (1968)

Cancer Ward (1968)

The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–56: An Experiment in Literary Investigation (1973)



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

As the first opponent of Soviet communism inside Russia whose views became widely known, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is a hero to numerous people around the world. Throughout a life packed with drama, Solzhenitsyn remained a political personality and historian vitally engaged with the central issues of his era. A survivor of eleven years of Soviet prisons, forced-labor camps, and exile, he was one of the most visible Soviet dissidents influential in exposing human-rights violations in the Soviet Union. He inspired many to voice their own dissent, advocate for free speech, and circulate clandestine literature. Like his predecessors Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn focused predominantly on Russia, yet he addressed concerns that resonate far beyond any national boundaries.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Raised in Squalor by a Single Mother Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn was born in 1918 in Kislovodsk, Russia. Solzhenitsyn never knew his father, who died in a hunting accident before Solzhenitsyn was born.

Solzhenitsyn's mother was denied sufficient employment by the Soviet government, and the family lived in squalor. Solzhenitsyn had some sense of his literary ambition by the age of nine, and before he was eighteen he resolved to write a major novel about the Russian Revolution of 1917, which led to the overthrow of the previous czarist Russian government and ultimately to the formation of the Soviet Union. After earning degrees in linguistics, mathematics, and physics, Solzhenitsyn began teaching physics in 1941.

Military Imprisonment and Exile With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union during World War II, Solzhenitsyn was drafted into the Red Army to help repel the German forces. In 1945, while serving as the commander of a Soviet army artillery battery, counter-intelligence agents discovered letters in which Solzhenitsyn had criticized Stalinism, the sometimes brutal system of government practiced by Soviet ruler and dictator Joseph Stalin. Found guilty of conspiring against the state, he was confined for more than a decade in numerous institutions, including a labor camp in Kazakhstan, and Marfino Prison, a *sharashka*, or government-run prison and research institute. It was while in Moscow's Lubyanka prison that he read otherwise unobtainable works by such authors as Yevgeny Zamyatin, the great Soviet prose writer of the 1920s, and American novelist John Dos Passos, whose expressionist style later influenced Solzhenitsyn's own writing. On March 5, 1953, the day Stalin died, he was released from prison and exiled to central Asia. There, Solzhenitsyn taught mathematics and physics in a secondary school and began writing poems and plays as well as taking notes for a novel. During this time he was also diagnosed with cancer, which nearly led to his death; his experiences during treatment inspired his later novel *Cancer Ward* (1968).

Freed from exile in 1956, Solzhenitsyn returned to central Russia, where friends encouraged him to submit his writings to the Russian periodical *Novy Mir*, which published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*) in 1962. Appearing during a period of openness fostered by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, the novel proved a considerable success. However, with the fall of Khrushchev and the rise of much less tolerant regimes, Solzhenitsyn quickly fell from official favor and was closely monitored by security forces. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970, he was unable to attend the award ceremony because the Soviet government would not guarantee his reentry into Russia. The French publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* (*Arkhipelag Gulag*) in 1973—a sweeping history of forced labor camps in the Soviet Union—led to his arrest, and in 1974 he was expelled from his homeland and eventually settled in the United States. In May 1994, after twenty years of exile in Vermont, Solzhenit-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Solzhenitsyn's famous contemporaries include:

- Andrei Sakharov** (1921–1989): Russia's leading physicist, Sakharov battled nuclear war and communist dictatorship.
- Joseph Brodsky** (1940–1996): Expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972, this Russian-born poet won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1987.
- Nelson Mandela** (1918–): Mandela served as president of South Africa (1994–1999) after twenty-seven years in prison for leading the antiapartheid movement.
- Vaclav Havel** (1936–): A Czech playwright and former anticommunist dissident, Havel served as president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and the Czech Republic (1993–2003).
- Isaac Asimov** (1920–1992): The Russian-born Asimov was a legendary science fiction writer in the United States.

syn and his wife Natalia returned to live in Russia. Though in frail health, Solzhenitsyn continued to work until his death from heart failure in 2008.

Works in Literary Context

Socialist Realism Socialist realism was the official artistic doctrine approved by Stalin in 1934. It dictated that the creative artist should serve society by being realistic, optimistic, and heroic. Creativity and freedom of expression were more than discouraged; they were illegal, forcing Solzhenitsyn to disguise his political and social messages in many of his best-known works.

Set in Stalinist Russia, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), the first published Soviet work of its kind, focuses on a simple prisoner who wants only to serve out his sentence with a certain integrity. In the novel, Solzhenitsyn strove to reverse the usual procedure of socialist realism, which imposed thoughts and feelings on its readers. Therefore, he rendered his tale in an ironic, understated, elliptical manner intended to elicit spontaneous feelings unrelated to official propaganda.

Paradoxes An appraisal of Solzhenitsyn's life and work must address irresolvable paradoxes—he acquired fame as a protest writer, but at heart he was an aesthete. His moral and spiritual authority came from the way he has bore witness to twentieth-century totalitarianism, but his dislike of publicity and his reclusiveness made him an anachronism. Solzhenitsyn's work needs to be discussed in relation to the tradition from which it came, for he responds to socialist realism, which was proclaimed in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich opened the eyes of the international community to the brutalities of the Soviet prison system. The novel takes its place in a literary tradition of factual and fictional works depicting incarceration, including the following:

The House of the Dead (1862), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. This novel is based on Dostoevsky's four years in a Siberian prison camp.

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898), a poem by Oscar Wilde. Wilde's poem is a meditation on suffering and the injustice of capital punishment, written after Wilde's incarceration for "gross indecency."

Memoirs from the Women's Prison (1994), a memoir by Nawal el Saadawi. In a highly literary memoir, a doctor, author, and women's rights advocate recounts nightmarish experiences amongst political prisoners in Egypt.

I Refuse to Die: My Journey for Freedom (2002), a memoir by Koigi wa Wamwere. A Kenyan human rights activist recalls thirteen years of imprisonment under President Daniel Arap Moi.

1932 as the only acceptable form of art in the Soviet Union. Because the literature of socialist realism resembles many Western best sellers in its accessible style, positive heroes, and happy endings, it cut off Russian literature from its rich heritage of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In his own way, Solzhenitsyn engaged in an ongoing attempt to restore wholeness to Russian society by reconnecting the pre- and postrevolutionary periods. He wrote to make sense of the evolution of twentieth-century Russia in terms of the lives and works of the nineteenth-century Russian classics. Accordingly, he knew intimately the works of Russian masters such as Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Yury Lermontov, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Anton Chekhov. Solzhenitsyn's efforts were rewarded in 1970 when he received the Nobel Prize in Literature for what the Nobel committee termed "the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature."

Works in Critical Context

As a writer and a public figure, Solzhenitsyn has evoked strong reactions, from crude abuse to enthusiastic admiration. Critical responses to Solzhenitsyn have consistently depended on the commentator's ideological sympathies in regard to Soviet communism. During the Cold War era in which Solzhenitsyn's most important

works appeared in the West, he was praised for the courage of his stance toward Soviet authorities. More rarely have critics probed substantially into the philosophical and moral dimensions of his message.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Written in sparse, plain prose, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* tells of one prisoner's typical activities. "Ivan Denisovich," affirmed Shirley J. Paolini in *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, "represents the common individual incarcerated in a Soviet camp for an insignificant crime; his energies are devoted entirely to survival under brutal conditions." Lauren Livingston, writing in the *English Review*, summarized *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as a "haunting read," and Gleb Zekulin, writing in *Soviet Studies*, recommended it as "a mine of information." Still another enthusiast, Vladimir J. Rus, wrote in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* that "Solzhenitsyn has given the world a moving picture of . . . a genuine joy in one's own existence, even when so limited in time, space, and one's own consciousness." Abraham Rothberg's *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Major Novels* acknowledges that in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn "explored new terrain in the use of language, exploiting a combination of prison slang, peasant and pornographic slang," and Christopher Moody, in *Solzhenitsyn*, deemed the story an "eloquent protest." Similarly, Robert L. Yarup observed in the *Explicator* that the novel concerns "man's irrepressible instinct for freedom."

"Matryona's House" *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* proved an immense success with Soviet readers, and Solzhenitsyn followed it in *Novy Mir* with short stories, including "Matryona's House," in which a former prisoner befriends an aging peasant woman who serves as his landlady. Andrej Kodjak, in his study *Alexander Solzhenitsyn*, noted that "Solzhenitsyn draws on his own experience to create the narrator, Ignatich." John Clardy, in a *Cimarron Review* essay, expressed particular praise for Solzhenitsyn's handling of characterization in "Matryona's House," declaring that "Matryona, like Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, stands out in our minds as a real personality." Leonid Rzhnevsky, meanwhile, quoted another reader, in *Solzhenitsyn: Creator and Heroic Deed*, who considered Matryona "the most brilliant image of the peasant woman in all of the Russian literature I have read." Still another critic, Stephen S. Lottridge, wrote in *Russian Literature Triquarterly* that "Matryona's House" relates "the trials and loss endured by an innocent and righteous person," while Robert Louis Jackson, in a piece featured in *Solzhenitsyn: A Collection of Critical Essays*, summarized the tale as "significant art." Sheryl A. Spitz, meanwhile, described the short work in a *Russian Review* essay as "the story of one individual's moral maturation."

The First Circle *The First Circle* was described by an essayist in *Encyclopedia of World Biography* as "harshly

satiric.” In the novel, according to David M. Halperin in an essay included in *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*, Solzhenitsyn “examines both the omnipresence of lying as a demonstrable feature of Soviet society and as a metaphysical, demonic device.” Furthermore, Solzhenitsyn, in his characterization of Stalin, emphasized that the dictator, however monstrous and however powerful, was nonetheless human. “In his portrait of Stalin in *The First Circle*,” wrote Paul N. Siegel in *Clio*, “Solzhenitsyn, in cutting the towering figure of the Stalin of Stalinist myth-making down to size, showed him to be a human being at ironic variance with the image.”

Responses to Literature

1. Do you agree with Solzhenitsyn’s decision to return to the country that both exiled and imprisoned him? What are the most important factors for an expatriate to consider before returning home?
2. Why do you think Solzhenitsyn was able to conduct the extensive research that enabled him to produce *The Gulag Archipelago*, while concealing the project from authorities?
3. Read George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. If you could include Solzhenitsyn as a character in the novel, what or who would he be? How would you show his role and actions in your characterization?

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☒ Sophocles

BORN: c. 496 BCE, near Athens, Greece

DIED: c. 406 BCE, Athens, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Antigone (442 BCE)

Oedipus Rex (c. 425 BCE)

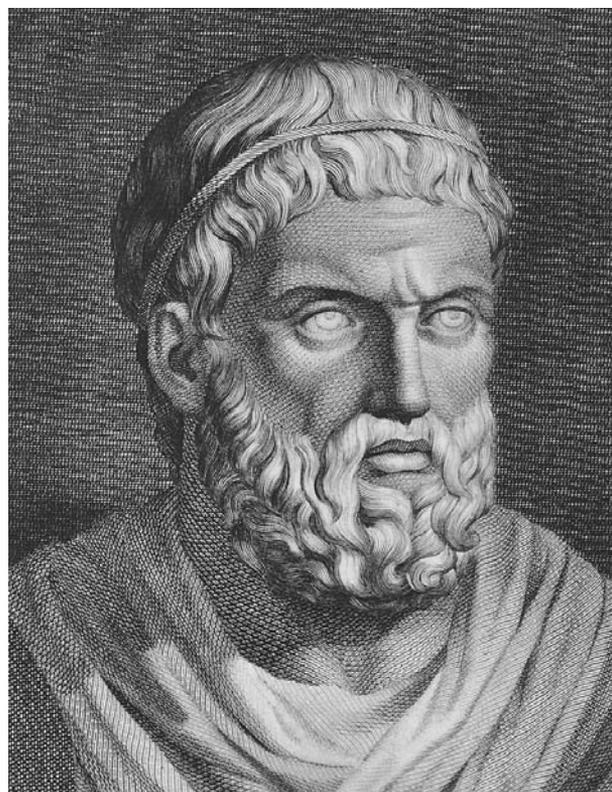
Electra (c. 425–410 BCE)

Philoctetes (409 BCE)

Oedipus at Colonus (401 BCE)

Overview

During the fifth century BCE, the Golden Age of Athens, new forms of art and literature were being developed with extraordinary speed and energy. Classical Greek author Sophocles, along with Aeschylus and Euripides, was a primary innovator of the new genre of tragedy, shaping stage conventions that have become central to dramatic art. Sophocles’ ability to blend irony and poetry with effective dramatic technique has earned him a reputation as the greatest playwright of world literature.



Sophocles Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sophocles's famous contemporaries include:

- Aeschylus** (525?–426? BCE): This contemporary of Sophocles is perhaps best known for his play *Agamemnon* (c. 458 BCE).
- Pericles** (495–429 BCE): This popular Greek statesman was a leader during Athens's Golden Age.
- Euripides** (480–406 BCE): This Greek playwright wrote *Medea* (c. 431 BCE) and his own version of *Electra* (c. 413 BCE).
- Aristophanes** (456–386 BCE): Known as the father of comedy, this playwright's best known work is *Lysistrata* (c. 410 BCE).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Artistic Ability Sophocles' date of birth is believed to be 497 BCE or 496 BCE. His father was a wealthy businessman named Sophillus. As such, Sophocles enjoyed a Greek education that included art and music. His musical ability presented him with a solo part that he sang in the victory paean after the battle of Salamis in 480 BCE. (This naval battle between Greek city-states and Persia took place in the strait between Piraeus and Salamis Island. The Greeks won handily, preventing Persia from conquering the Peloponnese.)

Prize Winner at the Greater Dionysia When Sophocles completed his education, he competed in the dramatic festival the Greater Dionysia, held every spring for five days. During the time of the festival, all business stopped in Athens, and everyone was invited to participate, even prisoners, who were freed to participate. At the festival of 468 BCE, Sophocles defeated Aeschylus, winning first prize. Sophocles went on to win first prize more than twenty times, never receiving anything below second prize, a unique feat among Greek dramatists.

Elite Athenian As a member of the Athenian elite at a time when Athens enjoyed extraordinary cultural and political supremacy, Sophocles held important political positions. He held the post of treasurer (Hellenotamias) in either 443 or 442 BCE, and served as general along with Pericles (a prominent Athenian general, statesman, and orator) in the war to suppress a revolution in Samos from 441 to 439 BCE. (Samos had been occupied by Athenians in 441 BCE.) Sophocles was also made a member of the Athenian senate. In addition to his political appointments, Sophocles showed his devotion to traditional religion by serving as a priest of the healing deity Amynos.

Debatable Dates It is estimated that Sophocles wrote some 123 plays. Titles and fragments of ninety exist, but only seven tragedies survive in their entirety. Of these seven, there is a only one that is firmly dated, *Philoctetes*, in 409 BCE. *Oedipus at Colonus* is known to have been Sophocles' last creation because it was produced posthumously in 401 BCE. There are grounds for placing *Antigone* close to 441 BCE. The date of *Women of Trachis*, a play whose authenticity has been doubted by a few in the past, is now generally put at sometime before *Antigone*.

Ajax is also deemed to be relatively early: 450 BCE. The date of *Oedipus Rex* has been endlessly discussed without an agreement being reached; stylistically it seems not far from *Electra*, whose placing on the chronological table is uncertain as to whether it precedes or follows Euripides' *Electra*, written in 413 BCE. It appears, then, that of the seven surviving plays, the ones deemed to be "early" belong to a time when the poet was already in his fifties; and some of his finest choral writing, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, belongs to a man of ninety.

Sophocles died c. 406 BCE, in Athens, Greece, though the details surrounding his death are vague.

Works in Literary Context

Among Sophocles known influences were Greek mythology as interpreted and shaped by poets such as Homer as well as Aeschylus—the author of such plays as *The Persians* (472 BCE)—who was twenty-eight years older than Sophocles but also Sophocles' rival during his early years as a writer. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles was affected by the flowering of Athenian culture and the related intellectual life. In addition, the military conflicts with the Persians and with Sparta influenced the work of Sophocles.

Technical Innovations The extraordinary dramatic and poetic power of Sophocles' tragedies stems, in part, from certain technical innovations that he introduced into the Athenian theater. Unlike Aeschylus, whose dramatic trilogies provide plot continuity and share characters, Sophocles focuses on individual tragedies. By limiting his narrative scope, he achieved a more concentrated emotional intensity and action. In addition, Sophocles enhanced the usually bare Greek stage with *sknographia*, or scene painting, and more expressive masks, thereby bringing greater realism to each scene.

Perhaps Sophocles' most important innovation was the introduction of the use of a third actor. Traditionally, two actors (all roles were played by male actors), along with the chorus, participated in the *epeisodia*, or episodes, of the play. The addition of the third actor enabled Sophocles to construct a more complex dialogue, thereby keeping the focus on the characters rather than on the chorus. He increased the chorus from twelve to fifteen members and, while limiting its participation in the action, composed some of his most beautiful poetry for

it. Many commentators have praised the imaginative form, striking imagery, and emotional power of Sophocles' choral songs, with particular attention to their poetical and philosophical content.

Sophocles' dramatic style is often described as a divine union of strength and control. In measured, simple, and piercingly direct language, Sophocles' dramas move swiftly, logically, and inexorably toward their seemingly inevitable conclusions. The most painful human situations—utter personal humiliation, the accidental murder of a loved one, a cataclysmic reversal of one's station in life—are presented in a manner that implies personal compassion for the suffering individual but also places personal misfortune in a universal, cosmic context.

Free Will The hallmark of Sophocles' style is his gift for portraying exceptional characters under stress. His dramas are built around a strong-willed, highly principled character who encounters a seemingly insurmountable ethical or moral difficulty. For Sophocles, the center of interest was the individual human being who will not compromise even when he or she clearly perceives the advantages that compromise would bring. Sophocles creates characters of heroic proportions, yet these heroic qualities often lead to disaster. By creating characters who refuse to compromise, Sophocles sows the seeds of a person's own destruction. At the same time, such a character is plainly the kind that he admires and for whom he seems to invite admiration by others. In this respect, his emphasis is on human free will. The hero has only to change his mind, to adapt to circumstances, and catastrophe will be averted.

Prophecy There is another counter-theme running through six of the seven tragedies: the theme of oracular predictions and the inevitability of their fulfillment. Though the extent of their participation in human affairs remains unclear, the gods are respected and feared in the world of Sophocles' plays. Oracles are consulted and heeded. This tension between human free will and divine predestination presents problems of interpretation. Artistically the interest revolves around a person's own free decision, but the development of the plot leaves no doubt as to the outcome.

Influences Sophocles is regarded as the pinnacle of Greek dramatic art and one of the greatest dramatists in Western literature. The stage conventions that he helped initiate have become central to dramatic art, and he is acknowledged as one of the shapers of the genre. Sophocles' plays and innovations have also profoundly influenced the development of European literature.

Works in Critical Context

Sophocles is considered one of the greatest dramatists in Western literature. His surviving tragedies attest to his consummate craftsmanship in plot construction, characterization, and versification. In fact, critics acknowledge

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sophocles's plays sometimes feature a "deus ex machina" (literally, "god from the machine"), an improbable and sudden solution to the conflict at hand. Though literary critics frown on the deus ex machina as an easy way out of a plotting problem, it has been used countless times in literature and film. A few other works that employ this device:

Alcestis (438 BCE), a play by Euripides. In this play, the title character, who has sentenced herself to death, is revived at the last minute by the hero Heracles.

The Winter's Tale (1623), a play by William Shakespeare. At the end of this play, a statue magically comes to life and reveals itself as the previously dead character Hermione.

The War of the Worlds (1898), a novel by H. G. Wells. The terrible alien invasion in this novel ends abruptly when the Martians all catch a cold and die.

Donnie Darko (2001), a film by Richard Kelly. In this movie, the title character's problems appear to be solved when a plane crashes into his bedroom.

him as one of the shapers of dramatic art. His reputation as a dramatist has been secure ever since his own time. Sophocles' technical skill as a dramatist, unforgettable characters, and haunting, perfectly plotted plays, have secured his standing in world literature.

Oedipus Rex Of all Sophocles' plays, *Oedipus Rex*—a tragedy denied first prize either because it was ahead of its time or because of the vagaries of the Athenian voting system at the dramatic festival—is at once his least typical play and the one that has left the deepest imprint. Perhaps the most famous play ever written, *Oedipus Rex* describes the tragic events that lead Oedipus to murder his father and marry his mother, unaware of their true identities. In *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), Aristotle plainly regarded the play as the greatest masterpiece of the genre, claiming it was a model tragedy, containing Sophoclean elements such as reversal and discovery.

However, when put under the microscope, critics have noted that *Oedipus Rex* is teeming with every kind of illogicality and inconsistency. Some of these problems were mercilessly pointed out by Voltaire in the preface to his own *Oedipe* (1718). Oedipus begins with a city stricken by a plague, but as the play progresses the plague is forgotten, and the emphasis shifts completely from the question "Who killed Laius, King of Thebes?" to "Who is Oedipus and what is his relationship with the last royal house?"

Despite such problems, *Oedipus Rex* has received considerable attention in modern times, partly due to

the father of modern psychiatry, Sigmund Freud. Freud was tremendously moved by the play and popularized the notion of the Oedipus Complex. While critics still agree that the play is a gripping exploration of the role of the gods in a man's life and a warning to man to avoid becoming too proud, some critics have focused their attention on the play's themes, the playwright's use of irony, the function of the chorus, and the Freudian interpretation, among other issues.

Writing about *Oedipus Rex* in 1953, F. J. H. Letters wrote in *The Life and Work of Sophocles*, "The *Oedipus tyrannus* (*King Oedipus*) is the best-known and best-built of classical tragedies. Yet in its treatment of inherent improbabilities... it is also the best illustration of the difference between ancient and modern views as to the limits of dramatic license. Sophocles' originality shows itself less in the making than in the shaping of the plot."

Responses to Literature

1. Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast Electra with her sister Chrysothemis and their actions and motivations in the play *Electra*.
2. In a group discussion, explain the roles of fate and free will in Sophocles' plays.
3. Write a brief report explaining why you think *Oedipus Rex* is considered Sophocles' masterpiece.
4. Research Sigmund Freud's Oedipus and Electra complexes. Are these terms fair to Sophocles' characters? Write an essay about your conclusions.
5. In small groups, create alternative ways in which you could solve Antigone's problems without using a *deus ex machina*.

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Wole Soyinka

BORN: 1934, Abeokuta, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Lion and the Jewel (1963)

The Interpreters (1965)

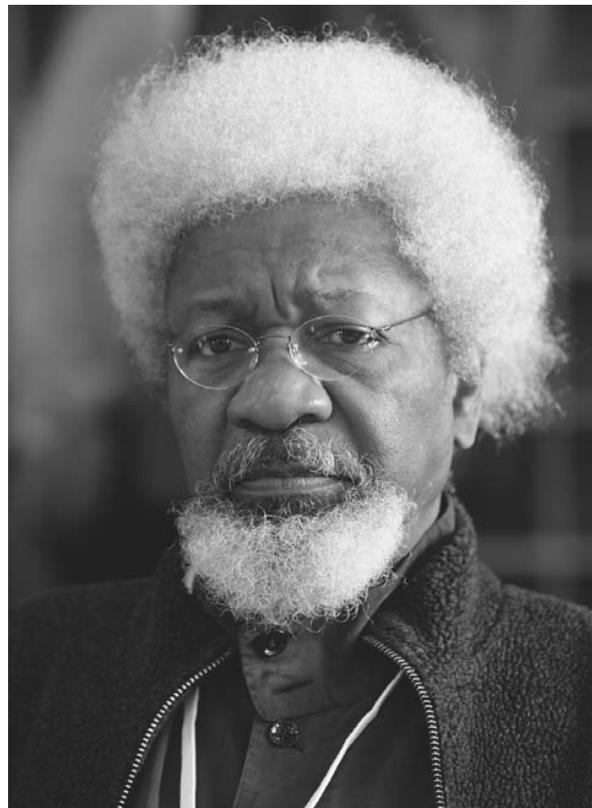
The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka (1972)

Death and the King's Horseman (1975)

Aké: The Years of Childhood (1981)

Overview

Wole Soyinka's plays, novels, and poetry record twentieth-century Africa's political turmoil and its struggle to reconcile tradition with modernization. With a style that combines the European dramatic form with traditional folk-drama in the Yoruba tongue, a Niger-Congo language family, Soyinka presents both satire and spectacle



Wole Soyinka Soyinka, Wole, 2006, photograph. AP Images.

on the stage. The first black African writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Soyinka is also well-known as a political activist in Nigeria.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

British Colonial Upbringing in Nigeria Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, in the British colony of Western Nigeria, on July 13, 1934, to Samuel Ayodele, headmaster for the village school established by the British, and Grace Eniola Soyinka, a Christian convert. His grandfather introduced him to the 401 gods of Yoruba and to other West African tribal folklore.

After high school and a brief period as a clerk in Lagos, Soyinka attended the University College in Nigeria. He published several poems and short stories before leaving Africa in 1954 to attend the University of Leeds in England, where *The Invention*, his first play, was produced in 1957. At Leeds, Soyinka expanded his awareness of Western literary and theatrical traditions. He was awarded a BA in 1957, started work on a master's degree, and moved to London, all the while continuing to be involved in the theater.

Critiquing Western Modernization Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1960, shortly after independence from colonial rule under the United Kingdom had been declared. He began to research Yoruba folklore and drama in depth and incorporated elements of both into his play *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), commissioned as part of Nigeria's independence celebrations. In the play, Soyinka warned the newly independent Nigerians that the end of colonial rule did not mean an end to their country's problems. Among Soyinka's best-known works is the play *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), which mocks the unquestioning embrace of Western modernization. Its 1966–1967 London production established Soyinka as a significant English-language dramatist.

In 1962 Soyinka began as a university lecturer at University College in Ife, Nigeria. Disgusted by the weakness shown by college authorities in the face of political pressure, he resigned the following year. During 1965, Soyinka became a senior lecturer in English at the University of Lagos. He allowed his genius for satire full rein in *The Republican* (1963), *The (New) Republican* (1964), and *Before the Blackout* (1965), attacking a variety of targets, exposing clearly identifiable individuals to ridicule, and commenting on the state of Nigeria since independence.

Political Critiques Lead to Imprisonment Soyinka was well established as Nigeria's premier playwright when he published his first novel, *The Interpreters* (1965). The novel allowed Soyinka to expand on themes in his plays and to present a sweeping view of Nigerian life immediately following independence. Essentially plotless, *The Interpreters* is loosely structured

around the informal discussions among five young Nigerian intellectuals.

Solitary Confinement The year 1965 also marked Soyinka's first arrest by the Nigerian police. He was accused of using a gun to force a radio announcer to broadcast incorrect election results. No evidence was ever produced, however, and Soyinka was released from jail after three months, only to be arrested two years later during Nigeria's civil war. After the Nigerian region of Biafra had declared itself an independent republic in 1967, Soyinka traveled to Biafra to establish a peace commission of leading intellectuals from both sides. When he returned home, the Nigerian police accused him of helping the Biafrans to buy jet fighters. This time, Soyinka was imprisoned for more than two years, even though he was never formally charged with any crime. In solitary confinement during most of his detention, Soyinka was denied reading and writing materials, but he managed to manufacture his own ink and began writing a prison diary on toilet paper, cigarette packages, and in between the lines of a few books he had secretly obtained. Published as *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972), Soyinka's diary should be regarded not as a factual account of his prison experience but as a creative response to detention.

Release from Prison and Self-Exile in Europe Soyinka was released in 1969 and, in an act of self-exile, left Nigeria soon after and did not return until 1975. He spent most of 1972 in Europe and delivered a series of lectures at Churchill College and Cambridge University during 1973–1974. Subsequently published as *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1978), the lectures combine criticism of specific texts with discussions that reveal the extent of Soyinka's knowledge of literary and theatrical traditions.

Returning Home Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1975, and in 1976 became a professor at the University of Ife. The Nigeria to which Soyinka had returned was a country where the rich had become richer and the poor had become even poorer than before. This polarization in wealth was due, in part, to the oil boom of the 1970s; while revenues from sales of Nigeria's oil were significant, most of the money fell into the hands of corrupt politicians. In reaction to conditions in Nigeria, Soyinka wrote *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), a work that explores the complexities of situations, ambiguities, and uncertainties in human relations. The work was not well received in Nigeria.

Work in the U.S. Yields More Publications During the 1980s, Soyinka held visiting professorships at American universities and continued to write and direct. He published *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), followed almost ten years later by *Isara: A Voyage around "Essay"* (1990), which explores the world in which his father grew up. In between these two works, *A Play of Giants* (1984) was published and performed. This drama

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Soyinka's famous contemporaries include:

Sani Abacha (1943–1998): President of Nigeria from 1993 to 1998, Abacha banned political activity, suppressed the press, and was named the fourth most corrupt world leader in recent history by the anticorruption coalition Transparency International.

Idi Amin (mid-1920s–2003): Hundreds of thousands of people were killed during the brutal rule of Amin, who seized power in a military coup and became president of Uganda from 1971 to 1979.

Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968): In 1961, this Soviet cosmonaut became the first person in space and the first person to orbit the Earth.

Jayakanthan (1934–): Jayakanthan is an Indian novelist and playwright from the Tamil Nadu region whose works question middle-class beliefs and conventions.

Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941–1995): This Nigerian author and activist led a campaign against environmental damage caused by multinational oil companies; he was executed after a sham trial under Abacha's rule, provoking international outrage.

is partly a specific campaign against Ugandan dictator Idi Amin and partly the presentation of a more general concern about the lack of responsible leadership in Africa.

Humble Acceptance of International Recognition In recognition of his achievements as a widely produced playwright, Soyinka was elected president of the International Theatre Institute in 1986. That same year, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for being “a writer who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence.” Soyinka stated that the prize was not an award for himself “but to all the others who laid the basis and were the source from which I could draw. It is the African world which can now be recognized.”

Political Questions Drive Ongoing Work A collection of Soyinka's essays, *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (1988), and a volume of poetry, *Mandela's Earth* (1988), followed. In 1996's *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996), Soyinka examines Nigeria's dictatorship. A compilation of essays originally delivered as lectures at Harvard University, *The Open Sore* questions corrupt government, ideas of nationalism, and international intervention.

In 1998, Soyinka ended a four-year self-imposed exile from Nigeria. His exile can be traced back to 1993, when a democratically elected government was to

have assumed power. Instead, General Ibrahim Babangida, who had ruled the nation for eight years, prohibited the publication of the voting results and installed his deputy, General Sani Abacha, as head of the Nigerian state. Soyinka, along with other pro-democracy activists, was charged with treason for his criticism of the military regime. Faced with a death sentence, Soyinka went into exile in 1994, during which time he traveled and lectured in Europe and the United States. Following the death of Abacha, who held control for five years, the new government, led by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, released numerous political prisoners and promised to hold civilian elections. Soyinka's return to his homeland renewed hope for a democratic Nigerian state. Like other acts of aggression against Soyinka by the leaders of his country, this incident failed to deter him from writing. He published a poetry collection *Outsiders* (1999), a play of political satire “King Baabu” (2001), and another poetry collection *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002).

After a relatively calm period of several years, however, Soyinka once again plunged into political activism as the leader of a grassroots group called “Citizens Forum.” He was tear-gassed and arrested in May of 2004 while protesting then-Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's attempt to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a third term. In 2006, Random House published Soyinka's memoirs, titled “You Must Set Forth at Dawn.” In April of 2007, two weeks after the country's presidential elections, Soyinka advocated for the election's cancellation, citing on-going violence and corruption. Today, he continues to take a strong stance against political corruption in Nigeria and abroad.

Works in Literary Context

Significant influences on Soyinka's writing, include, among others, Irish author J. M. Synge, traditional African theatre, and the mythology of his tribe, the Yoruba. Some reviewers link Soyinka's writing style, particularly that used in *The Interpreters*, to that of novelists James Joyce and William Faulkner. Others dislike the formless quality of the novel, but critic Eustace Palmer asserts in *The Growth of the African Novel* (1979), “If there are reservations about the novel's structure, there can be none about the thoroughness of the satire at society's expense.”

Synthesizing Traditions In his plays, Soyinka has consciously combined African—particularly Yoruba—forms with the European tradition of dialogue drama. For instance, *Opera Wonyosi* (1981) uses Bertoldt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (1928) as the basis for an attack on the vices of Nigeria and Africa. The Nigerian version of the story is patterned after Brecht's play, and therefore, to some extent, after English Renaissance playwright John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728). Because Soyinka adds new characters and sequences, he gives the work a distinctively African and Nigerian flavor.

As Palmer observes, works including Soyinka's *Interpreters* notably influenced the African fiction that followed it, shifting the focus "from historical, cultural and sociological analysis to penetrating social comment and social satire."s

Works in Critical Context

Soyinka's work is frequently described as demanding but rewarding reading. Although his plays are widely praised, they are seldom performed, especially outside of Africa. Their dancing and speech, reminiscent of the classical Greek chorus, are unfamiliar and difficult for non-African actors to master. However, when the Swedish Academy awarded Soyinka the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, its members singled out *Death and the King's Horseman* and *A Dance of the Forests* as "evidence that Soyinka is 'one of the finest poetical playwrights that have written in English,'" reports Stanley Meisler. Thomas Hayes summarizes Soyinka's importance: "His drama and fiction have challenged the West to broaden its aesthetic and accept African standards of art and literature. His personal and political life have challenged Africa to embrace the truly democratic values of the African tribe and reject the tyranny of power practiced on the continent by its colonizers and by many of its modern rulers."

The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka

The Man Died is "the most important work that has been written about the Biafran war," believes Charles Larson. "The Man Died is not so much the story of Wole Soyinka's own temporary death during the Nigerian Civil War but a personified account of Nigeria's fall from sanity, documented by one of the country's leading intellectuals," Larson asserts. Gerald Weales suggests that the political content of *The Man Died* is less fascinating than "the notes that deal with prison life. . . . They are vehicles to carry the author's shifting states of mind, to convey the real subject matter of the book; the author's attempt to survive as a man, and as a mind." Larson, however, underlines the book's political impact, noting that, ironically, "Soyinka, who was placed in solitary confinement so that he wouldn't embarrass the government, was writing work after work." A *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer characterizes *The Man Died* as "a damning indictment of what Mr. Soyinka sees as the iniquities of wartime Nigeria and the criminal tyranny of its administration in peacetime."

Aké: The Years of Childhood Soyinka's account of his first ten years stands as "a classic of childhood memoirs wherever and whenever produced," states James Olney. "This is the ideal circle of autobiography at its best. It is what makes *Aké*, amidst its other virtues, the best introduction available to the work of one of the liveliest, most exciting writers in the world today." John Leonard writes, "Most of *Aké* charms; that was Mr. Soyinka's intention. The last fifty pages, however, inspire and confound; they are transcendent."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Much of Wole Soyinka's work attacks corrupt societies and regimes. Here are several other works that examine public corruption and its effects:

Imelda, Steel Butterfly of the Philippines (1988), a biography by Katherine W. Ellison. This work tells the story of Imelda Marcos, former First Lady of the Philippines, who, accused of racketeering and fraud in 1990, was acquitted of thirty-two counts of money laundering in 2008.

The Last King of Scotland (2006), a movie directed by Kevin Macdonald. Forrest Whitaker won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in this movie, which is based on the novel of the same name by Giles Foden.

A Russian Diary: A Journalist's Final Account of Life, Corruption, and Death in Putin's Russia (2007), a published diary by Anna Politkovskaya. This work documents eighteen months of increasing power and corruption within Russian president Vladimir Putin's government; the author was murdered in 2006.

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (2005), a film directed by Alex Gibney. This critically acclaimed documentary details the collapse of the energy giant Enron, a corporate scandal in which investors and employees lost everything while company executives walked away with millions.

Responses to Literature

1. Read part of A. R. Ammons's long poem *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965), which he typed on long, narrow paper. How does the paper's shape affect the work? Discuss writing media in the context of Soyinka's *The Man Died*. How do you think the work would be different if Soyinka had been given access to books and paper while in prison?
2. Discuss Soyinka's blend of European and African cultural elements in his work.
3. Citing specific examples from the text, analyze examples of fantasy and satire in *A Dance of the Forests*.
4. Discuss the style and format of *The Interpreters*. Describe your emotional reaction(s) to the text.

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❏ Muriel Spark

BORN: 1918, *Edinburgh, Scotland*

DIED: 2006, *Florence, Italy*

NATIONALITY: *Scottish*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction, poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Ballad of Peckham Rye (1960)

The Bachelors (1960)

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961)

The Mandelbaum Gate (1965)

Overview

Dame Muriel Spark found her writing voice late in life, yet within a short time established herself as a competent biographer, literary critic, and poet, and made her name as a fiction author with great universal appeal. In almost fifty years, Spark produced almost fifty volumes of writing, including several award-winning masterworks.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Edinburgh Youth Muriel Sarah Camberg was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on February 1, 1918, to a Jewish English father and an Anglican mother. She was educated at James Gillespie's High School for Girls, and from 1934 to 1935 studied commercial correspondence and writing at Heriot-Watt College. After teaching English for a short time, she took a job as a secretary in a department store.

Seven-Year Marriage She married Sidney Oswald Spark in September of 1937 and soon followed her husband to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where she stayed for seven years. The Sparks' son, Robin, was born in July



Muriel Spark *Evening Standard* / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

1938, but the family would not last. Muriel determined her husband was a manic depressive, especially based on his tendency toward violent outbursts, and in 1940 left him and her son. Returning to the United Kingdom, Spark worked in the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office during World War II. Though she left Robin behind with his father, and though Robin returned to the United Kingdom with his father and was then raised by his maternal grandparents in Scotland, Spark consistently sent money to support him and would do so for the next forty years, helping him as he struggled as an artist in his own right.

After a period as general secretary of the Poetry Society from 1947 to 1949, serving as the editor of *Poetry Review* in 1949, and founding the short-lived literary magazine *Forum*, Spark worked as a part-time editor for Peter Owen Ltd. By this time, she had already achieved some recognition as a critic, biographer, and poet when she made her first attempt at fiction, the short story "The Seraph and the Zambesi." She entered the story in a 1951 Christmas writing contest sponsored by the *London Observer* and not only won top honors but attracted a great deal of attention for the piece's unconventional treatment of the Christmas theme. Several other stories set in Africa and England followed, and Spark's successes

in fiction soon began to overshadow those in criticism and poetry.

Religious Conversion While working in the areas of nonfiction, Spark had begun to undergo a crisis of faith. During this time of great individual evaluation, she received financial and psychological assistance from Graham Greene, also a Roman Catholic convert, and was eventually converted herself, a move that had significant influence on her novels. Spark published *The Comforters* in 1957 and followed that with *Robinson* in 1958, the same year she authored her first short-story collection, *The Go-Away Bird and Other Stories*. In this same period she began writing radio plays, with *The Party Through the Wall* in 1957, *The Interview* in 1958, and *The Dry River Bed* in 1959.

Literary Success It was in 1959 that Spark had her first major success, *Memento Mori*. She followed this with *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* in 1960, *The Bachelors* (1960), and *Voices at Play* (1961). Spark also published the novel generally regarded as her masterwork, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), which subsequently was made into a play, a film, and a six-part television adaptation.

In 1962, Spark's sole venture into theater, *Doctors of Philosophy*, was presented in London and was not a resounding success. She returned to fiction and over the next decade wrote eight more works, novels and short stories, among them such successful titles as *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), which was awarded both the Yorkshire Post Book of the Year award in 1965, and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1966.

Continued Success With five awards to her name already, in 1973 Sharp published *The Abbess of Crewe*, a work alive with paradox. A well-received book, it too went on to be filmed in 1976 under the title *Nasty Habits*. Then came seven more novels and two short-story collections, along with three more book awards as well as the honor Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, which France bestowed upon Spark in 1988. Also in 1988, however, was an event that got as much publicity as her work. Spark had for many years had a difficult relationship with her estranged son. That year, however, Robin declared that because he was Jewish he wished to petition for his late maternal grandmother to be recognized as Jewish, as well. A devout Catholic for over three decades, Spark responded by calling her son a publicity seeker, only making this latest attempt to further his typically weak career as an artist.

Partly to correct critical misunderstandings and inaccuracies about her life, as well as to put together the facts about her life and her fiction, in 1993 Spark published *Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography*. She then returned to the novel form in 1997 with *Reality and Dreams*. Her twentieth novel, it explored the boundaries and connections between realities and dreams. She continued with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Spark's famous contemporaries include:

Iris Murdoch (1919–1999): Irish novelist famous for such works as *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Green Knight* (1993).

Tadahiko Hayashi (1918–1990): Japanese photographer best known for his portraiture and documentary work on a wide range of subjects, from postwar Japan to Miss Universe contender trips through America.

Chaim Herzog (1918–1997): Soldier of the British Army and the Israel Defense Forces who served as the sixth president of Israel from 1983 to 1993.

John Updike (1932–): Award-winning novelist, essayist, and literary critic often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

the novel form in 2000 with *Aiding and Abetting*. In 2001, a limited edition of twenty-six copies of *A Hundred and Eleven Years Without a Chauffeur* was published by Colophon Press, each copy signed and inscribed with a passage and a letter of the alphabet by Spark. Spark's final novel was *The Finishing School* (2004).

Final Word In April 2006, the eighty-eight-year-old author, who had been made Dame Muriel Spark by the Order of the British Empire in 1993, died in Florence, Italy. When she had moved to Rome from New York City in the late sixties, Spark met artist and sculptor Penelope Jardine. In the early seventies, the two moved into a farmhouse in Tuscany, where they lived together—amid the rumors—until Spark's death. In her will, filed in an Italian court, Spark left her entire estate worth several million to Jardine.

Works in Literary Context

Emphasis on Character Relationships In much of Spark's work, her storylines are mischief-filled “fun-house plots, full of trapdoors, abrupt apparitions, and smartly clicking secret panels,” as fellow author John Updike described them in a *New Yorker* article. These plots involve the often bizarre behavior of people belonging to a small, select group: elderly men and women linked by long-standing personal relationships in *Memento Mori*; unmarried male and female residents of the same London district in *The Bachelors*; and students and teachers at a Scottish girls' school in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

In terms of setting, the author usually chooses to locate her modern morality tales in upper-class urban

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also succeeded in exploring, in an often humorous way, important human themes of identity, class, religion, and personal philosophy:

Brideshead Revisited (1945), a novel by Evelyn Waugh.

Waugh portrays the twilight of the British aristocracy in this melancholy novel.

Manservant and Maidservant (1947), a novel by Ivy

Compton-Burnett. In this novel, English author Compton-Burnett pokes fun at the “master” of a British household and his underlings.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960), a film directed by Karel Reisz. This film, based on the 1958 novel by Alan Sillitoe, details the lives of some young members of the working class in Nottingham, England.

The World of Malgudi (2000), a collection of short novels by R. K. Narayan. In this collection of four short novels, the author examines modern Indian life from a variety of perspectives.

areas of England or Italy, and in the tradition of the intellectual novelist, avoids florid descriptions of the physical world, preferring instead to concentrate on dialogue, on “the play of ideas and experiences upon the mind, and the interplay of minds upon each other,” writes scholar Joseph Hynes. The “action” in these stories springs from the elaborate ties—of blood, marriage, friendship—Spark concocts these between the members of each group, and her characterizations are quick, sharp, and concise.

Moral Wisdom Spark’s themes do not seem to reflect her strong religious and moral preoccupations. They are instead, as the Catholic Book Club defined them when granting her the 2001 Campion Award, “universal to the human condition—good and evil, honor and duplicity, self-aggrandizement and self-pity and courage amid poverty.” Such themes are carried by characters who embody what critic George Stade called “traditional moral wisdom” (in the case of Miss Jean Brodie) as they experience what critic *Washington Post Book World*’s Nina King and others pointed out as “the mysteries of evil and suffering, destiny and predestination, guilt and intention” (in the case of Margaret in *Symposium*, 1990). All this Spark masterfully delivered in what Nina King also called an “exquisitely balanced tone [that] proves that the richest comedy is that which explores the darkest themes.”

Influences Spark’s crisis of faith in the early fifties was strongly influenced by the writings of Newman, the nineteenth-century Anglican clergyman who became a convert to Roman Catholicism and eventually a cardinal in

that faith. Her conversion was also moved along by the financial and moral support from author Graham Greene, also a Roman Catholic convert. As she struggled the first three years to sort out the aesthetic, psychological, and religious questions raised by her conversion to Catholicism and her attempt at writing longer fiction, her efforts led to much speculation. Many scholars and critics have approached her work by focusing on the extent to which her Catholicism influenced her writing. Just as many more have considered her writing, especially her earlier work, in terms of how it has impacted readers and writers to follow, with her combined new faith and theory of the novel and the novelist as godlike creation authored by a godlike, omniscient and omnipotent being.

Works in Critical Context

Critical opinion has been generally kind, if not generous, to Spark’s work for four decades. Literary scholar Duncan Fallowell spoke for many when he observed, “She is the master, and sometimes mistress, of an attractive, cynical worldliness which is not shallow.” Critic Rebecca Abrams of the *New Statesman* concluded that the “trademark” of all Spark’s fiction, both novels and short stories, “is its lightness, the way it seems almost to shrug its shoulders at the people and lives it so piercingly brings to life.” Yet, as critic Barbara Grizzuti Harrison of the *New York Times Book Review* reminded readers, Spark is at heart “a profoundly serious comic writer whose wit advances, never undermines or diminishes her ideas.”

Symposium The 1990 best-seller *Symposium* centers on Margaret Demien, a character whose wealthy mother-in-law dies while Margaret is away at a dinner party. Appearing to all as virtuous at first, Margaret openly expresses a more sinister intent. She is also connected to other mysterious deaths, so that when the guests receive news of the older woman’s death, Margaret is a suspect. Peter Parker commented in the *Lit-tener*, “This is a marvelous premise for a novel, and, as one would expect, Spark makes the most of opportunities for dark comedy.” As Parker continues to explain, “The book’s epigraphs . . . supply hints both of the book’s resolution and of Spark’s fictional method.” The epigraphs also provide clues about the five couples at the dinner party, that in some way represent the varieties of love Plato defined.

Responses to Literature

1. Focus on a favorite Spark character. Consider how he or she copes, survives, and lives through a particular experience. Imagine how that character would advise you if you had to deal with a similar issue. Describe the scenario and present the advice in first person, as the direct voice of the character you have selected.
2. Spark was one of several British writers who became devout Christians well into adulthood. Evelyn

Waugh, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot also turned to Christianity later in life. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about these writers. Do you think they have anything in common with Spark? Why do you think religion came to play an important part in their lives?

3. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is set in an all-girls school. While single-sex education was common before the mid-twentieth century, it came under fire as inherently sexist in the 1960s and subsequent decades. Recently, however, some educators and parent groups have renewed their support for single-sex schools. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the controversy surrounding single-sex education. Write a brief paper outlining your position on the issue.

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Stephen Spender

BORN: 1909, London

DIED: 1995, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

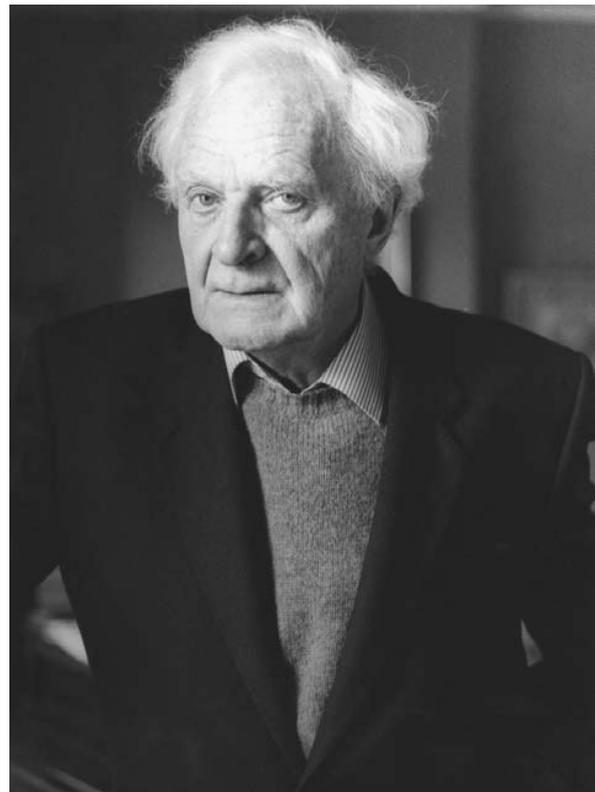
Poems (1933)

Vienna (1934)

The Still Centre (1939)

World within World (1951)

The Struggle of the Modern (1963)



Stephen Spender Spender, Stephen, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Stephen Spender is best known as a member of the generation of British poets who came to prominence in the 1930s known as the Oxford Poets. Like others in the group, Spender wrote with a social and political consciousness, reflecting such turbulent events as the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, and World War II. After the Second World War, Spender produced less poetry and concentrated on critical and autobiographical writing, editing, and lecturing at universities in England and the United States.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Loss of Parents Stephen Harold Spender was born February 28, 1909, in London, to Harold Spender, a liberal political journalist, and his wife, Violet Hilda, an invalid who painted and wrote poetry. Both parents died while Spender was still an adolescent. The Spender family was of mixed German, Jewish, and English origin. Spender did not discover his Jewish ancestry until he was sixteen. The discovery confirmed his lifelong sense of himself as an outsider.

From Oxford to Weimar Germany After transferring from a boarding school to University College School in Hampstead, Spender went to University College at Oxford. At Oxford in the late 1920s, Spender felt isolated, despite developing a close friendship with W. H. Auden. Spender printed his first volume of poetry, *Nine Experiments: Being Poems Written at the Age of Eighteen* (1928), on his own handpress. He later destroyed copies of his early efforts, but several of the poems he wrote between 1928 and 1930 would appear in his volume *Poems* published in 1933.

In the summer of 1930, before his senior year, Spender left Oxford without a degree and followed fellow writer Christopher Isherwood to Germany. Sexual liberation, artistic rebellion, and social unrest were prevalent in the last years of the Weimar Republic. (After the end of World War I, the defeated Germany was forced to give up its colonies and territories won in the Franco-Prussian War, nearly totally disarm, and pay reparations. Germany also became a republic, governed under the liberal Weimar constitution. Though Germany was a liberal country in this period, it also faced serious economic and social dislocations and, by the early 1930s, an economic depression.) There, Spender began writing a novel—*The Temple*, which would not be published until 1988—about a young Englishman in Germany, enjoying his youth, but concerned about the rising Nazi movement.

Rise of Hitler Affects Poems In 1933, Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party came to power. A fascist, Hitler converted the republic into a dictatorship, consolidated Germany's position at home and abroad, and began a military expansion. Like many young English intellectuals, Spender watched with horror the onset of fascism in both Berlin and Vienna. Spender's first important volume, *Poems*, was published in 1933. This collection exemplifies the social and political concerns of the time and triggered Spender's career. He became recognized as a major poet and literary celebrity. The following year, Spender produced *Vienna* (1934), a long poem that blends details of the fascist suppression of socialist insurgency in Austria with his own personal conflicts.

Spender and the 1930s The generation that grew up between the two world wars was acutely aware of the rupture World War I had created in European life. Seeing the established world crumbling around them, the writers of the period sought to create a new reality to replace a mindset that appeared obsolete. Spender, an ardent idealist, briefly joined the Communist Party, thinking it represented a viable alternative to fascism. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Spender went to assist the International Brigades that had formed to fight the fascist forces of General Francisco Franco in that country. As a pacifist, however, he did not partake in the armed struggle, which ended with Franco firmly in power. In 1937, Spender coedited a volume of "poems for Spain."

Spender also wrote outside of poetry in his most prolific decade, the 1930s. His first book of prose was *The Destructive Element* (1935), a work of literary criticism on such authors as Henry James, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence. A book of short stories, *The Burning Cactus* (1936), is reminiscent of Lawrence in its intense, suppressed emotion. He also authored a five-act, antifascist verse drama, *Trial of a Judge* (1938). His only full-length novel, *The Backward Son* (1940), is a thinly disguised autobiographical account of English boarding school life, which he hated.

His poetry continued to be significant as well. *The Still Centre* (1939) is based on Spender's experiences in Spain and records his growing detachment from communism. The Spanish Civil War poems resemble the World War I poetry of Wilfred Owen in their rejection of the heroic idea of war. *The Still Centre* is a key volume in Spender's poetic career because, in its pages, Spender turns from public, political verse back to his private, personal attempt to convey the "felt truth" of reality.

From Poetry to Prose In 1939, Spender and Cyril Connolly became coeditors of a literary magazine, *Horizon*. Barred from military service for health reasons during World War II (which broke out when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, compelling both Britain and France to declare war), Spender served in the London Auxiliary Fire Service. He published two poetry collections during the war. Poetry occupied a lesser place in his postwar career, as he turned increasingly to literary criticism, political and historical works, translations, and autobiography. During the 1950s and 1960s, he held visiting professorships at several prestigious American and English universities and traveled the world as a cultural ambassador with the United Nations' cultural organization UNESCO. From 1970 to 1977, he was an English professor at University College, London.

Postwar Life Spender contributed to *The God That Failed* (1949), an essay collection by disillusioned ex-Communists, including Arthur Koestler, André Gide, and Richard Wright. Spender and Irving Kristol cofounded a transatlantic, anticommunist periodical called *Encounter* in 1953. He resigned after fourteen years as an editor when he discovered that the publication was covertly funded by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Spender wrote several volumes of criticism in his later career, including *The Creative Element* (1953), a companion piece to his earlier *The Destructive Element*. In *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963), Spender portrays literary modernism as an endeavor to reconcile the past and the present, and heal the divide between art and life. He also produced several volumes of autobiography, journals, and collected letters, most notably the 1951 memoir *World within World*, a valuable document of literary and cultural history that re-creates the social and political atmosphere of the 1930s. This book exemplifies

the commitment to honesty and candor of an author who claimed that all of his art is essentially autobiographical. At its publication, the book created a stir for Spender's frank disclosure of a homosexual relationship he had before his first marriage in 1936.

Accused Author of Plagiarism Spender continued to write poems and nonfiction throughout his life, though his poems were published more sporadically. Later collections include *The Generous Days* (1969). In 1994, a year before his death, Spender sued American author David Leavitt for plagiarism, alleging that Leavitt had modeled his novel *While England Sleeps* on events from Spender's life. Leavitt made editorial changes and the case was settled. Spender died in London on July 16, 1995.

Works in Literary Context

Spender's poetics reflect three major influences. The first is the Romantic poets; Spender's ethereal lyricism and youthful idealism made him something of a twentieth-century Percy Bysshe Shelley. A second influence comes from the modernists of the generation preceding his, such as Rainer Maria Rilke, W. B. Yeats, and, especially, D. H. Lawrence. Lastly, his Oxford cohorts, primarily Auden and Isherwood, shaped his understanding of the poet's role in commenting on society.

The so-called "Auden generation" reacted against the chilly esotericism of T. S. Eliot, insisting that poetry should be clear, accessible, and engaged with the issues of the day. Yet Spender's career exemplifies the split between personal and political life his generation felt. Even while they were transforming British letters with their brazenly political verse, at some level Spender and his colleagues felt divided between the artistic muse and the urge to confront fascism. The struggle to connect outer and inner reality is, in fact, Spender's overarching theme.

The "Pylon Poets" Spender's name is invariably associated with that of W. H. Auden, perhaps the most famous poet of the thirties, whose renown surpassed Spender's. The two poets were dissimilar in many ways, but they burst upon the literary scene at the same time and earned the collective name of the "pylon poets." The term refers specifically to "The Pylons," a poem by Spender, which many critics described as typical of the Auden generation: images of the ugliest features of the urban-industrial landscape reflecting political and social concerns. This felt obligation constrained the spontaneous lyricism of Spender's early verse.

Style Critics have called the Auden group politically radical, yet formally conservative. Spender was slow to break free of formal poetic conventions. He preferred truncated, sonnetlike structures. Yet as he developed, he used less rhyme or meter and drifted toward free verse. The sound of his poems is distinctive, although he uses

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Spender's famous contemporaries include:

W. H. Auden (1907–1973): This British American poet was the most celebrated member of the Oxford Poets. His poetry centers on moral issues and evidences strong political, social, and psychological orientations. Auden's books include *The Orators: An English Study* (1932).

Albert Camus (1913–1960): This leading French Algerian author and philosopher won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957. He explores his absurdist/existentialist beliefs in the essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942).

Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986): This British American novelist and playwright was best known for his stories of Weimar Germany. Such stories were later adapted for the play *I Am a Camera* (1951), by John Van Druten, and the stage musical *Cabaret* (1966), by Joe Masteroff, Fred Ebb, and John Kander.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): This Chilean poet and Communist politician was also the Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1971. His poetry collections include *Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair* (1924).

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): This popular American Nobel Prize-winning novelist wrote such classics as *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The latter won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940.

few seductive aural techniques, such as alliteration, assonance, full or near rhyme, or regular rhythms. The imagery, though painterly, often lacks concreteness. One weakness of his poetry is a tendency toward rhetorical abstraction.

Inner and Outer The autobiographical impulse is obvious in Spender's poetry. Its obsessive theme is an introspective search for a valid, sustaining faith, a coherent approach to uniting the self with the world, the personal with the political. In *The Destructive Element*, Spender argues that the prose of Lawrence successfully balances the inner and outer worlds. Spender sought to emulate Lawrence in his poetry. This search for a united, integrated self is notable in *The Still Centre*, especially in the poem "Darkness and Light." The poem reflects the ambivalence and conflict between opposites that has so bedeviled Spender's life; they are reconciled within the poem, but not in life.

Influence As a leading poet of the twentieth century, Spender influenced poets that followed him, especially through the idealism that runs through his poems. As a lionized writer, a respected critic, an important player in cultural politics, and a university lecturer, he was much read, observed, respected, and emulated by practicing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Spender's political poetry reflects the social upheaval of the 1930s, as do these other key literary works from that decade.

Brave New World (1932), a novel by Aldous Huxley. The dystopian classic is about a society happily tranquilized by government-issued drugs.

The U.S.A. Trilogy (1930, 1932, 1936), novels by John Dos Passos. These three experimental novels reflect a pessimistic view of American life in the early twentieth century.

Nausea (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this philosophical work, the overwhelming nausea experienced by the protagonist is a clue to the nature of existence.

Homage to Catalonia (1938), a nonfiction book by George Orwell. A first-person account of the Spanish Civil War was written by one of England's leading political journalists and a well-known novelist in his own right.

"September 1, 1939" (1939), a poem by W. H. Auden. This poem was written upon the outbreak of World War II. The poet later disavowed this work, with its famous exhortation, "We must love one another or die."

poets. Dylan Thomas found licenses for his subjectivity in Spender's exploration of the "I." Spender also encouraged and helped Thomas. Philip Larkin, Charles Tomlinson, Ted Hughes, and Seamus Heaney were also believed to be affected by Spender's work. Some critics believed that his autobiography and criticism had more influence on later authors as they revealed what it was like to be a poet in Britain in the 1930s.

Works in Critical Context

Spender's verse is admired for its lyrical transcendence and powerful imagery. However, some deride his poetry for its excessive idealism. The acclaim he earned as a young man, and the romantic image he developed in the 1930s, cast a shadow over the remainder of his career—as did the far greater acclaim that went to his friend Auden. After his first success with the 1933 *Poems*, Spender showed promise of becoming one of the century's greatest poets. Some critics, surveying his career as a whole, contend that he is an overrated poet who failed to realize his potential.

Spender published some below-average volumes of poetry, and response to his critical prose has been decidedly mixed. Critic V. S. Pritchett observes that Spender's "insights are better than his arguments and he is best when he proceeds, as we would expect a poet to do, by vision." Critics have taken more kindly to his autobiographical prose, especially to *World within World*. The

relentless, public self-examination found in his body of work is, for some, his greatest contribution to twentieth-century letters.

Critics note that Spender's poetic and political attitudes, developed in the 1930s, continued to influence the poet throughout his life. Over time, Spender became increasingly identified with that decade, as it became clear that none of his subsequent writing would surpass the vividness of his early work. By the end of the 1950s, his work had fallen out of fashion. The common perception of Spender was that he was a figure from the past. His postwar drift from political radicalism to mainstream liberalism, and his years as an international spokesman for free speech, gradually mellowed his reputation. After the passage of still more time, Spender now appears as a symbol of the decade he helped to define.

The Generous Days One of Spender's last collections of poetry, *The Generous Days* was his first in two decades when it was published in 1969. Critics gave the collection mixed reviews. In *Books and Bookmen*, Derek Stanford wrote "there are some half dozen pieces so right, or true, or personally authentic (the criterion of being *well-written* is not one we think of applying to Spender) that the book is justified by their existence." Other critics, like Roy Fuller in *London Magazine*, found more to like in the poems. Fuller wrote, "The tenderness of feeling for family life, the eye for nature and the rooting out of the precise word to express it, the poetic explosion—all these *are* to be found and sustain the book's interest."

Responses to Literature

1. In an essay, address the following question: What similarities do you identify between Spender's poetry and that of Percy Bysshe Shelley, with whom he is sometimes compared?
2. Citing two or more of Spender's works, explore in a paper how Spender addresses the theme of integrating the self with the wider world.
3. In a chart, list the images and allusions in *Vienna* and discuss how the poet sees the world.
4. Research the role of antifascist volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. In a paper, contrast the account of the war with the war images in Spender's poems and discuss how the poet views the broad significance of the fight.
5. In a paper, write about the relationship between personal and political expression in poetry, providing a careful reading of one or several of Spender's early poems.

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Edmund Spenser

BORN: c.1552, London

DIED: 1599, London

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Shepherdes Calender (1579)

The Faerie Queene (1590, 1596)

“Amoretti” and “Epithalamion” (1595)

Prothalamion (1596)

A View of the Present State of Ireland (1633)

Overview

English poet Edmund Spenser was a man of his times, and his work reflects the religious, humanistic, and nationalistic ideals of Elizabethan England. His contributions to English literature—in the form of an enlarged poetic vocabulary, a flexible verse style, and a rich fusing of the philosophic and literary currents of the English Renaissance—make him one of the most influential poets



Edmund Spenser Spenser, Edmund, drawing.

of the English language, and perhaps the single most important poet of the of the sixteenth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Educated at Cambridge Spenser, born in London in or about 1552, was the son of a poor tailor. His early schooling took place at the Merchant Tailors’ Free School, where he received an education considered quite progressive by the standards of the day. He studied a humanist curriculum that included the study of English language and literature—an unusual innovation at the time. Spenser excelled in the study of languages in school and in 1569 went to Cambridge University. He studied Italian, French, Latin, and Greek; he read widely in classical and modern literature, and he wrote some Latin verse.

Position of Influence After completing his studies, Spenser went to the district of Lancashire where he increased his familiarity with local dialects. Shortly after leaving the university, Spenser also spent time in the service of the highly influential Earl of Leicester (Robert Dudley), who was regarded as the head of the Puritan faction of the government. By this time, Elizabeth I was England’s ruler, and the earl was her favorite for many

years. With the power he wielded at court, the Leicester-led Puritan party desired war with Spain. Puritans wanted to remain with the dominant Church of England—formed by Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII, after breaking with the Roman Catholic Church—but wanted it to be further reformed and distanced from its Catholic roots.

Spenser may have traveled as an envoy for Leicester to Ireland, Spain, France, and Italy. By 1579, he was back in London, and he was much involved in discussions about English language and literature. Probably at this time Spenser made the acquaintance of Sir Philip Sidney, the poet and courtier.

Published First Work Spenser’s first published work was *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579), which he dedicated to Sidney. This poem, consisting of twelve pastoral eclogues (or conversations between highly idealized shepherds), is full of references to the various political and religious problems of this complex period in British history as various Protestant factions as well as remaining Catholics fought for power and influence. Spenser’s time in London was also full of other literary projects, and he was already at work on what would become his greatest achievement, *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596).

Meanwhile, he was also studying law and hoping to secure a position in the civil or diplomatic service. His efforts were rewarded in 1580, when, through the influence of the Earl of Leicester, he was named secretary to Lord Grey, the new Lord Deputy of Ireland. Spenser accompanied Grey to Dublin, and Ireland was to remain Spenser’s home for the rest of his life. At this time, the whole of Ireland was controlled by Great Britain. Under the rule of Queen Mary I, Elizabeth’s elder sister, the British began wholesale confiscations of Irish land and large plantations of English colonists were formed. This practice continued under Elizabeth and several of her successors.

Completed Part of The Faerie Queen By 1589, three of the seven cantos of *The Faerie Queene* were complete. When Sir Walter Raleigh visited the poet that year, he was so impressed with the poet’s work that he took Spenser with him back to England, where the cantos were published with an elaborate dedication to Queen Elizabeth (the “Faerie Queene” of the title). Spenser’s ambition was to write the great English epic. His plan was to compose twelve cantos, each concerned with one of the twelve moral virtues as classified by Greek philosopher Aristotle. Each of these virtues was to be embodied by a knight. Thus, the poem would combine elements of a chivalric romance, a handbook of manners and morals, and an epic poem about the history and character of a nation. The poem can also be read in its historical context as an allegory about the struggle between the Protestant traditions of England and the many threats posed by England’s Roman Catholic neighbors.

The publication of the first three cantos of *The Faerie Queene* met with much acclaim, but in courtly circles

Spenser was still an insignificant figure without an official profession. In 1591, he returned to Ireland, famous but disappointed. His mood at the time may have been expressed by the title of a collection of minor poems he prepared at the time, *Complaints: Sundry Small Poems of the World’s Vanity* (1591).

Poems Inspired by Marriage Back in Ireland, Spenser wrote the greater part of *Colin Clouts come home againe* (1595), an idealized poetic autobiography dedicated to Raleigh. It is another allegorical pastoral that recounts Spenser’s reception in London and his impressions (mostly negative) of courtly life. Meanwhile, Spenser was courting Elizabeth Boyle, an Anglo-Irish woman of a well-connected family. They were married on June 11, 1594.

His sonnet sequence “Amoretti” and his “Epithalamion” (both 1595) together form an imaginatively enhanced poetic chronicle of his courtship and marriage. Some of the “Amoretti” sonnets were probably written earlier, but Spenser intended this collection to represent the fluctuations and the emotions of his love for his wife. The “Epithalamion” is generally acknowledged to rank among the greatest love poems in English. The poem is ingeniously constructed with twenty-four stanzas to represent the twenty-four hours of the wedding day, with many other more subtle parallels.

Named Sheriff of Cork In 1595, Spenser returned to London and stayed for more than a year. He published three more cantos of *The Faerie Queene* and several other works, including his *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1633), a prose tract in which he defended the policies of his earlier patron, Lord Grey, in dealing with rebellious Irish subjects and reforming their government. Spenser eventually did receive his long-awaited government position when he was named sheriff of the Irish county of Cork in 1598. He had hardly taken control of that office when a local political revolt broke out. Spenser’s home was burned, and he was forced to flee Cork with his family, which now included four young children.

In December, the provincial governor of Ireland sent Spenser as a messenger to Queen Elizabeth. He arrived in the capital at the end of 1598, weakened by the hardships of the preceding months. Spenser presented his messages to the queen, together with a personal statement of his position on the Irish situation. Soon after his arrival he became ill and died on January 16, 1599.

Works in Literary Context

Spenser was a product of the Renaissance (a word that means “rebirth”), an outburst of artistic and intellectual activity that began around the late fifteenth century, and greatly influenced by its ideas and ideals. One of the results of a confluence of money, reform, exploration, and a revived spirit to *carpe diem* (“seize the day”) at this time was a cultural movement known as humanism. Humanism shifted the emphasis from the afterlife to *this*

life. The focus was on man in the world, engaged in his civic duty and doing many things well, from poetry to warfare (the “Renaissance Man” ideal).

Humanism Spenser was one of the earliest English Renaissance poets to explore humanist ideas for everything they could contribute to English language and poetry. He was close with the greatest humanists of Elizabeth’s court, including the courtier/poet Philip Sidney and the explorer Walter Raleigh. But Spenser was the first to attempt to pull various strands of humanist thought together into a single poem that would combine the best of the past with the controversies and challenges of the present, capturing it all in an epic structure that would assure its permanence for the future.

The Faerie Queene borrows from classical philosophy a vision of love and beauty that operates in parallel harmony on both the human and divine levels. It also shares the classical values of a disciplined analysis of morals and personal responsibility. What Spenser brings to *The Faerie Queene* from his own time is a strong Protestant sensibility, making all of his heroes embody good Calvinist or Anglican traits and his villains represent the lies of Roman Catholicism. *The Faerie Queene* is therefore a perfect example of the fusion of classical and Christian ideals that is central to Renaissance humanism.

Poetic Language *The Faerie Queene* and *The Shepherdes Calender* are interesting humanist texts because of their distinctive use of poetic language. Spenser was a student of classical and European languages, and his study was unusual for also including the history of the English language. It had long been assumed that literature written for the ages must be written in Latin, and that if English were to be used, it should certainly avoid unrefined regional dialects that only a limited number of people would understand.

Spenser believed that the English language and the structures of folksongs were capable of poetry on the highest level, and he took a nationalistic pride in the achievement of such medieval poets as Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower. He felt that English (including its regional dialects) had the ability to dignify great poetry, just as great poetry can in turn dignify the evolving language. The unusual and archaic spellings of Spenser’s works may seem awkward to modern readers, but in Spenser’s day, they were a bold, scholarly, and even patriotic assertion of the poetic capabilities of English speech—especially when used for the most dignified classical form of them all, the epic.

Influence In his own time, Spenser exerted an influence on English culture that rivaled that of any poet in the language. Such contemporaries as Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, and Thomas Lodge were beginning to imitate *The Faerie Queene* and *The Shepherdes Calender*, and Spenser’s influence continued to grow among writers of the seventeenth century such as Ben Jonson and John

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Spenser’s famous contemporaries include:

John Webster (c. 1580–1625): An English dramatist, Webster was popular for his tragedies about bloody revenge stories. While plays such as *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) are not nearly as sophisticated as Shakespeare’s tragedies, they are often seen as comparable in their energy and poetic lyricism.

Tomás Luis de Victoria (c. 1548–1611): A Spanish composer who was quite important in his time in Spain. He was also a priest, and his religious music captures much of the evocative mysticism of the Spanish Catholic church.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English playwright who is widely recognized as one of the greatest poets and dramatists in English literature. Shakespeare was enormously innovative, fusing existing stories and historical materials into plays that remain unsurpassed in the originality of their construction and their emotional impact. His plays include *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) and *Julius Caesar* (1599).

James I (1566–1625): James was the king of England from 1603 to 1625. He was the king of Scotland when Elizabeth I, the queen of England, died without an heir in 1603. His insistence on the “divine right of kings,” or the right of the king to base his personal authority on the will of God, helped to bring about the English Civil War.

Tintoretto (1518–1594), pseudonym of Jacopo Robusti. Tintoretto was one of the most prolific and influential portrait artists in Renaissance Venice. He is famous for his innovations in perspective that give a new dynamism to his paintings of New Testament scenes, including *Crucifixion* (1565) shown from a side angle and *Last Supper* (1592–1594) seen from an upper-diagonal angle.

Milton. Even more striking, however, is the response of writers in the eighteenth century, during which time scores of poets produced literally hundreds of imitations, adaptations, and continuations of Spenser’s works. No other English poet except Milton can claim a greater following among the writers of that period.

By the nineteenth century the flood of imitations in England had narrowed, but it had also grown deeper. Along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, Spenser stood as one of the great English sources of inspiration for the Romantic age, providing in *The Faerie Queene* the quasi-medieval setting, the romance form, the structural patterns, the archaic language, and the mingling of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Spenser made extensive use of allegory, the technique of using abstract ideas and values as named characters. Allegory is an ancient technique that is just as suitable for religious instruction as for biting satire. Here are some other works that use allegory:

A Tale of a Tub (1704), a prose parody by Jonathan Swift.

This allegory satirizes the splits in the Christian Church by representing the main divisions as three brothers: Peter (Catholicism), Jack (Puritans), and Martin (the Anglicans/Lutherans). They fight over a coat that their father left them—symbolic of the Bible that God gives mankind—until it is left in tatters that none of them can use.

Everyman (c. late fifteenth century), a play by an unknown author. This is a “morality play,” a form of allegorical drama authorized by the Catholic Church to teach Bible stories and moral lessons to common people. In this perfect example of the genre, the title character, Everyman, receives a summons from Death, but Good Deeds is the only one of his friends—the others include Fellowship, Kindred, Worldly Goods, Beauty—who can go along with him to the final meeting.

“Young Goodman Brown” (1835), a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this allegory, set in Puritan New England, a young man has his faith tested during a late-night walk in the woods.

natural with the supernatural that became the very stuff of Romanticism. Every one of the major Romantic poets was a serious reader of Spenser’s works. In England, prose writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Charles Lamb, and George MacDonald were deeply touched by Spenser’s work, and in America, where religious sympathies were perhaps closer to Spenser’s own devout brand of Protestantism, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville turned to *The Faerie Queene* for its moral allegory.

Works in Critical Context

From the sixteenth century to the present day, Spenser’s work has maintained a place of distinction in English literature. His masterpiece, *The Faerie Queene*, was very favorably received upon its publication and has remained popular ever since. While *The Shepherdes Calender* was also enthusiastically praised by early critics, its popularity waned by the twentieth century, and it is now considered a minor work. Nonetheless, Spenser’s importance and his impact on the development of English poetry has been judged incalculable. While twenty-first-century critics generally agree with this judgment, much of the more

recent criticism of his work has concentrated on its allegorical aspects and on Spenser’s role as a stylistic innovator.

The Faerie Queene *The Faerie Queene* is a work that elicits strong reactions, both positive and negative. Its length and complexity have daunted many readers. Ben Jonson, who once remarked about *The Faerie Queene* that “Spencers stanzas pleased him not, nor the matter,” nevertheless listed him among the great writers in the language. Francis Thompson has stated flatly that *The Faerie Queene* “is in truth a poem no man can read through save as duty, and in a series of arduous campaigns (so to speak).”

Other critics had more favorable reactions to *The Faerie Queene*. Most critics have focused on the lushness of the poem as its most admirable aspect. In 1910, Edward Dowden described the poem as “a labyrinth of beauty, a forest of old romance in which it is possible to lose oneself more irrecoverably amid the tangled luxury of loveliness than elsewhere in English poetry.”

Responses to Literature

1. Write an essay in which you address these questions: What are the values of heroism seen in the knights of *The Faerie Queene*? How have they been modified from the medieval sources for a Renaissance audience?
2. Does *The Shepherdes Calender* reflect humanist values, or is the pastoral too idealized and nostalgic a form to contain such progressive ideas? Answer in the form of an essay.
3. How does structure reinforce meaning in the “Epi-thalamion”? How are the years, months, days, and hours represented in the form of the stanzas and in the form of the poem overall? Create a presentation with your conclusions.
4. Spenser used archaic and unusual spellings of words in his works to good effect. Can you think of a contemporary writer that plays with spelling, grammar, or form to the same effect? Research a writer that does this and find out why. Could they, like Spenser, be making a statement about language and speech? How so? Be specific in your analysis in your paper.

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Gertrude Stein

BORN: 1874, Pennsylvania

DIED: 1946, France

NATIONALITY: American

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Three Lives (1909)

Tender Buttons (1914)

Geography and Plays (1922)

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933)

The Mother of Us All (1947)

Overview

A controversial figure during her lifetime, Stein is now regarded as a major literary modernist and one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Working against the naturalistic conventions of nineteenth-century fiction, she developed an abstract manner of



Gertrude Stein Stein, Gertrude, 1942, photograph. AP Images.

expression that was a counterpart in language to the work of the postimpressionists and cubists in the visual arts. Stein wrote prolifically in many genres, composing novels, poetry, plays, and literary portraits. Her radical approach to these forms was admired and emulated by other writers of her era and has served as a key inspiration for such postmodernist writers as the French New Novelists.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in California The youngest daughter of a wealthy Jewish family, Stein spent most of her childhood in Oakland, California. Biographers describe her mother as a weak, ineffectual woman and her father as an irrational tyrant; a few have inferred that this family situation is the origin of Stein's lifelong aversion to patriarchal cultural values. Lacking a satisfactory relationship with her parents, she grew very close to her brother Leo.

The Influence of William James When Leo went to Harvard in 1892, Stein enrolled in the all-female Harvard Annex—soon to become Radcliffe College—the following year. Radcliffe, and in particular her favorite professor there, the psychologist William James, proved a decisive influence on her intellectual development. Many of James's teachings, including his theories of perception and personality types, would inspire her own theories of literary aesthetics.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Stein's famous contemporaries include:

- Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): American expatriate writer who prompted Stein to remark upon the “Lost Generation.”
- Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): Famous Spanish artist responsible for cubism and a good friend of Stein.
- Alfred Stieglitz** (1864–1946): One of the first to make photography a respectable art form, Stieglitz is also famous for his marriage to artist Georgia O’Keeffe.
- Guillaume Apollinaire** (1880–1918): French writer and friend of Stein; one of the founders of the surrealist movement.
- William James** (1842–1910): Brother of novelist Henry James; famous American philosopher, psychologist, and doctor; mentor to Gertrude Stein.

Decision to Pursue Psychology With James’s encouragement, Stein decided to become a psychologist and began medical studies at Johns Hopkins University as part of her training. In 1902, however, after several years of study, she grew disaffected with medicine and left the university without completing her degree. In the months that followed, Stein devoted herself to the study of literary classics. Inspired by her reading, particularly the works of Gustave Flaubert and Henry James, she began to write her first novels.

Violating Formal Conventions: The Modernist Movement In 1903, after travels in Europe and Africa, Stein and Leo settled in Paris, where they began to collect work by the new modernist painters and became personally acquainted with many of them, including Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso. The Steins’s apartment became a salon where numerous artists and literary figures, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Marie Laurencin, and Max Jacob, met regularly. Stein particularly enjoyed the company of Picasso, who in 1906 painted a portrait of her that would become one of his best-known works, and she greatly admired his artistic style, as well as that of such other painters as Cézanne and Juan Gris, who experimented in their works with ways of conveying a more profound and truthful vision of reality than that allowed by the naturalistic techniques of the nineteenth century. This revolution in the visual arts encouraged Stein to formulate a literary aesthetic that would, similarly, violate existing formal conventions in order to allow the reader to experience language and ideas in provocative new ways.

A Lifelong Partnership with Alice B. Toklas Leo, however, who was not as enthusiastic about mod-

ernist painting, responded to his sister’s work with scorn, causing her anxiety and self-doubt. Stein found a much more appreciative audience in her friend Alice B. Toklas, a young woman from California who was staying in Paris. In 1909 Stein invited Toklas to live with her, and the women developed a close and affectionate relationship that Stein referred to as a marriage; they remained together for the rest of their lives. Toklas was not only Stein’s devoted friend and lover but a vital part of her literary work, helping her to prepare manuscripts and providing her with much-needed encouragement. Because commercial publishers initially rejected her work, Stein was forced to subsidize the printing of her first books. However, many of her distinguished and influential friends, most notably art patron Mabel Dodge, critic Carl Van Vechten, and poet Edith Sitwell, admired and promoted her writings, and by the outbreak of World War I she was regarded as a central figure in the modernist movement.

Volunteering in World War I Stein and Toklas were sent to Alsace to help provide relief for civilians during World War I. Prior to the war, Alsace was controlled by the German Empire but in 1918, after the Treaty of Versailles was signed, the region reverted to France. So dedicated to the volunteer effort were Stein and Toklas that they sold their last Matisse painting, the once controversial *Woman with a Hat*, in order to take the assignment. At the end of the war, the French recognized their services with the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française.

Lectures at Oxford and Cambridge In 1925, after Stein’s unsuccessful attempt to have Hogarth Press publish *The Making of Americans*, Edith Sitwell, realizing that Stein needed more publicity, arranged for Stein to lecture at Oxford and Cambridge in 1926. By 1930, Stein and Toklas were living a pleasantly domestic life of gardening, preserving, and baking cakes in their summer residence at Bilignin. Basket, the white poodle they had acquired in 1928, had made a dog lover of Stein. “I am I because my little dog knows me,” she would write in 1935: one’s identity was the self that others knew.

Death from Inoperable Cancer On July 19, 1946, Gertrude Stein collapsed on her way to stay at the country house of a friend. She was immediately rushed to the American Hospital at Neuilly, where she was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, but against medical discretion, she ordered the doctors to operate. On July 23 she made her will, then settled in to wait, heavily sedated and in considerable pain, for the operation, scheduled for July 27. She died on the operating table while still under anesthesia. “What is the answer?” she asked Toklas before her death. Toklas remained silent. “In that case what is the question?” Stein added. Toklas herself died on March 7, 1967, and is buried next to Stein in Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

In her innovative uses of language Stein has bridged the gap between conventionalism and experimentalism. A writer who strove to revitalize communication and rescue it from hackneyed clichés, she sought an instinctive use and understanding of language. For Stein language was the only tool capable of advancing social harmony and personal integrity and of negotiating the affiliation between thought and word. Stein's writings were influenced by the work of psychologist William James and Gustave Flaubert, the paintings of Paul Cézanne, and her relationship with her life partner, Alice B. Toklas.

Redefining Rhythm and Rhyme In his introduction to Gertrude Stein's *Four in America* (1947), Thornton Wilder observed:

She knew that she was a difficult and an idiosyncratic author. She pursued her aims, however, with such conviction and intensity that occasionally she forgot that the results could be difficult to others. At such times the achievements she had made in writing, in "telling what she knew" (her most frequent formalization of the aim of writing) had to her the character of self-evident beauty and clarity. A friend, to whom she showed recently completed examples of her poetry, was frequently driven to reply sadly: "But you forget that I don't understand examples of your extreme styles." To this she would reply with a mixture of bewilderment, distress, and exasperation: "But what's the difficulty? Just read the words on the paper. They're in English. Just read them. Be simple and you'll understand these things."

Pieces such as the rhythmic and evocative "Susie Asado" (in *Geography and Plays*), Marjorie Perloff has pointed out, must be read as multiple interlocking and open-ended systems in which each element and system is as important as any other. In "Susie Asado" such systems include the sound patterns of flamenco-dance rhythms, the series of sensual suggestions in phrases such as "the wets," the pun on "sweet tea" or "slips slips hers," and the suggestion of a tea ceremony in a garden—"told tray," "sash," "rare bit of trees," and the Japanese sound of the name Susie Asado.

Stein's radical approach to literature was admired and emulated by other writers of her era, including Ernest Hemingway, Thornton Wilder, and Sherwood Anderson and has served as a key inspiration for such postmodernist writers as the French New Novelists and William H. Gass.

Works in Critical Context

Always a writer's writer, Stein's influence is still growing. The persistent activity of her artistic vision makes her a major writer of this century, comparable in the magnitude of her perception and achievement to her contemporaries Ezra Pound and James Joyce. During Stein's lifetime, however, her innovative writing, often the butt of reviewers' parodies, received little recognition or understanding.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Stein is noted most for her unusual use of language. In most of her works, she strives to alter a phrase's meaning with alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds), assonance (rhyme), or what at first seems like nonsense. Here are some other works that modify and distort language in order to achieve a certain effect on the reader or viewer:

The Cantos (1922), a poem by Ezra Pound. A long poem composed of Chinese characters and chaotic rhythms.

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs. This novel consists of cut-up chapters that can be read in any order and that detail the protagonist's hallucinogenic journey to a place called Interzone.

Eraserhead (1977), a film directed by David Lynch. One of the first cult films, much of the dialogue consists of screaming and incomprehensible dream sequences.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas With *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein proved to her critics that she was capable of writing a relatively conventional, commercially successful work. While most reviewers were charmed by the autobiography's wit and engaging conversational style, not all were pleased. A group of Stein's friends from the art world, including Tristan Tzara and Henri Matisse, published "Testimony against Gertrude Stein," in which they condemned the *Autobiography* as a shallow, distorted portrayal of their lives and work. "Miss Stein understood nothing of what went on around her," protested painter Georges Braque. Stein nevertheless followed the popular success of the *Autobiography* with other memoirs.

Stanzas in Meditation "It came to Gertrude Stein," critic Donald Sutherland points out, that "after all grammar and rhetoric are in themselves actualizations of ideas." In *Stanzas in Meditation*, he adds, "Stein solved the problem of keeping ideas in their primary life, that is of making them events in a subjective continuum of writing . . . about ideas about writing." Sutherland places the poem with Pound's *Cantos* and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* in the "tradition of the long, rambling, discursive poem whose interest and energy are primarily in the movement of the poet's mind writing."

Responses to Literature

1. Read the poem "Susie Asado." Can you find evidence of Japanese influence? Provide examples.
2. Why do you think most of Stein's plays are called "landscape plays"?

Stendhal

- Using your library and/or the Internet, research the cubist and surrealist art movements. What are the main characteristics of each? Do you think Stein's early work reflects more of a cubist style or a surrealist style? Why?
- The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is essentially Stein's own autobiography, written from the point of view of her partner. How does she describe herself as a character in her own memoir? Why do you think she chose to write the book from the point of view of Toklas instead of herself?

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Stendhal

BORN: 1783, Grenoble, France

DIED: 1842, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

On Love (1822)

Armance (1827)

The Red and the Black (1830)



Stendhal *Imagno / Getty Images*

Overview

Among the four most important novelists of nineteenth-century France, Stendhal is noteworthy for the intensity of conscience and feeling in his characters and for beginning his publication of fictional works later in life than did Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Émile Zola. These two facts may have a common cause. Stendhal was usually preoccupied with self-image, and as a result he was by turns timid or brazen, sensitive or cynical, evasive or forthright, never sure of how he was being perceived by others. These aspects of his personality appear in the portraits of his heroes and in his narrative technique, but they may also account for his waiting until age forty-four to publish his first novel. Having filled hundreds of pages in his diaries, and with nonfiction works already in print, he finally had the confidence to risk public scrutiny of a totally creative work. His sense of the craft of fiction developed quickly after the appearance of his novel *Armance* (1827), and his later novels have an important place in the development of literary realism. Stendhal's techniques of handling point of view and psychological portraiture are distinctive and have been much admired by critics and writers alike.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Turbulent Childhood and the Death of His Mother Stendhal was born Marie-Henri Beyle on

January 23, 1783, in Grenoble to Joseph-Chérubin Beyle, a lawyer, and his wife, Caroline-Adélaïde-Henriette. He was the first child in the family to survive, a previous Marie-Henri having died a few days after birth the year before. Later siblings included Pauline, to whom the young Stendhal was very close, and Zénaïde, for whom he professed dislike. Letters written to Pauline after Stendhal had left Grenoble at age sixteen are an important part of his collected correspondence. His mother died in 1790, when he was seven. Thanks to reminiscences in Stendhal's autobiographical works, much is known about his childhood memories. In a famous passage from *Vie de Henry Brulard*, he claims that, before his mother's death, he loved her ardently and desired to cover her body with kisses. In a contrast that has provoked much Freudian criticism, Stendhal never had a good relationship with his father, whom he described as authoritarian, hypocritically conventional, and bourgeois.

French Revolution, Paris, and the Napoleonic Wars During the years of the French Revolution (1789–1799), Stendhal, captivated by rhetoric of liberation from tyranny, followed the events enthusiastically. Though the revolution, aiming as it did at the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a more democratic political system (it succeeded in the former and failed quite thoroughly in the latter), spent the greater part of its energy in Paris, it extended far enough into the countryside for Stendhal's father's royalist sentiments to earn him several months of incarceration. The newly created public school in Grenoble, l'École centrale (Central School), afforded Stendhal much interaction with peers (he undertook a duel using pistols with one schoolmate), and the opportunity to excel at mathematics, which he saw as his ticket out of Grenoble. Indeed, in November of 1799 he arrived in Paris, where he was supposed to sit for the entrance exam given by l'École polytechnique. He did not take the exam, however, and instead benefited from the patronage of a powerful cousin, Pierre Daru, who obtained for him a position as clerk in a government office.

Stendhal longed to write plays and become the Molière of his time, but for the present he was being paid to write official letters for Daru's signature. A few months later Daru sent him, commissioned as a second lieutenant, across the Saint Bernard pass into northern Italy, where Napoléon Bonaparte's Italian campaign was in progress. Having read voraciously during his childhood, Stendhal identified with the heroes of romances by Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso as he endured the perils and rigors of a soldier's lot on the way to Milan. He was enchanted by the soldier's life, and the vivid memories of this experience would find their place in the composition of *The Charterhouse of Parma* nearly forty years later.

Accusations of Plagiarism and the Start of a Literary Career In 1814, Stendhal's first book appeared, bear-

ing the unwieldy title *The Life of Haydn, in a Series of Letters written at Vienna, followed by the Life of Mozart, with Observations on Metastasio, and on the present State of Music in France and Italy, 1817*, and fancifully attributed to a pseudonymous Louis-Alexandre-César Bombet. Sales were less than brisk, and three hundred unsold copies were republished in 1817 with a new binding and a much shorter title, by which the work is known today: *Lives of Haydn, Mozart, and Metastasio*. The pseudonym was all the more appropriate in that Stendhal's book had borrowed to the point of plagiarism from other sources, principally from Giuseppe Carpani's *Le Haydine* (1812). Carpani discovered the theft and complained in the French press, but the matter was never taken seriously. Comparison of Stendhal's text with Carpani's reveals much translation and adaptation but also considerable originality in style, scope, and critical judgment. Having subsidized the printing himself, Stendhal lost money on the venture but found his calling.

French Romanticism From 1821 to 1830, Stendhal lived in Paris, frequenting the salons of Marie-Joseph, Marquis de Lafayette, Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis, Etienne Delécluze, and others. He interacted with the major figures of the Restoration—the return to the throne of the House of Bourbon accompanying Napoléon's fall from power—particularly those with a liberal orientation, and acquired the reputation of being a witty (and sometimes irritating) conversationalist. His friendship with Prosper Mérimée, who published a portrait of Stendhal titled *H. B.* (1850), dates from these years. He met other Romantic writers in the salons and contributed to their movement a pamphlet, *Racine and Shakespeare*, first published in 1823, then revised and enlarged in 1825.

Because of his attachment to the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment, Stendhal stood apart from the early French Romantics, who had a nostalgia for the traditional values of legitimate monarchy and church, which had been stigmatized and even outlawed during the turbulent revolutionary and Napoleonic years. Indeed, the 1823 version of his pamphlet does not seem to have attracted wide attention. But French Romanticism was already in the process of becoming more liberal, as it contended against the reestablished French establishment's condemnation of the movement. The 1825 version of *Racine and Shakespeare* enjoyed a good measure of success and influence, including a favorable review in the liberal *Globe* in London, which had been founded only the year before. Stendhal would later parlay this minor success into further critical publications and, ultimately, the novel *The Red and the Black* (1830), for which he is best known.

An Unrecognized Masterpiece The arrival of *The Red and the Black* on the literary scene of Paris, however, went largely unheeded. Stendhal himself wrote with some resignation that he published for “the Happy Few,” although later authors (such as Honoré de Balzac were

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Stendhal's famous contemporaries include:

Washington Irving (1773–1859): An American author most famous for his stories “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”

Charles Lamb (1775–1834): An English essayist also responsible for making Shakespeare accessible to children in his book *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Charles Nodier (1780–1844): A French author who wrote during the same period as Stendhal but whose work involved gothic themes, including vampires.

Benoit Fourneyron (1802–1867): The French engineer who designed the first usable water turbine, a device that captures energy from moving water.

William Fox Talbot (1800–1877): An English inventor, and a pioneer of the photographic process.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): An English naturalist responsible for defining and defending his theory of natural selection as a mechanism for evolution.

outraged by the tepidity of the reception of this and other works), and he took up a post as consul to the papal state of Civitavecchia in 1931. For the next ten years, he held this post, publishing a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction texts, until an apoplectic fit forced him—in 1841—to request leave to recover in Paris. The following year, another such fit struck him as he was walking down the street, and he died at the age of seventy-eight in his Paris apartment. Publishing his first novel only at the age of forty-four, and unheralded in his lifetime, Stendhal has since been recognized as one of the greatest literary figures France—indeed, the world—has ever produced.

Works in Literary Context

Stendhal's fiction is marked primarily by its emphasis on “realism.” Unlike the wild narratives of novels such as *Don Quixote*, Stendhal's fiction tries to represent the world as it is, catching both the small and large details of his characters' lives in order to paint them as realistically as possible. As literature would continue to develop over the next century and, indeed, to this day, the tendency to represent fictional worlds realistically has continued. Novelists as divergent in subject and theme as Mark Twain and Toni Morrison have written in the realist tradition for which Stendhal was at least partially responsible.

Realism Like most of his previous works, *The Red and the Black* relied in part on borrowed material and sprang from the account of a crime that Stendhal had read in the *Journal of Criminal Cases*. A blacksmith's son

named Antoine Berthet had been sentenced to death after shooting a woman—with whom he may have had a romantic history—in a church during Mass. Stendhal's Julien Sorel differs from the real-life Berthet in important ways, but their stories have similar outlines. Given that Stendhal works from actual accounts of real-world events, it is no wonder that this novel, like much of his work, emphasizes “realism,” a technique in which an author tries to portray his characters and worlds as realistically as possible—as opposed to fantasy literature, such as science fiction, in which considerations of “the way things really are” is minimal.

Stendhal's narrator touts his realist aesthetic in some direct statements in *The Red and the Black*, the most famous of which defines the novel as a mere reflector of reality: “Why, sir, a novel is a mirror that is carried along a highway.” In other interventions as well, the narrator pretends to apologize for elements of the story that might in some way be objectionable, but that must be reported because they are part of the story's declared historical reality. Such protestations of “reality,” which accompanied the emergence of the novel as a distinct genre, may call attention to the artifice that underlies the invented narration, but do so without compromising fictional illusion—an important development in the history of literature. The importance of realism in the novel is further emphasized by Stendhal's subtitle at the beginning of book one, “Chronicle of 1830,” despite the absence in the work of any mention of the crucial revolution of 1830 and the end of the Bourbon regime in France.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime Stendhal's works enjoyed much less popular success than those of contemporaries whose work has not endured, but his works were well known to the cultured elite. Consequently he had a certain reputation in Paris salons but did not derive a substantial income from his writing. Stendhal reflected that it was less desirable to have a wide following among his contemporaries than to appeal to readers in 1880 or 1935, and curiously, his choice of dates proved somewhat prophetic. Zola, in an essay first published in 1880, discussed Stendhal as one of his precursors (along with Balzac and Flaubert), and in 1882 an article by the novelist Paul Bourget, along with the influence of Hippolyte Taine's continuing enthusiasm, consolidated Stendhal's reputation in the French literary canon. By 1935 a growing critical industry of “Stendhaliens” had published a wealth of texts on and by their author. In his own time, however, Stendhal had to rely on work as a journalist, a specialist in military supply, and as French consul abroad to supplement income from publications and his father's estate.

Armance In part to distract himself from dejection after the end of a love affair, Stendhal wrote his first novel, *Armance*, in 1827. Stendhal took the premise of his novel from another author's book. Henri de Latouche

had published an anonymous novel, *Olivier*, in 1826; this in turn was based on an unpublished story of the same title by Claire de Durfort, Duchesse de Duras. The reading public and Stendhal's friends, however, had a largely negative reaction to *Armance*, and the eight hundred to one thousand copies of the first printing found so few buyers that in 1828 the remainders were rebound and announced as a second edition. Indeed, despite his prodigious output, Stendhal frequently misjudged the appeal of his work to the reading public. Although he often picked scandalous and timely subjects, plucked from gossip circles, he could never quite make a lasting connection with critics of his time. Perhaps this was due, to the novel's gender-bending literary trickery, on which some recent criticism has focused. Maryline Lukacher, for instance, suggests that "in *Armance*, the title is deceitful and enigmatic, since it does not correspond to what it is supposed to describe. Under the cover of a woman's name, Stendhal is effectively telling the story of a man."

The Red and the Black By far Stendhal's most popular and most frequently read work today is *The Red and the Black*. Responses to the novel have come from a wide variety of directions, including everything from psychoanalysis to philosophy of science, political science to theater studies. John Vignaux Smyth surveys this criticism, noting that "'Red' and 'Black' are often identified by critics with the poles of honesty and hypocrisy," and arguing, "The venerable comparison of fiction and truth to clothes and body takes us beyond fiction-as-representation to fiction as a relation between concealment and revelation." Meanwhile, writing from the perspective of psychoanalytically informed feminism, Julia Kristeva writes that Stendhal's women, here and elsewhere, "have the strength of destiny, the power of ancient divinities."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Red and the Black*. In your opinion, how successful is Stendhal's portrayal of "reality"—how real is his realism? In your response, consider his portrayal not only of physical details—descriptions of places and objects—but also his portrayal of human nature. Collect your thoughts in a short essay in which you analyze specific examples from the text to support your thinking.
2. Read, watch, or listen to a work that is "based on a true story." The examples from the "Common Human Experience" sidebar might provide some possibilities. Then, using the Internet and the library, research the real events upon which this story is based. In a short essay, discuss the choices the artist made in shaping the final text—which details were kept, and which were lost? What details seem to have been distorted for artistic effect?
3. Choose an event that is currently being talked about frequently in the news or in your circle of friends.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Stendhal looked to real-life events for the plots of his novels *The Red and the Black* and *Armance*. He was not the first artist to look to real life for inspiration for his fictional work. To a certain extent, the practice dates back to Homer's *Iliad*, which was believed by the ancient Greeks to have taken place in the distant past. The film, novel, and song that is "based on a true story" or "inspired by real events" is now a staple of the entertainment industry. Here are a few examples:

Catch a Fire (2006), a film directed by Philip Noyce. After Patrick Chamusso is falsely accused of an act of terrorism and after the South African government beats him and intimidates his wife, he vows revenge.

Into the Wild (1996), a speculative biography by Jon Krakauer. In this text, Krakauer recounts the short life of Christopher McCandless, who, at the age of twenty-two, left behind his affluent family to live off the land, though he wound up dying in the Alaskan wilderness only two years later.

"Hurricane" (1975), a song by Bob Dylan. In this song, Dylan describes the imprisonment of Rubin Carter, who had been framed by crooked cops and lawyers for multiple counts of murder.

Then, create a short story or film that is based on this event. Review Stendhal's fiction, particularly *Armance* and *The Red and the Black*, as examples if necessary.

4. In modern times, plagiarism of another author's work is not only frowned upon but a violation of copyright law. In the time of Shakespeare, however, the kind of plagiarism Stendhal committed was not considered a serious crime. Using the Internet and the library, research the history of plagiarism and its perceived inappropriateness. In a short essay, present an overview of this history and make an evaluation of what you've discovered. Do modern copyright laws provide suitable protection for writers? Do these laws restrict freedom of expression in some ways?

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Laurence Sterne

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▣ Laurence Sterne

BORN: 1713, Clonmel, Ireland

DIED: 1768, London, England

NATIONALITY: Irish, British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759–1767)

A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (1768)



Laurence Sterne Sterne, Laurence, painting. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Laurence Sterne's enduring reputation as an author rests upon two works, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760–1767) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), both of which were written and published during the last nine years of his life. During that time he was the recipient of excessive praise and the target of scathing criticism, heralded as a second François Rabelais, Miguel de Cervantes, or Jonathan Swift, but also condemned as an immoral hypocrite. Controversy continues about the precise nature of Sterne's contribution to English literature, but few scholars would deny him a place among the most important of eighteenth-century writers. It is Sterne more than any other author of that century whose work has seemed, time and again, of special interest to modern fiction writers as they experiment with realism, psychology, and "metacommentary" as the organizing principles of narrative.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Penniless Youth Sterne was born in Clonmel, in County Tipperary, Ireland. His English father made a poor living as a soldier in the army; his mother, a woman of Irish and French ancestry, was of a lower class than her husband, who apparently married her to settle a debt

with her father. Sterne spent much of his childhood moving with his family from one army barracks to another throughout England and Ireland, and his recollections of the military surroundings in which he grew up formed the basis for the characters of Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim in *Tristram Shandy*. In 1723, Sterne began attending a school in Halifax, Yorkshire, but when his father died penniless in 1731, he was forced to discontinue his education and live with relatives in Elvington, Yorkshire. Two years later his cousin arranged for him to enter Jesus College, Cambridge, as a sizar, which allowed Sterne to defray his university expenses by working as a servant to other students. At Cambridge he met John Hall-Stevenson, a rich and reckless young man whose home—Skelton Castle, renamed "Crazy Castle"—has figured prominently in the Sterne legend as the site of boisterous drinking parties and of a library containing a notable collection of curiosa and erotic literature.

Life in the Church After receiving his bachelor's degree from Cambridge, Sterne was influenced by his uncle Jacques, a prominent churchman active in Whig politics, to enter the clergy. Sterne's decision to follow an ecclesiastic career resulted from his need to earn a living rather than from any sense of spiritual calling. He was ordained a deacon in 1736, a priest in 1738, and afterward received various appointments in Yorkshire. In

1741 Sterne was married to Elizabeth Lumley, who is described by Sterne's biographers as an unpleasant woman whose instability—she eventually became insane—was not improved by her husband's incessant philandering. Despite his lack of faithfulness, however, Sterne was not the cruel husband and parent once portrayed by his detractors. After his marriage was effectively dissolved in separation, which was actually initiated by Elizabeth rather than Sterne, he continued to provide for his wife and daughter.

From the time of his marriage until the publication of *Tristram Shandy* in 1759, Sterne lived for the most part the life of an average Yorkshire clergyman, although some of his activities—his extramarital affairs, his frequenting the society of Hall-Stevenson's "Demoniacs" at Crazy Castle, his lawful but self-serving acquisition of his parishioners' property, and his casual attitude toward the theological doctrines of his church—would by subsequent generations be considered extraordinary conduct, however common it was in Sterne's time. Prior to the composition of his masterpiece, Sterne's only works were the sermons in which he preached an abstract rather than specifically Christian morality, articles of political propaganda written at the instigation of his uncle Jacques, and *A Political Romance* (1759), a satirical allegory concerned with local church politics that indicates some of the humor and narrative flair of Sterne's major work.

Literary Celebrity Sterne was forty-six when the initial volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were published, and his fictional alter-ego Tristram vowed to produce two additional volumes each year for the remainder of his life. Although the novel received mixed reviews, readers of the time elevated both the book and its author to a phenomenal status of celebrity. A short while after the publication of *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne happened to be in London and found himself the center of a following that included aristocrats, members of fashionable society, and leading figures in the arts. His lively, amusing manner made him well liked, and his attendance at social affairs was eagerly sought. However, upon the discovery that the author of *Tristram Shandy* was a clergyman, Sterne was attacked in the English press, which complained that the slyly erotic and scatological humor of Sterne's novel was unacceptable coming from a man of the cloth. Nevertheless, with the appearance of subsequent volumes of his novel, Sterne retained much of his popularity, not only in England but throughout the rest of Europe as well. The social successes of London were repeated when Sterne visited Paris in 1762. A second visit to continental Europe in 1765 served as the material for *A Sentimental Journey*, a work which in its extreme subjectivity, emotionalism, and narrative verve is as striking a contrast to the literary travelogue as *Tristram Shandy* is to the realistic novel. During his remaining years, Sterne continued to compose installments of *Tristram Shandy* and wrote *The Journal to Eliza* (1904), a self-conscious record of his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sterne's famous contemporaries include:

Voltaire (1694–1778): Born François-Marie Arouet, but better known by his pen name, Voltaire was one of the leading writers of the French Enlightenment. His thoughts on civil liberties, freedom of religion, and the ills of society were to prove highly influential on the leaders of both the French and American revolutions.

George Washington (1732–1799): The first president of the United States, Washington led the Continental Army during the American Revolution and is often described as the Father of His Country.

Frederick II of Prussia (1712–1786): Dubbed Frederick the Great for his spectacular military victories during the Seven Years' War, Frederick began the ascendancy of Prussia as a major power in Europe.

Adam Smith (1723–1790): Smith's views on economics, expressed in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, have formed the foundation of modern economic theory. His ideas on competition and self-interest promoting a healthy economy have long been used to defend free trade and capitalism.

Robert Burns (1759–1796): A writer known as "Scotland's favourite son," Burns's poetry was written in Scots dialect as often as in English. He was both a cultural icon and inspiration to later Romantic poets and liberal thinkers.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797): British philosopher and feminist, her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* argued that women were not naturally inferior to men, as was widely believed at the time.

romance with a woman named Eliza Draper. Having suffered poor health since his youth, Sterne died of tuberculosis in London a few weeks after the publication of *A Sentimental Journey*.

Works in Literary Context

The Black Sheep of Eighteenth Century Literature *Tristram Shandy* is an unusual work by the literary standards of any period, but it particularly stands out in the century that saw the birth and early development of the realistic novel. While such novels as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* display their authors' attempts to make prose fiction a means for depicting contemporary life, Sterne demonstrates in *Tristram Shandy* aspirations of an entirely different kind. His characters, although profoundly human, are also profoundly odd and do not have the significant connections with their society held by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The bildungsroman traces the growth and development of a single character, often from youth to old age. *Tristram Shandy* is just one classic bildungsroman story; here are some others.

Pamela (1740), a novel by Samuel Richardson. The first epistolary novel—that is, a novel told through a series of letters—this tale follows a young maid who resists her master’s advances until he agrees to marry her. The success of the book led to many more such epistolary tales throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Tom Jones (1749), by Henry Fielding. After writing two parodies of *Pamela*, Fielding tried his hand at novel-writing (at the time a new form of storytelling); the resulting tale, which follows a boy in his growth to a successful young man, stands as one of the classics of eighteenth-century literature.

The Catcher in the Rye (1951), a novel by J. D. Salinger. This controversial tale of teenage discontent is an account by Holden Caulfield of life following his expulsion from a prep school at the age of sixteen.

Into the Wild (1996), a nonfiction work by Jon Krakauer. This book is an ultimately tragic account of a free-spirited, nature-loving young man who leaves his life and family behind in search of his own identity.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (2001), a film by Chris Columbus. Based on the first book of the best-selling Harry Potter series of novels by J. K. Rowling, this introductory tale follows young Harry as he begins his adventures at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

characters in the great realistic novels of the time; his style is one of cultivated spontaneity and unpredictability, a series of digressions as opposed to the progressive movement of events common in the works of Sterne’s contemporaries; and, perhaps most conspicuously, his narrator is concerned with relating his “Life and Opinions” rather than the more usual “Life and Adventures” of the eighteenth-century bildungsroman (coming-of-age tale), making the novel largely a plotless discourse on an encyclopedic array of subjects.

Unsentimental Journey Sterne’s other major work, *A Sentimental Journey*, is a nonfiction memoir that conveys much the same sensibility as the fictional *Tristram Shandy*. An account of Sterne’s travels in France and Italy, this memoir has as its central concern the subjective side of the author’s experiences rather than the objective rendering of people and places, which is the more usual concern of the travel writer. V. S. Pritchett has written

that “Sterne displays the egotist’s universe: life is a personal dream,” an observation that is illustrated by the minute and self-conscious attention that Sterne pays to his own feelings in *A Sentimental Journey*. Sterne’s preoccupation with feelings, especially those of tender pathos, led to his establishing the word “sentiment” as it is presently understood, giving connotations of heightened, somewhat artificial emotion to a term which previously had denoted “thought” and “moral reflection.” The deliberate courting and elaborate description of feeling in *A Sentimental Journey* also appears in Sterne’s letters and his *Journal to Eliza*, provoking a major controversy in criticism of Sterne—the sincerity or pretense of both his personal writings and those written for a reading audience. As the issue of sincerity by its nature is restricted to the realm of individual opinion, critics have tended to praise or condemn Sterne to the extent that they believe in the truth of the feelings he describes. Modern critics have generally treated the question of Sterne’s sincerity as a more subtle and complex matter than had been previously realized, attributing to him a facility for taking an ironic view of his most intense feelings or, as in Ernest Nevin Dilworth’s *The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne*, finding in his work a satirical mockery of sentiment.

Works in Critical Context

Perhaps the most important factor contributing to the controversies surrounding Sterne’s work is his provocative and persuasive humor. Some critics have seen this quality of Sterne’s writing as an end in itself, a viewpoint represented by Wilbur L. Cross, who contends that Sterne “was a humorist pure and simple, and nothing else.” Other critics, including those of the English Romantic movement and most modern commentators, perceive more profound motives underlying these works, with a number of recent studies contending that Sterne’s humor derives from an acute awareness of the ultimate evil and suffering of human existence and that each farcical antic is an allusion to a grim truth. Whether or not it is justified to place Sterne in the philosophical company of modernists who blend comedy and despair in their works, critics are now largely in agreement that Sterne is an exceptional case of an eighteenth-century writer whose works are particularly sympathetic with the concerns and temperament of twentieth-century readers.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman *Tristram Shandy*’s uniqueness brought about its wide success during the 1760s, and the novel’s universal appeal has enabled the work to overcome the disparagement of such important eighteenth-century authors as Samuel Johnson—whose comment on Sterne’s novel was that “nothing odd will do long”—and to survive the outright loathing of such nineteenth-century figures as William Makepeace Thackeray.

William Kenrick wrote of the work and the author in 1759, “His characters are striking and singular, his observations shrewd and pertinent; and, making a few exceptions, his humour is easy and genuine.” By contrast, author Horace Walpole, writing in 1760, called the book “a very insipid and tedious performance” and stated, “It makes one smile two or three times at the beginning, but in recompense makes one yawn for two hours.” Critic Edmund Burke pointed out one defining aspect of the novel that has been the subject of much critical discussion over the centuries: “The author perpetually digresses; or rather having no determined end in view, he runs from object to object, as they happen to strike a very lively and very irregular imagination. These digressions so frequently repeated, instead of relieving the reader, become at length tiresome.”

As additional volumes of the ongoing work were published, more critics echoed the sentiment of Burke. Owen Ruffhead, reviewing the third and fourth volumes in 1761—and who, like many at the time, assumed Tristram Shandy to be the actual author of the work—directed his criticisms directly at the author: “We must tax you with what you will dread above the most terrible of all imputations—nothing less than *dullness*. Yes, indeed, Mr. Tristram, you are dull, *very dull*. . . . Your characters are no longer striking and singular. . . . The novelty and extravagance of your manner pleased at first; but Discretion, Shandy, would have taught you, that a continued affectation of extravagance, soon becomes insipid.” Despite this critical backlash, Sterne’s most famous work remained the subject of favorable scholarship throughout the nineteenth century, with prominent figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Hazlitt complimenting many elements of the books.

Influence Unlike many authors whose works are discussed in relative isolation from their lives, Sterne is closely identified with his narrator, Tristram Shandy. Especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sterne was often judged by the narrator’s opinions and liberties of taste; inverting this approach, an appraisal of Sterne’s work became inseparable from an appraisal of his life, either to demonstrate a reprehensible similarity between the two or a paradoxical contrast. The issue of the often salacious humor in *Tristram Shandy* pervaded Victorian commentary, both positive and negative, on Sterne’s work. In the twentieth century, critics have emphasized the remarkable likenesses between the narrative techniques in *Tristram Shandy* and the formal experimentation of modern literature, particularly in Sterne’s unorthodox punctuation, his use of nonverbal devices like drawings, his disregard for sequence, and his self-conscious dwelling on his manner of composition. Despite the evidence presented by John Ferriar and others that Sterne borrowed heavily and blatantly from a number of sources, including Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*,

few critics have questioned the success with which he adapted these borrowings to his own purposes and transformed old materials into one of the most original and important works in literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Many critics have argued that the method of storytelling in *Tristram Shandy* is more akin to current novels rather than those of the eighteenth century. Do you think this is true? Pick two to three recent experimental novels and compare their format and narrative strategies with that of *Tristram Shandy*.
2. Describe Sterne’s interest in travel and unusual settings, customs, and people. Contrast this to other eighteenth-century writers, such as Jonathan Swift or Voltaire, who utilized unusual settings and people in their stories. How do the writers’ works differ?
3. In 2005, filmmaker Michael Winterbottom directed the film *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*, but remarked that Sterne’s story was “utterly unfilmable.” Watch Winterbottom’s film and try to decipher the problems he faced in adapting the novel to film. Where does he succeed and where does he fail? Come up with a strategy of how you would have adapted the film, including ideas for dialogue, scenes, and actors and actresses you would cast.
4. Do you feel that the digressive action in *Tristram Shandy* dominates the story, or is there an overarching plot that the digressions ultimately serve? In your opinion, is an overarching plot a defining characteristic of a novel? Why or why not?

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Robert Louis Stevenson

BORN: 1850, *Edinburgh, Scotland*

DIED: 1894, *Vailima, Samoa*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

New Arabian Nights (1882)

Treasure Island (1883)

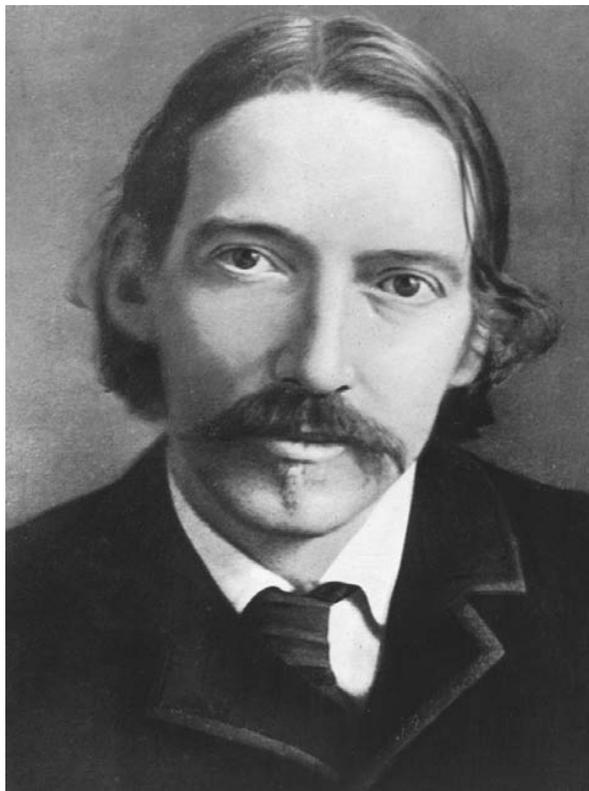
Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886)

Kidnapped (1886)

In the South Seas (1896)

Overview

The life of Robert Louis Stevenson was regarded by his public, his friends, and his biographers to be as thrilling as the adventures in the stories he wrote. Stevenson began his career primarily as an essayist and travel writer, though he soon moved on to short fiction, and after the publication of *Treasure Island* in 1883, the novel was his preferred form. He wrote memorable poetry and forgettable plays, but it was short fiction, particularly his famous *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), that gained him a large adult readership.



Robert Louis Stevenson Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Sickly Childhood in Edinburgh Robert Louis Stevenson was born to Thomas and Margaret Isabella Balfour Stevenson in Edinburgh on November 13, 1850. From birth he was sickly, and throughout much of his childhood he was attended by his faithful nurse, Alison Cunningham, known as Cummy in the family circle. She told him morbid stories, read aloud to him Victorian penny-serial novels, Bible stories, and the Psalms, and drilled the catechism into him—all with his parents' approval. Robert's father Thomas Stevenson was quite a storyteller himself, and his wife doted on their only child, sitting in admiration while her precocious son expounded on religious doctrine. Stevenson later reacted against the morbidity of his religious education and to the stiffness of his family's middle-class values, but that rebellion would come only after he entered Edinburgh University.

An Indifferent Student Sets Out to Write In November 1867 Stevenson entered Edinburgh University, where he pursued his studies indifferently until 1872. Instead of concentrating on academic work, he busied himself in learning how to write, imitating the styles of William Hazlitt, Sir Thomas Browne, Daniel Defoe, Charles Lamb, and Michel de Montaigne. By the time he was twenty-one, he had contributed several papers to the short-lived *Edinburgh University Magazine*, the best of which was a fanciful bit of fluff entitled "The Philosophy of Umbrellas." Edinburgh University was a place for him to play the truant more than the student. His only consistent course of study seemed to have been of bohemia: Stevenson adopted a wide-brimmed hat, a cravat, and a boy's coat that earned him the nickname of Velvet Jacket, while he indulged a taste for haunting the byways of Old Town and becoming acquainted with its denizens.

On a trip to a French artists' colony in July 1876 with his cousin Bob, Stevenson met Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne, a married woman, an American, and ten years Stevenson's senior. The two were taken with one another, and Osbourne said she would be getting a divorce from her husband.

Impetuous Transatlantic Pursuit of a Married Woman In August 1879, Stevenson received a cablegram from Fanny Osbourne, who by that time had rejoined her husband in California. With the impetuosity of one of his own fictional characters, Stevenson set off for America to find her. On August 18, he landed, sick, nearly penniless, in New York. He was most likely suffering from tuberculosis (the disease was commonly called "consumption" at the time, and it was often misdiagnosed), which was incurable. From there he took an overland train journey in miserable conditions to California, where he nearly died. After meeting with Fanny

Osbourne in Monterey, and no doubt depressed at the uncertainty of her divorce, he went camping in the Santa Lucia mountains, where he lay sick for two nights until two frontiersmen found him and nursed him back to health. Still unwell, Stevenson moved to Monterey in December 1879 and thence to San Francisco, where he was ever near to death, continually fighting off his illness (people with tuberculosis often had periods of relative wellness interspersed with bouts of sickness). When Stevenson had left Scotland so abruptly, this had temporarily estranged him from his parents. They were also upset about his relationship with a married woman. However, hearing of their son's dire circumstances, they cabled him enough money to save him from poverty. Fanny Osbourne obtained her divorce from her husband, and she and Stevenson were married on May 19, 1880, in San Francisco.

Tuberculosis, Travel, and Writing While in Bed

In the next seven years, 1880 to 1887, Stevenson did not flourish as far as his health was concerned, but his literary output was prodigious. Writing was one of the few activities he could do while confined to bed because of hemorrhaging lungs (a common tuberculosis symptom). During this period, he wrote some of his most enduring fiction, notably *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *The Black Arrow* (1888). He was also busy writing essays and collaborating on plays with W. E. Henley, the poet, essayist, and editor who championed Stevenson in London literary circles and who became the model for Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*.

This was also a period of much traveling. His and Fanny's various temporary residences in England, Switzerland, and southern France had more to do with his probable tuberculosis than with his love for travel. The main accepted treatment for tuberculosis at the time was the seeking of "healthy air," although doctors disagreed about what made air healthy. Switzerland was a popular destination for tuberculosis patients because of its clear mountain air. It was at Braemar in Scotland that *Treasure Island* was begun, sparked by a map that Stevenson had drawn for the entertainment of his twelve-year-old stepson Lloyd Osbourne. Stevenson had quickly imagined a pirate adventure story to accompany the drawing, and a friend arranged for it to be serialized in the boys' magazine *Young Folks*, where it appeared from October 1881 to January 1882. By the end of the 1880s, it had become one of the most popular and widely read books of the period.

Bound for the South Seas In 1888, Stevenson made a drastic decision. In a letter to his friend Baxter in May of 1888, he wrote that he would be taking a South Seas cruise, one that he expected to heal him emotionally as well as physically: "I have found a yacht, and we are going the full pitch for seven months. If I cannot get my health back . . . 'tis madness; but of course, there is the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Stevenson's famous contemporaries include:

- Queen Victoria** (1819–1901): The ruler of the United Kingdom (1837–1901) and the first Empress of India; the period of her reign is known as the Victorian era.
- Richard Francis Burton** (1821–1890): An English explorer and writer, Burton was best known for his travels in Asia and Africa, especially his expedition to find the source of the Nile River.
- Mark Twain** (1835–1910): An American humorist and satirist born Samuel Clemens, Twain is best known for his novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
- Henry James** (1843–1916): An American novelist who eventually took a British passport, James was one of the founders of realism in fiction.
- Sigmund Freud** (1858–1939): The Austrian psychologist who founded the school of psychoanalysis, Freud pioneered the concept of the division of human consciousness into an id, ego, and superego.
- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** (1859–1930): A Scottish author best known for creating the character of Sherlock Holmes.
- Rudyard Kipling** (1865–1936): A British writer and poet, Kipling is the author of *The Jungle Book* and the first English-language writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

hope, and I will play big." Sea air was also considered beneficial to people suffering from tuberculosis.

South Pacific Journey and a Home in Samoa

The Stevenson party—including Stevenson, his wife, his stepson, and his mother—chartered the yacht *Casco* and sailed southwest from San Francisco to the Marquesas Islands, the Paumotu, and the Society Islands, and thence northward from Tahiti to the Hawaiian Islands by December of 1888. They camped awhile in Honolulu, giving Stevenson time to visit the Molokai leper settlement and to finish his novel *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889). In June 1889 they set out southwest from Honolulu for the Gilbert Islands aboard the schooner *Equator*. From there in December 1889 the Stevensons traveled to the island of Upolu in Samoa. By that time Stevenson realized that he was too ill to return to Scotland, despite his friends' urgings and his own homesickness; each time that he ventured far from the equator he fell sick. In October of 1890, the Stevenson party returned to Samoa to settle, after a third cruise that had taken them to Australia, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, and some of the more remote islands in the South Seas. The

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Stevenson's later novels and stories examine moral dilemmas presented in an atmosphere imbued with mystery and horror. They include certain recurring themes, such as those of the divided self and the nature of evil. Here are some other works that deal with the theme of the divided self:

The Invisible Man (1897), a novel by H. G. Wells. This novel centers around a scientist who discovers a formula for invisibility but becomes mentally unstable as he copes with the problems of his condition while attempting to become visible again.

Seize the Day (1956), a novella by Saul Bellow. This novella chronicles a day in the life of Tommy Wilhelm, born Wilky Adler, a character who embodies the notion of the divided self.

Psycho (1960), a film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. This suspense/horror film explores the moral dimensions of crime and murder.

Samoan islands had been claimed by Great Britain, Germany, and the United States, by this time, and Stevenson developed a lively disdain for their colonial presences—in many cases taking much more the part of the Samoans, whom he saw as unjustly governed in slapdash fashion by slovenly rulers.

Death at the Height of His Power While he lived in the Pacific, Stevenson kept up his usual impressive literary output, but in the last two years of his life his letters to his friends in Great Britain increasingly revealed a longing for Scotland and the frustration he felt at the thought of never seeing his homeland again. To S. R. Crockett he wrote, “I shall never see Auld Reekie. I shall never set my foot again upon the heather. Here I am until I die, and here will I be buried. The word is out and the doom written.” It may have been this preoccupation with Scotland and its history that made *Weir of Hermiston* so powerful a tale. With its theme of filial rebellion, and its evocation of Scotland's topography, language, and legends, it is a masterly fragment and the most Scottish of all his works. *Records of a Family of Engineers*, a biographical work that recounts his grandfather's engineering feats, reveals, too, that Stevenson was trying to find a bridge back to his own family and finally coming to terms with his earlier rejection of the engineering profession. In *Records of a Family of Engineers* he depicts his grandfather as a scientist-artist, linking his own growing objectivity in his style of writing to the technical yet imaginative work of his forebears. Increasingly Stevenson's art embraced more of the everyday world and drew on his experiences in the South Seas for its strength.

When he died of a stroke on December 3, 1894, in his house at Vailima, Samoa, he was at the height of his creative powers.

Works in Literary Context

In “A Penny Plain and Two-pence Coloured” (1884), Stevenson recounts how the seeds of his own craft were sown in childhood when he purchased Skelt's Juvenile Drama—a toy set of uncolored or crudely colored cardboard characters (hence the title of Stevenson's essay) who were the principal actors in a usually melodramatic adventure. Stevenson maintained that his art, his life, and his mode of creation were all in some part derived from the highly exaggerated and romantic world he had inherited from Skelt. Indeed, he saw himself as the literary descendant of British Romantic author Sir Walter Scott. The best storytelling, he felt, had the ability to whisk readers away from themselves and their circumstances.

Daydreams and Nightmares, but Without Escapism Although much of Stevenson's fiction was aimed at entertainment, his later novels and stories cannot be easily categorized as escapist. In one sense, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can be taken as a satire of the times in which a respectable and educated man is forced so to repress his animal nature as to turn it into an uncontrollably violent beast. Yet there is much in the tale that does not allow such an interpretation to go unqualified. There is a wildness in Hyde that does not really lend itself to possible accommodations to a moral world, even one more liberal and permissive than that of the 1880s. Furthermore, as it progresses the story seems preoccupied less with social and moral alternatives than with the inevitable progress into vice. Part of the appeal of the tale is, as the title suggests, its strangeness. It has its own obsessive logic and momentum that sweep the reader along. Thus, though various morals can be drawn from it (warnings against intellectual pride, hypocrisy, and indifference to the power of the evil within), the continuing attraction of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is perhaps the exact reverse of that of *Treasure Island*: One is an almost perfect literary rendition of a child's daydream of endless possibilities, the other of an adult's nightmare of disintegration. In both cases, whether gleefully or frightfully ensconced in the realm of the fantastic, Stevenson's work is if not precisely escapist then at least elsewhere-directed.

Works in Critical Context

Pinnacle to Nadir, and Back: A Treasure Not Just for Children At the time of his death in Samoa in 1894, Robert Louis Stevenson was regarded by many critics and a large reading public as the most important writer in the English-speaking world. “Surely another age will wonder over this curiosity of letters,” wrote Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch at the time, “that for five years the needle of literary endeavor in Great Britain has quivered toward

a little island in the South Pacific, as to its magnetic pole.” Critics as demanding as Henry James and Gerard Manley Hopkins agreed on Stevenson’s importance. This idealized portrait was attacked in the 1920s and 1930s by modernist writers who labeled his prose as imitative and pretentious and who made much of Stevenson’s college-day follies. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, his work was reconsidered and finally taken seriously by the academic community. Outside of academia, *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* continue to be widely read over a century after they were first published, and show promise of remaining popular for centuries to come. As such, they have influenced generations of writers, including Ernest Hemingway, who noted that Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* was one of his favorite books as a child. In this vein, R. H. W. Dillard has remarked, “When future scholars manage to see past their blind spot concerning the influence of children’s books on adult literature and come to look for (apart from the usual suspects) the sources of the best twentieth-century prose, they may well find to be more important than they currently imagine.”

Responses to Literature

1. *Treasure Island* tops the list of children’s classics, and many famous authors have noted that the book was one of their favorites in their youth. It has been adapted for film numerous times, and its characters are generally familiar even to those who have never read the book. Read *Treasure Island*, then write a paper examining whether or not the youth of today would find the story and the style as gripping as readers of the past. Why or why not?
2. Stevenson’s life was given nearly as much attention as his writings. Do you think a writer’s life should be a focus of the audience’s attention, or should readers and critics look only at the words and stories instead? Have you found that learning about authors’ lives adds to or takes away from your understanding and appreciation of their works?
3. Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll character has been used in many movies since the book was published. What is the attraction of this character? Is it simply an entertaining notion, or does Dr. Jekyll have an enduring appeal because his story tells us something deeper about our modern selves?
4. Many of Stevenson’s writings chronicled his travels and personal adventures. Today, blogging is a widely used forum for this same kind of writing, and bloggers have the advantage of being able to publish their works instantly, often from faraway places. Does the immediacy of blogging add to or take away from this form of writing? Do blogs today have the same quality of writing and insight as the travel writings of authors like Stevenson?

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Bram Stoker

BORN: 1847, Clontarf, Ireland

DIED: 1912, London, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Dracula (1897)

The Lair of the White Worm (1911)

Overview

Irish writer Bram Stoker wrote several novels in different genres, but he is typically, if not exclusively, best known for his Gothic horror novel *Dracula* (1897). Stoker scholars often agree that with *Dracula*, Stoker not only created one of the most identifiable figures in popular culture but set the standards for all horror-mystery books that followed.



Bram Stoker Stoker, Bram, 1906, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Ireland Marked by Illness Bram Stoker was the third of seven children born to Abraham Stoker Sr. and Charlotte Thornley Stoker on or about November 8, 1847, in Clontarf, a village just north of Dublin Bay. In rural Ireland, this was the time of the potato famine in which around a million Irish people died of starvation and another million or more immigrated to the United States, Canada, and Australia to escape the horrors in their home country. The Stokers, however, were solidly middle class, with the father a civil servant, working as a chief secretary at Dublin Castle, the administrative center of the country. The mother was two decades younger than her husband and a rugged west-of-Ireland woman who had survived the cholera epidemic of 1832 in her native Sligo. She was a social activist who fought for the rights of impoverished women and was a formidable presence for her children. Charlotte was especially important to Bram, a sickly child who was often bedridden during his first seven years. While Bram enjoyed his father's well-stocked library, he also listened avidly to the gruesome tales his

mother spun to entertain him—perhaps the seeds of his own future horror stories.

Civil Service Career and Work in the Theater

Stoker began writing ghost stories in his childhood, predicting that someday he would be famous for his literary efforts. As a student at Trinity College he excelled in athletics and earned honors in mathematics. Upon graduation, he worked as a civil servant. For ten years in the Irish Civil Service, Stoker kept this unfulfilling position but one which left energy for his literary pursuits, including writing drama reviews for the *Dublin Mail*, a newspaper co-owned by his fellow horror writer, Sheridan Le Fanu. Stoker's drama criticism led him to meet with actor Henry Irving, whom he much admired. The friendship was mutual, and Irving hired Stoker as his personal manager as well as secretary, and even director of his Lyceum Theatre in London, positions he held until Irving's death in 1905. It was about this time, too, that he fell in love with his nineteen-year-old neighbor, the stunning Florence Balcombe. The two soon married, on December 4, 1878.

Inspiration for Dracula While working at the theater, Stoker entertained a wide variety of people, including the Hungarian adventurer and professor Arminius Vambery, who would relate stories of vampires in Eastern Europe. Shortly after this meeting, Stoker began researching vampirism. He would later claim that *Dracula* came to him in a nightmare following a particularly indulgent crab dinner, but scholars also believe that Stoker likely knew of several existing vampire stories: "Carmilla" (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu, "Le Horla" (1887) by Guy de Maupassant, and *The Vampyre* (1819), a novel by Dr. William Polidori. For four years, Stoker did extensive research and labored over his vampire novel. The book was published in 1897, and was a smashing success. Unlike any other vampire in popular artistic culture, Count Dracula became an international icon. Critics have speculated that the foreign, exotic villain with his evil, dirty habits played on British concerns about the growing number of Eastern European immigrants in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Many Jews of Eastern European origin fled persecution in their home countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They resettled in large numbers in England and the United States, where they often faced prejudice from those who feared their unfamiliar culture.

After Dracula None of Stoker's later books matched the popularity of *Dracula*. His final novel, *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), however, has received some critical attention in the decades since its publication, though not perhaps the kind of attention Stoker would have hoped for. As critics Daniel Farson and Philip Dematteis once noted, "Hilarious throughout, without one line of intentional humor, it could still become a cult classic." A

campy 1988 film adaptation of the novel by Ken Russell seemed to bear out that prophecy.

Stoker was already seriously ill when writing *The Lair of the White Worm* and died on April 20, 1912.

Works in Literary Context

Little critical importance is attached to most of Stoker's work, but *Dracula* is considered a landmark of horror fiction. Some critics have even dubbed it the first true horror novel.

Influences Stoker was inspired by those he admired, and his realistic writing took influence from the period in which he lived, but many of his horror influences originated when he was young and very ill. His enforced bedridden state clearly made an impression on the course Stoker's life would take. During the long months and years of his illness, Stoker's mother would entertain her young son with macabre tales from her own youth, such as the story of the army sergeant who had apparently died of the plague. When the undertaker attempted to bury the man, he found the corpse's legs were too long for the coffin. Determined to chop the legs off at the knee to ease the fit, the undertaker took an axe to the legs, but at the first hit, the sergeant suddenly revived. Such tales informed much of Stoker's youth and his later horror works.

Epistolary Novel Stoker's most successful work, *Dracula*, was written during the literary period when the novel was not yet fully defined nor developed. Nineteenth-century authors were writing episodic works, publishing weekly chapters in the local newspapers (now known as serialized novels), and introducing the novel's story and characters by way of collections of letters or journal entries written by the characters themselves or a narrator. This form, called the epistolary form, was used by Aphra Behn, a woman now considered to be one of the first novelists of the seventeenth century. It was also characteristic of eighteenth-century writers such as publisher and author Samuel Richardson and French philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau and was further refined by Wilkie Collins in the nineteenth century. *Dracula* is written this way—as an epistolary novel made up of journal entries, a ship's log, newspaper articles, letters, and phonograph recordings that tell of Count Dracula's attempt to settle in England and of his ultimate demise at the hands of a team of Englishmen. It is a style of writing that, with the Gothic elements of the novel, allowed Stoker to contrast his characters' actions with their own explanations of their acts.

Horror Fiction Horror fiction is distinguished from Gothic fiction or novels about supernatural occurrences by its aim: to frighten or unsettle the audience. American author Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820) is an early example. It features a monstrous headless horseman that pursues the hero.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Stoker's famous contemporaries include:

- Alexander Graham Bell** (1847–1922): American inventor best known for his invention of the telephone.
- Oscar Wilde** (1854–1900): Irish novelist and playwright known for his flamboyant life and sharp wit.
- Kate Chopin** (1851–1904): American writer considered one of the first feminist authors.
- Thomas Alva Edison** (1837–1931): American inventor of Dutch origin whose contributions include the incandescent lightbulb, the cylinder phonograph, and 1,091 other patented inventions.
- Paul Gauguin** (1848–1903): French post-impressionist painter also associated with primitivism and a return to the pastoral movement.
- Menelik II** (1844–1913): Ethiopian emperor of Shewa who was influential in introducing technological progression in Ethiopia.

Monsters such as vampires, werewolves, and zombies all arise out of human fears of the blurring of boundaries between life and death, human and animal. Stoker subtly brought many other fears into action in *Dracula*. For example, some scholars have pointed that there is a suggestion of an interracial relationship between Mina and the Count, something that would have been taboo to Stoker's contemporaries. Later masters of horror fiction include Stephen King (author of *The Shining*, 1977, and many books) and Dean Koontz (author of *Demon Seed* and many other books).

Works in Critical Context

Although most of Stoker's novels were fairly well received when they appeared, they are dated by their stereotyped characters and romanticized Gothic plots and are rarely read today. Even the earliest reviews frequently decry the stiff characterization and tendency to melodrama that flaw Stoker's writing. Critics, however, have universally praised his beautifully precise descriptions of various settings. Stoker's short stories, while sharing the faults of his novels, have fared better with modern readers. Anthologists frequently include Stoker's stories in collections of horror fiction. "Dracula's Guest," originally intended as a prefatory chapter to *Dracula*, is one of the best known.

Dracula Initially, *Dracula* was interpreted as a straightforward horror novel, with early critics noting the "unnecessary number of hideous incidents" that could "shock and disgust" readers. One critic even advised keeping the novel away from children and nervous adults. Yet the Gothic horror novel was widely read and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also delivered compelling horror stories:

It (1986), a novel by Stephen King. In this popular and gripping horror story, *something* is feeding on the neighborhood children of Derry, Maine.

Interview with the Vampire (1976), a novel by Anne Rice. In this modern Gothic tale, a 200-year-old vampire tells the story of his life and loves.

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. In this classic written by the novelist when she was nineteen, a scientist challenges nature (and God) by creating his own "human" being.

appreciated. A large part of the novel's initial success was due not to its Gothicism but to how, as Daniel Farson points out, "to the Victorian reader it must have seemed daringly modern." An early reviewer of *Dracula* in the *Spectator* even commented that "the up-to-dateness of the book—the phonograph diaries, typewriters, and so on—hardly fits in with the mediaeval methods which ultimately secure the victory for Count Dracula's foes."

Further criticism points to the sensual or sexual appeal of the work. In 1916, critic Dorothy Scarborough wrote that "Bram Stoker furnished us with several interesting specimens of supernatural life always tangled with other uncanny motives." In 1931, scholar Ernest Jones drew attention to the theory that these "other uncanny motives" involve repressed sexuality. And besides approaching the book from several angles—folkloric, political, feminist, medical, and religious—modern critics have continued to view *Dracula* from a Freudian psychosexual standpoint. Having fallen prey to Count Dracula, heroines Lucy and Mina change from pure and near-sexless to aggressively sensual. Were Stoker alive today, suggests Brian Murray, "the publicly prudish Stoker—who once wrote an essay calling for the censorship of works that exploit 'sex impulses'—would probably be shocked to read much of the recent criticism of *Dracula*."

Responses to Literature

1. Consider the differing roles of men and women in nineteenth-century England. How were women expected to behave in the company of men? What was expected of them socially as well? How were men expected to behave? Where do the men and women in *Dracula* break with convention? How

does their behavior in the novel affect the plot and dialogue?

2. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the pseudo-science of eugenics. Write a paper in which you explore whether Stoker was influenced by eugenics in his descriptions of various classes and races of people in *Dracula*.
3. Why is society fascinated with horror stories? In your mind, what is this fascination based on? Can you find a passage in *Dracula* that may have been particularly horrifying at the time, but to a contemporary audience, might really seem almost silly? What defines "horror" today? Name a horror writer today that is successful and discuss why that is so. What is his appeal?

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Tom Stoppard

BORN: 1937, Zlín, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1966)



Tom Stoppard *Stoppard, Tom*, photograph. © by Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Jumpers (1972)

Travesties (1974)

Shakespeare in Love (1998)

The Coast of Utopia (2002)

Overview

One of England's most important playwrights, Tom Stoppard has gained a wide international audience. His plays revolutionized modern theater with their uniquely comic combinations of verbal intricacy, complex structure, and philosophical themes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Conflict Thomas Straussler (Stoppard) was born on July 3, 1937, in Zlin, Czechoslovakia, to Eugene, a doctor, and Martha Straussler. In 1939, troops from Nazi Germany invaded the country; according to Nazi racial laws, there was "Jewish blood" in the family, so Stoppard's father was transferred to the island of Singapore in Southeast Asia in 1939, taking the family with him. When the Japanese invaded Singapore in 1942, the

women and children were taken to India. Dr. Straussler stayed behind as a British Army volunteer and was killed as a captive in a Japanese prison camp.

From School to Journalism In Darjeeling, India, Thomas attended an American boarding school. In 1945, his mother married Kenneth Stoppard, a British Army major, and both of her sons took his name. When the family moved to England, Stoppard continued his education at a preparatory school in Yorkshire until the age of seventeen, when he felt that he had had enough schooling. Stoppard became first a reporter and then a critic for the *Western Daily Press* of Bristol from 1954 to 1958. He left the *Daily Press* and worked as a reporter for the *Evening World*, also in Bristol, from 1958 to 1960. Stoppard then worked as a freelance reporter from 1960 to 1963. During these years, he experimented with writing short stories and short plays. In 1962 he moved to London in order to be closer to the center of the publishing and theatrical worlds in the United Kingdom.

Radio Plays Stoppard's first radio plays for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) were aired in 1964, with two more following in 1965—the same year he met and married his first wife, nurse Josie Ingle. His first television play appeared the next year, as did his only novel and the stage play that established his reputation as a playwright, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. The play takes two minor characters from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and shows the world of the Danish prince from a different perspective. More than an oblique look at a dramatic classic, it is an examination of existentialist philosophy—the belief that human beings are both free and responsible for their actions and that this responsibility is the source of their feelings of dread and anguish—with protagonists who learn that they are to die and must accept their fate. The play earned Stoppard his first Tony Award in 1966.

Television Plays That same year, Stoppard produced *Tango*, based on a work by Slawomir Mrozek, followed by two more television plays in 1967. The year 1968 saw another television play and two short works for the theater. By 1970, after Stoppard returned to the BBC with two more radio plays, two more television plays, and another stage piece, he began to make connections in the world of alternative theater. He became acquainted with Ed Berman from New York City's off-off-Broadway, who was attempting to establish an alternative theater in London. Stoppard composed a single play for performance in 1971 at the Almost Free Theater, a feeble double bill in 1975, and *Night and Day*, which prompted lengthy discussion in 1978.

In 1972, the same year Stoppard met and married Miriam Stern, he presented *Jumpers*, his second major work, which begins with circus acts and evolves into religious and moral philosophy. As philosophical ideas began to eclipse characters in his drama, critics began to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Stoppard's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Bukovsky (1942–): Russian author and activist. Bukovsky is most noted for being a former Soviet political dissident.

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech writer and dramatist who was the ninth and final president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic.

Mick Jagger (1943–): An English rock musician who performs as the front man for one of the world's most successful bands, the Rolling Stones.

Peter O'Toole (1932–): An award-winning Irish actor often remembered for his iconic performance in *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Edward Albee (1928–): An American playwright associated with the theater of the absurd, which explores domestic frustration and anguish.

André Previn (1930–), a German-born American award-winning pianist, composer, and conductor.

get restless. While Stoppard was making a name for himself with intellectual debates over ethics, morality, censorship, and other modern problems, critics were shifting in their seats.

Major Stage Plays After a collaborative effort with Clive Exton two years later, Stoppard produced his third major work, *Travesties*. The play is based on the premise that Vladimir Lenin, James Joyce, and Tristan Tzara all lived in Zurich, Switzerland, during World War I. Stoppard illuminates the purpose and significance of art by fostering the interaction of the three men's theories: Lenin's Marxism, Joyce's modernism, and Tzara's Dadaism. *Travesties* won Stoppard his second Tony Award in 1976.

A year later, Stoppard presented *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, a tour de force premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the hundred-piece London Symphony Orchestra conducted by André Previn at the Royal Festival Hall. Brought to the United States, it was presented at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York with an eighty-one-piece orchestra. Concerning a dissident in an Iron Curtain country who has been placed in a mental institution, the play's attack on the totalitarian state was the author's strongest political statement up to that time. He was named a commander of the British Empire that same year.

The year 1979 brought three more plays, and by 1982, Stoppard was delivering his fourth major work. *The Real Thing* won Stoppard another Tony Award in 1984, but again critical opinion was divided: Some

reviews touted Stoppard's continued combination of humor and complexity, while other critics, such as Robert Brustein, discounted the work as just "another clever exercise in the Mayfair mode, where all of the characters . . . share the same wit, artifice and ornamental diction."

Multiple Successes Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Stoppard enjoyed a series of successes, including the Emmy Award-nominated television play *Squaring the Circle* (1984); the Academy Award-nominated screenplay *Brazil* (1985); and the Academy Award-winning screenplay *Shakespeare in Love*. He was knighted in 1997 and elevated to the Order of Merit in 2000. Also in 2000, Stoppard's play *The Real Thing* was performed in a limited engagement at the Albery Theatre, London, before opening on Broadway at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. It won a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play.

In 2006, Stoppard's significantly revised trilogy of plays, *The Coast of Utopia*, opened at its U.S. premiere in New York City. It is also heavily rumored that the successful playwright was on-site to assist with the dialogue in George Lucas's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) and *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005), as well as in Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). On June 3, 2006, Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London. As with Stoppard's former successes, the play received mixed reviews for its controversial treatment of anticommunist, leftist, and artistic dissent. The rock music-driven drama opened in February 2007 at Prague's National Theatre and in November 2007 at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre in New York, where it was scheduled to run until March 2008.

Works in Literary Context

Complexity Describing Stoppard's style, critic and scholar Enoch Brater notes in *Essays on Contemporary British Drama* how Stoppard presents "a funny play" in which he "makes coherent, in terms of theatre, a fairly complicated intellectual argument." Brater also adds, "That the argument is worth making, that it is constantly developing and sharpening its focus, and that it always seeks to engage an audience in a continuing dialogue, are the special characteristics of Stoppard's dramatic achievement. They are also the features which dignify and ultimately transform the comic tradition to which his work belongs." Brater has summarized the complexity of language, ideas, and technique as they are so skillfully combined with humor.

Entertainments "Writing entertainments," Stoppard told interviewer Mel Gussow, is what he considers he has been doing all along. Stoppard does, however, understand that his humor is complicated by intellectual ideas that sometimes displace the characters. Between fun plays like *The Real Inspector Hound* and "plays of ideas like *Jumpers*," he told Gussow, "the confusion arises because

I treat plays of ideas in just about the same knockabout way as I treat the entertainments.” Still, he reasoned to *Washington Post* interviewer Joseph McLellan, “The stuff I write tends to work itself out in comedy terms most of the time.”

Humor in Problematic Truth Whatever the degree of comedy or seriousness in Stoppard’s approach, scholar and critic Benedict Nightingale of the *New York Times* concludes that Stoppard is consistent in the themes he examines: “All along he’s confronted dauntingly large subjects, all along he’s asked dauntingly intricate questions about them, and all along he’s sought to touch the laugh glands as well as the intellect.” Because of the contrasting light tone and cerebral weightiness of his plays, however, others have made specific efforts to define Stoppard’s thematic concerns as he presents them within his plays. His ideas encompass such concepts as “the nature of perception, art, illusion and reality, the relativity of meaning, and the problematic status of truth,” scholar Anne Wright observes in a *Dictionary of Literary Biography* article, with “recurring themes includ[ing] chance, choice, freedom, identity, memory, time, and death.” Stoppard, however, has offered a simpler interpretation. Speaking to Tom Prideaux of *Look*, the enigmatic playwright said, “One writes about human beings under stress—whether it is about losing one’s trousers or being nailed to the cross.”

Influences Stoppard has been said to show—and sometimes admits to showing—influences from Henry James, James Joyce, and A. E. Housman, as well as absurdist such as Polish writer Václav Havel and Irish minimalist writer Samuel Beckett. Stoppard also takes inspiration from the works of existentialist philosophers, such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, primarily since existentialism is a fundamental part of the Theater of the Absurd. Because of Stoppard’s unique and unmatched approach to blending such schools of thought and such wit with traditional theatrical conventions, the full measure of the impact Stoppard has had on others is yet to be seen.

Works in Critical Context

Against Classification Because Stoppard’s work demonstrates a union of the intellectual to convey ideas with the emotional to express dark humor, several critics have made efforts to classify his works as either philosophical or humorous. Stoppard, however, diplomatically discourages efforts at classification. As he told *Newsweek*’s Jack Kroll, “Theater is an event, not a text. I respond to spectacle. Ambushing the audience is what theater is all about.”

A Serious Comic Writer This “ambush,” the way he shrewdly infuses his plays with sophisticated concepts, is what keeps the critics talking. As *Washington Post* writer Michael Billington described, Stoppard “can take

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Stoppard is celebrated for his linguistically playful and experimental style. Other works known for their linguistic virtuosity include:

Endgame (1957), a play by Samuel Beckett. In this one-act play, the action is minimal and the dialogue is absurdly unique.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. In this comedy of manners, the dialogue is stark and explosive with irony, sarcasm, and social puns.

Lolita (1955), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov’s novel is renowned for its wordplay and innovative form.

a complex idea, deck it out in fancy dress and send it skipping and gamboling in front of large numbers of people,” for the playwright has “a matchless ability to weave into a serious debate boffo laughs and knockdown zingers.” Stoppard scholar Joan Fitzpatrick Dean concurred, saying, “Like the best comic dramatists, his gift for language and physical comedy fuses with an active perception of the excesses, eccentricities, and foibles of man.”

Critic Enoch Brater summarized the essence of Tom Stoppard, saying, “Stoppard is that peculiar anomaly—a serious comic writer born in an age of tragicomedy and a renewed interest in theatrical realism. Such deviation from dramatic norms . . . marks his original signature on the contemporary English stage,” for his ‘high comedy of ideas’ is a refreshing exception to the rule.” Among the plays that best demonstrate this is *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead “Stoppard’s virtuosity was immediately apparent” in his first major dramatic work, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *New York Times* critic Mel Gussow asserted. The play revisits Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* through the eyes of the two players whose task of delivering Hamlet’s death sentence prompts their own execution instead. Vaguely aware of the scheming at Elsinore and their own irrelevance to it, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meander through the drama playing games of language and chance until they cease to exist. “In focusing on Shakespeare’s minor characters Stoppard does not fill out their lives but rather extends their thinness,” writer Anne Wright observed. By turning *Hamlet* “inside out” in this way, the play is “simultaneously frivolous in conception but dead serious in execution,” Brater added, and it addresses issues of existentialism reminiscent of Samuel Beckett’s drama *Waiting for Godot*. The result, Brater concluded,

“is not only a relaxed view of *Hamlet*, but a new kind of comic writing halfway between parody and travesty.”

Especially notable is the play’s innovative use of language and Shakespeare’s actual text. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* interweaves references to Hamlet with actual lines of the bard’s verse. Stoppard packs the drama with “intricate word plays, colliding contradictions and verbal and visual puns,” describes Gussow. This “stylistic counterpoint of Shakespeare’s poetry and rhetoric with the colloquial idiom of the linguistic games and music-hall patterns” proves very effective, Wright commented. “Stoppard’s lines pant with inner panic,” a *Time* reviewer noted, as the title characters, according to *Village Voice*’s Michael Smith, ultimately “talk themselves out of existence.” The play became one of Stoppard’s most popular and acclaimed works: Twenty years after its premiere, Gussow contended, it “remains an acrobatic display of linguistic pyrotechnics as well as a provocative existential comedy about life in limbo.” Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* concluded that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* established “the characteristic Stoppard effect.”

Responses to Literature

1. Stoppard’s *The Coast of Utopia* features the character Mikhail Bakunin, a real-life anarchist in prerevolutionary Russia. Find out more about Bakunin’s philosophy by reading his *God and the State*, an unfinished work penned around 1871.
2. Stoppard reimagines the action of *Hamlet* from the point of view of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Pick another character from Hamlet—perhaps Ophelia, Gertrude, Horatio, or Polonius. Imagine the story from their point of view. Write a narrative in the voice of the character you pick describing the action of the play.
3. Make a list of puns and word play in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. How do these elements contribute to character development? What can you tell about each character by the language, puns, and humor he displays?

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Alfonsina Storni

BORN: 1892, Sala Capriasca, Switzerland

DIED: 1938, Mar del Plata, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentine

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Disquietude of the Rosebush (1916)

Irremediably (1919)

Ocre (1925)

World of Seven Wells (1934)

Overview

Argentine author Alfonsina Storni is one of Latin America’s most widely read poets. She gained early fame through the publication of her first books of poetry,



Alfonsina Storni (right) © Eduardo Longoni / Corbis

partly through their explicitly confessional nature, but also because of her defiant posture regarding the status of women. Although primarily a lyric poet, she often revealed a quick turn of humor. Her dramatic suicide in 1938 added to her legendary status as a writer and public figure, and in subsequent decades both her poetry and her personal story have acquired almost mythic status.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Multitasker Born in Sala Capriasca, Switzerland, on May 29, 1892, Storni was the daughter of Alfonso and Paula Martigoni Storni. Her father was a beer manufacturer. She immigrated at four years of age to the provinces of Argentina, first to San Juan, then to the province of Santa Fe, finally settling in Buenos Aires in 1912. In many ways, her personal history is symbolic of a new class of literary and professional women who emerged from modest beginnings and gained access to opportunities through the public education system in Argentina. In addition to her studies, she worked in the

family cafe and then as a seamstress with her mother and older sister throughout childhood and adolescence.

After her father's death in 1906, she began to work in a hat factory in Rosario to help make ends meet. Early on, she demonstrated her ability to engage in multiple activities while at the same time developing her literary and theatrical interests. At fifteen, she joined a traveling theater company and spent three years with them. In 1909 she entered a two-year teacher-training program in Coronda, ending her formal education in 1911 at nineteen years of age. She then took a teaching job at an elementary school in Rosario. Throughout most of her adult life, Storni continued to combine teaching and an active writing career.

Single Motherhood and Work Storni's life took a dramatic turn after her first year of full-time teaching. In Rosario, she became pregnant by a married man with high standing in the community. She made the move to Buenos Aires when she was expecting a child and, as an unmarried woman, needed to escape the reduced social and professional circles of the provinces where her condition as an unmarried mother would make a teaching position impossible. At the time, Argentina was becoming a modern nation and attracting thousands of European immigrants each year who were looking for a better life. Between 1851 and 1910, Buenos Aires' population expanded from 90,000 to 1.3 million people. The city became known as the "Paris of South America."

Her son, Alejandro Alfonso Storni, was born there in 1912. In Buenos Aires, she worked at office and factory jobs for three years while writing *The Disquietude of the Rosebush* (1916). Despite the financial hardships of these early years, Storni moved quickly into the writing world and as early as 1913 began to publish in the popular magazine *Faces and Masks*.

By 1920, Storni began to work as a regular contributor to the *Nation*, one of the two major newspapers of the period. Her articles concerned almost all areas of women's experience: working women and their occupations, the relationship of women to national and cultural traditions, the role of the church, single mothers, female poverty, migration to the city, and fashion. Many of her contributions were published under the pseudonym "Tao Lao." These pieces were often impressionistic observations with highly personalized judgments. In a kind of urban adaptation of the travelogue, they recorded vignettes of daily life in Buenos Aires in a chatty tone with frequent asides to the reader.

Poetry Storni's lasting fame is as a poet, and she wrote and published poetry during this period. Much of her poetry reads like an inventory of the concerns of women, particularly nonconformist women, with its anger at male expectations, the seeming impossibility of equality in love, and the dissatisfaction at the traditional roles imposed on women. One of her most enduring types of poems is the pattern of a female persona addressing a male "tú" (you), often by a series of rhetorical questions.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Storni's famous contemporaries include:

Horacio Quiroga (1878–1937): This Argentinian writer and friend of Storni influenced the “magical realism” literary trend that became popular in Latin America. His poetry collections include *Cuentos de amor, de locura, y de muerte* (1917).

J. Paul Getty (1892–1976): This American businessman founded the Getty Oil Company. He wrote a memoir, *My Life and Fortunes* (1963).

Margaret Sanger (1879–1966): This American activist for women's rights founded what eventually became Planned Parenthood.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973): This British writer is best known for the fantasy fiction novels *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) trilogy.

Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957): A Chilean poet and fellow feminist, Mistral is often linked to Storni because of their similar careers. Mistral won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. Her poetry collections include *Desolación*.

This pattern, often verging on stereotype, engages a wide variety of readers in echoing many of the joys and frustrations of erotic love and sentimental attachments within family and social structures. Undoubtedly, the most celebrated poem of this nature is “You Want Me White” from *El dulce daño* (1918), in which a woman insolently responds to male demands for female purity.

After Storni dabbled in playwriting for some years, in 1934 she published *World of Seven Wells*, which marked a significant change in her poetry. On the formal level, she leaves behind meter and rhyme and develops another style based on often idiosyncratic rhythms. Changed too are the topics she treats. The world viewed here is primarily the universe of the body, and the close-up visual focus, along with the altered rhythms, distance this poetry from the autobiographical vein of her earlier poetry.

Diagnosed with Cancer In 1935, Storni was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery to have one breast removed. The next few years were marked by her struggle with cancer, a struggle that emerges in her poetry as a confrontation with the physicality of the world, a distancing from a personal focus. The illness and decline of the writer Horacio Quiroga, for whom Storni had felt great passion and affection, was a serious blow. Despite his fame as a writer, when Quiroga committed suicide in 1937, he was in such reduced economic circumstances that there were not enough funds for his burial.

As she became increasingly aware of her own mortality because of her cancer, Storni struggled to finish her most important works. Late in 1937, she turned in the manuscript of her last book (*Mask and Clover*) and in 1938 prepared an anthology of her poetry (*Antología poética*). In 1938, she was invited to Montevideo, Uruguay, to participate in a program with the Uruguayan poet Juana de Ibarbourou, and in late October of the same year, she made a trip to the seaside city of Mar del Plata. On October 25, 1938, she mailed to the major newspaper a farewell poem to her friends and readers, “I Am Going to Sleep.” She then walked into the sea and drowned.

Works in Literary Context

Although Storni never consciously allied herself with any literary school, her early collections of poetry contain elements of Romanticism and reflect traces of the Hispanic modernist movement of Rubén Darío. Her early works focus on the themes of love, passion, and the suffering they often bring. In contrast, her last two collections marked the final stage in her poetic development and reflect the influence of the avant-garde movement, particularly that of Federico García Lorca, whom she described in “Retrato de García Lorca.” Storni's break with traditional forms and the less subjective tone in her last two volumes can be seen because of her incorporation of techniques that had marked the poetry of the 1920s, especially with the ultraísta movement led by Jorge Luis Borges.

Sentiment Primarily autobiographical, Storni's early poetry revolves around lyrical and sentimental themes, portraying the misunderstood, rebellious poet standing alone against the world. Her first collection, *The Disquietude of the Rosebush*, reflects the restlessness and emotional conflict that persisted throughout her life. Storni later renounced this volume, and critics generally agree that it is her least significant work. Storni's next collections, *El dulce daño* (1918), *Irremediablemente* (1919), and *Languidez* (1920), express her disillusionment with love and her desire to renounce physical passion.

Much of the outrage and suffering evident in these verses resulted from her frustrations with contemporary stereotypes of women. In “You Want Me White,” for example, she indicts the Spanish American male for wanting women to be pure. Storni strove to articulate the collective concerns of women in these collections and pleaded for a more balanced and intellectual relationship between the sexes. Her fifth collection, *Ocre* (1925), demonstrates her increasing maturity as a poet and exhibits a new conciseness of style. Relying more on metaphors instead of similes, she steps outside herself to observe life more analytically. In contrast to the bitter resentment of her early confessional verse, these more cerebral, cynical, and ironic poems demonstrate her increasingly caustic attitude toward men.

Alienation and Death The poems of *Mundo de siete pozos* (1934) depict a fragmented reality consisting of

moods and dreams, surrealistic imagery, and abstract language. Abandoning the literary conventions of her previous collections, Storni used free verse to communicate her predominant themes, urban alienation and death, which she often associated with images of the sea. For *Mascarilla y trébol* (1938), published posthumously, she created a new, unrhymed verse form that she called the “anti-sonnet.” Here, Storni completely abandoned the preoccupation with love and passion that had characterized her earlier collections and instead devoted herself wholly to the craft of poetry. Exceptionally abstract and obscure, these poems, according to Storni, were “the individual results of moments of near loss of consciousness.” Combining images of the physical world, particularly the sea, with scenes from dreams, Storni expressed intense grief and explored the magical and metaphysical significance of such geometric forms as the circle.

Influence Storni and Uruguayan poet Delmira Agustini are the two major figures credited with changing the nature of female eroticism in poetry in Spanish. They influenced many female poets who worked in this genre in succeeding generations as well as other feminist poets in general.

Works in Critical Context

During her lifetime, Storni was one of the most prominent female poets in Latin America, yet her works remained controversial due to their feminist themes and open expression of female passion. While Storni is included among the ranks of leading Latin American women writers, her work stands out as the most courageously and openly critical of male-dominated society. Critical response to her body of poetry has developed through two distinct phases. Her early works were popular with the reading public, while receiving mixed critical response, due to her feminist stance. Her later works were met with waning popularity as well as harsh criticism for their experimental forms and obscure meanings. Critics in the late twentieth century viewed her later work, most notably *Mascarilla y trébol*, as her most mature and important contribution to Latin American literature.

The Disquietude of the Rosebush This collection established Storni as a new voice in Argentine culture. Shortly after publication, she became the first woman in the country to join a literary circle, from which she obtained critical comment and encouragement. Storni’s unconventional views, however, along with her status as an unmarried mother, sometimes resulted in critical censure of her work. Irritated at her frank, often resentful attacks on female stereotypes and on those who propagated them, some of her contemporary critics attributed her feminist ideas to personal dissatisfaction and dismissed her arguments for parity between the sexes as merely the complaints of an unhappy woman. Later in her career, Storni herself renounced the book in an interview quoted in Sonia Jones’s *Alfonsina Storni*: “My first book . . . today frankly embarrasses me. I would love to be

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Storni’s later poems deal extensively with imagery devoted to the sea in which she eventually drowned herself. In these poems, the sea is symbolically presented as an overwhelming natural force. Here are some other works that center around a preoccupation with the sea:

The Old Man and the Sea (1952), a novella by Ernest Hemingway. This short book tells the story of an old Cuban fisherman’s fight with a huge marlin.

Moby-Dick (1851), a novel by Herman Melville. It is the story of one man’s hunt for a legendary whale told by the pensive, wandering sailor Ishmael.

Farewell to the Sea (1987), poems by Reinaldo Arenas. In this collection, Arenas extensively describes the shores of a Cuban beach. Like Storni, Arenas wrote a letter to the public and committed suicide after finding himself in ill health.

Omeros (1990), an epic poem by Derek Walcott. Walcott retells the *Odyssey* but sets the epic in the Caribbean, on the island of Santa Lucia.

able to destroy every single copy of that book until there was not a single trace of it left.”

World of Seven Wells After a trip to Europe in 1934, Storni published *World of Seven Wells*. In this, her sixth poetical work, Storni made a nearly total break from the subjective lyricism and inner conflict that characterizes most of her previous poetry. Centering instead on the external world, the free verse and traditional sonnets display Storni’s increased attention to imagery. Several critics considered Storni’s new cerebral, ironic tone as an indication of a growing despair and preoccupation with death. Citing the volume’s proliferation of sea imagery, for example, Sidonia Carmen Rosenbaum noted in her *Modern Women Poets of Spanish America: The Precursors* that never a poetess of joy and laughter, [Storni] sinks still deeper into the bitter waters of sadness and hopelessness. . . . If in other books she spoke of the sea, it seemed to be in a somewhat casual manner. Not so here where the sea and the thought of finding peace in its icy, turbulent depths, become almost an obsession.

Responses to Literature

1. In a paper, discuss which type of setting Storni most effectively describes: small or large. Look to *Ocre* for examples.
2. In Storni’s earlier works, she often negatively emphasizes sexual passion and love. Can you find evidence that her views on male-female relationships

are not always negative? Write an essay that outlines your findings.

3. Create a presentation that addresses the following questions: How did Storni's journalistic writings add to her poetry? How did they detract from it?
4. Make a list of descriptions of the sea that Storni uses in her later poems. What do you think the sea symbolizes for her? Discuss your conclusions in a small group.

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❏ August Strindberg

BORN: 1849, Stockholm, Sweden

DIED: 1912, Stockholm, Sweden

NATIONALITY: Swedish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Master Olof (1881)

The Father (1887)

Miss Julie (1888)

Inferno (1897)

To Damascus (1898–1904)



August Strindberg Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

August Strindberg is considered one of the most important Swedish writers of the modern era. His drama *Miss Julie* (1888) has proven to be a classic, and several of his later plays, such as *The Dream Play* (1907) and the trilogy *To Damascus* (1898–1904), are recognized as forerunners of expressionism and the theater of the absurd. His psychologically astute plays, exposing the hidden roots of human conflicts, strongly influenced twentieth-century European literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Distressing Childhood in Stockholm Johan August Strindberg was born in Stockholm on January 22, 1849. His father was a steamship agent; his mother, Nora, had at one time been a waitress in a tavern and later became the housekeeper of her future husband. In his autobiographical novel *The Son of a Servant* (1886), Strindberg underlines the class difference between his parents as one source of the conflict in his nature and worldview. The Strindbergs were devout Christians, and their family life was patriarchal. As a boy Strindberg was unhappy. His mother died when he was thirteen, and less than a year later, his father married the children's

governess—a woman thirty years younger than his father. Strindberg's lifelong mental anguish can be attributed in part to his unhappy childhood.

Failing Chemistry and Turning to the Stage An average student, Strindberg graduated high school in 1867 and enrolled in the University of Uppsala to study medicine. He failed his qualifying examination in chemistry, and left academia without a degree. His interest turned to the theater, but here, too, he failed to qualify; after an unsuccessful acting audition, he started writing plays. He completed his first three in 1869, at the age of twenty. In the summer of 1872 Strindberg completed *Master Olof* (1881), the first of his many historical dramas and his first important literary work. It concerns the sixteenth-century religious reformer Olaus Petri, a disciple of Martin Luther who helped free the Church of Sweden from Rome's domination. He wrote several versions of the play, in prose and verse, before it was staged in Stockholm in 1881.

During his early career, Strindberg supported himself partly as a journalist and translator. In 1874, he found more permanent employment as an assistant librarian. In the spring of 1875 he met his future wife, Siri von Essen. She was married to a baron, but her husband had amorous interests outside his marriage. Strindberg encouraged her aspirations to a theatrical career, and the two fell in love. Siri divorced her husband amicably, debuted as an actress in 1877, and married Strindberg that December.

Controversy and Exile Strindberg's breakthrough as a prose writer—and the breakthrough of realism in modern Swedish literature—came with *The Red Room* (1879), a collection of satirical short stories about bohemian life in Stockholm. The title comes from a room at the popular Berns Salonger restaurant, where a coterie of young artists gathered regularly. The book was an overnight success, and put its author in the limelight. He followed this up with *Old Stockholm* (1880), a popular history of daily life in the city.

Commissioned in 1881 to write a major cultural history of Sweden, Strindberg produced a thousand-page volume that concentrated on the life of the common people, rather than the kings whose exploits traditionally fill the pages of history books. Criticized by professional scholars, Strindberg responded by publishing a scathing attack on Sweden's social and political establishment, *The New Kingdom* (1882). The book gave Strindberg new and powerful enemies, and its negative reception was probably the catalyst for Strindberg's decision to leave Sweden, which both ruined his marriage and was extremely productive for his work: he published more than twenty volumes of writing in the ensuing six years.

Strindberg soon provoked further controversy with his story collection *Married* (1884). In this work's preface, Strindberg brings up the so-called woman question—a hotly debated issue among the European intelligentsia

at the time—and presents a program for gender equality that seems progressive even to many contemporary readers. The story "Virtue's Reward," which starkly depicts the social repression of adolescent sexuality, led Swedish authorities to confiscate the books and charge the author with blasphemy. Strindberg returned to Sweden to stand trial; he spoke eloquently in his own defense and was acquitted of all charges.

Lifelike Art or Artlike Life? Strindberg's views on women soon darkened considerably, however; the second volume of *Married* (1886) is more bitter and resentful. The theme of male-female relationships seen as a battle of the sexes also surfaces in many Strindberg dramas, including some of his most celebrated ones. During this period, Strindberg became increasingly preoccupied by new discoveries in psychology. He now wanted to construct psychological case studies for the stage. The style he adopted for this venture was that of naturalism. His first great drama of psychic combat was *The Father* (1887), and he found the material for it in his own marriage: he suspected Siri of being unfaithful and questioned the paternity of his children. He transformed this anguish into a taut drama in which an unscrupulous wife provokes her husband to doubt his fatherhood, and drives him to a mental and physical collapse. Strindberg's marriage deteriorated rapidly after he wrote *The Father*, and the play was a great success, gaining Strindberg general European recognition (and leading some to question art's role as a vampiric force in Strindberg's life). The following year, he relayed the story of his marriage in *The Confessions of a Fool* (1888). This autobiographical novel has been called one of the great love stories in Swedish literature, though it contains a ruthless and even hateful depiction of his wife.

Surprisingly, just as his marriage was growing brittle, Strindberg began writing one of his sunniest novels, *The People of Hemso* (1887), about a farmhand who seduces a widow and tries to persuade her to marry him and sign over the farm. The novel has become a Swedish classic and mandatory reading for Swedish high school students.

In the summer of 1888, Strindberg composed his best-known drama, *Miss Julie*. The story is simple. During a midsummer night's celebration, a high-strung young noblewoman is seduced by her father's good-looking, social-climbing butler. Afterward she kills herself out of shame and desperation. Strindberg, the "son of a servant," undoubtedly drew upon his own marriage to an aristocratic woman for the play's undercurrent of class struggle.

Berlin and Paris Strindberg moved to Berlin in 1892, and found there a following of artists and writers, as well as directors eager to stage his plays. He met his second wife there, a twenty-one-year-old journalist named Frida Uhl. The marriage lasted a year and a half; their parting became the opening scene of his pivotal novel, *Inferno* (1897). Strindberg then turned his hopes

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Strindberg's famous contemporaries include:

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906): A Norwegian playwright and, along with Strindberg, one of the founders of modern drama.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): An American novelist and humorist and the author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Émile Zola (1840–1902): A French novelist and playwright and a leading proponent of literary naturalism.

William James (1842–1910): An American psychologist and philosopher and the author of the influential textbook *Principles of Psychology*.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): An Irish-English playwright and lifelong socialist who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

Selma Lagerlof (1858–1940): A Swedish novelist who in 1909 became the first woman awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

to Paris, where he tried hard to market himself and had a victory with a Paris production of *The Father*.

In Paris, Strindberg underwent a spiritual crisis. Reading the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish mystic, convinced him that he had gone through a hell on earth; that his sufferings were actually administered by a merciful higher power who intended to destroy his arrogance and make him a better person. This line of thinking is the essence of *Inferno*, which became one of Strindberg's best-known prose works.

A Return to Sweden Strindberg's new religious framework helped structure his "pilgrimage" trilogy, *To Damascus* (1898–1904). Invoking the New Testament story of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Strindberg focused on a character called "the Stranger," who moves from despair to acceptance of the divine. After finishing *To Damascus* in 1898, Strindberg left Paris for good and returned to Sweden.

In the next five years, he wrote twenty-two plays, including one of his masterpieces, *The Dance of Death* (1900). Coming home after many years abroad, Strindberg negotiated the tensions of his return by composing a remarkable series of historical dramas. The eleven plays he wrote between 1899 and 1908, together with *Master Olof* from 1872, form a cycle dramatizing seven centuries of Swedish history. His model for this enormous project was Shakespeare. The best-known plays of the cycle portray leading Swedish figures such as *Gustav Vasa* (1899), the nation's founding father, and *Erik XIV* (1899), the

psychopathic king who proposed to Queen Elizabeth of England and was rejected.

Revolutions in Word and World Strindberg had previously attempted to open his own theater, without success. In 1907, he succeeded, founding the Intimate Theatre with a young producer named August Falk. For this stage, Strindberg wrote a series of "chamber plays"—plays composed like chamber music, with theme and development rather than plot and character. The chamber plays are usually set in a house that quickly assumes metaphorical significance: its respectable exterior hides the lies and deceptions in the rooms within. The chamber plays culminate in the extraordinary *Ghost Sonata* (1908), with a peculiar blend of occult, fantastic, and surreal elements.

Alongside these plays that emphasize theme over plot, Strindberg also wrote a scathing, thinly fictionalized portrayal of several of his contemporaries titled *Black Banners* (1907). In 1910, inspired in part by the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, in which socialist workers and members of the military unsuccessfully sought to dismantle the Russian monarchy, he penned a series of polemics in a left-wing newspaper. These pieces, highly critical of the monarchy and the military, stirred up a lively national debate, later called the "Strindberg feud." Strindberg died of stomach cancer in May of 1912.

Works in Literary Context

August Strindberg's career was remarkable in the stages of its development. At every turn, he departed from literary conventions and customary dramatic norms. Many of his plays, particularly *Master Olof* and his later historical cycle, follow a Shakespearean model of stagecraft, but he absorbed numerous other artistic and philosophical influences along the way and innovated freely. As a young man, he studied the natural philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. By the mid-1880s, however, he had become an admirer of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Gendered Struggles of the Will Two aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy are readily apparent in Strindberg's writing: his conception of life as a succession of contests between stronger and weaker wills, and his emphasis on the refined superiority of the male intellect. If conflict is the driving force of Strindberg's mature plays, his principal theme is the battle of wills, especially as applied in the battle between the sexes for intellectual and psychological supremacy. Strindberg's attitude toward women was more ambivalent than negative. He was acutely aware of the problems facing women in the patriarchal societies of nineteenth-century Europe. Henrik Ibsen had fueled the debate in 1879 with his play *A Doll's House*, and Strindberg was one of many to respond to that important drama. Strindberg initially advocated an egalitarian relationship between the sexes. In his plays, though, female characters often appear as diabolical usurpers of man's "naturally" dominant role, cruelly shattering his psyche and draining his intellect.

Naturalism Strindberg's efforts to portray psychic combat on stage went hand in glove with his conception of naturalism, an attempt to explore in literature the terrain of the new social sciences. In a preface to the published script of *Miss Julie*, Strindberg outlines the theatrical and philosophical principles of naturalistic drama: nothing should appear theatrical; there should be no intermissions, which might break the illusion of reality for the audience; characters are determined by their heredity and environment. This manifesto for naturalism is often considered as important for modern drama as *Miss Julie* itself. The play also adheres to the naturalist rule that a work of fiction should demonstrate a law of nature, in this case the Darwinian concept of the survival of the fittest. Strindberg's naturalism focuses on the "moment of struggle," the immediate conflict affecting his characters, and eliminates any extraneous incidents or dialogue, creating a spare, intense theatrical effect.

Forerunner of Modern Drama *To Damascus*, *The Dance of Death*, *The Dream Play*, and *The Ghost Sonata* employ dream symbolism to translate Strindberg's mystical visions into the language of drama. Highly abstracted characters appear and disappear in stylized settings; scenes and images change unexpectedly; and profound fears and ghastly fantasies materialize. By breaking with the realistic traditions of drama in his later career, Strindberg opened up new possibilities, prefiguring such major dramatic movements of the twentieth century as expressionism and exerting a powerful influence on dramatists such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene O'Neill, and Eugene Ionesco.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, August Strindberg frequently courted controversy and deliberately outraged the establishment. It is no wonder that reaction to his creative work was often mixed. The first few years of his career were marked by his unconventional, grassroots approach to Swedish history; his outspoken assault on powerful leaders and institutions in *The New Kingdom*; and his 1884 blasphemy trial. Even the greatest triumphs of his naturalist period, *The Father* and *Miss Julie*, were clouded by personal scandal and controversy over his perspective on gender issues. His later plays, with their spooky effects and outlandish sensibility, bewildered his contemporaries still further. At the end of his iconoclastic life, the polemical "Strindberg feud" cast his legacy in the light of his role as social critic and political firebrand.

Despite or because of these recurrent controversies, Strindberg achieved lasting popularity in his home country. The whole city of Stockholm turned out to celebrate his sixtieth birthday in 1909. When he was passed over for the Nobel Prize in Literature that year—in favor of fellow Swede Selma Lagerlof, the first woman to receive the prize—a nationwide appeal went out to present Strindberg with a special award, including forty-five thousand crowns raised largely from small donations. At the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Strindberg was long a proponent of naturalism—a literary genre that attempts to represent human behavior with scientific detachment. Here are some well-known examples of the genre, which tends to be skeptical about the experience of freedom of choice, emphasizing instead hereditary, social, and evolutionary factors as determinants of human decisions.

Therese Raquin (1867), a novel by Émile Zola. Zola described this novel of adultery, murder, and guilt as akin to a scientific study of human temperaments.

Hedda Gabler (1890), a play by Henrik Ibsen. This landmark psychological play features one of the most highly regarded female roles in world theater.

Sister Carrie (1900), a novel by Theodore Dreiser. This classic American naturalist novel portrays the moral fall and material rise of a young woman in the big city.

The Lower Depths (1902), a play by Maksim Gorky. This work is a dark study in self-deception, first produced by the Moscow Arts Theatre and directed by the famous dramaturge Konstantin Stanislavsky.

Native Son (1940), a novel by Richard Wright. The first successful African American protest novel, *Native Son* portrays its protagonist's violence as an inevitable consequence of poverty and racial discrimination.

time of his death, Strindberg was a national treasure and a respected name among the European intelligentsia.

Miss Julie In the United States, Strindberg's best-known work is probably the gender play *Miss Julie*. His strongest champion in American theater was certainly Eugene O'Neill, who called him "the greatest genius of all modern dramatists," but he has also garnered much praise from other corners. Recent responses to *Miss Julie* have often focused on issues of gender and class, with neo-Marxist critics like Evert Sprinchorn arguing that "when Miss Julie kills herself, we understand that one social class is being replaced by another one." From the gender studies perspective, literary scholar Robert Gordon has observed that "for all its ambiguities *Miss Julie* is possibly the first nineteenth-century play by a male writer to have conceived the woman's role as subject of the drama, her point of view being as fully explored as the man's."

Responses to Literature

1. August Strindberg championed naturalism in his early career, and then later rejected it and pursued more expressionistic theatrics. Write about the uses and limits of naturalism in his plays, citing examples from his early and late work.

2. Explore the theories of the eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, who influenced many famous writers. How do Strindberg's post-*Inferno* writings reflect Swedenborgian ideas?
3. Write about the theme of power as expressed in Strindberg's work. How do his characters acquire, display, and use power?
4. Many scholars have written about the bitter relations between men and women in Strindberg's dramas. Do you think his is a sexist point of view? Explain your position using detailed analysis of passages from Strindberg's writing.
5. How would you characterize Strindberg's beliefs about human nature?

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☒ Rosemary Sutcliff

BORN: 1920, Surrey, England

DIED: 1992, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Eagle of the Ninth (1954)



Rosemary Sutcliff. *Sutcliff, Rosemary*, photograph by Mark Gerson. Reproduced by permission of Mark Gerson.

Warrior Scarlet (1958)

The Lantern Bearers (1959)

The Mark of the Horse Lord (1965)

Overview

A Carnegie Medal-winning author, Sutcliff brought history to life through her heroes, the atmospheres she created, and the sense of continuity found in her works. Known primarily for her children's novels, she presented English history from the late Bronze Age through the coming of the Roman legions, the Dark Age invasions of the Angles and the Saxons, and the Norman Conquest, focusing on the experiences of young men and women who overcome the unrest of their times to find a measure of peace, despite their personal or physical limitations. Sutcliff also explored history through her many retellings of old legends or stories, such as those of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and Beowulf. In these works, she presented well-known heroes, often adding a new dimension to their tales.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Budding Interest in War Themes Rosemary Sutcliff was born in Surrey, England, in 1920. When Sutcliff was eleven years old, her father retired from the navy and the family settled in a somewhat isolated moorland house

in north Devon. She contracted a debilitating form of arthritis called Still's disease as a child, but was nevertheless able to attend a normal school for a few years. Sutcliff's father returned to the navy at the onset of World War II, however, leaving mother and daughter alone again. Their isolation was broken when their house became a British Home Guard signals post, and Sutcliff's interest in battles and the military can be traced back to this time. The British Home Guard was a volunteer force composed of people who were ineligible for military service, who were assembled to protect Britain in case of a Nazi invasion.

Leaving school at the age of fourteen, Sutcliff began training as a painter of miniatures, a profession that was chosen for her because of her disability. Even though she had no inclination for the work, she made it through three years at Bideford Art School and became a professional.

Early Efforts at Writing Sutcliff made her fiction debut with *The Chronicles of Robin Hood* (1950), quickly followed up with and *The Queen Elizabeth Story* (1950). Within a few years, she found her literary voice with such novels as *Warrior Scarlet* and *The Lantern Bearers*.

A Consistent Career Perhaps the best of all Sutcliff's writing is found in two novels of the 1960s, *The Sword at Sunset* (1963), which tells of the life and death of the Celtic warlord Artos (Arthur) and his doomed fight against the Saxons, and *The Mark of the Horse Lord* (1965), where a freed gladiator impersonates a Scottish chieftain and inherits his Highlands kingdom. Both stories end in tragedy but contain an unforgettable blend of action, deep thinking, and striking landscapes.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a smaller amount of work by Sutcliff, but of high quality. *The Capricorn Bracelet* (1973), a collection of stories first used as radio broadcasts, covers three hundred years and six generations of Aquila descendants fighting for Rome in the Scottish Border country. *Blood Feud* (1977) is the story of the Anglo-Saxon Jesty, captured by marauding Vikings, who journeys with them to Constantinople to fight for the Byzantine emperor. *Frontier Wolf* (1980) returns to Roman Britain, where Alexios Aquila commands a body of frontier scouts against Scottish tribesmen along Hadrian's Wall. Both novels are fine examples of Sutcliff's work.

A Perfect Mesh of History and Fiction In her autobiography, *Blue Remembered Hills* (1983), Sutcliff recalls her early life and her struggle against crippling arthritis. Sutcliff died on July 23, 1992.

Works in Literary Context

The isolation of Sutcliff's early life, her crippling illness, and the pain she experienced in a variety of relationships all influenced the trajectory her successful literary career would take. Inheriting the tradition of storytelling from

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Sutcliff's famous contemporaries include:

- Mary Stewart** (1916–): English novelist and children's author renowned for her historical fantasy series that focuses on the life of Merlin.
- J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892–1973): English writer who authored *The Hobbit* and the much-loved *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.
- C. S. Lewis** (1898–1963): Perhaps best known for his *Chronicles of Narnia* children's series, Lewis also wrote a number of philosophical and religious texts.
- Queen Elizabeth II** (1926–): Queen of England since the early 1950s, Elizabeth took the throne upon the death of George VI, her father; after Queen Victoria, she has reigned over the United Kingdom the longest of any monarch to date.

her mother, Sutcliff was exposed at a young age to both Celtic and Saxon legends; she later built upon her memory of these stories to write engaging works of historical fiction that continue to engage readers of all ages but particularly young adults.

Light vs. Dark Similar themes and images connect many of Sutcliff's books. Margaret Sherwood Libby, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* about *The Lantern Bearers*, declared that "the plot, both interesting and plausible, has its significance heightened by the recurring symbolism of light in dark days." Margaret Meek, in *Rosemary Sutcliff*, recognized this theme of light and dark in all three of the books: "The conflict of the light and dark is the stuff of legend in all ages. . . . Sutcliff's artistry is a blend of this realization in her own terms and an instructive personal identification with problems which beset the young, problems of identity, of self-realization." For example, Aquila's lighting of the Rutupiae beacon becomes not only a personal symbol of his choice to remain in Britain but also a symbol of hope for those who fight on with him, a sign that the light of civilization will not die out forever.

Promises and Rings Another of the themes that run through Sutcliff's works is the great oath of loyalty, found in titles from *Warrior Scarlet* to *The Shield Ring*: "If we break faith . . . may the green earth open and swallow us, may the grey seas roll in and overwhelm us, may the sky of stars fall on us and crush us out of life for ever." The ritual of the spear that marks Drem's entrance into manhood in *Warrior Scarlet* is echoed many years later in a similar scene in *The Eagle of the Ninth*. Still another connection lies in the continuity of Aquila's family from

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Sutcliff was one of many authors to draw on the legend of King Arthur for inspiration. Here are some other works that feature the mythic Arthur:

The Once and Future King (1958), a novel by T. H. White. White focuses on Arthur's childhood and his relationship with the wizard Merlin in this popular version of the Arthurian legend.

The Mists of Avalon (1982), a novel by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Bradley presents an entirely fresh perspective on the tale of Arthur: she tells the story from the point of view of the women involved and places Arthur's struggles within the context of the dwindling power of paganism and the rising power of Christianity in England.

The Skystone (1992), a novel by Jack Whyte. The first book of *The Camulod Chronicles*, this novel details the beginning of King Arthur's England.

one generation to the next, symbolized by the massive golden ring, inset with a flawed emerald and carved with the figure of a dolphin, which is the emblem of Aquila's house. The ring reappears at intervals throughout Sutcliff's history: Marcus first sees it on a thong around the neck of an ancient warrior in the Scottish Highlands; it is a sign of recognition between Flavius and Justin when they first serve together in Britain; it comes to Aquila from his sister Flavia when he escapes from the Jutish camp; it comes to Owain more than a hundred years later from the hand of his dead father as he flees the battlefield; and it comes to Bjorn from his foster father, Haethcyn, six hundred years later still, when Bjorn marches with Aikin Jarlson's war band to fight the Normans, as a token that he has come into his father's estate.

While many of her adult books are now out of print, Sutcliff's children's stories continue to entertain young readers and influence writers such as Helen Hollick.

Works in Critical Context

"Most critics," contend May Hill Arbuthnot and Zena Sutherland in their *Children and Books*, "would say that at the present time the greatest writer of historical fiction for children and youth is unquestionably Rosemary Sutcliff." Despite this, Sutcliff's name is rarely mentioned among the great children's authors, nor is her life as discussed or investigated as are those of her more famous contemporaries.

The "Roman Britain" Trilogy Sutcliff's "Roman Britain" trilogy begins with *The Eagle of the Ninth*, which concerns a young Roman centurion and his first few years

spent in second-century Britain. *The Eagle of the Ninth* "is one of the few good stories" covering the period of Roman rule in Britain, maintains Ruth M. McEvoy in *Junior Libraries*. And a *Booklist* contributor concludes that the realistic background and characters make this a novel that "will reward appreciative readers."

The third book, *The Lantern Bearers*, "is the most closely woven novel of the trilogy," claims Margaret Meek in her book *Rosemary Sutcliff*. "The characterizations are vivid, varied and convincing," maintains Margaret Sherwood Libby in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*.

Warrior Scarlet With *Warrior Scarlet*, Sutcliff continued her tales of the making of Britain through two new young heroes. The story of the Bronze Age in England is told in *Warrior Scarlet* by focusing on a boy and his coming to manhood. "Sutcliff has widened her range to cover the hinterland of history," states Meek, "and realized, with the clarity we have come to expect, every aspect of the people of the Bronze Age, from hunting spears and cooking pots to king-making and burial customs, from childhood to old age. The book is coloured throughout with sunset bronze." *Warrior Scarlet*, according to a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer, "is outstanding among children's books of any kind."

Sword at Sunset Like her novels for young adults, Sutcliff's adult novels also delve into history. *Sword at Sunset* is a retelling of the legend of King Arthur that blends "legend, historical scholarship and masterfully humane storytelling to illuminate the misty and romantic era that preceded the Dark Ages," remarks a *Chicago Tribune Books* reviewer. Sutcliff has placed Arthur outside the legends, imbuing him with more believability, according to Robert Payne in the *New York Times Book Review*. "This time," writes Payne, "he is a living presence who moves in a brilliantly lit and fantastic landscape only remotely connected with ancient England." Reflecting on the novel's craftsmanship, Payne concludes: "Sutcliff is a spellbinder. While we read, we believe everything she says. She has hammered out a style that rises and falls like the waves of the sea."

Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think Sutcliff is not mentioned as frequently as Tolkien or C. S. Lewis in discussions of young adult authors? Is it because her books are based more on history than on fantasy? In an essay, explain your thoughts on the author's relative obscurity.
2. How did Sutcliff's lifelong illness directly and indirectly influence her career as a writer?
3. Why do you think Sutcliff chose to retell the Arthurian legend, which has already been retold many times? What is the legend's allure? Do you think this allure is specific to England?

4. How are Sutcliff's adult novels different from her children's books? Compare the "Roman Britain" stories with *Sword at Sunset*.

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Jonathan Swift

BORN: 1667, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1745, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

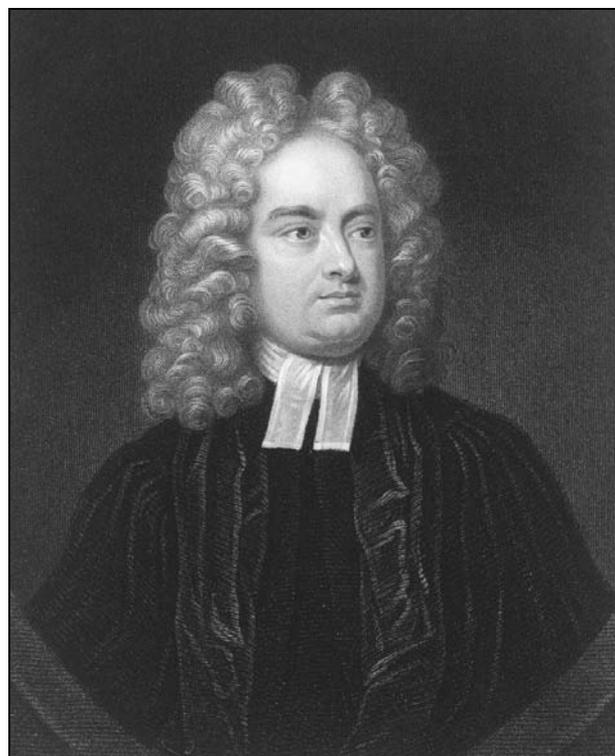
A Tale of a Tub (1704)

Gulliver's Travels (1726)

A Modest Proposal (1729)

Overview

Jonathan Swift is the foremost prose satirist in the English language. His greatest satire, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), is alternately described as an attack on humanity and a clear-eyed assessment of human strengths and weaknesses. In addition to his work as a satirist, Swift was also an accomplished minor poet, a master of political journalism, a prominent political figure, and one of the most distinguished leaders of the Anglican church in Ireland. For these reasons he is considered one of the representative figures of his age.



Jonathan Swift Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Lonely Childhood Amid Political Turmoil

Swift's childhood was characterized by separation. His father died shortly before Swift's birth, and his mother left him in the care of a nurse for three years at a very young age. However, Swift was financially provided for, and he was educated in the best schools in Ireland. He was enrolled at Trinity College, Dublin when, in 1689, a wave of civil unrest erupted in the wake of the abdication of the Catholic King James II. Many Anglo-Irish escaped to the safety of England, including Swift.

The Temple Years In England, Swift secured a position as secretary to Sir William Temple, a scholar and former member of Parliament engaged in writing his memoirs. Except for two trips to Ireland, Swift remained in Temple's employ and lived at his home, Moor Park, until Temple's death in 1699. During this period, Swift read widely, was introduced to many prominent individuals in Temple's circle, and began a career in the Anglican church, an ambition thwarted by Temple's inaction in obtaining Swift a promised preferment in the church. Around this time, he met Esther Johnson, stepdaughter of Temple's steward. "Stella," as Swift nicknamed her, became an intimate, lifelong confidante to Swift. Despite rumors to the contrary, their relationship remained platonic;

Swift's correspondence with her was later collected in *The Journal to Stella* (1963).

Toward the end of this period, Swift wrote his first great satires, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. Both were completed by 1699 but were not published until 1704 under the title *A Tale of a Tub, Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind, to which is Added an Account of a Battel between the Antient and Modern Books in St. James's Library*. Framed by a history of the Christian church, *A Tale* satirized contemporary literary and scholarly pedants as well as the dissenters and Roman Catholics who opposed the Anglican church, an institution to which Swift would be devoted during his entire career.

The Protestant control of England under Oliver Cromwell had resulted in an attempt by the government to impose the stringent, unpopular beliefs of Puritanism on the English populace. Swift detested such tyranny and sought to prevent it through his writings. *The Battle of the Books* was written in defense of Temple. A controversial debate was being waged over the respective merits of ancient versus modern learning, with Temple supporting the position that the literature of the Greek and Roman civilizations was far superior to any modern creations. Swift addressed Temple's detractors with an allegorical satire that depicted the victory of those who supported the ancient texts. Although inspired by topical controversies, both *A Tale* and *The Battle* are brilliant satires with many universal implications regarding the nature and follies of aesthetics, religious belief, scholasticism, and education.

Political Activism When Temple died in 1699, Swift was left without position or prospects. He returned to Ireland, where he occupied a series of church posts from 1699 to 1710. During this period he wrote an increasing number of satirical essays on behalf of the ruling Whig party, whose policies limiting the power of the crown and increasing that of Parliament, as well as restricting Roman Catholics from political office, Swift staunchly endorsed. In these pamphlets, Swift developed the device that marked much of his later satire: using a literary persona to express ironically absurd opinions. When the Whig administration fell in 1709, Swift shifted his support to the Tory government, which, while supporting a strong crown unlike the Whigs, adamantly supported the Anglican Church. For the next five years, Swift served as the chief Tory political writer, editing the journal *The Examiner* and composing political pamphlets, poetry, and prose. Swift's change of party has led some critics to characterize him as a cynical opportunist, but others contend that his conversion reflected more of a change in the parties' philosophies than in Swift's own views. Always one to place the interests of the church above party affiliation, he chose to serve the party that promoted those interests.

With the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the accession of George I, the Tory party lost power to the Whigs, and Swift returned to Ireland in 1714 to become dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Except for brief visits to London, Swift spent the rest of his life in Ireland. For the first five years after his return, he refrained from political controversy. By 1720, however, he renewed his interest in the affairs of Ireland, producing a series of pamphlets attacking the economic dependence of Ireland upon England and criticizing the policies of Prime Minister Robert Walpole. His most well-known, *A Modest Proposal* (1729) is a bitter satire inspired by the plight of the masses of impoverished Irish. In it, Swift ironically suggests that a growing population and widespread starvation could both be alleviated if the poor began eating their children. Considered one of the greatest satirical essays in world literature, Swift's piece attacks complacency in the face of misery and the coldly rational schemes of social planners who fail to perceive the pain resulting from their action or inaction.

The "Travells" On August 14, 1725, Jonathan Swift wrote to his friend Charles Ford: "I have finished my Travells, and I am now transcribing them; they are admirable Things, and will wonderfully mend the World." *Gulliver's Travels* challenged his readers' smug assumptions about the superiority of their political and social institutions as well as their assurance that as rational animals they occupied a privileged position in the world. Universally considered Swift's greatest work of this period, *Gulliver's Travels* (published as *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts; by Lemuel Gulliver*), depicts one man's journeys to several strange and unusual lands. Written over a period of several years, some scholars believe that the novel had its origins during Swift's years as a political agitator, when he was part of a group of prominent Tory writers known as the Scriblerus Club. The group, which included Alexander Pope, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot, collaborated on several satires, including *The Scriblerus Papers*. They also planned a satire called *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, which was to include several imaginary voyages. Many believe that *Gulliver's Travels* was inspired by this work. Although the novel was published anonymously, Swift's authorship was widely suspected. The book was an immediate success.

Life After Gulliver Swift remained active throughout the 1720s and 1730s as a political commentator, satirist, and, more importantly, as a poet. During this period, he wrote much of his best poetry, including *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*. The last years of Swift's life, from approximately 1736 until his death, have been the subject of much legend and misinformation. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, critics and biographers mistakenly concluded that Swift was insane during the years before his death. However, throughout his life he had suffered from what is known as Meniere's

Syndrome, or labyrinthine vertigo, a disease of the inner ear that causes attacks of nausea, dizziness, temporary deafness, and extreme pain. He also suffered a paralytic stroke in 1740 that caused aphasia and loss of memory. Eventually, in 1742, he was declared incapable of caring for himself and placed in the custody of guardians. Swift died in 1745 and was buried beside Esther Johnson in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Works in Literary Context

Satire or Cynicism? During the Enlightenment, eighteenth-century thinkers espoused an increasing faith in the rationality of human beings and in the capacity of reason to improve and even perfect the human condition. Swift categorically rejected these views; educated in the seventeenth century, he held to that period's emphasis on the imperfection of human beings resulting from the Fall of Man. Although Swift believed humans capable of reason, he also believed they rarely exercised this capacity. Thus, while he endorsed some measures of social reform, he argued for their implementation through means that acknowledged a need to control human corruptibility. Swift's departure from the prevailing thought of his time earned him censure in his lifetime, and for centuries afterwards, by critics who accused him of misanthropy and portrayed him as a bitter individual who hated humanity. However, his defenders, mostly twentieth-century critics, argued that his acerbic prose merely expressed his pain at the disparity between the world as it was and the world as it should have been. By portraying people in shocking extremes of baseness and monstrosity, they argue, he sought a better world. Swift defended his view of humankind by writing: "I have ever hated all Nations, professions, and Communities and all my love is toward individuals . . . I hate and detest that animal called man, although I hartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth."

A Novel of Imaginary Voyages Of course *Gulliver's Travels* is satirical, but is it also a novel? "Probably not," Robert C. Elliot remarks, "although it is not easy to say (except by arbitrary stipulation) why it is not." Part of the problem in classifying *Gulliver's Travels* as a novel arises from Swift's inclusion of large quantities of material which are neither purely narrative nor satirical, but are largely philosophical. Indeed, *Gulliver's Travels* has most often been described as an imaginary or "philosophic" voyage, a subgenre most clearly defined by William A. Eddy as "a didactic treatise in which the author's criticism of society is set forth in a parable form of an *Imaginary Voyage* made by one or more Europeans to a nonexistent or little known country . . . together with a description of the imaginary society visited."

Works in Critical Context

Between 1945 and 1985, nearly five hundred books and articles devoted their attention to Swift's most popular

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Swift's famous contemporaries include:

William Congreve (1670–1729): A poet and playwright, Congreve wrote some of the most popular English plays of the Restoration period, including *The Way of the World* (1700).

George I (1660–1727): When Queen Anne died childless in 1714, George, Prince-Elector of Hanover, was named King of Great Britain because of his Protestant faith—the other claimants were Catholics. The House of Hanover would rule Great Britain until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901.

Daniel Defoe (1661?–1731): Writer, journalist, and spy, Daniel Defoe is best remembered today for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*, one of the first, and still one of the most widely read, novels written in the English language.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): The preeminent English poet of the eighteenth century, Pope is, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, the third most quoted writer in the English language, after Shakespeare and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* derived its title from one of Pope's poems, for example.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1789): Perhaps the most well-known Baroque composer, Handel's most famous work is his *Messiah*, particularly the "Hallelujah" chorus. His work influenced later composers such as Mozart and Beethoven.

work, *Gulliver's Travels*. Even today, Swift scholars still do not know how to classify a work which has been regarded as a children's tale, a fantastic voyage, a moral allegory, and a novel.

Gulliver's Travels Gulliver's characterization has also been much debated. Early critics viewed him as Swift's mouthpiece and accepted everything Gulliver said as authorial opinion. Modern critics, however, recognize him as a distinct character whom Swift uses to subtler purposes. The most significant contemporary debate centers on Swift's intentions regarding the creation of Gulliver—whether he is meant to be a consistently realized character, a reliable narrator, or a satirical object whose opinions are the object of Swift's ridicule. This debate over the nature of Gulliver is important because critics seek to determine whether Gulliver is intended to be a man with definite character traits who undergoes a transformation, or an allegorical representative of humanity. In general, Gulliver is considered a flexible persona manipulated by Swift to present diverse views and satirical situations

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works of literature considered to be exemplars of scathing satire include:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. Told through the eyes of an innocent abroad, Twain's greatest novel is an indictment of many entrenched ideas and prejudices, particularly racism.

Catch-22 (1961), a novel by Joseph Heller. Considered one of the greatest literary works of the twentieth century, this tale set during World War II turns nearly every moral and logical convention on its head: "the only way to survive such an insane system is to be insane oneself."

Babbitt (1922), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. Lewis's first novel, it quickly earned a place as a classic satire of American culture, particularly middle-class conformity.

and to indicate the complexity and unpredictability of human nature.

While Swift's earliest readers greeted *Gulliver's Travels* enthusiastically, later critics complained that the Voyage to the Houyhnhnms constituted a "real insult upon mankind." Edward Young spoke for many when he accused Swift of having "blasphemed a nature little lower than that of the angels." Victorian critics could only explain the corrosive satire of the Voyage to the Houyhnhnms by positing an author who was both misanthropic and mad. Sir Walter Scott, for example, traced Swift's "diatribe against human nature" to that "sour and disgusted state of Swift's mind, which doubtless was even then influenced by the first impressions of that incipient mental disease which in this case, was marked by universal misanthropy." Novelist William Thackeray Asked, "What had this man done? What secret remorse was rankling at his heart?" Thackeray's queries typify the desire of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century biographers to explain Swift's satirical indignation by conjuring up a dark and largely imaginary past.

Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet or a library, research how actual voyages of the so-called Age of Discovery (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) compare to Gulliver's journeys. In a report to the class, describe two or three tales you find of fantastical, far-away places described by real-life explorers.
2. Using the Internet or a library, research the conflict between the Irish and English during Swift's time. Write an essay describing how this conflict seems to

motivate the Swift satire you have read. What is the historical significance of Swift's own Anglo-Irish heritage?

3. With a group of your classmates, research the philosophical theories of the great minds of the Age of Enlightenment, such as René Descarte, Thomas Hobbes, Gottfried Leibniz, and John Locke. Then, write a report for your class on how Gulliver's opinions in *Gulliver's Travels* reflect some of those ideas.
4. With a group of your classmates, discuss Swift's concept of absurdity among upper-class fashions and social mores. Use the most recent Swift text you have read as a group to support your opinions.

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Algernon Charles Swinburne

BORN: 1837, London, England

DIED: 1909, Putney, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

A Year's Letters (1862)

Atalanta in Calydon (1865)

Poems and Ballads (1866)

Overview

Swinburne was one of the most accomplished lyric poets of the Victorian era and was a preeminent symbol of



Algernon Charles Swinburne Hulton Archive / Getty Images

rebellion against the conservative values of his time. The explicit and often pathological sexual themes of his most important collection of poetry, *Poems and Ballads* (1866), delighted some, shocked many, and became the dominant feature of Swinburne's image as both an artist and an individual.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Mystery, Melancholy, and Notoriety Algernon Charles Swinburne was born into a wealthy Northumbrian family in 1837, the very year that marked the beginning of the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with advances in industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with proper behavior in society and domestic life, which Swinburne famously rebelled against with his poetry.

Swinburne was educated at Eton and at Balliol College, Oxford, but did not complete a degree. While at Oxford, he met the brothers William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as well as other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, a group of artists and writers whose

work emphasized medieval subjects, elaborate religious symbolism, and a sensual pictorialism, and who cultivated an aura of mystery and melancholy in their lives as well as in their works. In 1860 Swinburne published two verse dramas in the volume *The Queen-Mother and Rosamond*, which was largely ignored.

He achieved his first literary success in 1865 with *Atalanta in Calydon*, which was written in the form of classical Greek tragedy. The following year the appearance of *Poems and Ballads* brought Swinburne instant notoriety. He became identified with the "indecent" themes and the precept of "art for art's sake" that characterized many of the poems in the volume. He subsequently wrote poetry of many different kinds, including the militantly republican *Song of Italy* (1867) and *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871) in support of the Risorgimento, the movement for Italian political unity. Although individual volumes of Swinburne's poetry were occasionally well received, in general his popularity and critical reputation declined following the initial sensation of *Poems and Ballads*.

A Most Peculiar Man Swinburne's physical appearance, his personality, and the facts of his life have received much attention from biographers and from commentators exploring his works from a biographical standpoint. He was small, frail, and plagued by numerous peculiarities of physique and temperament, including an oversized head, nervous gestures, and seizures that may have been manifestations of a form of epilepsy. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, he drank excessively, and until his forties, he suffered intermittent physical collapses that necessitated removal to his parents' home while he recovered. In 1879 Swinburne's friend and literary agent, Theodore Watts-Dunton, intervened, isolating Swinburne at a suburban home in Putney and gradually weaning him from alcohol as well as from certain companions and habits. Swinburne lived another thirty years with Watts-Dunton, whose friendship remains controversial. Watts-Dunton is credited with saving Swinburne's life and encouraging him to continue writing. Swinburne died in 1909 at age seventy-two.

Works in Literary Context

During Swinburne's lifetime, critics considered *Poems and Ballads* his finest as well as his most characteristic poetic achievement; subsequent poetry and work in other genres was often disregarded. Since the mid-twentieth century, however, commentators have been offering new assessments of Swinburne's entire career.

Scandalous Themes in the Victorian Era Swinburne is regarded as a Victorian poet profoundly at odds with his age and as one of the most daring, innovative, and brilliant lyricists to ever write in English. Certainly, he shocked and outraged Victorian sensibility, introducing into the pious, stolid age a world of fierce atheism, strange passions, fiery paganism, and a magnificent new

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Swinburne's famous contemporaries include:

George Meredith (1828–1909): English novelist and poet best known for his tragicomic novel *The Egoist* and for his role as a publisher's adviser, from which position he helped launch the careers of Thomas Hardy and many others.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): An English poet, translator, and novelist of Italian descent. Also a cofounder of the realist Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and a significant painter in his own right.

Clorinda Matto de Turner (1853–1909): A Peruvian writer who spoke out strongly for the rights of indigenous people and whose own independence sparked the imagination of many during the era of independence movements in Latin America.

John Ruskin (1819–1900): An English art and social critic whose essays on art and architecture were extremely influential in both the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

David Livingstone (1813–1873): Scottish missionary and representative of British imperialism. Also the first European to see the Mosi-oa-Tunya waterfalls on the border between present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe; he promptly renamed them Victoria Falls in honor of the queen of England.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): One of the best-known American poets of all time, she published fewer than a dozen of the almost eighteen hundred poems she wrote during her quiet and private life.

lyrical voice the likes of which had never before been heard. His radical republicanism, a worship of the best instincts of man, pushed Victorian humanism well beyond the “respectable” limits of Matthew Arnold's writings. Additionally, his critical writings on art and literature greatly influenced the aesthetic climate of his age, and his extraordinary imitative facility made him a brilliant, unrivaled parodist. But most important, the expression of his eroticism in many poems about nature, particularly about the sea, wind, and sun, make him the Victorian period's greatest heir of the Romantic poets.

Lyricism Another particularly important and conspicuous quality of Swinburne's work is an intense lyricism. Even early critics, who often took exception to his subject matter, commended his intricately extended and evocative imagery, delicate hand with meter, rich use of assonance and alliteration, and bold, complex rhythms. At the same time, the strong rhythms of his poems and his characteristic use of alliteration were sometimes carried to extremes, rendering his work highly susceptible to

parody. Some critics also regard his imagery as vague and imprecise and his rhymes as facile and uninspired. After establishing residence in Putney, Swinburne largely abandoned the themes of sexuality that had characterized much of his earlier poetry. Nature and landscape poetry began to dominate, as did poems about children. Many commentators maintain that the poetry written during the Putney years is inferior to Swinburne's earlier work, but others see examples of exceptional merit among his later works, citing in particular “By the North Sea,” “Evening on the Broads,” “A Nympholept,” “The Lake of Gaube,” and “Neap-Tide.”

Historical Verse Drama Swinburne was primarily a poet, with his prolific years from 1860 to 1862. During this time, in addition to a large body of lyrics, many of which were to appear in *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne completed his tragedy *Chastelard* (not published until 1865), the first play in the eventually massive trilogy about Mary Queen of Scots that would include *Bothwell* (1874) and *Mary Stuart* (1881). Swinburne was drawn to the history of Mary Stuart both by his family's historic attachment to the Stuart cause and by his attraction to the character of Mary. *Chastelard's* bitter expression of his love for the queen pithily expresses Swinburne's main concern: “men must love you in life's spite; / For you will always kill them, man by man / Your lips will bite them dead; yea, though you would, / You shall not spare one; all will die of you.” Swinburne's deep emotional involvement with the theme of painful, fatal love infuses his verse with passionate lyricism; *Bothwell* and *Mary Stuart* were well received on publication but are rarely read today.

Mythical Themes in Lyric Verse Drama In 1865 and 1866, Swinburne became a literary lion and a literary scandal with the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Poems and Ballads*. *Atalanta in Calydon*, still justly regarded as one of Swinburne's supreme achievements, became a masterpiece partly because his choices of subject and form were perfectly adapted to his concerns and talents. The imitation of Aeschylean tragedy allowed him to exercise his superb lyrical gifts, the choice of the pagan Greek setting enabled him to express his antitheism convincingly, and the Meleager myth provided a vehicle with which to express his obsession with the fatal power of passion and of women. *Atalanta in Calydon* is a forceful attack on traditional Christianity, which Swinburne, like William Blake, saw as an instrument of moral repression that sets the ideals of the soul in conflict with the needs of the body. The message is summed up in the famous anti-theistic chorus that denounces “The supreme evil, God,” who “shapes the soul, and makes her a barren wife / To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay.” *Atalanta in Calydon*, however, is not merely a play with a message; it also represents a rebirth of the powerful lyricism of Greek tragedy. Rejecting all belief in a beneficent scheme of things and even in the possibility of joy, it is Swinburne's

most pessimistic major work, yet in its surging rhythms, in its fusion of the imagery of natural cycles, it achieves the intensity that John Keats saw as the essential quality of tragic art: the intensity that is “capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth.”

A Novelist One of Swinburne’s most significant prose works is the satiric epistolary novel of 1862, *A Year’s Letters* (pseudonymously serialized in *Tatler* in 1877). *A Year’s Letters* is a masterful, more or less autobiographical account of the aristocratic Victorian world that shaped Swinburne’s character, “a world,” writes Edmund Wilson in *The Novels of A. C. Swinburne* (1962), “in which the eager enjoyment of a glorious out-of-door life of riding and swimming and boating is combined with adultery, incest, enthusiastic flagellation and quiet homosexuality.” This and other works were not significant merely for their sensational value, however. The subtle analysis of characters and relationships, the close portraits of an aristocratic way of life, the power of description, and the precise, beautifully cadenced prose of these works reveal Swinburne’s genuine but often unrecognized talents as a novelist.

Literary Critic Throughout his career, Swinburne also published literary criticism of great acuity. His familiarity with a wide range of world literatures contributed to a critical style rich in quotation, allusion, and comparison. He is particularly noted for discerning studies of Elizabethan dramatists and of many English and French poets and novelists. In response to criticism of his own works, Swinburne wrote essays, including *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866) and *Under the Microscope* (1872), that are celebrated for their wit and insight. Swinburne also left a second novel, *Lesbia Brandon*, unfinished at his death. Some critics have theorized that *Lesbia Brandon* was intended as thinly disguised autobiography; however, its fragmentary form resists conclusive interpretation.

Works in Critical Context

Intellectual Poet Thanks to his sense of irony and gift for parody, Swinburne could do a better job making fun of himself than any of his critics, but this humor did not mean that he took himself or his work lightly. He wanted to be remembered not only as a great poet but also as a great poetic thinker. Along these lines, T. S. Eliot recognized that Swinburne’s music and intellect cohere, in his finest moments, into a sort of single entity that “there is no reason to call anything but genius. . . . What he gives is not images and ideas and music, it is one thing with a curious mixture of suggestion of all three.” Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s famous remark that Swinburne was “a reed through which all things blow into music” expresses the enduring quality of Swinburne’s achievement. The winds of primitive, savage passions—from love to the elemental forces of nature, the sea and sky, and on

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Poems and Ballads and *A Year’s Letters* are seen by many as obscene and offensive, though they are also acknowledged classics. Here are a few more examples of significant literary classics that were considered immoral when first published:

Aeropagitica (1644), a nonfiction work by John Milton.

This treatise condemning censorship makes the case—coming from one of literature’s most passionate defenders of Christian theology—that morality is only possible as a choice for those who have some minimal, albeit accidental, sense (even an imaginary sense) of immorality. It should be noted, however, that Milton was making the case for freedom of speech with the explicit goal of working toward a fuller understanding of the Christian god.

Tropic of Cancer (1961), a novel by Henry Miller. The publication of this novel led to a series of obscenity trials that tested American laws on pornography. The U.S. Supreme Court overruled state court findings of obscenity and declared the book a work of literature. The Modern Library named it the fiftieth-best book of the twentieth century.

Lady Chatterly’s Lover (1928), a novel by D. H. Lawrence.

This novel was originally to be called “Tenderness,” and met with scandal on account of its explicit sex scenes, which included previously banned words. A portion of the outrage with which the novel’s publication met may also have derived from the fact that the lovers were a working-class male and an aristocratic female. It is generally considered a classic of English literature.

to the “ruling song” of man—blew through Swinburne’s remarkably open heart, and came forth in sophisticated yet joyously primitive song. Tennyson’s comment does justice not only to Swinburne’s unquestionable talent for lyrical beauty but also to his less-recognized gift for translating an unmediated experience of the universe into language, into verse.

“On the Cliffs” One of Swinburne’s finest poems, “On the Cliffs,” was written at Holmwood in 1879, shortly after Watts-Dunton had rescued Swinburne from his rooms on Guildford Street. The poem approaches spiritual autobiography, which expresses the themes of *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (1885) in a richly complex and precise syntax. The setting, as in “The Forsaken Garden” and later “By the North Sea,” is a crumbling cliff that is being slowly eaten away by the sea—Swinburne’s favorite image for his belief that all earthly life, even the Earth itself, is destined for oblivion. Some critics in the early twentieth century dismissed Swinburne’s nature

poetry as ornamental and obscure, even verbose. They remarked, as noted in a Swinburne study by scholar David Riede, on the difficulty of Swinburne's "syntactical maze of modifying clauses and phrases" as well as his complicated literary allusion. Riede also suggests some critics dismissed Swinburne's "On the Cliffs" due to its meaning: the reader seems to always be in "continual doubt."

Bothwell In 1874 an anonymous reviewer in *Macmillan's Magazine*, writing on Swinburne's *Bothwell*, praised the dramatist's "strength and sweep of imagination" and suggested the play succeeds because Swinburne is "as much scholar as poet." The reviewer goes on to laud Swinburne's attention to history and his seriousness regarding the play's subject. George Saintsbury, in an 1874 issue of *The Academy*, also appreciated *Bothwell*, cheering its lyrical power and elevating its author to "the heights of the English Parnassus." Much more grounded in their analysis, twentieth-century critics like Curtis Dahl looked to *Bothwell* and the rest of Swinburne's trilogy on Mary, Queen of Scots as an autobiographical/biographical study. They believed the trilogy sheds new insight into how Swinburne saw himself at the time of publication.

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Atalanta in Calydon* with an eye to genre. Write an informal essay in which you explain whether you see the work as a play or a long piece of dramatic verse. Also, describe what you see as the difference between the two genres.
2. With a small group of your classmates, choose three poems with overlapping themes from *Poems and Ballads*. Consider the impact that they make when read together. Create a group presentation in which you explain what message they might communicate if read as parts of a whole, as opposed to individual poems. Engage the rest of your class in the following discussion: How does reading an entire collection of poems in their printed order differ from reading individual poems in that collection? Does the meaning change? Are different stories told?
3. In "By the North Sea" and other pieces, Swinburne paints linguistic pictures of bleak, desolate landscapes but often follows these dark pictures with hopeful or positive endings. Write a personal essay in which you imagine those poems as expressions of an internal landscape. Do you find the positive conclusions of "By the North Sea" emotionally convincing or compelling? Why or why not? How would you rewrite parts of the poem to make it say more about you and your life?
4. Swinburne is highly critical of organized religion throughout his body of work, especially in poems such as "Before a Crucifix," in which he parodies

what he sees as a corrupt and greedy Church. Find another Swinburne poem that offers a similar view of religion. How do you think readers in his day responded to these works? Why?

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John Millington Synge

BORN: 1871, County Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1909, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

In the Shadow of the Glen (1903)

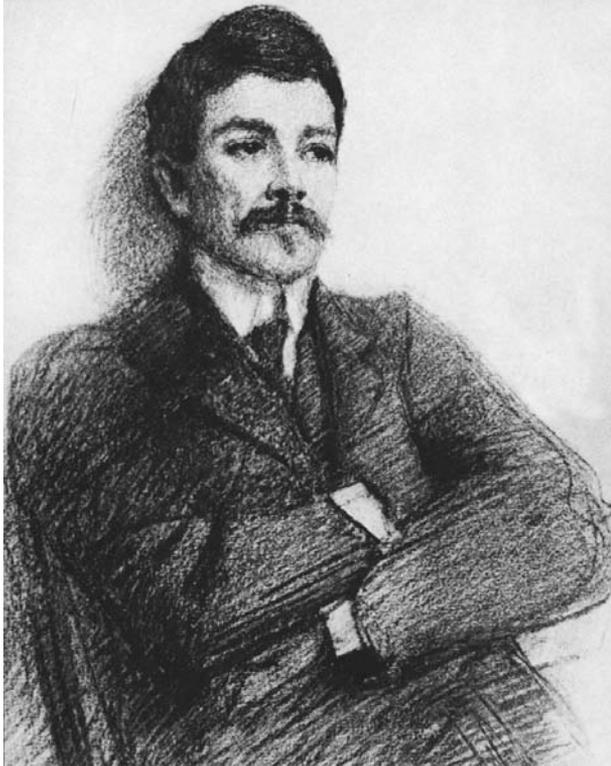
Riders to the Sea (1904)

The Playboy of the Western World (1907)

Deirdre of the Sorrows (1910)

Overview

The author of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Edmund John Millington Synge is considered the greatest dramatist of the Irish Literary Renaissance. In his unsentimental but compassionate portrayal of Irish peasants and his highly imaginative and poetic dialogue (patterned after the vernacular spoken by the rural population in the west of Ireland), Synge attempted to capture the essence of the Irish spirit, which he described in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* as "fiery and magnificent, and tender."



John Millington Synge *Synge*, John Millington, drawing. Irish Tourist Board

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Reaction to Religious Upbringing Born in 1871 in Rathfarnham, a town near Dublin, into a middle-class Protestant family, Synge was raised by his devoutly religious mother after his father's death in 1872. Due to his poor health, he was educated at home by private tutors. Influenced by his reading of the works of Charles Darwin (who published the theory of evolution), Synge broke from his religious upbringing at the age of fourteen, and his ill feelings toward Christianity often arise in his plays. He studied Hebrew and Irish at Trinity College in Dublin and, after earning his bachelor's degree, he traveled extensively in Germany, France, and Italy, intent on a career in music.

Focused on Writing Eventually judging himself better suited to literary endeavors, he moved in 1895 to Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne. The following year, he encountered two fellow expatriates, the political activist Maud Gonne and the poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats. Synge briefly joined Gonne's Irish League, an organization dedicated to liberating Ireland from English rule, but he quickly became disillusioned with the militant tactics she advocated. Ireland had been controlled by England for hundreds of years, and the Irish generally resented English policies that took their land

and denied them full legal rights. Over the years, especially in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Irish demanded home rule, if not independence, which gained them some reforms from the British government in this time period.

Yeats, the most prominent figure of the Irish Literary Renaissance, had a more lasting influence on Synge. (The Irish Literary Renaissance was a movement that sought to create a new literature out of the heritage, language, and folklore of the Irish people.) Yeats urged Synge to return to Ireland and to write about the peasants of the three small islands off the country's western coast, known collectively as the Aran Islands or, simply, Aran. The advice appealed to Synge, and he subsequently spent many summers on the islands observing the customs and dialect of the peasants. In their Anglo-Irish dialect, in their stories and legends, and in their spiritual beliefs—which he viewed as a hybrid of Christian teachings and the stronger, more exciting element of ancient paganism—Synge discovered the inspiration for most of his dramatic works.

The Dublin Years In 1903, Synge settled in Dublin, where the Irish National Theatre Society staged his first play, *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903). Presenting the story of a suspicious husband who fakes his own death in order to determine whether his young wife is faithful, and who has his worst fears confirmed, the play shocked and revolted Irish audiences with its ironic depiction of marriage. However, it found popularity in the more liberal atmosphere of England. In 1905 Yeats and dramatist Lady Gregory produced Synge's *The Well of the Saints* at the new Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Containing Synge's most acerbic characterizations of Irish peasants in the sarcastic, feuding blind couple Martin and Mary Doull and in a saint of questionable virtue, the play greatly impressed Yeats with its colorful dialogue. Yet it, too, offended Dubliners.

The first production of *The Playboy of the Western World* incited a public outrage in 1907 when audiences took exception to its coarse language and what they considered an unflattering portrayal of the Irish peasantry. Attempts to disrupt performances of the drama were so hostile that police were called to the Abbey Theatre to protect the players. News of the so-called Playboy riots earned an international reputation for Synge, who defended the play against charges that no Irish citizen would behave as his characters did by insisting that the characterizations and the plot of the play were taken from actual events. Two years later, Synge died of Hodgkin's disease (a type of cancer affecting the lymphatic system), leaving *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) complete but only partially revised.

Works in Literary Context

The stories, legends, folktales, customs, and speech Synge observed on the Aran Islands greatly influenced the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Synge's famous contemporaries include:

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Often credited with driving the Irish Literary Revival, this Irish poet and dramatist is highly regarded as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century. His works include *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1929).

Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932): This Irish dramatist and folklorist cofounded the Irish Literary Theater and the Abbey Theater. Her folk-influenced books include *A Book of Saints and Wonders* (1906).

Maud Gonne (1866–1953): A feminist and an actress, this Irish revolutionary captured the heart of William Butler Yeats. She published her autobiography in 1938, *A Servant of the Queen*.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): This famous Spanish artist cofounded the Cubist movement. His best known works include "Les Femmes d'Alger" (1911) and "Guernica" (1937).

Joseph Conrad (1859–1924): This Polish author is considered by many to be one of the most remarkable novelists to write in the English language. His most studied work is *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

content and themes of his plays. His musical training and close study of art and natural history also serve as a foundation of his attempt to bring into harmony in his writing not only the sound, meaning, colour, and rhythm of language, but a harmony of nature, myth, and passion. Synge was also greatly influenced by his life experiences, and constantly strove to distill the essence of experience into his art.

Style to Theme in *Riders to the Sea* Synge is remembered primarily for his innovations as a linguistic stylist. While his dialogue, as he professed, was taken directly from the speech of Irish peasants, he used his aesthetic sensibilities to bring out the inherent poetic qualities of the Anglo-Irish dialect. As Yeats suggested, in response to objections that Synge's dialogue was not entirely "natural," "Perhaps no Irish countryman had ever that exact rhythm in his voice, but certainly if Mr. Synge had been born a countryman, he would have spoken like that." Synge's achievement, critics maintain, was the use of this style to complement the themes pervading his works: the possibilities and limitations of speech, the disparity between reality and illusion, and the painfulness of everyday existence.

Exhibiting all of these themes in a highly compressed format, *Riders to the Sea* is a one-act tragedy set inside an

Aran cottage. The play presents vivid descriptions of the daily actions of the islanders and focuses on the danger of their custom of fishing in small boats, called currachs. Synge renders the fatalism native to a region in which the people depend on the sea for their livelihoods and exist in constant fear of sudden and violent storms. In the course of the play, Maurya, who has already lost four of her six sons to drowning, discovers that her son Michael has also drowned. She protests in vain as her last remaining son, Bartley, subsequently sets forth on what will be another fatal expedition. She expresses her grief by keening, the ritual shrieking over a corpse, but ultimately assesses her situation in a characteristically simple and fatalistic pronouncement: "I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them."

Critics have compared *Riders to the Sea* to Greek tragedy due to its compactness of narrative and its symbolic structure, which mirrors the cyclical nature of human existence in the intertwined stories of the two deaths. Commentators also observe that the play contains numerous allusions to Greek and Irish myth, as well as the *Book of Revelations*. It is esteemed as Synge's most artful and poetic work, but the bleakness of its subject matter has prevented it from being widely produced.

Influence Synge was an important catalyst in the development of Irish drama, for in bringing Anglo-Irish dialect to the stage he greatly influenced his successors, among whom Sean O'Casey and Brendan Behan are notable examples. He remains one of the most revered figures in modern drama, and his plays had a great influence on modern developments in the genre. In addition, his creation of a stylized language incorporating poetic imagery and vernacular speech patterns had a profound effect on such writers as William Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett.

Works in Critical Context

Critics often gave mixed, if not hostile, reviews to Synge's plays when they were originally produced, though France and Germany quickly embraced him and his European-style of thinking. Criticism of the playwright and his work have moved away from the initial controversy to be seen as masterworks of twentieth-century theater. Time has only improved critical esteem of Synge. Critics focus much of their attention on the dialogue, themes, and sources for his plays.

Playboy of the Western World *Playboy of the Western World* is considered by some to be the finest play written in English during the twentieth century. Criticism of *The Playboy of the Western World* typically stresses the thematic opposition between reality and imagination in the drama, tracing Christy's development toward self-realization as an individual and as a poetic persona. The

play's portrayal of his transformation is praised for suggesting a variety of mythological and biblical archetypes. For example, *Playboy* is often discussed in terms of the central themes and plot structures of the legends surrounding the hero Cuchulain from Irish mythology, and the drama's treatment of patricide is compared to that in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*.

Some commentators, emphasizing the rejection of Christy by his former admirers in the play's third act, have argued that Synge presents him as a Christ figure. However, comic and ironic elements in *Playboy* have caused critics to debate the degree of parody involved in Synge's approach to such prototypes. Christy, for example, is also considered a mock or secularized Christ in light of the drama's pagan themes and ironic use of religious allusions and expressions. *Playboy* has garnered much critical attention for eluding traditional classifications of comedy and tragedy, and is cited as an early example of the modern tragicomedy.

Synge's use of language in *Playboy* was also important from the first. Writing about the play in 1908, Louis Untermeyer in *Poet Lore*, noted "Wild poetry itself is in his utterance, for although Mr. Synge writes entirely in prose, his sentences are so steeped in similes of the skies that his very commonplaces are filled and colored with all the *nuances* of rhythm. The sunlight filters through his lines and the spell of scenic splendor is over all his work."

Responses to Literature

1. Account for the oppressive mood, atmosphere, and tableau settings of *Riders to the Sea* in a paper. How does this mood affect the actions and dialogue of the characters? Is Synge's depiction of the Aran Islands sympathetic? Hostile? Condescending?
2. Describe various types of humor and comedy in *The Playboy of the Western World* in an essay. Do these types of humor differ in class or along gender lines?
3. In an essay, discuss Synge's influence on the growth of the Abbey Theater. What made the Abbey Theater so important for its era, and for Irish national consciousness generally? Examine the history of the Abbey Theater alongside other culturally important theater groups and art collectives, such as the "Lost Generation" of American expatriates or the art circle surrounding Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground. What role do such cultural collectives play in shifting national attitudes or social perspectives?
4. *The Playboy of the Western World* was considered so offensive at the time of its staging that it sparked riots. Choose two or three other twentieth-century dramas that have been denounced as obscene or offensive, and examine in a small group setting what it is that audiences have struggled so deeply with. Is there ever a good reason to ban or censor plays or works of art in general? What are the dangers of a refusal to engage with challenging or disturbing material?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Synge was particularly fascinated by the possibilities opened up and the limitations imposed by speech. Synge listened to the speech of the islanders, a musical, old-fashioned, Irish-flavored dialect of English. He conversed with them in Irish and English, listened to their stories, and learned the impact that the sounds of words could have apart from their meanings. Other works that explore dialectal language include:

Absalom, Absalom! (1936), a novel by William Faulkner.

This tragedy of the American Deep South reveals, as do his other novels, a gift for capturing regional and racial vernacular.

Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce. This Irish novelist's sprawling final novel is best known for its obscure language and complexity. Joyce developed a basically new language that many commentators term *Wakese*—solely for the book. *Wakese* has a vocabulary of composite words drawn from sixty or seventy world languages to form puns or phrases meant to convey several layers of meaning at the same time.

Tender Buttons (1914), an experimental fiction book by Gertrude Stein. This book exemplifies the high modernist style. Basing her fiction in a technique of "automatic writing," she sought to access a deeper level of experience through language that was often jarring, alienating, or repetitive.

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❏ Wisława Szymborska

BORN: 1923, *Prowent-Bnin, near Poznan, Poland*

NATIONALITY: *Polish*

GENRE: *Poetry, essays*

MAJOR WORKS:

Calling Out to the Yeti (1957)

Salt (1962)

Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts (1981)

People on a Bridge (1986)

View with a Grain of Sand (1995)

Overview

Winner of the 1996 Nobel Prize in Literature, Wisława Szymborska is a private—some would say reclusive—widow. She has been described as “the [Wolfgang] Mozart of poetry...[with] something of the fury of [Ludwig van] Beethoven,” and although she is perhaps Poland’s most popular female writer and is valued as a national treasure there, she has only slowly made her way onto the radar of English-speaking readers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Krakow Wisława Szymborska was born on July 2, 1923, in the small town of Bnin (which is now part of Kórnik). She spent her early childhood there, near the city of Poznan, the industrial and cultural center of the western part of Poland. Her father, Win-



Wisława Szymborska *Szymborska, Wisława, photograph. AP Images.*

centy Szymborska, served as the steward of the Count Władysław Zamoyski’s family estate until taking a generous early retirement in the 1920s. In 1932, when Szymborska was eight, her family moved to the historic city of Krakow—as much the informal capital of southern Poland as Poznan is of its western reaches—to settle down for good. Since then, Szymborska’s entire life, except for her infrequent and usually short travels, has been spent in Krakow.

From September 1935 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Szymborska attended Gimnazjum Sióstr Urszulanek (Academy of the Sisters of the Ursuline Order), a prestigious parochial high school for girls in Krakow. When the Gimnazjum was shut down during the Nazi German occupation of the city, she attended underground classes, passing her final exams in the spring of 1941. During the war, she began to write short stories, of which she has remained critical. After the war Szymborska studied first Polish philology and then sociology at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow but never completed a degree.

The Postwar Years The war had a profound effect on Szymborska. Her poetic debut, “I’m Searching for a Word,” appeared in a literary supplement to *Dziennik Polski* (The Polish Daily) in March 1945. The poem expresses the inadequacy of language in the face of the personal and collective experience of war. More broadly, many of her poems of this period, including “Remembering September, 1939,” “Remembering January,” “Leaving the Cinema,” and “We Knew the World Backwards and Forwards,” give voice to the desire to dispel the mirages of collective happiness that arise in the enthusiasm following the end of war. These poems and others of this period were published in newspapers and periodicals, and only a few of them were ever anthologized, generally much later.

In 1948 Szymborska assembled a collection of her poetry, which was to be titled simply *Poezje* (Poems), but the collection never found a publisher; its contents were deemed too “bourgeois” and “pessimistic,” clashing with the socialist realist aesthetic that was beginning to take hold. Socialist realism was a movement promoted by the government of the Soviet Union as a way to ensure that all art contributed positively to society; to this end, the movement emphasized optimism and pride in communist ideals and cultural triumphs. The movement also worked against those artists who sought to question those in power or the current state of society. One of Szymborska’s poems, “Sunday at School,” even sparked a campaign against her, in which high school students were prodded to write letters of protest. She was accused of writing poetry that was inaccessible to the masses and too preoccupied with the horrors of war. A two-year poetic silence followed.

Krupnicza Also in 1948, at the age of twenty-four, Szymborska married Adam Włodek, a minor poet and

literary editor, and joined him at the writers' complex on Krupnicza Street in Krakow. (The marriage ended in divorce in 1954.) Krupnicza Street played an important role in the literary life of Poland in the postwar period. Following World War II, several dozen poets, writers, and translators shared close quarters and dined together at the Krupnicza complex, including Czesław Miłosz, Jerzy Andrzejewski, poet Artur Miedzyrzecki, Maciej Ślomczyński (Shakespeare translator and author of crime novels under the pen name Joe Alex), poets Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński and Anna Świeżczyńska, and the foremost postwar scholar of Polish literature, Artur Sandauer. Some lived there for a short period of time, awaiting the rebuilding of Warsaw, but for Szymborska and others it was to be home for many years.

Szymborska worked as an assistant editor in publishing houses until 1953, when she became the editor of the poetry section of the Krakow-based weekly *Zycie Literackie* (Literary Life), a position she held until 1968. She remained on the board as a regular contributor until 1976.

A New Direction As time passed, Szymborska became disillusioned with communism as it was practiced in Poland and the Soviet Union. This point is evident in the contrast between the title of her first collection, *That's What We Live For* (1952), and that of her second, *Questions Put to Myself* (1954). In the semantic gap between these two titles is the first glimpse of the fully original voice that emerged with Szymborska's third collection, *Calling Out to Yeti* (1957). *Calling Out to Yeti* marks a turn in Szymborska's conception of the role of the poet: She distances herself from the demand to speak for others (the worker, the country, the party), electing to speak only in her own subjective voice. *Calling Out to Yeti* has been considered a transitional volume, one in which her basic themes begin to take shape.

Solidarity and Support During the 1970s, Polish protesters held mass anticommunism demonstrations. Although her sympathies were aroused by the growing political opposition, Szymborska remained hesitant to adopt the role of spokesperson for political causes, perhaps because she felt she had earlier misplaced her trust in the promise of socialism. For Szymborska, the 1970s were a relatively prolific period. She produced two volumes of poetry, both marked by a strong existentialist streak. Critics of the 1972 collection *Any Case* highlighted Szymborska's anti-Romanticism and praised her for her skepticism and humanism, sense of wonderment, and cool assessment of the limitations of human cognition, and pointed to her sensitivity and intellectual subtlety.

With the emergence of the Solidarity movement in 1980, the Society and similar initiatives found themselves briefly freed from earlier encumbrances. Szymborska began her affiliation with the newly formed Krakow journal *Pismo* (Writing), the editorial board of which included

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Szymborska's famous contemporaries include:

Václav Havel (1936–): Renowned playwright and author, Havel was both the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the independent Czech Republic.

Lech Walesa (1943–): Walesa was the leader of Poland's primary resistance movement under authoritarian rule (Solidarity), winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983, and first president of Soviet-free Poland (from 1990 to 1995).

Tom Wolfe (1931–): Cofounder of the New Journalism movement of the 1960s and 1970s (incorporating literary techniques into reporting), Wolfe is renowned for his fast-paced, technically brilliant nonfiction chronicles of contemporary society.

W. G. Sebald (1944–2001): Sebald has been hailed by many as the greatest German writer of the postwar period; his novels are known for their lucid but surreal shifts in perspective and style.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): After Joseph Stalin, Brezhnev was the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He was political leader of the authoritarian Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1964 until his death in 1982.

many of her closest friends, among them fiction writer and poet Kornel Filipowicz, her longtime companion. Following the declaration of martial law on December 13, 1981, the composition of the editorial board of *Pismo* shrank as the government imposed demands on it, and Szymborska began to distance herself. Similarly, Szymborska terminated her thirty-year association with *Zycie Literackie* during this period. Under martial law, she chose to publish underground and in the émigré press under the pen name Stanczykowna, a feminized derivation of the name of a sixteenth-century court jester noted for his forthrightness.

Awards and Fame Although Szymborska's poems found their way into a few adventuresome literary periodicals during the 1980s, the political climate prevented her from publishing a volume of poetry until after the end of martial law, marking the longest hiatus between her collections. When it was published, *People on the Bridge* (1986) garnered her praise and several awards, including one from the Ministry of Culture, which she declined, and the Solidarity Prize, which she accepted.

Szymborska won her most prestigious award, the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1996. Despite, or perhaps due to, giving the shortest acceptance speech in literary

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

More than perhaps any other poet of her generation, Szymborska has an eye for the small and the everyday. Here are a few other poets and authors whose reputation rests in part on their ability to see complexity in simplicity:

The Little Prince (1943), a children's story by Antoine de Saint Exupéry. The simplicity of this children's story lines up with a complex but unspoken philosophy of the world.

"The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923), a poem by William Carlos Williams. This poem is a quick sketch of a red wheelbarrow. It has captured the fancies of generations and has been seen as reflective of the imagist philosophy.

Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), a novel by Willa Cather. This historical novel portrays two French priests setting out to establish a diocese in New Mexico.

Nobel history, she went from being an intensely private person to a public figure, vigorously pursued by the media. Since then, however, Szymborska has continued to be known for her quiet way of life and unwillingness to embrace the status of a celebrity. She shuns public gatherings, rarely travels abroad, hates being photographed or interviewed, and, except for her human rights and democratic reform activities, refuses to be involved in partisan politics. She is nevertheless quite involved in the cultural landscape of Krakow and maintains lively contacts with a small circle of friends. Her dislike of being in the limelight is by no means a sign of antisocial inclinations. Rather, it stems from her recognition that the larger part of a writers' public functioning is an empty ritual and an unnecessary waste of their inner resources.

Works in Literary Context

Skamander Szymborska's early work drew upon several literary movements, including the Polish avant-garde and the Skamandryci (Skamander formation). The Skamandryci was a group of interwar poets of diverse styles and literary lineages who shared a commitment to democratizing and expanding the range of poetry and poetic language, writing such "low" poetic forms as cabaret songs, nursery rhymes, and commercial slogans. Like the Skamander poets, Szymborska embraces colloquialism and is especially indebted to Julian Tuwim's poetics of the everyday.

Simple Details Szymborska emphasizes and examines the chance happenings of daily life and of personal relations in her poetry. "She is a master at recognizing the

importance of the insignificant," explains James Beschta, continuing, "It is the innovative, playful use of language that dominates her style." Indeed, what sets Szymborska apart from her poetic peers is her insistence on speaking for no one but herself. She refuses to wear the cloak of the prophet and harbors no illusions about changing the world or even the local political landscape with her poetry. As a result, she writes with the liberation of a jester. Szymborska has drawn attention for her irreverence toward the lofty and self-important and for her exaltation of the lowly and seemingly trivial.

A Poet of Socialism? Szymborska's book debut came during the heyday of Stalinism. In 1952 she published her first collection of poetry, *What We Live For*, and was admitted to the Polish Writers' Union (ZLP) and the United Polish Workers Party (PZPR). With this involvement, she participated in the socialist-realist aesthetic that changed the course of Polish literature. As party pluralism was replaced by the authoritarian, single-party state, a new literature arose that served to illustrate ready-made slogans, culminating in formulaic propaganda. Szymborska was far from alone among her contemporaries in joining in the chorus of communist apologists, accepting the new codes of speech, and selecting topics fit for use as propaganda. Reflecting an enthusiasm for the socialist utopia, her first volume and its successor, *Questioning Oneself* (1954), are dominated by politically engaged poetry. That is, they are filled with anti-Westernism, anti-imperialism, anticapitalism, and "struggle for peace."

Apolitically Political Poetry Szymborska later renounced her first two volumes of poetry as ignoble, however, criticizing herself for attempting to conform to the tenets of socialist realism. The Swedish Academy awarded her the Nobel Prize in 1996 on the basis of poems from her third collection, *Calling Out to the Yeti*, and thereafter. The Academy saw this collection as a reaction against Stalin, but Szymborska has challenged that interpretation of her work. "Of course, life crosses politics, but my poems are strictly not political," she noted in a rare interview. "They are more about people and life."

As a Polish poet gaining international prominence during the most frigid years of the cold war, she sought to write poems about people, about a common and simple humanity. This very emphasis on the human, however, has been identified as a part of an "apolitical politics" in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern bloc countries. That is, in totalitarian political systems, where even the most mundane activities and everyday life itself are "for the Party," an insistence on humanness and connection *without* politics was itself a political statement.

Works in Critical Context

Wisława Szymborska was thrust into the international spotlight in 1996 after receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The reclusive and private Szymborska was described by the Swedish Academy as writing “poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality.” Her poetry, in the words of *Los Angeles Times* critic Dean E. Murphy, is “seductively simple verse . . . [which has] captured the wit and wisdom of everyday life for the past half century.”

Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts: Seventy Poems Although still not widely read outside her native Poland, Szymborska received critical acclaim for the first collection of her work to appear in English translation, *Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts: Seventy Poems*. “Of the poetic voices to come out of Poland after 1945, Wisława Szymborska’s is probably the most elusive as well as the most distinctive,” writes Jarosław Anders in the *New York Review of Books*. Anders comments further: “*Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts* contains poems from [Szymborska’s] five books written since 1957, comprising more or less half of what the poet herself considers her canon. Its publication is of interest not only because of Szymborska’s importance as a poet, but also because her work demonstrates that the diversity of poetic modes in Poland is much greater than is usually perceived.” Alice-Catherine Carls, in a review of *Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts* in *Library Journal*, calls the work “one of those rare books which put one in a state of ‘grace.’” Robert Hudzik, also in *Library Journal*, claims: “This volume reveals a poet of startling originality and deep sympathy.”

View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems The 1995 collection *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems* was also praised by the critics, who lauded Szymborska’s directness and distinctive voice. For the *Washington Post Book World*, Stephen Dobyns praises both the humor of Szymborska’s work and the imaginative integrity of this translation by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. Celebrated proponent of the idea of “cultural literacy” Edward Hirsch agrees, arguing in the *New York Review of Books* that the volume reveals “the full force of [Szymborska’s] fierce and unexpected wit.” Louis McKee, in a *Library Journal* review, also praises the “wonderfully wicked” wit of Szymborska. Dobyns concludes his review by noting, “The poems are surprising, funny and deeply moving. Szymborska is a world-class poet, and this book will go far to make her known in the United States.”

Responses to Literature

1. Choose four poems from *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems* and discuss a common theme in these poems. Discuss why Szymborska opted to anthologize these poems together. Do the different poems reflect on one another in some ways?
2. Discuss Szymborska’s representation of the unexpected within daily life. What sorts of details draw her attention? What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking on a perspective such as hers?
3. Find an example of a poem where Szymborska uses a small and apparently insignificant detail to reflect on a large and important issue. What are some of the effects of this technique?
4. In *The Century’s Decline*, Szymborska writes, “The most pressing questions are naive ones.” What do you think she means by this? What are some of the “naive” questions Szymborska poses in her poetry?

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T-V

☒ Rabindranath Tagore

BORN: 1861, Calcutta, India

DIED: 1941, Calcutta, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Morning Songs (1883)

The Golden Boat (1894)

Gora (1910)

Gitanjali (1912)

The Home and the World (1916)

Overview

Rabindranath Tagore is India's most celebrated modern author. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, the first non-European to be awarded this prize. Astonishingly prolific in practically every literary genre, he achieved his greatest renown as a lyric poet. His poetry is imbued with a deeply spiritual and devotional quality, while in his novels, plays, short stories, and essays, his social and moral concerns predominate.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Literary Family in Calcutta Tagore was born into an upper-caste Hindu family in Calcutta on May 7, 1861. His grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, was a key figure in what is known as the Bengal renaissance in the mid-nineteenth century. Tagore's father, Debendranath, was a writer, religious leader, and practical businessman. Tagore was the fourteenth of his father's fifteen children and his father's favorite. From an early age, he embraced his father's love of poetry, music, and mysticism, as well as his reformist outlook.

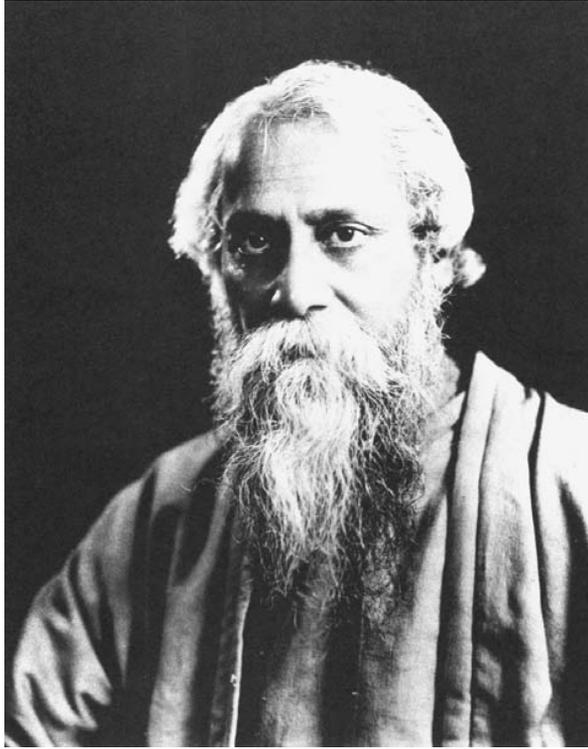
Tagore was a precocious child who showed unmistakable poetic talent. As early as eight, he was urged by

his brothers and cousins to express himself in poetry. This encouragement, which continued throughout his formative years, caused his talent to flourish. When Tagore was twelve, his father took him on a four-month journey to the Punjab and the Himalayas. This was Tagore's first contact with rural Bengal, which he later celebrated in his songs.

Public Recognition of Poetry After publishing his first poems at the age of thirteen, Tagore's first public recitation of his poetry came when he was fourteen at a Bengali cultural and nationalistic festival organized by his brothers. His acclaimed poem was about the greatness of India's past and the sorrow he felt for its state under British rule. India had been controlled by Great Britain in one form or another for some years. While the British had helped India develop economically and politically and expanded local self-rule, an Indian nationalist movement was growing in the late nineteenth century. This trend continued into the first decades of the twentieth, as well.

Tagore left India at age seventeen to continue his studies in England. During this time, he read extensively in English and other European literature, forming the universalist outlook he maintained throughout his life that included: a profound desire for freedom, both personal and national; an idea of the greatness of India's contribution to the world of the spirit; and poetry expressing both of these. His stay in England was brief, and when he returned home, he published the first of nearly sixty volumes of verse. He also wrote and acted in verse dramas and began to compose devotional songs for the *Brahmo Samaj*, the Hindu reformist sect his father promoted. In 1883, he married Mrinalini Devi. He was twenty-two years old, and she was ten. The couple had five children.

"The Lord of His Life" Tagore produced his first notable book of lyrics, *Evening Songs*, in 1882, followed by *Morning Songs* (1883). The latter work reflects Tagore's new mood initiated by a mystical experience he had while looking at the sunrise one day. His devotion to *Jivan devata* ("The Lord of His Life"), a new conception of God as humanity's intimate friend, lover, and beloved,



Rabindranath Tagore Tagore, Rabindranath, photograph. Source unknown.

played an important role in his subsequent work. Several poems in the volume *Sharps and Flats* (1886) boldly celebrate the human body, reflecting his sense of all-pervading joy in the universe.

Creative Virility In 1890, Tagore took charge of his family's far-flung estates, some of them in regions that are now part of Bangladesh. The daily contact with peasants and farmers aroused his empathy for the plight of India's poor. Coming in close touch with the people and geography of Bangladesh, Tagore was inspired to write his first major collection of verse, *The Golden Boat* (1894). The contemplative tone of his poetry gives his work the depth and serenity of his mature voice.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Tagore's creative output was tremendous, and his reputation steadily developed in his country as the author of poems, short stories, novels, plays, verse dramas, and essays. He moved through several phases at this time. If he began in the manner of the late Romantics, he soon became a writer of realistic fiction about everyday situations and people from all spheres of life. He frequently reinvented himself, creating new forms and introducing new genres and styles to Bengali literature—social realism, colloquial dialogue, light satire, and psychologically motivated plot development.

Music and Novels Tagore was also known for his musical creations. His compositions started a new genre

in Bengali music, known as *rabindrasangit* ("Tagore song"), an important part of Bengali culture. His music mingled elements of the folk music of boatmen and wandering religious with those of semiclassical love songs. He wrote more than two thousand songs in his lifetime, setting his poems, stories, and plays to music.

Tagore reached the peak of his fiction-writing career in 1910, when he published the novel *Gora*. This sociopolitical novel of ideas projects the author's concept of liberal nationalism based on international brotherhood. In the West, his best-known novel is *The Home and the World* (1916), which frankly expresses his conflicted sentiments regarding nationalist agitation in India.

Gitanjali and Worldwide Fame Tagore's standing as the leading Bengali writer was confirmed in 1911, when he was given a public reception in Calcutta to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. As he was about to visit England for the third time, he fell ill, and his trip was delayed. Lacking energy to compose new writing, he began translating some of his recently published lyrics into free verse. He landed in England with a slender English manuscript of devotional poems from the volume *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings). In June 1912, Tagore read his translations to a select group of London literati, including W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. The response was overwhelming, and Tagore became a literary sensation. A limited edition of *Gitanjali*, with an introduction by Yeats, quickly sold out. A second edition became a best-seller.

Tagore sailed to the United States later in 1912. Pound, a tireless promoter of poetry, introduced Tagore to influential literary people in America. When Tagore returned to India in 1913, he left behind a distinguished group of European and American admirers. That year, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature—the first such recognition of an Eastern writer. The prize gratified Tagore, but the sensation it created in Bengal also alarmed him. He would never again be out of the public eye.

Tagore as Public Figure Between 1916 and 1934, Tagore made five visits to America and traveled to nearly every country in Europe and Asia, lecturing, promoting his educational ideas, and urging international cooperation. Wherever he went, he was greeted as a living symbol of India's cultural heritage. He was knighted by the British crown in 1915, but resigned his knighthood four years later after British troops fired into a crowd in the Punjab, killing four hundred people. He denounced the European nationalism and imperialism that had brought about the First World War. While the war was fought primarily in Europe and Africa, the Indian army was compelled to support Great Britain and provide troops for the conflict. Thousands of Indian soldiers died and were wounded during their service. In India, the call for self-rule only continued to grow.

Now a major figure in the movement for national emancipation, Tagore became close to leaders like Mohandas K. Gandhi. His relationship with Gandhi was tumultuous. He rejected Gandhi's strategy of economic self-sufficiency and

derided “the cult of the spinning wheel.” Instead, he favored education as the primary engine of national uplift. He founded the university called Visva-Bharati, at the site of his ashram (spiritual retreat) at Santiniketan. He also created an Institute for Rural Reconstruction, recruiting international assistance to create a model for popular education in poverty-stricken villages. Like Gandhi, Tagore fought against the Indian caste system and discrimination against the “untouchable” class.

In the second half of the 1930s, old age, failing health, and international turmoil put a stop to Tagore’s travels. He suffered chronic pain and long bouts of illness in his final years. As he became conscious of his approaching death, Tagore wrote some of his finest poetry, continuing to experiment with technique and addressing issues of mortality. At his death on August 7, 1941, he had achieved what the contemporary Indian American writer Pico Iyer sees as a unique position: he had become “not just the world’s leading symbol of India, but India’s leading spokesman for the world.”

Works in Literary Context

In terms of his literary inspiration, Tagore acknowledged three main sources: the Vaishnava poets of medieval Bengal and the Bengali folk literature; the classical Indian cultural and philosophical heritage; and European literature of the nineteenth century, particularly the English Romantic poets. Woven through all these influences is an acutely modern sensibility, in touch with the social and political currents of his era. Throughout his life, he refused to belittle Western contributions to culture, always seeking a fusion of East and West.

Innovations in Fiction The sheer volume of Tagore’s contributions to every field of literature can obscure the innovative qualities of much of his work. For example, his two hundred short stories were the first in the Bengali language and represented a new genre in Indian prose. His stories depict the everyday lives of ordinary people, whether in rural settings or in Calcutta or in remote parts of India. The social reformer is evident in stories that target issues such as child marriage, dowries, or the tyranny of landlords.

Abundance of Poetic Themes The Western world has viewed Tagore primarily as a poet devoted almost exclusively to spiritual themes. However, that view does not reflect the variety nor the depth of his poetic voice. Sometimes the images he used were the old religious ones of the love between man and woman as representative of the love between humanity and God. Sometimes they were the earthy images of the boatmen of the vast rivers or the country marketplace. Sometimes they were drawn from the complex life of Calcutta. They were always images that touched something deep in the hearts and memories of the Bengali people. He excelled in everything from stately love poetry to nonsense rhymes,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tagore’s famous contemporaries include:

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Shaw, an Irish playwright, socialist, and Nobel Prize winner, revolutionized the English stage, disposing of the Romantic conventions and devices and instituting a theater of ideas grounded in realism. His plays include *Pygmalion* (1912).

W. B. Yeats (1865–1939): Yeats, an Irish poet and dramatist, befriended Tagore and championed his work. Yeats’s poetry included *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889).

André Gide (1869–1951): Gide is a French author known for relentless self-exploration and credited with introducing modern experimental techniques to the French novel. His novels include *The Immoralist* (1902).

Thomas Mann (1875–1955): This German novelist and essayist addressed aesthetic, philosophical, and social concerns in his writing, while combining elements of literary realism and symbolism. His novels included *The Magic Mountain* (1924).

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948): Tagore called Gandhi “Mahatma,” or “Great Soul.” This Indian political and spiritual leader is known for his nonviolent protests and passive resistance to British rule.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): This German-born physicist and humanitarian was the most famous scientist of the twentieth century. His theory of relativity reconfigured notions of time, space, and matter that had been formulated by Isaac Newton.

from flights of fancy to realistic depictions of ordinary people and situations.

In his nearly sixty volumes of verse, Tagore also experimented with many poetic forms—lyrics, sonnets, odes, dramatic monologues, dialogue poems, long narrative works, and prose poems. Every volume of his poetry is distinctive, whether in form or content, and he kept developing until the end of his very long career.

One of the aspects of Tagore’s genius is his use of the Bengali language, for his musician’s ear caught natural rhythms and his free mind paid little attention to classical rules of poetry. The forms he created were new. Even in the poetry that he intended to be read rather than sung, rhythms, internal rhyme and alliteration, and a peculiar sonorousness almost make the poems sing themselves. These are things that cannot even be suggested in translation. The translations of Tagore’s poetry available in English are hardly representative of his total work. *Gitanjali*, on which his reputation in the West is largely based, shows nothing of the humor, for example, or intellectual rigor of which he was capable. Tagore’s published work is

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tagore's *Gitanjali* revived the tradition of mystical poetry. The following collections also explore Eastern and Western approaches to spiritual verse.

The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu (1968), nonfiction by Chuang Tzu, translated by Burton Watson. The writings attributed to the ancient Taoist hermit are among the world's funniest, and most renowned, works of scripture.

The Essential Rumi (1995), poetry by Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks. The ecstatic outbursts of the most well-known Sufi poet were written over seven hundred years ago but still resonate in today's society.

The Gift (1999), poetry by Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ledinsky. This contemporary translation of the fourteenth-century Persian poet captures his passionate celebration of life.

Songs of Innocence and Experience (1789, 1794), poetry by William Blake. A pair of magnificent illuminated manuscripts by the visionary British poet and painter that describe "the two contrary states of the human soul."

Mountains and Rivers without End (1996), a poem by Gary Snyder. This epic work by the ecological Buddhist of the Beat generation was forty years in the making.

largely, though not completely, contained in twenty-six substantial volumes.

Influence Tagore almost single-handedly transformed Bengali literature and enriched its culture. Bengalis continue to find in him an endless source of inspiration. His poems, plays, songs, and stories have become part of the lives of the people of the Indian subcontinent. He is not only the author of the Bangladeshi national anthem but the Indian one as well. Many leading literary figures in South America, such as Nobel Prize winners Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, and Octavio Paz, also acknowledge him as a major influence on their work.

Works in Critical Context

While some critics feel that Tagore's prodigious output is uneven in its artistic value, his very prolificacy is often considered a measure of his creative achievement. Critics of Tagore's work are nearly unanimous in designating him as one of the preeminent lyric poets of the twentieth century. While Tagore's novels are mostly conventional in style and plotting, dealing frequently with crossed romances and improbable coincidences of fate, they are considered effective in dramatizing the moral conflicts between tradition and modernity in colonial India.

Even among more sensitive critics, Tagore's cadences and stylistic choices appeared increasingly old-fashioned in the interwar period. Although Tagore was the first modern Indian writer to introduce psychological realism in his fiction, his novels appeared out of step with the bold innovations in the novel represented by artists such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust. The Nobel Prize made Tagore and his books instantly popular in the rest of the world. However, the Tagore craze was brief in England and the United States. On the European continent, his reputation held on somewhat longer. Both political and literary factors explain the decline in his standing. His rejection of his knighthood and criticism of British rule in India had rankled many in Britain.

However, as Tagore's critical reputation began to decline in the English-speaking West, he was welcomed with great enthusiasm in the Middle East, the Far East, and South America. With the passing of time, more of Tagore's writing has reached English-language readers, allowing a more complete picture of his achievements to emerge. Present-day critics worldwide are nearly unanimous in designating Tagore one of the preeminent twentieth-century authors, as well as an indispensable figure in the modern history of the Indian subcontinent.

Gitanjali Outside his homeland, Tagore's reputation stemmed from his presentation of the *Gitanjali* translation in 1912. Artistically, *Gitanjali* came to be seen as Tagore's most characteristic work. Yeats, who publicly proclaimed his admiration for the poems, and Ezra Pound, who compared Tagore with Dante, set the tone for Tagore's reception in the West. In his introduction to the 1912 London edition, Yeats explained, "I have carried the manuscript of these translations about me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the tops of omnibuses and in restaurants... These lyrics display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long."

A *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer agreed with Yeats, commenting, "These poems are prophetic of the poetry that might be written in England if our poets could attain the same harmony of emotion and idea." Another critic noted of the poems in the collection, "*Gitanjali* has some of the finest descriptions of nature that Tagore has written."

Responses to Literature

1. Research Bengali literature and culture before the era of Tagore for a paper. How can you characterize Tagore's specific artistic influence on Bengali society?
2. Tagore said that his plays summon up "the play of feeling, not of action." What does this mean? Cite one or two of his plays to explain your answer in the form of an essay.
3. Based on *The Home and the World* and other works, summarize Tagore's attitudes toward Indian anticolonial activism. Create a presentation with your findings.

4. Read several poems from Tagore's youth, and some from his final years. In a small group, discuss some of the common elements. What do the poems tell you about the arc of his life?
5. Write an essay about the religious and spiritual perspectives expressed in Tagore's poetry.

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Alfred, Lord Tennyson

BORN: 1809, Somersby, Lincolnshire, England

DIED: 1892, Aldworth, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems (1842)

In Memoriam (1849)

"The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854)

Maud (1855)

Idylls of the King (1874)

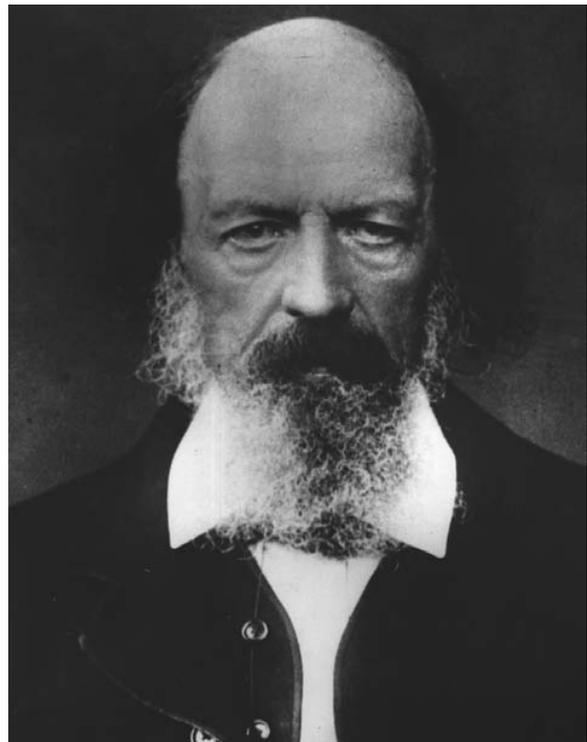
Overview

British author Alfred, Lord Tennyson is considered an icon of the Victorian period of English history and is regarded as one of the most accomplished lyric poets in the history of English verse. He was immensely popular in his lifetime, especially in the years following the publication of his lengthy elegiac poem *In Memoriam* (1850). While Tennyson was the foremost poet of his generation and the poetic voice of Victorian England, many critics have since found his poetry excessively emotive and moralistic, though he is universally acclaimed as a lyricist of unsurpassed skill.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unhappy Childhood with an Unstable Father

The fourth of twelve children, Tennyson was born in Somersby, Lincolnshire, England, on August 6, 1809. His father, George Clayton Tennyson, was a rector who maintained his benefice grudgingly as a means of supporting himself and his family. The elder son of a wealthy



Alfred, Lord Tennyson *Lord Tennyson, Alfred, photograph*. AP Images.

landowner, he had obtained the rectory when his younger brother was designated as prospective heir to the family's estate. Tennyson's father had been essentially disinherited and reacted by indulging in drugs and alcohol, creating an unpleasant domestic atmosphere often made worse by his violent temper. It also believed that George Tennyson was mentally unstable, and each of his children also suffered to some extent from drug addiction or mental illness.

Biographers speculate that the general melancholy and morbidity expressed in much of Tennyson's verse is rooted in the unhappy environment at Somersby. He began writing poetry long before he was sent to school. All his life he used writing as a way of taking his mind off his troubles. One odd aspect of his method of composition was set in childhood as well. He would make up phrases or discrete lines as he walked, and store them in his memory until he had a proper setting for them.

Launched Writing Career In 1827, when he was almost eighteen years old, Tennyson's first volume of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* was published. Later that year, Tennyson enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he won the chancellor's gold medal for his poem "Timbuctoo" in 1829. *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, published in 1830, was well received and marked the beginning of Tennyson's literary career. Another collection, *Poems*, appeared in 1832 but was less favorably reviewed, many critics praising Tennyson's artistry but objecting to what they considered an absence of intellectual substance.

The latter volume was published at the urging of Arthur Hallam, a brilliant Cambridge undergraduate who had become Tennyson's closest friend and was an ardent admirer of his poetry. Hallam's enthusiasm was welcomed by Tennyson, whose personal circumstances had led to a growing despondency. His father died in 1831, leaving Tennyson's family in debt and forcing his early departure from Trinity College. One of Tennyson's brothers suffered a mental breakdown and required institutionalization. Tennyson himself was morbidly fearful of falling victim to epilepsy or madness. Hallam's untimely death in 1833, which prompted the series of elegies later comprising *In Memoriam*, contributed greatly to Tennyson's despair.

Financial and Poetic Uncertainty For nearly a decade after Hallam's death Tennyson published no further poetry. During this period, he became engaged to Emily Sellwood, but financial difficulties and Tennyson's persistent anxiety over the condition of his health resulted in their separation. As Tennyson struggled, Great Britain was also changing as Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837, beginning a long reign (which ended in 1901) and setting the tone for an important era in British history. During the Victorian age, the Industrial Revolution reached its peak and provided British colonial and military expansion during the nineteenth century. At home, there was a vast increase in the factory system, industrialization, and urbanization, changing the fabric

of British society. Reform and social justice were also emphasized, as humanitarian legislation eliminated some long-standing abuses.

In this environment in 1842, yielding to a friend's insistence, Tennyson published his two-volume collection *Poems*, for which reviewers were virtually unanimous in expressing admiration. That same year, however, an unsuccessful financial venture cost Tennyson nearly everything he owned, causing him to succumb to a deep depression that required medical treatment. In 1845, he was granted a government pension in recognition of both his poetic achievement and his apparent need. Contributing to his financial stability, the first edition of his narrative poem *The Princess: A Medley*, published in 1847, sold out within two months. Tennyson resumed his courtship of Sellwood in 1849, and they were married the following year.

The timely success of *In Memoriam*, published in 1850, ensured Tennyson's appointment as poet laureate, succeeding William Wordsworth. The success of *In Memoriam* and his appointment as poet laureate assured Tennyson the opportunity to become the poetic voice of his generation, and in his ceremonial position he composed such poems as "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade", each of which is a celebration of heroism and public duty. *Idylls of the King* (1859), considered by Tennyson's contemporaries to be his masterpiece, and *Enoch Arden* (1864), which sold more than forty thousand copies upon publication, increased both his popularity and his wealth and earned him the designation "the people's poet."

Poet Laureate Although the dramatic works written later in his career like *Queen Mary* (1875) and *The Foresters* (1892) were largely unsuccessful, Tennyson completed several additional collections of poems in the last decade of his life, all of which were well received. They included: *Ballads and Other Poems* (1880), *Tiresias, and Other Poems* (1885), and *Demeter, and Other Poems* (1889). In 1883 he accepted a peerage, the first poet to be so honored strictly on the basis of literary achievement. Ill for the last two years of his life, Tennyson died on October 6, 1892, at his home and was interred in Westminster Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Tennyson's poetry had a number of influences, including Elizabethan songs, the traditional ballad, and the poetry of the Romantics who came before him. They included Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats, as well as other authors like William Shakespeare, John Milton, and Sir Walter Scott. Traditional legends, classical mythology and poets, and fairy tales also informed some of his narrative subjects, such as "The Day-Dream." Tennyson had nearly a lifelong interest in the legends of King Arthur, which ultimately resulted in *Idylls of the King* (1889). Yet many critics believe that his most characteristic lyrics are unique and individual,

marked by a Tennysonian “something” that had no precedent in English verse.

Idylls of the King and the British Empire Tennyson’s epic poem *Idylls of the King* followed the controversial *Maud* by examining the rise and fall of idealism in society. “I tried in my *Idylls*,” Tennyson wrote, “to teach men the need of an ideal.” F. E. L. Priestley has observed that Tennyson used the “Arthurian cycle as a medium for discussion of problems which [were] both contemporary and perennial,” and concludes that the *Idylls* “represent one of Tennyson’s most earnest and important efforts to deal with the major problems of his time.” Tennyson was concerned with what he considered to be a growing tendency toward hedonism in society and an attendant rejection of spiritual values. *Idylls of the King* expresses his ideal of the British empire as an exemplar of moral and social order: the “Table Round / A glorious company” would “serve as a model for the mighty world.” However, when individual acts of betrayal and corruption result from adultery committed by Arthur’s wife and Lancelot, the ensuing disorder destroys the Round Table, symbolizing the effects of moral decay that were Tennyson’s chief concern about the society of his day.

Theme of Death In Tennyson’s major work, *In Memoriam*, he expressed his personal grief over Hallam’s death while examining more generally the nature of death and bereavement in relation to contemporary scientific issues, especially those involving evolution and the geologic dating of the earth’s history, which brought into question traditional religious beliefs. Largely regarded as an affirmation of faith, *In Memoriam* was especially valued for its reflections on overcoming loss. Comprising 132 sections written over the course of nearly two decades, the poem progresses from despair to joy and concludes with a marriage celebration, symbolically expressing Tennyson’s faith in the moral evolution of humanity and reflecting the nineteenth-century ideal of social progress.

Suicidal Bravery In an earlier assessment of the narrative poem “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854) Christopher Ricks has argued that the poem is indirectly concerned with the idea of suicide, which pervades Tennyson’s early poetry, but can also be discovered in his later works. In armed combat, self-extinction loses the stigma that traditionally attaches to it in Western society and is esteemed an honorable behavior instead. There is little doubt that military actions have sometimes been prompted by an urge for annihilation. Seen from this angle, the enthusiastic self-sacrifice of soldiers, loses its heroic note but gains a profoundly human significance that would have appealed to Tennyson. It is important to note in this connection that his description deviates at one point from the steadfast regularity that otherwise characterizes the advance. In the last stanza, lavish praise

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tennyson’s famous contemporaries include:

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879): Cameron was a British photographer noted for taking pictures of Victorian celebrities, including Tennyson and his friends. She is also remembered for a cycle of photographs based on an Arthurian theme.

Prince Albert Edward (1841–1910): Prince Edward, who was Prince of Wales during Tennyson’s lifetime, succeeded Queen Victoria to the throne in 1901. The Edwardian period in England saw many advances in technology and science and the reconstruction of the army between the Boer War and the outbreak of World War I.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): British novelist Dickens was a prolific and beloved writer of the Victorian era and is best known for such novels as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Bleak House* (1853), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900): A witty novelist, poet, and playwright, Wilde was known as the leader of the Decadent movement that dominated British literature at the end of the nineteenth century. His only novel was *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), while his plays include *Lady Windemere’s Fan* (1892) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895).

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910): Nightingale was a pioneer in the medical field who sought improved health care and conditions for the citizens of Great Britain. After serving as a nurse in the Crimean War, she launched a campaign for medical reform and started a nursing hospital in London.

is bestowed on the “wild charge” of the Light Brigade as if the poet had for once yielded to a secret conviction that the ride had a suicidal aspect.

The suicide motif arises from the argument advanced in the second stanza where the moment of awareness is expressly articulated. “Their’s but to do and die”: the steady progress of the collective body of troopers who pass lemminglike to their doom will raise associations that are more closely related to contemporary everyday life than to military engagement. The common man has become painfully aware of the infinite variety of administrative mishaps that devolve upon him in the shape of coercive patterns imposed from above. Legal restrictions, bureaucratic regulations, rigid codes of professional conduct, technocratic directions—the individual’s existence is weighed down by constraints that we often know to be erroneous and yet are forced to comply with, since the rhythms of contemporary life depend on our enactment of predetermined roles.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tennyson was just one of many authors to tackle the legends of King Arthur. Each work focuses on different aspects of the mythology, demonstrating the mutability and enduring popularity of the stories.

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485), a novel by Sir Thomas Malory. Perhaps the best-known version of the Arthurian saga, Malory drew upon a multitude of sources to construct the story of Arthur's life and reign, from the "sword in the stone" to Arthur's death at the hands of his son Mordred.

The Once and Future King (1958), a novel by T. H. White. In a modernized take on the Arthurian legends, the mythological figures are updated with real-life emotions, the events of a far-off time given contemporary relevance.

Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights (1976), a novel by John Steinbeck. This updated, "living" translation of Malory is by the noted American author, long an admirer of the Arthurian cycle.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889), a novel by Mark Twain. A comedic take on King Arthur's Camelot, this novel features a time-traveling American who introduces modern concepts and inventions to his new medieval world.

The Mists of Avalon (1983), a novel by Marion Zimmer Bradley. The Arthurian cycle is retold from the perspective of the women, chiefly the Ladies of the Lake in this novel. The Knights of the Round Table and Arthur become the supporting characters, much as the women are in conventional tales.

Moreover, the predicament requires distinctly more than sheeplike obedience. Fortitude and active dedication are called for if the rigorous discipline of the modern state is to be maintained. Advancing or retreating with the steady measure of a pendulum, men may at all times be forced into situations that could terminate in personal annihilation. Modern society is still prepared to acknowledge the importance of unflinching loyalty on the part of the individual. Yet no purgatorial purification or spiritual reward, not even the certainty of lasting public esteem, could still be attained through acts of selfless devotion, and this is precisely the point where the "The Charge of the Light Brigade" falls short of illustrating the human condition in our time. Tennyson ended his poem on a note of praise, promising everlasting glory for the victims of an administrative blunder.

Influence As perhaps the leading poet of the Victorian era as well as the poet laureate of Great Britain, Tennyson was highly regarded in his lifetime as well as long after his

death. Many Victorian readers were touched by his words, including Queen Victoria herself. University students were reading his verse, quoting it as a mark of sophistication. An extraordinary number of writers, both in Great Britain and the United States, count Tennyson as an influence, including T. S. Eliot, George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Walt Whitman.

Works in Critical Context

Today, Tennyson is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language. This critical reputation began in his lifetime when many of his poems were universally acclaimed. By the end of his lifetime, however, there were the beginnings of an anti-Victorian movement, as new styles of poetry and criticism emerged. Tennyson was so closely identified with his era that his critics began dismissing him with disillusionment for his Romantic stylistic and language choices, which were considered Victorian. Many early twentieth-century readers found his stylistic and subjective choices to be dated. By mid-century, Tennyson's importance was again recognized, and he continued to be appreciated into the twenty-first century. However, critics remain divided, as some critics consider him a minor poet of a minor historical period while others recognize his anticipation of twentieth century poetic movements.

Early Works Tennyson's first two significant collections, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* and *Poems*, were considered by many critics to be of high poetic merit but devoid of meaning or purpose beyond their pure artistry. In a review of the latter collection, philosopher John Stuart Mill urged Tennyson to "cultivate . . . philosophy as well as poetry," expressing a sentiment not uncommon among Tennyson's early reviewers. The collection of *Poems* that appeared in 1842 included radically revised versions of his best poems from the earlier volumes, and addressed such themes as duty, self-discipline, and the complexities of religious faith, offering what critics considered to be a truer representation of human life than that of his early works.

Maud *Maud, and Other Poems* (1855) was the first collection Tennyson published as poet laureate, but it elicited a negative response. The title poem is a "monodrama" in which the changing consciousness of the narrator is traced through a series of tragedies that result in his insanity. Confined to an asylum, the protagonist is cured of his madness and asserts his love for humanity by serving his country in the Crimean War. Both author George Eliot and prime minister William Gladstone denounced the poem as morbid and obscure, and were among many who disapproved of Tennyson's apparent glorification of war, which he depicted as an ennobling enterprise essential to the cleansing and regeneration of a morally corrupt society. *Maud* has since been reevaluated by critics who find it Tennyson's most stylistically inventive poem, praising its violent rhythms and passionate language. Modern critics largely agree with Christopher

Ricks that *Maud* was for Tennyson an “exorcism”; as Ricks explains, “*Maud* was an intense and precarious attempt . . . to encompass the bitter experiences of four decades of a life in which many of the formative influences had also been deformative.” Thus madness, suicide, familial conflict, shattered love, death and loss, and untempered pursuit of wealth, all central sadnesses in Tennyson’s life, are attacked openly and passionately in *Maud*, with war cultivating the spirit of sacrifice and loyalty that Tennyson felt essential to avert the self-destruction of a selfishly materialistic society.

Responses to Literature

1. What can you discern about Victorian values from reading Tennyson’s “Ulysses”? In an essay, summarize the values laid out in the poem and how values have changed since the poem was written. What would an updated version of “Ulysses” be like?
2. In a presentation, explain the personal loss and resulting despair that motivated Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*.
3. In “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” Tennyson turned a military blunder into a tale of glory. In a group, discuss the following questions: What do you think is the significance of having the Light Brigade temporarily victorious in stanza 4? Does it add to the story’s tension? Does it make these brave soldiers more admirable? How?
4. Read about the presidential administration of John F. Kennedy and write a paper that addresses the following questions: Why was it called “Camelot”? Find particular figures from the Arthurian myths that correspond to figures in U.S. politics. In particular, whom would you say is most like the Lady of Shalott?

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William Makepeace Thackeray

BORN: 1811, Calcutta, India

DIED: 1863, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Yellowplush Correspondence (1838)

The Luck of Barry Lyndon (1844)

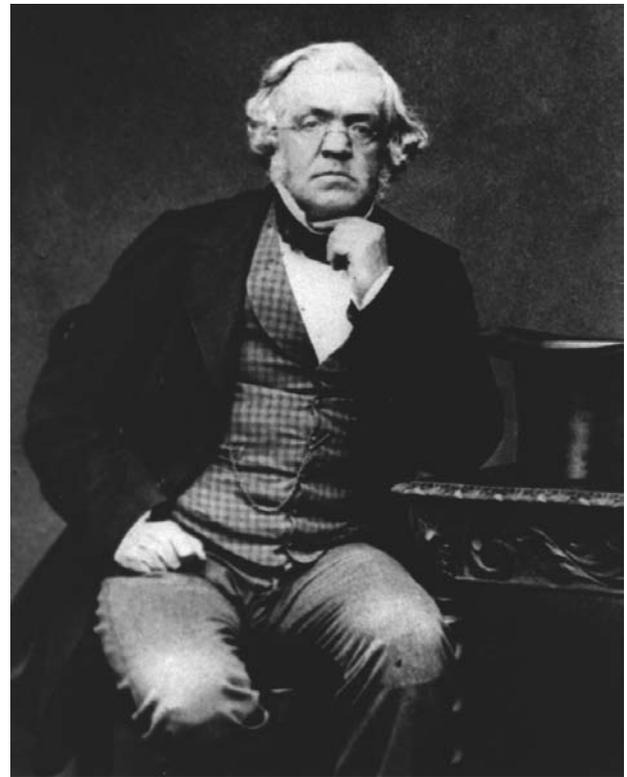
Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero (1848)

The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., a Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Q. Anne (1852)

Roundabout Papers (1863)

Overview

British author William Makepeace Thackeray is best known for his satiric sketches and novels of upper- and middle-class English life and is credited with bringing a simpler style and greater realism to the English novel. *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1848), a panorama of early nineteenth-century English upper-middle-class society, is generally regarded as Thackeray’s masterpiece. Although *Vanity Fair* has received more critical attention than any of his other works, many regard *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., a Colonel in the Service of Her*



William Thackeray Thackeray, William, photograph. AP Images.

Majesty Q. Anne (1852), a historical novel set in early eighteenth-century England, to be his most well-planned and carefully executed work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unhappy Childhood Spent in Boarding Schools

Thackeray was born in Calcutta, India, in 1811, where his father worked as a secretary for the British East India Company. At the time, India was under the colonial rule of the company, and, indirectly, Great Britain. The British East India Company was a trading company with political power that reaped high profits from such goods as salt, indigo, and coffee while modernizing India. After his father's death when Thackeray was six, however, Thackeray was sent to England, where he was cared for by relatives. His mother, who remarried and remained in India, did not return to England for four years. During these years Thackeray attended several boarding schools, where he was extremely unhappy. He later attended the prestigious Charterhouse School and then Trinity College, Cambridge, which he left before finishing his degree.

After reading law for a short time, Thackeray moved to Paris, where he studied art. Although he eventually abandoned the idea of making his living as a painter, Thackeray continued to sketch and paint throughout his life and illustrated many of his own works. While studying in Paris, he married a young Irishwoman named Isabella Shawe. Shortly after their marriage, they returned to London, where Thackeray began writing professionally, contributing to *Fraser's Magazine*, *New Monthly Magazine*, and later to *Punch*, to support himself and his new family after the fortune he inherited from his father was lost in an Indian bank failure in 1833. In 1839, the Thackerays' second daughter, Jane, died in infancy, and the next year, shortly after the birth of their third daughter, Harriet, Isabella Thackeray went mad, never regaining her sanity. Because she outlived him, Thackeray was unable to remarry and was thus deprived of the family life he so desired.

Published under Pen Names During the years before the success of *Vanity Fair* as he struggled to make a living, Thackeray wrote numerous reviews, essays, comic sketches, and burlesques under more than a dozen comic pseudonyms. Among the best known of his early nonfiction is *The Yellowplush Correspondence* (1838), a series of satiric sketches written in the guise of a cockney footman's memoirs published under the pen name Charles J. Yellowplush. The most successful of the early burlesques is the novella *Ikey Solomons*, a parody of the crime story genre popular in Thackeray's day. This work is the strongest expression of Thackeray's contempt, discernible throughout his other works, for the prevalent literary convention of glorifying criminals.

The Luck of Barry Lyndon (1844), his first lengthy novel published under the name Fitz-Boodle, was strongly influenced by Henry Fielding's *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743) and demonstrates his keen interest in eighteenth-century literary forms. *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, which first revealed Thackeray's skill at depicting the language and manners of an earlier age, was also his first serious attack on social pretension. His increasing scorn for the shallow acquisitiveness of Victorian society is obvious in *The Book of Snobs* (1848), a collection of satiric character sketches, which first appeared as *The Snobs of England, by One of Themselves* in *Punch*. This series denounces the snobbery and greed bred by the changes in social attitudes and relationships brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the resulting redistribution of wealth and power. During the Victorian era, British society was undergoing other major transformations such as increased urbanization, population shifts, and a greater concern for reform and social justice in the face of unprecedented commercial and industrial prosperity.

Vanity Fair For *Vanity Fair*, his first signed work, Thackeray adopted the publication form of monthly periodical installments already made popular by Charles Dickens. This comprehensive satire of corruption in upper- and middle-class English society is set during the Waterloo crisis of 1815 (when Britain and a European coalition finally ended Napoléon's attempt to control Europe). The themes central to Thackeray's earlier writings are clarified and fully developed in *Vanity Fair*, in which he delivers his most scathing attack on the heartless pretension prevalent in nineteenth-century English life and concludes that self-interest is at the heart of human motivation.

Literary Success Finally successful and well known, Thackeray began suffering from a sudden decline in his health in the late 1840s, including what was believed to be a bout of typhoid in 1849. He also suffered from the emotional effects of a long, but unphysical, love affair with Jane Brookfield, the wife of his clergyman friend, Henry Brookfield. Thackeray came to realize that she had merely played with his affections and never intended to be unfaithful. Despite such troubles, Thackeray went on to write *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy* (1849–1850), the first of three related novels based on his own experiences. *The History of Pendennis* chronicles the early life of Arthur Pendennis, who takes the role of the narrator in the sequels, which are titled *The Newcomes: Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family* (1854–1855) and *The Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World* (1862). All three novels are set in contemporary London and are narrated in the manner, according to Thackeray, of "a sort of confidential talk." Although their narrative technique is often considered diffuse and overly didactic, these novels are praised for their convincing characterization and vivid depiction of Victorian society.

Henry Esmond is Thackeray's only novel completely written before publication and issued in book form without first being serialized. Critics often cite these circumstances when praising the novel's careful organization and elegant style. Set during the reign of Queen Anne (1702–1714), *Henry Esmond* is written in imitation of early eighteenth-century English prose. The coarse, inconsiderate Lord Castlewood in the novel is a stab at Thackeray's former friend Brookfield. Although it offended some readers due to the incestuous overtones of Henry Esmond's marriage to Lady Castlewood, it is now regarded as one of the greatest nineteenth-century English historical novels. Its sequel, *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century* (1858–1859), is generally considered to be inferior.

Focused on Journalism In 1859, Thackeray became the first editor of and chief contributor to *Cornhill Magazine*. During his last years, he contributed numerous essays and several novels to the journal, including *Lovel the Widower* (1861) and *The Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World; Shewing Who Robbed Him, Who Helped Him, and Who Passed Him By* (1862). The essays collected in *The Roundabout Papers* (1863), however, are probably the most highly valued of these contributions. In these nostalgic, rambling pieces Thackeray wistfully recounts his childhood experiences, travels, and impressions of Victorian literature, politics, and society. He was in the midst of publishing *Denis Duval* (1864) in *Cornhill Magazine* when he died suddenly of an apoplectic stroke on Christmas Eve 1863.

Works in Literary Context

In his writings, Thackeray was greatly influenced by such writers as Miguel de Cervantes, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Fanny Burney, Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and Alexandre Dumas. Honoré de Balzac, especially his *Cousine Bette* (1846) specifically inspired *Vanity Fair*. Beyond other authors, Thackeray was also influenced by the era in which he lived—the Victorian era—with all its contradictions and social conditions as well as the externals of everyday life, including personal connections, jobs, and marriages. Thackeray's need to question nineteenth-century ideals, as well as religion and moral choices, also informed his works.

“Novel without a Hero” Like many of his fellow Victorian novelists, Thackeray is noted for his ability to create memorable characters—for example, Major Gahagan, Charles Yellowplush, Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Henry and Beatrix Esmond, Colonel Newcome, and the roundabout commentator who addresses the reader in virtually all of Thackeray's works. In spite of giving such prominence to character delineation, Thackeray also came to develop an important new kind of novel, the “novel without a hero.” Such a novel may have a chief figure, one who is neither a romantic hero nor a rogue hero but a flawed, recognizable human being like Arthur Pendennis or Philip Firmin. In the case of several of Thackeray's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Thackeray's famous contemporaries include:

Anthony Trollope (1815–1882): A successful and prolific English Victorian author, Trollope was noted for his keen observations of social, cultural, and political issues of the day. His novels include *The Warden* (1855) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867).

Emily Brontë (1818–1848): One of a trio of literary sisters, Emily wrote only one novel—albeit one that was considered an instant classic: *Wuthering Heights* (1847)—before dying of tuberculosis at age thirty.

Jacob Grimm (1785–1863): As one half of the famous Brothers Grimm, Jacob was instrumental in conducting one of the first comprehensive surveys of folklore. Grimm was primarily a respected and influential figure in the study and history of the German language and wrote several authoritative works on the subject. His publications included *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835).

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850): French novelist and playwright, whose *La Comédie humaine* (1799–1850), a one-hundred-volume collection of novels and stories, has exerted a strong influence over many famous authors, from Dickens to Proust to Kerouac.

Karl Marx (1818–1883): Called the “father of communism,” Marx was both a political philosopher and activist. Although German by birth, Marx spent most of his adult life in London, where he refined his theories of class struggle and the emergence of a classless society. His books on the subject include *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855): This Danish philosopher is best known for his probing questions on institutionalized religion, ethics, and faith. His publications include *Either/Or* (1843).

masterpieces, such as *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848) and *The Newcomes* (1853–1855), however, the center of interest is the complex network of relationships among the characters—an analog of society itself.

Class and Narrative Technique Thackeray's masterpiece, *Vanity Fair*, includes the most comprehensive treatment of the concerns central to all of Thackeray's works—the divisive effects of greed, class, and social ambition—and epitomizes the sardonic wit and apt character sketching for which he is esteemed. This satiric novel revolves around the lives of two characters, the passive Amelia Sedley and the ambitious, conniving Becky Sharp. Thackeray's treatment of these characters has sparked endless debate, for although Becky is ostensibly the negative character, it is she who actively engages the reader's interest and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Thackeray's works often parody the pretensions of the upper classes. Other novels that also comment on the rich include:

Carry on, Jeeves (1925), a book of short stories by P. G. Wodehouse. These comic stories feature the bumbling British aristocrat Bertie Wooster and his levelheaded valet, Jeeves, who repeatedly extricates his employer from various amorous, legal, and familial difficulties.

Vile Bodies (1930), a novel by Evelyn Waugh. Known for his black satires, Waugh takes on young British socialites in this mordant novel.

The Philadelphia Story (1940), a film directed by George Cukor. This romantic comedy about a Philadelphia socialite planning for her wedding encourages viewers to reconsider their preconceptions about social class.

sympathy, while Amelia, though good-hearted, appears in the final analysis to be dull and ineffectual. Becky Sharp is often praised, in fact, as one of the most memorable anti-heroines of the nineteenth century. The other major and minor characters are also noted for their lifelike complexity.

In addition, Thackeray first uses in *Vanity Fair* the narrative technique employed throughout his subsequent novels: the omniscient, didactic narrator who comments freely upon the motives and actions of the characters. Similarly, three related novels he published between 1849 and 1862 share an unusual narrative technique. *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy* (1849–1850) is the first of three related novels based on Thackeray's own experiences. *The History of Pendennis* chronicles the early life of Arthur Pendennis, who takes the role of the narrator in the sequels, which are titled *The Newcomes: Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family* (1854–1855) and *The Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World* (1862). All three novels are set in contemporary London and are narrated in the manner, according to Thackeray, of “a sort of confidential talk.” Although their narrative technique is often considered diffuse and overly didactic, these novels are praised for their convincing characterization and vivid depiction of Victorian society.

Influence While Dickens ultimately left a more prominent legacy than Thackeray, the latter's influence can still be felt in other works of Victorian literature that realistically examine society. Thackeray's journalistic work also affected many readers and writers in the nineteenth century and beyond. It is also believed that Thackeray's literary techniques also influenced such sweeping novels as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–1869).

Works in Critical Context

During his life Thackeray's work was regarded as the great upper-class counterpart to Dickens's panorama of lower-class Victorian society. Indeed, because of his precise rendering of character types and his acuity in describing the social mores of his time, some critics have contended that he is Dickens's superior as a historical chronicler. However, Thackeray's reputation declined at the turn of the century. Early twentieth-century critics often found his vision of society limited and his characterization impeded by his deference to Victorian conventions. More recently there has been a resurgence of interest in Thackeray and numerous studies have appeared that afford his works a more sympathetic treatment. Thus, although Thackeray is no longer widely ranked as an equal of Dickens, his works continue to inspire a diverse body of critical interpretation, and he is generally recognized as one of the major writers of the mid-Victorian era.

Criticism of Thackeray's works primarily revolves around several issues, including his narrative technique and his use of satiric irony. Many early critics were particularly disturbed by Thackeray's apparent cynicism; some, including novelist Anthony Trollope, chided him for dwelling too exclusively on the negative traits of humanity. Others claimed that his satiric depiction of self-interested rogues served a useful moral purpose and was sufficiently balanced with sensitivity and compassion. In contrast, his twentieth-century detractors have been far more critical of the sentimentality that often creeps into his works.

Thackeray's omniscient narrative technique continues, however, to be the most controversial element in his fiction. While many claim that the authorial commentary is intrusive and interferes with dramatic unity, others believe that this method enhances Thackeray's work by creating a deliberate moral ambiguity that actively involves readers by forcing them to render their own judgments. Another area of interest for both critics and biographers is the possible autobiographical sources for Thackeray's works. Numerous studies have been published that examine the parallels between his private relationships and experiences and the characters and plots of his works. Critics often maintain that Thackeray's intense emotional involvement with characters based closely upon real-life models severely limited his artistic achievement.

Vanity Fair Critics believe that Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* represents a milestone in the development of fictional realism in England. The novel is widely regarded to be Thackeray's masterpiece and is considered to be as original and ambitious as any novel from the Victorian era. However, early critical reactions to the novel were mixed. A number of prominent authors expressed high praise for *Vanity Fair*, including Charlotte Brontë, who called the novel a “Herculean feat” and its author a “Titan” among Victorian writers. Some contemporary reviews objected to the work on moral grounds. Robert

Bell took exception to the “vicious and odious” qualities of the main characters.

In spite of the furor sparked by the book’s supposed amorality and ruthlessness, most critics agreed that the novel represented a landmark of realistic fiction. John Forster wrote in the *Examiner*, “*Vanity Fair* must be admitted to be one of the most original works of real genius that has late been given to the world. . . . The very novelty of tone in the book impeded its first success; but it will be daily more justly appreciated; and will take a lasting place in our literature.”

Beginning in the twentieth century, critical interpretation began to steer away from moral consideration of the novel and focus on Thackeray’s stylistic innovations. Other critics began to recognize the possible strategies behind the work’s structural imbalances, arguing that the lack of a clearly developed plot allowed the novel’s themes to serve as a framework of the story. In more recent years, critics have returned to the moral considerations that preoccupied Thackeray’s contemporaries.

Responses to Literature

1. Using Thackeray’s novels as a base, research and explain the manners and customs of his time in a paper. How does Thackeray point out the peculiarities and foibles of members of Victorian society?
2. In a group, discuss the following questions: What impact do the Napoleonic Wars have on the characters in *Vanity Fair*? How closely are their lives touched by such monumental yet relatively far-off events?
3. Select a scenario in Thackeray’s works in which a character manipulates or intimidates another. In an essay, express whether the method is physical force, political power, or social or educational superiority, and show how the submissive character is harmed.
4. Create a presentation that answers these questions: How are Thackeray’s own life experiences reflected in the characters in *Vanity Fair*? Why do you think he chose to make the story “a novel without a hero”?
5. How is the society in which you live similar to the one depicted in *Vanity Fair*, and how is it different? Present your answer in any form you choose, such as an essay, short story, or poem.

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■ Dylan Thomas

BORN: 1914, Swansea, Wales

DIED: 1953, New York

NATIONALITY: British, Welsh

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Eighteen Poems (1934)

Deaths and Entrances (1946)

“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (1951)

Under Milk Wood (1954)



Dylan Thomas Francis Reiss / Picture Post / Getty Images

Overview

One of the most renowned authors of the twentieth century, Thomas is as well known for his life of excess as for his iconoclastic, critically acclaimed writings. Often focusing on such universal concerns as birth, death, love, and religion, Thomas's works remain distinctly personal through a blend of rich metaphorical language, sensuous imagery, and psychological detail.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Wales Born in a suburb of the port of Swansea, on the southern coast of Wales, Thomas was the second child and only son of middle-class parents. His father, an English teacher who had a great love for literature, encouraged similar devotion in his son, even going so far as to read the works of Shakespeare aloud to the infant Thomas in his cradle. Such efforts were rewarded when Thomas began writing verse at an early age. He was an otherwise undistinguished student, however, and left school at sixteen to work for the *South Wales Daily Post* in Swansea.

Thomas continued to compose verse while working at the *Post*. When he resigned from the paper early in 1933, poetry became his primary occupation. It was at this time that Thomas began to develop the serious drinking problem that plagued him throughout the remainder of his life and resulted in his death at the age of thirty-nine. His notebooks reveal that many of his most highly regarded poems were either written or drafted during this period and that he had also begun to experiment with short prose pieces. In May of 1933, his poem "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" was published in the *New English Weekly*, marking the first appearance of his work in a London journal, and in December of the following year his first poetry collection, *Eighteen Poems* (1934), was issued. Although this book attracted little attention, Thomas's second volume, *Twenty-five Poems* (1936), fared somewhat better, and as the decade progressed he gained increasing recognition for both his poetry and his prose.

Marriage and a Nomadic Life In the summer of 1937, Thomas married Caitlin Macnamara, an aspiring dancer of Irish descent whose reputation for unconventional behavior rivaled Thomas's own. For the next twelve years the couple led a nomadic existence, staying with friends, relatives, and a series of benefactors. The stories later collected in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) were written primarily during their stay in the Welsh coastal village of Laugharne in late 1938 and early 1939. Too frail for active military service, Thomas wrote scripts for propaganda films during World War II, at which time he also began to participate in radio dramas and readings for the BBC. His hometown of Swansea was targeted by German bombers during air raids in 1941, and a large urban portion of the town was completely destroyed. He later wrote about witnessing the

aftermath in the radio drama *Return Journey Home*. Thomas emerged from the war years a respected literary figure and popular performer; however, his gregarious social life and the excessive drinking it encouraged seriously interfered with his writing. Seeking an environment more conducive to poetic production, Thomas and Caitlin returned to Laugharne in 1949.

During the early 1950s, Thomas wrote several of his most poignant poems, including "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" and "Lament." He also completed the radio drama *Under Milk Wood* (1954) and began work on an autobiographical novel, which was left unfinished at his death and published posthumously as *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1955). Nevertheless, he feared that his creative powers were rapidly waning, and, partly in an attempt to avoid the pressures of writing, he embarked on a speaking tour of the United States in the spring of 1950. A highly charismatic speaker, Thomas charmed American audiences with his readings and shocked them with his often wild, irresponsible behavior.

Beyond Poetry Thomas focused on writing prose and screenplays during the last years of his life. Previous to this period, his most important prose appeared in the semi-autobiographical short stories, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, which stylistically and thematically bear comparison to Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The most significant prose piece to issue from Thomas's later period is the "play for voices," *Under Milk Wood*.

Thomas went to the United States on lecture tours four times, beginning in February 1951, leaving his home for the four and a half years before his death. In 1953, Thomas fell into a coma due to ailments complicated by alcohol and drug abuse. He died four days later, leaving behind a mound of debts that private contributions helped to pay.

Works in Literary Context

Passionate and intense, vivid and violent, Thomas wrote that he became a poet because "I had fallen in love with words." His sense of the richness and variety and flexibility of the English language shines through all of his work.

The theme of all of Thomas's poetry is the celebration of the divine purpose that he saw in all human and natural processes. The cycle of birth and flowering and death suffuses his poems. He celebrated life in the seas and fields and hills and towns of his native Wales. In some of his shorter poems, he sought to recapture a child's innocent vision of the world.

Words and Style Thomas set a new standard for many mid-twentieth-century poets through works that display his mastery of vivid imagery, involved word play, fractured syntax, and personal symbology. He was passionately dedicated to his "sullen art," and he was a competent, finished, and occasionally intricate craftsman. He made, for example, more than two hundred versions

of “Fern Hill” before he was satisfied with it. Like James Joyce before him, Thomas was obsessed with words—with their sound and rhythm and especially with their possibilities for multiple meanings. His early poems are relatively obscure and complex in sense and simple and obvious in auditory patterns. His later poems, on the other hand, are simple in sense but complex in sounds.

Depictions of Wales One key element in Thomas’s works is his depiction of his native Wales. His radio play *Under Milk Wood* is an example of this work, as a pageant of eccentric, outrageous, and charming Welsh villagers reminisce about the casual and crucial moments of their lives. This is also shown in *Return Journey Home*, where he describes the devastation of Swansea by German bombers during World War II.

Old Age and Death Thomas frequently utilizes the notion of the cycle of life by contrasting young and old or living with dying. This is shown in his most famous poem, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” where the narrator advises a dying person to fight back against the onset of death, with the emotion of rage being equated with life. It is also shown in his poem “Fern Hill,” found in the aptly named collection *Deaths and Entrances*. In the poem, Thomas begins by relating the experiences of youth, and concludes with an aged narrator lamenting his coming death. Though Thomas generally depicts death and old age negatively, his poem “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” offers a hopeful view of life after and beyond death.

Works in Critical Context

From the outset of Thomas’s career there has been much critical disagreement as to his poetic stature and importance. Many commentators regard Thomas’s work as too narrow and unvarying; he essentially confines himself to the lyric expression of what Stephen Spender calls “certain primary, dithyrambic occasions,” chiefly birth, love, and death. The influence of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets is often cited in connection with Thomas’s unorthodox religious imagery, while the influence of the Romantic poets is seen in his recurrent vision of a pristine beauty in childhood and nature.

Dylan Thomas’s life, work, and stature among twentieth-century poets are all matters of controversy and speculation. An essentially shy and modest man when sober, Thomas called himself the “captain of the second eleven” on the team of modern poets, an uneasy, pivotal ranking between the clearly major and the clearly minor poets. Others, too, such as John Crowe Ransom, have found difficulty in formulating a final opinion of Thomas: Is he really only the best of the minor poets—those who achieve distinction within inherited modes and procedures—or is he the weak man, if that, among the major poets—those who absorb the tradition of ideas and forms that they then in some way radically change?

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Thomas’s famous contemporaries include:

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Stravinsky was a Russian composer famous for his music for the ballets *The Rite of Spring* (1913) and *The Firebird* (1910), and is widely considered to be one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century.

John Cage (1912–1992): Cage was an American avant-garde composer who was instrumental in the development of modern dance and electronic music.

John Berryman (1914–1972): Berryman was an American poet who was one of the founders of the confessional school of poetry.

Shirley Jackson (1916–1965): Jackson was a popular and influential American writer of novels and short stories best known for “The Lottery” (1948).

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969): Kerouac was an influential American poet and novelist who was part of the Beat generation; he is most famous for his semiautobiographical novel *On the Road* (1957).

Poetry Collections The critical reception that greeted *Eighteen Poems* was overwhelmingly positive; reviewers sensed in Thomas a highly unique yet traditional poetic voice. In many of these poems Thomas drew upon his childhood and adolescent experiences. Often described as incantatory, *Eighteen Poems* records Thomas’s experimentations with vibrant imagery and with sound as “verbal music.” Thomas’s brilliant debut—and subsequent brief career and life—would later prompt comparisons to the short, dazzling, and ultimately tragic career of American poet Hart Crane, who drowned himself in 1932.

Twenty-five Poems contains many of the same themes as his first work. William York Tindall referred to Thomas’s first two books as the poet’s “womb-tomb” period because of his penchant to focus on the polarity of birth and death. Critics also noted that Thomas frequently questions or comments upon religion, using images and terminology from Christian mythology, history, and doctrine. “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” was considered by many critics to be a breakthrough work in Thomas’s career. In it, the poet addresses the Christian ideas of life and death, ultimately defying death and celebrating the possibility of eternal life. Another acclaimed poem, “Altarwise by Owl-Light,” is a sequence of ten sonnets discussing the crucifixion of Christ. Both poignant and comic, the sequence is generally regarded as one of Thomas’s best works.

Under Milk Wood Critics have often noted similarities between Thomas and James Joyce. In *Under Milk Wood* and

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Many of Thomas's poems incorporate autobiographical aspects. Other poems compare the poet to the natural world. Here are some other works constructed in a similar way:

"Death of a Naturalist" (1966), a poem by Seamus Heaney. This poem details the exploits and thoughts of a young boy collecting frogspawn in a flax-dam.

"The Drunken Boat" (1871), a poem by Arthur Rimbaud. This poem is well known for both its surreal, dazzling imagery and its symbolism.

The Golden Age (1895), stories by Kenneth Greene. This collection of stories represents children as having perception that is far superior to that of the unimaginative, pleasure-stifling adults.

Walden (1854), a nonfiction work by Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau spent two years living in a cabin in the Massachusetts woods in order to gain perspective on human society for this work.

Ulysses, respectively, each author captures the life of a whole society as it is reflected in a single day; for Joyce it is the urban life in Dublin, while for Thomas it is the Welsh village community of Llareggub. Criticism of *Under Milk Wood* generally concentrates on the play's lack of moral center. David Holbrook, who has written two books attacking Thomas, argues that his "place of love" is infantile, that his lyric boisterousness is really sniggering dirty-mindedness, and that we are finally invited to laugh cruelly at the characters. While there is some justice in this view, it recalls the moral sensibility that is appalled to discover that "Llareggub" is "Buggerall" spelled backward. Raymond Williams, on the other hand, seems to find genius in Thomas's mastery of an unrealistic but still convincing "pattern of voices"; Thomas, he implies, in transmuting the lives of a community into art, produced a play "not inconsiderable" in substance and superior to the verse drama of Christopher Fry or T. S. Eliot. William Ayres Arrowsmith expresses the same preference for Thomas's life-affirming, Dionysian vision over Eliot's "sterility."

Responses to Literature

1. Thomas was known for his inspired performances, his entertaining public personality, and his colorful personal life. As a class, discuss whether Thomas's poems would be as interesting on their own. How much did his personal mystique contribute to the positive reception of his works?
2. Read several of Thomas's poems from *Twenty-five Poems*. Choose one and write a brief analysis of the

poem's rhythm and theme. Point out any evidence of mysticism or religion that you can find in the poem.

3. Critics and readers have noted that Thomas's prose and scripts draw heavily on the author's life. Attempt to re-create some of Thomas's life by identifying autobiographical details in his prose and poetry.
4. Thomas's reading tours in the United States in the early 1950s won him great acclaim. Write an essay tracing the impact of his trips to the United States on his later works.

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J.R.R. Tolkien

BORN: 1916, Bloemfontein, South Africa

DIED: 1995, Thirsk, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again (1936)

The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955)

The Silmarillion (1977)



J.R.R. Tolkien *Tolkien, J.R.R., photograph. AP Images.*

Overview

A leading linguist of his day, Tolkien was an Oxford University professor who, along with colleagues C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, helped revive popular interest in the medieval romance and the fantastic tale genre. Tolkien is best known for his novels of epic fantasy, the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955). Beneath his charming, adventurous surface story of Middle Earth lies a sense of quiet anguish for a vanishing past and a precarious future. His continuing popularity evidences his ability to draw audiences into a fantasy world, at the same time drawing attention to the oppressive realities of modern life. Many critics claim that the success of Tolkien's trilogy has made possible the contemporary revival of "sword and sorcery" literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Orphaned Young, Educated at Oxford John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born the son of English-born parents in Bloemfontein, in the Orange Free State of South Africa, where his father worked as a bank manager. To escape the heat and dust of southern Africa and to better guard the delicate health of her sons, Tolkien's mother moved back to England with him and his brother when they were very

young. Within a year of this move, their father, Arthur Tolkien, died in Bloemfontein; a few years later, the boys' mother died as well. The boys lodged at several homes from 1905 until 1911, when Tolkien entered Exeter College, Oxford.

Tolkien married his longtime sweetheart, Edith Bratt, and served for a short time with the Lancashire Fusiliers, a British infantry regiment assigned to the Western front during World War I. World War I was a horrific conflict that cost millions of military and civilian lives across Europe: England alone suffered nearly 900,000 military deaths and about twice that many casualties. While in England recovering from an illness he developed on the front in 1917, Tolkien began writing "The Book of Lost Tales," which eventually became *The Silmarillion* (1977) and laid the groundwork for his stories about Middle Earth. After the end of the war, Tolkien returned to Oxford, where he joined the staff of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and began work as a freelance tutor.

The Coalbiters and the Inklings In 1920 Tolkien was appointed Reader in English Language at Leeds University, where he collaborated with E.V. Gordon on an acclaimed translation of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," which was completed and published in 1925. (Some years later, Tolkien completed a second translation of this poem, which was published posthumously.) The following year, having returned to Oxford as Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, Tolkien became friends with a coworker, C.S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956). They shared an intense enthusiasm for the myths, sagas, and languages of northern Europe; and to better enhance those interests, both attended meetings of "The Coalbiters," an Oxford club founded by Tolkien where Icelandic sagas were read aloud. The influence of these and other Germanic tales can be seen clearly in Tolkien's fantasy fiction.

As a writer of imaginative literature, Tolkien is best known for *The Hobbit* (1936) and *The Lord of the Rings*, tales that were conceived during his years attending meetings of "The Inklings," an informal gathering of like-minded friends, initiated after the demise of The Coalbiters. The Inklings, which was formed during the late 1930s and lasted until the late 1940s, was a weekly meeting held in Lewis's sitting-room at Magdalen. At these meetings, works-in-progress were read aloud, discussed, and critiqued by the attendees, all interspersed with free-flowing conversation about literature and other topics. The nucleus of the group consisted of Tolkien, Lewis, and Lewis's friend, novelist Charles Williams, bound together by their belief in Christianity and their love of stories. Having heard Tolkien's first hobbit story read aloud at a meeting of the Inklings, Lewis urged Tolkien to publish *The Hobbit*, which appeared in 1937. Tolkien also read a major portion of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) to the Inklings group before it disbanded in the late 1940s.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tolkien's famous contemporaries include:

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963): Huxley was an English poet, essayist, and novelist whose most popular work is *Brave New World* (1932).

Norman Rockwell (1894–1978): The work of this American artist and illustrator frequently featured on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): Churchill, who held the position of prime minister of the United Kingdom during World War II, was also a renowned author.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): This English novelist used “free indirect discourse,” a style of writing in which an author attempts to describe the many avenues a person's thoughts follow, a deceptively difficult feat in literature.

Louis Armstrong (1901–1971): This American jazz musician's unique, strained vocals made “What a Wonderful World” a hit.

The Father of Fantasy Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* appeared in three volumes in England in 1954 and 1955, and soon thereafter in the United States. The books made him a cult figure in the United States, especially among high school and college students. Uncomfortable with this status, he and his wife lived quietly in Bournemouth for several years, until Edith's death in 1971. In the remaining two years of his life, Tolkien returned to Oxford, where he was made an honorary fellow of Merton College and awarded a doctorate of letters. He was at the height of his fame as a scholarly and imaginative writer when he died in 1973. Critical study of his fiction continues and has increased in the years since his death.

Works in Literary Context

The concise edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines philology as “the study of literature in a wide sense, including grammar, literary criticism and interpretation, the relation of literature and written records to history, etc.” The stories of Middle Earth made a quiet, unassuming teacher of linguistics—whose life in most ways was uneventful and modest—into an international celebrity. Tolkien wrote in the foreword to the Ballantine edition of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy that his task in writing his fairy-stories is “primarily linguistic in inspiration.”

Philology Tolkien was a philologist in the literal sense of the word: a lover of language. In his scholarly biography *The Inklings*, Humphrey Carpenter explained, “It was a deep love for the look and sound of words [that motivated Tol-

kien], springing from the days when his mother had given him his first Latin lesson.” After learning Latin and Greek, Tolkien taught himself some Welsh, Old and Middle English, Old Norse, and Gothic, a language with no modern descendant—he wrote the only poem known to exist in that tongue. Later, he added Finnish to his list of languages; the Finnish epic *The Kalevala* had a great impact on his *Silmarillion*. The Finnish language itself, said Carpenter, formed the basis for “Quenya,” the High-elven tongue of his stories.

Ancient Myths So much of the art of Tolkien's storytelling relies on ancient, archetypal patterns derived from Greek, Germanic, Celtic, and Old and Middle English models. Tolkien's expertise in these established forms reveals a passion he developed early in life for exploring lost cultures and the ancient roots of modern cultures. Though the mythologies of many cultures can be discerned in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Germanic and Norse sagas are particularly dominant.

Allegory of the Modern World? Because *The Lord of the Rings* was written during World War II, it has been analyzed as a fictionalized, allegorical account of those horrors—Sauron, for example, being the equivalent of Hitler, and so forth. Nonetheless, Tolkien explicitly rejected such an interpretation. In the foreword to the Ballantine edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, he stated, “As for any inner meaning or ‘message,’ it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical.” He continued, “I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and have always done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’ but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed dominations of the author.”

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Tolkien immediately after the publication of his most well-known work, *The Lord of the Rings*, was divided. Many critics felt the trilogy was written for children and consequently was not worthy of the same kind of critical evaluation as other, more “adult” fiction.

Upon its release, many critics, were hostile toward *The Lord of the Rings* because the book did not fit current fashions of adult fiction. It was not a realistic contemporary novel, and in the words of Edmund Wilson, “It is essentially a children's book—a children's book which has somehow got out of hand.” Such misunderstandings were anticipated by the three authors commissioned to write the jacket blurb, so they concentrated on comparable authors such as Thomas Malory and Ariosto and on genres such as science fiction and heroic romance.

What these early critics could not predict, however, was that *The Lord of the Rings* would reawaken an appetite for fantasy literature among readers and create a new genre: adult fantasy. Since its publication, those critics who appreciate Tolkien have worked to establish criteria by which Tolkien and other fantasists should be judged. Among them was Elizabeth Cook, who wrote in *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, “The inherent greatness of myth and fairy tale is a poetic greatness. Childhood reading of symbolic and fantastic tales contributes something irreplaceable to any later experience of literature. . . . The whole world of epic, romance, and allegory is open to a reader who has always taken fantasy for granted, and the way into it may be hard for one who never heard fairy tales as a child.”

Legacy Tolkien’s life’s work, the creation of Middle Earth, “encompasses a reality that rivals Western man’s own attempt at recording the composite, knowable history of his species,” wrote Augustus M. Kolich in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Kolich continued, “Not since Milton has any Englishman worked so successfully at creating a secondary world, derived from the real world, yet complete in its own terms with encyclopedic mythology; an imagined world that includes a vast gallery of strange beings: hobbits, elves, dwarfs, orcs, and, finally, the men of Westeros.” Throughout the years, Tolkien’s works—especially *The Lord of the Rings*—have pleased countless readers and fascinated critics who recognize their literary depth.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the effect of using children and other characters small in stature as opponents of evil in *The Hobbit*. Once you have explored this topic, use your conclusions to write a short children’s story featuring a young character fighting the forces of evil.
2. Tolkien claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* is not meant to be an allegory of the modern world, specifically World War II. After doing some research on World War II, write a short paper tracing similarities and differences between the vast struggle faced by Middle Earth and that faced by our world during World War II.
3. Using the Internet and the library, research “flat characters” and “round characters.” Then, choose four characters from either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Based on your research, do you feel these characters are flat characters or round characters? Compare them to characters from at least one other novel and one film who are flat or round characters. How could the flat characters be made round? Support your argument in a brief essay.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The story of David and Goliath is perhaps the most popular story of an underdog, but Frodo’s struggle against the dark forces of Middle Earth, to some, is an equally compelling tale of a surprise victor. As the popularity of each of these stories indicates, humans enjoy participating in the fight against seemingly superior powers. Here are some more popular underdog stories:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831), a novel by Victor Hugo. Hugo’s unlikely hero is Quasimodo, a hunchback who lives in Paris’s famous cathedral.

Rocky (1976), a film directed by John Avildsen. This Academy Award winner is the story of an obscure boxer in Philadelphia who gets a shot at the world championship.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (2001), a novel by J.K. Rowling. Harry, an orphan raised by his cruel aunt and uncle, is transformed from a timid weakling to a powerful hero when he attends Hogwarts, a school for wizards.

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Leo Tolstoy

BORN: 1828, *Yasnaya Polyana, Russia*

DIED: 1910, *Astapovo, Russia*

NATIONALITY: *Russian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Childhood (1852)

War and Peace (1869)

Anna Karenina (1877)

A Confession (1884)

The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories (1886)

Resurrection (1899)

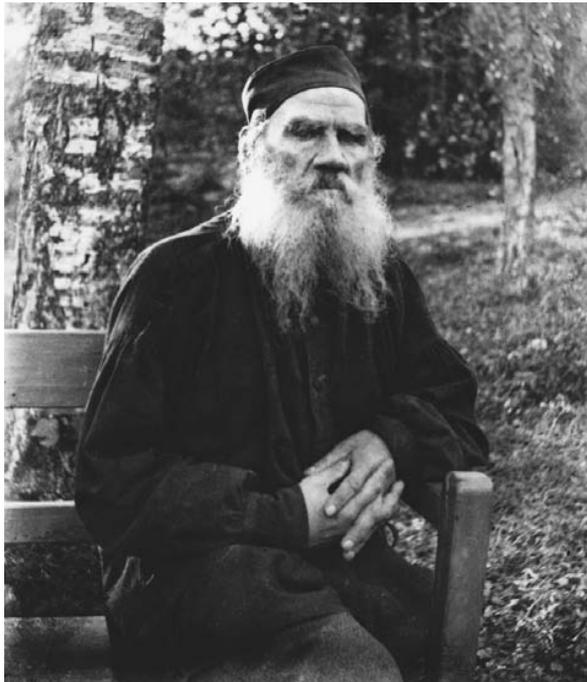
Overview

Russian novelist and moral philosopher Leo Tolstoy was one of the great rebels of all time, a man who during a long and stormy life was at odds with the Church, government, literary tradition, and his own family. His novel *War and Peace* has been called the greatest novel of all time. Tolstoy's brooding concern for death made him one of the precursors of existentialism, yet the bustling spirit that animates his novels seems to convey more life than life itself.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Religious Aunt Leaves Strong Impression Leo (Lev Nikolayevich) Tolstoy was born on August 28, 1828, in the Tula Province of Russia, the youngest of four sons. His mother died when he was two years old, whereupon his father's distant cousin Tatyana Ergolsky took charge of the children. In 1837 Tolstoy's father died, and an aunt, Alexandra Osten-Saken, became legal guardian of the children. Her religious fervor was an important early influence on Tolstoy. When she died in 1840, the children were sent to Kazan to live with another sister of their father.

Tolstoy was educated at home by German and French tutors. Not a particularly apt pupil, he was good



Leo Tolstoy *Tolstoy, Leo, 1897, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

at games. In 1843 he entered Kazan University to study Oriental languages, intent on a diplomatic career. Finding these studies too demanding, he switched two years later to study law. Despite the relative ease of this new pursuit, Tolstoy left in 1847 without taking his degree.

Army Life and Early Literary Career Nikolay, Tolstoy's eldest brother, while on furlough from military service, asked Tolstoy to join him in the south. Tolstoy agreed. After a meandering journey, he reached the mountains of the Caucasus, where he sought to join the army as a Junker, or gentleman-volunteer. He passed the necessary exams and was assigned to the 4th Battery of the 20th Artillery Brigade, serving on the Terek River against the rebellious mountaineers.

Tolstoy's border duty on a lonely Cossack outpost consisted of hunting, drinking, sleeping, chasing girls, and occasionally fighting. During the long lulls he first began to write. In 1852 he sent the autobiographical sketch "Childhood" to the leading journal of the day, the *Contemporary*. Nikolai Nekrasov, its editor, was ecstatic, and when it was published (under Tolstoy's initials), so was all of Russia. Tolstoy now began *The Cossacks* (1863), a thinly veiled account of his life in the outpost.

From November 1854 to August 1855 Tolstoy served in the battered fortress at Sevastopol. He had requested a transfer to this area, where one of the bloodiest battles of the Crimean War was in process. (The Crimean War of 1853–1856 was a clash between Russia and the allied forces of France, England, Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire. The war was infamous for brutality and its many examples of military incompetence.) He later fictionalized his experience of the 4th Bastion, the hottest area in the conflict for a long while, in writing and revealed his distinctive Tolstoyan vision of war as a place of confusion, banality, and heroism. The first of the three "Sevastopol Tales" was the talk of Russia, attracting (for almost the last time in Tolstoy's career) the favorable attention of the czar.

School for Peasant Children In 1856 Tolstoy left the service (as a lieutenant) to look after his affairs in Yasnaya Polyana. He made his first trip abroad the following year. He did not like Western Europe, as his stories of this period show. He was becoming increasingly interested in education, however, and he talked with experts in this field wherever he went. In the summer he returned to Yasnaya Polyana and set up a school for peasant children. In 1860–1861 Tolstoy went abroad again, seeking to learn more about education; he also gambled heavily. During this trip he witnessed the death of his brother Nikolay in the south of France. More than all the grisly scenes of battle he had witnessed, this event brought home to Tolstoy the fact of death, the specter of which fascinated and terrified him throughout his long career.

Golden Years of Family Happiness and Professional Productivity In September 1862 Tolstoy wrote his aunt Alexandra, "I, aged, toothless fool that I am,

have fallen in love.” He was only thirty-four, but he was sixteen years older than Sofya Andreyevna Bers (or Behrs), whose mother had been one of Tolstoy’s childhood friends. Daughter of a prominent Moscow doctor, Bers was handsome, intelligent, and, as the years would show, strong-willed. The first decade of their marriage brought Tolstoy the greatest happiness. Never before or after was his creative life so rich or his personal life so full. In June 1863 his wife had the first of their thirteen children.

Since 1861 Tolstoy had been trying to write a historical novel about the Decembrist uprising of 1825 (a failed revolt against the czar by about 3,000 soldiers). But the more he worked, the farther back in time he went. The work would become the vast *War and Peace*. The first portion of *War and Peace* was published in 1865 (in the *Russian Messenger*) as “The Year 1805.” In 1868 three more chapters appeared; and in 1869 he completed the novel. Tolstoy had been somewhat neglected by critics in the preceding few years because he had not participated in the bitter literary politics of the time. But his new novel created a fantastic outpouring of popular and critical reaction.

From 1873 to 1877 Tolstoy worked on the second of his masterworks, *Anna Karenina* (1877), which also created a sensation upon its publication. The concluding section of the novel was written during another of Russia’s seemingly endless wars with Turkey. The country was in patriotic turmoil. M.N. Katkov, editor of the journal in which *Anna Karenina* had been appearing serially, was afraid to print the final chapters, which contained an attack on war hysteria. Tolstoy, in a fury, took the text away from Katkov, and with the aid of N. Strakhov published a separate edition that enjoyed huge sales. Tolstoy’s family continued to grow, and his royalties made him an extremely rich man.

Spiritual Crisis The ethical quest that began when Tolstoy was a child and that tormented him throughout his younger years now drove him to abandon all else in order to seek the ultimate meaning in life. At first he turned to the Russian Orthodox Church, visiting the Optina-Pustyn monastery in 1877. He found no answers there. When he began reading the Gospels, though, he found the key to his own moral system in Matthew: “Resist not evil.” In 1879–1880 Tolstoy wrote his *A Confession* (1884) and his *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (1891). From this point on his life was dominated by a burning desire to achieve social justice.

In the next few years a new publication was founded (the *Mediator*) in order to spread Tolstoy’s word in tract and fiction, as well as to make good reading available to the poor. In six years almost twenty million copies were distributed. Tolstoy had long been under surveillance by the secret police, and in 1884 copies of *What I Believe* were seized from the printer.

Tolstoy’s relations with his family were becoming increasingly strained. The more of a saint he became in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tolstoy’s famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837): Russian Romantic poet known for his verse poem, *Eugene Onegin* (1833). Pushkin is also a distant cousin of Tolstoy’s.

Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883): Aristocratic author of *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and lifelong friend of Tolstoy’s.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881): Another of the great Russian writers, and also one who dealt with issues of ethics and morals in his work.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880): French writer best known for his novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857).

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American abolitionist and novelist. Best known for writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).

the eyes of the world, the more of a devil he seemed to his wife. He wanted to give his wealth away, but she would not hear of it. An unhappy compromise was reached in 1884, when Tolstoy assigned to his wife the copyright to all his works before 1881.

In 1886 Tolstoy worked on what is possibly his most powerful story, “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” and his drama of peasant life, *The Power of Darkness* (which could not be produced until 1895). In 1888, when he was sixty years old, his thirteenth child was born. In the same year he finished his sweeping indictment of carnal love, *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Final Years Full of Personal Turmoil In 1892 Tolstoy’s estate, valued at the equivalent of \$1.5 million, was divided among his wife and his nine living children. Tolstoy’s final years were filled with worldwide acclaim and great unhappiness, as he was caught in the strife between his convictions, his followers, and his family. Unable to endure the quarrels at home, he set out on his last journey in October 1910, accompanied by his physician and his youngest daughter, Alexandra. The trip proved too stressful and he died on November 9, 1910.

Works in Literary Context

An enormously important figure in Russian literature and culture, Tolstoy is famous not only for his novels, short stories, and plays but also for his moral authority. By the turn of the century, he had achieved worldwide recognition and prestige. The influence of his thought was felt not only by virtually all of Russia’s leading cultural figures, but also beyond Russia’s borders by contemporaries such as George Bernard Shaw, Mohandas Ghandi, William Dean Howells, and Romain Rolland. Tolstoyism has not

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tolstoy's most famous work, *War and Peace*, covers many characters over a long period in a time of war. Here are some other famous war epics:

The Iliad (7th or 8th century B.C.), an epic poem by Homer.

This epic poem details the siege of Troy by the Greeks.

Winds of War (1971), a novel by Herman Wouk. Wouk's best-selling World War II epic became a popular mini-series in 1983.

Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This prize-winning novel follows the lives of three people caught up in the events surrounding Nigeria's civil war in the 1960s.

endured, however; the religious and moral movement he founded did not remain strong after his death in 1910. Rather, his literary masterpieces have survived, retaining their freshness and vitality for new generations of readers.

Didactic Fiction Though Tolstoy was a masterful stylist, his works are never meant purely for entertainment. Embedded in his novels are lessons, morals, that he strives to impart to the reader. This makes his work, especially *War and Peace*, part of the tradition of didactic literature, or literature that teaches. Tolstoy was always interested in theories of education. Even in his early years he felt a strong sense of responsibility as a writer, and even before his religious conversion in 1880 he wrote many simple, edifying stories for peasants and less sophisticated readers. He printed his theories in his own education journal, *Yasnaya Polyana*, which he founded in 1862. Tolstoy's writing style frequently made use of structural devices that have been associated with education. For example, he used repetition for emphasis, asked questions and then answered them, enumerated features or characteristics of phenomena he was analyzing, and appealed to logic in support of his views. His fictional writings can be seen broadly as instructional art. *War and Peace*, for instance, teaches about historical development, just as *Anna Karenina* teaches about the destructive power of passion. In his later fiction, the moral lessons of his works stand in even sharper outline, and his stories become more schematic.

Works in Critical Context

Tolstoy's novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* were warmly praised in his lifetime and continue to be regarded by critics as among the best examples of the novel as a genre.

War and Peace *War and Peace* is expansive in conception and execution, supporting a cast of more than six hundred characters who play out their roles against a

historical backdrop provided by French leader Napoleon Bonaparte's military campaigns at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The novel's broad sweep, multiple perspectives, and lack of a clear generic identity has raised questions about its unity. Henry James and Percy Lubbock, for example, were critical of the novel's formlessness and lack of a center. Complaining that the work was truly two novels, not just one, Lubbock lamented the absence of a single point of view. Modern critics have responded to the problem of unity with various solutions. In "The Moral Vision: Tolstoy," Albert Cook, for example, found the novel's unity in its moral orientation; Edward Wasiolek, in *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*, found the structural principle in *War and Peace* to be the "interdiction of force in life," where force is understood as interference, violence, institutional intimidation, and psychological manipulation. This principle, he argued, underlies Tolstoy's entire creative activity.

One character in particular, Natasha Rostova, is universally praised, not only because she is so "full" a character, but also because she represents an ideal—the truly "natural person" Tolstoy strove to embody in his art. Another female character, Princess Marya Bolkonskaya, also occupies an important position. As he stated in *A History of Russian Literature*, D.S. Mirsky believed that it was with the women in this novel that Tolstoy really triumphed.

Anna Karenina *Anna Karenina* explores questions of love, sex, and marriage. For the depth of Tolstoy's treatment of these themes, it has achieved recognition as one of the great novels of world literature. Tolstoy's contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky, described the book as "flawless." Twentieth-century Russian writer and critic Vladimir Nabokov echoed Dostoevsky's sentiments, and even turned to Tolstoy's famous work in beginning his own novel about love and family life *Invitation to a Beheading: A Family Chronicle* (1969). Mirsky and others found in the novel's ending a reflection of Tolstoy's own growing spiritual perplexity, which culminated in his crisis and conversion to a new worldview. Tolstoy brought the novel to a conclusion with difficulty; the tragic atmosphere surrounding Anna's death is unsettling. As Mirsky commented, "the novel dies like a cry of anguish in the desert air."

Responses to Literature

1. Take a look at some of Tolstoy's educational writings. Would his ideas still work today? Can you think of any other suggestions to reform the educational system?
2. Tolstoy is said to have greatly influenced Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Take a look at some of their writings, perhaps "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and find connections between the ideas of these later men and those expressed in Tolstoy's works.
3. After reading *Anna Karenina*, examine Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. How are the title characters similar? How are they different?

4. Tolstoy was a bit of a mystic, and Russian culture over the years has been peppered with mystics such as Rasputin. What do you think accounts for these mystical and almost magical beliefs in an otherwise practical culture?

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📖 Michel Tournier

BORN: 1924, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Friday, or The Other Island (1967)

The Ogre (1970)

The Fetishist, and Other Stories (1978)

The Golden Droplet (1985)

Overview

Michel Édouard Tournier, one of the most popular novelists in France, writes provocative fiction that blends myth and symbolism with realistic depictions of characters and setting. Tournier is a radical social critic, challenging cultural notions of the social contract handed down through myth and showing characters who select alternative modes of relating to their environment. Like the works of Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Vladimir



Michel Tournier Tournier, Michel, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Nabokov, Tournier's tales are densely packed with a complex network of symbols and allusions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Influence of Germany and World War II Tournier was born on December 19, 1924, in Paris. His family was middle class. His father, Alphonse Tournier, founded and directed an organization that dealt with musical copyrights. Shortly after Tournier's birth, the family moved to the Parisian suburb of Saint-Germainen-Laye, where the author-to-be spent his childhood. When he was four years old, he underwent a painful tonsillectomy without anesthesia, which he later described as a kind of primitive initiation rite. Consequently, the theme of initiation figures prominently in many of his works. A sickly child, he excelled in theology and German studies.

Tournier's youth was indelibly marked by World War II. After attempts to appease the territorial ambitions of Adolf Hitler failed, the war began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Both Great Britain and France immediately declared war on Hitler and Germany. In the spring of 1940, France fell to Hitler's army and the country was occupied for much of the war.

The war years were particularly painful for Tournier, because he was raised in a household that had as much

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tournier's famous contemporaries include:

Nelson Rockefeller (1908–1979): The vice president of the United States under President Gerald Ford, Rockefeller was a liberal Republican who had previously served as the governor of New York.

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): The first female British prime minister. Her tough, conservative leadership earned her the nickname the "Iron Lady."

Bobby Fischer (1943–2008): Often cited as one of the greatest chess players of all time, Fischer was a teenage prodigy who became the first American to win the World Chess Championship.

Steven Spielberg (1946–): A director, producer, and screenwriter, Spielberg's films have been the highest grossing of all time.

Ronald Reagan (1911–2004): Popular actor, governor of California, and two-term U.S. president.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): This Chilean writer is one of the most popular poets of the twentieth century and the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971.

respect for genuine German culture as contempt for the Nazi parody of it. His family spoke German and often had spent summers in Germany. Although he was too young to serve actively in the war, living close to Paris provided him with opportunities to observe the varying reactions to the German occupation. He noted the pain and suffering of the French, but also in many cases, the French admiration for their German conquerors, as well as the frequently slavish adulation of Marshal Philippe Pétain and his puppet government at Vichy. After the war, Tournier was witness to the numerous distortions and fictionalizations that led to the creation of the myth of the "French Resistance."

Denied University Career Tournier's postwar studies led him to what was supposed to be a brief period at the German University of Tübingen. This visit wound up lasting four years (1946–1950), during which Tournier devoted himself to the study of philosophy. When he returned to Paris, it was to prepare for the difficult French examination called the *agrégation*. Tournier later recalled that, although he considered himself the finest philosopher of his generation, this opinion was not shared by his examiners, and he flunked the test. This setback effectively ended his hopes for a university career, and for a while he drifted in the exciting intellectual world of postwar Paris. He sat in on Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropology lectures at the Musée de l'Homme. The influence of this experience is apparent in his first published novel, *Friday, or The Other Island* (1967).

Tournier held a number of media positions in France in the postwar period as well. He was a producer and director with the R.T.F. (Radiodiffusion-télévision française) from 1949 to 1954. In 1955, he joined Europe No. 1, a radio network, as a press attaché and announcer. (His short story "Tristan Vox," in the collection *The Fetishist, and Other Stories* (1978), displays his knowledge of the realities of the radio business, as well as the fantasies that can be engendered by the human voice.) Tournier left in 1958, when he joined the Parisian publishing house, Plon, as the director of literary services. During his decade-long tenure, he also did translations of German works, particularly the novels of Erich Maria Remarque.

Television Career Soon, television beckoned as well. From 1960 to 1965, Tournier hosted a series titled *The Black Box*, which concerned what was to become his principal hobby, photography. This interest led him to write many introductions to photographic collections. Tournier was also one of the founders of the annual Rencontres internationales de la photographie, which takes place in Arles. Photography figures in most of Tournier's fiction, and his ambivalent attitude toward the photographic image plays an important role in the novel *The Golden Droplet* (1985), as well as the short story "Veronica's Shrouds," which appears in *The Fetishist, and Other Stories* (1978).

Literary Success Every aspect of Tournier's varied career helped him to become a novelist, though it was philosophy education and his years as a translator that were particularly influential. While holding the media jobs, he figured out how to combine myth, philosophy, and fiction. He wrote three novels he deemed unworthy of publication, then completed *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1967), which inspired *Friday, or The Other Island*. Tournier was forty-three years old when he published *Friday* and began his meteoric career as a novelist. This book won him the prestigious Grand prix du roman de l'Académie française in 1967, and much acclaim. Tournier followed *Friday* with *The Ogre* (1970), an exploration of life in Nazi Germany, for which he received the Prix Goncourt. He was soon recognized as one of the most remarkable writers to appear on the postwar French literary scene and received international attention for his works. In 1972, he accepted an invitation to join the Académie Goncourt.

Focusing primarily on writing, Tournier continued to publish challenging novels intermittently in the 1970s through the early 2000s. He followed *The Ogre* with *Gemini* (1975) and *The Four Wise Men* (1982). The latter is a retelling of the biblical story of the Magi that finds the men resolving personal problems when they find the messiah in Bethlehem. Tournier also includes a fourth seeker of the Christ Child who misses the birth, spends the next thirty-three years in prison in another man's place, eats leftovers from the Last Supper, and is welcomed into heaven. The book received critical acclaim for its melding of religious and secular elements.

Simple Life After publishing the notorious novella *Gilles and Jeanne* (1983) and the novel *A Garden at Ham-mamet* (1985), Tournier put out the critically acclaimed *Golden Droplet* (1986), which looks at a quest for identity in a world where images are valued more than realities. Through the story of Idriss, a young Berber shepherd who goes to Paris, Tournier argues that the primary force of culture seems to be its ability to construct convincing illusions. Tournier challenged readers with his short-story collection *The Midnight Love Feast* (1991). The novel *Eleazar, Exodus to the West* (2002) finds Tournier returning to the Bible for inspiration. This time, he compared the journey of Moses across the desert with that of American immigrants heading west to California in search of a better life.

Tournier, a lifelong bachelor, has lived in a former rectory in the valley of the Chevreuse, for many years. Although he enjoys his considerable isolation, he also has been a frequent guest on French television talk shows, travels and lectures extensively in Europe and Africa, and gives talks to French schoolchildren. He has continued to publish other new works as well, including the observational diary *Journal extime* (2002).

Works in Literary Context

White Laughter In an effort to achieve his ends, Tournier makes use of two concepts that suffuse all of his writing, both of which are crucial for understanding his creative works. Both have bases in his philosophical studies, and both are replete with irony. They are *le rive blanc* (“white laughter”) and the special meaning he gives to myth.

In *The Holy Spirit*, Tournier notes that the “white laughter denounces the fundamentally transitory, relative nature of everything human . . . ; the man who experiences white laughter has just seen the abyss open beneath him. He knows suddenly that nothing is important. He is filled with agony, yet at the same time delivered from all fear.” White laughter reflects an awareness of life’s utter meaninglessness. It is precisely this intuition that many of Tournier’s major characters attempt to reject by their elaborate inventions of highly structured universes.

Myth An equally strong influence on Tournier’s writing is myth. In his novels, he makes frequent use of a variety of myths, but principal among them is the myth of twinship he associates with Cain and Abel. These two figures represent types of opposing but complementary personalities. Cain is the sedentary, the person who fears the complex and unforeseen. He hopes to have his life unfold in a totally predictable manner within a clearly demarcated geographic space. Abel is the nomad, the individual who, at times despite himself, becomes a wanderer and is forced to confront some of life’s complexities. It is tempting yet misleading to place Tournier’s characters into one or the other category. For example, Robinson of *Friday* could easily be Abel and the slave Vendredi Cain. In *The Ogre*, the conveniently named

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tournier’s use of symbolism and allusion has much in common with the work of several other acclaimed twentieth-century authors, including:

Lolita (1955), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. A novel both famous and infamous, *Lolita* is the tale of a middle-aged man obsessed with a young teenage girl. The book is filled with literary and cultural allusions, often multilayered.

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), a novel by Thomas Pynchon. Even though this novel consists of fewer than two hundred pages, the story is thickly packed with dense historical and literary references, including a poetical allusion to the character of Humbert Humbert from *Lolita*.

The Sot-Weed Factor (1960), a novel by John Barth. A “mock epic” that satirizes both historical epics and picaresque novels, this book traces an “innocent abroad” as he makes his way through colonial Maryland, interacting with many actual historical figures.

Abel Tiffauges would be an Abel figure, and his friend Nestor a Cain. The globe-trotting Jean in *Gemini* would be Abel and his brother Paul Cain. In spite of the neatness of this schema, it simply does not work. No single character is a Cain or an Abel; each has within himself the potential to be the other. The myth of twinship indicates for Tournier that the quest for self-fulfillment involves a struggle, not just with the beloved and despised other, but within the individual himself.

Influence As a leading modern French author, Tournier has influenced postmodern authors worldwide with his thematic, stylistic, and philosophical choices. Literary critics and fine-art students find such works as his collection of art criticism, *Le Tabor et le Sinai Essais sur l’art contemporain* (1988), particularly useful.

Works in Critical Context

Since the publication of his first acclaimed novels, critics have acknowledged Tournier as an important figure in modern French literature. He has been praised for creating challenging works, but his novels have also been criticized for their pretentiousness and, on occasion, for their somewhat disturbing and even frightening themes. The controversial nature of his subjects has brought him much critical attention as well. As Bob Halliday comments in the *Washington Post Book World*, “In Europe, where Tournier is recognized as the major French novelist of the past 20 years . . . his morally often uncomfortable works have aroused hot controversy and sold in the millions.”

The Ogre Many critics, including Jean Amery in *Merkur*, gave *The Ogre* a hostile reception, calling it a glorification of neo-Nazi ideals. However, William Cloonan argues in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that this reading results from mistaking the main character, Tiffauges, as a spokesman for Tournier, who has deliberately presented his character in a negative light. It also ignores the fact that Tournier depicts Tiffauges as a man separated from recognizing the ultimate evil of his actions by elaborate self-delusions. Cloonan asserts that “Tournier is depicting a deeply confused person whose personality is at once a portrait and parody of the Nazi psyche,” and an illustration of how important it is for individuals and nations to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Other critics, too, have been baffled by the multiplicity of ideas and interpretations present in the story, yet they still regard reading it as a worthwhile literary experience. *Newsweek*'s Peter Prescott calls it a “fine novel” that is “more likely to be praised than read.” “*The Ogre* is built in the way Bach built his fugues; themes and statements are introduced, inverted, tangled and marched past each other, all to be resolved in loud, majestic chords,” described Prescott, adding, “and yet the symbols and correspondences of this story, which are far more complex than I have been able to indicate, would be insufficient to sustain it as fiction. Tournier’s achievement rests in his remarkable blend of myth with realism. . . . [He] offers a succession of scenes . . . which, as Abel says, not only decipher the essence of existence, but exalt it.”

Responses to Literature

1. Tournier, like many French intellectuals of his age, was influenced by the philosophy of Claude Lévi-Strauss. In a paper, address these questions: What impact do you think Tournier’s background in philosophy and the influence of Lévi-Strauss had on his writing? How does he interweave philosophy with his narratives?
2. In a group, discuss the following questions: What role do pairs play in Tournier’s literature? What are his views of heterosexual pairings? How do these views compare with his take on homosexual relationships, or to the relationships between twins?
3. Create a presentation that addresses these questions: How does Tournier’s depiction of the character Friday differ from the original *Robinson Crusoe* depiction by Defoe? What are some other modern interpretations of Friday? What different messages were the various authors (including Defoe) trying to convey with Friday? Why is Friday such a suitable character for transmitting an author’s message?
4. In an essay, answer the following questions: How do you feel about the main character in *The Ogre*? Is it appropriate for an author to write from the perspective of such an unlikable character? How closely do you think Tournier identified with Tiffauges? Why?

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Georg Trakl

BORN: 1887, Salzburg, Austria

DIED: 1914, Krakow, Poland

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Gedichte (1913)

Sebastian Dreaming (1915)

Die Dichtungen (1918)



Georg Trakl *Imagno / Getty Images*

Overview

While the influence of Austrian author Georg Trakl's poetry has been widely discussed, his work is best known for its lyric qualities. His controlled uses of colors, sounds, and ciphers blend into brooding meditations that speak out against the doomed existence of man. Trakl's writing exhibits many of the techniques and themes employed by the imagists, surrealists, and impressionists, making his work difficult to classify. Many critics believe he was a modernist before his time, citing as evidence his lines that break free from traditional poetical modes in order to follow musical forms and expressions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Emergent Schizophrenia Trakl, born in 1887 in Salzburg, was the son of affluent parents. Throughout his short life, he suffered from mental disturbances and persistent schizophrenia. Many critics have argued that his fragile mental state was exacerbated by his parents' unhappy marriage, his mother's opium habit, and the Catholic schooling he and his brothers and sisters received, although they grew up in a Protestant household. His condition, coupled with his drug and alcohol abuse, led Trakl quickly to his end. By age fifteen, Trakl was experimenting with chloroform and had begun drinking heavily. By 1906, he was forced to leave school prematurely. That year, he wrote two one-act verse tragedies, *All Souls Day* and *Fata Morgana*. The former was well-received by his Salzburg audience, while the other was a failure that temporarily blocked his creative impulses.

Both he and his sister Margaret, the sibling to whom he was the closest, found the paths of middle-class life unendurable compared to the ivory towers of their art. Their relationship, debatably incestuous, haunted him even as it nourished him. Her figure appears often in his work as "the sister," an alter ego, a beloved mirror-image or *doppelgänger*. Even though she married and was able to play the role of the bourgeois wife, she herself committed suicide a few years after Trakl did.

Access to Narcotics Soon after leaving the university, the patriot Trakl volunteered for a year in the Austro-Hungarian army and was assigned to the medical corps. After leaving the army and returning to work in Salzburg, Trakl began an apprenticeship in a pharmacy that, unfortunately, and ultimately, fed his future addiction to narcotics. From this point onward, events in his life are inextricably woven into his poetry. His increasing addiction to narcotics is reflected in his use of images, synaesthesia (experiencing one sense through another), and an inscrutable personal mythology. Likewise, his experiences during World War I also gave rise to a prolific period, but eventually proved too much for his fragile mental condition.

World War I After finding the working life unendurable, Trakl reenlisted in the army and was put on active duty. In 1912, while stationed in Innsbruck, he met

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Trakl's famous contemporaries include:

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951): This Austrian-born philosopher is widely considered one of the twentieth century's greatest. He concerned himself with matters of logic, mathematics, the mind, and language. His books include *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921).

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914): The heir to the sprawling Austro-Hungarian Empire, Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian separatist. His death touched off a series of events that would lead to the outbreak of the First World War.

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924): This Italian composer wrote such operas as *La Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

Aleister Crowley (1875–1947): Infamous British occultist and mystic, Crowley was a self-acknowledged hedonist, dabbling in drugs and polyamory and coining the phrase "Do as thou wilt" shall be the whole of the law." His books include *The Book of the Law* (1904).

Buffalo Bill Cody (1846–1917): Legendary figure of the American Old West, Cody earned his nickname by killing more than four thousand American bison in eighteen months as part of a contract to supply buffalo meat to the railroad. As the "Wild West" cooled down, Cody started up a world-famous traveling exhibition of the already legendary trappings of that time, including six-gun shootouts, cowboys and Indians, and rodeos.

Ludwig von Ficker, editor of *Der Brenner*. Ficker became friend and mentor to Trakl for the remaining years of his short life, publishing the poet's work regularly in his literary journal. Trakl published his first collection of poetry in 1913, *Gedichte* (Poems).

While Trakl was still serving in the army, World War I broke out. The war began when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a terrorist in Sarajevo, Serbia, in June 1914. Austria-Hungary soon declared war on Serbia and its allies. Entangling alliances brought nearly every European country into the conflict. Austria-Hungary allied with Germany, Turkey, and, until 1915, Italy, against France, Russia, Great Britain, and, after 1917, the United States. In August 1914, Trakl went to Austrian-controlled Poland as a medic under the command of incompetent Austrian generals.

Mental Breakdown and Death After a bloody defeat at Grodek, which saw the Austrians lose control of the city, Trakl was left to care for ninety wounded throughout two days and two nights, without supplies or attending physicians. The battle at Grodek caused Trakl

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other poetic works that, like Trakl's, have focused on pain, death, and decay include:

"Another Elegy," a poem by Margaret Atwood. "Fine words, but why do I want / to tart up death?" Atwood is interested in the inevitability of death and the decay of the human body over time, and several of her poems, including "Another Elegy" address this theme.

"The Death of Raschi," a poem by Emma Lazarus. Best known for her sonnet "The New Colossus" ("Give me your tired, your poor . . .") that appears on the Statue of Liberty, Lazarus wrote about the Jewish experience and the sense of loss that it so often entailed in nineteenth-century Europe in "The Death of Raschi."

"Ode on a Grecian Urn," a poem by John Keats. Inspired by an exhibition of Greek artifacts, Keats wrote this enduring meditation on truth and beauty and their transcendence of time and decay.

to suffer a psychotic episode upon the unit's retreat. He threatened to shoot himself in front of his fellow officers but was disarmed and restrained.

In October, he was ordered to the hospital at Krakow for observation. Ficker hurried to Krakow to secure his release, because he knew that confinement would only cause Trakl's condition to deteriorate. Unable to secure the release, Ficker later received a letter from Trakl and a copy of "Grodek" and "Lament," Trakl's last two poems, the former considered to be one of his greatest lyrics. A week later, Trakl died of an overdose of cocaine. He had been working on his second collection, *Sebastian Dreaming*, which was published posthumously in 1915.

Works in Literary Context

Though he produced only a small amount of writing in his short life, Trakl is an important lyric poet in German literature of the early twentieth century. His work was influenced in part by the events around him, including World War I, as well as his own mental illness and substance addictions. He was exceedingly aware that his world, personal as well as external, was "breaking apart." This mood of suffering prevails in his poetry.

Imagism, Surrealism, and Symbolism Critics also associate his work with various modern artistic movements, and affinities with imagism have also been noted in Trakl's strikingly visual style. In addition, the dreamlike flow of images in his poems has indicated to some commentators a compositional method similar to the automatic writing of the surrealists, with whom Trakl also shared a preoccupa-

tion with violence, perversity, and death. Trakl's strongest literary affiliation, however, is with the French Symbolists of the nineteenth century, primarily Arthur Rimbaud, whose disordered and conflict-ridden genius is said to have incarnated in the Austrian poet.

Trakl was a dedicated perfectionist for whom the craft of poetry meant striving for absolute truth of expression, purity, and precision of language. His relatively small and cohesive oeuvre is remarkable for the extant number of variant versions of the poems. Though Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, and Charles Baudelaire variously influenced his development, Trakl early established a pronounced personal style. This is distinguished by great linguistic concentration, recurrent patterns in diction and imagery, individual use of color symbolism, and a fine lyricism, which set him apart as a distinctive new voice in poetry. Like Friedrich Hölderlin, to whom he owes something of his elliptical conciseness and hymnic intensity, Trakl was essentially a visionary poet in whom the inner vision, the image-making faculty, takes precedence over the mimetic function of creative imagination.

Death and Decay In Trakl's work the melancholy and elegiac moods predominate, and his poetry heralds the calamity of World War I. The principal subject of this poetry is a darkened world of pain, death, and decay in which man is the passive suffering victim. The poet's self is repeatedly projected into mythopoetic personae who represent pure vessels of violated humanity, yet not without an ethereal strength and some redemptive significance. In Trakl's treatment, established religious imagery is fragmented, inverted, or distorted and projected into startling combinations that produce new resonances and meanings.

Works in Critical Context

Critics agree that though Trakl had been writing poetry from an early age, his best work dates from the final two years of his life, displaying a noticeable development from his efforts prior to 1912. Personal torment and an unrelieved sense of horror and disintegration dominated the earlier poems. Critical analysis of Trakl's work has revealed its disjointed, fragmentary nature, summarizing it as a collection of often-repeated symbols and motifs without consistent meaning. Later poems, however, are credited with a consistency of mood and attitude that unifies them into a cohesive, though nonrational, statement. In essence, they form the poet's protest against the corrupt, fallen condition of humankind.

Later Poems The tone of Trakl's later poems is more impersonal and ambiguous. In these works, Trakl transcends the extreme subjectivity of his former poetic self to universalize his existential vision. Some critics describe this new quality in Trakl's mature poems as a mythic objectivity, while confronting the paradox that this poet's world is essentially private, resembling that of a schizophrenic. Most critics also find that his later works were modern in nature,

exhibiting an aggregate of rhythms, grammatical structures like musical scores, and poetic logic of colors, phrasings, and figures all his own. For example, Irene Morris noted in *German Life & Letters* that “Trakl’s last poems are completely visionary in style and apocalyptic in content.”

Responses to Literature

1. It is generally agreed that Trakl’s poetry was at its best toward the end of his life, when he was suffering from drug addiction, depression, and schizophrenia. Do you feel Trakl’s poetry benefited from these conditions, or in spite of them? Do you feel that works produced by the mentally ill should be evaluated by the same criteria as works produced by the non-mentally ill? Write an essay that addresses these questions
2. How does Trakl’s poetry anticipate the horrors of World War I? Create a presentation that links his poetry to the war.
3. Trakl’s poetry is often seen as transitional. In an essay, discuss the following questions: What elements can you identify as belonging to earlier Symbolist poetry? What elements of German expressionism can you identify?
4. Research German expressionism and other leading expressionist poets for a paper. How did Trakl influence the movement? How did other poets’ works compare with Trakl’s in subject matter and tone?

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☒ Tomas Tranströmer

BORN: 1931, Stockholm, Sweden

NATIONALITY: Swedish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Seventeen Poems (1954)

Night Vision (1971)

Baltics (1971)

Truth Barriers (1978)

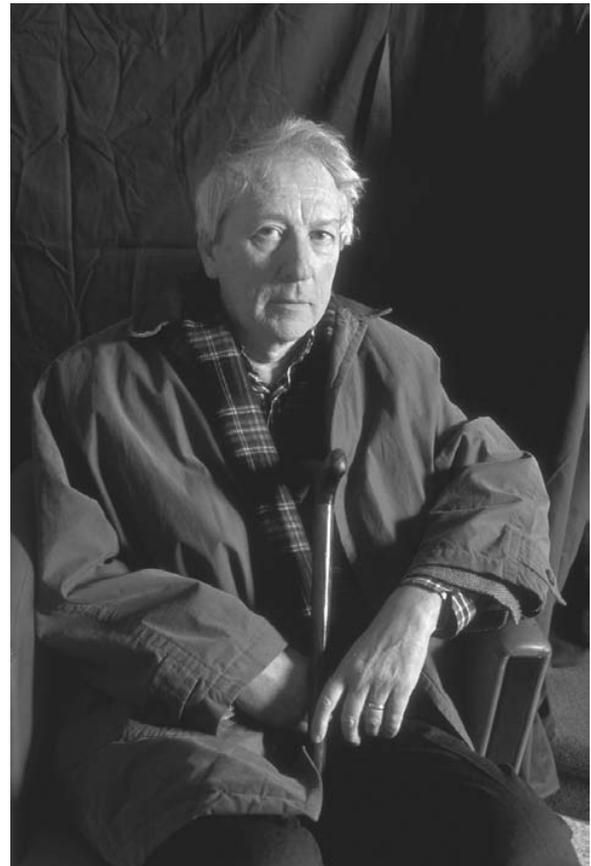
Grief Gondola No. 2 (1996)

Overview

Few poets have in their lifetimes been as abundantly translated or as willingly assimilated into other languages as the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer. His works can be read in practically every European language and in quite a few non-European languages as well. In his native Sweden, Tranströmer’s reputation as a leading poet of his generation was assured almost from the publication of his first book in 1954. By the time he published his second book, his presence on the Swedish literary scene arguably marked a turning point in the history of the national literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Grandfather Figure Tomas Tranströmer was born on April 15, 1931, in Stockholm, Sweden. Some



Tomas Tranströmer © Bassouls Sophie / Corbis Sygma

might say that he was the product of a broken home because his parents separated when he was three years old, and his father, Gösta Tranströmer, an editor and journalist, remained rather aloof thereafter. Yet the boy grew up in a remarkably harmonious and intellectual household. His mother, Helmy, taught primary school in an exclusive area on the other side of town, and her fair and caring approach as a teacher was legendary. The family's male caretaker—and Tranströmer's role model—was ship pilot Carl Helmer Westerberg, the boy's maternal grandfather. Tranströmer counts his time spent with Westerberg, whom the poet lovingly describes in the long poem *Baltics* (1974), among the most tender of his childhood memories.

World War II and School Years In the summer months the extended Westerberg-Tranströmer family typically stayed on Runmarö, an island located in the archipelago that separates Stockholm from the open sea. On the island, Tranströmer and his mother vacationed at Westerberg's two-story blue house, surrounded by similar houses inhabited by their cousins and siblings and friends. Tranströmer's childhood was not, however, merely idyllic, for World War II raged on the periphery of Sweden for six years, from the time that he was eight years old until he turned fourteen. During Sunday dinners the family listened avidly to the Allied news, and the young Tranströmer often wished he could demonstrate his family's anti-Nazi stance in a public way.

At Södra Latin, Tranströmer's high school, his classmates were an unusually clever and well-read group who participated in or wrote for formal and informal literary clubs, poetry competitions, and high-school magazines. After the grim war years of rationed food and isolation, as people recognized a need for culture and for beautiful objects, money became available for funding the production of lavish art books and small magazines and for encouraging these young literary talents. *While the Laurels Grow* was the high-school magazine in which Tranströmer's first works appeared. After his debut he coedited a poetry magazine, *Opening Note*, until 1957. The magazine introduced Swedish readers to the work of Greek, German, and French poets, and the teen had the opportunity to publish world poetry in translation.

Traveling Years In the early 1950s Tranströmer completed his obligatory military service and studied literature, psychology, philosophy, and the history of religion at the University of Stockholm. He also indulged his taste for travel and made trips to what in those days were out-of-the-way places, traveling with scarcely any luggage or money to Iceland, Morocco, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, among other locales. Witnessing the harsh conditions under which many people outside Sweden lived left a profound impression on him, as did his first encounter with communism in Yugoslavia.

Tranströmer's eight years of postsecondary school studying and traveling were nevertheless generally happy. He enjoyed friendships, new and old, and socialized with

intellectuals and artists, people with whom he shared interests in literature, modern classical music, and the arts. He also wrote poetry, played the piano, and read as much as he could—developing an enduring preference for surrealist poetry and a related taste for parapsychology. All the while he avidly collected experiences and broadened his range of interests, as the publication of his second volume of poetry, *Secrets on the Way* (1958), reflected. In 1958 Tranströmer took his first full-time job as a psychologist at the Psychotechnical Institute in Stockholm and also married Monica Bladh. When the couple traveled to Egypt, he recorded her reactions to the experience in poems published in *The Half-Finished Heaven* (1962).

Distanced from Poetic Shifts in Sweden In 1960 Tranströmer and his wife left Stockholm, and Tranströmer took on a job as psychologist in residence outside Linköping at Roxtuna, an institution for delinquent youth. In the beginning, the couple found the distance from Stockholm difficult at times, because they were away from friends, parties, gallery openings, and the theater. Nevertheless, poetry collections continued to appear at a steady rate, once every four years: *The Half-Finished Heaven* was published in 1962; *Resonances and Tracks* in 1966; and *Night Vision* in 1970.

A shift in poetics characterized Swedish literature from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, and expectations for lyric poetry altered radically. Swedish writers and poets coming of age in the 1960s began to feel that artistic form and aesthetic pleasure might be obstacles to empathy. The reason for the reevaluation of literature was the discovery of social problems and injustices overseas: graphic pictures of the suffering inflicted on the people of Vietnam and of the misery of the dispossessed in India and Africa were shown on the evening news. The bleakness of the situation in the world was being matched by engagement at home. Swedish writers and poets therefore saw artistic form as a hindrance, as for them it evoked indecency in the face of human suffering.

Tranströmer's verse was hardly designed to endear him to the politically committed, and eventually the differences between him and writers of the "new simplicity" appeared even more distinct. Ultimately, these irreducible differences found their way into Tranströmer's works, as he analyzed them in *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness* (1970) in such poems as "Going with the Current" and "About History."

Illness and Later Years Besides being a time of artistic reconsideration, the late 1960s and early 1970s were also years of serious illness in the Tranströmer family. During this period his mother passed away. As evidenced by its title, *Night Vision* (1971) includes poetry that reflects the poet's stress and pain. Yet, during those difficult years he was buoyed by his growing international reputation, by the steady increase of his readership in the United States, and his friendships with such champions of

international poetry as American poet Robert Bly, whom Tranströmer has known since the 1960s.

When Tranströmer had a stroke in 1990, resulting in expressive aphasia, or the inability to talk, he again considered themes of illness and aging. The effects of the stroke had only temporary consequences, and in 1993 he published his memoir, *Memories Look at Me*, and saw the appearance in 1996 of another book of verse, *Grief Gondola No. 2*. Melancholy does not, however, completely overtake his works. There is also in his poetry a strong element of peace and reconciliation in the face of impending death: as Tranströmer wrote in *For the Living and the Dead* (1989), “We living nails hammered down in society! / One day we’ll come loose from everything. / We’ll feel the wind of death under our wings / and become milder and wilder than here.”

Works in Literary Context

Modernist Influences Swedish critic Peter Hallberg wrote an essay analyzing the literary sources and influences in the poems “Song” and “Elegy” from *Seventeen Poems* in which he showed the debt that these early pieces owed to high modernism. These long, elaborate poems further show influences of esoteric material that ranges from Finnish folk literature to the parapsychology of J. W. Dunne, and from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1944) to such nearly forgotten modernist texts as Jean-Paul de Dadelsen’s *Jonas* (1962). “Song” and “Elegy” (as well as “Epilog”) are considered Tranströmer’s most modernist poems, though they also look to the forgotten Baroque tradition for models and inspiration.

Surrealist Style In interviews Tranströmer has said repeatedly that he wishes people would live their lives more intensely. He makes poetic efforts to wake up people and encourage them to do so. This is in line with the “*changer l’homme*” (change of mankind) tradition of Arthur Rimbaud, a tradition continued and developed by the French surrealists and also by the “deep image” poets in the United States.

Scholar and critic Urban Torhamn analyzed Tranströmer’s poetic method and argued that the shock and power of his images derive from their unusual function in the poem: the metaphors do not aim at conveying information, nor are they a means of communicating by substitution. Rather, the poet uses metaphors as “explosions aiming at a total transformation of the experience of reality.”

Tranströmer’s early poetry often relies on surreal imagery. Involving dreams and the subconscious, he uses the poetic technique of linking images and things from different areas of experience. The poet takes from phenomena ordinarily viewed as widely disparate. This shocks readers, forcing them to make leaps of association and shifts of consciousness. In *Secrets on the Way* (1958), for instance, Tranströmer counterbalances the widely

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tranströmer’s famous contemporaries include:

- Robert Bly** (1926–): An American poet and activist who founded the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement.
- Ingmar Bergman** (1918–2007): Swedish filmmaker who created classics of international cinema such as *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *The Virgin Spring* (1960).
- Max von Sydow** (1929–): Actor famous for his collaborations with Ingmar Bergman as well as his roles in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and *The Exorcist* (1973).
- Ted Hughes** (1930–1998): English poet and author famous for his marriage to Sylvia Plath and for his children’s novel *The Iron Man*.

ranging imagination of the poems with a repeated crossing of the border between dreaming and wakefulness.

Works in Critical Context

In Sweden the critical response to Tranströmer’s poetry has fluctuated between two extremes: for a decade or so after the appearance of *Seventeen Poems*, his work was much admired, while after 1966 he came under frequent attack for what was perceived as an outdated style. Nevertheless, several literary scholars have made serious attempts to regard his work from a critical angle, and insightful essays on his poetry have been published.

As early as 1954 a critic emphasized aspects of Tranströmer’s poetry that included its exactitude and shocking leaps of association in conjunction with a matter-of-fact tone. These aspects were and still are experienced as a new departure and a clean break with Swedish modernism. Critic Göran Printz-Påhlson wrote in 1979, “The modernism professed by Tranströmer seemed . . . to be of a radically different nature from the dominant tendencies of the preceding decade, when Swedish modernism had come of age. . . . With its spare and ascetic style, graphic visualization and ultimately enigmatic content, it exhibited a clean break with what seemed fuzzy and blurred, sentimental or exhibitionistic in modernism.” In 1999 Niklas Schiöler suggested that the distinctive quality of Tranströmer’s verse can perhaps be best described as magic realism. Such an interpretation is verified in Tranströmer’s “Grief Gondola No. 2.”

Seventeen Poems Tranströmer’s first collection, *Seventeen Poems*, received critical praise upon its publication in 1954. As Joanna Bankier describes in an essay for *Ironwood*, “There was a poise and a maturity in his first work that was compelling.” Leif Sjöberg states of the work, “Its perfect employment of classical metrics, its

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by poets and writers who have also considered themes of illness or struggle:

The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield (1945). Featured in this collection are themes of physical and mental illness expressed by a writer who suffered her share of the same, from depression to tuberculosis.

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1930), a short story by Katherine Anne Porter. In this story, Granny Weatherall's well-being is in the hands of family, who do all the talking and decision making for her.

Midnight's Children (1981), a novel by Salman Rushdie.

This is the story of an Indian protagonist, born with 1,001 others on August 15, 1947, (India's Independence Day) amid political turmoil.

"The Yellow Wallpaper," (1892), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This story, often viewed as an early feminist work, details the female narrator's descent into madness.

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. In this work by the Father of Magic Realism, a family's generations of struggles are chronicled.

startling new discoveries in Swedish landscapes and seascapes, its amazing density of acute images (written in a mild modernism which is more suggestive of Éluard and Dylan Thomas than of Lindegren and Ekelöf) soon made Tomas Tranströmer the most imitated poet in Sweden."

Responses to Literature

1. Tranströmer's poetry is a mixture of modernism and surrealism. Find as many incidences of surrealism as you can in Tranströmer's work. For example, what is dreamlike about his writing? Discuss with others, and point out something the others in the group did not see, so you can collectively come up with your own understanding of surrealism.
2. The anthology *English and American Surrealist Poetry* includes Tranströmer as part of the "deep image" canon of translated poetry. Consider one of his poems and select all of the images you find striking. Make a list of these images. What senses does each image appeal to? Why does it move you?
3. Consider how many of these images can be considered to symbolize, or represent, a larger concept. Make note of any associations you have with the image. For instance, what do you think of when you

see the word *garden*? Go online to a symbolism dictionary and look up the imagery words you have collected. Do the symbolic meanings agree with your associations?

4. In a group, photocopy one of Tranströmer's poems—such as "Tracks"—and read it through together. Then, use scissors to cut the poem into pieces, one line of poetry per cut piece. Mix up the pieces (lines) and together with your groupmates decide how you will "rewrite" the poem by gluing the pieces in the new order your group chooses. When you are finished, read aloud your version. Why did your group decide to place lines in the positions they placed them? Why do you think Tranströmer decided to place lines in the positions he placed them? What messages do you think each poem version expresses, and how do they do that differently?

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Michel Tremblay

BORN: 1942, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Stories for Late Night Drinkers (1966)

Les Belles-soeurs (1968)

Like Death Warmed Over (1970)

Hosanna (1973)

The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant (1978)

Overview

Michel Tremblay is one of the first Canadian playwrights to have won international recognition. His plays have been translated into many languages and performed successfully on three continents. In Quebec, his work is frequently classified as “theatre of liberation” and given political significance due to his introduction of the Montreal working-class French *joual* (dialect) as a stage idiom, as well as to his merciless naturalism and the political parables that underlie many of his plays. Viewed from a



Michel Tremblay Tremblay, Michel, photograph by Yves Renaud. Agence Goodwin. Reproduced by permission.

wider perspective, Tremblay’s work is impressive particularly because of its memorable characters, sophisticated methods of dramatic composition, and the richness and complexity of its levels of meaning.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Humble Origins Tremblay was born in Montreal in 1942, the son of Armand and Rhéauna Rathier Tremblay. His father was an alcoholic printer and linotype operator, while his mother was an American who was part Cree Indian. Tremblay grew up in poverty in the eastside working-class neighborhood of Plateau Mont-Royal and the rue Fabre district. Raised primarily by five women in an extremely crowded house, Tremblay early developed a hostility toward family life. The oppressive conditions in this impoverished area, along with the glitzy nightlife of Montreal’s Main district, later provided the backdrop for much of Tremblay’s work. His maternal grandmother was uneducated but a voracious reader who shared her love of reading with her grandson.

Despite these inauspicious beginnings, Tremblay began writing when quite young. He was inspired to write in part because he realized by the age of twelve that he was homosexual and used writing to help him deal with his outsider status. He wrote a number of short stories with gay themes that were hidden by fantasy elements. By the time he attended the Catholic high school *École de Saint-Stanislas*, he was seen as a promising student who earned a scholarship to a *collège classique* (essentially, a prep school).

Unable to endure the elitist attitudes fostered at the school, Tremblay left after only two months to study graphic arts at the *Institut des Arts Graphiques* beginning in 1969 and become a linotype operator like his father. He worked there until 1966 but furthered his education by borrowing books from a friend who was taking courses at the school Tremblay had left. The influence of classical Greek drama appears throughout Tremblay’s work. He continued to write and, by the time he was eighteen, had completed his first play, *Le train*. In 1964, the work won first prize in Radio Canada’s Young Author Competition.

“Theatre of Liberation” After winning his 1964 prize, Tremblay published a collection of gay-oriented short stories, *Stories for Late-Night Drinkers*, in 1966. He drew on his Montreal background for a one-act play, *Five*, which also appeared in 1966. Two years later, Tremblay made Quebec theater history by writing *Les Belles-soeurs* (1968) in *joual*, or working-class Quebec dialect, instead of the classical French typically used in works for the stage. This decision signaled Tremblay’s desire to supplant the province’s traditional French culture with an independent Quebecois culture.

In the 1960s, there was a resurgence of French Canadian separatism, symbolized by a series of cultural

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tremblay's famous contemporaries include:

Pierre Trudeau (1919–2000): Perhaps the most dominant political figure in twentieth-century Canadian politics, Trudeau served as prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984. Highly polarizing politically, he was noted for his outlandish personality, his jet-set lifestyle, and his iconoclasm.

Philip K. Dick (1928–1982): An influential American science fiction writer, Dick's dystopian, paranoia-infused stories often touch upon metaphysical or theological themes.

Dan Akroyd (1952–): A Canadian-born actor and comedian, Akroyd was one of the original cast members of *Saturday Night Live*. Since leaving the show, he has found success in movies and music.

René Lévesque (1922–1987): Founder of the political group Parti Québécois, Lévesque was an active advocate of Quebec's political independence, which he attempted to achieve through popular referendum. He served as premier of Quebec from 1976 to 1985.

Harry Turtledove (1949–): American historian-turned-novelist Turtledove has made a career for himself as author of a wide range of historical, fantasy, and science fiction novels.

agreements between France and Quebec. Tremblay's creative choice to use dialect can be seen as a reflection of the ongoing call for French Canadian autonomy as the author was a staunch supporter of the movement as well as independence for Quebec. He even refused to let *Les Belles-soeurs* be performed in English until the separatist Parti Québécois won elections in the province in 1976.

Thus, *Les Belles-soeurs* catapulted the young dramatist to fame and became an important contribution to what is known in Quebec as the "theatre of liberation." *Les Belles-soeurs* examines the deepest private thoughts and feelings of fifteen working-class housewives gathered at a party. Through stylized monologues and choral "odes" the characters reveal the banal and repetitive nature of their lives and their inability to achieve emotional or physical fulfillment. The play's overriding theme is the fundamental absurdity and meaninglessness of existence. Its popular success allowed Tremblay to devote himself to writing full time.

"Le Cycle des Belles-soeurs" After *Les Belles-soeurs*, Tremblay embarked on a cycle of eleven plays, set mostly in the Montreal east end locale of the playhouse. The remaining dramas in Tremblay's cycle, known as "Le Cycle des *Belles-soeurs*," focus on three distinct areas: daily

family life in Montreal's rue Fabre neighborhood; the seamy underworld of transvestites, prostitutes, and homosexuals in the Main district; and the realm of pure fantasy. In such plays as *Like Death Warmed Over* (1970), *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou* (1971), and *Hello, There, Hello* (1974), Tremblay portrays the family as a detrimental institution that inevitably traumatizes individuals by fostering frustration, bitterness, ineffectual communication, and emotional sterility. Critics generally regard the family in Tremblay's plays as symbolic of Quebec itself.

In many of the plays in the cycle, individuals also try to escape from the despair of their environments by advancing toward new sexual or social realms. Two of the plays—*La Duchesse de Langeais* (1970) and *Hosanna* (1973)—feature gay characters, a new development in serious theater at the time. But Tremblay was living in the midst of a profound transformation in Quebec. He came out as a gay man during a 1975 television interview, but reported few instances of overt hostility or discrimination afterward.

Turned to Film and Novels During the 1970s, Tremblay began working in film, often with friend André Brassard. Their film *Françoise Durocher, Waitress* (1972) won three Genie Awards at the Toronto Film Festival. While the pair collaborated on two other films, Tremblay also translated and adapted various English-language plays for the Quebec market, including various works by Tennessee Williams, whose plays and subject matter have much in common with Tremblay's. While Tremblay continued to write dramas over the years, his most characteristic mode of production from the late 1970s onward was the novel.

Beginning with the novel *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant* (1978), Tremblay wrote a group of six novels set in his childhood neighborhood in Montreal and included strong autobiographical elements. Known as "Les Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal," the novels, which included *Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel* (1980), *The Duchess and the Commoner* (1982), and *News of Edward* (1984), deal with the destructive effects of family life. Tremblay continued to write new novels into the early 2000s.

More Plays and Television Work While Tremblay wrote few plays in the 1980s through early 2000s, he did produce some of his best-known works in this time period. They included *The Real World* (1987), in which he looked back on and questioned his own artistic uses of the milieu in which he had grown up. Tremblay wrote about rural Quebec in the play *The Suspended House* (1990), a multigenerational saga. With his *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again* (1998), he honored his mother and the influence she had on his artistic personality. In the early 2000s, Tremblay moved into television by writing scripts for a series on French Canadian television, *The Open Heart*. This was the first series on Quebec television to explore an ongoing gay relationship.

Tremblay has remained a firm French Canadian separatist throughout much of his lifetime, but raised separatist eyebrows in 1999 when he accepted the Governor General's Award for Drama from the Canadian government. While this award was the highest literary honor given to authors, it came from what many French Canadian separatists consider their enemy. Tremblay again stirred up controversy in 2006 when he seemed to waver on the issue of Quebec separatism by criticizing the sovereignty movement for its focus on economic issues to the exclusion of cultural ones. Despite such statements, Tremblay has remained a resident of the province and a firm devotee to the idea of Quebec's independence.

Works in Literary Context

Tremblay combines a basically naturalistic view of the world with a variety of stylistic devices that reflect his chief models: Greek tragedy, Shakespearean monologue, and theater of the absurd. His originality lies, in part, in his method of composition. He conceives his plays in the manner of musical compositions, as "scores" for voices rather than as conventional dialogue. This method of composition gives his drama a poetic quality and puts the burden of visual interpretation of the text on the director. The musical quality of his plays is in no way hampered by his use of *joual* or of the somewhat less extreme *Quebecois* dialect. Also influenced by the tradition of psychosocial drama begun by Gratien Gélinas and Marcel Dubé, Tremblay has transcended the work of his predecessors, achieving a successful synthesis between realism and theatricalism in style, the regional and the universal in theme, naturalism and lyricism in dramatic idiom.

Family and the Underbelly Tremblay's dramatic world is firmly rooted in his own life experience in Montreal, in the rue Fabre neighborhood where he grew up and in the Main district off Sainte Catherine Street, known for its colorful night life. The first provides the setting for his analysis of "monstrous family" situations. The Main district provides the background for the cheap entertainers, whores, and transvestites who appear in Tremblay's work. In his attacks on the institution of the family, as well as in his fascination with marginal characters, Tremblay is within the mainstream of contemporary drama. His work takes on special significance in the context of Quebec's history and culture, however: the family plays may be seen as conscious efforts to counterbalance the traditional myths of the French-Canadian family created and encouraged by the Catholic Church; and his transvestite characters, beyond their symbolic significance for modern alienated man, carry heavily political overtones. For Tremblay, the transvestite best exemplifies life in Quebec since the conquest, with its foreign dominance, foreign models, and cultural colonialism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works that, like Tremblay's, examine the detrimental effects of family life include:

Anna Karenina (1877), a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Often cited as the pinnacle of realistic fiction, Tolstoy's great novel begins with the immortal line, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Romeo and Juliet (1597), a stage play by William Shakespeare. The tragedy of the "star-cross'd lovers" is set in motion by the senseless feuding of their two families. It is only through the death of the title characters that the families realize they must finally end their enmity.

A Doll's House (1879), a stage play by Henrik Ibsen. Highly controversial in its day, this Norwegian play's scathing and harrowing portrayal of Victorian married life has made it Ibsen's most well known work.

Autobiography and Sexual Orientation Unlike most writers, whose early work reflects the experience of their childhood and early youth, Tremblay creates a world in which the autobiographical element unfolds progressively and by degrees as his universe expands. This is particularly true for the revelation of his sexual orientation. Although the homosexual element is present throughout his work, it first appears in a largely objective manner with the political symbolism of the transvestite figures of his early plays. The central transvestite figure reappears in the novels that make up "Les Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal." Finally, in the third phase of the author's work, Tremblay himself takes center stage, first as the thinly disguised Jean-Marc, the professor of French in the play *Remember Me* (1981) and the novel *The Heart Laid Bare* (1986), and at last openly in the stories of *The Movies* (1990), which tell how the boy Michel first discovers and faces his "abnormal" proclivities.

Influence Because Tremblay's works have been translated into more than twenty languages (including Spanish, Yiddish, and Polish), his influence can be seen worldwide on naturalistic authors as well as those who explore gay themes. Because of his importance in French Canadian society, his works also affected several generations of Quebecois writers as well. Prolific and versatile, Tremblay is seen as voicing the frustrations and aspirations of his native Quebec.

Works in Critical Context

Recognized as one of Canada's most important contemporary authors, Tremblay has risen to international prominence through his iconoclastic dramas about familial, political, linguistic, and identity problems that are unique

to Quebec. Synthesizing local and universal themes and naturalist and symbolist styles, Tremblay has created a body of work that has prompted critic Geraldine Anthony to remark: “Tremblay’s deep understanding of human nature and his mastery of dramatic technique are responsible for his position as one of the leading Canadian dramatists today.” Similarly well-received are Tremblay’s novels. Both critics and readers have generally praised his novels, especially *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant*.

Les Belles-soeurs *Les Belles-soeurs* is the first in what became an eleven-play cycle that, in its entirety, many critics regarded as Tremblay’s finest achievement. John Ripley suggested that Quebec’s “recent past, characterized by a desperate struggle to replace authoritarianism, negative identity, and destructiveness with self-respect, love, and transcendence, is nowhere better encapsulated than in the *Les Belles-soeurs* cycle.” Ripley’s sentiments were echoed by critic Renate Usmiani, who in his *Studies in Canadian Literature: Michel Tremblay* stated: “The most general underlying theme of all [Tremblay’s] works is the universal desire of the human being to transcend his finite condition.” More specifically, Usmiani proposed that the typical Tremblay character is either trying to escape from family life as represented by the rue Fabre, from the false world of the Main district, or from the limitations of self into a transcendent ecstasy.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss Tremblay’s contributions to Canadian theater in an essay. What political views does Tremblay support or oppose? How do his plays deal with the idea of a particular Quebecois identity?
2. Explain how Tremblay synthesizes regional and universal themes in his works in a presentation. Can his works be compared with those of other, non-Canadian playwrights? Which of Tremblay’s themes are particular to Canada and which are universal?
3. In a paper, define *joual* and explain how Tremblay uses it in his works. Why does Tremblay choose to write in a dialect? How does this affect the audience?
4. Discuss in a group how Tremblay interweaves high and low culture in his works. How does he synthesize fantasy and reality?

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Anthony Trollope

BORN: 1815, London, England

DIED: 1882, Harting, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Barchester Towers (1857)

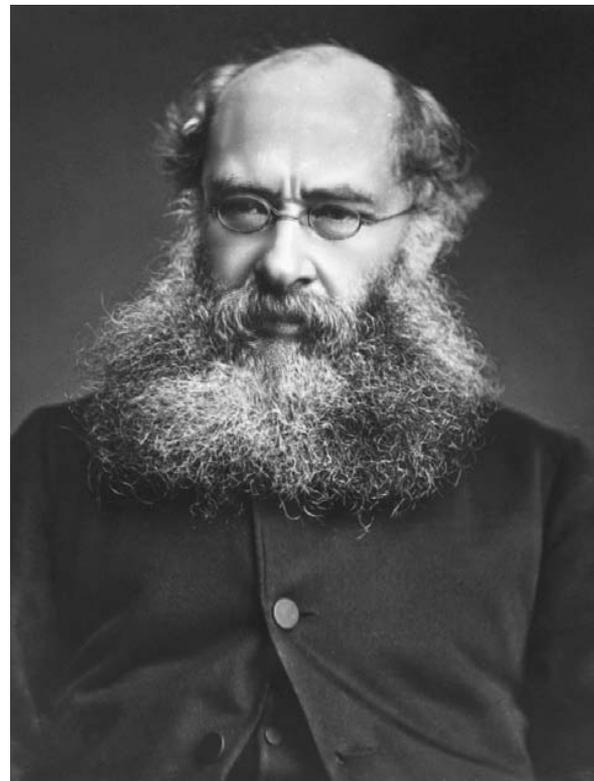
Orley Farm (1862)

The Eustace Diamonds (1873)

The Way We Live Now (1875)

Overview

Anthony Trollope was one of the most prolific English writers of the nineteenth century, writing some forty-seven novels and many further volumes of travels, sketches, criticism, and short fiction. Although most critics consider him a major Victorian novelist, the precise nature of his achievement has often proved elusive. In spite of conflicting interpretations, commentators tend to agree that his realistic characterizations form the basis of his importance and appeal.



Anthony Trollope Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Poor Victorian Trollope lived nearly all of his adult life during a time known as the Victorian era. This era was named after Queen Victoria, who ruled England and its territories, including Ireland. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with advances in industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with proper behavior in society and domestic life, common themes found in Trollope's works.

Anthony Trollope was born on April 24, 1815, in London. His father, Thomas Trollope, failed at law and farming before going bankrupt, and his mother, Frances, began what eventually became a lucrative writing career to support the family. Trollope's early years were marked by poverty and humiliation; he was under constant ridicule by his wealthier classmates at Harrow and Winchester. At the age of nineteen he found work as a junior clerk at the post office and seven years later was transferred to Ireland.

The Barsetshire Series Trollope's move to Ireland inaugurated a period of change: For the first time in his life he was successful in work, love, friendship, and financial matters. Trollope began writing, though his first novel, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), received little critical attention. In the early 1850s Trollope's post office work absorbed all his energies. He was assigned to work out the routes for rural deliveries, first in a district in Ireland and then in a number of counties in England, particularly in the west. He did his work with zeal, riding over all the routes himself, determined to make it possible that a letter could be delivered to every remote residence in his district. It was while visiting the close of Salisbury Cathedral that he conceived the story of *The Warden*, the first in the series of novels about his invented county of Barsetshire that was to make him famous.

The Warden (1855), Trollope's fourth novel, was a moderate success. The story was followed by *Barchester Towers* (1857), the second novel in the series, which marked the public's recognition of a new major novelist. Many readers still regard it as the apogee of Trollope's achievement.

The other novels in the Barset series, with which Trollope was engaged intermittently over the next decade, were *Doctor Thorne* (1858), *Framley Parsonage* (1861), *The Small House at Allington* (1864), and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). Each of these novels is distinctive, with its own plot, new major characters, and a few recurring characters. All were set in the quiet cathedral city of Barchester with its surrounding town, villages, and ancestral estates of Barsetshire. *Framley Parsonage*, the fourth novel in the Barsetshire series, was Trollope's first work to appear in serial form, a method of magazine publication that promised a wide readership and greater critical response.

The Palliser Series Before he had written his last chronicle of Barset, Trollope had already launched into the first of a new series of interconnected novels, the Palliser, or political, novels. Young Plantagenet Palliser, a dedicated politician and the heir to the duke of Omnium, was first introduced as a minor character in *The Small House at Allington* in the Barset series. Where the clergy are the focus of interest in the Barset novels, politicians and their business are the concern of the Palliser novels; and the major scene of action shifts from the quiet though sufficiently busy rural county of Barsetshire to the more hectic bustle of the metropolis. Like the Barset novels, the Palliser novels all have separate plots and are complete in themselves, but characters introduced in one novel are apt to recur in subsequent ones.

Political Life Having returned to England in 1859, the pattern of Trollope's life seems to have changed in the late 1860s. He left the post office, worked as an editor, and attempted to pursue a career in politics. In 1868, he unsuccessfully ran for a seat in Parliament. Trollope called the years 1867 and 1868, the years of his resignation, editorship, second trip to America, and political campaign, "the busiest of my life." With the new decade he seemed to slow down a little. He continued to be busy, but he was perhaps less cheerful.

Declining Popularity The 1870s witnessed a decline in Trollope's popularity as his writing style and focus changed. Although they often include subjects similar to those in his earlier works, Trollope's later novels are more cynical and pessimistic in tone: *He Knew He Was Right* (1869) examines marriage and finds jealousy and corruption; *The Way We Live Now* (1875) studies society and uncovers financial and moral corruption. Critics objected to what they considered the sordid realism of these works, charging that Trollope ignored the novelist's responsibility of providing solutions to the social problems he depicted. In addition, because he was so prolific, Trollope was accused of commercialism.

Posthumous Self-Effacement During the 1870s, Trollope began to travel extensively and write travel books. He also found time to write literary criticism. Yet as he aged, he encountered trouble with asthma, deafness, and other ailments. During a friendly evening with his old friends, Trollope had a stroke. He lingered a few weeks, but died on December 6, 1882.

Trollope's prudent habit of keeping a manuscript or two on hand meant that the novels kept coming for a while, including *Mr. Scarborough's Family* (1883) and *The Landleaguers*, which he had not lived to finish, yet was published incomplete. His major posthumous publication, however, was *An Autobiography*, an engagingly frank account of his professional life and working habits that has continued to shock and delight his readers in almost equal measure.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Trollope's famous contemporaries include:

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910): Called “The Lady with the Lamp” for her habit of caring for patients long into the night, Florence Nightingale became a public figure after her efforts to improve battlefield hospitals during the Crimean War. She was a lifelong advocate for nursing and patient care.

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898): The pen name of Charles Dodgson, Carroll was a master of the genre of literary nonsense, penning the surreal tales of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and the poem “Jabberwocky.”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881): One of the premier Russian novelists of the nineteenth century, Dostoyevsky focused on troubled psyches and is considered by many to be the father of existentialism.

William Gladstone (1809–1898): A lion of Victorian politics, Gladstone was Liberal prime minister on four occasions, repeatedly butting heads with both Queen Victoria and his Conservative rival, Benjamin Disraeli.

Cetshwayo (1826–1884): The last king of the Zulu nation, from 1872 to 1879, Cetshwayo was the grand-nephew of the legendary king Shaka.

Alexander II (1818–1881): From his ascension to the throne as leader of the Russian Empire in 1855 to his assassination in 1881, Alexander II led a program of systematic reforms, most notably the emancipation of the peasant class of serfs.

Works in Literary Context

Critics continue to dispute the nature of Trollope's achievement, and there is no general agreement on his rank among writers of fiction. Yet commentators universally applaud the quality of his characterizations. Many believe that Trollope was able to paint characters of such consistency, veracity, and depth because of his profound insight into and sympathy for his creations. Trollope himself considered the ability to live with one's characters essential and defined the main work of the novelist as “the creation of human beings in whose existence one is forced to believe.”

Maidens and Women “There must be love in a novel,” Trollope declared; and he became an acknowledged expert in handling a character's intricate vacillations between love and social constraints. It was for such portraits as that of Lucy Robarts that Henry James remembered Trollope as an author who celebrated the “simple maiden in her flower. . . . He is evidently always more or less in love with her.”

There are several comparable features in Trollope's two major series, the Basset and the Palliser novels. A major character in each is a dominating woman who competes with her husband for power and then dies suddenly toward the end of the series. A noticeable change is in the presentation of the other female characters. Whereas in the Basset novels “the simple maiden in her flower” had predominated—such girls as Mary Thorne, Lucy Robarts, and Grace Crawley—in the Palliser novels the interest shifts from innocent girls to experienced women: Lady Laura Kennedy, who deserts her husband and declares her adulterous passion for another man; Madame Max Goesler, who, having married once for a settlement pursues a handsome young man for love and actually proposes to him; and Lady Glencora herself, who not only is much more sympathetically handled than Mrs. Proudie but also breaks the standard Trollope code by abandoning her first love and devoting herself to a second.

Densely Layered Novels *The Last Chronicle of Barset* is typical of Trollope's copious, variegated kind of novel. Its characters are numerous and diverse, and its world is composed of several plots and different settings. Although he wrote a number of relatively short novels in which a classic unity of action is clearly preserved, his greatest works are those in which the main plot is amplified by subplots and the themes are enlarged and qualified. “Though [the novelist's] story should be all one, yet it may have many parts,” Trollope explained. “Though the plot itself may require but few characters, it may be so enlarged as to find its full development in many. There may be subsidiary plots, which shall all tend to the elucidation of the main story, and which will take their places as part of one and the same work.”

Works in Critical Context

Trollope's enormous productivity has had much to do with a patronizing dismissal of his work by some critics and a rather apologetic attitude adopted even by his admirers. In a review of *Miss Mackenzie* the young Henry James admitted, “We have long entertained for Mr. Trollope a partiality of which we have yet been somewhat ashamed.” It has been a recurring attitude. Even his major biographer, Michael Sadleir, writing in 1927, and his next major critic, Bradford A. Booth, have been tentative and cautious in their praise and have partly adopted the stance of apologists. Critics have found his elusive but undoubted quality difficult to analyze: “His work resists the kind of formal analysis to which we subject our better fiction,” Booth admitted. His unambiguous style has not invited critical interpretation. Compared with George Eliot or George Meredith he has seemed lowbrow, and compared with Charles Dickens and Hardy his unemphatic social commentary has seemed mild.

Some critics, including several of his original reviewers, have found fault with Trollope's subsidiary plots and have

wished them away. Recent criticism, however, has shown Trollope's impressive art in the orchestration of plot with subplot. In the article entitled "Trollope at Full Length," Gordon Ray demonstrates how Trollope "knew exactly how to assign each set of characters its proper part in the story, to time his shifts from one plot to another so as to obtain maximum emphasis, contrast, and change of pace, and to bring the whole to a smooth conclusion within the space allotted. Trollope, in fact, made himself a great master of the contrapuntal novel long before anyone had thought of the term."

The Barset Series The Barsetshire series elicited several comments that were repeated throughout Trollope's lifetime. Above all, critics warmed to his characters and praised both Trollope's lively, readable style and his humorous portrayal of everyday life. They also noted his fidelity to the English character, particularly in his portraits of young girls, although some critics noted that he overused the plot scheme of a heroine vacillating between two suitors.

Trollope's early critics attributed a number of his faults, including careless construction, grammatical errors, and insubstantial story lines, to the fact that Trollope wrote quickly, and they blamed the exigencies of serial publication for his overly episodic and fragmentary plots. In addition, many commentators found Trollope's technique of allowing the narrator to constantly comment on the action and characters to be irrelevant and distracting.

Legacy If it has taken time for critics to claim a place for Trollope among the greatest novelists, the readers have kept buying and reading his books. He has continued to be "obsessively readable," in C. P. Snow's phrase. He lost some readers during his lifetime and some more after his death; but after the 1890s reprints of his many novels have proved sound investments for many publishers. During the two world wars, Trollope and Barset were in enormous demand. In the 1970s his second series was adapted by the BBC as a highly successful television serial, *The Pallisers*. And increasingly in the two decades before the centenary of his death, the critics have ceased to be apologists. Trollope has been recognized as a major novelist.

Responses to Literature

1. Read several of Trollope's short stories. Discuss how Trollope presents Victorian life. What makes his characters different from those of other Victorian writers? Do you think his stories represent a realistic view? Find textual examples to support your position.
2. Using Trollope's autobiography as a source, analyze his objectivity in his introspective study of himself as an artist.
3. Contrast two characters from opposite ends of the social spectrum in one of Trollope's early novels, for example, *Barchester Towers*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Trollope made a name for himself with the tales of the residents of an invented county that held recognizable elements from real locations despite its being fictional. Other works featuring famous fictional settings that bear a strong resemblance to real places include:

"The Dunwich Horror" (1929), a short story by H. P. Lovecraft. This pulp horror writer used Arkham County, a prototypical New England locale, as a setting for many of his stories. This, one of his best-known short stories, prominently features two of Arkham County's most famous locales: Miskatonic University and the town of Dunwich.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), a novel by Thomas Hardy. Hardy wrote a series of stories and poems set in the semifiictional Wessex County; this was his fourth such story and first major success.

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. In this would-be travelogue, the locations visited by Gulliver—Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and so forth—are allegorical countries, each representing a different aspect of human nature.

4. Compare Trollope to Charles Dickens. How did their literary styles differ? How were they similar? Which author do you feel is more emblematic of the Victorian period? Why?

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Leon Trotsky

BORN: 1879, Yanovka, Ukraine

DIED: 1940, Mexico City

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

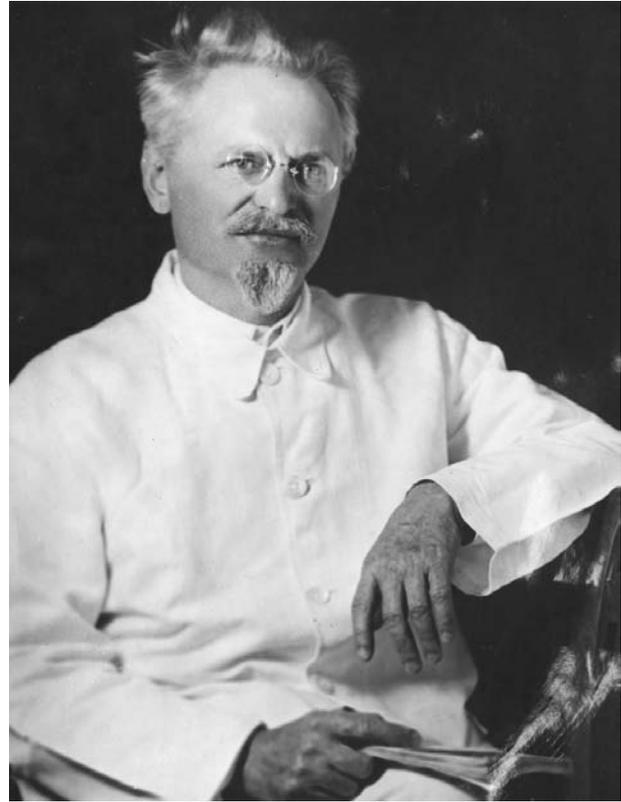
My Life (1930)

The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk (1932)

The Revolution Betrayed (1937)

Overview

Leon Trotsky was a principal strategist of the Russian revolution and a central leader in the founding of the Soviet Union. He played an important role in the revolution that brought the communist Bolsheviks to power, and he organized the Red Army during the ensuing civil war. Trotsky was also a brilliant and influential author who contributed thousands of essays, letters, and political tracts to the literature of Marxism, as well as important works of history, biography, and literary criticism. Trotsky was the foremost critic of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader from 1924 to 1953, whose repressive policies resulted in the deaths of millions of Soviet citizens. Exiled by Stalin, Trotsky became—and remains—a figure of international controversy.



Leon Trotsky Topical Press Agency / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youthful Activism Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein in the Ukrainian village of Yanovka in 1879 to a relatively prosperous Jewish farming family. (The name on Bronstein's false passport—Trotsky—would remain with him.) From the ages of nine to sixteen he lived in Odessa with his mother's nephew, journalist and publisher Mossoi Filipovich Spentzer, who oversaw his education. The boy was strongly influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the Spentzer home, where journalists and other writers frequently visited.

Trotsky was sent to the nearby seaport of Nikolaev for his last academic year. There he met Russian socialists for the first time and joined a radical discussion group. One member of this group, Alexandra Sokolovskaya, considered herself a Marxist, and Trotsky almost immediately opposed her ideology. He instead preferred the populist view that education of the peasants was the best way to achieve social progress.

Trotsky played a role in the formation of the Southern Russian Workers' Union, an underground group of students and workers devoted to improving the lives of the laboring class. Trotsky also wrote and printed leaflets for the group, pointing out abuses in factories and in the

government. These leaflets provoked the ire of the authorities, and he and his companions were arrested as dissidents in 1898.

Trotsky was held in prison for the next two years and then sentenced to four years of exile in Siberia. While awaiting deportation, he first heard of Vladimir Lenin and his writings about Russian capitalism. Trotsky married Alexandra Sokolovskaya before leaving. During his exile, he studied works by such political theorists as Lenin and Karl Marx, and gradually his views became inclined toward Marxism. He wrote a steady stream of political essays and pamphlets for clandestine circulation among prisoners, and he began to develop a reputation.

Insurrection of 1905 Urged by his wife, Trotsky escaped from Siberia in 1902 using a fake passport. Leaders of the Russian underground movement directed him to London, where he joined the circle of exiled revolutionists, including Lenin and Julius Martov of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Trotsky was set to work writing for their newspaper, *Iskra* and within months was an established party leader.

The Social Democratic Party split the following year, divided on the question of whether to limit or expand party membership. In opposition to Lenin and his Bolsheviks, Trotsky found himself in the middle of the dispute, siding with Martov of the Menshevik faction in favor of a broad-based party. Trotsky wrote that Lenin's preference for concentration of power could eventually lead to dictatorship. History proved him correct—as Stalin's rise to power demonstrated—but his words mainly served to estrange him from Lenin. Ironically, Trotsky soon parted ways with the Mensheviks as well. Suspended between both factions, Trotsky discovered A. L. Helfand, a German-born Marxist theoretician, who wrote under the pen name of Parvus. Under his influence, Trotsky adopted the political theory that would later be associated with him, the notion of “permanent revolution.”

In January 1905, government soldiers in St. Petersburg fired upon a group of citizens who had gathered to petition Czar Nicholas II for civil and political rights. Trotsky returned to Russia almost immediately and produced incendiary essays and pamphlets calling for insurrection. Demonstrations continued, culminating in a general strike that brought Russian industry and transportation to a standstill. This led to the formation of Russia's first elective body to represent the working class, the Council (or Soviet) of Workers' Deputies. Trotsky became a leader of the St. Petersburg Soviet, but by December its leaders were under arrest and martial law declared. The revolution was put on hold. Meanwhile, Trotsky was put on trial, and again exiled to Siberia. Again, he escaped.

Central Role in Bolshevik Revolution Trotsky spent most of the next decade in Vienna, Austria, editing the revolutionary newspaper *Pravda* and contributing political journalism to the European press. He refined his ideas of “permanent revolution,” advocating a socialist

revolution that would carry beyond Russia's borders. As Trotsky saw it, since Russia had not developed a powerful capitalist middle class, or bourgeoisie, the success of a revolution would depend on the lower class, or proletariat. Leadership of the state, Trotsky argued, should then pass immediately to the “dictatorship of the proletariat”—that is, the vanguard, or Communist elite. Furthermore, the survival of such a revolution would depend on economic support from abroad. The history of the Soviet revolution would bear out much of this theory; as historian Irving Howe has observed, “of all the Marxists it was Trotsky who best foresaw the course of events in Russia.”

Threatened with internment by Austria as World War I broke out, Trotsky journeyed to Switzerland, France, and the United States. As the war progressed, Russia's domestic situation became increasingly unstable. In March 1917, the news arrived that the czar had been overthrown. By the time Trotsky arrived in Petrograd in early May, the country had fallen into political chaos. Trotsky quickly reconciled with Lenin and joined the Bolshevik Party, becoming its most eloquent orator. When Lenin, suspected of being a German spy, went into hiding, it was Trotsky who organized Bolshevik military regiments and spearheaded the bloodless takeover of the government, hereafter called the October Revolution.

In the Bolshevik government formed after the coup, Trotsky was offered the chairmanship of the ruling body, the Council of People's Commissars. He declined the post, offering instead to become press director for the new regime. Out of hiding, Lenin assumed the chairmanship and later persuaded Trotsky to serve as commissar for foreign affairs. In this capacity, he led the Soviet delegation to the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations that ended Russia's participation in World War I. Soon afterward, civil war broke out in Russia between supporters and opponents of the Soviet regime. Trotsky became war commissar, assuming command of an exhausted and demoralized force of less than ten thousand soldiers. In what historian E. H. Carr calls his supreme achievement, Trotsky rebuilt the Red Army to over 5 million men, restored order and discipline, and by 1921, achieved victory over the anti-Bolshevik White Army, which had been armed by Britain, France, and the United States.

Exiled by Stalin As powerful an orator and capable a leader as Trotsky was, however, he was a blunt, arrogant man who made numerous enemies. When Lenin suffered a stroke in 1922, many believed Trotsky to be the best choice for his successor, but he had a small political base. His main opponent, Joseph Stalin, had better tactics and a stronger network of alliances. Stalin gradually gained control of the bureaucracy of the party and the Soviet state. He also reached out to Trotsky's enemies and effectively used Trotsky's own words, such as his previous attacks on Lenin, to discredit him. For his part, Trotsky made the error of declining to reply to many of Stalin's attacks. His dignified silence cost him even more political

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Trotsky's famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924): Russian revolutionary and first leader of the Soviet Union.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971): Russian composer of classical works such as *The Firebird* (1910) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924): U.S. president from 1913 until 1921.

Maxim Gorky (1868–1936): Russian author and proponent of socialist realism in literature.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Irish expatriate author who wrote modern classics such as *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and *Ulysses* (1922).

support. Between 1925 and 1927 he was forced to relinquish his political responsibilities. Trotsky, along with fifteen hundred other “Trotskyists,” was expelled from the party in 1927 and exiled to central Asia in 1928.

Trotsky remained in exile until his death twelve years later, living at times in Turkey, France, Norway, and, finally, Mexico. He turned to literature, and wrote his most critically acclaimed books during this period, including *The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk* (*Von Oktober bis nach Brest-Litovsk*) (1932), *My Life* (*Moya zhizn*) (1930), and *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937). In this last work, Trotsky denounced Stalin's creation of a bureaucratic elite that sought to stifle opposition and extend its dominance.

During his final period of exile, Trotsky labored to create a Fourth International, a federation of socialist organizations dedicated to worldwide revolution; Stalin had taken over the Third (or Communist) International and made it an instrument of his own policies. However, the Fourth International never achieved a large membership. Stalin never let up his assault on Trotsky's reputation. In 1936, Trotsky was tried in absentia in the Soviet Union for treason, murder, conspiracy, and espionage. The Soviet courts convicted him, but a Western commission of independent scholars found him innocent of all charges. In 1940, a Stalinist assassin killed Trotsky in Mexico City.

Works in Literary Context

Political Leader vs. Author Despite his renown as a political leader, Trotsky considered himself primarily an author. In fact, at many times in his life he remarked that the revolution was interfering with his literary work. Trotsky's combination of literary talent and political skill is

particularly evident in his historical writings, most notably in 1905 and *The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk*. 1905, Trotsky's first major work, was written early in his career and completed before the development of many of his important political ideas. Critics note that as a result, the work is free of the sweeping theoretical generalizations that characterize his later historical writings, although the influence of Marx and Lenin is evident.

Political Historian and Biographer *The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk* is considered both Trotsky's masterpiece and the greatest Marxist history ever written. The work portrays on an epic scale the interaction of masses and individuals in the months between February and December of 1917. Trotsky maintained that “the most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct intervention of the masses in historic events.” Although the *History* is dominated by a Marxist perspective, the author's analysis emphasizes the dynamics of mass psychology along with economic factors.

Trotsky hurriedly composed a biography of Lenin after the leader's death in 1924, intending to complete a full-scale biography later. He completed only the first volume, entitled *The Young Lenin* (*Vie de Lenine, jeunesse*) (1936). This work has been widely praised for its sensitive and poetic portrayal of Lenin's childhood and youth. The opening chapters of Trotsky's autobiography, *My Life*, have been similarly praised for their vivid remembrance of childhood, earning favorable comparison to self-portraits by Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky. The later chapters of the work, however, have been criticized for their concentration on political and public matters to the exclusion of Trotsky's inner and personal life. Trotsky himself noted that his *Diary in Exile* (1935), a journal kept during his exile in France and Norway, was dominated by political commentary and literary criticism. “And how could it actually be otherwise?” he wrote. “For politics and literature constitute the essence of my personal life.”

Marxist Literary Critic Trotsky's works of literary criticism also have considerable historical value. His most important work in this genre, *Literature and Revolution* (*Liturgatura i revolyutsiya*) (1923), surveys prominent Russian authors and includes a controversial theoretical essay. Trotsky opposes “proletarian art,” a concept championed after the revolution by artists and writers who believed that art and literature should reflect class consciousness and Marxist values. Trotsky maintained that “proletarian culture and art will never exist,” arguing instead that the Russian Revolution “derives its historic significance and moral greatness from the fact that it lays the foundation for a classless society and for the first truly universal culture.” His theories were strongly opposed by Soviet officials who sought to control intellectual life through regulation of the arts and by literary groups who sought official endorsement for their particular doctrines. In the years preceding Trotsky's exile to central Asia, his opponents cited these “anti-proletarian” views

of art and culture as evidence that his thought was fundamentally counterrevolutionary. Among Western critics, however, *Literature and Revolution* is praised for its wit, originality, and insight, and is generally considered the definitive exposition of Marxist literary theory.

Works in Critical Context

Union of Thought and Action Although the controversy surrounding Trotsky has subsided somewhat since his death, few public figures of the century have inspired such intense emotions from both admirers and detractors. Decades after Stalin, Trotsky was still denounced in the Soviet Union as a heretic of Marxism. He was denounced as well by Western anticommunists who considered him a ruthless, or at best, misguided revolutionary fanatic. At the same time, many political leftists worldwide consider him among the most brilliant proponents of classical Marxist thought. Trotskyite political parties that campaign for worldwide revolution still exist in many countries. His achievements and his tragic life have inspired adulation by Western intellectuals who see in Trotsky the perfect union of thought and action.

Objectivity Critics are nearly unanimous in praising Trotsky's compelling prose style, especially in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. However, no consensus exists as to Trotsky's success in achieving the dispassion that historical scholarship requires. George Vernadsky, among others, calls the work "an impassioned invective against [Trotsky's] enemies" that is "undeniably permeated by ill-suppressed bias." Trotsky himself distinguished between "objectivity" and "impartiality," writing that he sought the former while disdaining the latter, and many critics agree that he succeeded in achieving intellectual honesty without sacrificing his commitment to a particular ideological perspective. According to Deutscher, "extreme partisanship and scrupulously sober observation go hand in hand" in the *History*.

The question of Trotsky's objectivity is even more central to his writings on Stalin. His scathing biography of Stalin, which denounces his personality and rise to power, is perhaps the most controversial of Trotsky's writings. Left unfinished at the time of Trotsky's death, the manuscript was pieced together from the author's notes by editor Charles Malamuth and submitted for publication in 1941. According to Bertram Wolfe, Malamuth's version differed enough on crucial issues from Trotsky's known views that the author's literary executors threatened legal proceedings to prevent its publication. This proved unnecessary, however, as the manuscript was voluntarily withheld by the publisher at the behest of the United States government, which was at that time allied with Stalin's Russia in World War II. Upon its appearance in 1946, the work was viciously received by many critics, who considered it a malicious and unjustified attack on Stalin and Stalinism motivated solely by personal vindictiveness. Such critics as Robert H. McNeal, on the other hand, assert that "it is rather to be wondered that the polemical reaction of a leader so naturally proud and combative as

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The writings of Leon Trotsky are among the classics of revolutionary literature. Here are some other essential titles in the revolutionary's library:

The Communist Manifesto (1848), a political treatise by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This famous work suggests a course of action for working-class revolution to overthrow the social order created by industrial capitalism.

State and Revolution (1917), a political treatise by Vladimir Lenin. Lenin defends Marxist theory and outlines the role of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" following the revolution.

Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong (1964), a political treatise by Mao Tse-tung (or Zedong). The "little red book" was required reading in the People's Republic of China during the Cultural Revolution.

The Wretched of the Earth (1961), a nonfiction work of political theory by Frantz Fanon. A defense of national liberation from imperialism, this work was written during the Algerian struggle against French colonial rule.

Trotsky was so restrained, considering the provocation that Stalin gave him." Trotsky's intellectual integrity in this matter has some prominent defenders, but even those critics who consider the biography an accurate depiction of Stalin's personality and career agree that *Stalin* is largely unsuccessful as a work of literature.

Responses to Literature

1. What do you think Russia would have been like from 1940 to 1960—politics, economy, standard of living, art—if Stalin had been exiled in 1928 instead of Trotsky?
2. Evaluate Trotsky's theory of worldwide or "permanent" socialist revolution, in light of the rise and fall of Soviet communism in the twentieth century.
3. Research the cultural theory proposed by Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution*. How do his ideas shed light on the artistic genre of "socialist realism" that emerged from the Soviet Union?

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☒ Marina Tsvetaeva

BORN: 1892, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1941, Elabuga, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Mileposts: Poems: Issue I (1916)

Mileposts: Poems: Issue II (1921)

“Downpour of Light” (1922)

Craft (1923)

After Russia (1928)

Overview

Along with Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva is included in Russia’s “poetic quartet,” a group of important authors whose works reflect the changing values in Russia during the early decades of the twentieth century. Tsvetaeva’s central interest as a poet was language, and the stylistic innovations displayed in her work are considered a unique contribution to Russian literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood of Privilege and Poetry Marina Ivanova Tsvetaeva (also transliterated as Tsvetayeva, Cvetayeva, and Zwetaewa) was born in Moscow to art history professor Ivan Tsvetayev and concert pianist Mariya Meyn Tsvetayeva. Tsvetaeva grew up in Moscow in an upper-middle-class family distinguished for its artistic and scholarly pursuits. Her father was the founder of the Museum of Fine Arts, and her talented and accomplished mother encouraged Marina to follow a musical career. Attending schools in Switzerland, Germany, and at the Sorbonne in Paris, Tsvetaeva preferred writing poetry.

Two Books, Marriage, and Several Affairs In 1910, when Tsvetaeva was eighteen years of age, her first collection, *Evening Album*, was privately published. This volume received unexpected attention when it was reviewed by the prominent critic Max Voloshin and the poets Nikolay Gumilyov and Valery Bryusov, all of whom wrote favorably



Marina Tsvetaeva *The Granger Collection, New York. Reproduced by permission.*

of Tsvetaeva’s work. In 1911, Tsvetaeva published a second collection of poetry, *The Magic Lantern*, and the following year was married to Sergey Efron. Throughout the marriage Tsvetaeva pursued romantic attachments with other poets, following a pattern of infatuation and disillusionment she had established in adolescence.

Russian Civil War During the Russian civil war, which lasted from 1918 to 1921, Tsvetaeva lived in poverty in Moscow while her husband fought in the Crimea as an officer of the czarist White Army. The Russian civil war was complicated by the presence of several opposing military factions, but had as its primary antagonists the Bolshevik, or Red, Army—which had a broad mandate following the 1917 Workers’ Revolution—and the czarist White Army, desperately struggling to reestablish the old political

order. Tsvetaeva wrote prolifically during this time, composing poetry, essays, memoirs, and dramas. But the anti-Bolshevik sentiments pervading many of these works prevented their publication. During a famine in 1919, the younger of her two children died of starvation, and in 1922 (the year after the Bolsheviks won the civil war and the year their leader, Vladimir Lenin, died), Tsvetaeva immigrated with her surviving child, Ariadna, to Germany. There—after five years of wartime separation—she rejoined Efron.

Adamant Pro-Soviet Stance While Tsvetaeva's family was living in Berlin, and later Prague, where her son, Georgy, was born in 1925, she began to publish the works she had written during the previous decade. These found favor with Russian critics and readers living in exile. Moving to Paris, Tsvetaeva continued to write poetry, but her changing politics brought her into disfavor. Tsvetaeva's reputation among other émigré writers began to deteriorate—largely because of her refusal to adopt the militant anti-Soviet posture of many émigrés, and her husband's pro-Soviet activities (Efron had at this point changed sides so completely as to have become a Communist agent).

Stalinist Terror, World War II, and Suicide Efron and daughter Ariadna returned to Russia in 1937. Tsvetaeva, who was being treated with indifference by Russian expatriates in Paris, followed in 1939 with son Georgy. At that time, artists and intellectuals, especially those with ties to the West, were at risk under the extremist policies of Joseph Stalin—which included paranoid and, even worse, deeply arbitrary torture and execution of suspected enemies of the state. The family was reunited only briefly in Moscow before Efron and Ariadna were both arrested and Efron was charged with anti-Soviet espionage.

When German troops attacked Moscow in 1941, breaking the Nonaggression Pact that Stalin had secretly signed with German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler at the outset of World War II (1939–1945), Tsvetaeva and Georgy were evacuated to the village of Elabuga in the Tatar Republic. Despondent over the arrest and possible execution of her husband and daughter, denied the right to publish, and unable to support herself and her son, Tsvetaeva took her own life.

Works in Literary Context

Russian Influences Tsvetaeva's writings were significantly influenced by those of her contemporaries and by the events surrounding the Russian Revolution. Yet she remained largely independent of the numerous literary and political movements that flourished during this tumultuous era, perhaps because of the strength of the impressions left on her by her eclectic reading interests. *Evening Album* (1910), for example, bears the strong influence of the young Tsvetaeva's readings, which included much second-rate poetry and prose. In *Mileposts: Poems: Issue I* (1916), she is inspired by the architectural and religious heritage of Moscow, perhaps

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tsvetaeva's famous contemporaries include:

- Charles de Gaulle** (1890–1970): A French general and the leader of the Free French Forces, he founded the French Fifth Republic and became its first president.
- Vladimir Mayakovsky** (1893–1930): A Russian poet and playwright, he is considered one of the forerunners of Russian Futurism.
- Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): A Chilean poet and writer and political Communist; his 1971 receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature caused much controversy.
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882–1945): An American politician and the thirty-second president of the United States, he was so popular with the people he was elected to the office for four terms.
- Edith Stein** (1891–1942): A Carmelite nun and German philosopher, she became a martyr of the Catholic Church upon losing her life at Auschwitz.

because of the work of Karolina Karlovna Pavlova, one of her favorite poets.

Tsvetaeva's numerous affairs, which often did not involve sex, were also apparent influences; she considered these essentially spiritual in nature, and they are credited with providing the highly charged emotion of her poetry, as well as inspiring poems dedicated to Osip Mandelstam, Aleksandr Blok, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Tsvetaeva's lyric dialogues with Blok, Mandelstam, and Akhmatova in *Mileposts* center on the themes of Russia, poetry, and love. While she based her poems predominantly upon personal experience, Tsvetaeva also explored with increased detachment such philosophical themes as the nature of time and space.

Russian Folk Style Tsvetaeva developed poetic traits early on that are largely preserved in her subsequent collections. Both volumes of *Mileposts* are marked by an extraordinary power and directness of language. The ideas of anxiety, restlessness, and elemental power are emphasized with language, as Tsvetaeva draws on common regional speech and refers to folksongs and Russian poetry of the eighteenth century. Her interest in language shows through the wordplay and linguistic experiments of her verse. Scholars have also noted the intensity and energy of verbs in her poems and her fondness for dark colors. On the level of imagery, archetypal and traditional symbolism prevail, for example, in her use of night, wind, open spaces, and birds.

In the early 1920s, Tsvetaeva experimented with narrative verse. She adapted traditional Russian folktales in *The King-Maiden* (1922) and *The Swain* (1924). In the volume

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Tsvetaeva, also paid homage to their homelands, peoples, and fellow writers in folktales, poems, lyrics, and prose:

Folktales of Greece (1970), a collection edited by Georgios A. Megas. This collection includes such stories as "Almondseed and Almondella" and "Brother and Sister."

Popular Tales of the West Highlands (1890), a collection by John Francis Campbell. These tales hail from Scotland and include such titles as "The Tale of the Queen Who Sought a Drink from a Certain Well."

Vladimir Il'ich Lenin (1925), a tribute poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. This three-thousand-line poem was a high-styled tribute to Lenin upon his death.

After Russia (1928) she fused her early romantic style with more regional diction. As the 1930s progressed, Tsvetaeva devoted more energy to prose than to poetry. In such memoirs as "Captive Spirit" and "My Pushkin" (both published in *Contemporary Annals* in 1934 and 1937, respectively), she recorded her impressions of friends and poets. In a prose style characterized by stream-of-consciousness narrative technique and poetic language, Tsvetaeva expressed her views on literary creation and criticism in such essays as "Art in the Light of Conscience" and "A Poet on Criticism" (both published in *Contemporary Annals* in 1932).

Works in Critical Context

After her death Marina Tsvetaeva and her work were virtually forgotten. For many years her name was unmentionable in the Soviet Union. Then her posthumous publications started to appear, and she soon gained recognition as one of the greatest Russian poets of all time. A veritable cult of Tsvetaeva developed in Russia and outside its borders. Today she is an internationally famous poet and the object of many scholarly studies that are on a par with criticism about Pasternak, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, or even classics of the Russian Golden Age. This reputation springs in part from Tsvetaeva's earlier poetry. *Craft* (1923), the last volume of poetry Tsvetaeva completed before her emigration, is praised for its metrical experiments and effective blending of folk language, archaisms, and biblical idioms. *After Russia* (1928) has been deemed by critics such as Simon Karlinsky "the most mature and perfect of her collections."

Demonstrating her literary merit further are both Tsvetaeva's mature verse and even her first verse work, *Evening Album*.

Evening Album (1910) Composed almost entirely before she was eighteen years old, *Evening Album* is considered a work of technical virtuosity. The volume's occasionally immature themes do not obscure Tsvetaeva's mastery of traditional Russian lyric forms. At the time of its publication it was noticed immediately by leading critics, who gave the book favorable reviews and emphasized its intimacy and freshness of tone. Valerii Iakovlevich Briusov, who, in his 1911 article "New Verse Collections" in *Russian Thought*, expressed some reservations concerning Tsvetaeva's domestic themes and commonplace ideas, nevertheless dubbed her an "undoubtedly talented" author capable of creating "the true poetry of the intimate life." Further reflecting the critical attitude at the time, Nikolai Sergeevich Gumilev wrote enthusiastically about Tsvetaeva's spontaneity and audacity, concluding in his 1911 article "Letters on Russian Poetry" in *Apollo*, "All the main laws of poetry have been instinctively guessed here, so that this book is not just a book of charming girlish confessions, but a book of excellent verse as well."

After her initial critical success and popularity, Tsvetaeva was largely neglected because of her experimental style and her refusal to assume either a pro- or anti-Soviet stance. Recent critics regard her work as among the most innovative and powerful Russian poetry of the twentieth century, with scholars such as Angela Livingstone writing, "An emotional but not a 'feminine' poet, she avoids all mellifluous sentimentality and instead loves, hates, lauds, castigates, laments, marvels, aspires . . . with a kind of unflinching physicality, always pushing passions and stances to the point at which they will be fully revealed."

Responses to Literature

1. Tsvetaeva and her writing were influenced by the events of the Russian civil war, when the poet lived in poverty in Moscow while her husband fought in the Crimea as an officer of the czarist White Army. Research the Russian civil war. How did it specifically impact the civilians? How is this impact reflected in Tsvetaeva's work?
2. Tsvetaeva showed anti-Bolshevik sentiments in her poetry, plays, journals, and stories. This fact prevented publication of her writing for several years. Choose a poem by Tsvetaeva that you believe might have had such controversial political messages (you may need to research the Bolsheviks to understand this context). Explain why this poem may have been such a threat, using detailed analysis of passages from the poem to add depth to your position.
3. In her writing, Tsvetaeva has a commitment to folk-songs, folk ditties, and Russian poetry of the eighteenth century. Research Russian folk tradition, mythology, or history to get a deeper sense of the people of Tsvetaeva's writings. How would you characterize the typical Russians of the time? Are they well-depicted in her work? What values do they have that

come through in the poet's writing? What do you learn about Russian tradition from Tsvetaeva's writing?

4. Tsvetaeva's work has been praised for its lyricism and "intuitive" grasp of what moves the human soul. Analyze the emotional effects produced by one of her poems that you find particularly striking; explain the different elements of poetry that she brings to bear in creating particular images for and inspiring particular feelings in a reader. Help your reader understand, ultimately, *how* the poem works.

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Tu Fu

BORN: 712, Kung-hsien, Honan, China

DIED: 770, T'an-chou, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

"Eight Immortals of Drinking"

"Facing the Snow"

"Traveling North"

"A Song of Lo-Yu Park"



Tu Fu Chinese poet Tu Fu, photograph. The Art Archive / British Library / The Picture Desk, Inc.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tu Fu's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Martel (688–741): Martel, also known as “the Hammer,” was a towering figure in medieval European history: founder of the Carolingian dynasty, his tactical innovations led to a Frankish victory over the invading Moors at the Battle of Tours, the turning point that is regarded as the end of Muslim expansion in the West.

Jia Dan (730–805): Jia's writings on geography and trade routes have provided historians with detailed information on the Asian world of the eighth century. Commissioned by the emperor, Jia Dan oversaw the creation of a map of China and its neighbors that was thirty feet square.

Bede (672/673–735): Generally referred to as the Venerable Bede, this English monk was one of the most active scholars of the Dark Ages. His masterwork, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, has led to his being called the Father of English History.

Harun al-Rashid (763–809): Beginning his reign around the time of Tu Fu's death, this Persian caliph's magnificent lifestyle is said to have inspired many of the tales in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*.

Li Po (701–762): Along with Tu Fu, Li Po is considered one of the two greatest poets in Chinese history. As renowned for his love of wine as for his imaginative Taoist verses, he is said to have died by drowning after drunkenly trying to embrace his own reflection in the moonlit Yangtze River.

Han Gan (706–783): Chinese painter renowned during his lifetime and for centuries after for his ability to paint horses.

Overview

Widely regarded as one of the greatest Chinese poets, Tu Fu is known for his contemplative verse that chronicled the political and social upheaval of mid-eighth-century China. Praised for his innovative use of traditional verse forms and his synthesis of a variety of elements drawn from previous Chinese literature, Tu Fu also drew imagery from his personal experiences to create compelling verse that served as an inspiration to succeeding generations.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life and Work Tu Fu was born in Kung-hsien, Honan (also spelled Henan), a province of central China. His mother died when he was a child, and he was raised by an aunt in Loyang. In about 731, he began traveling through the Yangtze River and Yellow River regions,

and approximately five years later he moved to Ch'ang-an, the capital, in order to secure an official post. Failing the imperial examination for public office, Tu Fu resumed traveling. In 744 he met the poet Li Po in Loyang. Tu Fu's friendship with Li Po served as material for some of his most famous poems, including “Eight Immortals of Drinking,” which reflects on the carefree atmosphere of his time spent in Loyang. Tu Fu returned to Ch'ang-an in 746 to retake the examination for public office and failed again. He remained in Ch'ang-an until he acquired a minor post in the early 750s. While he attained some official recognition for his poetry during this period, his multiple failures of the literary examinations indicate that his work was not highly esteemed at court. When the An Lu-shan rebellion broke out in 755, Tu Fu was captured by the rebels, but later escaped and lived as a refugee until he was able to return to court in 757. He was soon banished from the capital as a result of his outspoken advice to the emperor. Tu Fu spent the next nine years wandering through various cities in Szechuan Province, at one point holding the position of military advisor in the governor's headquarters in Ch'eng-tu. This was his most prolific period, during which he wrote acclaimed poems about social issues. After his governor-appointed patron died in 765, Tu Fu began another trip along the Yangtze River that ended with his death at the age of fifty-eight.

Works in Literary Context

Alienation and Hardship Tu Fu's canon of more than fifteen hundred poems demonstrates a variety of verse forms and themes. Much of his work is characterized by a sometimes self-deprecating tone, particularly the later poems in which he chronicled the alienation he felt as an aging traveler. In “A Song of Lo-yu Park,” he recalled the exuberance of an outdoor party, but ended the poem, “Nowhere to return after drinking, I am standing alone in the dusk, composing poems.” A sense of loss and despair informs many of Tu Fu's poems from the post-rebellion period, including “Lament for Ch'ent'ao,” “Lament for Ch'ing-fan,” and “Facing the Snow,” all sorrowful depictions of the destruction wrought by the rebellion and subsequent war. “Traveling North” is a melancholy description of Tu Fu's reunion with his family: “I am now facing my son after narrowly escaping from death. Let me forget for a while all the hardships of life.” Many of Tu Fu's poems of social protest were written during the post-rebellion period and contrast the suffering of the impoverished villagers with the lavish life of the court.

Confucian Ideals, Warm Humanism Tu Fu is philosophically a Confucian earnestly accepting his duties to his family and to the state, and this perspective is reflected in his poems. Confucianism focuses primarily on the performing of good deeds as a way of expressing the divine. The ideal poet, as he conceives it, is the

scholar who by virtue of knowing the realities, desires, and aspirations of human nature also knows how best to counsel and advise in matters of state. The poet is also the official, or, better, the ideal official is the ideal poet. In poetry he composes his “reminders” to the throne, intended as advice to the emperor. Politics is not to him a peculiar science, categorically apart from other branches of knowledge and understanding. In this respect also he is a true humanist.

Works in Critical Context

According to Stephen Owen, “Within the Chinese poetic tradition, Tu Fu is almost beyond judgment because, like Shakespeare in our own tradition, his literary accomplishment has itself become a major component in the historical formation of literary values.” However, Tu Fu was not highly regarded during his lifetime; critics speculate that his contemporaries, accustomed to the rigid forms and styles of Chinese verse, were unable to appreciate his synthesis of traditional elements. However, his works were favorably reevaluated by Chinese poets and scholars several decades after his death, and since that time his enormous contributions to the development of Chinese literature have been meticulously researched.

Influence on Bashō Tu Fu’s influence stretched beyond his native China. Matsuo Bashō, a seventeenth-century Japanese poet often credited with inventing the haiku form, displayed many thematic similarities to Tu Fu. Bashō borrowed various elements of imagery from Tu Fu. Several of them are found in his prose writings of the period preceding his maturity. Others are found in the poetry he composed as he was perfecting his style. The attraction that Tu Fu held for Bashō was admitted by him at the time he published a collection of haiku titled *Empty Chestnuts*. In the preface of this collection, written when Bashō was forty years old, he acknowledged the influence of Tu Fu, as well as that of other poets, by saying in regard to his own verses, “the spirits of Li Po and Tu Fu revive and Han Shan’s Zennism prevails, while Saigyō’s tranquility and elegance are newly explored.” Although his self-styled affinity with these four renowned poets might not be appreciated by others, and the ordinary man might regard his poems as “empty chestnuts” (*minashiguri*) not worth picking up, the poems in *Empty Chestnuts* presented to Bashō the possibility of a new taste and the exploration of a new poetical realm.

The continuing influence of Tu Fu on Bashō appears repeatedly in the poetry written by him in the years following the publication of *Empty Chestnuts*. The poetic accounts of his travels throughout Japan and the verses he penned during periods of seclusion clearly attest to the inspiration he drew from the Chinese poet.

Modern Commentary Modern commentary often focuses on the implicit philosophy in Tu Fu’s work. Critics also address the way in which Tu Fu explored in his poetry the social issues of his time. Burton Watson has

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The T’ang Dynasty (618–907) was a fertile period for Chinese poetry. Study of the other major T’ang poets can provide a greater historical context for Tu Fu’s place among his contemporaries.

The Selected Poems of Wang Wei (2006). A contemporary of Tu Fu, Wang Wei’s poetry characterizes the then-emerging tenets of Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism: calm acceptance and close appreciation of nature.

The Mountain Poems of Meng Hao-jan (2000). A master of the landscape poem and another enthusiastic Ch’an poet, Meng Hao-jan is credited with starting the flowering of Tang poetry that would be carried on by the likes of Tu Fu.

The Selected Poems of Li Po (1998). Reputedly, Li Po could compose fully realized poems, in their finished form, extemporaneously. Over one thousand of his poems survive today, and he is still one of the most popular and widely read poets in China.

noted that “whereas most T’ang poets . . . expressed their criticisms indirectly through the conventions of the yueh-fu style, borrowing the guise of the soldier or the peasant and setting the poem in some distant era of the past, Tu Fu boldly described in his own words the abuses and sufferings that he and his contemporaries encountered.” The personal nature of Tu Fu’s poetry has garnered critical admiration, particularly his poignant descriptions of his own experiences and his meticulous attention to detail in depicting everyday life during the T’ang dynasty.

Responses to Literature

1. Find some examples of historical events that Tu Fu relates in his poetry. Discuss how social upheaval and political instability influenced Tu Fu’s poetry.
2. Read some of Tu Fu’s reminders to the emperor. How do these reflect the author’s Confucianism?
3. Li Po and Tu Fu, both acknowledged as China’s greatest poets, were contemporaries. Discuss how Li Po influenced Tu Fu’s poetry, and vice versa. Do you think they inspired each other to greater poetic heights, or is their work largely independent of the other’s influence?
4. Select and examine the work of a modern poet who deals with a theme found in Tu Fu’s work, such as alienation. How does the modern poet handle the theme differently than Tu Fu? How are the two poets similar in their handling of style and subject, if at all?

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❏ Ivan Turgenev

BORN: 1818, Orel, Russia

DIED: 1883, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

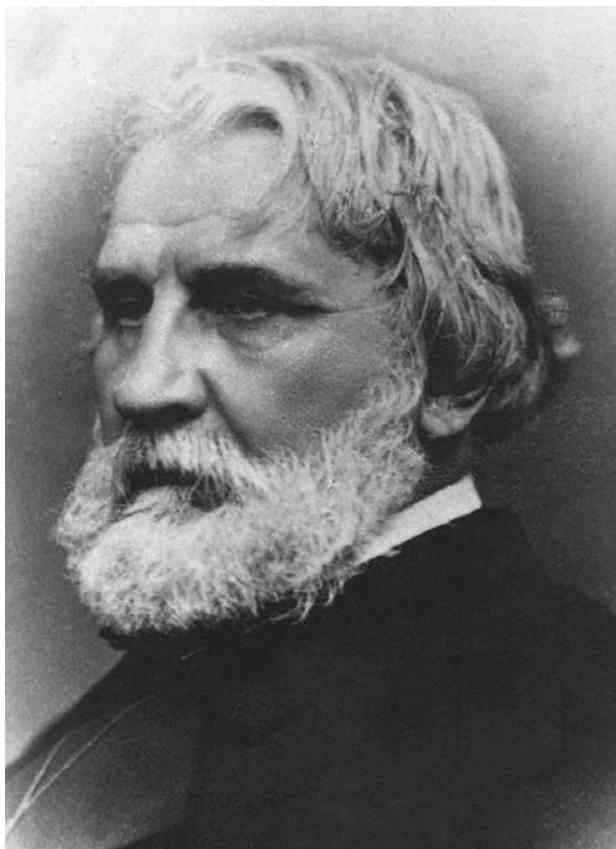
A Sportsman's Sketches (1852)

Fathers and Sons (1862)

Virgin Soil (1877)

Overview

The first Russian author to achieve widespread international fame, Ivan Turgenev was hailed as his country's premier



Ivan Turgenev Popperfoto / Getty Images

novelist by nineteenth-century Westerners and is today linked with Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy as one of the triumvirate of great Russian novelists of that century. As a writer deeply concerned with the politics of his homeland, he vividly described the tumultuous political environment in Russia from the 1840s to the 1870s. Simultaneously, as a literary artist, he created works noted for their psychological truth, descriptive beauty, and haunting pathos.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Daunting Household Turgenev was born on October 28, 1818, in the city of Orel into a family of wealthy gentry. His father, by all accounts a charming but ineffectual cavalry officer, paid little attention to Turgenev, whose childhood on the family estate of Spasskoye was dominated by his eccentric and impulsive mother, Varvara Petrovna. Her treatment of her favorite son Ivan alternated between excessive affection and mental and physical cruelty; she ruled Spasskoye and its five thousand serfs with the same unpredictability. Biographers have cited his mother's influence to explain much about the development of Turgenev's personality—particularly his horror of violence and hatred of injustice—and his fiction, populated as it is by strong women and well-meaning but weak-willed men.

During Turgenev's early childhood, French was the primary language spoken in his household, as was customary among upper-class Russians. Although his mother later permitted the use of Russian, it is likely that Turgenev's first lessons in the vernacular came from the Spasskoye serfs. When Turgenev was nine, the family left the country for Moscow, where Ivan attended boarding schools before entering Moscow University in 1833. At the university, he earned the nickname "the American" for his interest in the United States and his democratic inclinations. In 1834, Turgenev transferred to the University of St. Petersburg. Upon graduation, he decided that the completion of his education required study abroad, so he went to Germany in 1838, enrolling at the University of Berlin. During the next several years, he studied philosophy, but he never finished his degree. Turgenev returned to Russia in 1841, but for the rest of his life he divided his time between his homeland and western Europe.

Early Career Although Turgenev had begun writing poetry as a student in St. Petersburg and published his first verses in 1838, biographers generally cite the narrative poem *Parasha*, published in 1843, as the beginning of his literary career. This work attracted little attention from his contemporaries, however, and the friendships he made in the mid-1840s, including those with Pauline Viardot and Vissarion Belinsky, proved more important for his literary development—indeed, the rest of his life—than the poem. Viardot was a successful opera singer and a married woman when Turgenev met her in 1843. The

precise nature of their relationship is uncertain. While Turgenev's letters to her seem to indicate a grand passion, at least on his side, there is no evidence that the two were ever lovers. At any rate, their relationship endured for the rest of Turgenev's life; he frequently followed Viardot to wherever her career took her and was on excellent terms with her husband and the rest of her family. Turgenev himself never married.

Turgenev's friendship with Belinsky, an extremely influential literary critic, also directed the course of his life. A political liberal and an ardent Westernizer, Belinsky sought to bring Russia's culture and political system nearer to that of Europe. Belinsky was closely associated with the radical periodical *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*), edited by Nikolay Nekrasov, and it was in this journal that Turgenev published his first prose work, the short story "Khor i Kalinych."

A Sportsman's Sketches Although Turgenev continued to write poetry and tried his hand at drama, he had found his niche and his audience in narrative prose. "Khor and Kalinych" was followed by a series of related pieces between the years 1847 and 1852, all first published in the *Contemporary* and later collected and published in book form in 1852 as *Zapiski okhotnika* (*A Sportsman's Sketches*). In these sketches, which range from brief slices of life to fully realized short stories, Turgenev adopted the persona of a hunter in the country, drawing on his experiences at Spasskoye and expressing his love for the land and people of rural Russia. The sensitive portraits of country peasants and landowners in *A Sportsman's Sketches* gently persuaded the reader not only that serfdom was unjust, but also that it damaged the character of the upper classes morally and spiritually. *A Sportsman's Sketches* is frequently compared to Harriet Beecher Stowe's contemporaneous antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, also published in 1852. Unlike the American novel, however, Turgenev's work is understated, his moral message implied rather than overt.

At their first publication, Turgenev's stories were enormously popular with almost everyone but government officials. In 1852, when he wrote an admiring obituary of Nikolai Gogol, whose socially conscious writing had inspired many in Turgenev's generation, Turgenev was arrested, supposedly for excessive approval of a suspect writer but more likely for his own social critique in *A Sportsman's Sketches*. After a month in jail, Turgenev was confined to Spasskoye, where he remained under house arrest for nearly two years. When the serfs were finally freed in 1861, there were many who credited *A Sportsman's Sketches* with having helped to effect their emancipation.

Turgenev's Novels Russia in the nineteenth century was a divided and politically troubled country, unsure of its future political course. Tension existed not only between conservatives and liberals but also between the radical liberals, who called for immediate change and economic communism—the sharing of all resources and wealth equally among citizens—and the moderate liberals, who

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Turgenev's famous contemporaries include:

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Russian novelist, essayist, and philosopher who wrote the epic novel *War and Peace* (1869).

George Sand (1804–1876): Sand was a French Romantic writer who explored sexual identity and gender issues in her fiction.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880): French realist novelist. Flaubert is best known for *Madame Bovary* (1857), the story of unhappy, adulterous Emma Bovary.

Alexander II (1818–1881): Emperor (czar) of the Russian Empire from 1855, Alexander II was assassinated in 1881.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Renowned American author. Twain penned *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), considered one of the masterworks of American fiction.

favored slow, peaceful reform and free enterprise. Turgenev managed to draw the hostility of nearly every Russian school of thought, from reactionary to revolutionary, with his next and most famous novel, *Fathers and Sons*. Bazarov, the protagonist of the book, is considered Turgenev's most successful and most ambiguous character—Turgenev himself confessed that he did not know whether he loved or hated his hero. Bazarov also provides an intriguing portrayal of a political type just then coming into existence in Russia: the nihilist, a person who rejects all conventional values. While Turgenev did not invent the term "nihilist" his depiction of Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons* brought it into general usage. Bazarov rejects every aspect of Russian political, social, and cultural life, believing in nothing but empirical science. *Fathers and Sons* was denounced on every side: blasted by conservatives as a favorable portrayal of a dangerous radical; attacked by liberals as a damning caricature of radicalism.

Depicting Russia from Abroad Distressed by the unfavorable reaction to *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev spent more and more time abroad, residing in Baden, Germany, and Paris near his friend Pauline Viardot. He frequented social circles that included some of the most illustrious authors of his era. With the appearance of his next novel, *Smoke* (1867), critics charged that he was out of touch with his native land. This bitter work criticizes conservatives and radicals alike, portraying arrogance and ideological disdain for practicality in both camps.

During the next decade, Turgenev produced a relatively small body of novellas and short stories that are among his greatest works, including "First Love" (1870),

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* popularized the concept of "nihilism," or the rejection of all conventional values. Nihilism became an important undercurrent in modern literature, as the following works illustrate:

The Will to Power (1901), a philosophical work by Friedrich Nietzsche. This work is a ruthless attack on the structures of morality from one of the most vital modern philosophers.

The Waste Land (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. Despair and disillusionment are conveyed by the poem's image of a culture that is crumbling, not only from the impact of the Great War but also from its spiritual vacancy.

The Sun Also Rises (1926), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. The unhappy characters in the novel, wounded both physically and emotionally by World War I, seemed to have lost their ability to believe in anything permanent.

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. A founding work of the theater of the absurd, this drama reflects the pointlessness of the human condition.

"A King Lear of the Steppe" (1870), and "Torrents of Spring" (1872). These shorter pieces explore esoteric aspects of Russian life. After accusations of being a traitor who had rejected Russia, Turgenev created a gallery of striking Russian portraits such as "The Brigadier" (1868) and "An Unfortunate Woman" (1869).

Narodnik Movement By 1872, Turgenev had become interested in the *narodnik* movement that expressed the selfless desire of young Russians to repay the debt they felt they owed to the emancipated serfs. To describe this phenomenon to his countrymen, Turgenev returned to Spasskoye in 1876 and composed his last novel, *Virgin Soil* (1877). His hero and heroine, Aleksei Nezhdanov and Marianna Sinetskaia, attempt to put their radical principles into practice among the common people. Nezhdanov is another of Turgenev's ineffectual male protagonists, and his efforts fail tragically, leaving Marianna to join forces with the more practical-minded, Westernist factory owner, Vasilii Solomin. The accusations that Turgenev was out of touch with Russian reality vanished when the first mass *narodnik* trial was held in 1877.

Following the publication of *Virgin Soil*, Turgenev, now virtually self-exiled from his homeland, no longer attempted to describe the Russian political scene. His remaining works—prose poems and stories—are described by critics as nostalgic, philosophical, and frequently pessimistic, and are often concerned with the occult. After a long and debilitating illness, Turgenev died in Bougival, near Paris, with Pauline Viardot at his side. His body was

returned to Russia by train. There, despite the unfavorable reception of his later works and the efforts of the Russian government to restrict memorial congregations, Turgenev was widely mourned by his compatriots.

Works in Literary Context

Ivan Turgenev was steeped in the literary traditions of western Europe as well as Russia. He even met several of his idols, including Gogol and Aleksandr Pushkin, as a student. Among his European influences were Goethe and Shakespeare, whose works he learned almost by heart.

A Master of Character The plots of Turgenev's novels are often slight. Instead, interest centers largely on the characters, who are both unique individuals and representatives of more universal qualities. Turgenev draws his characters with a psychological penetration; their minds and personalities are revealed through their own words and actions, not through direct exposition by the narrator. Turgenev was particularly adept at portraying women in love, and at creating an atmosphere of pathos, but not sentimentality, in his unhappy love stories. Fatalism and thwarted desires are hallmarks of the novelist's work. His characters are generally unable to control their destiny, either because of their own flaws or through arbitrary fate.

Lasting Influence Turgenev's sheer literary virtuosity—his skills with dialogue, character, descriptions of natural and social environments, and conveying ideas through image and illustration—earned him many admirers. Among the illustrious writers who claimed him as an influence were the French novelist Émile Zola and the American literary giants Henry James and Ernest Hemingway. At one point, Turgenev was a close friend of Tolstoy's, but their relationship was strained by ideology, as Tolstoy was a Russian patriot (or "Slavophile"), not a Westernist.

Works in Critical Context

Criticism Through the Years Turgenev's novels got an uneven critical reception at the time of their appearance. Because of the highly political content of most of Turgenev's works, the earliest Russian commentators tended to praise or disparage his writings along partisan lines. Similarly, many foreign critics of the nineteenth century were interested in Turgenev primarily for the light his prose shed on the political situation in Russia. Turgenev's works were quickly translated into French, German, and English, and he developed an overseas following. Many English and American readers considered Turgenev the most accessible of Russian writers and they—particularly American critics—took a lively, generally appreciative interest in his career beginning with the publication of *A Sportsman's Sketches*. Early Russian and English-language critics by no means neglected the aesthetic qualities of Turgenev's

works, however, recognizing from the start that his fiction was more than simply the literal portrayal of the people and concerns of a particular country at a given historical moment.

Turgenev's literary reputation has remained generally stable over the years, with twentieth-century commentators echoing and amplifying the conclusions reached by their nineteenth-century counterparts. Critics agree that Turgenev's work is distinguished by solid literary craftsmanship, especially in the areas of description and characterization. Keenly observant, he infused his work with precise, realistic detail, bringing a natural scene or character into focus through the evocative power of his words.

Fathers and Sons Turgenev's 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons* remains perhaps his most studied work. Dmitry I. Pisarev, in a contemporary review of the book, states, "Turgenev's novel, in addition to its artistic beauty, is remarkable for the fact that it stirs the mind, leads to reflection, although, it does not solve a single problem itself and clearly illuminates not so much the phenomena depicted by the author as his own attitudes toward these phenomena." Novelist Henry James, in his *French Poets and Novelists*, states of the author, "His works savour strongly of his native soil, like those of all great novelists, and give one who has read them all a strange sense of having had a prolonged experience of Russia." James also notes that the author "is particularly unsparing of the new intellectual fashions prevailing among his countrymen," especially in *Fathers and Sons*, "for the figures with which he has filled his foreground are, with their personal interests and adventures, but the symbols of the shadowy forces that are fighting for ever a larger battle—the battle of the old and the new, the past and the future, of the ideas that arrive with the ideas that linger."

Responses to Literature

1. Research the circumstances surrounding Czar Alexander II's emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861. What grounds do you find for the claim that *A Sportsman's Sketches* was an influential precursor to Alexander's decree?
2. Much has been made of the weakness of Turgenev's male heroes and the strength of his heroines. Script a conversation between Turgenev's Rudin and Shakespeare's Hamlet in which they discuss their inability to act. Include in this discussion their feelings about and perspectives of the women in their lives.
3. Write a short essay explaining how or if Turgenev's fiction reflects socialist realism in literature, a genre associated with Russian writers of the twentieth century.
4. Compare how Turgenev portrays the legacy of serfdom, and its impact on Russian society, to the treatment of Negro slavery in the works of prominent African American authors such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison.

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Amos Tutuola

BORN: 1920, Abeokuta, Nigeria

DIED: 1997, Ibadan, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town (1952)

My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1954)

Yoruba Folktales (1986)

Overview

Amos Tutuola was the first Nigerian writer to achieve international recognition. He spun adventure fantasies based on traditional Yoruba folktales, writing in an idiosyncratic, deliberately flawed pidgin English. His works are crudely constructed and restricted in narrative range, yet are highly imaginative. Tutuola is one of the most successful stylists in twentieth-century African literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Writing on the Job Tutuola was born in the western Nigerian town of Abeokuta in 1920, when Nigeria was ruled by the British as a part of the British Empire. Tutuola completed six years in missionary schools. When



Amos Tutuola Tutuola, Amos, photograph. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Reproduced by permission.

his father, a cacao farmer, died in 1939, he left school to learn a trade. Tutuola worked as a coppersmith in the Royal Air Force during World War II, but he lost his position in postwar demobilization. (In the postwar period, Nigeria demanded self-government from the British, resulting in a series of short-lived constitutions through the early 1950s.) He found employment as a messenger for the Department of Labor in Lagos. The job left him ample free time, and he took to writing English versions of stories he had heard old people tell in Yoruba.

In the late 1940s, he wrote to Focal Press, an English publisher, asking if they would consider a manuscript about spirits in the Nigerian bush. Several months later, *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* arrived, wrapped in brown paper and bound with twine. The mythological adventure story, clearly the work of a novice, would not be published until 1982. Had it been published earlier, it would not have generated the same excitement among readers overseas as did Tutuola's next narrative, a bizarre yarn with the improbable title *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town* (1952).

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is a voyage of the imagination into a never-never land of magic and marvels. The prodigious drinker of palm wine appears at first to be an unpromising hero, but he cleverly circumvents numerous

monsters and misadventures and settles the cosmic dispute between Heaven and Land, ending a catastrophic drought.

A Colonial Throwback? Tutuola was lucky to get this second story published and luckier still that it gained commercial success. The book might have sunk into obscurity had it not been enthusiastically reviewed by well-known poet Dylan Thomas. Within a year, an American edition won similar acclaim. It was eventually translated into fifteen languages.

In Nigeria, however, Tutuola's writing received an unfriendly reception. Educated Nigerians were shocked that a book written in substandard English by a lowly Lagos messenger was being lionized abroad. Tutuola's first books appeared at the close of the colonial era, when Africans were trying to prove to the outside world that they were ready to manage their own political affairs. For educated Africans, acutely conscious of their image abroad, the naive fantasies of Tutuola projected a primitive impression.

Despite the criticism from his countrymen, Tutuola pressed on, producing more adventure stories cut from the same cloth. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), opens as its hero, a boy of seven, abandoned by his stepmothers, is left to wander in the bush during a tribal war. He spends twenty-four years wandering in an African spirit world, until a "television-handed goddess" helps the young man escape. *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), in which a pampered only child defies her parents and undertakes a solitary journey, displays for the first time signs of formal literary influence. It is Tutuola's first book to be divided into numbered chapters, and it is written from the third-person point of view. Tutuola was becoming conscious of himself as an author and reading more widely. He continued to work as a messenger, writing in his spare time.

Imagination and Grotesque Fantasy As Tutuola continued his work as both a writer and a messenger, Nigeria was continuing to undergo political change. In the mid- to late 1950s, the country moved further into self-government and became a fully independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1960. In 1963, Nigeria became a republic, with Nnamdi Azikiwe serving as its first president. Internal unrest soon became a hallmark of Nigeria, with two military coups taking place in 1966 alone.

While Nigeria was going through these changes, Tutuola published such works as *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962). This book is Tutuola's most stylized work. The narrative frame is structured somewhat like the *Arabian Nights*: an elderly chief entertains villagers for ten nights with accounts of his past adventures. As with Tutuola's other works, the technique recalls devices from oral storytelling. Tutuola published nothing between *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967) and *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* (1981), but the hiatus had no discernible impact on his chosen methods. In *The Witch-Herbalist*, a hunter goes on a quest to find a

cure for his wife's barrenness. He survives bizarre and sometimes frightening encounters over six years, eventually reaching the Remote Town. He gets the medicine from the herbalist, sips some on his return to stave off hunger, and gives the rest to his wife, who promptly becomes pregnant. However, so does he, and he must undergo further trials and torments before being cured.

Evolved Late Works *Yoruba Folktales* (1986) is Tutuola's first effort at preserving, rather than retelling, the stories that are the communal literary property of his people. Tutuola remains faithful to tradition but occasionally adds some zaniness to spice up characterization and plot. The grammatical blunders and stylistic inventions found in Tutuola's earlier works are absent from *Yoruba Folktales*. The reason is not mysterious: The book was targeted at primary school classrooms, and one cannot address Nigerian schoolchildren in a fractured foreign tongue.

Tutuola's final publication, *The Village Witch Doctor, and Other Stories* (1990), contains eighteen stories based on traditional Yoruba fables. Like most of Tutuola's previous work, the stories deal with greed, betrayal, and tricksterism. After more than forty years, the same buoyant imagination and fascination with comically grotesque fantasy worlds were evident.

Tutuola resided in Ibadan and Ago-Odo, Nigeria, for most of his life. For several years, he worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. He also traveled around Africa, Europe, and the United States, serving stints as a visiting fellow at the University of Ife, Nigeria (1979), and the University of Iowa (1983). He died in Ibadan in June 1997 from hypertension and diabetes.

Works in Literary Context

When *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* gained public attention abroad, some Nigerians were contemptuous of Tutuola's efforts because he had borrowed heavily from the well-known Yoruba novelist D. O. Fagunwa. Some Yoruba readers accused him of plagiarism. Indeed, the narrative devices, and much of the content of Tutuola's early writings, echo the work of Fagunwa rather precisely. Tutuola admitted as much in interviews and letters and never pretended that his stories were original creations. Rather, he was following in the norm of indigenous oral tradition. In oral art, what matters most is not uniqueness of invention but the adroitness of performance. A storyteller's contribution is to tell old, well-known tales in an entertaining manner. Thus, he was creatively exploiting, not pilfering, his cultural heritage.

Fagunwa was not Tutuola's only teacher. He had also read John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and the *Arabian Nights* (c. 800–900), both classic adventure stories fabricated out of a chain of old tales loosely linked together. Events in Bunyan's narrative, such as Christian's visits to Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, and the Celestial City, may have served as models for some of Tutuola's romantic adventures. However, unlike *Pilgrim's*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tutuola's famous contemporaries include:

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and essayist whose novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is the most widely read work of African literature.

Wole Soyinka (1934–): This Nigerian playwright, poet, and essayist was also a Nobel Prize winner. His plays include *A Dance of the Forest* (1960).

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (1938–1997): This Nigerian musician and political activist sang in cunningly broken English. His albums include *Zombie* (1976).

Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986): This Senegalese anthropologist and historian studied ancient Africa and the origins of humanity. His books include *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* (1974).

James Baldwin (1924–1987): This African American novelist and essayist wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953).

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): This Colombian novelist wrote the Latin American epic *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

Italo Calvino (1923–1985): This Italian author of short stories and novels wrote modern fables, such as the *Our Ancestors* trilogy (1952–1959).

Progress—and Fagunwa's novels—Tutuola's narratives are not religious allegories. It is Yoruba oral tradition, not the Christian Bible, that influences Tutuola's works. Tutuola may have learned from Bunyan how to put an extended quest tale together, but in substance and spirit he was a thoroughly African storyteller.

The Heroic Quest Tutuola's storytelling method did not change much over the years. His stories typically concern a naive or morally weak character who is inspired or forced to embark on a spiritual journey. He or she encounters danger, confronts a tremendous variety of shape-shifting spirits from the underworld, and displays the heroic traits of the most popular folktale protagonists: hunter, magician, trickster, superman. Tutuola varies the quest pattern slightly from book to book, but never abandons it entirely. Because of their spiritual themes, allegorical characters, and symbolic plots, Tutuola's works have been called mythologies or epics rather than novels.

Ancestral, Yet Contemporary Tutuola employs many techniques associated with oral traditions in his novels and stories. The supernatural, fantastical, and grotesque are commonplace in Yoruba folklore. However, he embellishes ancestral tales with modern and Western elements, such as the "television-handed goddess" in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, which, in context, appear both exotic and in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The novels of Amos Tutuola represent a modern effort to preserve and revive folklore traditions. The following works of modern literature also invoke, update, or invent folktales:

The Robber Bride (1993), a novel by Margaret Atwood.

This novel is loosely based on a fairy tale in the Grimm Brothers' collection, peppered with allusions to fairy tales and folklore.

Ceremony (1977), a novel by Leslie Marmon Silko. In this contemporary novel, a Native American returning from World War II delves into the ancient stories of his people to overcome despair.

Mules and Men (1935), a travelogue by Zora Neale Hurston. This unique anthropological travelogue documents the hoodoo practices of southern blacks, with many folktales thrown in.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), a children's novel by L. Frank Baum. This celebrated fantasy book for children, the first of a long series, is a conscious attempt to create a modern American fairy tale, or "wonder tale."

The Jungle Book (1894), a story collection by Rudyard Kipling. This book of fables uses animals in an anthropomorphic manner to give moral lessons.

keeping with contemporary Nigerian changing culture. The result is a collage of borrowed materials put together in an eclectic manner by a resourceful raconteur working well within oral conventions.

Use of Language Perhaps the most unique aspect of Tutuola's novels is his unconventional use of the English language: skewed syntax, sometimes broken English, and idiosyncratic diction. For example, Tutuola wrote in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*: "[If] I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man, I would jealous him more than that." His usage of "jealous" as a verb reflects Yoruban grammatical constructs, in which adjectives and verbs are often interchangeable. Tutuola coins new words, incorporates Nigerian idiom and patois, and even spells with startling and charming inventiveness. In a unique way, he resolves the dilemma of the African writer representing his heritage authentically while working in the language of the colonizer.

Influence Most critics agree that Tutuola's literary style and method are highly personal and have had little influence on subsequent writers in Nigeria. However, his contribution—refashioning traditional Yoruba myths and folktales and fusing them with modern life—is increasingly appreciated. Tutuola retains a wide international readership, and his works are commonly read in Nigerian schools.

Students of African literature in Europe and the United States were also influenced by Tutuola and his writings.

Works in Critical Context

Audiences were sharply divided over Tutuola's work when it first began to appear in the 1950s. At first, Anglo-American commentators praised the style and content of Tutuola's fiction for its originality and imagination. Tutuola's later offerings were not as enthusiastically received in England and America as his first two. As new African voices reached the Western public, reviewers complained that Tutuola's writing seemed repetitive and rudimentary. His novelty had worn off, and the pendulum of critical opinion had begun to reverse direction. Later it would return to a more neutral position.

Early Nigerian critics expressed doubt about Tutuola's writing ability, but have since reclaimed him as a unique and innovative storyteller. In Nigeria, the pendulum started to swing in a more positive direction shortly after the nation achieved independence in 1960. The consensus of opinion today is that he is far too important a phenomenon to be overlooked.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard The appearance of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was greeted with hostility by Nigerian intellectuals. Some maintained that Tutuola's work was an unprincipled act of piracy, especially since he was writing in English for a foreign audience rather than in Yoruba for his own people, and that his obvious lack of proficiency in English would give readers overseas a poor opinion of Africans, thereby reinforcing their prejudices.

However, European and American readers found Tutuola an exotic delight. Dylan Thomas called the novel "bewitching." British critic V. S. Pritchett wrote in the *New Statesman and Nation* that "Tutuola's voice is like the beginning of man on earth." Perhaps Tutuola's Nigerian critics were right after all. To native speakers of English, his splintered style was an amusing novelty; to educated Nigerians who had spent years polishing their English, it was an abomination.

Responses to Literature

1. In a paper, identify some of the particular patterns of error or peculiarity in how Tutuola renders the English language. Assuming that these aberrations are purposeful, what purposes do they serve? Are they effective, and do they achieve what they are intended to?
2. Tutuola incorporates the phenomena of modern life into the fantasy worlds of his stories, yet he also seems to mourn the loss of ancient African traditions. How would you describe his attitude toward African modernity? Put your answer in the form of an essay.
3. What challenges did Tutuola confront in transmitting oral traditions into print? Would you think that these are challenges common to any writer facing this same

- task within any culture, or is this exclusive to Tutuola's culture? Create a presentation with your findings.
4. As Nigeria struggled to overthrow colonialism, many of Tutuola's countrymen condemned him for disseminating a poor image of his people. Do you agree? Was his work a worthy representation of Nigerian culture? Write an essay that addresses these questions.

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Tristan Tzara

BORN: 1896, Moinesti, Bacau, Romania

DIED: 1963, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Gas Heart (1920)

Of Our Birds (1923)

Approximate Man (1931)

Conquered Southern Regions (1939)

The Escape (1947)

Overview

Tristan Tzara is a poet and essayist best known as one of the founders of the Dada artistic movement, which was



Tristan Tzara DEA Picture Library / drr.net

focused primarily on protesting World War I and rejecting established traditions in art and literature. As a creator, chronicler, and critic, he wrote prolifically all his life. By the time of his death, he left behind numerous volumes of poetry, plays, essays on art and literature, critical commentary, unfinished studies on Rabelais and Villon, and an unfinished autobiographical novel titled *Place Your Bets*. Tzara's life journey westward from Romania to Switzerland, France, and briefly Spain constitutes a noteworthy example of the international character of the century's avant-garde movements and forms the background of his unceasing search for a genuine poetic language in conditions of war and human frailty.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Against Tradition Not much is known of Tzara's early life. He was born Samuel Rosenstock in Moinesti, in the Romanian province of Bacau, in 1896, the son of a prosperous forest administrator. Judging by his unfinished autobiography, *Place Your Bets*, it seems that from early on Tzara was a difficult, wayward youth battling against his traditional family, his father in particular. While studying mathematics and philosophy in Bucharest

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tzara's famous contemporaries include:

André Breton (1896–1966): French writer and poet Breton is credited as the founder of the surrealist movement, writing the *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924.

Ion Minulescu (1881–1944): Romanian avant-garde poet, novelist, journalist, critic, and essayist, Minulescu was strongly influenced by his stay in Paris during the 1920s. He returned to Romania, where he in turn became one of the major influences of modern Romanian literature.

Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968): French artist associated with Dada and surrealism whose provocative “found art” pieces challenged concepts of what constitutes art.

Fritz Lang (1890–1976): Austrian German film director and screenwriter whose silent films, including the classics *Metropolis* and *M*, continue to be highly influential for their visual power and imagery.

Philo Farnsworth (1906–1971): Holder of more than three hundred patents, Farnsworth is best remembered today as the inventor of the television and video camera. He transmitted the first experimental television pictures in 1927.

Henri Bergson (1859–1941): French philosopher and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1927; Bergson's ideas on metaphysics and the philosophy of language were highly influential in the first half of the twentieth century.

in 1912, he began to publish in his native language. His first postsymbolist poems appeared in the *Symbol*, a literary journal he had founded with Ion Vinea and Marcel Janco. Many of these poems, written in Romanian and influenced by French symbolist writers, appear in *Primele poems: First Poems* (1965). Tzara derived the pseudonym he adopted in 1915 partly from the name of an esteemed predecessor, Tristan Corbière, and partly from *tara*, the Romanian word for country. He legally changed his name in 1925.

Dadaism Tzara immigrated to Switzerland from Romania in 1916. Together with Jean Arp, Hugo Ball, and others, Tzara founded Dadaism, a movement that emerged from their protest of artistic, social, and political convention and stylistically relied on the absurd or irrational. Tzara staged Dadaist performances at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, but left Switzerland in 1919 to settle in Paris, where he engaged in Dadaist experiments with such literary figures as André Breton and Louis Aragon. Serious philosophical differences caused a split between Tzara and Breton in 1921; soon after, Breton founded

the surrealist movement, and by 1922 the Dada movement had dissolved. Tzara's early Dadaist verse, written between 1916 and 1924, utilizes clusters of obscure images, nonsense syllables, outrageous juxtapositions, ellipses, and inscrutable maxims to perplex readers and to illustrate the limitations of language. Volumes such as *Twenty-five Poems* (1918) and *Of Our Birds* (1923) display the propositions outlined in Tzara's manifestos and critical essays, often blending criticism and poetry to create hybrid literary forms.

Surrealism From 1929 to 1934, Tzara participated in the activities of the surrealist group in Paris. In this environment, he created a more sustained and coherent poetry that places less emphasis on the ridiculous than did his Dadaist verse. Tzara's works published during this period include *Approximate Man, and Other Writings* (1931), an epic poem that is widely considered a landmark of twentieth-century French literature. This work portrays an unfulfilled wayfarer's search for a universal knowledge and language. Art historian Roger Cardinal asserted: “[In] this apocalyptic explosion of language, Tzara finally approaches the primal seat of creativity, the point where the naked word reveals the naked truth about the world.” This and Tzara's later surrealist volumes—*The Travelers' Tree* (1930), *Where Wolves Drink* (1932), *The Anti-head* (1933), and *Seed and Bran* (1935)—reveal his obsession with language, his vision of humanity's destiny of tedium and alienation, and his concern with the struggle to achieve completeness and enlightenment.

Communism In the 1930s, Tzara strove to bring about a reconciliation of surrealism and Marxism and began to turn away from aesthetic, surrealist revolt to political commitment. He became a member of the French Communist Party in 1936 and served as a delegate of the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture to Spain during the Spanish Civil War. At this time, he joined the Republicans, or Spanish Loyalists, who championed democracy and liberty over tyranny and fascism, and also befriended Pablo Picasso. Later, forced into hiding during the Nazi occupation of France, Tzara participated in the Resistance. His clandestinely published poems were revolutionary and humanistic.

As his commitment to left-wing politics increased, his poetry included greater political content and stressed revolutionary and humanistic values while maintaining his lifelong interest in free imagery and linguistic experiments. *Conquered Southern Regions* (1939) focuses on Tzara's impressions of Spain during the country's civil war, while *The Escape* (1947) depicts the frantic German evacuation of Nazi-occupied France during World War II. The prose poems “Without a Need to Fight” (1949) and “Flame Out Loud” (1955) also address political topics related to World War II.

Tzara's embrace of communism, although by no means uncommon among European intellectuals in the late 1920s and early 1930s, remains somewhat of a surprise insofar as it comes from one of the most fiercely independent spirits among the Dadaists. No matter how much one would wish to excuse him, and in spite of a mostly discreet and possibly guarded allegiance, the fact remains that Tzara maintained his Communist Party membership with equanimity, if not enthusiasm, through the Stalinist purges and the Nazi-Soviet pact and into the cold war period until the very end of his life in 1963.

Works in Literary Context

Dadaism Tzara is remembered as a proponent and theoretician for Dadaism, an intellectual movement of the World War I era whose adherents espoused intentional irrationality and urged individuals to reject traditional artistic, historical, and religious values. In response to the alienation and absurdity of World War I and the staid, unimaginative art forms predominant in Europe during that era, Tzara and other European artists sought to establish a new style in which random associations would serve to evoke a vitality free from the restraints of logic and grammar. Tzara articulated the aesthetic theories of Dadaism in his seminal collection of essays, *Seven Dada Manifestos* (1924). This volume, in which Tzara advocates "absolute faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity," represents a chaotic assault on reason and convention.

Works in Critical Context

Public and critical reaction to Tzara's work is difficult to evaluate using traditional measurements. As a Dadaist, the point of much of his early work was not to entertain or enlighten, but to evoke a reaction—typically a negative reaction due to the author's deliberate rejection of the familiar. In the decades since his death, however, scholars have been able to place Tzara's work in the context of the avant-garde movements of the time and judge its significance in the development of modern literature. Although his work often defies standard classification and is regarded by most contemporary English-speaking scholars as little more than a literary curiosity, Tzara is esteemed in France for his large and diverse body of poetry, which is unified by his critique of and search for a universal language and cosmic wisdom.

Approximate Man Hailed by surrealists upon its publication in 1931, the epic poem *Approximate Man* has continued to be viewed as one of Tzara's most significant works. Ruth L. Caldwell, in an essay for *Perspectives on Contemporary Literature*, calls the work his "masterpiece" and "his key poetical work, in which he sets forth the ideas which have occupied him for years." Mary Ann Caws, in *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*:

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tzara was the first to outline the tenets of Dada, but here are works by several other writers who are also credited with being early Dadaists, intentionally or not:

King Ubu (1896), a play by Alfred Jarry. This play is widely acknowledged as the forerunner of Dada, surrealist, and absurdist drama.

"Karawane" (1916), a poem by Hugo Ball. Composed by one of Tzara's collaborators at the Cabaret Voltaire, this work, written in German, consists of strings of nonsense words. The poem's very meaninglessness was one of the first formal expressions of Dada.

The Breasts of Tiresias (1917), a play by Guillaume Apollinaire. A two-act play that was one of the earliest recognized surrealist works.

Dada, Breton, Tzara, Éluard and Desnos, agrees with the label of "masterpiece" and notes that the "extremely diverse and unequally brilliant images" found in the work reinforce its theme of imperfection. However, not all readers sing the work's praises. Roger Cardinal, writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, states, "Prolonged reading of the poem has left this reader unsatisfied that it succeeds in approximating a visionary grasp on cosmic realities. Much of [*The Approximate Man*] is too wordy, the modulation from chaos to confidence too sleekly verbal."

The Gas Heart Critic Robert Varisco suggests that Tzara's play *The Gas Heart* represents "a form of anarchy against art or the theatre. Characters (body parts) have no spoken lines, personalities, names, real characters. The audience, meaning and authority are alienated—an initial step to overturn traditional theatre." Varisco also notes that Tzara, throughout the play, "elevates the realm of pointless verbiage." Varisco posits that the body parts, which are in fact the characters, express their resistance to (and by extension the author's resistance to) theatrical convention "in highly stylized and anti-symbolic philosophizing which always leads back to the prevalent feeling of 'lag' that they all share."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *Seven Dada Manifestos*. Then write a summary of what you think makes up this "philosophy of meaninglessness."
2. Read Tzara's *Approximate Man* and write an essay in which you describe what you think makes up his "philosophical driving force."

3. Choose a poem from Tzara's Dadaist period. Create an audio-visual presentation that illustrates Tzara's unique style and expression. Try to reflect the language and theme of the poem.
4. Read *Seven Dada Manifestos*. Then, using resources from your library and the Internet, research the varying styles of the pop art movement. Write a personal statement in which you discuss how you see Dadaist influences in pop art. Support your answer with examples from your research.

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▣ Miguel de Unamuno

BORN: 1864, Bilbao, Spain

DIED: 1936, Salamanca, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho (1905)

The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples (1913)

Mist: A Tragicomic Novel (1914)

The Agony of Christianity (1925)

Overview

Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo is a crucially important figure in twentieth-century Spanish culture. Novelist, short-story



Miguel de Unamuno Popperfoto / Getty Images

writer, poet, playwright, teacher, and commentator on politics, culture, and literature, he was appointed professor of Greek philology at the University of Salamanca at the age of twenty-six. By age fifty, he was rector of the university. Dismissed from his rectorship and later imprisoned and exiled for his public criticisms of the monarchy and the government, he went on to publish a study of the politics and philosophy of Christianity as well as other works. After a triumphant return to his native country, Unamuno remained a controversial figure: the Vatican placed his essay *The Agony of Christianity* (1925) on the Index of Prohibited Books twenty years after his death.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Basque Youth Unamuno was born in Bilbao in the Basque region of Spain and was raised in a traditional Catholic environment. He was profoundly affected during his childhood by political instability that ensued from attacks against the government by Catalan and Basque separatists; when he was nine years old, his native city was attacked by government troops, and one of their bombs destroyed a neighboring house. This civil war ended in

1876, the year Unamuno graduated from the Colegio de San Nicolas. He then entered the Instituto Vizacaino, where he became an advanced student in 1879 and revealed his aptitude for philosophy. The following year, Unamuno moved to the Spanish capital to continue his academic work at the University of Madrid, where he presented a dissertation on the Basque language and obtained a doctoral degree from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in 1884. For the following seven years, Unamuno unsuccessfully campaigned to obtain a university appointment; finally, in 1891, he was named professor of Greek at the University of Salamanca, the oldest and most revered university in Spain.

Religious Crisis In the 1890s, Unamuno's writings began to appear in periodicals, particularly the socialist *Class Struggle*. His first major work, *En torno al casticismo*, appeared as five separate essays in the journal *Modern Spain* in 1895. In these essays, Unamuno called upon Spain to cease its cultural isolation from the rest of Europe. Two years later, his novel *Peace in War* (1897) appeared, an event that coincided with a personal, intense religious crisis, from which Unamuno emerged without an orthodox faith in God. He subsequently expressed his struggle with the philosophical conflict between faith and reason in a series of acclaimed works: *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, and *The Agony of Christianity*.

Political Conflicts In his essays, Unamuno attacked the policies of Spain's King Alfonso XIII, who ruled from 1902 until 1931, and the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the prime minister who effectively controlled the government from 1923 until 1930 during Alfonso's reign. Considered both a religious and political heretic, Unamuno was dismissed from the University of Salamanca in 1914 and exiled to the Canary Islands ten years later. Unamuno then moved to France, where he lived in Paris until settling in the frontier town of Hendaye on the border with Spain, near his Basque homeland. With the fall of the Riviera dictatorship, Unamuno returned to Spain in 1930 and resumed his university position, finishing his best-crafted work of fiction, *Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr* (1933).

In the early 1930s, Spain was a nation torn in two. Some citizens, including many in Unamuno's native Basque region, wished to become independent of the Spanish government based in Madrid and were known as republicans. These were regions traditionally viewed by their citizens as self-contained and autonomous despite the fact that they were all collectively referred to as Spain. Other republicans supported the creation of an effective democratic government. Opponents to this movement, known as nationalists and spearheaded by Francisco Franco, sought to keep Spain intact at any cost. Many nationalists also supported the return of the Spanish monarchy. While Unamuno was critical of the republicans, he ultimately became an outspoken critic of the nationalists as well,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Unamuno's famous contemporaries include:

Antonio Machado (1875–1939): Spanish poet Machado was one of the leading literary lights of the so-called Generation of 98, a collective of Spanish writers, poets, and intellectuals.

José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955): A Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset was also a social and political activist involved in the overthrow of King Alfonso XIII in 1931.

Annie Oakley (1860–1926): One of the enduringly legendary figures of the Old West, Oakley was a world-renowned sharpshooter and star of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. She was also an active advocate for allowing women to serve in combat in the military.

Wilhelm II (1859–1941): Kaiser (emperor) of the German Empire from 1888 to 1918, Wilhelm was also the last emperor of Germany. He led Germany into World War I and was widely painted as the aggressor during and after the conflict. He abdicated the throne two days before the armistice and went into retirement in the Netherlands.

Marie Curie (1867–1934): Polish physicist and chemist who, with her French husband, Pierre, conducted pioneering experiments in radiation and radioactive elements. Her efforts garnered her the Nobel Prize in Physics and in Chemistry.

primarily for their brutal tactics. After voicing his opposition to the nationalists, Unamuno was confined by military order to his house, where he died in 1936.

Works in Literary Context

Immortality and the Rejection of Religion Like his near contemporary José Ortega y Gasset, Unamuno was well versed in modern European literature and philosophy. Initially influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectical method and the positivist worldview of Herbert Spencer, he later studied Søren Kierkegaard, Henri-Louis Bergson, and William James, especially for their perspectives on faith, reason, and intuition. Unamuno's philosophy reflected their fundamental skepticism: he defined man as an end in himself rather than as an agent of God's will, though he recognized humanity's innate desire for immortality, and he denied the validity of any autonomous philosophical system.

Works in Critical Context

Critic Enrique Fernandez suggested that Unamuno "dug deeper into the national spirit than any of his contemporaries,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Unamuno is regarded as an early existentialist writer, whose ideas were formulated a generation before existentialism emerged as a prominent intellectual movement in philosophy and literature. Here are some of the best-known works that deal with existentialist themes.

The Stranger (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. Although Camus refused to be associated with existentialism, his philosophy of the absurd, expressed succinctly in this novel, led many to closely link him with other existentialist thinkers of his time.

Nausea (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. This novel functions as a sort of outline of existentialism, describing a main character who is suddenly struck by the realization of the indifference of his surroundings to his own existence.

Being and Time (1927), a philosophical work by Martin Heidegger. Originally intended as the first part in an ultimately uncompleted larger project, this book has gone on to become one of the most influential works of philosophy of the twentieth century. Notably, it inspired Sartre to write *Being and Nothingness*, generally regarded as the first true existentialist philosophical work.

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. This absurdist work about two men waiting for a third who never arrives is often singled out for its existentialist themes.

a generation whose collective project was the exploration of Spanishness.” Unamuno’s poetic emphasis and concern with human mortality has led many critics to characterize his work as distinctively Spanish. Salvador de Madariaga, who deemed Unamuno Spain’s greatest literary figure, asserted that “Unamuno, by the cross which he has chosen to bear, incarnates the spirit of modern Spain.” At the same time, Unamuno’s eclecticism and experimental method have caused many critics to place him outside of the mainstream of modern Spanish literature. Fernandez also remarked, “Though he ravaged all genres, Unamuno is hard to classify as a writer—if he even is a writer.” His fiction and poetry, “though powerful, [are] more philosophical than lyrical,” Fernandez continued, and his philosophical writings “are emotional and personal” rather than logical or theoretical. “Too writerly to be a philosopher, too philosophical to be an artist,” Fernandez concluded, “Unamuno is, as he deserves to be, a category unto himself.”

Legacy “At his death in 1936,” Arthur A. Cohen claimed in the *New York Times Book Review*, “Miguel de Unamuno was the most influential thinker in Spain, more renowned

than his younger contemporary Ortega y Gasset and regarded by his own aficionados as the greatest stylist in the Spanish language since Cervantes.” Fernandez posited in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, “Quixote incarnate, he lived out his nationality to its logical philosophical conclusions. . . . The soul-searching of the first Spanish moderns, who would be called the generation of 1898, found its fullest expression in Unamuno. In poems, plays, novels, and essays,” the critic continued, Unamuno questioned “Spanishness, modernity, science, politics, philosophy, faith, God, everything.”

The Tragic Sense of Life Unamuno’s philosophical work *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1913) was, upon the publication of an English translation in 1921, a critical success. The book deals with the reconciliation of the logical mind with the spiritual, particularly regarding immortality. Salvador de Madariaga wrote in 1921, “This strife between enemy truths, the truth thought and the truth felt, or, as he himself puts it, between veracity and sincerity, is Unamuno’s *raison d’être*. And it is because the *Tragic Sense of Life* is the most direct expression of it that this book is his masterpiece.” Mark Van Doren, in a 1922 review for the *Nation*, wrote of Unamuno, “His masterpiece, [*The Tragic Sense of Life*] . . . is modern Catholicism’s richest, most passionate, most brilliant statement of the grounds that exist for faith in immortality, now that reason and science have done their worst.” Van Doren noted the author’s unorthodox but ultimately uplifting perspective: “Supremely intelligent, he never believes; religiously alive, he hopes. His book is very absurd, but it is tremendous work and fun for the mind.” Ernest Boyd, in a 1925 essay, described the book as “a work which comes in direct line from the literature of the Spanish mystics. . . . The visionary passion of a mind which refuses to accept the denial of spiritual hopes and is yet conscious of the sovereignty of the reasoning faculties finds dramatic expression in this book.”

Responses to Literature

1. Unamuno once said, “Realism is the coherence of mysticism.” Write an essay in which you use Unamuno’s work to comment on that quotation.
2. Read *El Cristo de Velazquez*. Then, create an audio-visual presentation that illustrates the religious themes and imagery evoked by the poem.
3. Write an informative essay that explains the Basque ideals that led to six years of exile for Unamuno.
4. Unamuno lived through many important events in the history of Spain. Research the following major events or eras in Spain’s history: the Carlist Wars, the Spanish-American War, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the Second Republic, or the Spanish Civil War. With other classmates who have read Unamuno, discuss how Unamuno’s writings reflect the shifts in government and shifts in social concerns and attitudes toward the Catholic Church.

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Sigrid Undset

BORN: 1882, Kalundborg, Denmark

DIED: 1949, Lillehammer, Norway

NATIONALITY: Norwegian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Jenny (1911)

Kristin Lavransdatter (1920–1922)

The Master of Hestviken (1925–1927)

The Wild Orchid (1929)

The Faithful Wife (1937)



Sigrid Undset *Undset, Sigrid*, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Norwegian author Sigrid Undset is a dominant figure among Scandinavian novelists and one of the foremost literary proponents of Christian ethics and philosophy. Her major works, *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920–1922) and *The Master of Hestviken* (1925–1927), are skillfully rendered portrayals of medieval Norwegian life and have been praised as exemplary models of historical fiction, evidencing a detailed knowledge of and keen sympathy for their subject. On the strength of these works, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood Steeped in History Born in Kalundborg, Denmark, in 1882, Unset was the eldest of three daughters of the renowned Norwegian archaeologist Ingvald Undset and his wife, Anna Charlotte. Ingvald Undset had come from Trondelag, an area of Norway articulately described in his daughter’s masterpiece, *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Anna Charlotte Undset, a reserved and proud woman, inspired respect in her daughter but not the deep affection that the child felt for her father.

At the age of two, Undset moved with her family to the city of Christiania (now Oslo), where her father was associated with the archaeological section of the University Museum. As Ingvald Undset's health declined (he had caught malaria on an expedition to the Mediterranean), the family moved frequently, and Undset became intimately acquainted with many areas of the city of Oslo. As the daughter of an archaeologist, she acquired an acute sense of history. The Undset home was filled with books, and the child was encouraged by her father to read extensively, especially works of history and Old Norse sagas. When Undset was eleven years old, her father died, and the family experienced genuine poverty. Her autobiographical memoir, *The Longest Years* (1934), records memories of the first eleven years of her life. That she gave herself the name "Ingvild" in these memoirs suggests the strength of her attachment to and identification with her father.

Secretarial Work Although Undset attended the liberal school of Ragna Nielsen and had the opportunity to enroll in the university, she chose at the age of fifteen to prepare for a secretarial career at the Christiania Commercial College. Her certificate from this school a year later helped her to obtain a position in the local office of the German Electric Company, where she worked for ten years. Undset's intimate acquaintance with young working girls provided the material for many of her earliest works.

In her free time from her secretarial job, Undset turned her hand to writing. She submitted a historical novel to the Gyldendal publishing house in Copenhagen, only to be told that she should turn to modern themes that seemed more suited to her talents. Undset followed this advice, and her first contemporary social novel, *Mrs. Marta Oulie*, appeared in the fall of 1907. As Undset's career was taking off, Norway was undergoing political change as the country gained its independence from Sweden in 1905, after spending much of the nineteenth century in forced union.

After the publication of three additional works of moderate success, Undset felt secure enough to quit her job for a full-time career as a writer. In 1909 she received a travel grant from the Norwegian government and went to Rome, where she met her future husband, the painter Anders Svarstad. Married in 1912, the couple lived first in London and later in Norway, where Undset continued to produce fiction, nonfiction, and translations.

Contemporary Fiction Sparks Controversy The novel *Jenny* (1912), which caused a sensation in Scandinavian feminist circles, is the story of a promising young artist who commits suicide. Jenny has, along the way, had an affair with her fiancé's father, borne a child out of wedlock, suffered through the death of that child, and experienced frustration as a creative artist. Whether Jenny's suicide is caused by her failure as an artist or by her failure in erotic and maternal relationships is open to interpretation. In any case, the work is the most successful of all of Undset's social novels with contemporary settings. While her novels

featured concerns of the time, World War I was not a topic she focused on despite its importance in the 1910s. Though Norway remained neutral in the conflict, its merchant marine suffered losses.

As controversial as some of her novels of contemporary life may have been, none of them could compare with Undset's masterpieces of medieval life. Critics agree that it is the multivolume *Kristin Lavransdatter* and the *Olav Audunsson* series (*The Master of Hestviken*, 1925–1927), that have secured her place in literary history. Showing a mastery of style lacking in her novels of contemporary life, these works also reveal the understanding of vanished cultures and love of the past instilled in the writer by her father. Her intimate knowledge of the laws, culture, and history of earlier ages had given her a sense of the continuity of life. Despite the copious and meticulously accurate historical details that embellish these novels, there is nothing strange about the people who inhabit that distant world.

After the births of three children—Anders, Maren Charlotte, and Hans—Svarstad and Undset eventually became estranged, and their marriage was annulled when she converted to Catholicism in 1924.

Lillehammer and the War Exile Remaining in Lillehammer, Norway, until 1940, Undset devoted herself both to her work, for which she received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928, and to her children. Maren Charlotte, who was born handicapped, lived only to the age of twenty-three. Anders, Undset's eldest son, was killed in 1940 when German armies invaded Norway in 1940. While Norway had proclaimed its neutrality during the early days World War II, its waters were too strategically important for it to remain outside the war. Germany invaded in April 1940, and controlled the country by June. A government in exile was founded in England, led by King Haakon VII. With Hans, her only surviving child, Undset then made the long journey through Sweden to Russia, from there to Japan, and from there to San Francisco.

During the war, she channeled her considerable energies into the war effort, giving lectures, writing propaganda, and calling attention to the plight of occupied Norway. In August 1945, after the war's end, she returned to her homeland, and in 1947 King Haakon VII conferred upon her the Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Olav for service to her country. On June 10, 1949, Undset died in Lillehammer. Her life provided the impetus for her works: her religious faith, her pride in the past of her people, and her assessment of motherhood as woman's most important calling are all mirrored in her imaginative works and clearly stated in her nonfiction.

Works in Literary Context

Although there is no clear chronological division between Undset's novels of contemporary life and her works set in earlier historical periods (in 1909 she published a pastiche of the Icelandic saga, and contemporary social novels reoccur in the 1930s), most of her early writing was

inspired by her knowledge of the working class of Oslo. Her interest in Scandinavian history and Norse legends primarily comes from the influence of her archaeologist father and his career. This influence compelled her to write accurate, compelling historical fiction.

Infidelity Undset is a moralist, first of all, though she is certainly not by temperament an ascetic. She has a profound, brooding awareness of the domination of the flesh in the average human life, the central place of passion in the average human destiny. *Mrs. Marta Oulie*, for example, treats of infidelity in marriage. The novel, which is written in diary form, begins with the confession, “I have been unfaithful to my husband.” Undset’s only play, *In the Gray Light of Dawn* (1958), is likewise concerned with adultery, and this theme is prominent in Undset’s novels of the Middle Ages as well. Two collections of short stories, *The Happy Age* (1908) and *Poor Fortunes* (1912), address problems of adolescence, motherhood, and spinsterhood in the lower economic classes of Norwegian urban society.

Feminist Themes Several later works also realistically treat problems of sexual fidelity and parenthood, stressing the importance of forgiveness and presenting the child as the element that can weld the most disparate parents together. Through these novels, Undset was placed squarely at the head of the women’s movement in Scandinavia, whether she wished to be in that position or not. An intelligent, creative working woman who also experienced marriage and motherhood, she could write eloquently of the problems that beset such women.

The question of whether Undset was a feminist or an antifeminist is a thorny one. Selective quoting can produce arguments for either side. Carl F. Bayerschmidt maintained that “Sigrid Undset was not a militant feminist, but neither was she an antifeminist. She believed that every woman should be free to practice an art or a profession or occupy herself in any form of work without losing the right to love and to establish a family.”

Female Characters Undset was particularly interested in women, and she gives realistic descriptions of countless different women, descriptions marked by great psychological insight and understanding. The women we meet through Undset are seldom soft and obedient. Kristin, for example, is strong and resourceful, while her husband, Erlend, despite his high position in society, shows a weaker and more tender nature. Nevertheless, the strong woman is not a fixed pattern in Undset’s books. There are strong women and weak women, hard women and soft, those who cannot cope with life, and those who surmount their difficulties and live full, rich lives. There are bitter women full of hate and revenge and women full of concern and thoughtfulness. As in life itself, Undset’s books take in the whole spectrum of women—and of men. Throughout her fiction, we find the same theme we find in Undset’s articles: woman is

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Undset’s famous contemporaries include:

George V (1865–1936): King of Great Britain, Protector of Ireland, and Emperor of India, George ruled from 1910 to his death, guiding his country through the tumultuous days of World War I.

Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924): Lenin was a Russian political thinker and revolutionary who led the October Revolution of 1917, the uprising that led to the establishment of the Bolshevik regime. Lenin served as head of the Soviet Union until his death.

Joan Miró (1893–1983): Spanish painter and sculptor, Miró’s modernist, surrealist works, in particular his public sculptures, left their mark on his native Barcelona and other Spanish cities. His sculptures in Barcelona include *Woman and Bird* (1982).

Rudolph Valentino (1895–1926): Arguably the first male film idol, American actor Valentino’s good looks in such films as *The Sheik* (1921) made him internationally famous. His funeral was attended by an estimated one hundred thousand people, including politicians and dignitaries.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): French novelist and critic, Proust is best remembered today for his opus *In Search of Lost Time*, published over a fourteen-year period beginning in 1913. Many critics consider it the greatest literary work of the modern age.

George Gershwin (1898–1937): American composer who, with his brother Ira acting as lyricist, penned some of the most memorable musical pieces of the twentieth century. Their musical comedies included *Funny Face* (1927) and *Girl Crazy* (1930).

just as well endowed as man, she was not meant, by nature, to be a special carrier of “soft” values. Differences of this sort are culturally and socially conditioned.

Undset’s heroines, after Jenny, are almost without exception not tragic characters. Most of them ultimately learn to adjust themselves to life, though only after a more or less severe struggle. This is true of Rose Wegner in *Springtime*, Undset’s most important work in the decade between *Jenny* and the publication of *Kristin Lavransdatter*. This is true also of most of the women characters in the two collections of short stories *The Splinter of the Troll Mirror* and *The Wise Virgins*. And this is preeminently true of Kristin in *Kristin Lavransdatter*.

Works in Critical Context

Undset won a secure place in literary history as one of the foremost authors of historical novels and as the most prominent Catholic author Scandinavia has produced.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although Undset's role as a feminist author remains debatable, she wrote at a time of great flowering among other women authors who most definitely were writing with an agenda in mind. Here are some works that address women's place in society.

The Awakening (1899), a novella by Kate Chopin. This novella is the tale of an upper-class woman who longs to break free of the strict society she inhabits, and the price she must pay to do so.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Perhaps the first modern feminist text, this story, told in first person, concerns a woman confined to her room "for her own good" and her descent into psychosis as a result of her isolation.

Aurora Leigh (1856), an epic poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A nine-volume epic poem written in blank verse, this work chronicles the life and travels of its strong and capable heroine.

Carl F. Bayerschmidt, in his critical study *Sigrid Undset*, labeled the Norwegian novelist "one of the greatest realistic writers of the first half of the twentieth century." A. H. Winsnes, in *Sigrid Undset: A Study in Christian Realism*, called the author "the Christian realist *par excellence*." Critics believed that Undset's works are powerful not only because of their moral message but also because of her mastery of technique. Few other novelists have so accurately painted background and setting or so completely banned romanticism from their works.

Undset's critical reputation has waxed and waned over time. Her early works, especially *Jenny*, were well received upon their publication. By the 1930s and 1940s, on the strength of both her contemporary novels and historical fiction, she was regarded as one of the greatest realistic writers of the time. Because her writings are not particularly innovative stylistically or thematically, they became unfashionable, and critical interest lessened for a time. By the late twentieth century, interest was revived as critics reconsidered the value of the works of women writers. Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* and *The Master of Hestviken* have a secure reputation as masterpieces of the historical novel genre.

Historical Works In general, critics of Undset's era and of today have admired the sympathetic character portrayals and realism of her historical novels, especially the *Kristin Lavransdatter* and *The Master of Hestviken* series. In his presentation of the award at the ceremony in Stockholm, Nobel Committee chairman Per Hallström also praised Undset's depiction of the inner lives of her

medieval characters. He noted briefly the concern of some critics that Undset had added fantasy to historical fact in her presentation of medieval psychological detail, but insisted, "the historian's claim is not absolute: the poet has at least an equal right to express himself when he relies on a solid and intuitive knowledge of the human soul." The critical reception of the Olav Audunsson novels was positive, but the main character was generally viewed as a less interesting personality than Kristin Lavransdatter.

As Winsnes pointed out, however, Undset has been called "the [Émile] Zola of the Middle Ages." Very few other writers have understood so fully the past and its connection with the present. Winsnes noted that "history is Sigrid Undset's muse. No one since [thirteenth-century Icelandic poet and historian] Snorri Sturluson has presented medieval Norway with such power."

Responses to Literature

1. From a young age, Undset was attracted to the Middle Ages. Why do you think she always felt more comfortable with that bygone era? Do you think she held a romanticized idea of the period? Why or why not? Use evidence from Undset's writings to support your assertion in essay form.
2. *Kristin Lavransdatter* has been hailed as an early feminist work. Do you agree with this assessment? What elements of the story, if any, do you think give it a feminist tone? Write an essay with your conclusions.
3. In a presentation, address these questions: How would you characterize the mother-daughter relationships in *At Eleven*? How do they relate to Undset's overall view of women and their relationships?
4. Discuss the role of religion and Catholicism in Undset's works in a paper. How did Undset's conversion to Catholicism influence her writing, and vice versa?

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Luisa Valenzuela

BORN: 1938, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentine

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS: *Clara: Thirteen Short Stories and a Novel* (1966) *Strange Things Happen Here* (1976) *Other Weapons* (1982) *Black Novel (with Argentines)* (1990) *Bedside Manners* (1990)

Overview

Luisa Valenzuela is an Argentine writer of both fiction and journalistic works. She is among her nation's most significant writers, best known for magic realism, a style of writing often associated with Latin American writers Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, that blends magical and fantastic elements. Valenzuela is also one of the most widely translated female South American writers. Throughout her literary career, Valenzuela has focused on the themes of politics, language, and women. Valenzuela is renowned for her short stories, especially



Luisa Valenzuela (Valenzuela, Luisa, photograph.
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those collected in *Strange Things Happen Here (Aquí pasan cosas raras)* (1976) and *Other Weapons (Cambio de armas)* (1982).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Liveliness of Words Luisa Valenzuela was born November 26, 1938, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Pablo Francisco Valenzuela, a physician, and Luisa Mercedes Levinson, a writer. Valenzuela, an insatiable reader, attended a British school in her youth. Given her parents' place in society and the family's connections with academics, Valenzuela was able to meet writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Ernesto Sabato, and Peyrou, in her youth. While she originally hoped to become a painter or a mathematician, writing eventually won out over those early career aspirations.

Early Writing Endeavors Valenzuela's first journalistic work appeared in magazines while she was still in her teens. Her first short story, "Ese Canto," was published in 1956. Valenzuela also worked for a time at the Biblioteca Nacional, where Borges was the library's director. She went on to earn a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Buenos Aires.

In 1958 Valenzuela married French merchant marine Theodore Marjak and moved with him to the Normandy region of France, where her daughter, Anna-Lisa, was born. It was while living in France that Valenzuela wrote her first novel, *Clara: Thirteen Short Stories and a Novel (Hay que sonreír)* (1966).

Journalism and International Attention Divorcing her husband after five years of marriage, Valenzuela moved to Paris and began working as a writer for Radio Television Française. She returned to Buenos Aires in 1961 and worked as editor of *La Nación's* Sunday supplement from 1964 to 1972.

A collection of short stories titled *The Heretics (Los Hereticos)* was published in 1967. Valenzuela was subsequently awarded a Fulbright grant in 1969 that allowed her to participate in the International Writers Program at the University of Iowa. The result of this fellowship award was the 1972 novel *Cat-o-Nine-Deaths (El Gato eficaz)*. In 1970 Valenzuela began giving lectures about writing, and over the course of the next two years, she traveled to Spain, France, and Mexico on a grant from the National Arts Foundation of Argentina. Her journalistic work appeared in publications in the United States, Mexico, France, and Spain, as well as in various publications based in Buenos Aires.

Political Concerns Returning to Buenos Aires in 1974, Valenzuela discovered that the political situation in Argentina following the death of Juan Perón—three-time president of Argentina, beloved by many but viewed as anti-intellectual by some writers and artists—had degenerated into a paramilitary dictatorship rife with violence and repression. Between 1976 and 1983, some twenty thousand Argentine citizens "disappeared" and were never heard

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Valenzuela's famous contemporaries include:

Juan Perón (1895–1974): Controversial yet popular, Perón was elected president of Argentina three times.

Peter Benenson (1921–2005): This English lawyer founded Amnesty International in 1961.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): García Márquez is a Colombian novelist and short-story writer who brought magic realism into the spotlight with his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Margaret Atwood (1939–): This Canadian writer's themes involve women's issues, some told in the style of magic realism.

Laura Esquivel (1950–): Esquivel's magic realist romance novel *Like Water for Chocolate* was very successful in the United States.

from again. They were almost certainly the victims of abduction and murder by government forces. Continuing to work as an editor, Valenzuela was impelled to write fictional works under the repressive regime, resulting in another short story collection, *Strange Things Happen Here*. Valenzuela had been teaching at Columbia University periodically since 1973; in 1979 she was offered a writer-in-residence position and decided to move to the United States to escape political repression. At Columbia University she became a teacher in the school's writing division from 1980 to 1983, the year she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. The fellowship allowed Valenzuela to move across town to New York University, where she was appointed visiting professor in 1985. She held that post until 1990, traveling frequently to lecture, and was a guest speaker at writing conferences in locations throughout the world, including the Americas, Israel, and Australia. Valenzuela became a fellow at the New York Institute for the Humanities in 1982 and belonged to the Freedom to Write committee of PEN's American Center. Her concerns with human rights issues prompted her to join Amnesty International. In 1984, after the fall of Argentina's military regime, forensics specialists from the United States came to Argentina at the request of the government to help investigate the fate of the thousands of citizens who had disappeared. Hundreds of mass graves were found, and evidence uncovered by the forensics experts helped convict six out of nine leaders of the military junta of murder.

Return to Argentina With democracy restored to Argentina in April of 1989, Valenzuela returned to Buenos Aires. Occasionally visiting New York City, she continued to write prolifically, as evidenced by the publication of the novels *Black Novel (with Argentines)* (*Novela negra con argentinos*) (1990) and *Symmetries*

(*Simetrias*) (1993), as well as the 1990 short-story collection *Bedside Manners (Realidad nacional desde la cama)*.

Valenzuela's works have been translated into English and have appeared in several anthologies. Much of her work has been published in translation outside the Americas, including Japan, and her books can be found in French, German, and Portuguese translations, leading to her acclaim as the most widely translated of the South American female authors.

Works in Literary Context

Since her earliest pieces, Valenzuela has concentrated on three interrelated topics: language, politics, and male-female relationships in patriarchal societies—societies in which the power is generally held and passed down from generation to generation by males. The power of Valenzuela's fiction lies both in the intrinsic interest of the themes it develops and in her constant search for a feminist discourse. Although she is not the only Latin American female writer to embark on such a project, her fiction undoubtedly has broken new ground for women's writing in Latin America.

The Power of Language Valenzuela's prose, often playful and humorous, underscores the fact that language is an untrustworthy means of expression and communication. Words not only can distort reality, but they can also contaminate social interactions. Most individuals are unaware of such contamination, and very few escape it. This idea constitutes a fundamental concern of the collection *Strange Things Happen Here*.

Characters in the stories of *Up Among the Eagles (Donde viven las aguilas)* (1983) explore language as a means to escape contemporary Western societies. Most of the tales are set in the Mexican highlands where vestiges of pre-Columbian cultures are still present. In these "upper worlds," reason and magic coexist; individuals experience closeness to nature, and the possibilities of communicating by interpreting pauses, intonations, facial expressions, and sighs allow the characters to pierce the boundaries of reason.

Politics and Women's Issues As critics have noted, Valenzuela's work usually revolves around themes of politics and women's issues. Also rooted within her work is the violence and suffering experienced in many Latin American countries under authoritarian regimes. For instance, in her novel *The Lizard's Tail (Cola de largartija)* (1983), the protagonist, a cruel sorcerer, is based on José López Rega, Isabel Perón's Minister of Social Welfare.

Strange Things Happen Here is Valenzuela's most overtly political work. Its stories were inspired by the "Dirty War" unleashed against the Argentinean population by that country's military dictatorship in the mid 1970s and early 1980s. The stories explore the psychological and social effects of sustained and systematic violence. One of their most immediate concerns is the effect of fear, which translates into people's unwillingness to

recognize that strange things are happening, that nothing is normal anymore. The main character in “Who, Me a Bum?” for example, regards the cries of those being tortured that he overhears at night to be a mere impediment to his sleep. Also, while at a metro station, he comments on the anger of commuters because a suicide victim is holding up the train. Nobody questions the motives behind these incidents, and all continue about their business.

The five stories in *Other Weapons*—all of them narrated by a female voice—explore the ways women resist the codes of behavior imposed on them by the patriarchy. The title not only refers to the violence of the dirty war, of which women were often the main victims, but also to the recourses available to women in their struggle for freedom. In their struggle against a tradition of passivity, submission, and acquiescence, Valenzuela’s women need to chart new ground and explore the untapped resources of their imaginations and erotic impulses.

Works in Critical Context

Called “the heiress of Latin American literature” by Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, Luisa Valenzuela is one of the most celebrated contemporary female authors in Latin America. Nearly all her novels and short stories have been translated into English, and some have been published as far abroad as Holland and Japan. Critic Evelyn Picon Garfield has described Valenzuela’s prose as “critical and revolutionary.”

Strange Things Happen Here The 1979 English publication of Valenzuela’s story collection *Strange Things Happen Here* was marked by rather lackluster reviews. Fimie Richie, in a review for *Studies in Short Fiction*, states, “None of this is edifying nor pleasurable reading.” Clara Claiborne Park, writing for *The Hudson Review*, asserts that most of the stories in the book are “finished before we know what they’re up to,” and therefore seem pointless. Park offers one possible explanation: “Maybe it’s safer to stick to parable and mysterious vignette if you want to go on living and publishing in Argentina, where Valenzuela is a prominent journalist. . . . If this is the price of writing in Argentina it is a heavy one.” Roger Sale, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, acknowledges “moments of perkiness and whimsy in the stories.” However, he calls the short novel “He Who Searches” (included in the collection) “unreservedly awful,” and asserts that on the whole the author “is just playing around in a sandbox filled with trite words and events that she, and, one hopes, not very many others, find fascinating.”

Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think magic realism seems to be so prevalent among South American writers? Is it popular in the literature of other cultures? Do you think the magic realism Valenzuela uses makes the violence she describes harder or easier to digest?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Valenzuela’s works center around the power of language, especially when used to gain freedom for women or for the oppressed. Here are some other works that deal with similar themes:

Like Water for Chocolate (1989), a novel by Laura Esquivel. Each chapter of this novel begins with a Mexican recipe, symbolizing the main character’s need to express herself the only way she has so far been allowed to: through cooking.

Evita (1978), a musical by Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice. This Broadway musical chronicles the life and death of Eva Perón, the much loved second wife of Argentine president Juan Perón.

Silkwood (1983), a film directed by Mike Nichols. This Academy Award-nominated film details the life of Karen Silkwood, an activist who mysteriously dies while investigating—and potentially disclosing—wrongdoings at a nuclear power plant.

The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. Set in a futuristic state, this novel deals with the subjugation and silencing of women and their attempts to regain freedom.

2. What do Valenzuela’s works have in common with fairy tales you may have read or heard growing up? Would you recommend reading some of her stories to children?
3. Choose two different female characters from Valenzuela’s works and two different male characters. Write a list of adjectives describing each. Are there any similarities among characters or genders?

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■ Paul Valéry

BORN: 1871, *Cette* (now *Sete*), France

DIED: 1945, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

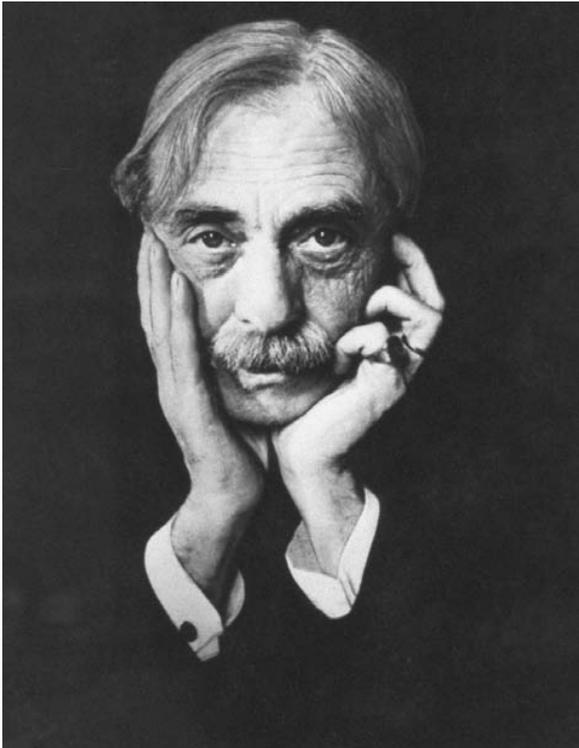
MAJOR WORKS:

The Young Fate (1917)

Album of Old Verse, 1890-1900 (1920)

The Graveyard by the Sea (1920)

Songs; or, Poems (1922)



Paul Valéry Valéry, Paul, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Overview

Paul Valéry is widely regarded as one of the most important French poets and intellectuals of the twentieth century. He is best known for such highly introspective poems as *The Young Fate* and “The Graveyard by the Sea.” His poetry reveals his concern with human consciousness, artistic form, and the creative process. Having endorsed Edgar Allan Poe’s dictum that a poet should create solely from his powers of concentration and intellect (rather than depending on inspiration), Valéry developed a theory maintaining that literary composition, like science and mathematics, is valuable only as a mirror to the workings of the creative mind.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Silence to Defining Voice Paul Valéry was born in the French Mediterranean coastal town of Cette. When he was fourteen, his parents moved to the nearby city of Montpellier, where he attended secondary school. After his graduation, he entered law school at the University of Montpellier. During this time he met the poet and novelist Pierre Louys, who introduced him to the circle of writers associated with the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé became the single most influential figure in shaping Valéry’s aesthetic sensibility. Unlike Mallarmé, however, Valéry’s principal interest lay in the process of poetic composition rather than the poem itself, which he considered necessarily imperfect due to the limitations of language and the artist’s creative powers. After his initial appearances in French literary journals during the early 1890s, Valéry entered what many critics refer to as his “silent period,” almost twenty years in which he wrote virtually no poetry and published very little prose. From approximately 1898 to 1917, he lived a quiet, studious life, investigating mathematics and psychology with the intent of developing a scientifically based theory of creative activity. He recorded his insights in personal notebooks, the *Cahiers*, or *Notebooks*, which were eventually published in twenty-nine volumes. He emerged from his silent period with the publication of *The Young Fate*, which established his reputation as France’s most outstanding living poet and one of Europe’s premier artists and intellectuals. In 1925 he was elected to the French Academy. Although he served as professor of poetry at the Collège de France from 1937 until his death in 1945, his literary work during the last twenty years of his life consisted primarily of prose.

Principal Works Valéry’s three principal works of poetry are *Album of Old Verse, 1890-1900*, *The Young Fate*, and *Songs; or, Poems*. Published in 1920, *Album* is composed primarily of his early poetry and shows a tendency toward imitation, particularly of the rigorous formalism of Mallarmé’s work. Valéry himself considered *Album* “an unsatisfactory collection, studies that do not exist as a

harmonious whole.” *The Young Fate* is a poem of some five hundred lines that took nearly five years to complete. By depicting a sequence of psychological states and emotions, the poem portrays the sensibility of a young woman who represents the universal self. An extremely complex work, the poem combines the external natural world with the woman’s inner self through a series of interrelated images, and its movement is sustained by the shifting states of the protagonist’s awareness. The poems in *Songs; or, Poems* feature a wide variety of forms and reflect the dominant concerns of Valéry’s thought. Such poems as “Aurore” and “Palme,” for example, concern the earliest stages of poetic creation, suggesting that a poem forms deep within the poet’s mind and body. “Ebauche d’un serpent” (“Silhouette of a Serpent”), noted for its changing tone and rhyme schemes, focuses on intellectual activity, contrasting the perfection of pure thought with the imperfections of earthly existence. “The Graveyard by the Sea,” which depicts a progression of moods as the poet meditates on the sea and light of the Mediterranean coast, addresses the theme of death and the compromise the individual must make between pure thought and the phenomenal world.

Nonpoetic Works In 1931 and 1934 Valéry collaborated with the composer Arthur Honegger to produce two short opera-ballets, *Amphion* and *Sémiramis*, both of which touched upon themes from similarly named poems Valéry had written previously. A third and final collaboration with another composer, Germaine Taillefer, gave rise in 1938 to *Cantate du Narcisse* (published 1939), yet another treatment of the Narcissus theme that had figured in both the *Album* and *Songs; or, Poems*.

Valéry served as a faculty member of the Collège de France, but lost this position as well as others he held after the German occupation of parts of France during World War II. The interim French government known as the Vichy regime, which collaborated with the German government in order to prevent occupation of the rest of France, objected to Valéry’s lack of support. Paul Valéry died of a heart ailment on July 20, 1945. Even on the occasion of his death, the two worlds might be said to have been reconciled. He was given a lavish state funeral in Paris attended by thousands of mourners, but he was then buried in the quiet cemetery by the sea in Cette.

Works in Literary Context

Scholars generally concur that the central theme of Valéry’s most accomplished poems, *The Young Fate* and “The Graveyard by the Sea,” is the mind’s struggle between total detachment from the world and total involvement. Commentators also agree on the important role that Valéry’s appreciation of music played in the development of his style; for instance, the concept of modulation, which is a method for gradually changing key, tone, or mood in a musical work, plays a prominent role in the progression of psychological states depicted in *The Young Fate* and “The Graveyard by the Sea.” In

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Valéry’s famous contemporaries include:

Clarence Darrow (1857–1938): An American lawyer and leader of the American Civil Liberties Union, Darrow became a national figure in the 1920s for his defense of such controversial figures as the murderous duo of Leopold and Loeb and the teacher John Scopes, who was arrested for including evolution in his school lessons.

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): Austrian-born dictator of Germany, Hitler held absolute power in Germany from 1933 to his death. At first admired by some for pulling Germany out of a crushing economic depression and restoring a sense of national pride, he in time revealed himself to be a megalomaniac who dragged his country into the most destructive war of all time and directly or indirectly caused the deaths of tens of millions.

Edward Hopper (1882–1967): American painter of rural New England scenes and small-town America, his most famous work, *Nighthawks* (1942) depicts late-night diners in a brightly lit cafe.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): American novelist whose work evokes the 1920s Jazz Age, a term he himself originated. His writing focuses on the “Lost Generation” of young Americans living in the aftermath of World War I.

Philippe Pétain (1856–1951): French general and France’s oldest head of state. Initially considered a national hero for his leadership in World War I, Pétain is today despised by his countrymen for assuming the office of prime minister of the German puppet state of Vichy France after Germany’s occupation in 1940. He was convicted of treason after the war and at first sentenced to death; the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970): French general and leader of the Free French forces in World War II, de Gaulle became the first postwar president of the French Fifth Republic, successfully stabilizing and rebuilding his country’s shattered political and economic infrastructures.

discussing his theories of poetic composition scholars have focused on his aversion to the idea of poetry as a spontaneous expression and his claim that poetry should not evolve from ideas but from rhythms and words.

The Influence of Mallarmé and Poe A brief comparison of Valéry’s famous poem *The Young Fate* to Mallarmé’s “Herodiade” concretely illustrates the nature of the older writer’s influence on the young one. Both poems depict a young woman engaged in narcissistic

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Valéry's poetry is often linked to the symbolist movement due to his efforts to describe thoughts outside of a formal structure. What exactly comprised a symbolist poem can best be seen in the following works:

The Flowers of Evil (1857), a poetry collection by Charles Baudelaire. Often called the father of the symbolist movement, Baudelaire faced legal action after the publication of the decadently erotic poetry in this, his most well-known collection.

"The Afternoon of a Faun" (1876), a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé. Perhaps the definitive symbolist poem, this dreamlike, lyrical work describes the sensual experiences of a faun after waking up from a morning's nap.

Wisdom (1880), a poetry collection by Paul Verlaine. One of Verlaine's later works, the subject matter of the poems in this volume, which focus on maturation, reflect the tumultuous life events experienced by the poet and the bitter lessons he had learned by that point.

A Season in Hell (1873), a prose work by Arthur Rimbaud. Taking the sensuality of symbolism to deliriously nightmarish extremes, the *enfant terrible* of French poetry looked ahead to such twentieth-century movements as Dadaism and surrealism.

introspection, both embody a severely formal, musical prosody, and both deliberately reject any identifiable "content," or theme. Valéry's poem is, in fact, more obscure and less musical than Mallarmé's simply because it is more purely metaphysical.

Valéry's passion for "scientific speculation," which is how he preferred to label his metaphysical writing and that of others, was the reason for his lifelong fascination with American writer Edgar Allan Poe. In *The Tell-Tale Heart: The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Julian Symons has described Poe as divided between two obsessive tendencies in his writings, a visionary one and a logical one. Although Mallarmé and French poet Charles Baudelaire had celebrated the visionary qualities in Poe, Valéry most fully admired his powers of reason, as revealed through Poe's pseudoscientific meditation on the nature of human knowledge, "Eureka," and through his brilliant practical logician, Auguste Dupin, the detective of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter."

Valéry's unyielding positivism (rationalism) is thus another characteristic setting him apart from other French writers. In an early letter to André Gide, Valéry wrote: "Poe, and I shouldn't talk about it for I promised myself I wouldn't, is the only writer—with no sins. Never was he mistaken—not led instinctively—but lucidly and successfully, he made a synthesis of all the vertigos."

Music and Letters In the highly formal, mannered musicality of Valéry's verse, the influence of Mallarmé is unmistakable. Valéry's *Notebooks* record his conviction that the subject of a poem was far less important than its "program": "A sort of program would consist of a gathering of words (among which conjunctives are just as important as substantives) and of types of syntactical moments, and above all a table of verbal tonalities, etc." Mallarmé had said something very similar in "Music and Letters": "I assert, at my own aesthetic risk, this conclusion: . . . that Music and Letters are the alternate face here widened towards the obscure; scintillating there, with certainty of a phenomenon, the only one, I have named it Idea."

For Mallarmé, as for his younger disciple, Idea was not a theme that could be formulated in a sentence or two; it was not a thought but rather the ongoing process of thought within the mind. Yet although Mallarmé believed that the end product of thought had to be a poem, Valéry disagreed. In his view, thought was always an end in itself; poetry was simply a more or less desirable byproduct to be pursued as long as it stimulated the mental processes. As he put it in his *Notebooks*, "In sum, Mallarmé and I, this in common—poem is problem. And this, very important." But Valéry also declared: "For him: the work. For me, the self. . . . Poetry has never been an objective for me, but an instrument, an exercise." Responding to seventeenth-century poet and critic Nicolas Boileau's time-honored dictum that "my verse, good or bad, always *says* something," Valéry asserted in the *Notebooks*, "There is the principle and the germ of an infinity of horrors."

Symbolism Clearly Valéry was heir to the symbolist tradition of Mallarmé. On the other hand, he is understood as having broken away from symbolism, as having rejected the cult of poetry for its own sake in favor of a cult of the mind. These views need not be contradictory. Critics have focused on Valéry's relation to symbolism, the theme and style of his works, and his theories of poetic composition. Many early commentators, emphasizing his relationship to Mallarmé and the apparent similarity in technique and effect between Valéry's poetry and that of the Symbolists, interpreted Valéry's works as a direct extension of symbolism. Later critics, however, noting Valéry's rejection of the symbolist notion of art for art's sake, have argued that Valéry was attempting to move beyond symbolism and look at poetry in a new way.

Works in Critical Context

Paul Valéry occupies a position in the history of French letters that is at once strategic and highly problematic. Critics have affixed to him various labels, all of them partially correct. He has been called the last French symbolist, the first post-symbolist, a masterful classicist, an advocate of logical positivism, and a cerebral narcissist.

Critic Francis Scarfe stated in his essay "The Art of Paul Valéry": "I hesitate to say what estimate of Valéry could be made on the basis of his essays and aphoristic

jottings alone. It is possible to rescue a critic and a critical system even from them. . . . But there are so many Valérys to be rescued, and when that is done a heap of unclassifiable Valérys still remain. Outside his poems, dialogues and libretti he left—as Leonardo left—nothing but a clutter of magnificent fragments. Only his poetry stands unchangeable and complete. Any final judgment on Valéry must be a judgment of his art and via his art.”

The Young Fate The publication of *The Young Fate* (known as *La Jeune Parque* in French) in 1917 essentially marked a rebirth of Valéry’s creative life. Reviews of the work were largely positive, despite the work’s perceived difficulty. J. Middleton Murry, in a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*, writes, “French poetry and French symbolism have a message which we should understand—that the achievement of poetry, in whatever kind, is due to the exact probity with which it is pursued. Because of this *La Jeune Parque* is beautiful like an enchanted house set in a haunted garden. We could not live in it; but we enter, explore its darkest rooms with gratitude, peer through its windows as though they were our own, and go on our way comforted that someone should have so honourably labored on the mansion of his dream.” According to scholar Alastair W. Thomson, the author himself stated of the work, “Its obscurity brought me into the light; neither one nor the other was the result of my wishes.”

Responses to Literature

1. Analyze how Valéry’s style differs among his prose, poetry, and drama. How is it similar? What messages does he convey through each?
2. Both Valéry and Edgar Allan Poe, whom he admired, are known for their gothic themes and images. Do they use these images and metaphors for the same purposes? Read a work by each writer and form an argument that explains why the authors are drawn to gothic imagery.
3. Stéphane Mallarmé exerted a strong influence on Valéry. Choose one of Valéry’s works (such as *The Young Fate*) and discuss how Mallarmé’s style is apparent.
4. Valéry employed musical methods, most notably modulation, in his poetry. What other concepts of musical theory can be applied to poetry? Try writing a poem that integrates modulation or another musical technique into its structure.

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W. D. Valgardson

BORN: 1939, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Bloodflowers (1971)

God Is Not a Fish Inspector (1975)

Gentle Sinners (1980)



W. D. Valgardson Photograph by Jan Magnusson

Overview

During the 1970s, William Dempsey Valgardson established himself as one of Canada's foremost writers of short fiction. His forceful presentation of lives shaped by isolation and the brutal effects of a northern environment, his careful control of narrative method, and his respect for his audience have won him both a wide readership and high praise from critics and reviewers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Isolated Childhood Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in 1939, Valgardson was the son of Dempsey Alfred Herbert and Rachel Iris Valgardson. His father was a fisherman of Icelandic descent. Valgardson grew up in Gimli, a fishing village on Lake Winnipeg which was originally known as New Iceland as it was settled in 1875 and 1876 by Icelandic settlers trying to get away from volcanic eruptions. Gimli retains a strong ethnic connection with Iceland and a sense of a collective Icelandic literary heritage. Valgardson says of the Gimli area: "In a sense, [it] was the Appalachia of Canada. The choices people had were incredibly restricted. . . . There was tragedy, poverty, foreignness, displacement and an idealization of the past." The Icelandic settlers to Gimli brought books with them as well as a tradition of interest in writers and writing. Thus both the community and his ancestry strongly influenced Valgardson's writing, providing him not only with settings and themes but also with a vision of human life.

Valgardson received his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Manitoba in 1960. He spent the next few years teaching English and art at various rural schools in Manitoba and earned a B.Ed. from the University of Manitoba in 1966. Valgardson then attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, receiving a master of fine arts degree in 1969. In the early 1970s, Valgardson taught English at Cottey College in Missouri, where he was head of the department from 1971 to 1974. His writing career began in this period, but as would become a hallmark of his career, he worked slowly and always had a limited output. While teaching there, he began establishing his reputation as a short-story writer at home in Canada.

Short-Story Success After finding success in a number of writing contests, Valgardson published *Bloodflowers* (1971), a collection of ten short stories. The title story—which was originally published in a 1971 issue of *Tamarack Review* and won the President's Medal from the University of Western Ontario for best short story in a Canadian publication—depicts a young teacher from mainland Canada who comes to teach on an island off the coast of Newfoundland. Once there, he slowly begins to suspect that he is to be made the sacrificial victim in a ritual spring sacrifice. The sinister tone of this story is repeated in the others, which are pessimistic portrayals

of life in northern Manitoba; the moments of optimism that exist are brief and qualified.

While working on his second collection of stories, in 1974 Valgardson joined the faculty of the University of Victoria in British Columbia as a creative writing teacher. The following year, his second collection of short stories, *God Is Not a Fish Inspector* (1975), was published. Critics praised the book for its coherence and attention to the hardships of rural life. Following this volume, Valgardson published a collection of poetry that he had written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *In The Gutting Shed* (1976). The collection received mixed reviews but nonetheless went into a second edition during its first year, a rarity in Canadian poetry. Returning to short stories, he published his third collection, *Red Dust*, in 1978. In this book, Valgardson continued to examine the poverty and violence that exists in portions of rural Canada, while showing newfound maturity and confidence as a writer. In "Red Dust," for instance, a man permits his niece to be raped in exchange for a hunting dog.

Continued Literary Success Valgardson's first novel, *Gentle Sinners*, was published in 1980 and won the *Books in Canada* award as the best first novel of the year. Somewhat different from his other work, *Gentle Sinners* suggested a limited form of redemption and happiness in its account of a boy who flees his authoritarian parents and finds a sense of community and ethnic identity with his uncle Sigfus. Two years after his first novel came out, Valgardson began his first stint as chair of the University of Victoria's Creative Writing Department. He held the post from 1982 to 1987. Also during this time, he served as the president of the Canadian Authors Association, from 1985 to 1986.

After publishing a second collection of poetry—*The Carpenter of Dreams* (1986)—Valgardson returned to short fiction with the collection *What Can't Be Changed Shouldn't Be Mourned* (1990) and the novel *The Girl with the Botticelli Face* (1992). Beginning in the mid-1990s, Valgardson began writing books for children. Valgardson revisits the setting of his early life in *Thor* (1994), a children's book that culminates in the unlikely heroism of a young boy named Thor. While visiting his grandparents in a small fishing village, Thor reluctantly abandons his favorite television programs to help his grandfather on Lake Winnipeg, where he discovers the selflessness and courage to save a drowning man. Though decidedly redemptive, Valgardson's evocative depiction of traditional Icelandic Canadian culture and engaging dialogue are consistent with his many other works. Valgardson published a number of other books for children, including the fairy tale-inspired *Sarah and the People of Sand River* (1995), the short-story collections *Garbage Creek, and Other Stories* (1997) and *The Divorced Kids Club, and Other Stories* (1999), and the young-adult novel *Frances* (2000). He continued to emphasize rural settings at a time when Canada's rural economy—

agriculture, fishing, and natural resources—were continuing to take a back seat to mechanization and an urban-based economy.

Valgardson remained with the faculty at the University of Victoria until 2004. Before his retirement, he also served his second stint as the chair of the Creative Writing Department, from 1999 until 2004. Valgardson continued to make his home in Victoria in retirement, though it was unclear if he could continue to write.

Works in Literary Context

As a writer, Valgardson found inspiration in his Icelandic ancestry as well as the rural Canadian landscapes where he grew up and taught. Thus, many of his books are set in harsh northern environments. In addition to being influenced by Icelandic storytelling traditions, Valgardson is often compared with Russian writers, and he admitted that Anton Chekhov was an influence on his work. While others have detected the impact of Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner on his writing, Valgardson also found inspiration in the stories of Ernest Hemingway and Somerset Maugham, the novels of Jane Austen, and the poetry of Al Purdy, James Dickey, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Wallace Stevens. The author believes that his strong Lutheran, conservative background gave rise to an authoritative tone of voice in his writings.

Thematic Constancy Critics have noted that the themes of tragedy and isolation are typical of many of Valgardson's works, especially in books targeted at adults. While *Gentle Sinners* features some guarded optimism, the author's preferred themes dominate, and he also admitted that as a writer, theme is more important than plot to him. Even most of the poetry found in *In the Gutting Shed* is parallel, in setting and theme, to Valgardson's fiction. Many of his books for children focus on his dominant theme in a slightly different way. Books like *The Divorced Kids Club, and Other Stories* focus on the theme of the outsider.

When *Red Dust* was published, some reviewers of the book took Valgardson to task for not striking out in new directions stylistically and for not attempting to deal with new and different themes. Yet, as Margaret Atwood states in her discussion of this book for *Essays on Canadian Writing*, the author has deliberately chosen to develop his characteristic voice: "If you look at what most writers actually do, it resembles a theme with variations more than it does the popular motion of growth. Writers' universes may become more elaborate, but they do not necessarily become essentially different. Popular culture, based on the marketing of novelties, teaches us that change is desirable in and for itself. Valgardson is its antithesis."

Influence As an author, Valgardson stated once that his goal was to write stories that influence people and make them think. His short stories are so highly regarded

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Valgardson's famous contemporaries include:

Farley Mowat (1921–): Conservationist and author, Mowat was already well known in his native Canada when he shot to international fame with his documentary film about his work with wolf packs titled *Never Cry Wolf* (1983).

Queen Elizabeth II (1926–): Queen of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth realms (including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), Elizabeth is one of Britain's longest-reigning monarchs. Despite widespread personal support, her reign has seen an increasing dissolution of the respect and privacy normally afforded the royal family.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): An American politician, Nixon made a name for himself as a staunch anti-Communist senator and vice president to Dwight Eisenhower. He was narrowly elected president in 1968, then reelected to a second term amidst a deep cultural war over America's involvement in Vietnam. Shortly after his reelection, stories began to surface of criminal activities during his campaign, eventually turning into the Watergate scandal. Rather than face certain impeachment, Nixon resigned in 1974.

Russell Means (1939–): A Lakota Sioux Indian, Means is one of the most recognizable activists for Native American rights. He rose to prominence as a leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and that group's nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay in 1969.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): Political leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, Brezhnev reversed many of the domestic political reforms of his predecessor, Nikita Khrushchev, and pursued the policy of "détente" with U.S. presidents Nixon and Ford, seeking to end the Cold War arms race.

that he is regarded as a master of the form in Canada, an inspiration to others who write such stories in both his native country as well as in other English-speaking countries. Many of the stories have been translated into other languages, including Icelandic, Russian, Ukrainian, Danish, Dutch, Spanish, German, and French, ensuring Valgardson's influence abroad as well.

Works in Critical Context

Critical opinion of Valgardson has generally been positive, with some reviewers calling his work "prairie gothic" because of its unflinching depiction of the brutal aspects of rural life. Critics praise his works for their

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Valgardson's repeated meditations on tragedy and isolation have strongly resonant analogs in some of the world's all-time literary classics, including:

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. The Monster of Shelly's novel is not the semi-intelligent brute of film fame, but a thinking, rational creature, only too bitterly aware of his outcast status and consumed with both love and hatred for his creator.

Richard III (1591), a play by William Shakespeare. Essentially a work of propaganda, Shakespeare's take on the English monarch casts him as one of the all-time great villainous antiheroes—bitter, alone, and doomed.

Ethan Frome (1911), a novel by Edith Wharton. The story of a tragic love triangle, partly based on Wharton's own life, that ends with a cruel twist of fate for the title character and his would-be mistress.

craftsmanship, dedication, deep understanding of human motivation, and attention to detail in writing about such areas. While some critics, such as Sam Solecki, believe that Valgardson overwrites, relies too extensively on similes, and overrelies on a monotone style, they also praise his ability to movingly write about ordinary lives with respect.

God Is Not a Fish Inspector Critics generally praised his second collection of short stories, *God Is Not a Fish Inspector*. Especially lauded was the collection's coherence and careful consideration of the hardships of life in a rural environment. Reviewing the collection, Adrian Vale of the *Irish Times* comments that Valgardson's "Manitoba countryside has close affinities with Egdon Heath. There is death and suicide and isolation. These elementals, however, are not dragged in to inflate a final paragraph; they come as hammer-blows, falling inevitably and with complete artistic rightness. Mr. Valgardson is an authoritative writer; he leaves the reader with no inclination to gainsay him or the truth of the events he describes."

Sarah and the People of Sand River Valgardson's books for children are as highly regarded as his short-story collections targeted at adults. Critics regarded the novel he wrote for young readers, *Sarah and the People of Sand River*, as a tightly woven fairy tale with depth and meaning. Anne Louise Mahoney, writing for *Quill & Quire*, called the book a "haunting tale, skillfully written, and with a powerful ending." *Booklist's* Carolyn Phelan believed that Valgardson's "taut narrative . . . transcends time." *Publishers Weekly* found the book poetic, writing

that "Wallace's . . . delicate, somber watercolors underscore the plaintive tone. Working in a subdued, pale palette, he diffuses the harshness of the heroine's experiences in a rush of gentle light."

Responses to Literature

1. Use the following questions as a basis for a small group discussion. Provide a definition, in your own words, for what you think the term "prairie gothic" means. Why do you think some critics have labeled Valgardson's work as such?
2. Valgardson's Icelandic heritage comes through in several of his stories. In an essay, examine the following questions: What role does his ancestral culture play in his narratives? How does it interact with Canadian culture?
3. Write a paper that addresses the following concerns: What major themes does Valgardson return to in his work? How effectively does he address these themes, in your opinion?
4. Valgardson hails from one of the "prairie provinces" of Canada. In a paper, compare his work with that of other Canadian writers from the central part of the country—Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan—and discuss common themes in the authors' works.

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❑ César Vallejo

BORN: 1892, Santiago de Chucho, Peru

DIED: 1938, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Peruvian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Black Messengers (1919)

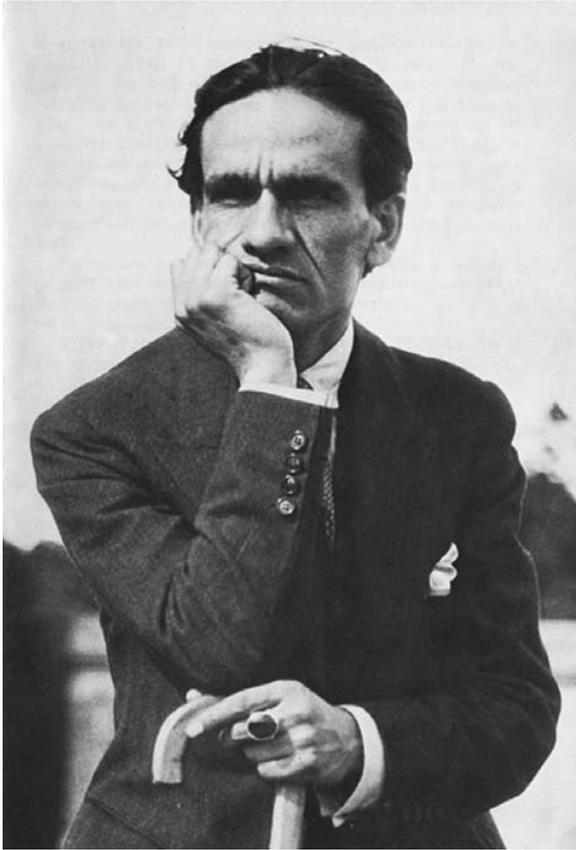
Trilce (1922)

Spain, Take Away This Chalice (1937)

Poemas humanos (1939)

Overview

Peruvian author César Vallejo is known primarily for the highly original—almost postmodern—use of language in his poetry. His devastating vision of the world, coupled

César Vallejo *Writer Pictures / drr.net*

with a hoped-for future utopia grounded in a Communist idealism, mark his writings as poignantly sensitive to the common man's struggles and ambitions. Deeply rooted in his mixed European and Peruvian Indian heritage, his poetry expresses universal themes related to the human condition. His literary production included essays, novels, short stories, plays, and a screenplay, but his reputation rests primarily on his poetry, much of which appeared posthumously.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Rural vs. City Life Vallejo was born in Santiago de Chuco, a small village in the northern Andes Mountains of Peru in 1892. Raised Catholic and encouraged to become a priest, he discovered that he could not adhere to the requirement of celibacy. Though Vallejo's relationships with women were often complicated or stormy, he remained close and secure with his family. For a time, he was a clerk in his father's notary office. His mother's friendship, in particular, was a sustaining force in his life until her death in 1918. The comfort of this rural life set

for Vallejo a standard against which all later experiences seemed arduous and painful.

Early poems in his first collection, *The Black Messengers* (1919), relate Vallejo's bewilderment when struck with the harshness of city life in Trujillo and Lima, where he studied medicine, literature, and law. Introduced to the ideas of Marx, Darwin, and rationalist philosophers, Vallejo felt that the faith in which he was raised was no longer viable. Together with other intellectuals, he became actively interested in his pre-Columbian heritage and was anguished to learn of the suffering of aboriginals in his country.

Poems in *The Black Messengers*, like most Latin American poetry of the time, also follow the conventions of the *modernista* movement. The *modernistas* highlighted the melodic quality of language. Breaking a taboo, Vallejo added erotic lyrics to the descriptions of beautiful landscapes common to this style.

Personal Distress Though Vallejo thrived in his studies in the city, his personal life was filled with turmoil. When his lover broke off their relationship due to pressure from her parents, Vallejo attempted suicide. Unable to replace the caring family he had lost, Vallejo felt alienated in the city. Alienation and the apparent senselessness of his suffering became his recurrent themes.

While Vallejo was writing and publishing this poetry, Peru was undergoing radical changes itself. While Peru had a constitutional democratic government and a stable economy, a military coup in 1919 changed the course of the country. Businessman Augusto Leguía y Salcedo, who had been the constitutionally elected president from 1908 to 1912, took power and began modernizing Peru along capitalistic lines. In opposition to Leguía's dictatorship Peruvian intellectual Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre founded the leftist political party the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance.

Political Persecution After a number of years in Trujillo and Lima, Vallejo returned to his birthplace where, in 1920, he became involved in a political insurrection during which the town's general store was burned down. He was accused of instigating the conflict and was jailed for three months. The isolation and savagery of jail conditions, combined with the after effects of his mother's death, affected his mental health deeply. Accordingly, Vallejo's poems written in prison (collected in *Trilce*, 1922) are markedly different from the idyllic poems of *The Black Messengers*.

Marxism and Life Abroad In the 1920s and 1930s, Vallejo became more engaged in politics. His three visits to the Soviet Union—the first in 1928—aided in the formulation of his political views, and he subsequently produced political tracts including the essay collected in *Rusia en 1931: Reflexiones al pie del Kremlin* (1931), first published in Spain and not printed in Peru until almost thirty years later. He also wrote the novel *Tungsten*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Vallejo's famous contemporaries include:

Manuel González Prada (1844–1918): Director of the National Library of Peru, Prada was highly esteemed by his countrymen for his role in encouraging the development of the Peruvian intelligentsia and the Peruvian incarnation of the *modernismo*, or modernist movement.

Venustiano Carranza (1859–1920): One of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Carranza went on to become president of Mexico and presided over the creation of that country's current constitution. His reforms were considered too severe by some, too moderate by others, and he was assassinated while fleeing Mexico City after a previous, unsuccessful assassination attempt.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): A key figure in the formation of Fascism, a government philosophy promoting nationalism, expansionism, and anti-Communism. Mussolini (styled "Il Duce," or "the leader") was elected prime minister in 1922 and effectively ruled Italy until 1943. Although he was popular in the early years of his rule for his reforms, his decision to ally with Nazi Germany was seen by many Italians as dooming their country to the destruction and ruin of World War II.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938): At the end of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Atatürk was the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey. Atatürk's policies and reforms led Turkey in a modern, secular, Westernized direction.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): The German-born physicist became world famous for his revolutionary theories, which represented the most dramatic shift in scientific thought since Newton.

(1931), which condemns an American company for exploiting its Peruvian workers to get the element it needs to make weapons. (U.S. bankers had backed the dictatorship of Leguía, which lasted until 1930 when he was overthrown by Luis M. Sánchez-Cerro. Sánchez-Cerro was officially elected president in 1931, but assassinated in April 1933.)

Political statements emerged in his other works as well, but they did not dominate. Vallejo was an ambivalent Marxist. Scholar James Higgins finds evidence in *Poemas humanos* (1939) that Vallejo sometimes admired the single-mindedness of those who could submit themselves to "the cause," but again found it impossible to subject himself without question to Marxist or Communist ideals. He moved to Spain during its civil-war years to work as a journalist and lend support to his friends in defense of the Spanish republic. (Lasting from 1936 to

1939, the Spanish Civil War pitted fascist military forces, led by nationalist general Francisco Franco, against the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic. Franco won and controlled the country until his death in 1975.) At the same time, Vallejo admired the brotherhood achieved among the activists who gave their lives to serve what they believed was the improvement of life for the poor.

Having moved to Europe in 1923, Vallejo died in Paris in 1938 at the age of forty-six. After his death, his widow Georgette de Vallejo selected poems for publication in his last major poetry collection, *Poemas humanos* (1939).

Works in Literary Context

Vallejo's chief contribution to poetry is his innovative use of language to communicate intense, authentic emotion and to convey both personal and existential anguish. His verse is marked by a strong sense of compassion and filled with Christian imagery that in his later works is fused with Marxist ideology. In addition to being influenced by his Catholic/Christian background and his interest in Marxism and Communism, Vallejo was also inspired by *modernista* poets, especially Leopoldo Lugones and Julio Herrera y Reissig.

"*Wrenched Syntax*" *Trilce* is more difficult, more intense, and more original than Vallejo's first volume of poetry. Pared of all ornamental language, these poems convey the poet's personal urgency as he cries out against the apparent meaninglessness of his suffering. *Trilce* introduces the "wrenched syntax" that allows Vallejo to get beyond the constraints of linguistic conventions to a language that is true to his experience. Writing in *A History of Peruvian Literature*, Higgins catalogues the elements of Vallejo's diction:

Vallejo confounds the reader's expectations by his daring exploitation of the line pause, which often leaves articles, conjunctions and even particles of words dangling at the end of a line, by his frequent resort to harsh sounds to break the rhythm, by employing alliterations so awkward as to be tongue-twisters. He distorts syntactic structures, changes the grammatical function of words, plays with spelling. His poetic vocabulary is frequently unfamiliar and 'unliterary,' he creates new words of his own, he often conflates two words into one, he tampers with clichés to give them new meaning, he plays on the multiple meaning of words and on the similarity of sound between words. He repeatedly makes use of oxymoron and paradox and, above all, catachresis, defamiliarising objects by attributing to them qualities not normally associated with them.

Vallejo's wrenched syntax is not a mere literary performance. It is the means necessary "to discover the man that has been hitherto hidden behind its decorative facades. The discovery is not a pleasant one, and the noise in the poems makes it consequently aggressive and not

beautiful,” D. P. Gallagher observes in *Modern Latin American Literature*. Out of Vallejo’s self-discovery comes an “unprecedented, raw language” that declares Vallejo’s humanness despite his confinement to make a statement “about the human problems of which Vallejo is a microcosm,” Gallagher adds. *New York Review of Books* contributor Michael Wood explains, “With Vallejo [syntax] is an instrument—the only possible instrument, it seems—for the confrontation of complexity, of the self caught up in the world and the world mirrored in the self. It is an answer, let us say, to the simultaneous need for a poetry that would put heart into an agonizing Spain and for a poetry that will not take wishes for truths.”

Influence Vallejo’s poetry has influenced generations of Peruvian and other Spanish American poets to undertake further experiments with poetic language and technique.

Works in Critical Context

Although he published relatively little during his lifetime and received scant critical acclaim, Vallejo has come to be recognized as one of the most important and complex poets of the Spanish language, one of the foremost poets of Spanish America, and the greatest Peruvian poet of all time. “Vallejo created a wrenching Spanish poetic language that radically altered the shape of modernist imagery and the nature of the language’s rhythms. No facile trend setter, Vallejo forged a new discourse in order to express his own visceral compassion for human suffering,” Edith Grossman writes in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. “A constant feature of his poetry is a compassionate awareness of and a guilt-ridden sense of responsibility for the suffering of others,” observes Higgins in *The Poet in Peru: Alienation and the Quest for a Super-Reality*.

In *Modern Latin American Literature*, D. P. Gallagher suggests that Vallejo was “perhaps the first Latin American writer to have realized that it is precisely in the discovery of a language where literature must find itself in a continent where for centuries the written word was notorious more for what it concealed than for what it revealed, where ‘beautiful’ writing, sheer sonorous wordiness was a mere holding operation against the fact that you did not dare really say anything at all.”

Poemas humanos After its publication in 1939, *Poemas humanos* was well-regarded by critics over the next decades. In 1958, Xavier Abril saw a link between Vallejo’s poems and the artistry of film comedian Charlie Chaplin. Abril writes in *Odyssey Review*, “Many of the pages of *Human Poems* have an indefinable Chaplinesque tint, especially those that are charged with the feeling of desolate misfortune or stark abandonment, in which misery is like an X-ray of hunger and horror.” M. L. Rosenthal and Clayton Eshleman see the poems in a different light. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Rosenthal

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The first half of the twentieth century was an active time for poets with leftist or Communist sympathies. Like Vallejo, many poets were galvanized toward the left by the events of the Spanish Civil War. Poems that exhibit political views similar to those of Vallejo include:

Spain in My Heart (1937), a poetry collection by Pablo Neruda. Already an ardent Communist, Chilean poet Neruda wrote this collection of poetry after the death of Federico García Lorca at the hands of the Fascist nationalists.

Between the Stone and the Flower (1941), an epic poem by Octavio Paz. Although he would later denounce totalitarian Communism, Paz was an early Marxist sympathizer. This epic poem, his first of such length, concerns the proletarian struggles of Mexican peasants being exploited by greedy landlords.

Songs and Ballads of Absence (1938–1942), a poetry collection by Miguel Hernández. A fervent supporter of the leftist republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, Hernández was imprisoned after the nationalist victory. He wrote this collection of poems, reflecting on the tragedy of civil war and his own personal loss, before his death from tuberculosis.

praises the poems, writing, “These are poems of cruel suffering, physical and mental, which yet have a kind of joy of realization in their singular music, harshness, humor and pain.” Writing about the collection in *Tri-Quarterly*, Eshleman notes, “All solutions as such fade, in *Poemas Humanos*, before all-powerful death; it is as if man never dies but lives eternally at the edge of death; Vallejo is the great poet of the End.”

Responses to Literature

1. In a paper, describe the body of poetry that was published after Vallejo’s death. How does it compare with the poetry published before he died? How are the poems introduced or edited, and what does this say about Vallejo’s posthumous reputation?
2. In a group, discuss these questions: How does Vallejo utilize emotions in *The Black Messengers*? What specific images or literary devices does he use to convey emotion? Why, do you think, did he make the artistic choices he did?
3. In an essay, discuss Vallejo’s political beliefs as expressed in *Spain, Take Away This Chalice*. Can you compare these views with the views of other poets who appear in the “Common Human Experience” sidebar?

4. Vallejo's poetry has been categorized as both modernist and existentialist. What elements of modernism can you find in his work? How does his work compare with other existentialist poets of his day? Create a presentation with your conclusions
5. In an essay, address these questions: Why did Vallejo choose to leave Peru? How did his time abroad influence and change his poetry?

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❏ Mario Vargas Llosa

BORN: 1936, Arequipa, Peru

NATIONALITY: Peruvian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Time of the Hero (1963)

The Green House (1966)

Conversation in the Cathedral (1969)

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter (1977)

The War of the End of the World (1981)

Overview

Few writers from South America have achieved the literary status and international recognition of Mario Vargas Llosa. A major figure in contemporary literature, Vargas Llosa is respected for his insightful examination of social and cultural themes and for the structural craftsmanship of his work. Vargas Llosa is best known for his novels, in which he combines realism with experimentation to reveal the complexities of human life and society. Never afraid of intellectual controversy, he has always been outspoken on Latin American cultural and political issues. He ran for the presidency of Peru in 1990, narrowly losing to Alberto Fujimori. In spite of his involvement



Mario Vargas Llosa Vargas Llosa, (Jorge) Mario (Pedro), photograph. AP Images.

in politics, literature remained his first passion, and it is in the art of storytelling that his talent has shone the most.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Brutal Discipline Shaped into Fiction Jorge Mario Pedro Vargas Llosa was born into a middle-class family on March 28, 1936, in Arequipa, Peru's second largest city. For the first ten years of his life he lived in Cochabamba, Bolivia, with his mother and grandparents. He returned to Peru in 1946 when his parents, who had divorced shortly before his birth, were reunited. Ernesto Vargas, disdainful of what he perceived as his son's unmanly personality, shipped the teenager off to the Leoncio Prado military academy. This experience marked the future writer's life; it was his first encounter with the institutional violence that affected the various social groups in Peru's ethnically diverse society. Vargas Llosa spent two years at the Leoncio Prado, then returned to his mother's suburban home to finish high school. Vargas Llosa worked for a local newspaper during that time and wrote a play, which was staged but never published.

In 1953, Vargas Llosa studied literature and law at the University of San Marcos in Lima. During these years, Peru was governed by the military dictator General Manuel Odría, who had overthrown the nation's democratic government in 1948. San Marcos was a stronghold for clandestine opposition to Odría's dictatorship. This proved crucial in Vargas Llosa's intellectual formation as he joined a student cell of the Peruvian Communist Party.

In 1959, Vargas Llosa left Peru to pursue doctoral studies at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, Spain. His collection of short stories, *Los jefes (The Cubs and Other Stories)* (1959) was awarded the Leopoldo Alas Prize in Spain and published that year in Barcelona. Vargas Llosa later moved to Paris, where he worked as a journalist, taught Spanish, and continued to write. He became acquainted with several Latin American writers also living in Paris, including Julio Cortázar from Argentina and Carlos Fuentes from Mexico. In the 1960s, all three would be leaders of a literary "boom" that brought Latin American literature to international attention.

Vargas Llosa's painful experiences at Leoncio Prado were the basis for his first novel, *The Time of the Hero* (the title changed from the Spanish-language version *La ciudad y los perros*, meaning "the city and the dogs") (1963). The work gained instant notoriety when Peruvian military leaders condemned it and publicly burned one thousand copies.

Experiments in Social Narrative *The Green House (La Casa Verde)* (1966), Vargas Llosa's next novel, also won wide acclaim and established him as an important young writer. He followed up his success with *Conversation in the Cathedral (Conversacion en la catedral)* (1969), a monumental narrative exploring the moral depravity of Peruvian life under dictator Manuel Odría. In 1973, Vargas Llosa published his first satirical novel, *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service (Pantaleon y las visitadoras)*. With biting wit, the novel demonstrates Vargas Llosa's disdain for military bureaucracy.

Fact and Fiction Four years later, Vargas Llosa published his autobiographical and most internationally popular novel, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter (La tia Julia y el escribidor)* (1977). While this book is less complicated structurally than his earlier novels, Vargas Llosa's manipulation of point of view is of primary importance. Half the chapters in the book represent a fictionalized version of the author's short first marriage to his Aunt Julia. The alternate chapters are soap opera scripts composed by a radio scriptwriter, Pedro Camacho, whose stories of infanticide, incest, prostitution, religious fanaticism, and genocide keep his audience glued to the radio. Vargas Llosa stretches the limits of fact and fiction by using not only the historical real names of his main characters, but many historical events and characters from Peruvian public life as well.

Vargas Llosa produced an epic historical novel based on a true story, *The War of the End of the World (La guerra del fin del mundo)*, in 1981. The plot concerns a rebellion in the Brazilian backlands late in the nineteenth century, reflecting

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Vargas Llosa's famous contemporaries include:

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Colombian novelist, author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Cuban revolutionary and government leader from 1959 to 2008.

V. S. Naipaul (1932–): British novelist and essayist born in Trinidad and of Indian descent.

Václav Havel (1936–): Czech playwright, essayist, and president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

the plight of the poor throughout Latin American history. It received international acclaim and is considered by some to be Vargas Llosa's masterpiece.

Its huge success was only the beginning of an intense decade for Vargas Llosa, both as a writer and an influential public figure in Peru. In the 1980s he published a major anthology of his journalistic essays, *Against All Odds (Contra viento y marea)* (1983–1990). Its three volumes portray the shift in his political perspective, from his early admiration for socialism in the 1960s to his defense of free-market capitalism in the 1980s. This shift to a conservative position often placed him at the center of controversy both in Peru and abroad. After twelve years of progressive military rule, civilian rule was restored in 1980. Vargas Llosa maintained such close political ties to President Fernando Belaunde Terry that he was offered the post of prime minister, which he did not accept.

The Storyteller and the Candidate Vargas Llosa's political stands are present in his next novel, *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta (Historia de Mayta)* (1985). Using real and imagined events, it tells the story of Alejandro Mayta, a Marxist revolutionary who organized a failed rebellion against the Peruvian government in the late 1950s and quickly faded from public view. At the same time, a contemporary novelist in the 1980s (like Vargas Llosa himself) is trying to track down information about the legendary Mayta, sometimes embellishing factual material with fiction to enhance the significance of his story. The novel is a politically charged inquiry into the relationship between representation and reality, fact and depiction.

In his 1987 work *The Storyteller (El hablador)*, Vargas Llosa once again explores stories told from multiple points of view. *The Storyteller* concerns a Native American tribe, the Machiguengas, and in particular the community's storyteller, Saul Zuratas. The book energetically questions the multifaceted identity of Peruvian society, in which primitive and modern lifestyles are forced to coexist in conflict and contradiction. Peru has the largest Native American population in the western hemisphere: about half its population

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mario Vargas Llosa strove to write the “total novel,” a sweeping view of society within the pages of a single work. Here are some other notable works that fit that definition:

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. The lives of the Compson family, expressed in stream-of-consciousness narrative, represent in microcosm the declining culture of the American South.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. In this novel that is credited as a founding text of literary realism, Flaubert uses the failing marriage of Emma and Charles Bovary to depict French bourgeois culture of the period.

Sister Carrie (1900), a novel by Theodore Dreiser. In this panorama of America at the turn of the century, a young country girl ascends in social class as mistress to a bar manager, finally becoming a well-known stage actress.

The Rules of the Game (1939), a film written and directed by Jean Renoir. This comedy of manners concerns a group of French aristocrats and the servants they employ.

of 28 million is Native American. More than 15 percent of Peruvians speak Quechua, an indigenous Peruvian language, and Native American storytelling traditions have had a marked effect on modern Peruvian literature.

Vargas Llosa believes that a Latin American writer is obligated to speak out on political matters. This belief led Vargas Llosa in 1987 to speak out against the reformist tendencies of Peruvian President Alan García. His protest quickly led to a mass movement against nationalization of Peru’s banking industry, and the government was forced to back down. Vargas Llosa’s supporters went on to create Fredemo, a conservative political party calling for democracy, a free market, and individual liberty. The novelist ran for the presidency of Peru in 1990 and, despite being heavily favored, lost in a second-round vote to the then unknown Alberto Fujimori.

Later Career Shortly before campaigning for the presidency, Mario Vargas Llosa published an erotic novel, *In Praise of the Stepmother* (*Elogio de la madrastra*; 1988), and followed it up with a work of literary criticism, *Lies That Tell the Truth* (or *A Writer’s Reality*, 1991). He offers a critical look into his campaign in his 1993 memoir, *A Fish in the Water* (*El pez en el agua: Memorias*).

Since his political defeat, Vargas Llosa has lived in Europe and concentrated on his first love, literature. His novel *Death in the Andes* (*Lituma en los Andes*; 1993) was awarded Spain’s prestigious Planeta Prize. His 1997

novel *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto* (*Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto*) marked the first time any publisher had released a title in all Spanish-language markets on the same day. His most recent works of fiction are *The Way to Paradise* (*El paraíso en la otra esquina*; 2003) and *The Bad Girl* (*Travesuras de la niña mala*; 2006).

Works in Literary Context

As a teenager in the coastal town of Piura, Mario Vargas Llosa developed his affinity for literature, greatly admiring the works of a variety of authors, including Alexander Dumas and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. At the university, he was attracted by the rich narrative technique in the novels of William Faulkner, whose work he admired greatly.

The Total Novel Vargas Llosa’s discovery of Faulkner was crucial in the experimental nature of many of his novels and his concept of the “total novel,” an attempt to depict through writing as many facets of reality as possible. Another important source for Vargas Llosa’s theory of the total novel is Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary* (1857). For Vargas Llosa, Flaubert’s writing is key to understanding realism and the modern novel. If the novel is a genre that captures all aspects of reality, the novelist should strive to represent all aspects of life with equal passion and persuasion, becoming the invisible creator of a fictional world, a god that holds the ultimate power over a given reality. In a later work of literary criticism, Vargas Llosa holds up *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), by his contemporary Gabriel García Márquez, as a prime example of the total novel.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Political Prose At the same time, Vargas Llosa was also attracted to the way French author and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre used literature as a tool to pursue a life of political commitment. Some of Vargas Llosa’s early works, such as *The Time of the Hero*, are clearly inspired by Sartre’s notion that the writer’s role in any given society is to question the established social order relentlessly.

After the Boom Vargas Llosa’s first two novels, with their innovations in narrative technique, established him as a major influence in Latin American literature, along with his fellow representatives of the “boom” generation. Vargas Llosa has continued to redefine the role of the writer in Latin American society, and, in that fashion, his work has remained contemporary. For example, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* is in tune with the works of the so-called post-boom generation of writers from the 1970s, including Manuel Puig and Isabel Allende, who immersed themselves in popular culture and expanded the Latin American genre of magic realism.

Works in Critical Context

Mario Vargas Llosa is one of a small handful of the most esteemed Latin American authors of the twentieth century.

His novels are widely acknowledged as path-breaking in their narrative complexity and in the social panorama they encompass. Some critics have found the labyrinthine structure of works like *Conversation in the Cathedral* difficult to comprehend. Others have objected to some of the stylistic pyrotechnics in Vargas Llosa's fiction, contending that they exist at the expense of character development.

Conversation in the Cathedral Llosa's 1969 novel *Conversation in the Cathedral*, first published in English in 1975, received a range of critical reactions typical of the author's work. Roger Sale, writing for *The Hudson Review*, notes that the book "is huge, almost a quarter of a million words, and it manages that bulk with often amazing skill." Although he claims the story would work better as a film, Sale concludes, "*Conversation in the Cathedral* is immensely knowing, and so it makes a reader feel knowing; it is an excellent rather than a moving novel, not great, but very good." Suzanne Jill Levine, in the *New York Times Book Review*, writes, "It would be a pity if the enormous but not insurmountable difficulties of reading this massive novel prevent readers from becoming acquainted with a book that reveals, as few others have, some of the ugly complexities of the real Latin America." Other critics were less enthusiastic. For example, Pearl K. Bell of *The New Leader* calls the book "such a tiresome, repetitious, logorrheic bore that only in the cruelest nightmare could I imagine myself reading [Vargas Llosa's] greatly praised earlier works."

Responses to Literature

1. Write an essay about the relationship between fact and fiction in *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* and *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*.
2. Research the life story of Antonio Conselheiro and the bloody battle he and his followers provoked in Brazil. What interpretation does Vargas Llosa give to these events in *The War of the End of the World*?
3. What relationship do you discern between the evolution of Vargas Llosa's political views and the development of his literary concerns?
4. Which of Vargas Llosa's contemporaries had the greatest effect on his style of writing, and in which of his works do you see this being represented?
5. Is there an American author today whom you feel presents a similar biting look at politics in America? Explain your choice.

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Vergil

BORN: 70 BCE, Andes, Cisalpine Gaul

DIED: 19 BCE, Brundisium, Italy

NATIONALITY: Roman

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Eclogues (42–37 BCE)

Georgics (37–30 BCE)

The Aeneid (31–19 BCE)

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Vergil's famous contemporaries include:

- Augustus Caesar** (63 BCE–14 CE): Born Gaius Octavius, grand nephew and adopted heir of Julius Caesar, Augustus rose to become the first Roman emperor.
- Cleopatra VII** (69 BCE–30 BCE): Hellenistic ruler of Egypt, Cleopatra was the last in a centuries-long dynasty of Greek-speaking pharaohs tracing their lineage back to the conquests of Alexander the Great.
- Wang Mang** (45 BCE–23 CE): Wang Mang led a palace coup in China, installing himself as emperor of the newly proclaimed Xin dynasty in place of the ruling Han dynasty, though his success was short-lived.
- Strabo** (64 BCE–24 CE): A Greek academic specializing in history, philosophy, and geography. His seventeen-volume *Geographica* described the peoples and history of the known world at the time.
- Horace** (65–8 BCE): Considered by his contemporaries and later historians as one of the greatest Latin poets, Quintus Horatius Flaccus specialized in lyric poetry and coined many famous Latin phrases such as *carpe diem* ("seize the day").

Overview

Vergil, or Virgil (both spellings are considered correct), was a Roman poet who wrote chiefly in the epic genre. His poems, written as the Roman republic was collapsing and the Roman Empire was taking shape under Augustus, reflect the concerns of his day as well as broader human emotions. They remain widely studied and admired both for their technical ability and thematic content.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Pastoral Beginning Publius Vergilius Maro was born on October 15, 70 BCE at Andes, in Cisalpine Gaul (now a part of northern Italy), thereafter a province in the expanding Roman Empire. His mother was the daughter of the small landowner who employed Vergil's father, Maro, a day laborer. The couple's marriage elevated Maro's social status, possibly enhancing the quality of his son's education. The boy received elementary schooling in Mantua and then studied rhetoric in Rome and philosophy under the Epicurean philosopher Siro in Naples. Vergil planned to practice law but proved too shy to speak comfortably in public.

Restoration of the Family Farm Returning to the small family farm his mother and father operated, he studied and wrote poetry until, in 41 BCE, the land was confiscated to compensate retiring soldiers. Friends urged

Vergil to appeal to Octavian (known as Augustus after 27 BCE), Julius Caesar's adopted son and eventual successor. Octavian restored the farm—perhaps, scholars speculate, because he was impressed by Vergil's work—but the poet soon moved to Naples.

Success in Naples While in Naples, between 42 and 37 BCE, he composed the *Eclogues*, whose title means "Selections." These ten poems, also referred to as the *Bucolics*, depict shepherds singing of unhappy loves in an idealized landscape, no doubt influenced by the rural region in which he grew up. Their publication attracted widespread praise and the sponsorship of Octavian's friend, the art patron Maecenas. Maecenas allegedly prevailed upon Vergil to compose his next work, the *Georgics*, as an agricultural paean to persuade Romans, then deserting the countryside in large numbers, to return to farming. Written in Naples between 37 and 30 BCE, the *Georgics*, or "Points of Farming," consists of four books that offer instruction in grain production, the cultivation of trees and vineyards, animal husbandry, and beekeeping. The work further enhanced Vergil's reputation upon its appearance in 29 BCE. Octavian, to whom Vergil read the completed poem, honored him with two villas and a generous stipend, and Octavian's friends asked Vergil to compose an epic honoring the emperor.

Deathbed Request Goes Unmet This project, which became *The Aeneid*, occupied the last ten years of Vergil's life. According to several of his friends, he first drafted the epic in prose, then laboriously reworked it in verse. Composition was slow and revision constant; Vergil responded to one of Augustus's many inquiries about the poem's progress by asserting that he "must have been just about mad to attempt the task." When he left Naples in 19 BCE to gather new material in Greece and Asia Minor, he planned to devote another three years to revisions, but caught fever at Megara and died soon after returning to Italy. His deathbed request was that his companions burn *The Aeneid*. However, Augustus countermanded the request, asking Vergil's friends, the writers Varius Rufus and Plotius Tucca, to edit the manuscript but specifying that they neither add, delete, nor alter significantly. Published in 17 BCE, the epic's resounding success assured Vergil's fame. More manuscripts of Vergilian works exist today than of any other classical author.

Works in Literary Context

Considered the greatest of Roman poets, Vergil is acclaimed for transforming the Greek literary traditions that provided Roman writers with material, themes, and styles. Latin authors, Joseph Farrell explains, were fully expected to imitate their Hellenic (Greek) precursors, and Vergil's three major works adapt the characteristics of numerous Greek models, although particular influences predominate. Vergil's pastoral poem, the *Eclogues*, is modeled after Theocritus's *Idylls*; his poetic treatise on the significance of

human labor, the *Georgics*, after Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and his epic poem of Augustan Rome, the *Aeneid*, after Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. However, Farrell and numerous critics agree that surpassing the Greeks was far more esteemed than merely emulating them, and Vergil, synthesizing a more diverse array of literary examples than other Latin poets, reworked Hellenic influences so completely that he supplanted them.

Vergil's literary developments include populating a more idealized pastoral setting with contemporary figures, synthesizing vivid description with philosophical inquiry, increasing grammatical complexity, and enhancing psychologically realistic characterization. These technical innovations have informed all subsequent literature, yet Vergil is equally noted for his awareness of the uncertainties specific to the times in which he lived, as well as those inherent in the human condition. In addition, his work offers an insightful perspective on the anxieties of empire during the Augustan age.

The National Epic *The Aeneid* was composed at least in part to celebrate and promote the rebirth of the Roman way of life under Augustus. The epic poem also universalizes Roman experience, ideals, and aspirations. Critics have praised Vergil's ability to adapt a variety of traditions, motifs, ideas, and literary techniques to suit his poetic intentions in the work. As scholars have maintained, he forged a characteristically Roman epic from such disparate sources as archaic myths and mysteries, Homeric epic poetry, ancient beliefs such as reincarnation, and Stoic precepts. What makes *The Aeneid* so eminently Roman is its pervasive spirit of Augustan patriotism and imperialism, expressed through the idea of *pietas*, which, although formally denoting religious respect, in practice describes Augustus's strategy of using religion, history, and morality to create a Roman national identity with himself at the center.

Scholars have also carefully studied the formal structures of Vergil's epic. For example, Brooks Otis divides *The Aeneid* into symmetrical halves, each corresponding to one of Homer's epics. Thus, in the first six books, Aeneas's journey to what will eventually be Rome parallels Odysseus's homeward journey, while the last six books recount a Latin inversion of the Trojan War: the Greeks fought to destroy a city, while the Trojans fight to found one. This structural reading also supports the perception of some critics for whom the first six books constitute a spiritual journey that matures Aeneas so that he can lead the battles of Books VII–XII. Another popular approach to the epic's structure proposes that the books of the poem are alternately lighter and darker in tone. Viktor Poschl and George Duckworth perceive the poem as divided into three segments of four books each. The first four books they see as dark; the middle four, light; and the last four, dark. Such an interpretation of the poem's structure reinforces the critics' view of Vergil's

attitude toward Augustan Rome—both believe that he stresses its human costs and moral ambiguity.

Poetic Innovations Vergil is credited with significantly refining narrative technique in *The Aeneid*. A characteristic reworking of Homeric episodes consists in shifting from an objective tone to the subjective perception of his characters. In addition to contributing to psychologically credible characterization, this narrative procedure enabled the poet to introduce ironic contrasts between different characters' interpretations of a particular event, and between the reader's wider and the characters' more limited knowledge. Vergil is also noted for developing the dactylic hexameter (a line consisting of six feet, with a predominance of dactyls—a long syllable and two short syllables), a typically Greek meter that such early Roman poets as Ennius used with questionable success, into an outstanding instrument of Latin poetry. Vergil was able to do this without unduly complicating his syntax, which generally remains straightforward.

Legacy Endures after Rome Falls Immensely popular in Augustan Rome, Vergil's poems became part of the standard curriculum in Roman schools within fifty years of his death, ensuring the production of numerous copies. After the collapse of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century CE, Vergil's works remained accessible to scholars through numerous manuscripts copied in monasteries throughout Christendom during the early Middle Ages. In particular, the surge of scholarly interest in classical literature during the reign of Holy Roman emperor Charlemagne (800–814) produced numerous cursive copies, many annotated and elaborately illustrated. Collectively, the four most reliable codices, so considered because they are the oldest, provide complete copies of Vergil's three major works; they are preserved in the Vatican library and the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence.

Works in Critical Context

Although critical reception of Vergil's works has fluctuated over the centuries, his themes and techniques have influenced virtually all subsequent Western literature, with Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Matthew Arnold numbering among his prominent heirs. As centuries have widened the gulf between the present and pagan antiquity, scholars have increasingly appreciated the encyclopedic description of Greco-Roman culture Vergil's poetry provides.

The Aeneid Even in his own lifetime, Vergil's poetry had become a school text. Early Christian writers who attempted to reject Vergil could escape neither his style nor his attitudes. Christian thought assimilated them both. *The Aeneid* and the Bible were arguably the two most consistently read books in Western Europe for two thousand years. In that time, *The Aeneid* has been a pagan bible, a Latin style manual, a moral

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Aeneid is one of the great poetic national epics; other such works, that succinctly encapsulate the spirit and outlook of a people in verse form, include:

The *Kalevala*. Passed down via oral tradition for centuries, this national epic of Finland was compiled and put into print in the nineteenth century by Elias Lönnrot. Its length (more than twenty-two thousand verses) and narrative depth made an immediate impact on students of folklore and mythology; J. R. R. Tolkien claimed it as an inspiration for developing his own mythology for Middle Earth.

The Song of Roland. First appearing in the twelfth century and in other forms over the following two centuries, this epic poem of France describes the historical exploits, recast in a legendary, mythological mode, of Charlemagne and his paladin Roland, who fought a doomed battle against Spanish Moors. The poem's popularity was such that it launched an entirely new literary genre, the *chanson de geste* ("song of heroic deeds").

Mabinogion. A collection of prose and poetry, drawn from both oral and written sources, this is the medieval Welsh folkloric tradition encapsulated in a single volume. There is evidence that certain details may be rooted in pre-Christian, Iron Age society.

Beowulf. Dating from between the eighth and eleventh century, this Anglo-Saxon epic poem is the oldest work of English literature. Despite the fact that it describes events in the Saxon homeland of Scandinavia and Germany, it is often called England's national epic.

allegory, a document of European unity, a pacifist document—and one of the most-read and most-studied works of world literature of all time.

The Georgics Joseph Farrell has deemed the *Georgics* the most allusive poem of antiquity, and, though Hesiod's *Works and Days* is Vergil's most commonly cited model (perhaps because Vergil characterized his poem as "a Hesiodic song for Roman cities"), the influences of the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* of Homer, the *De Re Rustica* of Varro, and the *Phaenomena* of Aratus are also significant.

The *Georgics* is widely considered the most polished of Vergil's works; John Dryden, who translated all of Vergil's works, called it "the best poem of the best poet." In the view of L. P. Wilkinson, "The *Georgics* is, in fact, the first poem in all literature in which description may be said to be the chief *raison d'être* and source of pleasure."

Responses to Literature

1. Define the difference between folk and literary epics. Into which category would you place *The Aeneid*? Why?
2. Roman civilization was strongly associated with the city, yet poets like Vergil were fond of writing about rural settings, describing them in the highest terms. Why do you think this was the case? Can you draw any parallels to our own modern, urban society?
3. Why do you think Vergil chose Aeneas as a hero for Romans to look up to? What was the significance of his Trojan heritage, and of his activities after the Trojan War? What were the personal traits of Aeneas that Romans might have looked up to?
4. How did the ongoing political situation during Vergil's lifetime affect his composition of *The Aeneid*? Was the work meant to stand above current politics, or did it address contemporary issues?

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Paul Verlaine

BORN: 1844, Metz, France

DIED: 1896, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Saturnine Poems (1866)

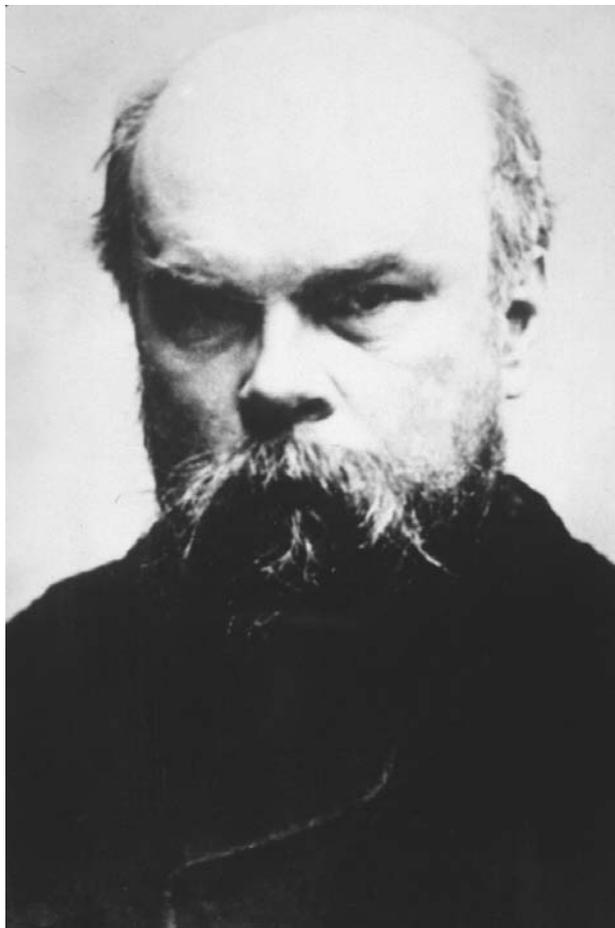
Gallant Feasts (1869)

Wisdom (1880)

Love (1888)

Overview

A poet renowned for the fluidity and impressionistic imagery of his verse, Verlaine succeeded in liberating the musicality of the French language from the restrictions of its classical, formal structure. Highly influenced by the French painter Antoine Watteau, Verlaine was fascinated



Paul Verlaine *Verlaine, Paul, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.*

by the visual aspects of form and color and attempted to capture in his poems the symbolic elements of language by transposing emotion into subtle suggestions. As a contributor to the French symbolists, who believed the function of poetry was to evoke and not describe, Verlaine created poetry that was both aesthetic and intuitive. Although his verse has often been overshadowed by his scandalous bohemian lifestyle, Verlaine's literary achievement was integral to the development of French poetry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Student of Life Born in Metz to religious middle-class parents, Paul Marie Verlaine's youth was guarded and conventional until he became a student at the Lycée Bonaparte (now Condorcet). While he never truly excelled in his studies, Verlaine did enjoy a certain success in rhetoric and Latin. Despite winning a number of prizes in these areas, however, Verlaine was not a highly respected student—one of his instructors claimed he looked like a criminal and was the filthiest and most slovenly pupil in school—and he barely managed to obtain the baccalaureate. Upon gradu-

ation, Verlaine enrolled in law school, but because of his tendency to frequent bars and to associate with women of questionable morals, he was quickly withdrawn from his academic pursuits. His father secured a clerical position for his son at a local insurance company, and while the work was mundane, it allowed Verlaine time to patronize the Café du Gaz, a gathering spot for the literary and artistic community, and to develop his poetic talents.

The Parnassians Verlaine made his literary debut with the publication of *Poèmes saturniens* (*Saturnine Poems*) in 1866. At this time, Verlaine began to associate with a group of young poets known as the Parnassians. This poetic movement, which had adopted Théophile Gautier's doctrine of "art for art's sake," included François Coppée, Charles Leconte de Lisle, and Charles Baudelaire. While Verlaine's *Saturnine Poems*, a volume true to the Parnassian ideals of detached severity, impeccable form, and stoic objectivity, was well received by his fellow poets, it took twenty years to sell five hundred copies, leaving Verlaine virtually unknown to general readers following its publication. Verlaine began to move away from the tenets of the Parnassians with his third volume, *Fêtes galantes* (*Gallant Feasts*). In this collection, Verlaine uses visual and spatial imagery to create poetry that has been described as "impressionistic music." According to many critics, this volume first revealed Verlaine's poetic talents in their pure form and later established Verlaine as a precursor to the symbolist movement.

While Verlaine's poetic style was taking shape and setting precedents, his personal life was slowly dissipating due to his increasing consumption of absinthe, a liquor flavored with wormwood that was believed to cause hallucinations. Despite his growing addiction and sometimes violent temperament, Verlaine's family encouraged him to marry, believing it could stabilize his raucous life. Verlaine sought out a young girl, Mathilde Maute, who was sixteen in 1869, the year of their engagement. Following their marriage in 1870, Verlaine published *La bonne chanson* (*The Good Song*), a volume that contains verse inspired by his young wife. This was Verlaine at his happiest; he seemed to truly believe that love and marriage would save him from his dangerous lifestyle.

Arthur Rimbaud Verlaine's hopes and good intentions, however, were shattered when he received a letter from the then unknown poet Arthur Rimbaud in 1871. Verlaine urged Rimbaud, a precocious and unpredictable seventeen-year-old genius, to visit him in Paris. Tempted by the anarchic and bohemian lifestyle the young poet represented, Verlaine abandoned his wife, home, and employment for Rimbaud. The two poets traveled throughout Europe, a journey punctuated by drunken quarrels, until Verlaine shot and wounded Rimbaud during an argument in 1873. Verlaine was arrested and later sentenced to serve two years at Mons, a Belgian prison. During this time he wrote *Romances sans paroles* (*Songs Without Words*), a collection of verse strongly influenced by his affair with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Verlaine's famous contemporaries include:

Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891): A lasting influence on innumerable poets to follow, Rimbaud had given up poetry by the age of twenty-one, having already produced a handful of enduring classics.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898): A major French symbolist poet, Mallarmé was part of the Paris intellectual society in the latter half of the nineteenth century and hosted a weekly salon for writers and poets every Tuesday night.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): Though he considered himself a poet first and foremost, and his poetry has come to be highly regarded since his death, Hardy was best known in his lifetime for his novels, most of which were set in the semifictional county of Wessex.

Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904): Born in Greece and raised in Ireland, Hearn moved to America to work as a journalist; this work took him to Japan, and his subsequent writings provided some of the West's first insights into Japanese culture.

Victor Emmanuel II (1820–1878): In 1861, Victor Emmanuel, king of Piedmont, Savoy, and Sardinia, assumed the throne of Italy, becoming the first king of the newly unified state, despite the fact that several states, including Rome, would remain as holdouts over the next decade.

Anthony Trollope (1815–1882): Like Thomas Hardy, Trollope was a successful Victorian author who set many of his stories in a fictional county. His novels were notable for their sharp observations of political and social issues of the time.

Rimbaud. Verlaine's masterful use of ambiguities, the smoothness and economy of his verse, and his usage of "half-light," or vague but deeply suggestive visual imagery, led Arthur Symons to speak for many when he called this volume "Verlaine's masterpiece of sheer poetry."

While in prison, Verlaine turned from atheism to a fervent acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith into which he had been born. While some observers have questioned the sincerity of Verlaine's conversion, others have pointed to *Sagesse* (*Wisdom*), a volume of poems that depicts his religious crisis, as evidence of his depth of feeling and moral commitment. Critical response to *Wisdom* was somewhat mixed. Following *Wisdom*, Verlaine produced a trilogy exemplifying his religious genesis: *Amour* (*Love*) was to represent religious perseverance, *Parallelement* (*In Parallel*) moral relapse, and *Bonheur* (*Happiness*) repentance and consolation. In all three collections, Verlaine continued to

develop his personal voice and to progress toward simple and graceful accentuations.

Later Life After being released from Mons, Verlaine traveled to Stickney and Bournemouth in England to become a teacher of French, Latin, and drawing. Although he called his stay in Stickney an *enchantement*, Verlaine decided in 1878 to take up a rustic life in the Ardennes with one of his former students, Lucien Letinois, whom he termed his adoptive son. Many of the elegies of *Love* refer to Letinois, who died in 1886 of typhoid, two years after the death of Verlaine's mother. For the remainder of his life, Verlaine lived in poverty and reverted to drink. Although he managed to publish a few works during this time, among them the tragic and brutal *Chansons pour elle* (*Songs for Her*), most critics contend that Verlaine's best and most original work can be found in his earlier volumes. After a number of hospital stays that allowed him to recuperate from his excesses, Verlaine died in humble lodgings in 1896.

Works in Literary Context

Symbolism While many critics consider Verlaine one of the harbingers of the French symbolists due to the impressionistic and evocative nature of his poetry, Verlaine denied belonging to any particular poetic movement. Instead of labeling himself a decadent or symbolist, Verlaine preferred to call himself a "degenerate," indicating his individualistic and anarchic tendencies. Much attention has been given to Verlaine's use of familiar language in a musical and visual manner and his ability to evoke rather than demand a response from his readers. Stéphane Mallarmé declared that "to name an object is to suppress three-fourths of the enjoyment of the poem . . . to suggest it, there is the dream." This statement, often considered the credo for the symbolist movement, can be used to describe much of Verlaine's poetry. As C. F. Keary suggests: "If there is one note which occurs more frequently than any other in [Verlaine's] poems, it is the longing for repose, a love of half-lights and the minor key."

Sensuous Beauty Out of the Ordinary Since the turn of the twentieth century, Verlaine has been noted for the sensuality and beauty he evokes with his poetic imagery and language. In 1922, Irène Dean Paul called Verlaine a "painter, a musician, and a remarkable philosopher" with the talent "to create out of old material new worlds, new sounds, new sights." Paul, like other critics to follow, praised Verlaine for his ability to take the reader along on his journeys; his detail is striking, vivid, and tangible. "Through his personality," Paul wrote, the reader sees landscape, and objects develop a "significance and personality of their own." Verlaine is known for his ability to draw the reader inside of everything he sees, touches, or experiences. With this technique, he takes the reader within himself, offering a new way in which to view and feel the world.

Works in Critical Context

Arthur Symons asserts that Verlaine's place in literary history rests on the fact that he "made something new of French—something more pliable, more exquisitely delicate and sensitive, than the language ever before has been capable of."

Verlaine's well-documented personal life has often overshadowed discussion of the merits of his numerous volumes of verse and his poetic genius. In Verlaine's work, as in his life, there was a constant struggle between the soul and the senses; between debauchery and repentance. This prompted critics to call him everything from a "propagator of moral cowardice" to "a victim of his own genius." Despite the many attacks on his character, Verlaine is considered a consummate poet whose extraordinary talents for fluid verse, figurative and suggestive language, and impressionistic imagery have assumed legendary stature. It was Verlaine, most critics agree, who was responsible for releasing French poetry from its technical severity and for bringing out the musicality inherent in the French language. "Remember," Anatole France wrote as early as 1891, "this lunatic has created a new art, and there is a chance that some day it will be said of him... [']He was the greatest poet of his time."

"Art poétique" When Paul Verlaine wrote his "Art poétique" in 1874, he was protesting against two traditions firmly rooted in the poetry of the time: the tradition of pictorial description and the tradition of rhetoric. Some poets followed Verlaine in creating melodious verse in which the logical and intellectual content was reduced to a minimum and the outside world was used simply as a means of expressing by analogy the poet's inner world. For example, the first three lines of the last stanza are a good example of this kind of allusive imagery, in which the two terms of the comparison—"le vers" and "la bonne aventure"—are equated, while the reason for the equation is left unspoken. Other poets, with Mallarmé chief among them, took a more complex and more abstract view of music as a system of interlocking relationships of sound, on which poetry could superimpose a system of relationships of sense and imagery. A few, led by René Ghil, attempted to construct a theory of "instrumentism," which postulated rigorous correspondences between instrumental timbres, vowel sounds, and colors. Almost all of them would have agreed with Verlaine in shunning clear, direct statement and proceeding instead by allusion, suggestion, or symbol.

Jadis et naguère Hastily gathered, the poems of *Jadis et naguère* were born from the necessity for Verlaine to live on his writings and to capitalize on the poet's own growing fame. His sonnet "Langueur," published in *Le Chat Noir* (May 1883), became the poetic model of the decadents, a group of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers who held that art was superior to nature and that the finest beauty was that of dying or decaying things, and who attacked the accepted moral, ethical, and social standards of their time. Arthur Symons

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Verlaine preferred to refer to his work as "degenerate." Other works that have received a similar label, either from the authors themselves or from critics, include:

The Flowers of Evil (1857), a poetry collection by Charles Baudelaire. In this, the first volume of Baudelaire's poems, the decadent verses caused such a scandal that Baudelaire was brought up on criminal charges, even as they influenced countless other artists in France and abroad.

The Great God Pan (1890), a novella by Arthur Machen. A tremendous influence on later generations of horror writers, Machen used Pan as a symbol for the dark, forbidden power of nature in this novella.

The Torture Garden (1899), a novel by Octave Mirbeau. An allegorical attack upon the hypocrisy of European efforts to spread their idea of civilization, complete with its systematic institutions of murder and violence, around the world.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), a novel by Oscar Wilde. The only novel published by the infamous wit Wilde, this book's themes of aesthetic decay and homoeroticism made it controversial upon its initial publication; it has gone on to be regarded as one of the great works of nineteenth-century literature.

wrote of the work in 1892 that "it makes no pretence to unity, but has something in it of every variety of his style, with certain poems, here and there, which rank among his special triumphs."

Legacy After his death in Paris on January 8, 1896, friends and admirers of Paul Verlaine—including François Coppée, René Sully-Prudhomme, José Maria de Heredia, Jean Richepin, Jean Moréas, Catulle Mendès, and Edmond Lepelletier—gathered to pay their respects to the poet they considered "the Master." Although Verlaine's literary reputation had declined later in his life—in part because of his scandalous behavior—in the 1890s he was closely identified with the younger poets of the symbolist movement, although he downplayed the association. Verlaine was also one of the models for the decadent movement that began in the 1870s. As much as for his literary reputation, however, his fame rests on his stormy personal relationship with fellow decadent Arthur Rimbaud.

Responses to Literature

1. Write a brief essay about how Verlaine views the past in *Gallant Feasts*. Discuss specific lines or imagery to support your ideas.

2. With a classmate, use resources from your library or the Internet to research Verlaine's life. Discuss the following: Why does Verlaine focus on remorse in *Wisdom*? What life events occurring around the time of his composing that volume would have led him to discuss such an emotion?
3. Read several selections from Verlaine's poetic canon. Write an essay explaining what role you think self-denial plays in Verlaine's poetry. Use specific examples from the poems you read to support your ideas.
4. Like many French poets, Verlaine's poetry often has a musical flow to it. Read a few selections of Verlaine's poetic work and have a classmate read a few selections of Charles Baudelaire's poetic work. Together, write an informal report in which you contrast the musicality of Verlaine's verse to that of Baudelaire. Cite examples from specific poems to support your opinions.

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☒ Jules Verne

BORN: 1828, Nantes, France

DIED: 1905, Amiens, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Extraordinary Voyages (1863–1910)

A Journey to the Center of the Earth (1864)

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (1869–1870)

Around the World in Eighty Days (1873)



Jules Verne Verne, Jules, 1904, photograph.

Overview

Jules Verne is arguably one of the most underestimated writers of the entire French literary tradition. Although ranked as the fifth most-translated author of all time (behind Lenin, Agatha Christie, Walt Disney, and the Bible—according to a UNESCO poll), Verne and his *Extraordinary Journeys* (1863–1910) were until recently persistently denied any literary recognition in France. In America, Verne is largely unstudied but widely recognized as the father of science fiction.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Nantes: The Art of the Sea and of the Machine Jules Verne was born on February 8, 1828, to a middle-class French family in the western port city of Nantes. His mother, Sophie (née Allotte de la Fuye), was the daughter of a prominent Nantes family of ship owners. His father, Pierre Verne, was a lawyer and the son of a Provins magistrate. Verne had three sisters—Anna, Mathilde, and Marie—and one brother, Paul, who eventually became a naval engineer and helped his older

brother from time to time with the mechanical details of his imaginary technological marvels.

Verne was a good student. He repeatedly won awards, and he passed his *baccalauréat* easily in 1846. But he especially loved the sea. The small shipyard docks of nearby Île Feydeau and the bustling Nantes harbor itself never failed to spark his youthful imagination with visions of far-off lands and exotic peoples. And he also loved machines. Reminiscing about those formative years when interviewed by a British journalist in 1894, Verne compared the pastime of watching them to viewing the art of Raphael or Correggio.

Indentured to Law, Aspiring to Theater Intending that his son follow in his footsteps as an attorney, Verne's father sent him to Paris in 1848 to study law. Not distracted from his studies by the political turmoil that engulfed the city—The French Revolution of 1848 ended the reign of King Louis-Philippe and, ultimately, led to the creation of the Second French Empire—Verne took his education seriously. He completed his law degree in just two years. Perhaps most significantly, while at law school Verne discovered a new vocation, literature. The young Verne wrote plays, some of which were performed in local theaters. He even managed to become the secretary of the Théâtre Lyrique in 1852. Verne also composed poetry and penned several short stories, including “A Balloon Trip” (1851) and “Wintering in the Ice” (1855). He was, however, to become better known for his novels.

From the Stage to the Library Many years were to pass before Verne would reluctantly decide to abandon his theatrical aspirations and redirect those energies toward adventure stories. During those difficult years of 1850 to 1862, he spent more and more of his time writing lucrative short stories and nonfiction articles for popular journals, such as the *Musée des Familles*. This work was fascinating for Verne, but it required long days in the Bibliothèque Nationale researching geography, world history and popular science.

During these extended work sessions at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Verne first conceived of the possibility of writing a wholly new type of novel, what he first called a *roman de la science* (novel of science). This new form would fully incorporate the large amounts of factual material that he was accumulating in his library research, would combine scientific discovery, action and adventure, history and geography, and be patterned on the novels and tales of Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe.

The Settled Life and the Mental Journey In 1857, Verne married Honorine Morel (*née* de Viane), a twenty-six-year-old widow with two daughters. With his new father-in-law's contacts in Paris and a monetary wedding gift from his own father, Verne reluctantly took a position as a stockbroker at the Paris Exchange with the firm Eggly & Cie and spent his early mornings at home writ-

ing. When not writing or at the stock exchange, Verne spent his time either with his old theater friends or at the Bibliothèque Nationale. His long-contemplated ideas for a *roman de la science* soon crystallized into a rough draft of what would later be titled *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863)—the first novel of the *Extraordinary Journeys*.

After a heated dispute with the editor in chief of the *Musée des Familles* in 1856, Verne stopped contributing his writing to this journal. Still determined, however, to expand his short narratives into a full-length scientific novel, Verne discussed his ideas with his friends and colleagues. Then, in September 1862, Verne was introduced to Pierre-Jules Hetzel through a friend of both the publisher and Alexandre Dumas. Verne promptly asked Hetzel if he would consider reviewing for publication his manuscript, “An Air Voyage.” Hetzel agreed to the request, and a few days later Verne and Hetzel began what would prove to be a highly successful author-publisher collaboration, lasting for more than forty years and resulting in more than sixty *romans scientifiques*. Soon after, Verne quit his job at the stock exchange and began to write full-time.

From the Earth to the Moon In 1864 Verne published *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The work proved to be one of his most popular *Extraordinary Journeys* volumes. Verne's famous *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865)—along with its sequel, *Round the Moon* (1870)—was the first “realistic” (that is, scientifically plausible) manned moon voyage in Western literature. Verne based his extrapolative tale on the lessons of modern astronomy and astrophysics. In 1868, Verne moved his family to the northern coast town of Le Crotoy. He purchased his first yacht, and, during his frequent voyages on the Somme River and along the coast of France, he began revising an early manuscript called “An Underwater Voyage.” A year later, in early 1869, Verne put the finishing touches on his first novel of the sea, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1869–1870).

During the summer of 1870, Verne received the Légion d'honneur (ironically, one of the last official acts of a corrupt government that the author despised). At the start of the short-lived Franco-Prussian War—the conflict that, ultimately, brought an end to the Second French Republic and established the modern German nation-state at its conclusion in 1871—he moved his family to Amiens to stay with his wife's relatives and joined the Le Crotoy home guard. After the ensuing German occupation and the Paris Commune (the socialist-anarchist self-rule of Paris in the wake of a revolt against the traditional authority that had driven the disastrous war just ended), Verne himself moved permanently to Amiens, where he spent the remaining thirty-three years of his life.

Around the World In 1873, Verne published his most commercially successful novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, a book inspired by rapid advances in transportation capabilities and communication technology in the late nineteenth century. For example, in the United States the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Verne's famous contemporaries include:

Susan B. Anthony (1828–1906): An American civil rights leader, primarily responsible for creating and passing the Nineteenth Amendment.

Paul-Jacques-Aimé Baudry (1828–1826): A French painter who was awarded the *Prix de Rome* in 1850.

Solomon Loeb (1828–1923): An American banker and major philanthropist to Jewish charities.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): An English poet, painter, illustrator, and translator who founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Karl Marx (1818–1883): A German philosopher, economist, and visionary social thinker, Marx laid the intellectual groundwork for most socialist activity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, linking the east and west coasts. In the early 1870s, advances in steamship design made international trade and travel much faster and economical. Also by the early 1870s, telegraph lines link ran virtually around the global, making rapid communication between places as distant from each other as Britain and India inexpensive and easy. The hardcover edition of Verne's book quickly set new sales records both in France and abroad, selling more than a half-million copies during the first year alone. Verne's growing celebrity correspondingly soared: in 1874 he was elected to the Académie d'Amiens, his *Extraordinary Journeys* were officially recognized by the Académie Française, and an extravagant stage adaptation of *Around the World in Eighty Days* proved to be a resounding success and would play uninterrupted at the Théâtre du Châtelet for a record-breaking fifty years. Verne's theatrical ambitions were finally satisfied. In 1877, Verne successively purchased two more yachts, and for the next few years he sailed to ever more distant ports of call. Not surprisingly, many of these locales found their way, sooner or later, into the settings of his subsequent *Extraordinary Journeys*.

During his final years, despite increasingly poor health, the death of his brother, Paul, in 1897, and annoying family squabbles, Verne continued diligently to churn out two to three novels per year. Verne fell seriously ill in early 1905, a few weeks after his seventy-seventh birthday. Lucid until the end, he told his wife Honorine to gather the family around him, and he died quietly on March 24, 1905. He was buried on March 28 in the cemetery of La Madeleine in Amiens. Two years later, an elaborate sculpture depicting the author rising from his tomb and engraved with the words "Toward immortality and eternal youth" was placed over his grave.

Works in Literary Context

Science Fiction In the history of literature, Verne's *Extraordinary Journeys* constitutes the birth of a unique, hybridized form of novel. This new brand of fiction was to be a forerunner of what would eventually evolve into the genre called science fiction. By any name, it represents the first successful attempt to incorporate science into literature by a delicate intertwining of fact with fantasy, mathematics with myth, and education with adventure—which constitutes the core of Verne's narrative recipe for the vast majority of his *Extraordinary Journeys* volumes.

A Dizzying Range of Contemporary Influences Perhaps more than most authors of fiction, Verne wrote in response to the perspectives and exploits of a wide range of his contemporaries. Among these were friends and colleagues including the famous explorer Jacques Arago, Verne's mathematician cousin Henri Garcet, and notorious daredevil balloonist Félix Tournachon, known to most Parisians by his popular pseudonym "Nadar." Nadar especially helped Verne, initiating him into the mysteries of air travel and bringing Verne into his own circle of friends, which included noted engineers and scientists who ultimately provided Verne with the technical knowledge that enabled him to write his first *roman scientifique*. A second influencing factor on the author was the list of current events themselves: stories about balloon travel and daily newspaper accounts of exotic new discoveries kept Verne informed about the world around him, and he saw in these ideal scenarios for his first scientific adventure novel.

Oppression, Animal Abuse, and Environmental Concern Two distinct thematic trends can be seen in the two different periods of Verne's writing life: in the first period, his outlook is more optimistic, some say shallowly so. In the post-1886 period, a variety of pro-environment and critical social themes emerge in his works. Readers can see the oppression of the Québécois in Canada in *A Family without a Name* (1889), the ignorance and superstition of humans in the world in *The Castle of the Carpathians* (1892), and a concern for the imminent extinction of whales in *An Antarctic Mystery* (1897), among many others.

Works in Critical Context

Literary criticism has taken a number of wild turns over Verne's work. In the early years of his career it was Verne's (or, more precisely, Hetzel's) English connection with the *Boy's Own Paper* that exacerbated the growing tendency among French literary scholars to categorize Verne as an author fit only for adolescents. There was also recently a controversy over how much of the posthumous novels of the *Extraordinary Journeys* Verne's son Michel altered prior to their publication. Close inspection has revealed that Michel, who frequently assisted and collaborated with his father during the latter's final years, is now known to have been the principal author of one

posthumous and several other texts normally credited exclusively to Verne. Nevertheless, verified Jules Verne works enjoyed a renaissance long after the author's death.

Extraordinary Journeys (1863–1910) One hundred years after the publication of the first novel of the collection, Verne and his *Extraordinary Journeys* were the rage of Paris. Reprints of his novels appeared from a variety of prestigious French publishing houses. Universities began to analyze his works. Respected literary journals began to publish articles about him, with literary critics, for the first time, placing Verne “in a first-rank position in the history of French literature,” according to scholar Marc Angenot. Outside of France, too, though it took a little longer, the Verne vogue caught on. With the growing academic respectability of science fiction and the sudden popularity of “new” French literary critics, such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, on Western campuses, the study of Verne increased as well. After nearly a half-century of virtually no serious Anglo-American literary criticism on Verne, the period from 1975 to 1990 witnessed no fewer than two biographies, seven monographs, one primary and secondary bibliography, and dozens of scholarly articles in a wide variety of academic journals on this prolific French author who was for so long deemed unworthy of critical attention. And the Verne renaissance continues even today.

Although earlier responses to *Around the World in Eighty Days: The Extraordinary Journeys* tended to dismiss it as light entertainment, more recent scholarly responses have regarded it in both an analytical and historical light. Edmund Smyth, for instance, suggests that “it would be fair to state that in the popular imagination Verne and science fiction are largely synonymous, even if modern science fiction has moved far beyond the narratives of travel and endeavour which are found in *Voyage au centre de la terre*.” He notes, too, that Verne’s “writing is self-consciously wrestling with language itself, rather than being a vehicle for representation.” Coming from another angle, literary critic Daniel Compere observes, “[Verne] also tried to use the poetic function in scientific discourse, emphasizing the formal aspect of language, something unheard of in discourse of this type.”

Responses to Literature

1. The growing pessimism in Verne's private life between 1886 and 1905 had its counterpart in the French social climate of the 1880s and 1890s. Consider the factors of the severe long-term economic crisis from 1882 to 1895 in France. How was the mood of the time reflected in Verne's later work? Provide and analyze examples.
2. In the early 1990s, a Jules Verne manuscript was discovered, and newspapers all over the world chronicled the events leading up to the new find. In 1994 Random House published *Paris in the Twen-*

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also indulged in science-based schemes and themes:

“The Birth-Mark” (1843), a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this romantic piece, a scientist challenges nature for its imperfections—which are found on his wife's cheek.

The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress (1966), a novel by Robert A. Heinlein. In this science fiction work, the physical properties of humans are challenged by conditions on the surface of the moon where they are setting up a colony.

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886), a novella by Robert Louis Stevenson. In this classic, a man fools with science by experimenting on himself—with very poor results.

The Time Machine (1895), a novel by H. G. Wells. In this work, the protagonist travels to the distant future where he meets the Eloi and Morlocks.

tieth Century. Research the discovery of this “lost” novel. Why was it not published during Verne's lifetime? Does it show the same optimistic outlook regarding technology that the author's other early work shows? How has this been changing scholarly opinion on how Verne's attitudes toward technology changed as he got older?

3. Jules Verne has been acknowledged as being brilliant in his careful predictions about the future, many of which accurately anticipated inventions and technologies not even sketched in any blueprint in his time: America's Apollo space program and the initial velocity necessary for escaping Earth's gravity; air conditioning; automobiles; television; and even the Internet. Did Verne's work—on your reading—simply predict the future, or did it also inspire it? Based on your examination of a specific technology, to what extent do you think each was the case?
4. Jules Verne is considered the “father of science fiction.” Consider the genre: is science fiction really different from other fiction? If so, how is it different? Consider essays such as Isaac Asimov's “The Little Tin God of Characterization.” What makes characters in science fiction any more or less believable than in other fiction?

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Alfred de Vigny

BORN: 1797, Loches, France

DIED: 1863, Paris, France

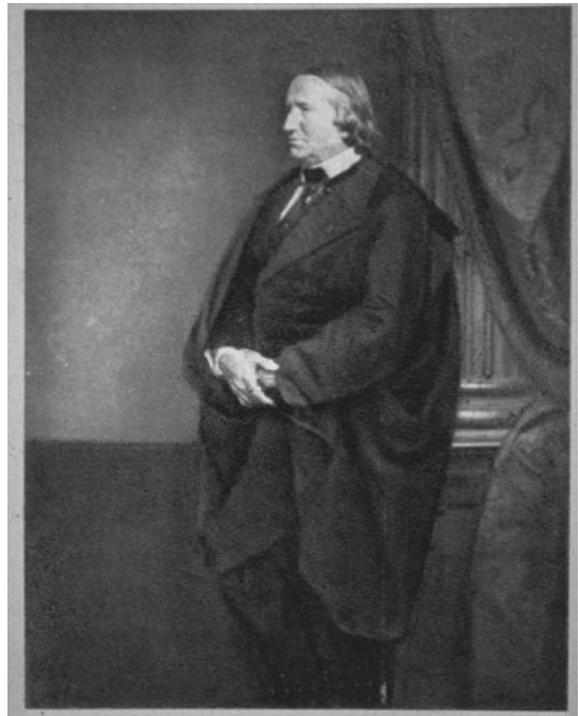
NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:*Cinq-Mars; or, A Conspiracy under Louis XIII* (1826)*Stello: A Session with Doctor Noir* (1832)*Chatterton* (1835)*The Military Necessity* (1835)

Overview

Alfred de Vigny is known for his philosophical plays, short stories, and poems, which are recognized as an important part of the French Romantic movement of the nineteenth century. In particular, his drama *Chatterton* contributed significantly to the development of the Romantic movement in French literature. Critics agree that Vigny is most admired and philosophical themes.



Alfred, Comte de Vigny (Vigny, Alfred, Comte de, photograph, The Library of Congress)

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Association with the Romantics Vigny was born at Loches in the Touraine region of France to aristocratic parents who, though once wealthy, had lost their fortune during the French Revolution less than a decade before. The French Revolution had been a revolt of the working class against the rule and power of the nobility and the clergy; because of this, noble families such as Vigny's were stripped of much of their past prestige and wealth after the revolution. The family moved to Paris where Vigny was raised among the nostalgic survivors of the old nobility of prerevolutionary France. In 1814 he followed family tradition by joining the Royal Guard, where he served for thirteen years.

During this period he renewed his ties with his childhood friend Émile Deschamps; in 1820, he met through Deschamps the growing body of Romantics—including Antony Deschamps, Jacques Ancelot, Alexandre Soumet, Pierre Guiraud, Jules de Rességuier, and Gaspard de Pons—who belonged to the first Cénacle and met in the home of Charles Nodier. They soon gravitated toward Victor Hugo,

with whom the aspiring poet Vigny became, for a while at least, the best of friends. Vigny made his poetic debut in the December 1820 issue of Victor, Abel, and Eugène Hugo's *Conservateur littéraire*.

Poetry Vigny began his literary career by writing poetry. He wrote slowly and with difficulty, leaving less than three dozen "poèmes," long philosophical pieces of sustained verse on generally grandiose themes, on which his reputation primarily rests. Despite money worries, he was never constrained to live by his pen and could afford both the slow maturation of his poetry and the long delays during its composition and revision. He abandoned or destroyed a great deal of material. He regarded himself, as he wrote in his *Journal*, as "a sort of epic moralist." *Poèmes antiques et modernes*, which includes the ten works published in *Poèmes* and *Eloa; ou, La soeur des anges, mystère*, contains twenty-one poems that are divided into three groups according to their sources of inspiration: mystical, ancient, and modern poems. The ancient group is further divided into biblical and Homeric poems.

Novels, Drama, and Other Writings *Cinq-Mars; or, A Conspiracy under Louis XIII* is Vigny's first significant novel. Influenced by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, this historical novel about the age of Louis XIII concentrates on the historical events of the period at the expense of its fictional scenes, which, according to critics, are flat and lack a genuine warmth and vitality.

Vigny's theatrical career began with his successful translation and adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* for the French stage. *Chatterton* followed, as a dramatic adaptation of Vigny's own short story "Chatterton," which depicts the fate of the poet Thomas Chatterton, who is eventually driven to suicide by a materialistic society that neither appreciates his talent nor offers him love. The play is classical in its taut construction, simple plot, and restrained emotion. Yet the attack on society, moral examination of the hero's soul, and impassioned defense of emotion over reason all contributed to its success as a Romantic drama.

Vigny's writings also include a significant collection of short prose works, including *Stello: A Session with Doctor Noir*, which represent his attempts to combine philosophy with storytelling. In these works, he consistently defended what he considered to be the outcasts of society: the poet, soldier, and visionary. The work testifies to Vigny's bitterness toward a society that, in his view, despises genius. *The Military Necessity*, similar in form and thought to *Stello*, consists of three stories unified by the author's personal comments on the role of the soldier, who is also a victim of society. Vigny depicted the struggle between the requirements of the soldier's conscience and the dictates of war; he contended that the soldier's greatness lies in his dignified and passive obedience to authority. Vigny began a third collection of stories on the suffering of the religious prophet, but he only completed one story, titled *Daphne*. In comparing these

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Vigny's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): An English naturalist, Darwin proposed and explained the processes of evolution and natural selection in such a satisfactory manner that his theories now form the basis of modern biology and evolutionary theory.

Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794–1876): Over four turbulent decades, Santa Anna held various military and political positions, rising as high as president and general; fighting both against and in favor of Mexican independence; and infamously leading the Mexican forces in an ill-fated attempt to suppress the Texan Revolution.

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875): A Danish author, Andersen penned several famous fairy tales, including "The Little Mermaid," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "The Ugly Duckling," that are now considered international treasures.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859): French historian and political philosopher, de Tocqueville wrote the two-volume *Democracy in America*, a study of early American democracy and its effects on the average person.

Napoléon III (1808–1873): Born Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, nephew to the legendary general, Napoléon III was an unlikely politician who rose to become president of the French Republic, then proclaimed himself emperor of the Second Empire, a title he held until he was deposed in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): One of the true geniuses of the Enlightenment period, Goethe was an acclaimed author and poet, theologian, philosopher, and scientist. His two-part play *Faust* has been hailed as one of the greatest works of world literature.

stories with his earlier prose work *Cinq-Mars*, critics commend Vigny's improved literary technique. Both collections of stories are admired for their simple plots, especially the two stories, "Laurette; ou, Le cachet rouge," and "La vie et la mort du capitaine Renaud; ou, La canne de jonc," which are often cited as Vigny's best fiction.

Disillusionment and Isolation Near the end of his military service, he married Lydia Bunbury, the daughter of a rich and eccentric Englishman who disapproved of Vigny and promptly disinherited her. Lydia became a chronic invalid shortly thereafter, and the marriage rapidly disintegrated. Vigny turned to other women for comfort, including the great Romantic actress Marie

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Vigny was one of the leading lights of the Romantic movement in French theater; other works that touch upon Romantic themes include:

La Morte Amoureuse (1836), a short story by Théophile Gautier. Combining Gothic and Romantic themes, this short story by one of the acknowledged masters of Romanticism tells the story of a priest who falls in love with a woman who turns out to be a vampire.

Voyage to the Orient (1851), a nonfiction work by Gérard de Nerval. Perhaps the definitive Romantic poet, Nerval also penned this hallucinatory travel account of a drug-fueled trip through the Middle East in the 1840s. His work would prove a tremendous influence on later Symbolists and surrealists.

René (1802), a novella by François-René de Chateaubriand. Considered by many critics to be the first true work of French Romanticism, this novella—by the man who inspired Romantics as much through his lifestyle as through his writings—includes all the classic elements of Romantic drama, particularly in its sensitive young protagonist's rebellions against society.

Dorval. Disillusioned by politics, failed love affairs, and his lack of recognition as a writer, Vigny withdrew from Parisian society after 1840. In 1845 he was elected to the prestigious literary Académie française after several unsuccessful attempts. Three years later, Vigny retreated to the family home at Charente, for which the French critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve coined the famous phrase a “tour d’ivoire,” or ivory tower, where he lived quietly until his death.

Works in Literary Context

With his collection *Poèmes antiques et modernes* Vigny championed the *poème*, which he defined as a composition in which a philosophic thought is staged under an epic or dramatic form. Vigny's *poèmes* are characterized by their stoical pessimism, compact form, and visual imagery. Their principal themes include God's indifference to humanity, women's deceit, inexorable fate, and the poet's alienation from a mediocre world. According to many critics, “Moïse” is one of the finest works in *Poèmes antiques et modernes* and an outstanding example of Vigny's use of the *poème* to dramatize a single idea through symbols. “Moïse” has been described as his pronouncement on the nineteenth-century Romantic poet's position in society.

Isolation and Misunderstanding Virtually all of Vigny's work deals with the isolation of the individual

and his belief in values that bring him into tension with a society from which he stands apart. *Stello* is essentially a collection of stories about the isolation of poets as beings superior to the rest of society and again explores the Romantic theme of being true to a vocation, whatever the cost in comfort or happiness. The work contains a condemnation of all social and political illusion and especially of philistine materialism. It also affirms the individual's duty to allow himself to be destroyed by society rather than abandon his ideal. His three major plays share the same concerns as the novels.

The poems convey images of stoical superiority, silent isolation, and dignified suffering, which take self-dramatization no doubt too far for modern taste, but which convey the quintessential Romantic need to investigate the values of the individual, especially of the outcast, who needs to remain aloof and alone in order to be true to his inner self, sometimes disguised as destiny. Vigny's poetic output was slight in quantity but was clearly intended to be prodigious in depth and to make a claim for the leadership of the new school, a role that went in the end to Victor Hugo, whose *Odes et ballades*, published in 1826, overtook Vigny's *Poèmes* in prestige and popularity.

The Reform of French Theater As early as 1823, Vigny admired Shakespeare's adroit synthesis of styles that allowed him to capture both the prosaic and lyrical aspects of the totality of human expression and aspiration. He found such attributes to be conspicuously absent in the virtually moribund neoclassical dramas of the period. He became convinced that Shakespearean drama could serve as a model for the reform and modernization of French theater.

Vigny's sporadic career as a dramatist began precisely at the time the Shakespeare controversy erupted in France during the 1820s. When his collaboration in 1827 with Émile Deschamps on a French adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (1594) was neither produced nor subsequently published, he set to work alone to translate *Othello* as *The Moor of Venice*, first performed at the Comédie-française on October 24, 1829. Vigny wanted his adaptation to serve as a point of mediation between the neoclassical factions that resisted all change and the Romantic innovators who advocated a complete revamping of the French stage. His translation endeavored to show that a new style, crucially informed by a different worldview, could triumph over the arbitrary limitations imposed by neoclassicism. His adaptation of *Othello* succeeded in softening the diehard resistance of opponents of Shakespeare and may be justifiably credited with preparing the atmosphere that enabled the success of Hugo's *Hernani* in 1830 and other daring dramas later.

Works in Critical Context

Vigny's works have received significant critical acclaim but little popular support. Only *Cinq-Mars* was an immediate popular success, yet it is ignored today. While *Chatterton* influenced the course of French Romantic drama, it, too,

has fallen into neglect. Of Vigny's collections of stories, *Stello* and *The Military Necessity* have enjoyed both popular and critical acclaim since their publication. Most critics also agree that Vigny conveys his philosophy most successfully in his poetry. For instance, *Les Destinées: Poèmes philosophiques* is generally considered to be Vigny's greatest poetic achievement, though some scholars have termed many of the poems uneven in quality. Nevertheless, Albert Thibaudet called *Les Destinées's* tercets "the most lastingly luminous poems, the fixed stars of French poetry," and a further example of Vigny's substantial contribution to the development of nineteenth-century French literature.

Poèmes antiques et modernes The collection of poems elicited mixed popular and critical reaction. Critics point to Vigny's inconsistency, inauthenticity, and not-so-subtle moral lessons. Whatever else, *Poèmes antiques et modernes* attested to the significant accomplishment of a poet whose verse was intricately linked to the mood and tenor of the new civilization being fashioned in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Cinq-Mars *Cinq-Mars* proved to be an immediate popular success in 1826. A second printing came out in June of the same year, and by 1827, Vigny counted thirteen printings in various formats—this despite glaring shortcomings in the novel. Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve criticized the work severely in the *Globe*, chiding Vigny for his outrageous falsification of historical personalities and events and for the irritating anachronisms that undermined the narrative at crucial intervals. He alluded to chapter 20, "The Reading," as a case in point. Vigny situates the episode in the salon of the celebrated courtesan Marion Delorme in 1642. Members of the audience listen distractedly to Milton as he reads from *Paradise Lost* (actually not written until 1665). In the background, a somewhat larger group listens in rapt attention to a libertine poet discuss Madeleine de Scudéry's "Map of Love" from *Clélie*, which she published between 1654 and 1661. Such anachronisms and sudden shifts in plot development were bound to disconcert the more discerning reader. Even the portrait of the main protagonist is, at times, skimmed over in rather cavalier fashion.

Legacy Alfred de Vigny, poet, novelist, and dramatist, was an influential figure in the Romantic movement, particularly as it developed in the late 1820s and 1830s. His influence on the direction of French theater was profound, despite the fact that his dramatic output was relatively small. He completed only three original plays, each of which he saw produced and published, and several translations of Shakespeare, only one of which was produced in his lifetime.

Responses to Literature

1. Read a selection of poems from the early years of Vigny's career and some from his later years. In an essay, compare and contrast how Vigny's philosophical views seem

to change between his early and later writings. Use specific examples from the poetry to support your ideas.

2. The plays *Chatterton* and *Stello* share a similar focus. With a group of your classmates, discuss what you think that focus is. How are the two plays linked through this shared theme?
3. Write an informal essay in which you describe the sort of picture of military life Vigny paints in *The Military Necessity*. What do you think his motivation was for depicting military life in such a light?
4. Make a chart in which you list and define the attributes of French Romanticism in one column, and in the other, list the attributes of *Chatterton* that make it an exemplar of Romantic drama.

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Elio Vittorini

BORN: 1908, Syracuse, Sicily, Italy

DIED: 1966, Milan, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Petty Bourgeoisie (1931)

Conversation in Sicily (1941)

The Red Carnation (1948)

The Dark and the Light: Erica and La Garibaldina (1956)

Women of Messina (1949–1964)

Overview

Elio Vittorini is among Italy's most distinguished writers of the mid-twentieth century. Vittorini was both an artist and a cultural entrepreneur. He wrote six novels—of



Elio Vittorini Vittorini, Elio, photograph. AP Images.

which one is unfinished and another is a long fragment—and some fifty short stories, while his many articles on literature, fine arts, politics, culture, and book and movie reviews appeared in approximately forty newspapers, journals, and magazines. In addition, he translated works of English and American literature, founded two cultural reviews, and edited three anthologies.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Sicilian Train Stations Vittorini was born in Sicily and spent much of his childhood with his father, a railroad worker, at various train stations. After only eight years of schooling, Vittorini began working in construction. By his late teens, however, he was also producing short stories. He eventually became a regular contributor of stories to the cooperatively managed periodical *Solaria*, and in 1931 he published these tales in the volume *Piccola Borghesia*. By this time Vittorini was working as a proofreader for the newspaper *La Nazione*. There he developed a command of the English language (in part, so it is rumored, by reading and rereading Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*); by the mid-1930s—after a severe bout of lead poisoning caused him to leave *La Nazione*—he was supporting himself with translations of American and British writers.

International Fame, Trouble at Home In the late 1930s Vittorini began publishing his first major work, the novel *Conversation in Sicily* (also translated as *Conversations in Sicily*), in serialization. This serial novel—produced as a book in 1941—concerns a young man whose father calls

him home after fifteen years to visit his mother, whom his father had earlier deserted. Once home, the main character meets various political figures, including both fascists and antifascists. This reflected Vittorini's own firsthand experiences with the growing importance—and criticism—of the Fascist Party in Italy during the 1920s and 1930s. On a more personal level, however, the main character also reunites with his mother and even converses with the ghost of his brother, who had perished in the Abyssinian War (fought between Ethiopia and Italy in 1885–1886, and ending in a decisive defeat for the Italians, making Ethiopia the only nation in Africa to successfully resist European colonialism with military strength). The novel ends with the return home of the father, who is forgiven by both his wife and his son.

With *Conversation in Sicily*, though, Vittorini ran afoul of Italy's Fascist leaders, who accused him of publishing subversive literature. A few years elapsed, but eventually the Fascists finally arrested him. Then, after less than a year of incarceration, he was freed as his country prepared for German occupation. Because Italy under Mussolini had been Nazi Germany's ally in World War II (1939–1945), Mussolini invited the Germans to occupy the country to protect it against the Allied forces (many Italian troops being occupied fighting in North Africa). After Mussolini was deposed by his own Grand Council of Fascism in 1943, Hitler set him up as a puppet ruler and continued using Italy as a military staging-point until Allied forces liberated the country in 1945. Living among the Italian underground (a group resisting the Germans), Vittorini wrote another novel, *Men and Not Men*. This work, which appeared in English translation in 1986, nearly forty years after its initial publication, details the often violent conflict between Italy's underground forces and the occupying Germans. In the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Eric Siggs notes the novel's "vivid, blow-by-blow account" of the "ugly, bitter contest."

Postwar Work After World War II ended, Vittorini resumed his multifaceted literary career and in the ensuing ten years produced many of his most important works. Perhaps foremost among his publications from this period is *The Twilight of the Elephant*, about an idle patriarch whose seemingly insatiable appetite threatens the remainder of his household with starvation. *The Red Carnation*, another of Vittorini's key works from this period, would have appeared several years earlier—in the mid-1930s—were it not for the then-ruling Fascists, who had prevented its publication. The novel tells of an adolescent boy who falls in love with a prostitute as he is simultaneously drawn to Fascism.

The novellas *Erica* and *La Garibaldina*, which were collected in English translation as *The Dark and the Light*, are probably the most important of Vittorini's remaining publications. Like *The Red Carnation*, *Erica* was actually written in the mid-1930s. Its heroine, an adolescent forced to fend for her younger siblings in an Italian slum, becomes an unlikely prostitute. The broader, more comical *La*

Garibaldina concerns a young soldier's encounters with hostile migrant workers and an aging camp follower.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Vittorini presided over the later period of Italian neorealism, editing and publishing new writers such as Italo Calvino, Leonardo Sciascia, and Beppe Fenoglio. He wrote little himself during his last ten years and died in Milan in 1966.

Works in Literary Context

It was while Vittorini worked as a proofreader that he "discovered" Cesare Pavese's early poetry. Vittorini used this as inspiration to incorporate "poetry" (in the sense of creative writing) into the essay material that had attached itself to the genre of the novel during the last century, and this technique is displayed in *The Red Carnation* and *Conversation in Sicily*.

Lyrical Rhythm, Allegory, and the Universe in the Past Having learned English by reading *Robinson Crusoe*, Vittorini had gone on to translate Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and William Saroyan into Italian. He read Ernest Hemingway and became friendly with him. From Saroyan and Hemingway he picked up and perfected a style based on rhythm and repetition, which went a long way to achieving his ambitions for the novel. *Conversation in Sicily* describes a journey back to his childhood roots by an autobiographical, near Dante-esque figure who is trying to make positive sense of his past and his present. Contemporary reality is superimposed on the past in symbolical and even allegorical terms. For instance, much importance is given to food: the bitter oranges of returning fruit pickers, his mother's herring, and the childhood memories of melons—a basic reality and yet symbolic of poverty, oppression, and resilience. The language used to re-create this experience is lyrical but sometimes unorthodox, and through the rhythmic repetition of certain key phrases such as "twice real" and "the extra now" the theme is raised to the level of the universal. Speaking of poetry in his postwar magazine *Il politecnico* in 1945, Vittorini said, "Poetry is poetry because it does not stay bound to its origins and if it is born of sorrow it can be linked to all sorrow."

The style and content of *Conversation in Sicily* gave the work a mythical quality and indeed, in his introduction to the novel, the author refers to its allegorical quality.

The New Italian Novel *Conversation in Sicily*—published in 1938–1939 during Mussolini's Fascist regime—was banned by government censors in 1943, although today it is unanimously regarded as one of the major achievements of Italian literature in the twentieth century. Indeed, Italo Calvino declared the novel to be the manifesto of modern Italian fiction on account of its stylistic innovations and the bold political agenda inherent in the work. *Conversation in Sicily* is one of the first examples of neorealist fiction.

Italian neorealism in the postwar period attempted to give an almost journalistic account of the stark, harsh realities of the working class. The south was a favorite

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Vittorini's famous contemporaries include:

Cesare Pavese (1908–1950): An Italian novelist, poet, and critic, Pavese was lionized after his death as one of Italy's great authors.

Agatha Christie (1890–1976): The pen name of Agatha Mary Clarissa, Lady Mallowan, this British author wrote romances, plays, and, most memorably, over eighty crime novels.

Eudora Welty (1909–2001): Starting out as a photographer during the Great Depression, Welty soon switched to literature, making a name for herself as a short-fiction writer with such works as "Why I Live at the P.O." and "A Worn Path."

Orson Welles (1915–1985): An iconoclastic American motion picture director, actor, and screenwriter who created *Citizen Kane*, often cited as the best film ever made.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): Perhaps the best-known American poet of the twentieth century, Frost's gentle, rural themes belied his deep philosophical explorations.

subject for neorealists because of the bleak situation in the rural areas of Italy. Vittorini's prose is simple and linear with brief sentences, balanced clauses, and extensive use of dialogue and repetition. The range of vocabulary is limited to the most everyday phrases and expressions, making the style the opposite of the heavy, ornate, and empty political rhetoric of Fascism.

Works in Critical Context

Vittorini's reception by readers and critics was hampered by the censorship his works were subjected to during Mussolini's rule. Often years passed between Vittorini's completion of a work and its publication in book form. Even so, the author was even then well regarded both in his native Italy and in other parts of the world where translations of his work were available. In the ensuing years, he has attained the status of a great figure in world literature, with references to his literature and critical works abounding in contemporary discourse.

Conversation in Sicily *Conversation in Sicily* became immensely popular upon translation into English in 1949. R. P. Warren, writing in the *Nation*, describes the novel as "remarkable, quite beautiful," and Bruce Taylor, in his *Chicago Sun* appraisal, notes its "positive freshness of purpose, of idea, of style." Similarly, Robert Pick hails *Conversation in Sicily* as "great" in the *Saturday Review of Literature* and adds, "To call [Vittorini] a master may be premature.... But you feel the master's hand at every page."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Allegory, or the representation of abstract concepts through concrete forms, was often employed by Vittorini, who was participating in a long and rich literary tradition. Here are some other works that employ allegory to achieve their emotional and conceptual effects:

The Divine Comedy (1308–1321), an epic poem by Dante Alighieri. Perhaps the best-known allegory in literary history, this epic three-part poem follows the author's journey from Hell to Purgatory and on to Heaven, neatly summarizing the entirety of the medieval worldview and critiquing contemporary political and religious leaders along the way.

The Trojan Women (415 BCE), a play by Euripides. In this early example of political allegory, Euripides sets his tragedy in the mythical Trojan War, but was using the play to comment directly upon Athenian policy during the then-ongoing Peloponnesian War.

Animal Farm (1945), a novella by George Orwell. By using barnyard animals in place of humans, Orwell weaves a harrowing tale of a populist rebellion that turns into tyranny, an allegorical condemnation of Stalinist communism in the Soviet Union.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950), a novel by C. S. Lewis. Lewis consciously injected his fantasy tales of Narnia, of which this novel is the first, with vivid Christian allegories—Aslan the Lion is a Christlike figure, for example.

Women of Messina Also notable among Vittorini's writings is *Women of Messina*, his novel of a Sicilian commune that slowly regains prosperity after World War II—only to consequently degenerate. In his *New Republic* review, Anthony Covatta deems *Women of Messina* Vittorini's "most extended and successful social statement." Similarly, Webster Schott, writing in *London*, describes *Women of Messina* as Vittorini's most ambitious work. "What we . . . have in *Women of Messina* is a novel of grand scale and ultimate ambition," Schott writes. "Vittorini wanted to tell us all he knew about how and why human beings behave as they do." Noting that Vittorini continually revised *Women of Messina* between its initial publication in 1949 and its reappearance in 1964, Schott called it "the kind of novel a man writes once in a lifetime, never finishes to his satisfaction, and surrenders rather than completes."

Responses to Literature

1. Vittorini wrote often of his childhood and of a longing for the land he grew up in. Find examples in his work of how he viewed his native region of Sicily.

Why do you think Vittorini left Sicily as a young man and never returned? How does that both fit and not fit with these portrayals?

2. Ernest Hemingway was an admirer of Vittorini, going so far as to write an admiring introduction to the American edition of *Conversation in Sicily*. Compare the two authors' writing styles. What similarities did they share? How were they different? Why do you think Hemingway admired Vittorini?
3. Discuss Vittorini's influence on postwar Italian writers like Italo Calvino. What elements of Vittorini's style did these writers integrate into their own work? Why do you think Vittorini has been so influential?
4. Read *Women of Messina* and comment on its implicit social theory. What idea of humanity, if any, is Vittorini espousing? Does this novel suggest a concept of human existence as a thing that may be improved, or is it guided by a darker vision? Structure your response as a thesis-driven essay, with detailed analysis of several specific passages from the novel.

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Voltaire

BORN: 1694, Paris

DIED: 1778, Paris

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Oedipus (1718)

The History of Charles XII, King of Sweden (1732)

The Elements of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy (1738)

Candide (1759)

Irene (1778)



Voltaire Stock Montage / Getty Images

Overview

For more than thirty years, scholars have been working to establish a definitive edition of Voltaire's works. Because of the vastness and variety of Voltaire's creative output as well as the seeming contradictions in his character and behavior, the story of his life is challenging and, at times, even perplexing. Voltaire wrote across genres as a poet-essayist-philosopher; he was known stylistically for his wit and thematically for his defense of civil liberties. An avid supporter of social reform in the face of strict censorship laws, he frequently used satire to criticize Catholic dogma and French institutions. The ideas Voltaire promoted in his work influenced important thinkers of both the American and French revolutions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Forged by Class and Religion Voltaire was born François-Marie Arouet on November 21, 1694, to an upper-middle-class Parisian family. At birth he was a weak child whose parents held little hope for his survival. But, under the care of a nurse, he gained his strength and within two years became a healthy and mischievous boy. Voltaire's father was a successful notary whose clients were generally rich and aristocratic. Young Voltaire grew up surrounded by wealthy, influential people who were of a higher social class than his own. Still, he had no trouble impressing everyone with his brightness and comic antics.

Even at a very early age, he loved being the center of attention. When Voltaire was ten, he was sent to an exclusive Jesuit school for boys, where he quickly gained a reputation as a class clown. Although he loved learning, he was very resentful of authority and constantly argued with his teachers over religion. During his seven years at the school, Voltaire became increasingly anti-Catholic. He strongly believed in God and in moral responsibility but denied religious authority and divine revelation.

Youthful Folly In addition to his startling views on religion, Voltaire had a fondness for writing scandalous poems and stories. Upon his graduation, he announced to his father that he intended to be a writer. His father thought that literary pursuits were useless and encouraged him to become a lawyer instead. Voltaire reluctantly agreed but spent the next couple of years mostly jobless, and writing in his spare time. In 1713, when Voltaire was nineteen, his godfather's brother was named the French ambassador to The Hague, in Holland. Complying with his father's wishes, Voltaire went along as the ambassador's page, a nonpaying job. In The Hague, he fell in love and planned to elope, but the ambassador discovered the scheme and sent Voltaire back home in disgrace.

In 1715, King Louis XIV died. His successor, Louis XV, was only five years old at the time, so for a while France was ruled by a regent, the Duke of Orléans. The duke was a man of questionable morals, and rumors about him soon began to circulate around Paris. When an anonymous poem surfaced in 1717 accusing the duke of committing incest with his daughter, there was little doubt about the identity of its author. The duke imprisoned Voltaire in the Bastille for a year. He was released in the spring of 1718, under the condition that he would not live in Paris. This was Voltaire's first taste of exile, a form of punishment he would receive several times throughout his life. He went to England and stayed at his father's country house in Chateaufort but longed to return to Paris. Meanwhile, a theater company accepted his first play, *Oedipus*, and by the time it opened in Paris, he had officially changed his name from Arouet to Voltaire. *Oedipus* was a tremendous success and by the age of twenty-four, the notorious Voltaire had become a literary sensation.

Enlightenment For the rest of his life, Voltaire worked tirelessly, writing plays, poems, novels, history books, philosophy texts, encyclopedia articles, and an endless list of pamphlets and letters. Through his works, he became known as the chief advocate of the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement rooted in the powers of human reason. Voltaire did not invent the Enlightenment; most of the views he preached had already been expressed by others. But Voltaire is regarded as a key Enlightenment thinker because—more than anyone else in his time—he helped to popularize the new philosophy in France and abroad. By exploiting every medium that existed in his day, Voltaire bombarded European culture with endless assaults against the status quo: Christianity and government practices were

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Voltaire's famous contemporaries include:

John Locke (1632–1704): Leading British empiricist and major figure of the Enlightenment.

King Louis XIV (1638–1715): Also called the Sun King, because France supposedly revolved around him, he made France more powerful in Europe.

Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727): English mathematician and physicist most famous for his theories of universal gravity.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): Irish writer responsible for *Gulliver's Travels* and the famous satire "A Modest Proposal."

his primary targets. Voltaire's writings were distinctive and easily recognizable. Still, most were published anonymously, due to the constant threat of imprisonment their author faced.

Heavily influenced by the writings of the English philosopher John Locke, Voltaire approached the study of history with an Enlightenment theme. He viewed the evolution of history as the gradual victory of rationalism over ignorance and superstition. This theme also provided the basis for many of his fictional works, most notably *Candide*. This novel stands as an all-out attack on the philosophy of optimism, which states that everything that happens—no matter how horrible—is for the best. In its place, Voltaire offers a simple, practical solution to the world's problems: cooperation.

Ferney and Later Years In the mid-1700s Voltaire served as a royal historiographer for Frederick the Great, the king of Prussia, in Berlin. After quarreling with the king in 1751, he distanced himself from the monarchy and lived off and on at Ferney on the shores of Lake Geneva. Having accumulated considerable wealth through wise investment, Voltaire added to his money by building a watchmaking industry in competition with the Swiss manufacturers. While living at Ferney, Voltaire also adopted a noble but poor girl whom he called Belle et Bonne ("beautiful and good"). She later became the Marquise de Villete. During her time with Voltaire, she served as an important source of encouragement and helped to make the last twenty years of his life the most productive ever. Much of his writing from that time championed the rights of individuals who had been mistreated.

In 1778, after a lifetime of exile, Voltaire finally returned to Paris to see the production of his last play, *Irene*. He was given a hero's welcome and spent his final days receiving guests from around the world, including

Benjamin Franklin. He died (of what was probably prostate cancer) on May 30 of that year, having lived long enough to see the first political outcome of the Enlightenment—the American Revolution. On his deathbed, he asked for paper and ink, with which he wrote: "I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition." Following Voltaire's death, the Church refused to grant permission for a burial in holy ground; however, thanks to the intervention of his nephew, Voltaire's mortal remains were finally laid to rest in a monastery in Champagne.

Works in Literary Context

Philosophical Writings: Truth and Fiction Voltaire expressed his revolutionary views about political and religious freedoms through a myriad of genres. From the epistolary style of *English Letters* (1734)—in which he framed his opinions as a series of letters addressed to a friend in France—and the fictional *Candide* to his poetry and historical studies, Voltaire presented his Enlightenment philosophies in both direct and indirect ways. Voltaire is credited for inventing the philosophical *conte*, or story, a genre that expresses intellect through fantastical or absurd happenings. Stylistically speaking, he was as conscious about the fashion with which to best present his ideas as he was about fashion itself; he felt form was the key to expression. Interestingly enough, despite Voltaire's experimentation with many different genres, he had an affinity for the theater and his critical social commentary is reflected throughout a canon of more than twenty tragedies.

Social Influence Inside and outside his texts, Voltaire championed the fight against intolerance. This activism is best illustrated by his involvement in an event in which a man named Calas, a Protestant, had been unjustly condemned by the Parliament of Toulouse for having murdered his son because he decided to follow Catholicism. Voltaire described the case in *Treaty on Tolerance* (1763). Later, he wrote in *Commentary on Crime and Punishment* (1766) that punishment should fit the offense. He denounced the provincial parliaments for abusing power as well as particular laws in their jurisdictions. In this way, he inspired a multitude of social and civil improvements. Voltaire may rightly be called the father of the rationalism of the nineteenth century and even of the twentieth. The successive waves of anticlericalism that swept first through the French bourgeoisie and then through the masses, and the harsh measures taken against the Church, may possibly be traced to his influence.

Voltaire's Self-Contradictions A survey of Voltaire's work demonstrates his changeable opinions. For example, though he could be considered an optimist by his writing in *The World* (1736), as well as in *Discourse on Man* (1738), Voltaire uses cynicism to show his pessimistic side in *Poem about the Lisbon Disaster* (1756). Furthermore, while Voltaire presented himself as a defender of free will in

Treaty on Metaphysics, he plays the role of “apologist of determinism” in both *The Ignorant Philosophy* (1755) and in his *Philosophical Dictionary*.

Works in Critical Context

“The spirit of Voltaire”—to use the title of the classic work by Norman Torrey—remains vital and alive through his textual wit, the ironic verve of his commitments, and his sincere dedication to humanity in all of its global extent and variety. “Voltaire is a good vaccine against stupidity,” writes Emmanuel Berl in an introduction to Voltaire’s works, and that kind of protection is as crucial today as it was in Voltaire’s day.

Candide *Candide* is the most famous and widely read work by Voltaire. *Candide* was written in 1758, when Voltaire was exiled in Geneva, and published anonymously the following year. Voltaire consistently denied that he was the book’s author and even called it a “schoolboy’s joke.” Although *Candide* was banned in Geneva and ordered destroyed, it was immensely popular and contributed to the demise of optimism as a serious philosophy. Not all agreed with Voltaire’s criticisms, however; an unnamed reviewer writing for the *Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Quarterly* in 1759, took Voltaire to task for, “like other ignorant persons,” either failing to understand the essence of the Optimists’ argument or deliberately distorting it in order to prove it ludicrous. Still, James Boswell, writing in *The Life of Samuel Johnson* in 1791, noted that Voltaire had refuted Optimism “with brilliant success.” It is perhaps an indication of Voltaire’s success in this regard that scholars in the decades that followed spent a great deal of time analyzing not *Candide* but Voltaire’s numerous other works. It has also been argued that because the work is ultimately a philosophical critique—albeit an effective one—it is not worthy of study as literature. More recent scholars have focused on the specifics of Voltaire’s writing, such as the structure of his sentences (as in a 1959 Ira O. Wade essay), or on the political and philosophical context in which it was written.

Zadig According to Andrée Maurois,

Voltaire’s contemporaries . . . attached little importance to frivolous stories in which what struck them most forcibly were numerous allusions to the author’s personal enemies. ‘It is easy to recognize Voltaire under the disguise of the sagacious Zadig. The calumnies and spite of courtiers . . . the disgrace of the hero are so many allegories to be interpreted easily enough. It is thus that he takes revenge upon his enemies.’ The abbé Boyer, who was the Dauphin’s tutor and a powerful ecclesiastic, took in very bad part the attacks on one whose identity was but thinly concealed behind the anagram Reyob. ‘It would please me mightily if all this to-do about *Zadig* could be ended,’ wrote Madame du Chatelet, and it was not long before

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Voltaire’s works are inherently philosophical and oftentimes political. Even his novels have an agenda and a slant. Here are some other works that offer severe critiques of society under the guise of fantastical fiction.

Gulliver’s Travels (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. In this parodic and satirical novel, the title character comes across fantastic beings, many of which are morally and intellectually superior to our own race.

The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896), a novel by H. G. Wells. In this novel, an evil scientist inhumanely breeds animal hybrids and raises questions of whether humans have the right to play God.

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This book, in part about the apparent disappearance of many of the world’s most significant minds, offers a fictionalized argument in favor of Rand’s own philosophy, known as Objectivism.

The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), a novel by Ursula K. Le Guin. Considered “feminist science fiction,” Le Guin’s novel centers around a race of cyclically hermaphroditic beings.

Voltaire disowned a book ‘which some there are who accuse of containing audacious attacks upon our holy religion.’

Responses to Literature

1. Write a paragraph in which you describe the balanced religion of Eldorado as described in *Candide*.
2. Use resources from your library or the Internet to research the difference between Optimism and Enlightenment. Then, create an electronic or poster presentation in which you compare and contrast the two movements.
3. Read *Candide* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. Make a chart in which you compare and contrast Gulliver and *Candide*.
4. Write an essay in which you explore whether you think *Candide* is an interesting character, or whether he is just important because of his travels and discoveries.
5. After reading selections from Voltaire’s work, write an essay on how his fictional writing demonstrates influences from his historical writing.

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▣ Andrei Voznesensky

BORN: 1933, Moscow, Soviet Union

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Mosaic (1960)

Antiworlds (1964)

Voznesensky: Selected Poems (1966)

Nostalgia for the Present (1978)

Overview

“The name of Voznesensky in Soviet poetry often becomes the centre of heated discussion,” observed Vladimir Ognev. “The young poet leaves nobody indifferent. Widely differing estimations are given to his poetry—some call him a daring innovator, others a cold rhymester.” Regardless of the more critical views of his work, Voznesensky warmed the hearts of his followers and heated the tempers of Soviet officials during his rise to international prominence in the 1960s. His swift, uncluttered, and often bold verse differed radically from the restricted poetry the Soviet Union had known in the Joseph Stalin years, and Russian audiences responded enthusiastically to the young poet’s work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Surrounded by Books As a child, Voznesensky was introduced to Russia’s great literary tradition by his



Andrei Voznesensky © Christopher Felver / CORBIS

mother, who surrounded him with books by great authors such as Aleksandr Blok, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Boris Pasternak and read poetry to him as well. Voznesensky experimented a bit with writing when he was young, but devoted himself mainly to painting and drawing. After he received his degree from the Moscow Architectural Institute, however, his interest in architecture dropped. Some of his poems appeared in magazines at that time and two years later, in 1960, he published his first book, *Mosaic*.

As a teenager, Voznesensky had sent some of his poems to Pasternak, who consequently invited Voznesensky to visit. The poems were obvious Pasternak imitations. Later, though, Voznesensky sent some of his postgraduate poems to Pasternak, revealing an entirely different poet. In the 1980s, Voznesensky participated in the drive to reinstate Pasternak into the Soviet Writers Union, giving the writer official status in the Soviet Union for the first time since 1958.

Success and Change Several factors contributed to Voznesensky's "meteoric" rise from a developing poet to one of the Soviet Union's most prominent literary figures. To begin with, poetry is Russia's "national art," contends Voznesensky. In addition, his generation was financially and politically in a position to afford and appreciate poetry readings. By American standards, the audiences were stupendous. Typical crowds for readings by Voznesensky numbered more than fourteen thousand. Enthusiasm for the printed word matched the enthusiasm for the spoken word. Even today, Voznesensky's new books sell out within hours of publication.

Problems with Authority To Soviet government officials and heads of the Soviet Writers Union, Voznesensky was somewhat more of an individual than they would have liked. Many times during his career, he has been at the center of controversy. One especially noteworthy denunciation took place in 1963, when Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev reprimanded Voznesensky and other Western-oriented intellectuals, accusing them of straying from the paths of "Soviet realism." The Soviet regime at the time subscribed to the notion of socialist realism, in which art was seen as a tool for expressing the ideals and praising the accomplishments of the Soviet people; art for any other purpose was viewed as non-productive at best, and destructive to society at worst. Attacks continued in 1965 when the government-controlled Communist youth newspaper accused him of obscurity of content and experimenting with complicated poetic forms. By 1969, government suppression had erased Voznesensky's name from Soviet literary journals. A decade later, in 1979, Voznesensky and several other writers were chastised for their roles in the publication of *Metropol*, a new literary magazine that challenged the government's strict control of the arts.

One much publicized incident involving Soviet restrictions occurred in 1967, when a New York City reading had to be canceled. Two days before the scheduled reading, rumors circulated, suggesting that Voznesensky had been the target of governmental attempts to detain or restrict him. At first, messages from Moscow said Voznesensky was sick, yet later reports revealed that his passport had indeed been sent to the U.S. Embassy with a request for a visa. But renewed hope for Voznesensky's appearance faded when the poet himself phoned New York and canceled his visit.

Publications and Continuing Popularity His first two major translated volumes are *Antiworlds* and *Voznesensky: Selected Poems*, in which Voznesensky stresses the importance of human values through works of irony and eroticism. Voznesensky's later works have benefited from the increased artistic freedom permitted under the rule of Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Critics assert that Voznesensky's contemporary poems are more thoughtful, direct, and dynamic than his earlier

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Voznesensky's famous contemporaries include:

- Mikhail Gorbachev** (1931–): Last head of state of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and contributor to the end of the cold war.
- Boris Yeltsin** (1931–2007): First president of the Russian Federation after Gorbachev and the fall of Communism.
- Yevgeny Yevtushenko** (1933–): Voznesensky's peer and fellow poet; the two are often compared or confused with one another.
- Bella Akhmadulina** (1937–): Russian female poet whose works, despite the times, are decidedly antipolitical.

verse. Voznesensky also comments on such modern problems as Siberia's water pollution and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, which resulted in the forced permanent relocation of over three hundred thousand citizens. *An Arrow in the Wall: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1987) probes humanity's pretensions through extensive use of irony. Reviewers lauded the volume's humor and sincerity, and he is regarded as one of Russia's finest to this day.

Works in Literary Context

Pop Culture A trademark characteristic of Voznesensky's work is its use of cultural references from around the world and throughout modern history. In one of his most celebrated poems, "I Am Goya," Voznesensky expounds on the destruction and wars that have ravaged Russia by utilizing the persona of Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), the Spanish painter whose works reflect the political and social upheavals of his time. Loss of identity is explored in "Monolog Merlin Monroe" and "Oza" through two distinctly different techniques. The first poem, a discussion of ill-fated actress Marilyn Monroe, shows how the manipulative power of society can turn individuals into objects, while "Oza," a spoof of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," examines the bewilderment of artists in a technocratic world.

Nationalism and Internationalism Despite his conflicts with Soviet authorities, Voznesensky maintains an intense love for his own country. In one poem, for example, "he exalted the ancient idea that Russia's mission is to save the world from darkness," reported the *New York Times*. Voznesensky has also admired the United States and, particularly, Robert Kennedy. The poet and the senator met in 1967 and discussed, among other topics, the youth of their respective countries. After Kennedy's death, Voznesensky published a poem paying tribute to his assassinated friend.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Voznesensky is concerned with political oppression, most likely inspired by the censorship of his own work in the Soviet Union. Though many of his peers chose to avoid being political for these reasons, he soldiered on and made an impact on the literary scene. Here are some other works that are defiantly—and often controversially—political.

The Prince (1532), an essay by Niccolò Machiavelli. This list of rules for a leader to follow has often been criticized as cruel, and it has a decidedly untrusting slant.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Not only did this book portray the cruelty of slavery and advocate abolition, but some say it helped spark the American Civil War.

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. The basis for this famous, intricate book is the French Revolution.

1984 (1949), a novel by George Orwell. Though cloaked in the guise of fiction, this novel is obviously a warning against totalitarianism in England and Europe.

Works in Critical Context

Voznesensky has become a favorite of several distinguished American literary figures. Among the poets who have translated his work into English are Stanley Kunitz, Richard Wilbur, William Jay Smith, Robert Bly, W. H. Auden, Allen Ginsberg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. In his introduction to *Nostalgia for the Present*, playwright Arthur Miller assessed Voznesensky's efforts: "He has tried to speak, in these poems, as though he alone had a tongue, as though he alone had learned the news of today and tomorrow, as though the space taken up by his poem were precious and must not be used by counterfeit words." Another Voznesensky admirer, W. H. Auden, once gave these reasons for appreciating the poet: "As a fellow maker, I am struck first and foremost by his craftsmanship. . . . Obvious, too, at a glance is the wide range of subject matter by which Mr. Voznesensky is imaginatively excited . . . and the variety of tones, elegiac, rebellious, etc., he can command. Lastly, every word he writes, even when he is criticizing, reveals a profound love for his native land and its traditions."

Selected Poems Translations have been a difficulty with reviewers of Voznesensky's work, especially in some of the earlier volumes. Anselm Hollo's translations in *Selected Poems*, for example, disappointed Gibbons Ruark. Voznesensky's "work is clearly superior to Yevtushenko's," Ruark wrote in comparing the two poets. "Unfortunately, his excellence seldom shows through Anselm Hollo's translations." Critics agreed that Herbert

Marshall's translations in *Voznesensky: Selected Poems* surpassed Hollo's. "The volume of selections by Herbert Marshall is, on the whole, an improvement over Anselm Hollo," wrote the *Hudson Review*. "But it is still an awkward and in places a careless performance." Other translations of Voznesensky's work have received considerably more praise.

Antiworlds In his review of *Antiworlds*, Graham Martin noted "Voznesensky's main bogey is the 'cyclotron,' symbol of all the dehumanising pressures in the modern world, and in 'Oza,' a long difficult poem, he deploys all his satiric force against 'the scientist,' damn his eyes." Similarly, M. L. Rosenthal found in Voznesensky "a satirist . . . who is against the computerization of the soul." As Auden pointed out, however, Voznesensky's focus can vary considerably. Miller Williams explained: "Voznesensky is an exciting writer who bangs and tumbles through his poems, knocking over icons and knocking down walls, talking with curiosity, anguish, and joy—in sharp and startling metaphor—about love and technology, science and art, the self and the soul and Andrei Voznesensky and people." Another admirer, A. Alvarez, praised Voznesensky, too, for "whatever direct, passionate thrust launches them [his poems in *Antiworlds*], they curve obliquely and brilliantly through layer after layer of experience before they land again."

Responses to Literature

1. Read two or three of Voznesensky's poems. With a classmate, discuss how Voznesensky's feelings toward technology are revealed in these works. Look specifically at language and imagery.
2. Using resources at your library or on the Internet, research Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Read one or two of Yevtushenko's poems. Then read one or two of Voznesensky's poems. Finally, using examples from the poems to support your opinions, write an essay in which you compare and contrast Yevtushenko's style with Voznesensky's.
3. Using resources at your library or on the Internet, research the Cold War. Then read one or two of Voznesensky's poems. Write an essay describing how the effects of the cold war are present in the poems you chose.
4. With a group of your classmates, discuss how political oppression could have actually helped Voznesensky's writing. Use examples from poems that you have read to support your ideas.

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W-Z

Derek Walcott

BORN: 1930, Castries, Saint Lucia

NATIONALITY: West Indian

GENRE: Poems, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Drums and Colours (1958)

In a Green Night (1962)

Another Life (1973)

The Star-Apple Kingdom (1979)

Omeros (1989)

Overview

For some forty years, Derek Walcott has been the leading poet and playwright of the West Indies. Winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature, Walcott is highly regarded for poetry and plays that focus on the mixed African and European influences of his Caribbean heritage. His poetic language reflects this cultural division, employing both the formal, structured language of Elizabethan verse and the colorful dialect of his native island, St. Lucia. His plays have ranged in subject matter from adaptations of classical Greek drama to topical explorations of everyday problems. While embracing the literary tradition of England, Walcott has frequently denounced the exploitation and suppression of Caribbean culture that resulted from British colonial rule.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Divided Loyalties Derek Alton Walcott was born on January 23, 1930, on St. Lucia, a small island in the West Indies. His mother was a schoolteacher who encouraged his early education and love for reading. She was also involved in a community cultural group and got her son involved in local theater. His father, a civil servant, poet, and visual artist, died when Derek and his twin brother, Roderick, were only one year old. Walcott drew inspira-

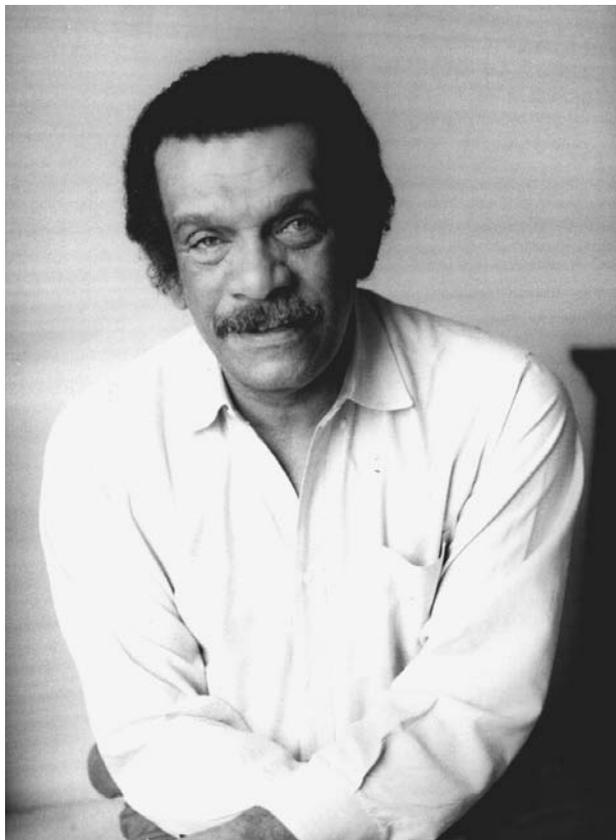
tion from the poems and watercolor paintings his father left behind and soon came to regard his own single-minded commitment to the artistic life as being a matter of completing what his father had begun.

Walcott has characterized his childhood as “schizophrenic,” referring to the divided loyalties associated with his African and English ancestry as well as the fact that he grew up in a middle-class Methodist family in a society that was predominantly Roman Catholic and poor. This sense of divided identity would become one of the main themes of Walcott’s writing.

The colonial education Walcott received exposed him to the heritage of English literature, for which he displayed an affinity. He began writing poetry at an early age, often imitating such writers as W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Dylan Thomas. When he was eighteen, he financed the publication of *Twenty-Five Poems* (1948), his first poetry collection. While studying literature at St. Mary’s College in St. Lucia and at the University of West Indies in Jamaica, he completed two more volumes of poetry and wrote *Henri Christophe*, a historical play written in verse. The play was staged in 1950 by the St. Lucia Arts Guild, which he had helped to found earlier in the same year. He earned his bachelor of arts degree in 1953 in English, French, and Latin.

Creating a West Indian Theater During his years in Jamaica in the 1950s, he became more locally popular, especially through the many productions of his plays, most of which he directed himself. In 1958, Walcott was commissioned to write a play for the opening of the first Federal Parliament of the West Indies. The result was *Drums and Colours*, a pageant that chronicles the history of the Caribbean in four episodes. Each episode centers on the story of a great historical figure: Christopher Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, Toussaint L’Overture, and the Jamaican nationalist George William Gordon, in chronological order.

Drums and Colors brought Walcott both critical recognition and a Rockefeller Fellowship to study theater in



Derek Walcott Walcott, Derek, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

the United States. He stayed less than a year, and upon his return to the Caribbean, became intensely involved in Trinidad's artistic community, writing reviews and organizing the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, where several of his plays were produced during the 1950s and 1960s.

Career Reaches New Heights *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) is often considered Walcott's most successful play. The 1960s and the 1970s were also the period when Walcott gained international stature as a poet. *In a Green Night* (1962) included such soon-to-be-famous pieces as "A Sea Chantey," a litany of his love for the islands; "A City's Death by Fire"; "Ruins of a Great House," which wrestled with the understandable Caribbean rage at a history centered on slavery; and "A Far Cry from Africa," in which the poet captured the West Indian's dilemma with the lines, "The gorilla wrestles with the superman. / I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" The scope of Walcott's visibility widened when the New York publisher Farrar, Straus published his *Selected Poems* in 1964.

Revolution and Politics In *The Castaway, and Other Poems* (1965), Walcott used the iconic figure of

Robinson Crusoe to explore themes of alienation and isolation. The early 1970s were a time of political turmoil in the West Indies, as the socialist and "Black Power" movements confronted established governments. Walcott rejected radical platforms for social revolution, but was outspoken in his concern for the poor and his insights into the lasting legacies of colonial rule. From this period on, Walcott's political commitments became increasingly visible in his writing. He maintained a high literary output. Among his works of the 1970s are his autobiography in verse, *Another Life* (1973), two further volumes of poetry, *Sea Grapes* (1976) and *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979), and the musical play *O Babylon!* (1976), which concerns the Rastafarians of Jamaica. Rastafarianism is a fairly new religion that emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s; it combines Biblical teachings with the belief that Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia, was God incarnate.

The Fortunate Traveler in the United States

Derek Walcott received the lucrative and prestigious John D. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1981. Early in 1982, he accepted a position as visiting professor of English at Boston University. He has been teaching in American universities ever since. Although he relocated to the United States, he has continued to return to the Caribbean frequently to have plays produced there.

In the deepest sense, Walcott never left the Caribbean, even though he agonized about having left it, for his concerns remained exclusively with the legacy of Caribbean history. His poetry continues to delve into themes of division, whether in the form of inequality between rich and poor, as in "North and South" from *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), or his own situation as a displaced exile, as in "Here" and "Elsewhere" from *The Arkansas Testament* (1987). His representation of the North, whether Europe or the United States, is always from the point of view of the Caribbean person.

Homeric Echoes Two highlights of Walcott's later career brought to a culmination his imaginative use of the classics, and more particularly, of Homer. In 1990, Walcott published his monumental *Omeros*. *Omeros* imagines West Indian fishermen, prostitutes, and landlords in such classical roles as Achilles, Helen, and Hector. It interweaves their story with its echoes of Homer, with the story of a retired British officer living in his adopted colonial home. The poet and narrator each appears as a character in his own fiction.

This achievement in poetry was doubled in the area of drama by Walcott's *The Odyssey*, which premiered in 1992. His epic, commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, represented a fulfillment of Walcott's career. Like Odysseus himself, determined to return to his home of Ithaca and be reunited with his wife, Penelope, the playwright has consistently written of the wanderer, driven by the desire for home. He returned to the theme once again with *The Prodigal* (2004), a book-length

poem that celebrates the happiness of homecoming and healing of the guilt of wandering. Walcott has said this will be his final book.

Works in Literary Context

Walcott was strongly influenced by his education within the British colonial system, which immersed him in classical and English literature. Some of his earliest works represent little more than imitations of modern poets such as Joyce and Eliot. He consciously absorbed and attempted to assimilate what he once referred to in the introduction to *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970) as “The literature of Empires, Greek, Roman, British.” At the same time, staying true to his Caribbean roots and finding innovative ways to use language as a bridge between Afro-Caribbean and Western cultures have been the primary projects of his career.

Influence of Brecht Walcott’s career in the theater illustrates this effort most vividly. His early efforts to forge a new type of West Indian theater led him to adapt traditional folk tales and incorporate such folklore elements as calypso music, carnival masks, and mime. In bringing these elements under artistic control, Walcott was aided by the influence of Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright and stage director. Brecht’s theory of the “epic theater” provided the foundation for Walcott’s assimilated techniques. Through Brecht, Walcott also discovered classic Asian theater and film. Akira Kurosawa’s film *Rashômon* (1950), with its shifting perspectives on the reality of one event, is clearly a basis for Walcott’s 1959 play *Malcauchon*.

Friends and Collaborators Walcott met and befriended the American poet Robert Lowell in Trinidad in 1962, not long after the publication of *In a Green Night*. Lowell enthusiastically praised Walcott’s work, and Walcott has acknowledged Lowell’s influence on his poetry. Walcott’s commitment to the discipline of verse found encouragement in two literary friendships he developed on relocating to the United States: with Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney, two of the most considerable poets of his time. All three were to become Nobel laureates (Brodsky in 1987, Heaney in 1995), and all three were published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Additionally, the three men were all outsiders in the United States: Brodsky was an exiled Russian, and Heaney an Irish expatriate. The three poets collaborated on a book, published in 1996, celebrating the work of American poet Robert Frost.

Regional and Worldwide Influence Derek Walcott’s artistic influence in the Caribbean is towering. He is a revered figure on his native islands. No writer has done more to fuse the Caribbean and European cultural traditions, while exploring the many tensions between them. His literary success has encouraged many younger Caribbean artists, many of whom have also spent time in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Walcott’s famous contemporaries include:

- Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian author and poet famous for his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is seen as the archetypal modern African novel in English.
- George Lamming** (1927–): Novelist and essayist born in Barbados, who led a Caribbean renaissance in England.
- Seamus Heaney** (1939–): Irish poet and Nobel laureate.
- Athol Fugard** (1932–): South African playwright.
- Michael Manley** (1924–1997): Served eleven years as prime minister of Jamaica.

the United States or the United Kingdom. The success of his Trinidad Theatre Workshop has inspired new companies throughout the West Indies.

More broadly, Walcott has become a prominent voice in what has come to be called postcolonial literature, linking his work thematically with that of African and Asian authors. His international acclaim affirms the importance of small places, showing that writers from the outposts of world power who focus on the concerns of their place and people need not be dismissed as too regional or parochial.

Works in Critical Context

Even before receiving the Nobel Prize, Walcott enjoyed an international reputation placing him among the greatest of contemporary English writers. Although many of his plays are highly regarded, the strength of his reputation rests primarily on his lyric poetry. Throughout his career, though, he has had to contend with the charge that he is so deeply influenced by Western tradition that he has yet to achieve his own voice. Beginning in the 1960s with Walcott’s first books, there were reservations about the artificiality of a West Indian using such “eloquent English.” Some critics have charged that Walcott’s written expression is so refined and technically intricate that it can obscure or overshadow his meaning. Such criticism arises in part from his efforts, some more successful than others, to blend Afro-Caribbean folk styles and classical European poetics. Over time, these critical voices have diminished somewhat, as his accomplishments are more widely recognized. Walcott offered a unique voice reflecting the cultural matrix of the New World.

***Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967)** The play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* was one of Walcott’s first to receive international recognition from established critics. W. I. Scobie, writing for the *National Review*, called it “a superb play,” as well as “a work of intense verbal and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Derek Walcott's poetry and plays are often categorized as postcolonial in their focus on the legacies of slavery and imperialism and the complications of clashing cultural inheritance. Here are some other important works in the postcolonial genre:

Midnight's Children (1980), a novel by Salman Rushdie. At the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, as India becomes an independent nation, two newborn infants—one from a wealthy Muslim family, one from a poor Hindu family—are switched.

In a Free State (1971), a novel by V. S. Naipaul. In these stories set in sub-Saharan Africa, the third world is a "free state" in which the characters can find nothing to belong to.

In the Skin of a Lion (1987), a novel by Michael Ondaatje. A fictional account of immigrants whose labor helped build the city of Toronto, several characters from this novel continue in the author's more widely known novel *The English Patient*.

Orientalism (1978), a nonfiction work by Edward Said. In this founding text of postcolonial studies, the author reveals the subtly demeaning codes Westerners use to discuss Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East.

The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience (1996), a collection by Meena Alexander. This collection of poems and essays follows the author from her childhood in India and the Sudan to her present home in New York City.

visual beauty, and visionary insight." Edith Oliver, reviewing the play for *The New Yorker*, states, "Every line of it plays; there are no verbal decorations."

***Another Life* (1973)** Walcott's long autobiographical poem *Another Life* divided many critics. "*Another Life* should make it clear," according to Roger Garfitt of *London Magazine*, "if it was ever in doubt, that Derek Walcott's superlative descriptions are far more than description, that they are the only feasible expression of his situation." Paul Smyth, in a review for *Poetry*, states, "It is a restless mixture of lyric and narrative, of the local and the European, of the evocative and the didactic; ultimately, its elements don't cohere or reconcile..." However, Smyth does recommend the book: "I urge everyone who cares for the wonders of fresh metaphor in the service of deep thought and feeling to sift *Another Life* for its triumphs." T. O'Hara offers a different opinion in *Best Sellers*, arguing that the poetry is too showy: "I was fascinated by his ingenuity but somewhat put off by the dazzling images and diction. The attention is violated in poetry like this rather than held as it should be."

O'Hara asserts that the book "suffers from a metaphor glut," and though the critic "[does not] doubt for a moment Mr. Walcott's abilities," his conclusion is that the book "doesn't work as a long poem."

Responses to Literature

1. Consider the use Walcott makes of classical references in *Omeros*. How is he asserting a connection between the heritage of ancient Greece and the present-day culture of the West Indies? Can you provide some specific examples from the text itself?
2. Do some research on the history of St. Lucia, the island nation where Derek Walcott was born. What light does this history shed on the multiple cultural traditions informing Walcott's literature?
3. Familiarize yourself with Bertolt Brecht's theory of dramaturgy, or stage direction. Which of his ideas do you think helped Derek Walcott integrate West Indian folklore with European traditions in the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, how were they used by Walcott and why were they successful?

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Edmund Waller

BORN: 1606, Coleshill, Hertfordshire, England

DIED: 1687, Beaconsfield, England

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

“The Story of Phoebus and Daphne, Applied”
(c. 1637)

“Go, Lovely Rose” (1645)

*A Panegyrick to My Lord Protector, of the present
greatness and joynt interest of His Highness,
and this nation* (1655)

*Instructions to a painter, for the drawing of a
picture of the state and posture of the English
forces at sea* (1665)

On the Park at St. James’s (1660)



Edmund Waller © Michael Nicholson / CORBIS

Overview

Edmund Waller is considered a minor poet within the English canon. He is known less for his poetry than his political activism; specifically, the thwarted royalist conspiracy known as “Waller’s Plot.” In terms of his writing, he is best recognized for “Go, Lovely Rose” (1645), which has been widely anthologized as an excellent example of a Cavalier lyric.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Wealth Waller was born to Robert Waller and Anne Hampden Waller on March 3, 1606, in Coleshill, Hertfordshire, England. His mother was a cousin by marriage to Oliver Cromwell, who would later become Britain’s ruler. Waller’s father died when Waller was twelve, leaving him a significant allowance that made him independently wealthy.

Guided by his formidable mother to adulthood, Waller attended Eton College and King’s College, Cambridge, but he never took a degree. He married Anne Banks, a wealthy heiress, on July 5, 1631. She died in 1634 while giving birth to their second child.

Parliamentarian and Middle-Aged Poet Royalist Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon and a contemporary of the poet, once wrote that Waller was “nursed in parliaments.” Although historians are uncertain about which parliament was his first, Waller himself asserted that he held his initial seat when he was only sixteen. Thus, most researchers surmise that Waller served in 1621 as a member for Agmondesham in the last parliament of King James I. In the parliament of 1624, he represented Ilchester and took a seat in the first parliament of Charles I.

Waller did not begin writing poetry until he was nearly thirty years old. He hired George Morley, who later became the bishop of Winchester, as his tutor. Waller’s poetic talent was first widely noticed in his courtship poems. In addition to love lyrics, Waller also wrote poems to politicians and royalty and poems complimenting friends and private individuals.

Waller’s Plot and Exile from England While the origins of Waller’s 1643 plot against Parliament remain unclear, scholars have pieced together the actual events of the insurrection, the arrest of Waller and his coconspirators, and Waller’s narrow escape from being executed. Essentially, Waller took the side of King Charles I against Parliament (the king and the parliament were at odds) and attempted to establish London as a stronghold for the king.

According to modern Waller critic George Thorn-Drury, Waller drew up a declaration of the conspirators’ cause, but various indiscretions and leaks from those involved reached authorities in London and brought Waller and Tomkins under scrutiny. The two were arrested on

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Waller's famous contemporaries include:

René Descartes (1596–1650): French philosopher and mathematician, he is known as “The Father of Modern Philosophy” for his profound influences on subsequent generations of thinkers. His treatises include *Passions of the Soul* (1649).

John Milton (1608–1674): English poet and essayist, he is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher, Pascal contributed to such fields as fluid studies, the construction of calculators, and the theory of probability. His writings on mathematics include “Treatise on the Arithmetical Triangle” (1653).

Jan van Riebeeck (1619–1677): This Dutch colonial administrator founded Cape Town, South Africa.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669): A Dutch painter and etcher, he is considered one of the greatest artists in European history. His paintings include *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) and *Night Watch* (1642).

May 31, 1643, and imprisoned in the Tower of London. When brought before the bar of the House of Commons to defend himself before being expelled from Parliament and remanded to a court-martial, Waller betrayed his fellow conspirators in order to attain a lenient ruling. He also appealed to his judges' interest in not setting too disgraceful and dangerous a precedent in the punishment of one of their own members of Parliament.

In addition, Waller tried to save himself by hypocritically accepting the spiritual help of nonconformist ministers, whose “ghostly assistance” he tried to buy with gifts. The leading members of the house were similarly solicited. What Waller undeniably bought—whether with his pathetic eloquence, his tactics of delay, his friends, or ready cash—was time, and thus eventually his life. After several interrupted preparations for court-martial, on September 23, 1644, a petition from “Edm. Waller, prisoner in the Tower” offered payment of a fine of ten thousand pounds and banishment from the realm. This was the judgment in fact finally handed down on November 4, 1644, giving Waller twenty-eight days from the 6th of November to leave England, not to return lest he incur the punishment both houses of Parliament saw fit.

Exile Revoked Waller's poems first found their way into print during his exile. Four editions were published in 1645, including an unauthorized volume published by Thomas Walkley in an attempt to cash in on Waller's notoriety. By the end of 1649, Waller and his second wife—Mary Bresse from the family of Thame, in Oxfordshire—had

settled in Paris, where, in contrast to the poverty and distress of most of the royalist exiles, he reportedly lived comfortably. On November 27, 1651, the House of Commons responded to “the humble petition of Edmond Waller” by revoking his sentence of banishment and ordering a pardon to be prepared for him.

Political Poems By this time, Great Britain had undergone extreme political changes. The English Civil War broke out in 1642 between Charles I, an absolutist believed to have Catholic leanings, and his royalist forces against the rising middle classes, primarily Protestant Puritans, who wanted to make Parliament superior to the monarchy. Charles was tried and executed in 1649, and Cromwell, a Puritan leader, took power as the Protector who ruled the newly created Commonwealth.

Waller ingratiated himself with Cromwell, writing in 1652, the year of his return to England, perhaps his best political poem, *A Panegyrick to My Lord Protector* (1655). In addition, Waller wrote two other poems voicing views favorable to the Protector's government, or promoting his success and greatness. Perhaps in recognition of this interest, Waller was appointed one of the commissioners for trade in December 1655. Almost immediately after another worshipful poem in 1658, his “Lord Protector” died. Waller responded with several elegies. Cromwell was succeeded by his son, Richard, who proved inept, and the monarchy was soon restored. In 1660, upon the succession of Charles II (the son of Charles I), Waller submitted his ingratiating *To the King, upon His Majesties happy return* (1660). Waller also returned to Parliament, serving again during Charles II's reign.

Final Writing Years According to the anonymous 1711 “Account of the Life and Writings,” Waller dabbled in writing for the theater, though unsuccessfully. Nevertheless, as his eighteenth-century editor Elijah Fenton puts it, “He soon relaps'd into poetry” and continued to write verse to the end of his life. Toward the end, he focused on spiritual poetry. Waller died at his home at Beaconsfield on October 21, 1687.

Works in Literary Context

Unusual Influences Waller enjoyed many unusual personal influences. For instance, Waller followed a course of study guided by Dr. George Morley, an instructor at Christ Church, Oxford. Waller took Morley to live with him and oversee his reading at Beaconsfield. Morley was a member of the “college” of serious-minded intellectuals collected by Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, at his country house, Great Tew. According to Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, Waller was heavily influenced by the artistic and political ideas of Morley and his coterie, who rejected the ambiguous poetic style of the metaphysical poets. Morley's influence may be reflected in Waller's cultivation of what is determined by scholars as a cool, balanced Augustan classicism in virtually all his

poetry. This style is one that intentionally returns to past models of writing.

Besides being informed by his social and intellectual connections, Waller's writing directly or indirectly reveals particular literary influences. In one of the sixteen Sacharissa poems, for instance, Waller refers specifically to Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590). The Sacharissa of the works is the Lady Dorothy Sidney, whom Waller was courting with the poems. Her uncle was the famous Sir Philip. In two other Sacharissa poems, Waller invokes Sidney's name and nobility. In the last poem of the series, in mock exasperation and despair, he charges that Sacharissa's refusal to be moved by his advances of love and poetry should deny her participation in such fine lineage as that of Sir Philip.

Three Styles of Poetry Waller's "essays" at verse may be categorized in three main groups: public panegyrics (formal speeches of praise), poems of compliment to private individuals, and love lyrics. First in the early collections and in the esteem of contemporaries are the panegyrics, poems of compliment with a political or larger public aspect. For example, with his "Of the Danger his Majesty (being Prince) escaped in the road at St. Andero," he turns a minor incident—Charles I's halted courtship of the Infanta of Spain while Prince of Wales—into a miniature heroic poem of 170 lines. The panegyrics aspire to a higher style—but the plain, urbane language of polished, sophisticated polite discourse is Waller's characteristic manner in most of his works.

The second type of poem composed by Waller were poems of compliment addressed to nonroyal personages or private friends and include commending verses for publications by other writers. They also include remarks on significant honors or trifling occurrences that befall the recipient; poems occasioned by illnesses; celebrations of marriages and births; funeral elegies; and epistles (or letters) of consolation. Examples include his 1665 "To His Worthy Friend, Sir Thos. Higgons, upon the Translation of 'The Venetian Triumph'" and *Instructions to a painter, for the drawing of a picture of the state and posture of the English forces at sea* (1665).

Lastly, the love lyrics embrace various Cavalier songs and the group of poems to "Sacharissa." This genre of poetry was particular to the seventeenth century Cavaliers—named for royalists during the civil wars who were supporters of King Charles I.

Influence To the generation of poets that succeeded him, Waller was one of the most important writers of the seventeenth century. Though he is now regarded as a minor poet, he anticipated the Augustan age in attitudes and diction. His versification was an important influence on John Dryden and Alexander Pope, among others.

Works in Critical Context

Waller's critical reputation has varied greatly over the past four centuries. Waller's contemporaries and the critics of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also made dedication or courtship the focus of their poetic efforts.

"Ode I–XI Carpe Diem" (c. 20 BCE), an ode by Horace. In this work, the poet urges his listener to "pluck" or "seize the day."

"The Flea" (1683), a poem by John Donne. One tiny flea connects two lovers, the speaker suggests.

"since feeling is first" (1926), a poem by e.e. cummings. In this modern seduction poem, the speaker suggests that "kisses are a better fate than wisdom."

"Sonnet XVII" (1960), a poem by Pablo Neruda, from his *100 Love Sonnets*. Here, the poet speaks to convince his listener of his love.

"To His Coy Mistress" (1681), a poem by Andrew Marvell. Often called a seduction poem, the work attempts to convince a young woman to drop her coy stance and give in to the speaker's urgings.

the eighteenth century heaped praises on his poetic gifts, focusing on his political poems and panegyrics. By the eighteenth century, Waller was still highly regarded as a lyric poet, and "Go, Lovely Rose" was being seen as the perfect Cavalier poem. However, by the nineteenth century, his reputation suffered considerably, in part because the occasional nature of his poetry was regarded as unfashionable in this period. By the twentieth century, Waller was chiefly remembered for either his role in the royalist conspiracy or his poem "Go, Lovely Rose," which had appeared in many anthologies as an example of the ideal Cavalier lyric.

Current scholars and critics admire and comment on the political panegyrics and the poetry of social occasions—the poems that to readers from the Romantic period until recently have seemed the least likely to be revived of all Waller's literary efforts. In the last thirty years, literary scholars have begun again to discover in Waller a significant transitional figure, and a subtle and skilled minor poet.

Sacharissa Poems In more recent years, his so-called Sacharissa poems, those written to his poetic mistress, have gained the attention of critics. The Sacharissa poems, many critics argue, reveal a major problem in Waller's poetic achievement. The very politeness, the persistent optimism and unflinching pleasantness that we are told characterized his conversation and social manner ultimately weaken the picture of the world he presents in his verse. Comparing these poems of Waller with the work of French poet Vincent Voiture, Thomas Kaminski in *Philological Quarterly* wrote, "Waller in fact often displays a greater reticence and decorum, that is, often

seems more typically précieux by our normal understanding of the term, than Voiture. And in his lyric poems Waller can achieve a unique poetic voice through the very quality that modern critics dislike in him—the restraint of his manner.”

Responses to Literature

1. Investigate a significant historical event in Waller’s time, such as Waller’s Plot; the death of Oliver Cromwell, the “Lord Protector”; or the English civil wars (1642–1651). Find expressions and descriptions of the chosen event in Waller’s poetry. What is the poet’s general tone or attitude? What does his tone suggest about his political involvement? Put your conclusions in the form of a paper.
2. Consider a poem by Waller that discusses a woman’s individual feminine traits (a poem such as “Go, Lovely Rose”) for a presentation. Identify the gender characteristics, listing as many as you find. How do the descriptions inform readers of what was important to a “feminine” woman of the seventeenth century? What roles for women are suggested? What could be considered feminine values?
3. The practice of patronage in the arts has been common for centuries. In Waller’s time, many poets’ lives depended upon finding patrons to finance their poetry. Explore this practice further, first by finding examples of other writers, poets, and artists who relied on it in Great Britain, then by considering the practice as it existed in other cultures and periods—such as with the National Endowment for the Arts today. Write a paper with your findings.
4. You may be an artist or writer who will be considering funding soon, or you may imagine you will be. Come up with a “service” or offering and then consider a patron capable of supporting your art. (Oprah Winfrey, for example, is famous for taking solicitations for her donations). Write a “dedication” that will win your potential patron’s favor.
5. Consider one of Waller’s poems of courtship (such as “The Story of Phoebus and Daphne, Applied”) and compare it with a contemporary song of seduction (such as Marvin Gaye’s “Let’s Get It On”). What elements make each a successful or convincing plea? Create a presentation with your findings.
6. While one of the genres Waller wrote in was Cavalier poetry, he is not considered among the most famous of Cavalier poets—generally, his writing is eclipsed by that of Thomas Carew, Robert Herrick, Ben Jonson, Richard Lovelace, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir John Suckling, and Henry Vaughn. Research the elements of a Cavalier lyric and compare Waller’s with one or more of the better-known poets of the seventeenth century in a paper.

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Hugh Walpole

BORN: 1884, Auckland, New Zealand

DIED: 1941, Cumberland, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Fortitude (1913)

The Cathedral (1922)

Wintersmoon (1928)

Rogue Herries (1930)



Hugh Walpole *Walpole, Sir Hugh, photograph by Carl Van Vechten. Reproduced by permission of the Estate of Carl Van Vechten.*

Overview

Hugh Walpole was one of the most prolific writers of his day. He lived the sophisticated life of London to the fullest yet retained throughout his life a certain boyish enthusiasm and naïveté that are reflected in his writings.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life as the Firstborn Child Hugh Walpole was born on March 13, 1884, the first of three children of George Henry Somerset and Mildred Barham Walpole in New Zealand, where his father was vicar of St. Mary's Church in Parnell, a suburb of Auckland. His family soon moved to New York, where his father taught at the General Theological Seminary, and in 1893, Walpole was sent to England to begin an English public school education; first, in Truro, then in Marlow and at King's School, Canterbury. In 1898, his family moved to Durham from the United States, and Walpole became a day student at Durham School, a place he heartily disliked.

A Born Storyteller Walpole attempted to write historical romances in his teens and seems to have been a born storyteller, although later in life he resented this designation and thought that he was stronger as a creator

of intriguing characters than as a spinner of tales. In October 1903, he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, as a subsizar (receiving a yearly stipend because his parents could not pay the full fee); in September 1906, after graduation, he went reluctantly to Liverpool as a lay missionary on the staff of the Mersey Mission to Seamen. It soon became apparent that he was not cut out to be a lay missionary and certainly not a cleric as his father was. He seems to have had little doubt that he wanted a career in letters, and he began supporting himself by teaching in Germany and England until the publication of his first novel, *The Wooden Horse* in 1909. When the novel was published, Walpole was on the threshold of the London literary world—reviewing books for the *London Standard*, seeing Henry James, and communicating with other literary figures. He came to know many of the most prominent members of that world: James, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf, John Buchan, Maurice Hewlett, J. B. Priestley, Dorothy Richardson (who called him “eminently a humanist, a collector of people”), and many others.

Experiences in Revolutionary Russia Just after the start of World War I, Walpole went to Russia to write newspaper articles for the *London Daily Mail*. Soon he was put in charge of the British propaganda bureau in Petrograd, then capital of Russia, but the enterprise degenerated into a rather farcical operation in which all secrecy was lost, and the office of propaganda became almost useless. He witnessed the first revolution of 1917 in Petrograd and left Russia just as the Bolsheviks were taking over in November 1917. This series of events marked the transfer of governing power from the Tzarist autocracy to the Soviet Union and the end of the Russian Empire. The material for two novels came out of Walpole's Russian experiences—*The Dark Forest* (1916) and *The Secret City* (1919), the latter the winner of the first James Tait Black Memorial Prize for the best work of fiction in 1919.

Return to London Back in London, Walpole worked for a short time in the Foreign Office of the Department of Information under novelist John Buchan and was awarded the CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) after the war. *The Green Mirror* was published in England in 1918, again to generally good reviews and only one or two dissenting voices. In 1919 *Jeremy*, the first of a series of books, was published, and Walpole left on the first of several lecture tours of America. On these tours, over the years, he met many American writers. In 1921, *A Hugh Walpole Anthology* was published with a short prefatory note by Joseph Conrad, one of Walpole's close friends.

The Revenge Novel In 1922, the year of the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Walpole produced *The Cathedral*. Walpole's biographer, Sir Rupert Hart-Davis, suggests that in this

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Walpole's famous contemporaries include:

Sylvia Beach (1887–1962): Famous American expatriate who owned and ran the influential Shakespeare and Company Bookstore in Paris in the 1920s.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1975): Twice prime minister of the United Kingdom, this statesman and acclaimed orator was also a Nobel Prize–winning author.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986): Famous American artist, she is best known for her Southwest themes and her radical defiance in both her art and her life.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): Poet whose most famous works, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922), exhibit the modernist ideas and techniques that Walpole famously critiqued.

George Cukor (1899–1983): American film director who helmed the 1935 adaptation of *David Copperfield* coscripted by Walpole. Cukor went on to direct film classics such as *The Philadelphia Story*, *Born Yesterday*, and *My Fair Lady*.

novel Walpole hits back at the cathedral clique and the snobbishness of which he and his family were the victims in their years in Durham. The fictional town of Polchester in this novel was also to be the setting for *Jeremy, Harmer John* (1926), and *The Inquisitor* (1935).

The Critique Novel In 1924, Walpole purchased Brackenburn, a home in Cumberland. He also kept a flat in London and divided his time between the two locations for the rest of his life. Throughout his career, Walpole felt a simultaneous respect for and distrust of the modernists. In 1928 he produced *Wintersmoon*, in which he sets forth his ideas on the new "modern" temperament as opposed to the traditional English one and, by extension, his ideas on modernist writers as opposed to traditionalist writers. The coldness, detachment, and scorn for traditional values—personal, societal, literary—that Walpole believed characterized the moderns are manifested in *Wintersmoon's* characters Rosalind and Ravage. Their foils, or opposites, are Janet Grandison and the members of her husband's aristocratic family.

The Popular Herries Novels The Herries novels, beginning with *Rogue Herries* in 1930 and continuing with *Judith Paris* (1931), *The Fortress* (1932), and *Vanessa* (1933), reflect something of Walpole's interest in Sir Walter Scott and his own adopted Cumberland. *Rogue Herries* is about an outcast from society. The novel is set around Cumberland, and its action skirts the events of the 1745 rebellion. In 1934 Walpole went to Holly-

wood, where he wrote the scenario for the film version of *David Copperfield* (1935). He became friends with director George Cukor and producer David Selznick and had a small part in the film. He also worked on other screenplays, including one for *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1936).

Hugh Walpole never married. He was knighted in 1937, died at Brackenburn, his Cumberland home, on June 1, 1941, and was buried in St. John's churchyard, Keswick, Cumberland.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Walpole was an avid reader and early on was influenced by Nathaniel Hawthorne and his ideas of evil. Walpole said later in life that there were "two strands—say Hawthorne and Trollope—from which I am derived." Walpole also acknowledged what he considered the superior genius of Virginia Woolf and contrasted it with his own mere talent. Sometimes he felt that he would have liked to have been a more modern writer but realized that he was hopelessly old-fashioned: "verbose, over-emphasized, unreal in many places, sometimes very dull" was his critical self-evaluation on one occasion. He felt that his connection with Virginia Woolf helped him "to get over a little of my sententiousness and sentimentality"—a change he welcomed while at the same time not wanting to surrender too much to her influence.

Romantic Style It is difficult to see any change in his writing because of his friendship with Virginia Woolf, but two years after *Wintersmoon*, Walpole did depart from traditional realistic fiction with an escape into historical romance. Having become something of an authority on nineteenth-century Scottish author Sir Walter Scott, Walpole's later works reflect the Romantic Scott and not the experimental Woolf. The Romantic movement in literature emphasized the transcendent power of nature and privileged the imagination over reason and emotion over intellect. These elements may have seemed ordinary for readers of Walpole's works.

Interest in Walpole's books, intimately tied to the author himself, dropped off sharply after his death in 1941. The advent of World War II and subsequent changes in literary styles also contributed to a decline in critical and popular attention to his works. Nevertheless, his books are still read, and his position as a prominent twentieth-century novelist remains secure.

Works in Critical Context

Most of Walpole's novels were well received, each one outselling its predecessor. Critics, however, were not impressed. After publication of *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), for instance, a reviewer commented that Walpole might have been a serious artist but had settled instead for being "a very good entertainer." But Walpole answered, "This is the old regular 'highbrow' attack. How sick I am though of this long-continued attempt to make the novel a solemn, priggish, intellectual affair, removed from the ordinary reader." This resistance to

meet the highbrow demands of the literary experts is demonstrated in novels such as *Fortitude*, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, and *Rogue Herries*.

***Fortitude* (1913)** With *Fortitude*, Walpole achieved widespread recognition in the literary world of London. The novel is a bildungsroman (a novel of self-cultivation) of sorts with a slow but steady narrative pace and a deadly serious tone. Its young hero, Peter Westcott, displays a toughness in facing bullies, and his emergence as a victor in school struggles suggests a bit of wishful thinking on Walpole's part—what he himself may have wished to accomplish in his unhappy days at school. Some critics, however, objected to the novel's mystical elements. Peter hears voices enumerating a new set of beatitudes at the end of the novel. Walpole saw no problem with the inclusion of the mystical in an otherwise realistic novel.

***The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914)** *The Duchess of Wrexhe* was published to generally favorable reviews. This book is discussed by Walpole's contemporary Henry James in his essay "The Younger Generation." He praises Walpole's enthusiasm but looks forward to the time when "form" or "a process" will be manifest in Walpole's writings. Indeed, this kind of criticism—again, that he was careless and failed to impose upon his novels some controlling sense of form—was made of Walpole's work throughout his career. He himself realized his lack of a distinguished style, but he recognized and emphasized his strong points—his goodwill, enthusiasm, and verve in storytelling. In a letter to Arnold Bennett (one of the many mutually chiding letters that these two exchanged), Walpole wrote, "I know that I am sentimental, romantic and slipshod," but, he insisted, this combination of traits represented the essential Hugh Walpole, take it or leave it.

***Rogue Herries* (1930)** *Rogue Herries* is lively but promises more than it delivers. Walpole develops the tic of saying "he would remember this incident years later," and then allows allegedly unforgettable events to come to nothing. But *Rogue Herries* is a good story (one that Virginia Woolf herself enjoyed); and with the other three novels gathered into one volume in 1939, *The Herries Chronicle*, the story was popular for years. Walpole's own evaluation of the entire series might be applied to his fiction as a whole: "It carries the English novel no whit further but it sustains the tradition and has vitality."

Responses to Literature

1. A unique contribution to the literature of the 1700s and 1800s, gothic fiction shares elements with horror. Research the two genres, identifying the characteristics of each. Then, consider what the two have in common. Find examples of gothic, horror, and gothic horror fiction, explaining how each demonstrates the genre you decide it fits.
2. Walpole made it clear that he thought entertainment was the most important purpose his novels served.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote in nineteenth-century Romantic or gothic styles:

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. In this gothic novel, the elements set the pace not only for nineteenth-century literature that challenges science but for the gothic horror genre that developed after it.

The Scarlet Letter (1850), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this Romantic and gothic work, Puritan values are closely examined and challenged.

Wuthering Heights (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. This work is often considered not only a classic but one of the most profound romances of all time.

What other purposes can novels serve? Think about your favorite book. Is entertainment value the most important quality it possesses? If not, what is its most important quality? Do you think all novels should have at least some entertainment value? In your opinion, are novels that emphasize entertainment less artistically important than other, more literary novels? Explain your answer using examples.

3. Walpole acknowledged being influenced by Virginia Woolf. Woolf's style was predominantly a stream-of-consciousness technique: her narrations were done through the ongoing thought processes of her characters. Find examples of stream-of-consciousness writing (in Walpole, Woolf, Jamaica Kincaid, Henry James, or others) and then try imitating this style. Can you turn ordinary observation into interesting interior monologue?

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▣ Evelyn Waugh

BORN: 1903, West Hampstead, London

DIED: 1966, Somerset, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Decline and Fall (1928)

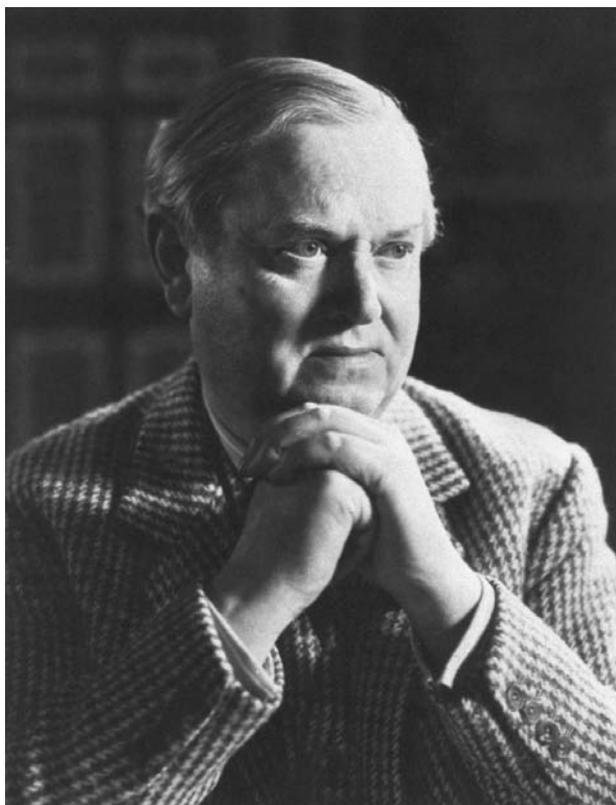
A Handful of Dust (1934)

Brideshead Revisited (1945)

The Loved One (1947)

Overview

Evelyn Waugh ranks as one of the outstanding satiric novelists of the twentieth century. During a four-decade-long career, Waugh was thought by many critics to be



Evelyn Waugh Waugh, Evelyn, photograph by Mark Gerson. Reproduced by permission of Mark Gerson.

England's most prominent man of letters. Savage wit and an enviable command of the English language were hallmarks of his style. He was admired by critics and the reading public alike for his portrayal of the attitudes, foibles, and virtues of the British aristocracy, but the author also wrote short stories, travel narratives, biographies, and one volume of an unfinished autobiography.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Religion a Prominent Part of Education at Lancing Evelyn Arthur St. John Waugh was born on October 28, 1903, in Hampstead, England. He grew up in a comfortable middle-class London suburb, the son of Arthur Waugh, a well-known literary critic and publisher, and Catherine Charlotte Raban Waugh. Reading and writing were a daily part of the Waugh household, and books were always a major topic of discussion. When Evelyn was seven, he wrote a short story that was published in an adult collection of narratives.

In addition to literature, Waugh showed an early interest in religion. He attended Lancing preparatory school, known for educating sons of Anglican clergymen. At Lancing, chapel attendance every morning and evening was compulsory, and on Sundays, attendance at three services was required. Waugh later recalled that he never thought this requirement excessive. As his education continued, however, Waugh came in contact with more rebellious and undisciplined schoolmates. He and his artistically and literarily inclined companions began to dominate Lancing school life. Before he left Lancing, Waugh realized he had ceased being a Christian. This occurred because of his association with more freethinking companions, because of his considerable reading of philosophy, and, ironically, because one of his Anglican clergyman-instructors instilled in him serious doubts about religious orthodoxy.

Oxford and a True Calling After Lancing, Waugh continued his studies in 1921 at Oxford. There, Waugh soon became associated with a different crowd, an arty, well-established group at the university that engaged in a considerable amount of socializing, party-going, and drinking. Because Waugh did only a minimal amount of studying at Oxford, he was forced to leave the university in his third year (1924) without a degree and saddled with debts.

After Oxford, Waugh decided to become a schoolmaster, but he was fired from three schools in less than two years, drank heavily, and gradually became so depressed about his lack of success that he attempted suicide. He noted many years later that during this period of his life, he was really avoiding the vocation that had been his since childhood. In 1927, however, he began to write steadily, and after the publication of a few short

pieces, he published his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, which gained him much attention.

Waugh's fame as a humorist and prose stylist developed thereafter in the period between the two World Wars. During this time, he produced many of his most well-regarded books written in the same vein of farce and burlesque, including *Vile Bodies* (1930), *Black Mischief* (1932), *Scoop* (1938), and *The Loved One* (1948). In a more serious mode, he published *A Handful of Dust* (1934) and *Helena* (1950).

Conversion to Catholicism Catholicism, in particular, influenced Waugh's works after he became a convert in 1930. The conversion created so much fanfare in London society at the time that Waugh responded by writing an article entitled "Converted to Rome: Why It Happened to Me," in which he claimed his conversion was not about religious orthodoxy but about making a choice between Christianity and chaos. Waugh's choice had come during his unhappy marriage to aristocrat Evelyn Gardner that lasted from 1928 to 1930. Although Waugh himself denied that his divorce had been an important catalyst behind his conversion, many critics and commentators feel that Waugh's conversion was a direct result of the end of his first marriage and the personal life crisis that his wife's adultery (which prompted the divorce) caused him.

After the divorce, Waugh searched for life circumstances in which marriage vows would be taken seriously and moral values constantly emphasized. In 1936, after many years of frustration, he secured an annulment of his first marriage, and then married Laura Herbert, a young woman from a staunch Roman Catholic family. (Roman Catholics are not permitted to marry people who have been divorced; an annulment is a retroactive cancellation of a marriage.)

Patriotism and Disillusionment Always patriotic, no matter how much he may have satirized and ridiculed British follies, Waugh took the earliest opportunity when war broke out in 1939 to join the military and defend his country. Although his age was against him (he had passed his midthirties), Waugh finally succeeded in getting the Royal Marines to accept him in December 1939. He saw service in West Africa and Crete, and as a British liaison officer he parachuted into Yugoslavia, where he narrowly escaped death in the crash of a transport plane. Later, during a period of leave and transition, he completed the most controversial of his novels, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), and it immediately made him famous. The book became a best-seller in England and the United States, but by this time, Waugh had become severely disillusioned by the war and deeply disturbed by the evil he saw in contemporary society. He grew unhappy and introverted, characteristics that lasted until his death of a heart attack on April 10, 1966.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Waugh's famous contemporaries include:

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930): A prolific and diverse writer whose collected works illustrated the vile effects of modernity and industrialization.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): Regarded as one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century, Woolf's novels explored the nature of history, identity, and gender.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): As one of the most famous figures in twentieth-century art, this Spanish painter, draftsman, and sculptor is best known for having helped establish the Cubist movement and for the wide variety of styles embodied in his work.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): This German-born, Nobel Prize-winning theoretical physicist is best known for his theory of relativity.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965): This Nobel Prize-winning author, orator, and statesman is best known for his leadership of Great Britain as the nation's Prime Minister during World War II.

Works in Literary Context

Many critics declared Waugh's first book, *Decline and Fall*, to be central to the modern movement in literature. Modernism was a cultural and artistic movement affirming the power of human progress, often through scientific knowledge and practical experimentation. Other modernists were more pessimistic, but as a group, they embraced the idea that the World Wars clearly meant that it was now time to disrupt old approaches and replace them with new ones. Waugh's brand of modernism manifested as cynicism, savage fantasy, and satire. Critics past and present have described his novels as funny, witty, and inventive in their attacks on vice and hypocrisy.

Satire

Satire is a form of writing in which the author criticizes elements of society or human nature, often in a way that on the surface seems to support the very thing the author is criticizing. Satirists usually rely on humor as a way to make their criticisms entertaining and therefore more likely to be accepted by readers. *Decline and Fall* is a good example of Waugh's satiric prose style. Through the novel's innocent main character, Paul Pennyfeather, Waugh draws a comic portrait of British high society in the 1920s. Pennyfeather is expelled from Oxford because of a lack of aristocratic connections and money to pay a fine he does not deserve, while those who committed a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

A major theme common to many of Waugh's novels is the horror of twentieth-century amorality and the modern "waste-land," where people give only lip service to principles. Here are some other works that share this theme:

In Our Time (1925), a collection of stories and vignettes by Ernest Hemingway. This collection was American author Ernest Hemingway's breakthrough work. The story "Big Two-Hearted River" is about a man looking for consolation in the world that to him seems wrecked and desolate.

The Waste Land (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. This highly influential modernist poem is about personal isolation and decaying contemporary life.

Endgame (1957), a play by Samuel Beckett. This play is about four characters locked in a room in a postapocalyptic world and how they deal with their mundane existence.

Less than Zero (1985), a novel by Bret Easton Ellis. Easton's debut novel examines the empty lives of rich, spoiled young college students.

dishonorable act against him are wealthy students who can easily afford to pay their fines. Pennyfeather's discoveries during his subsequent tenure as a schoolmaster emphasize that most of the teachers are either not interested in their profession or are unqualified for their jobs. The glorious tradition of sports as a character-building occupation that induces fair play is disgraced by a track-and-field day dominated by cheating, injury (even an eventual death), arguments, and racial hostilities. As the novel progresses, old burglars are transformed into members of Parliament, hypocrisy abounds, and the wealthy owe their fortunes to their corruption.

Authorial Influence

Throughout the presentation of disorder and evil in *Decline and Fall*, Waugh added two additional features to the detachment of his prose: black humor and disjointed dialogue, which years later became identified with the theater of the absurd. Indeed Waugh is one of the first, if not the first, to blend these two elements successfully in one book. Yet, as several scholars have noted, Waugh drew his inspiration from an earlier, lesser-known author named Ronald Firbank. Firbank had been effective in using fragmentary and exceptionally concise dialogue in a fresh, comic way. He was also talented in handling sly innuendos and revelations of characterization presented in a cold, detached manner so that no moral judgment appeared to be operative. Waugh took

Firbank's techniques, perfected them, and added his own ingredients. Influenced as well by Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, John Ruskin, and Saki (H. H. Munro), Waugh added a polished classical style, a greater subtlety of phrasing than Firbank was capable of, and a rare flamboyant comic touch.

Catholicism

The other great influence on Waugh's writing was Catholicism following his conversion in 1930. This new-found religious purpose is first reflected in *A Handful of Dust* (1934). Largely autobiographical, the novel traces the collapse of Tony and Brenda Last's marriage after Brenda has an affair with John Beaver. Brenda's affair is encouraged by her sophisticated London friends. The novel ends in tragicomedy. A despairing Tony travels to the Brazilian jungle to forget his troubles but is taken prisoner by Mr. Todd. Todd, a devotee of Charles Dickens, forces Tony into reading to him from Dickens's novels, presumably for the rest of his life. On a deeper level, the novel is an intense and bitter examination of humanism and modern society. The wild satire of Waugh's previous novels has gone; in its place is a more subtle satire and biting irony. Critics noted that the novel deals with the horror of modern amorality, calling it a classic portrayal of contemporary savagery. While *A Handful of Dust* was strongly Catholic in tone, it was not until *Brideshead Revisited* that Waugh wrote an overtly Catholic novel.

Brideshead Revisited, Waugh's most successful novel, chronicles twenty years in the lives of the Marchmains, a wealthy English Catholic family. It is narrated by Charles Ryder, who befriends Sebastian Marchmain while attending Oxford University in the 1920s and is later engaged to Sebastian's sister, Julia. Sebastian is an alcoholic; Julia has her first marriage annulled; and their father, long separated from his wife, returns to the Church only on his deathbed.

Works in Critical Context

In addition to some who do not relate well to his often sardonic comic touches, there are those critics who fault Waugh for not having a "social consciousness" and for being too conservative. His emphasis on religion in his later works has also not been well received in secular humanistic circles. Nevertheless, Waugh's overall literary achievement is considerable. He has presented an arresting historical portrait of British society and manners from the early 1920s to the end of the World War II era.

Decline and Fall

It is difficult to imagine a novel today that publishers would require the author to preface with a disclaimer such as Waugh's: "Please bear in mind throughout that it is meant to be funny." Yet *Decline and Fall* was so detached in its presentation of injustice and immorality and outrageous occurrences that parts of the book were

censored and the prefatory note was required before publication could be permitted. It did appear that Waugh was allowing all seven deadly sins to hold sway and was enjoying the triumph of evil and decadence in the novel with the most carefree attitude possible.

Critic Anthony Burgess argued that *Decline and Fall's* continuing power is due to its underlying moral purpose. "Waugh's humour," Burgess wrote, "is never flippant. *Decline and Fall* would not have maintained its freshness for nearly forty years if it had not been based on one of the big themes of our Western literature—the right of the decent man to find decency in the world."

Brideshead Revisited

Because of its essentially Catholic message and its alleged idealization of the English upper classes, *Brideshead Revisited* proved to be Waugh's most controversial novel. Many critics attacked the book for its sentimentality and seeming affection for English gentry. According to L. E. Sissman in the *New Yorker*, the Catholicism and conservatism in *Brideshead Revisited* made the book nearly unpalatable to critics. Critic Bernard Bergonzi attacked the book because, as he wrote, "the aristocracy—particularly the Catholic aristocracy—were seen as the unique custodians of the traditional values in a world increasingly threatened by the barbarians." At the same time, other important critics rejected such statements and lauded the book as Waugh's greatest. Brad Leithauser of the *New Republic*, for example, argued that Waugh's Catholicism "gives *Brideshead Revisited*, the most unfairly denigrated of his novels, its submerged power: *Brideshead* was...the book in which Waugh invested the most of himself: in some ways, it was the book of his life."

Responses to Literature

1. Waugh was a harsh critic of the upper-class youth of his time. What do you think his opinion would be of today's youth? What about today's youth might he satirize?
2. Waugh was one of many British writers who lived for a time in Los Angeles and worked for the film industry. Many expatriate Brits belonged to the Hollywood Cricket Club, which Waugh satirizes in *The Loved One*. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the Hollywood Cricket Club. Write a paper tracing its history.
3. Waugh was hurt by his first wife's adultery and seems almost preoccupied with the idea of adultery in some of his novels. Do you think general attitudes toward adultery have changed since Waugh's time? If so, how?

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John Webster

BORN: c. 1580, London, England

DIED: c. 1634

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Malcontent (1604)

The White Devil (1612)

Three Elegies on the Most Lamented Death of Prince Henrie (1613)

The Duchess of Malfi (1614)

The Devil's Law-Case (c. 1619)

Overview

Critics often rank British author John Webster second only to William Shakespeare among Jacobean tragedians. His two major works, *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), are more frequently revived on stage than any plays of the period other than Shakespeare's. Webster is considered a somewhat difficult dramatist to appreciate, especially on the first reading of his plays.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Limited Information Little is known about Webster's life. He was born around 1580 in London, the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Webster's famous contemporaries include:

René Descartes (1596–1650): A French philosopher and mathematician, he is nicknamed “The Father of Modern Philosophy” for his profound influences on subsequent generations of thinkers. His treatises include *Discourse on Method* (1637).

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Though known as an Italian physicist, he was also a mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer who was instrumental in the scientific revolution. His treatises include *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632).

Ling Mengchu (1580–1644): Chinese writer of the Ming dynasty, he is best known for his short-story collection, *Astonished Slaps upon the Desktop*.

Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660): A French patron saint, he founded several charitable organizations, including the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity and The Congregation of Priests of the Mission.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): Primarily a playwright and poet, Shakespeare is typically referenced as the greatest writer of all time. His plays include the tragedy *Hamlet* (c. 1601).

eldest son of a prosperous coachmaker and member of a prestigious guild, the Merchant Taylors' Company. Given his father's status, Webster was probably educated at the highly respected Merchant Taylors' School. Noting the prominence of legal concerns in Webster's dramas, scholars speculate that he may have also had some legal training. Records indicate that, like his father, Webster was a respected member of the community, and upon the elder Webster's death, he assumed his membership in the Merchant Taylors' Company.

From his birth to early adulthood, Webster lived during a relatively stable time in British history. Elizabeth I had taken the throne in 1558 and ruled until her death in 1603. During her reign, England acquired its first colony (Newfoundland) in 1583 and defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, ensuring England's freedom. Elizabeth also oversaw the beginnings of a golden age of drama, literature, and music, of which both Shakespeare and Webster played a part.

Respected in the Theater Webster's career in the theater began with collaborative work for Philip Henslowe, a man perhaps best known as the proprietor of London's Rose Theatre. Henslowe's *Diary*, which provides an invaluable view of English drama of the time, records in May 1602 that he paid Webster, Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, Thomas Middleton, and

Thomas Dekker for the now lost *Caesar's Fall, or The Two Shapes*. In October 1602, Henslowe paid Webster, Dekker, Heywood, Henry Chettle, and Wentworth Smith for a play called *Lady Jane*. Also in October, Webster and Heywood were advanced money for a play called *Christmas Comes but Once a Year*.

Although Webster appears to have had no further connection with Henslowe, he continued to collaborate on dramatic works, and towards the end of 1604, he and Dekker wrote *West-ward Ho*, a scandalous comedy. This satire spurred John Marston, George Chapman, and Ben Jonson to respond with the even more scandalous *East-ward Ho*. Dekker and Webster returned with *Northward Ho* in 1605, which many critics consider to be the better of the two Dekker-Webster comedies.

Webster's first independent work was *The White Devil*, apparently performed in 1612. This play, with Webster's next drama, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), established a reputation for the dramatist that has sustained itself for four centuries. Most scholars note a significant decline in Webster's dramaturgy following the composition of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Most also agree that his next play, the tragicomic *Devil's Law-Case* (publication date is said to be between 1619 and 1622), is the most difficult of Webster's works to assess because of its nearly incoherent plot. In fact, it has only been performed once—in 1980—since Webster's time.

Last Known Contributions Webster also contributed thirty-two character sketches to the sixth edition of Thomas Overbury's *New and Choice Characters, of Several Authors* (1615). In addition, Webster continued to collaborate on plays, including *Appius and Virginia*, perhaps written with Heywood around 1634. Other plays attributed either wholly or partially to Webster include several lost works and *A Cure for a Cuckold* (1624 or 1625), which survives only in a carelessly printed edition.

Thus, much of Webster's most active writing period was during the reign of Elizabeth's successor, James I, and his son, Charles I, the first two Stuart kings who oversaw a country becoming intensely disillusioned with the national life. While both James and Charles favored the notion of absolutism—that is, that the monarch holds all the political power—the rising middle classes, especially Puritans, believed Parliament should rule over the monarch. This conflict eventually led to the English Civil War, a few years after Webster's death. Scholars usually date Webster's death around 1634, the year that Thomas Heywood referred to him in the past tense in his *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels* (1635), but it could be as late as 1638.

Works in Literary Context

Influence or Plagiarism? To his peers, Webster was a slow, careful writer who “borrowed” lines from his fellow playwrights and used them to create powerful

scenes. Scholars are certain that he lifted many sentiments, images, and even whole sentences from such authors as Michel de Montaigne, William Shakespeare, and Scottish dramatist William Alexander. Such borrowing was not uncommon during the Jacobean era, but Webster made use of the material of others to such a degree that he was even satirized by such fellow writers as Henry Fitzjeffrey—who mocked the “Crabbed Websterio” for not writing one word of his own and not caring whether he would be misunderstood and obscure. Thus it is quite clear from Webster’s writings that he was influenced by, and alert to, the work of his contemporaries. The legal training he probably received also influenced the imagery and scenarios in a number of his plays.

Varying Levels of Difficulty Some of Webster’s works, such as *The Devil’s Law-Case* (1619–1622?), are difficult to understand. This particular play, unlike the others that follow the period’s model for tragicomedy, has an incoherent plot full of actions that are both absurd and shocking. Other plays, however, are highly accomplished. Both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example, are based on Italian history, have a clearly established tragic outcome, and express well-defined themes that are accessible to audiences.

Dark and Severe Themes Both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, as period tragicomedies, express the influence of a pessimistic worldview. Both reflect a sense of darkness encompassing human existence and a profound consciousness of evil and suffering in the world. *The White Devil* relates a complex tale of love, adultery, murder, and revenge. It centers on the adulterous passion between the Duke of Brachiano and Vittoria Corombona, who together plot and direct the murders of their spouses. Some scholars and critics maintain that the absence of any positive, truly moral figure makes the world presented in the play one of unrelieved bleakness.

The Duchess of Malfi offers no more relief. The widowed duchess, against the wishes of her brothers, secretly marries her servant Antonio. The brothers—the fanatical Ferdinand and the scheming Cardinal—plant a spy, Bosola, in their sister’s household. When Bosola uncovers the truth about the duchess’s marriage, her brothers ruthlessly harass her, drive her from her home, and eventually imprison her. In a famous scene, she is tormented by madmen performing a stylized dance around her, and she is ultimately murdered. Scholars agree that the duchess herself is one of the greatest tragic heroines of the period. As she resigns herself to a Christian stance in the face of her brothers’ vicious cruelty, she is filled with a profound dignity: the depiction of her murder is commonly judged one of the most moving scenes in all of Jacobean drama.

Works in Critical Context

The great number of printings and revivals of Webster’s plays during the seventeenth century attest to their pop-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also present themes of good exposed to evil.

A Clockwork Orange (1962), a novel by Anthony Burgess.

In this futuristic work, the powers that be devise select ways for treating the truants and thugs in the small gang called the Droogs.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. This novel of good and evil presented through a plot that turns on moral dilemmas was first published in serial form.

The Darkness and the Light (2001), a poetry collection by Anthony Hecht. In this work, the Nobel Prize-winning American exposes the technical, intellectual, and emotional terrors of the Holocaust and World War II.

Othello (1604), a tragedy by William Shakespeare. This play includes a character whom many scholars have named the most evil in all of literature: Iago.

ularity. In the eighteenth century, however, his reputation was eclipsed by a growing interest in Shakespeare. Increasingly, Webster was known only among bibliographers and scholars who considered his plays scarcely more than period pieces, fine examples of the drama of the past but with little to offer contemporary audiences. In fact, his tragedies were performed only five times during the eighteenth century.

From his own time to the present, some critics have praised the poetic brilliance of Webster’s tragic vision, while others have scorned his plays as confusing and excessively violent. While undeniably horrifying, his depictions of people struggling to make sense of their lives in an apparently meaningless world possess a curiously modern sensibility. This is demonstrated in such plays as *The Duchess of Malfi*.

The Duchess of Malfi *The Duchess of Malfi* is widely acclaimed as Webster’s masterpiece. Initial response to the play was strong. For decades, the play was one of those commanded by royalty, and it has been performed throughout the centuries. Algernon Charles Swinburne maintained that it “stands out among its peers as one of the imperishable and ineradicable landmarks of literature.” Many subsequent critics have echoed his opinion, and the play retains a vitality that continues to appeal to actors, audiences, and critics.

For example, John Russell Brown has suggested that *The Duchess of Malfi* offers a rich variety of interpretive possibilities for the stage, allowing it to retain its relevance for modern audiences. Literary scholars have focused their attention on both the form and the themes

of the play. Webster's talent as a technician has been a matter of some debate. In his study of Webster's dramatic art, Charles R. Forker has described Webster as one of the first playwrights to successfully create distinct psychological portraits of his characters, a claim with which later critics have concurred. Forker also notes the connection to Shakespeare, concluding that "the Duchess of Malfi not only appropriates some of Richard II's tragic self-consciousness; she also has a "mirror scene" of her own—one as fully theatrical and thematically suggestive as his."

Responses to Literature

1. The practice of patronage in the arts has been common for centuries. In Webster's time, his life depended upon finding patrons to finance his work. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the relationship between a famous artist or writers and his or her patron. Write an essay in which you examine the impact of patrons on the lives and artistic decisions of artists.
2. The revenge tragedy—developed in the Elizabethan period—is often referred to as "the tragedy of blood." This genre includes common elements: a quest for vengeance (often at the, sometimes repeated, prompting of the ghost of a loved one); scenes involving real or feigned madness; scenes in graveyards; and/or scenes of carnage or mutilation. Using either *The White Devil* or *The Duchess of Malfi*, find examples that define the play as a tragedy of blood. Then, find contemporary comparisons by identifying the same revenge elements in a movie—for example, *Gladiator*, *Mystic River*, or *Payback*. Write about your findings in an essay, while answering the following questions: How is the movie you chose a modern revenge tragedy? How could one explain the popularity of the Jacobean and the modern-day tragedies of blood?
3. Consider all of the parallels between Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of Malfi in an essay. Where does the duchess differ in her ruling style? Argue in agreement with or argue against Cyran's suggestion that the duchess's choosing love destroys her.

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Simone Weil

BORN: 1909, Paris, France

DIED: 1943, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind (1949)

Oppression and Liberty (1955)



Simone Weil © Photo12 / The Image Works

Overview

A French political activist and religious mystic, Simone Weil was a renowned and enigmatic Christian thinker. Her ambivalence toward the Catholic Church and her life of rigorous self-discipline and self-denial have become as well known and as much a part of her influence as her written works, most of which were collected from her notebooks and published after her death. Often paradoxical and contradictory, Weil's writings convey her intense compassion for the suffering of others, her disdain of nihilism (the belief that there is no meaning or purpose in existence), and her longing to be united with God.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Beginnings of Activism Simone Adolphine Weil was born in Paris on February 3, 1909, the daughter of a prosperous doctor and his wife. Her childhood was marked by intellectual precociousness and a sensitivity to human suffering. At the age of five, for example, she refused to eat sugar because none could be supplied to the soldiers at the front during World War I; at the age of six, she was able to quote passages of seventeenth-century French dramatist Jean Racine from memory. Although she earned her high school degree at fifteen, she felt extremely inferior to her brother, who was a mathematical prodigy. Consequently, she seriously considered sui-

cide and nearly suffered a nervous breakdown early in her life. Between 1925 and 1928, Weil studied at the Henri IV Lycée under the philosopher Alain (Émile-Auguste Chartier), whose influence intensified Weil's self-questioning search for truth.

Following the completion of her École Normale studies in 1931, Weil taught philosophy for several years in various provincial girls' schools. These were years of severe economic depression and great political upheaval in Europe, and Weil's interest in the common worker and her passionate concern for social justice led her to devote all of her time outside of teaching to political activism in the French trade-union (syndicalist) movement. She taught classes for workingmen, took part in meetings and demonstrations, and wrote for a variety of leftist periodicals that supported a workers' revolution and the establishment of a communist society.

At first Weil shared her comrades' belief that a workers' revolution was in the near future. Soon, however, both her experience with the revolutionary movement and her observation of the international political situation led her to the following conclusions: What had developed in the 1930s was different from anything Karl Marx (author of the foundational text of the communist movement, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848) had expected, there were no signs of the working-class revolution, and a new oppressive class was emerging—the managerial bureaucracy. Though Weil was an admirer of Marx himself, she became a critic of Marxism. In the last half of 1934, she wrote a lengthy essay, *Oppression and Liberty* (1955), in which she summed up the inadequacies of Marxism, attempted her own analysis of social oppression, and outlined a theoretical picture of a free society.

Experiences in Factories and the Spanish Civil War Between 1934 and 1935, Weil's intense sympathy for the working class led her to take a leave of absence from teaching to spend eight months as an anonymous worker in three Paris factories. This experience reinforced her conviction that political revolution without a total transformation of the methods of production—which depended on the subordination of the worker both to the machine and to managerial bureaucracy—would do nothing to alleviate working-class oppression.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, Weil, hoping that a genuine working-class revolution was under way in Spain, went immediately to Barcelona. The Spanish Civil War was a conflict between the ultranationalist forces of General Francisco Franco and the Republican forces. Many foreigners, including large number of artists and writers, volunteered to serve on the side of the Republicans. Weil was accepted into a militia unit, but she had to be hospitalized after only a week when her foot and ankle were badly burned in a camp accident. Her experiences in Spain further disillusioned her; she observed so much brutality on both sides of the conflict

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Weil's famous contemporaries include:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906–1945): German Lutheran theologian and founder of the Confessing Church, he participated in the German Resistance movement and was centrally involved in Abwehr (German Military Intelligence) plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler.
- Charles de Gaulle** (1890–1970): A French general and leader of the Free French Forces, de Gaulle founded the French Fifth Republic and became its first president.
- Edith Stein** (1891–1942): A Carmelite nun and German philosopher, she became a martyr of the Catholic Church upon losing her life at Auschwitz.
- Anne Frank** (1929–1945): Frank was a German-Jewish teenager who kept a journal while her family was in hiding during the Holocaust.
- John Dos Passos** (1896–1970): This American's bitter novels attacked the hypocrisy and materialism of the United States between the two world wars.

that she concluded that violence for any purpose could never be justified.

After Weil returned to France, ill health kept her from returning to teaching. Her burn was slow to heal, she was anemic, and her debilitating migraine headaches became worse. She spent the last of the 1930s reflecting and writing about war and peace, at the same time beginning to formulate her thoughts on the nature of force, on the human spirit's tragic subjection to it, and on mankind's temptation to worship it. These reflections found expression in early 1940 in two essays, "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force" and "The Great Beast," which was a long essay on the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Conversion Experience In 1937, Weil underwent a spiritual conversion, complete with mystical experiences. For instance, at the chapel of St. Francis in Assisi, Weil was so overwhelmed by the presence of "something stronger than [herself]" that she was forced to her knees. She memorized George Herbert's poem "Love," and used it as a meditation when she had migraines. Because she had previously believed that God did not directly reveal himself to individuals, Weil was convinced that her mystical encounters were authentic. This religious transformation led to a change in Weil's political views: She turned from political and social action to a search for spiritual truth.

Time in Marseilles during World War II Following the German occupation of Paris in June 1940, Weil and her parents fled to the south of France, residing

in Marseilles from September 1940 until May 1942. Marseilles was located in a part of the country that remained "free" under a provisional government approved by the Germans and based in the city of Vichy. During the time she spent in Marseilles, Weil was productive in her writing. She wrote essays on problems in modern science, a number of essays on religious subjects, and her Marseilles *Notebooks*. Though reluctant to leave France, Weil was persuaded to accompany her parents to New York in May 1942. Before she left, she gave her notebooks to Gustave Thibon, a noted Catholic philosopher and writer, urging him to use her ideas in his own writing.

Once in New York, Weil hoped to interest the U.S. government in a plan she had to organize a corps of nurses who would go into battle with the soldiers in order to give immediate aid, thereby saving lives that would otherwise be lost due to shock and loss of blood. Weil's proposal was turned down, and after five months in New York City, she traveled to London to work for the French Resistance, which fought back against the German forces in occupied France. Believing she was called by God to experience the perils of war, she asked to be parachuted into France to disrupt the war effort; instead, she was given a desk job and asked to develop her own ideas about how France should be reconstructed after the war. The result was *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind* (1949), a treatise on both the causes of modern man's loss of roots in the sacred and her suggestions for a solution.

Reported Suicide Limiting her food to the amount that the French were allowed during rationing, Weil was overcome by stress and malnourishment, and in April 1943 she was hospitalized with tuberculosis. Even in the hospital, she was either unwilling or unable to eat more than meager amounts. She died in a sanatorium in Ashford, Kent, on August 24, 1943, at the age of thirty-four. The local newspaper described her death as a "voluntary suicide." The story that she died because of her solidarity with the starving French captured the popular imagination, and Weil was widely seen as a kind of crazy secular saint, admirable but ludicrous in her intensity and impractical idealism. As her writings were published and translated in the 1950s and 1960s, this image gave way to serious study of her work.

Works in Literary Context

Weil's writing reflects the paradoxes of her life: Profound faith with intellectual skepticism, deep compassion for the suffering of others with a disregard for her own suffering, and a logical mind with a mystical spirit. Even though Weil's theories were not consistent and did not adhere to the conventions of traditional philosophical argument, they contain several recurring concepts essential to understanding much of her work.

Destruction of Self One of Weil's most basic concepts was that the self must be destroyed in imitation of Christ's self-sacrifice. Weil did not see the crucifixion of Jesus as a sacrifice that relieved mankind of its burden of sin, but rather as an inspirational model that the believer should follow. The experiences of abandonment and self-sacrifice, the ache of the absence of God, were, for Weil, necessary preludes to redemption by God's love.

Weil considered *The Iliad* to be the perfect example of pacifism because it presented the absolute futility of the Trojan War. In her essay on Homer's epic, Weil concluded that violence degrades both the victim and the victor; violence makes people selfless "things." To Weil, a soul destroyed externally was the ultimate sin because then the soul could not be sacrificed to God. This sacrifice was the key to atonement and redemption.

Manichaeism Another fundamental belief found in Weil's writing is related to Manichaeism, an ancient religious doctrine based on the separation of matter and spirit and of good and evil. Weil expressed this duality as the tension between "gravity" and "grace." The physical universe is drawn downward by gravity; Weil considered these physical laws inherently evil because God is absent in the physical world. Since God is absent, man cannot be near to God. The only hope for mankind is to wait for a visit from God, who will uplift man's soul to himself. This is grace.

Universal Faith Weil also believed that some elements of Christian faith, including the possibility of redemption, exist in all religions. Moreover, they existed in myths long before the birth of Christ. Weil's studies revealed these elements in many ancient religions, illustrated, for example, by ancient Greek writers such as Sophocles, Plato, and Homer. In fact, within Platonic philosophy, Greek tragedy, Hindu Upanishads, and ancient Egyptian and Chaldean writings, she believed she had found the basis for an ideal society: a truly Christian civilization that would be hierarchical yet non-oppressive.

Influences Weil published only magazine articles and poems during her lifetime. The bulk of her work was collected from her notebooks by J. M. Perrin and G. Thibon and published after her death. Nevertheless, Weil's limited writings have affected everyone from philosophers to filmmakers. Albert Camus, after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, spent an hour meditating in the deceased Weil's room before boarding the plane for Stockholm. Iris Murdoch's writings are marked by Weil's intellectualism. Even writer Mario Puzo and director Francis Ford Coppola are reported to have turned to Weil for inspiration when working on the script for *The Godfather III*.

Works in Critical Context

Weil wrote on both her secular thoughts and spiritual beliefs. Her works were intellectual and enthusiastic, eliciting mixed reviews from critics who focused on her

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other writers who have examined the intersection of politics and religion:

The Human Condition (1958), a philosophical work by Hannah Arendt. This work examines activities in realms most important to her "labor, work, action" in the context of society, politics, and the public and private sectors.

Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998), a philosophical work by Giorgio Agamben. This work is an exhaustive study by the Italian philosopher focusing on the place of the individual in society.

Working (1974), a book by Studs Terkel. In this collection, the social historian examines the work blue collar workers and investigates how such work gives or does not give their lives meaning.

mental instability or praised her philosophical insight and literary prowess.

Genius and Madness At the time of Weil's death, she was generally regarded as a crazed fanatic who exaggerated her interests in human salvation; however, she eventually earned a favorable reputation as one of the most original thinkers of her era. Eminent figures like Charles de Gaulle, who, as the leader of the Free French knew Weil slightly, considered her mad. Others who knew and respected her honored her genius. French existentialist playwright Gabriel Marcel admired her greatly, and T. S. Eliot described her as "a woman of genius, of a kind of genius akin to that of the saints." Had Weil been better appreciated in her time, she might have contributed much more than she did posthumously to political and social thought. She had visions and awakenings that prevented her from being taken seriously, but she also had premonitions and theories that might be regarded today as uncanny in their foreshadowing.

Other critics have decided that while, as scholar Jean Amery says, "the prestige of her death has shielded her from criticism," Weil's work must be examined in global terms. Weil has been harshly criticized for being a Jewish anti-Semite and for what critics have called misguided political suggestions. She denied the presence of any divine revelation in the Jewish religion, but found it in many other faiths besides Christianity. She advocated sacrificing Czechoslovakia to Hitler in the 1930s, writing in her 1943 notebook that the French ought to have used Gandhi-like passive resistance against the Nazis.

The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind According to a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Need for Roots*

examines “politics in the widest Aristotelian understanding of the term, and the treatment is of exceptional originality and breadth of human sympathy.” Weil wrote the volume at the request of the French in London, who were curious about her thoughts on the potential of France’s reconstruction after World War II. Or, as Jenny Turner in the *New Statesman* remarked, Weil specifically wrote the piece for General de Gaulle, and “it was intended to provide a philosophical foundation for the Fifth Republic.” However, as the *Times Literary Supplement* reported, “the [book] is of equal interest and appeal . . . no matter what country.” Indeed, Weil’s words seem to have been portentous: “What a country calls its vital economic interests are not the things which enable its citizens to live, but the things which enable it to make war. Gasoline is much more likely than wheat to be a cause of international conflict.”

S. M. Fitzgerald of the *New Republic* judged that the intended audience or target would not benefit from her thought: “[Weil’s] thinking is sometimes idiosyncratic in the extreme, displaying a lack of objectivity that seems almost willful, and some of her outbursts are so emotional as to be almost altogether untrustworthy.” In general, as the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* said, the “provocation to agree with her, and more often to disagree, is . . . strong.” Although dissent and controversy surround her work, most critics concede that Weil demonstrated penetrating insight and unquestionable integrity in all of her writings.

Responses to Literature

1. Research people who have gone on hunger strikes as a form of protest. Choose one individual whose story intrigues you. Prepare a speech that you would give on behalf of that individual, stating his/her cause and including comparisons to Weil’s situation.
2. Some critics relate Weil’s religious writing to the work of Blaise Pascal and Ludwig Wittgenstein. What commonalities does Weil have with these two writers? Are there any contemporary figures whose religious writing compares to that of Weil’s?
3. Define “radical humanism.” Create a timeline of individuals whom you think have demonstrated radical humanism. Each person on your timeline should have a picture of him or her and a short description of what makes this person’s actions an example of radical humanism.

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H. G. Wells

BORN: 1866, Bromley, England

DIED: 1946, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Time Machine (1895)

The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896)

The Invisible Man (1897)

The War of the Worlds (1898)

The Shape of Things to Come (1933)

Overview

Herbert George Wells is best remembered today as an author of several enduring science fiction classics, among them *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. He was also a vocal advocate of socialism and wrote a large volume of political philosophy and history in addition to his “science romances.”



H. G. Wells Wells, Herbert George, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Love of Science Born in Bromley, Kent, on September 21, 1866, Wells was the third son of Joseph Wells, a shopkeeper, and Sarah Wells. The family's lower-middle-class status was not helped by the fact that Wells's father preferred playing cricket to working as a shopkeeper. When he was injured in Wells's childhood, Wells's mother became the primary breadwinner, working as a housekeeper. While the young Wells inherited his mother's capacity for hard work, he did not share her religious nature. Wells later commented that he found religion of little use during a period of painful convalescence after breaking his leg in 1874. What he did find useful, he said, was the opportunity to read voraciously at this time, particularly science books. Wells later identified his reading as a turning point in his life.

Wells struggled to gain an education and finally succeeded in studying the natural sciences under the well-known proponent of evolution T. H. Huxley. Wells also became associated with the *Science Schools Journal* as a writer and editor.

A Prolific Writer In 1887 Wells and his cousin Isabel Mary Wells fell in love while he was living with her family as a student. They married in 1891, though the couple divorced by 1895 and Wells soon married another woman named Amy Catherine Robbins. Not content to

write only for periodicals, Wells turned his attention to books, and a good indication of how prolific he was at this time can be seen in the fact that in 1895 he published four books, including *The Time Machine*.

Largely on the basis of *The Time Machine*, which was popular during its 1895 serialization in William Ernest Henley's *New Review* and even more popular when published in book form, Wells became an overnight celebrity and was compared to a host of other writers. As he notes in his autobiography, he was variously called the next Jonathan Swift, the next Jules Verne, the next Robert Louis Stevenson, the next Rudyard Kipling, the next J. M. Barrie, and so on. While his next novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, was less well received than *The Time Machine*, Wells nonetheless was on his way up the literary ladder.

The year 1898 was a difficult one for Wells, as several years of overwork resulted in a serious breakdown of his health, with the problem variously diagnosed as tuberculosis and kidney trouble. To recuperate, he and his wife spent much of the year in different seaside resorts on the Kentish coast. Here he met and befriended both Henry James and Joseph Conrad, who lived nearby. This year also saw the publication of Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, a story of the invasion of Earth by Martians.

Moving Away from Science Fiction In 1900 Wells clearly saw the need to branch out from science fiction. That year he published *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, his first successful realistic novel, which deals with the conflicts between academic ambition and sexual desires in a protagonist much like Wells during his undergraduate years and early teaching career. Wells continued to be a prolific writer, producing science fiction such as *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) and increasingly writing about politics and science's impact on society.

Prior to World War I, such works as *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *The New Machiavelli* (1911) established Wells as a leading proponent of socialism, world government, and free thought. During the period of widespread disillusionment that followed World War I, Wells revised his essentially optimistic vision of the future. For example, his volume of essays *The War That Will End War* (1914), published shortly after the outbreak of World War I, inadvertently gave the world, through its title, a cynical catchphrase for obstinate naiveté in the face of widespread corruption. But throughout the 1920s and 1930s Wells wrote social and political criticism and prognostications about the future that were increasingly pessimistic. His last book, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1945), predicts the destruction of civilization and the degeneration of humanity. Wells died in 1946.

Works in Literary Context

Wells's critical and popular reputation rests primarily on his early works of science fiction. Wells's science fiction was profoundly influenced by his adaptation of Huxley's philosophical interpretation of Darwinian evolutionary

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wells's famous contemporaries include:

Jules Verne (1828–1905): French author of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and widely considered to be the first modern science fiction author.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941): Bengali poet, playwright, and philosopher, Tagore was the first Asian Nobel laureate, winning the 1913 Prize for Literature.

T. H. Huxley (1825–1895): English biologist nicknamed "Darwin's bulldog" for his vigorous defense of the new science of evolution.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Irish playwright who wrote of society's ills and the exploitation of the working classes and women. A lifelong socialist and early advocate of vegetarianism, Shaw is also the only person to win both the Nobel Prize and an Oscar.

theory, contending that the course of life on earth, like that of any organism, follows a pattern of quickening, maturation, and decadence. Writing at a time when the notion was seriously advanced that "everything had been discovered"—that only refinements of existing scientific and technological advances remained to be made—Huxley's "cosmic pessimism" was deeply disturbing, implying that humankind faced inevitable decline. Wells adopted this chilling notion in the stories and novels that he wrote in the 1890s, such as *The Time Machine* (1895), *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).

Cosmic Insignificance Wells's first published novel presents some of the major themes that recurred throughout his works, fictional and nonfictional. "The Time Machine," said Frank McConnell and Samuel Hynes in their essay "The Time Machine and The War of the Worlds: Parable and Possibility in H. G. Wells," "is a parable of [a] late-Victorian state of mind—a parable in which science is used as the vehicle for meanings that are profoundly anti-scientific." By the end of the nineteenth century, the reviewers argued, industrialization and scientific advances had created as many, if not more, problems than they had solved. The ultimate expression of Wells's despair of human progress can be found in the climactic scene of the distant future, after the Time Traveller has fled the Morlocks who have taken Weena. "Escaping on the recovered time machine into the infinite future," explained fellow science fiction writer and critic Jack Williamson in *H. G. Wells: Critic of Progress*, "he finds mankind extinct and the solar system itself near death, the earth spiraling inward toward the dying sun."

By the time Wells published *The War of the Worlds*, dozens of future-war stories had been read by audiences at first as cautionary tales and later for their vivid scenes of mass destruction. *The War of the Worlds* is also a future-war novel with many scenes of mass destruction; Wells's innovation here consisted of the fact that this was one of the first, if not the first, such works to describe an invasion by beings from another planet. Like *The Time Machine* with its suggestion that the extinction of the human race is possible if not in fact likely, the result is a questioning of humanity's confidence in its supremacy. Wells reinforces this theme with the conclusion of the novel: While some people have fought valiantly against the Martian onslaught, it is not human ingenuity or power that defeats the aliens, but rather microbes.

Evolution and Devolution In *The Island of Doctor Moreau* Wells presents a microcosm both of the dark side of scientific progress and the inherent savagery of evolution. If Moreau is a twisted God figure, the Beast Folk offer a savage satire of humanity and civilization similar to that found in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, one of Wells's favorite authors. When he returns to Europe, much like Gulliver after his experience with the Houyhnhnms, the protagonist cannot help seeing his fellow human beings as essentially animals. Despite all our seeming civilization, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* tells readers that because of our evolutionary heritage we are more like the Beast Folk than we would care to admit.

The novel *The Time Machine* also explores the implications of human evolution over the long term. In it, society has divided cleanly between the privileged Eloi and the laboring Morlocks. With the elimination of basic societal ills, the Eloi are humans that have evolved but not progressed; along with eliminating disease, crime, and other types of conflict, they no longer have a need for art or science. The Morlocks, with no chance of achieving anything greater than serving the machinery that provides the Eloi their comfortable existence, have also reached an evolutionary dead end.

Works in Critical Context

In his lifetime Wells was frequently criticized not only by those who disagreed with his socialist and agnostic tendencies but by those—such as Virginia Woolf and Henry James—who focused instead on his work's occasional lack of polish and its tendency to drift into propaganda. In some academic quarters, Wells, in many ways so much the antithesis of the widely admired Woolf and James, continues to be regarded with condescension. In his review of David Smith's 1986 biography of Wells, Stanley Weintraub, for example, asserts that Wells "was not a great artist, nor was he a major prophet. He was an undersized boy from the working class who, after a Dickensian childhood, heightened the imaginations of readers all over the world and in the process became rich, famous, self-indulgent, and sloppier as a writer."

Those who admired Wells in his lifetime included Anatole France, who described Wells as “the greatest force in the English speaking world.” Though he deplored the propagandistic streak in Wells’s later novels, H. L. Mencken greatly admired the strength and vigor of Wells’s mind, calling it “one of the most extraordinary that England has produced in our time.” In 1941—five years before Wells’s death—Sinclair Lewis suggested that “there is no greater novelist living than Mr. H. G. Wells.” More recent biographies and critical studies by Smith, Patrick Parrinder, John R. Reed, and John Batchelor reveal that a sympathetic interest in Wells and his work continues to grow. “Wells,” Batchelor suggests, “is a great artist, and those of us who enjoy his work need not feel ashamed of the pleasure we take in reading him.”

To the end of his life, Wells considered his scientific romances as inconsequential. Most contemporary critics agreed with him, including his distinguished colleague, the French science fiction writer Jules Verne. Verne told interviewer Gordon Jones in *Temple Bar*, “The creations of Mr. Wells . . . belong unreservedly to an age and degree of scientific knowledge far removed from the present, though I will not say entirely beyond the limits of the possible.” Verne does state, however, “I have the highest respect for his imaginative genius.”

The War of the Worlds Many critics have interpreted *The War of the Worlds* as an assault on Victorian imperialism and complacency. “Wells repeatedly compares the Martians’ brutal treatment of their victims to civilized man’s treatment of animals and supposedly inferior races,” declared Michael Draper. “The overdeveloped brains, lack of emotions, and artificial bodies of the Martians parody the characteristics of modern man and suggest his evolutionary destiny.” “The germs that kill the Martians appear at first glimpse to be coincidental, simply a convenient *deus ex machina* invented by the author to bring about a pleasing conclusion,” Jack Williamson said. “A second glance, however, shows this solution arising logically from the theme that progress is controlled by biological laws—which bind Martians, no less than men. Meeting a competing species of life against which they have no biological defenses, the Martians are eliminated. Ironically, their lack of defenses is probably the result of their own past progress.”

Responses to Literature

1. What parallels in Wells’s *The Time Machine* can be drawn between the Morlocks and the Eloi and contemporary society? How does the author’s depiction of these two societies reflect his political views? What do you think Wells’s ideal future society would look like?
2. If Jules Verne was the father of science fiction, it could be said that H. G. Wells was the father of science romance. Define science romance; what differentiates it from science fiction? What recent movies or books do you think could be classified as science romance?
3. H. G. Wells was a pacifist, but he also wrote a set of war-game rules called *Little Wars*, designed for

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wells was a master of integrating biting social and political commentary into supposedly fantastic tales, making his far-out tales eerily relevant to his readers. The following are some other works that share these themes and reflect similar mastery of mixing contemporary relevance into tales of imagination.

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969), a novel by Kurt Vonnegut.

This story of a man who has become “unstuck in time” uses time travel as a vehicle for exploring its protagonist’s personal relationships.

Brave New World (1932), a novel by Aldous Huxley. Set in the far future, Huxley describes a utopia free from war and disease, but purchased at the price of many things considered central to the human condition, such as love, family, and art.

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This magnum opus expounds on Rand’s philosophy of objectivism by presenting a world in which artists and intellectuals cease to contribute to the world’s welfare, to the detriment of all.

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This magnum opus expounds on Rand’s philosophy of objectivism by presenting a world in which artists and intellectuals cease to contribute to the world’s welfare, to the detriment of all.

Neuromancer (1984), a novel by William Gibson. Gibson imagines a near-future time dominated by corporations and advanced technology in one of the first popular works to examine genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and worldwide computer networks.

playing with toy soldiers. Do you think Wells was being hypocritical? What are your own views of pacifism? Do you think being against war in real life means that you cannot be interested in military matters at all?

4. Wells wrote about scientific discoveries and inventions that, for modern readers, are in many cases already history. Humans have already ventured to the Moon, for example, and unmanned exploration of Mars has revealed no vengeful alien race ready for attack. Despite this, Wells’s work remains popular, especially among younger readers. What do you think accounts for the continuing popularity of Wells’s work? Be specific in your answer.

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Rebecca West

BORN: 1892, London, England

DIED: 1983, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Return of the Soldier (1918)

Harriet Hume (1929)

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon (1941)

The Fountain Overflows (1957)

The Birds Fall Down (1966)



Rebecca West West, Rebecca, 1953, photograph. Baron / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Overview

Rebecca West's career as a writer spanned more than seventy years. She excelled in writing novels and short stories, literary theory and criticism, biography, political analysis, and persuasive rhetoric for various causes (socialist, feminist, anti-Fascist, and anti-Communist). Both her fiction and nonfiction are notable for their penetrating psychological analyses of motivation and behavior, and her nonfiction demonstrates her ability to research and to synthesize her findings on historical eras and sociological issues.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Impoverished Beginning Rebecca West was the pseudonym of Cicely (the spelling later changed to Cicily) Isabel Fairfield, born in London in 1892. The youngest of three daughters born to Charles and Isabella Fairfield, she had a childhood filled with intellectual stimulation but marred by instability. Her father abandoned the family when West was eight, and her mother, a Scotswoman, moved the family to Edinburgh. West's

schooling was interrupted in 1907 when she fell ill with tuberculosis.

In her teens, West became active in the women's suffrage movement. In England, the push to gain women the right to vote became especially vigorous. Emmeline Pankhurst, the most famous of the British suffragists, had founded a militant political action group in 1903 that staged numerous protests to draw attention to the cause. Pankhurst was arrested more than a dozen times, and she inspired thousands of women to join her struggle. British women finally gained full voting rights in 1928.

Although West harbored an early ambition to be an actress, she only attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London for three terms before deciding it was not the profession for her. She remained there long enough, however, to play the role of Rebecca West in Henrik Ibsen's *Romersholt*, a play she later characterized as "the 'Hamlet' of the revolutionary intellectual movement," in a 1919 *London Daily News* article. Thus, she found the name she made her own. The first published piece bearing this pen name appeared in the *Freewoman* in February of 1912. West made light of her decision to launch a literary career: "At home," she said, "we all wrote and thought nothing of it."

Feminist Writings: Wit, Audacity, and Savage Criticism It was as a book reviewer and journalist that West initially established her reputation, writing for a growing number of prominent publications in Britain and the United States. She joined the staff of the *Freewoman*, a militantly feminist publication, as a reviewer of books known for her wittily savage criticisms. Mrs. Humphrey Ward, a formidable member of the literary establishment and a foe of the suffragists, was one of her first targets. H. G. Wells was another, but he was so intrigued by her clever audacity that he sought her out. This marked the beginning of a ten-year relationship between Wells and West—an affair that resulted in the birth of their son Anthony West in August of 1914.

Support of Women's Suffrage Many of West's early pieces were written in support of the women's suffrage movement. For example, "The Life of Emily Davison" is an angry and moving essay on the suffragette who threw herself in front of the king's horse at Ascot. West had the ability to write passionate controversial prose, but she was also adept at the acidic aside, a technique she employed to devastating effect in her literary reviews. Although she claimed in her essay "Mr Chesterton in Hysterics" that "I myself have never been able to find out what Feminism is; I only know that people call me a Feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute," her adherence to a broadly feminist point of view is clear.

Career as a Novelist West's first book—a study of the American writer Henry James, published in 1916—

was an extended example of the same kind of literary criticism for which she was known. In it, West condemns James for portraying women only as "failed sexual beings" and accuses him of lacking intellectual passion. While it also shows West to be a great admirer of James, the book came in for criticism from those who regarded it as unseemly for a twenty-three-year-old woman to criticize the work of such an esteemed writer.

West's first work of fiction was *The Return of the Soldier*, published in 1918. It employs amnesia from shellshock and an unusual perspective on the war: that of those who waited at home. These elements permit West to explore the reactions of three women to a returning soldier who, though married, remembers only an earlier, idyllic love for another woman. This is the shortest of West's novels, and although it may be "composed entirely of the fictional clichés of its time," as Martin Green declared in a 1977 *Saturday Review* essay, it went into a second printing within a month. When her second novel, *The Judge*, was published in 1922, it inspired Somerset Maugham to write, "I do not think there is anyone writing now who can hold a candle to you."

Studies of Nazism and Treason West married banker Henry Maxwell Andrews in 1930, and after the publication of her fifth novel, *The Thinking Reed*, in 1936, she wrote no more fiction for nearly twenty years. In 1937, she and her husband undertook a trip to Yugoslavia that resulted in a mammoth volume on the history of the region and the threat of Nazism, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). Yugoslavia entered World War II, when Hitler—aided by Italian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian forces—invaded, bombing Belgrade and other major cities in April of 1941. After World War II, she wrote *The Meaning of Treason* (1947), a book that grew out of her coverage of the Nuremberg war crime trials for the *New Yorker*. *The Fountain Overflows* (1957) is a semi-autobiographical evocation of West's Edinburgh childhood. It was the first part of an intended trilogy, the second two books of which, *This Real Night* and *Cousin Rosamund*, were published posthumously. *The Birds Fall Down*, which appeared in 1966, was described by West as a study of treachery and can perhaps be seen as the working out in fictional form of themes that appeared in *The Meaning of Treason*.

West's last book, *1900* (1982), provides a compact social history of a single year, as well as a perspective from which that year can be seen as pivotal between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The book might be viewed as a nonfiction sequel to *The Fountain Overflows*, as if Rose had returned at the age of ninety to look back at her life in 1900. The episodic situation, the whimsical selection of anecdote, the swiftly sketched personalities, and the ranging interests of that novel all reappear, as does the vitality one identifies with the youthful narrator of that book and with the essays in *The Young Rebecca*,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

West's famous contemporaries include:

Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977): English actor and director who has been hailed as one of the greatest comic minds of the modern age. His iconic “Little Tramp” character is recognizable the world over and has influenced generations of comedians and actors since the character’s screen debut in 1914.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): Along with Jules Verne, Wells is often cited as the father of modern science fiction. Like Verne, his futuristic visions have had a tremendous influence on popular culture as well as legitimate scientific thought.

Mickey Spillane (1918–2006): Starting his literary career in the 1940s, Spillane churned out a series of “hard-boiled” detective novels featuring his signature hero, Mike Hammer.

Haile Selassie I (1892–1975): Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 until his death; Selassie’s speeches to the League of Nations protesting Italy’s invasion and use of chemical weapons in 1936 were some of the most eloquent words spoken against the brutality of modern war.

Amelia Earhart (1897–1937): An early aviation pioneer, Earhart was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic and the first woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross. She disappeared somewhere over the Pacific Ocean while attempting to circumnavigate the globe.

Howard Hughes (1905–1976): An aviation pioneer, Hughes went on to a career as a successful film director in Hollywood before becoming one of the world’s most famous eccentric recluses.

1911–1917 (1982). In *1900*, the substantial text is accompanied by excellent photographs.

In her last years, West remained articulate and thoughtful on public issues and figures. Two years before her death, she appeared in the film *Reds*, commenting upon the Russian revolution. In May 1980, when the Iranian embassy, adjacent to her home in Kensington, was under siege, she was reluctant to be evacuated. A month before her death her last article was published in *Vogue*, describing with sharp observation and gentlest wit the changes that age was producing in her sensory and mental processes—changes she found not only frustrating but sometimes intriguing. Her final illness was brief; she died on March 15, 1983, and was buried at Brookwood Cemetery, Woking.

Works in Literary Context

Heavily influenced by her youth in a household of fervent intellectual discussion and, later, by her relationships with many prominent writers of her day, West was one of the

leading intellectual figures of the twentieth century. Though her varied and long career makes it difficult to generalize about her work, certain philosophical views do underlie and unify her writing. After World War II, one theme emerged as a key element in much of West’s work, both fiction and nonfiction: the nature of treason and betrayal.

Treason and Betrayal West wrote much on treason and related topics in various periodicals. Some of this material she collected in two books, *A Train of Powder* (1955) and *The Vassall Affair* (1963). The courtroom atmosphere of *The Meaning of Treason* is present again in *A Train of Powder*. Although it contains two essays on the development of political awareness in postwar Germany, the book focuses primarily on trials: for war crimes at Nuremberg, for a racially motivated murder in South Carolina, for a greed-inspired killing in London, and—again—for treason of various kinds. West’s ability to bring these courtroom dramas to life, to make their participants live on the page, enhanced her reputation as one of the greatest journalists of her period. *The Vassall Affair*, her report on a young Englishman who spied for the Soviets, can be read as an addendum to *The New Meaning of Treason*. The report primarily illustrates how demoralizing the discovery of these spies was to the British government’s confidence in its own integrity and its ability to function in the country’s best interests.

A final example of West’s interest in treason’s many faces is her novel *The Birds Fall Down* (1966). Instead of using an example from the gallery of traitors she had observed in the British courtrooms, she drew upon the story of a double agent from tsarist Russia, Ievno Azeff, who was both an informant for the secret police and a leader of a terrorist band. The novel West creates out of this double betrayal concludes with the deaths of both the traitor and a friend he betrayed. Told through the consciousness of a young girl, the story is as much about how her innocent involvement in events affects her as it is about the entanglement of loyalties and betrayals among the adults.

Influence through the Power of Observation

West’s literary production was so varied and at times so unorthodox that attempting to restrain her within any conventional category would do her an injustice. She did have a large reading audience, though its composition shifted from book to book. As a novelist she was popular, but her wider influence came through her feminist writings and journalism, which are now receiving renewed attention from newer generations of readers. These works all carry a trademark power of observation that remains relevant. Thus William Shawn, editor of the *New Yorker*, could comment in the *New York Times*: “No one in this century . . . looked at the intricacies of human character and the ways of the world more intelligently.”

Works in Critical Context

The Judge While she was writing *The Judge* (1922), West entered a period of personal loss that may have negatively impacted her creative process. H. G. Wells insisted in an angry letter that he must be honest about how much she had failed in this novel, saying that *The Judge* was “an ill conceived sprawl of a book with a faked hero and a faked climax, an aimless waste of [her] powers.” Fortunately for West, none of the published evaluations were as negative. Most of those in the prominent publications praised her writing, but they ended with reservations about the aesthetic value of the work. Its length, its slow pace, and the lack of unity between its two large sections clearly damaged the novel in the minds of the critics.

Harriet Hume In *Harriet Hume* (1929), an experiment in fantasy, West also experiments with the form of the novel. In contrast to his critiques of her earlier novels, H. G. Wells wrote West a note of praise, stating that the love-antagonism of Harriet and Arnold illustrated Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung’s “ideas about the persona, anima, and animus.” The novel gained neither popular nor critical attention, but Wells could still be positive about this work, although his note implied disparagement of her other books: “It is just as though you were coming awake and alive after years in a sort of intellectual trance.”

While critics agree that Rebecca West may be the most consequential journalist of the twentieth century and one of the best modern essayists, one finds less agreement as to the permanence of her fiction in literary history. Most critics who have sought to generalize about her contribution to fiction since her death have stressed her style, wit, and facility with language, her tremendous intellectual powers, and her understanding of the intricacies of the human mind and emotions. Diana Trilling judged her to be “one of the major literary figures of this century” and celebrated the rigor of an intellect that “was never taken in by any of the easy pieties of the literary or political culture.” William F. Buckley, acknowledging her liberal persuasion as different from his own, acclaimed her as “a great literary figure,” “the literary virtuoso of immense learning . . . who was . . . forever capable of marshalling her incomparable energies to make the case for human decency.”

Responses to Literature

1. Review modern definitions of feminism. Do Rebecca West’s writings reflect any contemporary views? How do her views differ?
2. In West’s travelogue of Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, how does she portray the native populations? Does she take sides between the Serbs and Croats?
3. What do you think West meant when she said “I only know that people call me a Feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute”?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rebecca West was a notable feminist journalist, critic, and author. Works by other well-known feminist writers include:

The Feminine Mystique (1963), a book by Betty Friedan. Often cited as having launched the modern women’s movement, Friedan’s book condemned the widely held belief that women’s lives existed solely to cook, clean, and raise children.

A Room of One’s Own (1929), an extended essay by Virginia Woolf. Based on a series of lectures, this work examines women’s capabilities as authors and the obstacles they face.

The Bell Jar (1963), a novel by Sylvia Plath. Although not explicitly a feminist work, this novel, closely based on Plath’s own life and struggles with mental illness, strikes several strongly feminist chords, as in the famous quote, “What I hate is being under a man’s thumb.”

4. Do you agree with West’s assertion in *The New Meaning of Treason* that there *are* secrets of science—such as nuclear weapons—that should not be shared with enemy nations? Why or why not?

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Patrick White

BORN: 1912, London, England

DIED: 1990, Sydney, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

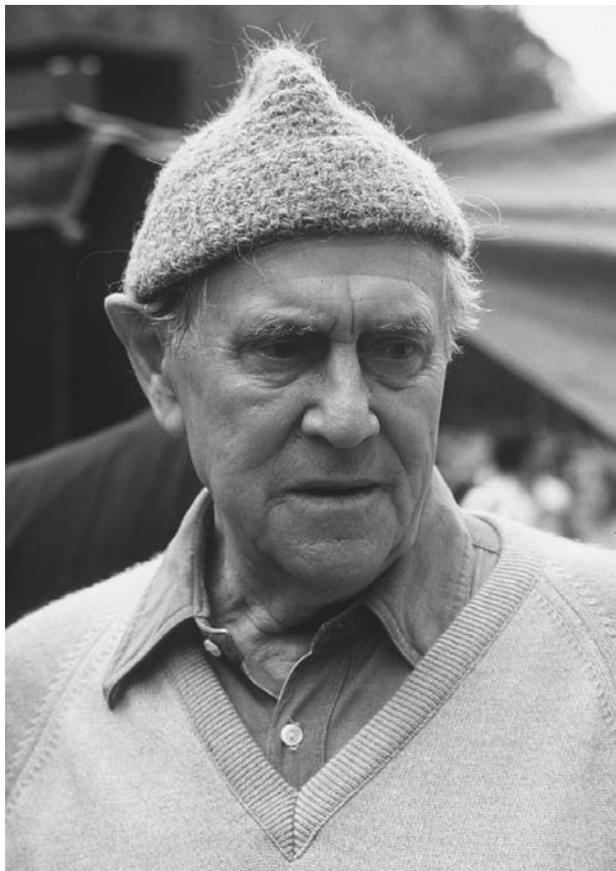
MAJOR WORKS:

The Tree of Man (1955)

Voss (1957)

Riders in the Chariot (1961)

The Vivisector (1968)



Patrick White Patrick Riviere / Getty Images

Overview

Best known as the author of such novels as *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957), Patrick White remains a central figure in Australian literature. The Nobel Academy awarded him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973 for “an authentic voice that carries across the world,” but his unflattering portrayal of Australian society denied him the stature within his homeland that he enjoyed elsewhere. White’s novels are stylistically complex explorations of isolation, often featuring unstable and eccentric characters who attempt to forge some semblance of normalcy in a banal and often cruel environment.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Educated in England The first child of a wealthy Australian couple, White was born while his parents were visiting London in 1912. He began writing plays at an early age and attended schools in Australia until the age of thirteen, when his parents sent him to Cheltenham College, a boarding school near Gloucester, England. After graduating in 1929, White returned to Australia and worked for two years as a jackeroo, or ranch hand.

During this period, he published a small volume of poetry—*Thirteen Poems* (1930)—and began writing novels. In 1932, White returned to England and entered Cambridge University, where he studied French and German.

Receiving his bachelor’s degree in 1935, White remained in London but frequently traveled throughout the United States and the European continent. He published another volume of poetry, *The Ploughman, and Other Poems* (1935), contributed several short stories in the *London Mercury*, and put out his first serious novel, *Happy Valley* (1939). Awarded the gold medal of the Australian Literary Society in 1941, *Happy Valley* takes place in a fictional rural region of Australia during the mid-1930s and chronicles the events leading up to the murder of an adulteress and the subsequent death of her killer.

Served in World War II During World War II, White served in the Royal Air Force as an intelligence officer from 1940 to 1945. World War II began in Europe in 1939 when Great Britain declared war on Germany after the Nazis invaded Poland. Britain and its allies sought to contain German leader Adolf Hitler’s territorial and military ambitions, but Germany was able to control much of continental Europe for much of the war and heavily bombed Great Britain in preparation for an invasion that never happened. Great Britain’s casualties reached seven hundred thousand over the course of the conflict. Australians fought alongside the British during the conflict, primarily in the Middle East theater from 1940 to 1942, then in the Pacific theater after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

While serving in the military during the war, White published one novel. *The Living and the Dead* (1941) centers on a middle-aged bachelor who reflects upon his childhood and family history. This work is chiefly noted for its development of stream-of-consciousness narration and its use of flashbacks. After World War II ended, White returned to Australia, where a period of intense immigration had just begun. There, he focused primarily on writing and soon became a literary success. White’s third novel, *The Aunt’s Story* (1948), is generally considered his first major work.

International Recognition After moving to a six-acre property known as Dogwoods, where he grew fruit and flowers, gathered farm produce, and bred goats and schnauzers, White published his fourth novel. He received international recognition for *The Tree of Man* (1955), which concerns a pioneering Australian couple who establish a farm at the turn of the twentieth century. The eponymous protagonist of White’s next novel, *Voss* (1957), is modeled after Ludwig Leichhardt, a German explorer who disappeared while attempting to cross the interior of the Australian continent during the 1840s.

Contrasting the experience of outsiders in Australian society with those of the well-established middle class, much of the narrative alternates between Voss's expedition across the outback and the daily life of Laura Trevelyan, a young woman living in Sydney with whom Voss shares an intuitive emotional bond that some commentators have described as telepathic.

The author continued to write challenging books in the 1950s. *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) concerns the persecution of four social outcasts by the inhabitants of Sarsaparilla, a fictitious suburb of Sydney. Critics have frequently noted White's satirical condemnation of the stifling conformity of suburbia in his portrayal of the residents of Sarsaparilla. White's seventh novel, *The Solid Mandala* (1966), is also set in Sarsaparilla.

Nobel Prize White's output was unabated in the 1970s. In *The Vivisector* (1970), he examines the relationship between the artist and society through his portrayal of the artistic and emotional development of a fictional Australian painter. White was awarded the Nobel Prize for his realistic portrayal of Australian society shortly after the publication of his ninth novel, *The Eye of the Storm* (1973). The author's life changed after he won the award as he was compelled to become a public figure. White became more outspoken on national and international issues, speaking out against Australian conscription for the war in Vietnam and the power brokers in Sydney, for example. He also used his Nobel Prize money to fund a grant for Australian writers.

By the end of his life, White resided on a duck farm in New South Wales, where he lived off the produce he raised there. During his last decade, he published his third short-story collection, *Three Uneasy Pieces* (1987). Like his previous two collections—*The Burnt Ones* (1964) and *The Cockatoos* (1974)—many of these stories feature the Sarsaparilla settings and themes found in his novels and are often noted for their harsh satirizing of middle-class life and politics. White also published another novel, *Memories of Many in One, by Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray* (1986), his last work of fiction; *Three Uneasy Pieces* (1987); and his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait* (1981), which focuses primarily on his early life and relates his experiences as a writer and homosexual in Australian society. As he had for many years, White continued to point out corruption in the Australian government as well as its inhumane treatment of aborigines. White openly boycotted the 1988 celebrations commemorating the two hundredth anniversary of white settlement in the country. He died after a long illness on September 30, 1990, in Sydney, Australia.

Works in Literary Context

As a writer, White found much of his inspiration in the way people lived and thought in the varied, harsh Aus-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

White's famous contemporaries include:

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992): One of the best-known Australian painters, Nolan made a name for himself with an iconic series of paintings of the outlaw hero Ned Kelly.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): One of the most successful and influential playwrights of the twentieth century, the American Williams specialized in writing emotionally charged character studies set in his native South. Many of his plays, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), were adapted into successful films.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969): Known as "Ike," American general Eisenhower became a national hero during World War II when he led the Allied forces in Europe to victory. He rode this popularity to a two-term presidency in the 1950s, a decade often remembered as the "Eisenhower era."

Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968): Soviet cosmonaut Gagarin became the first man in space and the first to orbit the earth on April 12, 1961, beating the Americans in the space race by twenty-three days.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): An American novelist and journalist, Hemingway's rugged, globe-trotting lifestyle was almost as noteworthy as his distinctive prose stylings. Winner of the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, Hemingway's writings, such as *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), are still widely read and highly influential.

Groucho Marx (1890–1977): Perhaps the best known of the Marx Brothers comedy troupe, Groucho was famed for his distinctive look—greasepaint eyebrows and moustache, and a porkpie hat—and his razor-sharp wit. His films include *Animal Crackers* (1930).

tralian landscape as well as his own sexual identity and interest in spirituality. Other authors also affected his works, and he was influenced by and compared with Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy for his psychological perceptions, the epic nature of his works, and his variety of characters. In addition to being influenced by D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy, White's modernist tendencies can be linked to his interest in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and the abstract paintings of Australian painter Roy de Maistre.

Spirituality and the Search for Meaning White examined a variety of religious attitudes to attain the philosophies he needed to explore his overriding concern: man's search for meaning in an apparently meaningless society. Inherent in White's consideration of spirituality in a mechanical and materialistic world was the concept of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other authors who have explored the theme of isolation and the search for meaning include:

H. P. Lovecraft: Tales (2005), a short-story collection by H. P. Lovecraft. This collection of short stories by the recognized master of modern horror, often revisits themes of cosmic indifference and inhuman horror: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents," he once stated.

Waiting for Godot (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. "A tragic-comedy in two acts," this play centers around characters who spend the entire performance waiting for a man named Godot—who never arrives. The exact meaning of Godot's nonappearance has been linked to religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the human condition.

The Awakening (1899), a novel by Kate Chopin. An early feminist novel that examines the consequences of a woman's attempts to establish an individual identity in the suffocating upper-class society of her contemporaries.

man's isolation in a crowded society. Even within the most basic societal structures man is alienated, alone; man's need for meaning is ultimately to be found in the interior world, the world of the imagination and the soul. Robert Phillips said, "White's thesis . . . is simply this: We are all alone in a chaotic world and only we ourselves can help ourselves during our brief tenure." Often White's theory of the duality of man was exhibited through characters decayed in body but whole in spirit. When asked in an interview if there were any continuing theme running through his work, White told Andrew Clark in the *New York Times Book Review* that his "dominant obsession" was the search for "some meaning and design" in what he described as "the tragic farce of life—to find reason in apparent unreason, and how to accept a supernatural force which on the one hand blesses and on the other destroys."

Isolation White's frequent use of the isolation theme in his fiction was rooted in his personal feelings of alienation from his fellow countrymen. Several periods of expatriation preceded his ultimate return to Australia. As he explained to Ingmar Bjoerksten in *Patrick White: A General Introduction*: "It was eighteen years before I dared to come back to Australia for the third time. . . . I couldn't do without the countryside out here. I don't believe in a final break with the place one originates from. Only a temporary break . . . to get perspective. You are

shaped by the place you have your roots in; it has become part of you. Outside places don't shape you in the same way. This has nothing to do with nationalism. People are always the same. This is what my compatriots find so difficult to understand." Bjoerksten explored another possible cause of White's feelings of alienation: "For a long time he was dismissed as peculiar, pretentious, and irrelevant by his countrymen, whose restricted vision and whose limited experience of what human life has to offer he exposes time after time, while simultaneously attacking the holy cow that they so deeply revere: an uncritical materialism that never questions itself." White's 1973 Nobel Prize has gained him greater acceptance among Australians, although he is still more widely read in other countries.

White's Homosexuality White saw no need to write the "great Australian homosexual novel" although he was urged to do so. He despised those who surrounded themselves with fellow homosexuals, yet he made no apologies about his own sexual orientation, which he thought to be the source of his creativity. For him, homosexuality meant a blending of masculine and feminine, and he credited his feminine side with the insight that enabled him to depict so accurately the spiritual and psychological inner beings of his characters. Although there are few overtly homosexual figures in his novels, and they are often singled out and criticized for shallowness, there are many substantial, almost mystical friendships, such as that between Voss and Harry Robarts. His "heroes" are mystics, driven to pursue the meaning below the surface of everyday life.

Influence As a leading author in twentieth-century Australian literature, White affected the generations of Australian novelists who followed him in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While all Australians have not always appreciated the way White has depicted them or their culture and society, his Nobel Prize brought greater attention and worldwide recognition of his power and influence as an author. He also helped financially support Australian writers through the grant program he established with the money that accompanied the Nobel Prize.

Works in Critical Context

White's reputation as a writer rests primarily on his novels, though his short stories, plays, and poetry have received increasing critical attention. With the publication of *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man*, he achieved international recognition as a novelist with a distinctive, if somewhat disturbing, literary style and vision of life. But such praise was almost exclusively outside his home country. In Australia, critics and readers initially found White's work harsh and difficult to read. This view changed with the publication of such masterworks as *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot*, and *The Solid Mandala* in the late 1950s and early 1960s. White is now generally recognized as one of

Australia's most important writers, perhaps its greatest novelist of the twentieth century. Many critics have found that his writing is "unreadable" and convoluted, that his symbolism is sometimes heavy-handed, and that his characterizations are restrictive or uneven. Others, however, have argued that within White's cynicism is a recipe for wisdom and redemption, and that his brutally honest depictions of the sinister aspects of human life contain hints, if not confirmations, of a higher reality to our mundane existence.

The Twyborn Affair One novel by White that exemplifies critical division is *The Twyborn Affair*, a modern rendering of the Tiresias myth set in the early twentieth century. While some reviewers found this work repugnant and degrading, others commended White's compassionate view of homosexuality. Many critics were impressed with White's achievement in finding new expression of a longtime major theme in his work—the infinite possibilities of a single personality. In the *New Leader*, Betty Falkenberg praised *The Twyborn Affair* as "an extraordinary novel of quest, an odyssey through place, time and especially gender—all three of which, by virtue of their boundaries, delimit and even alienate the individual from his possible selves." While the *New York Times Book Review's* Benjamin DeMott believed that the book was "a case study of sexual proteanism and the thematic core is the mystery of human identity," he also believed that "the problem is the book's too unremitting scorn of human attachment." More impressed was William Walsh. Reviewing *The Twyborn Affair* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Walsh wrote, "The novel is impressive in its conception, astonishing in its concreteness, sharp in its sardonic social discriminations, and rich in its use of the resources of language."

Responses to Literature

1. White's unique style has drawn as many negative critiques as encomiums. Write an essay in which you explore this question: Do you feel his style interferes with the message of his writing or supports it?
2. Despite feeling his whole life that he was a "Londoner" and not an Australian, White set all his novels in Australia. In a small group, discuss these questions: How does this ambivalence manifest in White's writing? Why do you think White chose to write about Australia if he felt so disconnected from it?
3. *Voss* centers on the real-life nineteenth-century attempts to cross the Australian outback. Research the life of Ludwig Leichhardt and other outback explorers and write a paper that includes your findings and answers these questions: What were some of the hardships they faced? Does White do an effective job of communicating these difficulties?
4. Create a presentation that answers these questions: How does White view organized religions? How does he address theological questions in his work? Does White think religion is relevant in modern society?

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Elie Wiesel

BORN: 1928, Sighet, Romania

NATIONALITY: Romanian, Jewish, American

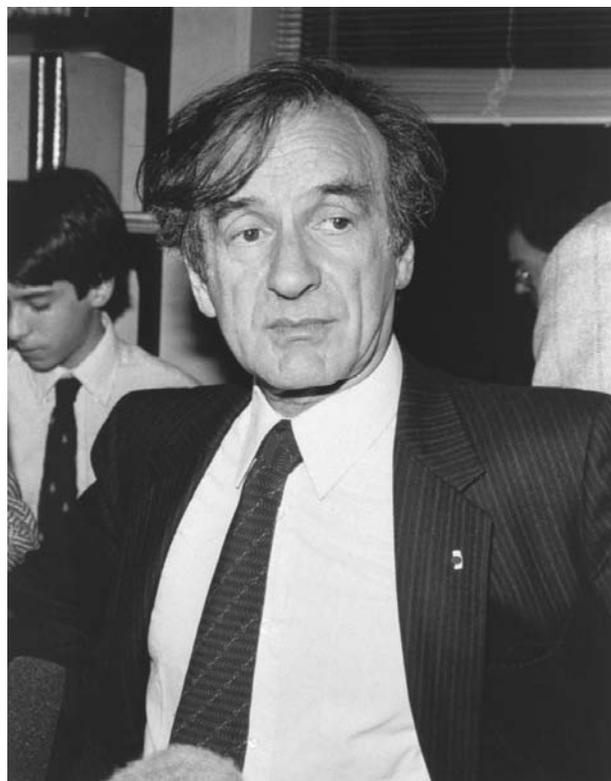
GENRE: Novels, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

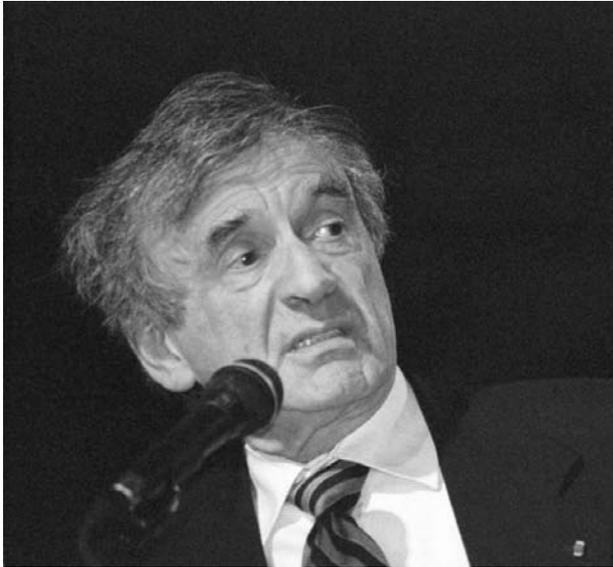
Night (1958)

Dawn (1961)

The Accident (1961)



Elie Wiesel *Wiesel, Elie*, 1986, photograph. AP Images.



Elie Wiesel *Wiesel, Elie*, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

A survivor of the Nazi concentration camps and the winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, Elie Wiesel is one of the most important authors of Holocaust literature and an eloquent spokesperson for contemporary Judaism. Throughout his work, he has attempted to comprehend the horror of the concentration camps and the apparent indifference of God, thereby reaffirming his life and faith. Although Wiesel seemingly focuses on exclusively Jewish concerns, the relevance of his work lies in his ability to speak for all persecuted people, and, by extension, for humanity itself.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Eliezer Wiesel was born on September 30, 1928, in Sighet, Romania, a town situated in the Carpathian Mountains in northern Transylvania. He was the third of four children and the only son born to Shlomo and Sarah Feig Wiesel. Sighet, which passed from Romanian to Hungarian rule during World War II, is described under various guises in several of Wiesel's novels. As Wiesel recalled in *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (1990), Sighet was a typical Jewish town, "rambunctious and vibrant with beauty and faith," whose inhabitants prayed in Hebrew, spoke Yiddish among themselves, and responded to outsiders in Romanian, Hungarian, or Ruthenian. Jews had lived there since the seventeenth century, developing synagogues, day schools and yeshivas, and various communal institutions, as well as newspapers. Sighet inspired Wiesel's profound sense of Jewish identity and particularly his belief in the Jewish people and God.

A Terror Never to Be Forgotten Wiesel's formal education began when he was three years old in traditional Jewish *kheder* (elementary religious school). His parents encouraged his interest in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as in the teachings of the Hasidic masters and the traditions of the Torah, Talmud, and Kabbala.

In the spring of 1944, the Nazis raided Sighet and deported Wiesel, then fifteen years old, and his family to the concentration camps at Birkenau and Auschwitz. Wiesel's descriptions of the traumatic end of Sighet's Jewish community capture not only his personal tragedy but the total destruction of Central and Eastern European Jewish life during the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the systemic arrest and murder of millions of European Jews and other populations deemed "undesirable" by the racist Nazi regime. Separated from his mother and sisters upon arrival, he was sent with his father to Auschwitz. When Soviet troops neared the concentration camp in 1945, the captives were forced to march to Buchenwald, another camp. Wiesel's father died in Buchenwald just days before the United States Army liberated the camp on April 11, 1945. Upon liberation, Wiesel learned that his mother and younger sister had perished in the gas chambers. His older sisters, however, had survived, and years later they and Elie were reunited.

Wiesel was evacuated with other child survivors from Germany by the American military, but their train was diverted to France on orders from Charles de Gaulle, head of the French provisional government after World War II. Wiesel was sent to a home for Jewish child survivors in Normandy. Later, in Paris, he found his eldest sister, Hilda.

Breaking the Silence About the Concentration Camps In Paris, Wiesel studied literature at the Sorbonne. Beginning in 1947, he became a journalist, writing for the French-Jewish periodical *L'Arche* and for the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Akharonot*. In 1949 he traveled to Israel to cover the War of Independence. His experience as a journalist provided Wiesel with the rigorous discipline he employed in his subsequent writing. But he could not quite bring himself to write about what he had seen at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Doubtful of his—or of anyone's—ability to convey the horrible truth without diminishing it, Wiesel vowed never to make the attempt.

The young journalist's self-imposed silence came to an end in 1954, after he met and interviewed the Nobel Prize-winning novelist François Mauriac. Deeply moved upon learning of Wiesel's tragic youth, Mauriac urged him to tell the world of his experiences, to "bear witness" for the millions of men, women, and children whom death had silenced. That meeting set Wiesel on his lifelong career as a Holocaust witness, writer, lecturer, and educator. Over the next year, Wiesel wrote an 800-page

Yiddish memoir, *And the World Kept Silent*, which was published in Argentina in 1956. On Mauriac's counsel, Wiesel revised, shortened, and translated the Yiddish text into French, giving it the title *Night* (1958). *Night* would come to be recognized as one of the most powerful works in Holocaust literature.

Life in America Wiesel moved to the United States in 1955. He followed up *Night* with *Dawn* (1961) and *The Accident* (1962). The three books together are known as the "Night Trilogy." Wiesel applied for and received U.S. citizenship in 1963, when his French travel papers expired. In 1969, he married Marion Ester Rose, a fellow Holocaust survivor who is now the primary English translator of his works.

With the success of his writings, Wiesel has emerged as an important moral voice on issues concerning religion and human rights, as well as one of the most significant witnesses to the Holocaust. From 1972 to 1976, Wiesel held a full-time position as distinguished professor at City College of New York, where he taught Hasidic texts, Holocaust-related subjects, and Talmud. Throughout this period, Wiesel produced several works about Jewish history and scripture.

In 1976, Boston University appointed Wiesel the Andrew W. Mellon Professor Chair in the Humanities. President Jimmy Carter invited Wiesel to chair the President's Commission on the Holocaust in November 1978. Wiesel's work helped create the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the annual "Days of Remembrance" to recall and honor the millions who lost their lives in the Holocaust. During the 1980s, Wiesel spoke out on many international issues, including the maltreatment of Soviet Jews, the suffering of African tribes, the injustice of apartheid in South Africa, and the perils of nuclear weapons. In 1985 President Ronald Reagan awarded Wiesel the United States Congressional Gold Medal. In 1986, the Nobel Committee conferred the Nobel Peace Prize on Wiesel.

Memoirs Wiesel produced two volumes of memoirs: *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995), spanning the years from his childhood to the 1960s, and *And the Sea Is Never Full* (1996), bringing his story to the present. The author devotes only twenty pages of the first book to his concentration camp experiences. The emphasis is not on those specific events, but on how he has spent the remainder of his life in their shadows.

Works in Literary Context

The major literary influences in the life of Elie Wiesel come from his early immersion in study of Jewish texts such as the Torah and Talmud, as well as Jewish history and the lives of the Hasidic masters. A great proportion of Wiesel's literary output has been Jewish in its overriding occupation with ethical and religious

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wiesel's famous contemporaries include:

Jacques Chirac (1932–): served as the president of France from 1995 to 2007

Harold Pinter (1930–): English playwright

Derek Walcott (1930–): West Indian poet and playwright

Desmond Tutu (1931–): South African religious leader and Nobel peace laureate

questions. Later, when he studied at the Sorbonne, his teacher Francois Wahl played a significant role in his life, conveying to him the subtleties of French literature.

Memory and Shaping Events Thematically, the writing of Elie Wiesel has been consistent, even single-minded, in its emphasis on the power of shaping events—most crucially, the experience of the concentration camps—to dominate the lives not only of their survivors, but of their children, and entire communities. His writings serve as rituals of collective memory for the Jewish people, and for the world: reminders not to forget the tragedy of the Holocaust. Not surprisingly, then, the issue of memory, and the limits of its power, is another touchstone in Wiesel's literary work. Wiesel has been an influential force in the ever-expanding literature of the Second World War, as well as twentieth-century Jewish writing. His intense confrontation with the meaning of the concentration camps, and his willingness to speak from a moral perspective on a range of issues, have influenced survivors of war and ethnic violence worldwide to testify publicly about their experiences.

Works in Critical Context

Night has been universally acclaimed as one of the most powerful works of literature to come out of World War II, although questions have at times been raised as to the veracity of some of the incidents and images recorded in the memoir. The remainder of Wiesel's work has been open to a range of critical assessments. He has his detractors, who dismiss many of his plots and characters as mere vehicles for his political and social concerns, and question whether his fiction is art or polemic. Some find that his prose occasionally turns trite. Others take issue with some of his political stances, such as his alleged lack of concern for the plight of the Palestinians. However, most commentators praise his sensitive insight into human behavior, his moral candor, and his status as the virtual living embodiment of Holocaust memory.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are some important works of postwar literature that, like the novels of Elie Wiesel, grapple with the epic tragedies of the war years:

Doctor Faustus (1947), by Thomas Mann. An elaborate reworking of the legend of Faust, set against the spiritual and intellectual disaster of the Third Reich.

The Thin Red Line (1962), by James Jones. A fictional account of the Battle of Guadalcanal, describing the alienation and horrors of American servicemen in the Pacific.

Black Rain (1965), by Masuji Ibuse. A novel based on records of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 and its aftermath.

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969), by Kurt Vonnegut. A tragic-comedy of time travel that opens with the firebombing of Dresden.

Responses to Literature

1. What do you think explains Elie Wiesel's consuming interest in the Holocaust and its aftermath? How has this interest affected other great humanitarian voices around the world? Describe two other such figures and talk about their influences as well.
2. Elie Wiesel's life has differed immensely from the life he imagined for himself as he grew up in the Romanian-Jewish shtetl of Sighet. Do some research on Sighet, and try to express some specific ways that Wiesel was shaped by his religious upbringing there.
3. Find three passages in Wiesel's works that you feel demonstrate his most powerful rhetoric and describe how they reflect his postwar passions.

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■ James Alfred Wight

SEE *James Herriot*

▣ Oscar Wilde

BORN: *Dublin, Ireland, 1854*

DIED: *Paris, France, 1900*

NATIONALITY: *Irish, British*

GENRE: *Drama, fiction, poetry, essays*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)

Lady Windermere's Fan (1892)

An Ideal Husband (1895)

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)

The Happy Prince, and Other Tales (1888)

Overview

There is a temptation to treat British author Oscar Wilde's work lightly in large part due to his flamboyant and notorious lifestyle, which is often better known than his writings. He posed as an aesthete and a decadent—a follower of literary movements of the late Victorian age that argued for "art for art's sake." Nevertheless, Wilde advocated reform through social critique in his plays,



Oscar Wilde *Wilde, Oscar, photograph.*

short stories, novels, essays, and poems, and he challenged Victorian morality with his work and his lifestyle.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Influenced by Creative, Flamboyant Mother

Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1854. At the time, Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, and controlled by the British. Outside of the six counties of the north that were predominantly British and Protestant—commonly known as Ulster—absentee British landlords controlled much of the land in the remaining twenty-six counties that were predominantly Catholic, rural, and poor. There was long-standing tensions between the British and Irish, as the Irish agitated for more control and home rule. Wilde's family was Anglo-Irish, and he was raised a Protestant.

His father, Sir William Wilde, was a well-known surgeon. Wilde likely learned sympathy for the poor from his father, who would collect folklore instead of fees from the peasants he treated. Wilde's mother, Jane, wrote popular poetry and prose under the pseudonym Speranza. She was a writer and poet with a flair for the dramatic not only in her writing but also in her appearance. She dressed up in increasingly outlandish costumes,

complete with headdresses and bizarre jewelry. Wilde shared both her literary taste and fashion flamboyance.

Jane Wilde created a salon society in Dublin, and her large Saturday-afternoon receptions included writers, government officials, professors, actors, and musicians. After her husband died in 1876, she moved her salon to London. Her poetry was inflammatory and pro-nationalist, and in 1849 during the sedition trial of a magazine editor, she stood up in court and claimed authorship of the offending articles (a mother taking responsibility for someone else's failings to save their reputation is a theme in Wilde's play, *Lady Windemere's Fan*, 1892). She became famous for this incident and, many years later, encouraged Wilde to stand trial rather than run away, no doubt imagining another famous court victory for the Wilde family.

In general, Wilde's childhood appears to have been a happy if unconventional one. He had an older brother, Willie, and a younger sister, Isola, who died at the age of eight in 1867. The family was devastated by Isola's death. Wilde, who regularly visited her grave, wrote the poem "Requiescat" (1881) in her memory. His father's three illegitimate children, fathered before he married Jane, were also included in the family, and all of the children spent their holidays together.

Early Literary Attention For three years, Wilde was educated in the classics at Trinity College, Dublin, where he began to attract public attention through the eccentricity of his writing and lifestyle. At the age of twenty-three, Wilde entered Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1878, he was awarded the Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna" (1878). He attracted a group of followers who became a personal cult, self-consciously effete and affected. His iconoclasm contradicted the Victorian era's easy pieties (the Victorian era was marked by romantic, evangelical, and humanitarian impulses, but with moral, insular overtones), but this was one of his aims. Another was the glorification of youth.

Wilde published his well-received *Poems* in 1881. He lectured in the United States and in England, and he applied unsuccessfully for a position as a school inspector. In 1884, he married Constance Lloyd, and their children were born in 1885 and in 1886. He encouraged his wife's political activity, including her involvement in the women's liberation and suffrage movements.

Challenging Societal Norms Wilde was also a reformer in support of women's liberation. He took over the editorship of the *Lady's World: A Magazine of Fashion and Society* in 1887 and reconstituted it. Discussion of fashion was relegated to the end of each issue, and serial fiction and articles on serious topics, such as the education of women, were moved to the front. Wilde also insisted the magazine be renamed the *Woman's World*, because he regarded "lady" as a pejorative term. Wilde remained editor for two years, but his involvement lessened as his other writing activities increased. His first

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wilde's famous contemporaries include:

Bram Stoker (1847–1912): This Irishman was a theater manager and agent for twenty-seven years, but his part-time career as a fiction writer brought him immortality as the author of *Dracula* (1897).

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903): This French postimpressionist painter spent most of his life in Tahiti and the South Pacific, creating highly original and influential paintings of scenes and people there. His paintings include *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*

George Eastman (1854–1932): This American inventor founded the Eastman Kodak Company and helped bring photography into the mainstream.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): This British writer and playwright wrote more than seventy plays during his career, including *Pygmalion* (1916, later adapted as the musical *My Fair Lady*).

Emilia Pardo Bazàn (1852–1921): This Spanish novelist described the degeneration of aristocratic families in novels like *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886).

popular successes in prose were fairy tales: *The Happy Prince, and Other Tales* (1888) and *The House of Pomegranates* (1892).

Wilde became a practicing homosexual in 1886. He believed that this subversion of the Victorian moral code was the impulse for his writing. Wilde considered himself a criminal who challenged society by creating scandal, and his works often explore the criminal mentality. “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime,” from *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime, and Other Stories* (1891), is a comic treatment of murder and its successful concealment. The original version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, published in *Lippincott’s Magazine*, emphasized the murder of the painter Basil Hallward by Dorian as the turning point in Dorian’s disintegration.

Dramatic Success Between 1892 and 1895 Wilde was an active dramatist, writing what he identified as “trivial comedies for serious people.” His plays were popular because their dialogue was clever and often epigrammatic, relying on puns and elaborate word games for their effects. *Lady Windermere’s Fan* was produced in 1892, *A Woman of No Importance* in 1893, and *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895.

The years 1889 to 1895 were prolific ones for Wilde, but during these years he led an increasingly double life that ended in his imprisonment in 1895. This secret life was also featured increasingly in his work, especially in the novella *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). This novella’s

themes were also an example of the aesthetic movement, of which Wilde was a part. This late nineteenth century European arts movement centered on the doctrine that art existed for the sake of its beauty alone. The movement began as a reaction to prevailing utilitarian social philosophies and to what was perceived as the ugliness and philistinism of the industrial age.

On March 2, 1895, Wilde initiated a suit for criminal libel against the Marquis of Queensberry, who had objected to Wilde’s relationship with his handsome young son, Lord Alfred Douglas. When his suit failed, countercharges followed, and after a sensationalist public trial, Wilde was convicted of homosexual misconduct and sentenced to two years in prison at hard labor. (Until 1861, the punishment for men convicted of having sexual intercourse with men was death, while a lesser offense of attempted “buggery” was punishable by at least two years in jail. The 1885 Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibited gross indecency between men. Gross indecency was interpreted to be any type of male homosexual behavior. Wilde was convicted under this amendment and received the harshest possible punishment under the law.)

Imprisonment Prison transformed Wilde’s experience as radically as had his 1886 introduction to homosexuality. In a sense, he had prepared himself for prison and its transformation of his art. “De Profundis” is a moving letter to his former lover that Wilde wrote in prison and that was first published as a whole in 1905. His theme was that he was not unlike other men and was a scapegoat. “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (1898) was written after his release.

After his release from prison in May 1897, Wilde went to France. He attempted to write a play in his earlier witty style, but the effort failed. He died in Paris on November 30, 1900.

Works in Literary Context

Wilde’s early education generated an admiration for John Keats, Percy Shelley, Benjamin Disraeli, and Honoré de Balzac. In college, he was influenced by the writings of Walter Pater, who in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) urged indulgence of the senses, a search for sustained intensity of experience, and stylistic perfectionism in art. Wilde adopted this as a way of life, cultivating an extravagant persona that was burlesqued in the popular press and music-hall entertainments, copied by other youthful rebels, and indulged by the literary and artistic circles of London where Wilde was renowned for his intelligence, wit, and charm.

Reaction to Victorian Values *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde’s last and most brilliant play, is a hysterical comedy but also a serious critique of Victorian society. Wilde anticipated modern writers such as Samuel Beckett in his use of farce to comment upon serious issues. The Victorian upper classes are presented as enclosed characters more intent on social surface in a world where form replaces emotion. Victorian stuffiness and hypocrisy in

marriage, education, and religion are all critiqued, but always through the sparkle of Wilde's biting satirical wit.

Readers familiar only with Wilde's plays and conversation may be surprised by his poetry, which demonstrates an expertise in classical literature and the mainstream Victorian influences of Matthew Arnold, Dante Rossetti, and Alfred Lord Tennyson. In *Poems* (1881), Wilde experimented with form and touched on many of the themes he would develop in his later works as a social and cultural reformer. He commented on what he regarded as the decline of civilization from the ancient Greeks to modern-day Europe. Decline became a recurrent theme in Wilde's later poetry, which he used to attack Victorian ruling-class values. He refused to see the Victorian age as one of glory, writing instead about the seedy, usually unmentioned side of Victorian life.

Aestheticism Wilde saw art as a vehicle for moral and social reform; what was not beautiful was not good, including poverty. The idea of poverty as dehumanizing ran counter to accepted middle-class views, both secular and religious, for by implication the ruling classes were responsible for this oppression. The value of domesticity, pride in industrialization, and the ennobling quality of poverty were popular Victorian literary themes. In his lectures and essays, Wilde preached a new program of social reform through art and beautification projects. Wilde criticized the false glamour of Victorian upper-class society, but Wilde was also attracted to that world. He viewed Victorian ideals of art, reflected in the ornate and orderly decor of upper- and middle-class homes, as a sham. During his aesthetic phase, he set about to reform rigid notions of art and decorated his home and his person as exhibits of this new modern art.

Wilde's critical essays and dialogues in *Intentions* (1891) defined his artistic philosophy. For example, "The Critic as Artist" developed his deeply held belief that originality of form is the only enduring quality in a work of art, a quality transcending its age. "The Decay of Lying" insisted on the superiority of art to nature and put forth the paradox that "nature imitates art," using this thesis to work out an ingenious line of argument revealing insights into the relationship between the natural and aesthetic worlds. "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" examined the relationship between art and morality, concluding that in fact there is none.

Influence Wilde has remained one of the most admired, read, and performed writers of all time. His poetry, essays, and children's books are reprinted regularly. *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains his best-known stage play, and is regularly performed all over the globe. Wilde's influence can be seen in a number of authors's writings, including E. M. Forester (who explores homosexuality in his novel *Maurice*) and, more recently, Stephen Frye, an actor/novelist/amateur Wilde scholar.

Works in Critical Context

Wilde's lasting literary fame resides primarily in his plays, one of which—*The Importance of Being Earnest*—is a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wilde was a famous conversationalist. His sharp, witty observations seemed to come out of his mouth perfectly formed, precisely balanced, and always apt. Legend has it that Wilde's dying words were "Either that wallpaper goes, or I do." The following works celebrate the art of witty conversation.

The Life of Johnson (1750), a biography by James Boswell. Samuel Johnson was a leading author and critic in the eighteenth century, and much of his considerable literary authority came from the forcefulness and genius of his conversation. Boswell recorded a great deal of it, real or reconstructed, in what became the first great biographical study.

Annie Hall (1977), a film written and directed by Woody Allen. This film established the comic pattern that Allen would follow in many of his later comedies: an effete, clumsy intellectual encounters beautiful women and his own insecurities, and the result is a long string of witty exchanges and sharp, self-deprecating one-liners.

The Bonfire of the Vanities (1987), a novel by Tom Wolfe. Wolfe is a conservative dandy, usually decked out in a white suit, florid tie, and spats, playing the role of bemused and devastatingly witty social critic. This best-selling novel is set in New York and takes an ironic look at American culture of the 1980s.

A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life (1656), a memoir by Margaret Cavendish. In an era when intellectual pursuits were reserved only for men, Cavendish was a poet, philosopher, playwright, and author of one of the earliest science fiction novels. In her autobiography, she describes herself as extremely shy, but in public she made a space for a new kind of brave female writer through her eccentricity and extravagant dress.

classic of comic theater. His only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), while artistically flawed, gained him much of his notoriety during his life time. This book gives a particularly 1890s perspective on the timeless theme of sin and punishment.

Upon his release from prison, however, Wilde was generally either derided or ignored by literary and social circles. At the time of his death in 1900, the scandal associated with Wilde led most commentators to discuss him disrespectfully, if at all. While critical response no longer focuses so persistently on questions of morality, Wilde's life and personality still attract fascination. Biographical studies and biographically oriented criticism continue to dominate Wilde scholarship. After his death came a renewed critical interest in him, but it is only within the last thirty years that his work has received serious scholarly attention.

Both Wilde's sincerity and his integrity have long been issues in criticism of his works. His conception of artistic beauty was often considered a superficial taste for ornament, though some critics have acknowledged that this conception of beauty additionally demands, as Wilde's character Gilbert states, "thought and passion and spirituality." Commentators on Wilde have also come to stress the intellectual and humanist basis of his work. Traditionally, critical evaluation of Wilde has been complicated, primarily because his works have to compete for attention with his sensational life. Wilde himself regarded this complication as unnecessary, advising that "a critic should be taught to criticize a work of art without making reference to the personality of the author. This, in fact, is the beginning of criticism."

Poetry The general critical reaction to Wilde's poems at the time of their publication was condemning and dismissive. Most reviewers were eager to denounce Wilde on the grounds of imitation of various writers and on his ornate language. The audacity of Wilde, an unknown in the literary world, perhaps triggered the critical attack when he published a collection of poetry. But in spite of the generally hostile reaction, within a year, five editions of Wilde's *Poems* had been sold.

An Ideal Husband While audiences thoroughly enjoyed the play *An Ideal Husband* when it was first produced, critics were more ambivalent. Many did not know how to respond to Wilde's treatment of his subject matter. That number included Henry James, who disliked the play so much that he wrote in a letter to his brother William about his own play *Guy Donville*, which was opening in London at the same time, "How can my piece do anything with a public with whom that is a success?" Even critics who had praised Wilde's previous work began to question his use of the epigram and criticized him for relying too heavily on his trademark device without providing substance to support his witticisms. However, the play did have its supporters, including George Bernard Shaw, who was so moved after seeing it that he described Wilde as "our only thorough playwright." In a review of the New York production of *An Ideal Husband*, William Dean Howells called the play "an excellent piece of art."

Recent critics of *An Ideal Husband* have generally accepted the conventional elements in the play at face value. Such elements include the melodramatic characters, the sentimental plot, the improbable twists, the witticisms, and the tidy resolutions, all of which make it a "well-made play." Instead, such critics focus on the core issues such as Wilde's social commentary on morality, the nature of political ambition, the disconnect between external appearances and the hidden lives of men and women, and the redeeming power of love. Thus, what has emerged is a view of the play as one in which Wilde developed markedly as a comedic playwright, providing, in addition to his biting social commentary, characters and themes that transcend the conventions of his theater. As Alan Bird stated in 1977, *An Ideal Husband* "marks yet another

stage in [Wilde's] evolution as a dramatist while retaining its intrinsic value as a comedy which entertains, delights, intrigues, and amuses audiences of today as much as it did the first-night audience in 1895."

Responses to Literature

1. Identify and summarize melodramatic scenes from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. What is their thematic purpose, if any? Put your answer in the form of a presentation.
2. What are "aphorisms" and "epigrams"? Locate some of Wilde's most famous examples. Can Wilde's conversation rightly be seen as part of his lasting artistic achievement? Do the characters in his plays speak in much the same way? Write an essay with your conclusions.
3. Read "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and/or "De Profundis," and research the events in Wilde's life that led up to it for a paper. Are you convinced by Wilde's account of his motives and actions?
4. In a small group, look over the broad scope of Wilde's life and work. Discuss such questions as: Could you say that one phrase that sums up most of it could be "the importance of being earnest"? Why or why not?

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Charles Williams

BORN: 1886, Holloway, North London, England

DIED: 1945, Oxford, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Outlines of Romantic Theology (1908)

Descent into Hell (1937)

Taliessin through Logres (1938)

The Region of the Summer Stars (1944)

All Hallows' Eve (1945)

Overview

British author Charles Williams was in many ways a paradox. He was a working-class man who lectured at Oxford University. He was a devoted Christian whose novels explore black magic. He was an eloquent philosopher of human and divine love whose own romantic life was often deeply troubled. Williams's talents were evident in many genres, including poetry, drama, fiction, biography, poetic theory, theology, literary essays, and book reviews.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family Finances Affect Life Williams was born in London on September 20, 1886, to a middle-class family in financial straits. Raised in the Anglican faith, Williams loved the city of London and the Church of England throughout his life, and both are central elements in much of his fiction.

Forced in 1908 by his family's lack of money to curtail his education at the University of London after only two years, Williams secured an editorial position at the London office of the Oxford University Press—where he worked for the rest of his life. During the same year,

he met Florence Conway, whom he later married and to whom he wrote many love poems.

Professional Poet, Eternal Mystic Throughout his professional writing life, Williams considered himself to be primarily a poet, and during the early years of his career, published only poetry. In his late twenties, he became interested in magic and Rosicrucianism—a view based on Western traditions of mystery that is concerned with inner worlds, mysticism, and spirituality. At this time, he also joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society devoted to the acquisition of occult knowledge. Although he did not remain with the group, Williams later drew upon his acquired knowledge of *Magia* (white magic) and *Goetia* (black magic) for subject matter in his novels.

By 1930, when the first of these novels, *War in Heaven*, was published, Williams had established himself as a minor poet and critic, as well as an outstanding lecturer on the major English poets at evening literature classes in London. His “supernatural thrillers,” as his novels were called, attracted a wide audience at the time and introduced the author to two notable admirers: T. S. Eliot, who as a director of Faber and Faber published several of Williams's novels; and C. S. Lewis, whose own *Allegory of Love* (1936) delighted Williams and initiated the two writers' friendship.

Oxford With the outbreak of World War II and the Nazi bombing of Great Britain, the staff of the Oxford University Press's London office was evacuated to Oxford. World War II began when Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany after the latter country invaded Poland in 1939. While Britain, as well as the rest of Europe, had tried to appease the territorial and military ambitions of Adolf Hitler by allowing him to take over certain territories in the late 1930s, the Nazi leader's actions in Poland were deemed unacceptable. France and other countries joined Britain as allies against the Germans and their allies, including Italy and, initially, the Soviet Union. Germany was soon in control of much of continental Europe and launched massive air attacks, known as the Blitz, against Great Britain in September 1940 that lasted till May 1941. Bombing attacks continued off and on until the end of the war.

At Oxford, Williams was soon introduced by Lewis into the Inklings—a group that gathered for discussions that ranged across politics, art, religion, and above all, fellowship. During one period of several months, members listened as the group's three principals read aloud from works in progress: C.S. Lewis from *Perelandra* (1943), J.R.R. Tolkien from *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), and Williams from *All Hallows' Eve* (1945)—novels that are recognized today to be among their authors' most accomplished works.



Charles Williams Used by permission of the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

Through the offices of Lewis and Tolkien, Williams was able to serve at Oxford as a lecturer on English poetry, attracting enthusiastic audiences at each appearance and receiving an honorary MA from the university in 1943. When he died suddenly after a seemingly minor operation in 1945, fellow Inklings Warren Lewis noted in his journal that “the black-out has fallen, and the Inklings can never be the same again.”

Works in Literary Context

Many and Varied Influences When Williams took on theology and literary analysis, his work reflected his study of and interest in other famous writers like Dante and noted mystic/writer Evelyn Underhill. During the early years of his career when he published only poetry, much of it showed influences of Dante and, in its style, of G. K. Chesterton. *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943), for instance, was highly influenced by Williams’s growing interest in Dante and the stories of the Grail, seminal influences on his thought that increased in power as the years passed. Some other works, such as *Divorce* (1920), were inspired by models ranging from Robert Herrick

and other seventeenth-century poets to the pre-Raphaelites and William Butler Yeats.

Mystical, Supernatural Style Williams’s first Grail poetry, *Taliessin through Logres* (1938), demonstrates his mystical interests. He may have been drawn to the tragedy of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, but more central was the story of the Grail and the quest to establish God’s kingdom, orderly and just, in England. The poems in the book are complex. Williams uses diagrammed associations to develop the narrative. For example, he connects characters to animals, and associates cities and their roles with parts of the human body and their functions.

But the religious, the magical, and the mythical make the most impact in his works as they reflect his devout Anglicanism and lifelong interest in all aspects of the supernatural. Williams’s novels, such as *War in Heaven* (1930), *All Hallows’ Eve*, and *The Place of the Lion* (1931) depict the earth as a battleground in a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. These novels present the author’s notion of the natural and supernatural realms as spheres separated by a penetrable boundary.

In *War in Heaven*, for example, Williams establishes one hallmark of his fiction: realistic depictions of common people encountering supernatural forces in and through everyday English life. In one set of critical terms, this type of fantasy is “low fantasy,” supernatural but taking place in this world, as opposed to the otherworldly “high fantasy” of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. In this way Williams is an ancestor to, though rarely a direct influence on, the supernatural-horror genre of the later twentieth century.

Influence Though Williams rarely influenced later horror, he was instrumental for fellow writers in another way. During the tenure of his friend C. S. Lewis as a fellow at Oxford’s Magdalen College, Williams became a guiding force of the Oxford Christians or “Inklings,” a group of like-minded writers who met weekly in Lewis’s rooms to discuss literature and to read works in progress to each other for critical advice and mutual enjoyment. Although his works are not today as well known as those of his fellow Inklings Lewis and Tolkien, Williams was an important source of encouragement and influence among the group, and his death brought about its demise.

Williams’s influence is most markedly evident, for example, in the work of Lewis, whose controversial *Preface to “Paradise Lost”* (1942) and apocalyptic novel *That Hideous Strength* (1946) advance ideas held by Williams. Such theological books as *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938) and *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (1939) are important for their explicit statements of the author’s spiritual

beliefs. *The Descent of the Dove* was a key influence in poet W. H. Auden's conversion to Christianity, which affected that author's output.

Works in Critical Context

Concerning Williams's fiction, William Lindsay Gresham has remarked that "reading him we feel like the blind man who was given his sight and saw people like trees walking," referring to the Gospel of Mark 8:24. But despite their interesting plots and elements of the supernatural, the novels have never attracted a wide audience. Because of Williams's difficult style, they require closer attention than most readers are willing to devote to them. Critics have praised Williams's novels for their ability to portray spiritual truths. They have condemned them for their sensationalism. They have analyzed the precision and delicacy with which Williams writes. They have also complained of the author's obscurity. However, most critics agree that Williams's strength as a fiction writer grew throughout his career: this is demonstrated by the success he achieved with his last works, including *Descent into Hell*.

Descent into Hell Generally seeing it as one of Williams's two or three best novels, critics regard *Descent into Hell* as his most structurally satisfying novel, mapping the crossed ascent and descent of two characters. The ascending character is Pauline Anstruther, a young woman terrified by appearances of her doppelgänger—an eerie exact double. She is taught the truths of doubling and substitution by Peter Stanhope, a playwright who is her mentor. Since doubling is limited by neither space nor time, Pauline is eventually able to substitute herself for a martyred ancestor during his burning, thus ending her own haunting. Conversely, the title refers to the path of Lawrence Wentworth, a man of small vices and smaller virtues, who falls willing victim to a succubus because true love—or even true companionship—is too irritatingly demanding for him. With *Descent into Hell*, as Charles Moorman points out, Williams was shifting away from "adventure" and increasingly "toward an attempt to picture salvation and damnation as they exist among the people of Williams's own time."

Poetry Williams's verse is often difficult for readers. Anne Ridler wrote, "It is not a poetry for all moods; it is one, also, to which you must wholly submit in order to enjoy it. But I am sure that his cycle has its place in the tradition of English visionary poetry." Agnes Sibley, agreeing with Ridler's appraisal, added that "to all of Williams's writings 'you must wholly submit'." Though not as well known as his novels, Williams's Arthurian *Taliessin through Logres* (1938) and *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944) are determined by some critics to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Williams's famous contemporaries include:

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970): Agnon was a Nobel Prize-winning writer who contributed much to Hebrew literature, particularly fiction. His novels include *The Bridal Canopy* (1931).

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): As the thirty-second president of the United States, FDR was so popular with the people that he was elected to the office for four terms.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1921–1968): Though known as a British writer, poet, and philologist, he is still widely appreciated for such fantasy works as the three novels that form the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) and *The Hobbit* (1937).

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): American author Woolf is known as one of the forerunners of modern literature, specifically for her stream-of-consciousness style and for novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

be among the most original works in twentieth-century English poetry. This Arthurian—or, more accurately, Grail—poetry is, as Roma A. King Jr. writes, "the poetical creation of a coherent mythical vision of man and his place in the larger creation of which he is a part."

Responses to Literature

1. In Williams's novels and dramas, common, unsuspecting characters from the natural world encounter beings from the supernatural realm. The reader is likewise intended to be startled by these strange and unexpected confrontations, and thereby awakened to their symbolic value. Consider one of the most important objects in your life. Write a personal essay in which you explain why you chose this object. What did it make you think of? What feelings come from the object/image for you? What does your choice say about who you are? How does your choice represent your personality?
2. Think about how natural and supernatural characters in Williams's works are caught up together in the struggle between good and evil. In *War in Heaven*, for example, the opposing forces converge on a humble church, each seeking to possess the Holy Grail, which has long stood unnoticed among the church's ornaments. Using either the Grail, the church, or another item from a Williams novel, consider all of the possible associations. Write a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

As ancestor to the supernatural-horror genre, Williams can be said to have pioneered it to some degree. Here are a few works that later established the genre as best-seller material and developed it further.

The Exorcist (1971), a novel by William Peter Blatty. Evil takes possession of a little girl's body and soul and leaves several dead in its wake.

Flowers in the Attic (1977), a novel by V. C. Andrews. In the first of a series of novels, the children lose their parents and are taken in by a malicious, abusive grandmother.

Rosemary's Baby (1967), a novel by Ira Levin. The biggest problem Rosemary has in the new apartment building, the Bramford, is the devil-worshipping elderly couple next door.

The Shining (1977), a novel by Stephen King. A winter caretaker and his family have other worldly experiences in the Overlook Hotel.

Lost Boy, Lost Girl (2003), a novel by Peter Straub. In this novel, a house is haunted, there is a serial killer on the prowl, and people are missing.

paragraph in which you discuss how the item is a symbol and explore what it might represent.

- In his poetry, Williams celebrates a vision he shared with Dante, one which reflects his major belief: that love is a sacrament enabling fellowship with God. With a group of your classmates, survey a few of Williams's poems and find evidence of love and of one's connection with God through love. Use examples from the texts to further your understanding of Williams's philosophy.
- Williams did not fail to perceive suffering and ugliness in the world, but he believed that God's purposes are accomplished in spite of and with the seeming agency of evil. This concept derived from one of his major influences, the Scottish fantasist George MacDonald. Consider the instances of evil in a Williams work. With another classmate, discuss how good prevails, or how God's purposes are accomplished.

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Emlyn Williams

BORN: 1905, *Mostyn, Wales*

DIED: 1987, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Drama, nonfiction, fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

A Murder Has Been Arranged (1931)

The Corn Is Green (1935)

Night Must Fall (1936)

Someone Waiting (1956)

Beyond Belief (1967)

Overview

British author Emlyn Williams is primarily recognized for his achievements after the late 1920s, as an actor-playwright in London's West End and on New York's Broadway. He has been credited with establishing the psychological thriller on the modern stage and was well-respected for one-man shows in which he portrayed Charles Dickens and Dylan Thomas. In addition,



Emlyn Williams Williams, Emlyn, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Williams wrote several studies of the criminal mind that have since become models for the mystery and documentary novel genres.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Interest in Death Sparked by Tragedies George Emlyn Williams was born on November 26, 1905, near Mostyn, Flintshire (now Clwyd), Wales, to Richard and Mary Williams. Formerly a stoker in a coal mine, at the time of Williams's birth his father was an unsuccessful greengrocer. (Coal and iron mining were primary industries in Wales in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, turning south Wales, especially, into a very industrialized area.) In 1906, the family moved to Pen-y-maes, Glanrafon, Wales, where Williams's father became the landlord of a pub. In Wales, the childhood experiences of death—when a village girl died and when a neighboring farmer committed suicide—prompted the young Williams to develop a fascination with the macabre. This would impact his writings for the rest of his life.

Early Scholarship Williams received his earliest education at a convent of French nuns and at a council school. He then earned a scholarship at Holywell County

School. He was eleven years old when he met Sarah Grace Cooke, the teacher who both inspired his interest in education and provided moral and financial support for him to continue. She encouraged his interest in language and sent him to St. Julien, France, when he was fifteen to study French with a teacher of her acquaintance. Williams describes the relationship with Miss Cooke in his two autobiographical books, *George* (1961) and *Emlyn* (1973). It also served as a source of inspiration for his play *The Corn Is Green* (1938).

Early Theatrical Inclinations Williams earned a scholarship to Oxford and entered the university in 1923. While he did well in school, it soon became clear to him that he was not a scholar. His main interest was in theater, and he became a member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. At Oxford, he decided to drop his first name in favor of his unusual middle name. Also at Oxford, he expressed his first tendencies towards the “sinister”—in a one-act drama, *Vigil*, which was produced in 1925. Successful on the stage, it was published in 1954.

Williams's first full-length play, *Full Moon*, was produced at Oxford in 1927. Later that year, he received his degree and moved to London to seek a career in the theater, making his professional acting debut as Pelling's Prentice in J. B. Fagan's *And So to Bed* in 1927. A series of other roles followed, including Jack in his own *Glamour* in 1928.

Williams's next venture in the realm of the mystery genre was *A Murder Has Been Arranged*, which began its run at London's St. James's Theatre on November 26, 1930, with Williams as director. Combining a story of murder with the supernatural, the play received favorable reviews, which emphasized William's command of atmosphere and sense of the theater, but it was not a commercial success. From April 1930 to January 1931, Williams played the role of the Chicago gangster Angelo in Edgar Wallace's *On the Spot*. When the play concluded its run, he went to Germany to research the mass murders of Fritz Haarman, the “Butcher of Hannover.” (Haarman was a prolific serial killer who targeted young men in that small city in the late 1910s and early 1920s. It is believed he killed at least twenty-four people.) In August 1931, he opened in Wallace's crime drama *The Case of the Frightened Lady* in the role of Lord Lebanon.

Personal Relationships and Dramatic Success Williams's next play, *Port Said* (1931), was, like *A Murder Has Been Arranged*, a failure. It was no more successful when it was renamed and revised in 1933 as *Vessels Departing*. Williams went on to appear as a young Frenchman in another crime drama, *The Man I Killed*, by Reginald Berkeley, in 1932. Three years later,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Williams's famous contemporaries include:

Josephine Baker (1906–1975): This expatriate dancer and singer became an international star as the first African American woman to star in a major motion picture.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): This Chilean author and Communist politician won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 and created controversy because of his Communist political leanings. His poetry collections include *Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair* (1924).

B. F. Skinner (1904–1990): An American psychologist, he made a great impact on the field with his theories on operant conditioning, his science of Radical Behaviorism, and his school of experimental research into and analysis of behavior. His books include *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971).

Hiroshi Inagaki (1905–1980): A Japanese filmmaker, he is best known for his *Samurai* trilogy (1954–1956).

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): A French philosopher, writer, and critic, he is credited with pioneering modern existentialism. He explored this philosophy in plays like *No Exit* (1944).

Williams married Molly O'Shann, whom he had known since 1930; they had two children together. In the autobiographical *Emlyn* (1973), Williams frankly discusses his relationships with several men prior to his marriage to Molly, including the actor Bill Wilson and a younger man named Fess Griffiths. The latter is thought to be the model for the character Dan in *Night Must Fall* (1935), Williams's first successful play using a mystery motif.

Night Must Fall established Williams as a playwright, and his portrayal of Dan furthered his reputation as an actor. The play opened at the Duchess Theatre in London on May 31, 1935, and ran for 435 performances, then moved to the Ethel Barrymore Theater in New York. It was filmed in 1937 with Robert Montgomery as Dan and again—less successfully—in 1964, with Albert Finney in the role. Williams toured in the part in 1943 and for the armed forces in the Middle East in 1944. By this time, World War II was nearing its end. While the war had begun in Europe and later extended to Asia, the Middle East theater of war was primarily active from 1940 to 1943. The Middle East theater included north-east Africa (such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt) and southwest Asia (such as the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran, and Tur-

key). The British Middle East Command was based in Cairo and took charge of operations in these areas for such military campaigns as the Middle East Campaign in 1940 and 1941.

In 1945, as the war was reaching its end, Williams wrote a crime sketch, *Thinking Aloud*, about the thoughts of an actress who has murdered her husband. It was performed at the Stage Door Canteen in London in July 1945, published in 1946, and revived in New York in 1975.

Final Transition to “Nonfiction Novels” In 1953, Williams completed *Someone Waiting*, his last play to study the psychology of a criminal. It opened at the Globe Theatre in London on November 25, with Williams in the role of Fenn. Williams then turned to “non-fiction novels”—works that are documentary but read like exciting fiction. His first was *Beyond Belief* (1967), a nonfiction novel similar to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966). His second work in this new genre, *Dr. Crippen's Diary*, was published in 1978 in *Great Cases of Scotland Yard* and separately in 1988. Williams would not see its second printing. He died of cancer on September 25, 1987, in London.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Although Williams used a modern form for his documentary novels, the form of his plays is dated and appears artificial to contemporary audiences. According to Don Dale-Jones, “His acknowledged influences are [W. Somerset] Maugham, [Henrik] Ibsen, [J. M.] Barrie and [John] Galsworthy, writers of ‘well-made’ plays.”

Criminal Psychology Much of William's literary achievement derives from his interest in criminal psychology. Williams is more concerned with the psychology of the killer and those associated with him than with presenting the crime as a puzzle to be solved. For example, while *A Murder Has Been Arranged* (1930) portrays a fatal birthday celebration in a haunted theater, *Night Must Fall* (1935) concerns a homicidal psychopath stalking an elderly woman and her young niece in a huge, old home. Williams's nondramatic works, *Beyond Belief* (1967) and *Dr. Crippen's Diary* (1988), are based on actual crimes. The former recounts a series of torture-killings of children in 1963 and 1964. The latter purports to be the diary kept by convicted wife-murderer Dr. Crippen, who was executed in 1910. These “nonfiction novels” also explore the background and psychology of the criminals, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley.

Solo Performance Though known for his psychological thrillers on both the page and stage, Williams was also celebrated for his one-man shows. His portrayal of

Charles Dickens, for example, made him a success as a solo performer. Williams did not simply read Dickens' work. Instead, he depicted the famous author as he was during his famous reading tours. Though some critics did not like the mode of one-man plays and refused to view them as legitimate theater, Williams persisted in experimenting with the genre. In 1955, he performed in a solo act based on the poetic writings of Dylan Thomas. Unlike his performance of Dickens, however, this play focused on interpreting Thomas' words, rather than inhabiting Thomas himself.

Influence Williams' long and distinguished career influenced generations of writers who followed. Like *In Cold Blood*, Williams's documentary novels anticipated the popularity of true crime books in the late 1950s. The emphasis on the psychology of criminals in many of his plays also provided a model for crime dramas that followed.

Works in Critical Context

While many of Williams's plays were not box office successes when originally introduced, critics found more to like. Plays like *A Murder Has Been Arranged* were embraced more by critics than by audiences; however, most critics concur that Williams will be best remembered as a writer of psychological thrillers, particularly *Night Must Fall*, and as the author of the more traditionally dramatic *The Corn Is Green*. Both plays were extremely popular in Great Britain and the United States.

Summarizing Williams's achievement as a playwright, Richard B. Gidez concludes in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that "his plays are often entertaining, his plotting ingenious [,] his ability to create atmosphere sure, his sense of theater consummate." As for Williams's nondramatic works, Nelson observes that "he is a good storyteller, and he is always entertaining. His contribution to the crime story is in his penetrating studies of the personality and psychology of the criminal."

Night Must Fall According to Gidez, *Night Must Fall* "is one of the most successful and chilling psychological thrillers of the modern stage." Audiences responded to the story as well as Williams's chilling portrayal of a homicidal psychopath stalking an elderly woman and her young niece in a huge old home. Of the London production, the *Spectator*'s Derek Verschoyle wrote: "In comparison with this play, all other modern plays with murder as their theme . . . seem in retrospect as flat as the proverbial pancake." When *Night Must Fall* was staged in New York City, critics were similarly impressed. The *New York Times* concluded: "When he is at his best as an author and actor, Mr. Williams can be morbidly terrifying, and enough of *Night Must Fall* is just that."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also shown interest in the psychology of criminals.

Brighton Rock (1938), a novel by Graham Greene. A chance meeting between a sociopath and a newsman has gruesome consequences in this thriller.

A Darker Justice (2004), a novel by Sallie Bissell. Abduction and psychopathology run in parallel stories in this crime fiction thriller.

Rules of Prey (1989), a novel by John Sandford. This first in the thriller series introduces readers to one of the more acclaimed detective characters in popular fiction.

The Straw Men (2002), a crime novel by Michael Marshall. Serial killers on the loose start their spree at an innocuous small-town McDonald's.

Thinner (1984), a novel by Stephen King. In this thriller, an overweight executive appears to get away with vehicular manslaughter of an old man. The man's surviving son, a traveling gypsy, touches the killer's cheek and utters a curse: "Thinner."

The Corn Is Green The more personal play, *The Corn Is Green*, attracted kudos from audiences and critics. The story focuses on the efforts of a schoolteacher, based on his own mentor, Cook, to found a school for the children of Welsh miners in the late nineteenth century and her efforts to help a boy, based on and played by Williams, win a scholarship. Although citing the sometimes overly theatrical nature of the play, Stark Young in the *New Republic* nonetheless found that Williams had given the play "something deeply felt, and perhaps personal, that gives it more life, refinement and intensity." Writing in *The Amazing Theatre*, James Agate commented, "The simplicity of the story can be relied on to throw the spectator into a mood of acceptance of make-believe from which he need make very occasional sorties to admire this bit of pathos pressed home but not too far home." Erik Johns concludes, "In the entire history of Wales [Williams] is the one solitary figure on the plane of first-rate dramatists to write a play in English that is essentially Welsh in essence."

Responses to Literature

1. While a playwright named Eugène Scribe is credited with creating the theater genre known as the well-made play, Williams was known as a playwright who met the conventions of that genre. Research the elements that make up this kind of play and match the list of criteria against one of Williams's works. Report back to a group of your classmates to discuss

Williams's important techniques of action, characterization, and plot.

2. The psychological thriller model is a specific sub-genre of the larger thriller genre. However, where thrillers focus on plot over character, psychological thrillers put more importance on character (and characters' minds, mentality, and mental manipulation) than on plot. Consider a Williams work such as *Night Must Fall*. Write an essay that explains what makes the work a psychological thriller. Focus on such key elements as how the characters' minds work, the use of stream-of-consciousness, what the first-person narration reveals, and any history (or back-story) that adds suspense and psychological intensity.
3. Several contemporary directors are masters of the psychological thriller—including Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, and Takashi Shimizu. Taking into consideration such directors and their techniques, choose one Williams work that would best lend itself to movie production. To gain a greater appreciation of the elements of the novel as a psychological thriller, meet with a group of peers and draft plans to turn the story (or one scene) into a movie. Consider the following possibilities:

What are the components of the character's psyche that are important to the storyline?

What is the "thrill" experienced by readers that could be translated to film to thrill viewers? For example, where does Williams put his protagonist at greatest risk, and how is this exciting? How would a favorite director illustrate this peak excitement?

What is important to the story that affects the characters' mentally? How would you script mental threats, abuse, fear, or other Williams issues so they translate to the screen? Would you use interior monologue? Voiceover narration? Dialogue between characters that reveals the necessary details?

What theme is expressed in Williams's play that needs to be expressed in the movie/scene? For example, is there an obsessive preoccupation with or fixation on something—identity, reality versus the unreal or untrue, or a problem to be solved? How would this best be filmed—by character behavior, quirks, dialogues, flashback devices, or special lighting or other special effects?

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Raymond Williams

BORN: 1921, *Llanfihangel Crocorney, Monmouthshire, Wales*

DIED: 1988, *Cambridge, England*

NATIONALITY: *British*

GENRE: *Nonfiction, fiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Culture and Society, 1780–1950 (1958)

The Country and the City (1973)

Television: Technology and Cultural Form (1974)

Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976)

People of the Black Mountains (1989; 1990)

Overview

British author Raymond Williams ranks as one of the most influential post-World War II cultural theorists in the English-speaking world. A prolific writer, he made significant contributions to intellectual history, literary criticism, and historical linguistics (language studies). His work includes the critical and historical examination of the novel, the popular press, drama, television, and the cinema. He also wrote novels, short stories, and plays. Williams is perhaps best remembered as one of the creators of cultural studies, a discipline that has profoundly

reshaped scholarship in the humanities since the mid-1970s.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Welsh Origins Raymond Henry Williams was born in Wales on August 31, 1921, the only child of Henry Joseph Williams, a railway signalman and active supporter of the labor movement, and Esther Gwendolene Williams. At age eleven, Williams received a scholarship that allowed exceptional working-class children to attend the King Henry VIII Grammar School for Boys in Abergavenny. He received outstanding examination scores, and his headmaster arranged for him to attend Trinity College, Cambridge, on a full-tuition scholarship, plus a stipend.

By the time he arrived at Cambridge to study literature in 1939, Trinity College was the scene of a vibrant left-wing intellectual atmosphere. Already a socialist, Williams joined the Communist-dominated Socialist Club, became a Communist Party member for a short time, and wrote for various left-wing magazines and journals. In the 1930s, such left-leaning political beliefs were popular in Great Britain as well as the United States among those who rejected Fascism and wanted to improve the lives of working-class people through political change.

Service in World War II Williams's education was interrupted in 1941 by military service in World War II. This war had broken out in Europe in 1939 when Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, invaded Poland. Great Britain, allied with France and other countries, had allowed Germany's territorial ambitions to go unchecked until this point. Realizing Hitler wanted to conquer Europe, if not the world, Great Britain and its allies declared war. While Hitler soon came to control much of continental Europe and began intensely bombing Britain in preparation for an invasion, Britain and its allies, which later included the United States, were able to defeat Germany. During the war, Williams achieved the rank of captain, but the war experience, he later said, caused him to feel as if he had lost the most significant dimension of his humanity. On leave in June 1942, he married Joy Dalling, a student at the London School of Economics. They had three children: Merryn in 1944, Ederyn in 1947, and Gwydion Madawc in 1950.

Critical Inquiry When the war ended, Williams returned to an England in which public opinion had begun to tilt toward the left. The millions of soldiers coming home from the war were eager for change. Their support resulted in the Labour Party's victory over Winston Churchill's Conservatives in 1945. The Labour government failed to bring about the ideal community for which Williams and other socialists had hoped, but he viewed the creation of a mixed economy and a welfare state as a substantial step forward.

Graduating from Cambridge with a degree in English in 1946, Williams became a tutor for the Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Education of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). The WEA had been founded in 1903 to extend educational opportunities to working people by offering courses that developed their intellectual skills while drawing on their practical experience. As a WEA teacher, Williams found himself mediating disputes between his Labour and Communist colleagues.

Published Culture and Society Although a committed socialist, Williams was attracted to the conservative ideas of F. R. Leavis and his followers. He appreciated Leavis's perspective: that critics were the guardians of the "great tradition" of literature. Literature was being produced for a passive and uncritical mass audience and was under siege by a debased popular culture. Yet, Williams objected to Leavis's elitist politics and disdain for the masses. This view prompted the launch of the journal *Politics and Letters*, which he edited from 1947 to 1948. *Politics and Letters* attempted to merge Leavis's critical methods with a leftist political outlook. Williams also respected Leavis's defense of cultural standards and agreed with him that language and literature played critical roles in cultural transmission, but rejected the notion that literature represents the entire cultural heritage and that intellectuals are its only guardians. To express these and other positions, in 1958 Williams published *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, the book for which he is best known.

Williams was an original member of the editorial board of the *New Left Review*, founded in 1960 through the merger of *Universities and Left Review* and *The New Reasoner*. In 1961, he left his position with the WEA to become a lecturer in English and a fellow of Jesus College at Cambridge. That same year, he published *The Long Revolution*, in which he examines the economic, political, social, and cultural transformations of the previous two hundred years. Williams was always ambivalent about his career at Cambridge. He was critical of the university's conservatism, hierarchy, and pretension: scholar Terry Eagleton quotes him as describing it as "one of the rudest places on earth...shot through with cold, nasty and bloody-minded talk." Despite such criticisms, Williams apparently enjoyed the prestige that his position carried.

Left Labour Party When prime minister Harold Wilson condemned the leaders of the 1966 strike by the National Union of Seamen as "a tightly knit group of politically motivated men," Williams resigned from the Labour Party in response. In 1967 and 1968, he contributed to the building of an alternative politics with the *May Day Manifesto* movement, which sought to reconstitute and expand the agenda of the original New Left. Williams was so disenchanted with Labour politics that he actually welcomed the election of the Conservative Edward Heath as prime minister in June 1970.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Williams's famous contemporaries include:

Dylan Thomas (1914–1953): Welsh poet famous as much for his writing as for his distinctive recorded readings of his own work. His best known work is *Under Milk Wood* (1953).

Richard Burton (1925–1984): Eminent Welsh actor who was at one time the highest-paid actor in Hollywood. Famous for his tumultuous relationship with actress Elizabeth Taylor, Burton was celebrated for both his stage and film work.

Toni Morrison (1931–): An African American Pulitzer Prize– and Nobel Prize–winning author, she wrote such novels as *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987).

Ernest “Che” Guevara (1928–1967): Marxist revolutionary leader from Argentina. Guevara was a hero of the countercultural movement of the 1960s.

His disillusionment with the Labour Party coincided with a new openness toward Marxism, or its variant, “Western Marxism.” His attitude is reflected in “Literature and Sociology: In Memory of Lucien Goldmann” and “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” published in the *New Left Review* in 1971 and 1973, respectively, and anthologized in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980).

Taught in United States Also in 1973 was the publication of his *The Country and the City*. In this work, Williams traced ideas of the urban and the rural in the English literary tradition from the early modern era to the contemporary period—critiquing early seventeenth-century poems he said celebrate the paternalistic culture of the landlords while ignoring the people of the countryside whose labor made the culture possible. The year this work was published, Williams was teaching at Stanford University in California, though he had previously refused to teach in the United States because of the country's involvement in the Vietnam War.

For the cultural theorist, his stay in California was highlighted by his exposure to American television. Throughout his career, he had demonstrated a scholarly and critical interest in popular cultural forms, and from 1968 to 1972, he had written a weekly column on television for the BBC publication the *Listener*, collected in *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings* (1989). Thus, watching American television did not create an interest where none had existed; rather, it forced him to see television from a fresh perspective. The result was his best-known critical work, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974).

Returning to “Welshness” Cultural studies, the field Williams had helped to found, had developed in multiple directions in the 1960s and 1970s. Williams became professor of drama at Cambridge in 1974. In 1977, he published *Marxism and Literature*, a definitive statement of the position he called “cultural materialism.” Following his retirement from Cambridge in 1983, Williams devoted most of his energy to a multi-volume novel encompassing all of Welsh history, *People of the Black Mountains*. The work remained unfinished at his death in London on January 26, 1988.

Works in Literary Context

Williams's work was influenced by or prompted by his responses to other theory. For example, based on his critiques of the elitist view of culture held by F. R. Leavis and based on Marxist views of class consciousness, he created a new theoretical space he called “cultural materialism.” He rejected the distinction between high culture and popular culture. Instead, he saw cultural representations—whether epic poetry or workers's cooperatives—as “ordinary.” He saw these representations not in the sense of being common but as giving meaning to everyday life.

Antielitist Theory of Culture *Culture and Society*, for another example, is an act of historical recovery that fleshes out a tradition whose scope was not understood at the time he wrote the book: the “culture and society” tradition. This tradition includes, in addition to Leavis, the inspiration of T. S. Eliot and his influential *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949). Williams rejected both Leavis's and Eliot's theories, considering them culturally elitist. He refuted the idea that culture is incompatible with democracy, socialism, and popular education. He argued that the capitalist social order that underpins Eliot's cultural elite must be held responsible. He also rejected the conventional distinction between “high” and “low” culture, and argued for a more encompassing view: culture as “the whole way of life.”

Influence Instrumental in creating cultural studies, Williams's influence can be seen in each academic who studies in this intellectual area. His influence can similarly be seen in sociology and intellectual history as well as modern, popular analyses of culture like literature, television, radio, drama, and film. Williams's left-leaning political and social beliefs also affected authors who followed him.

Works in Critical Context

Cultural studies has developed in directions that Williams could never have imagined, but the growth of the field is in large part indebted to his pioneering work. Speaking at a memorial service for Williams, former student and, later, friend and colleague Stephen Heath said, “To remember Raymond Williams here today is to pay tribute to a thinker whose work transformed our understanding of society and culture.” Several scholars have since

agreed. Yet, Williams is not without his critics. Some have charged him with having such an unshakable certitude in the truth of his own experience that his work borders on being preachy. Nevertheless, his creation of cultural studies as a field of study remains of the greatest importance, and the origin and continued inspiration he has left are forever reflected in his body of writings. This is demonstrated in such works as *The Country and the City*.

***The Country and the City* (1973)** According to the Marxist philosophy of the period, the logical progression of history requires that industrial production displace agricultural society. In *The Country and the City*, Williams opposes—among other things—mainstream Marxism. He acknowledges the accelerating spread of modernization, but also claims that the developmental process entails the growing rather than the shrinking of the agrarian sector.

The Country and the City was received enthusiastically by the British intellectual Left. Scholar E. P. Thompson echoed the general reception when he described the book as “part of that stubborn, uncompromising clarification of socialist thought which historians will come to see as more important and more lasting in influence than better advertised products of the international new left.” He concluded: “There is something in the unruffled stamina of this man which suggests a major thinker.”

Responses to Literature

1. Williams expressed a profound interest in culture and the language of culture in such works as *Culture and Society*, *The Long Revolution*, and *Keywords*. He regarded culture in his and the previous eras by considering the development of ideas. He studied culture as a kind of response—revealed in the political and social changes that came about because of the Industrial Revolution. Williams offered three kinds of culture:

In anthropology, *culture* signifies the meanings, values, and institutions of a society, or what he called a “whole way of life”;

The term *culture* also refers to the intellectual and imaginative work associated with the arts and humanities;

Ideal culture includes that intellectual and imaginative work that is what Matthew Arnold called “the best that has been thought and written.”

2. To come to a better understanding of at least one of Williams’s approaches to the term “culture,” imagine you are an ambassador of your society who has been called to travel to another planet to characterize and demonstrate what your culture involves. Choose one of the above definitions/forms of culture. Go out in the world (or online) and “collect” artifacts that will

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also critiqued culture in general or some specific aspect of culture.

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (1985), critical nonfiction by Neil Postman. The author analyzes the cultural medium of television.

Civilization and Its Discontents (1929), critical nonfiction by Sigmund Freud. The author studies culture versus the individual.

Critique of Dialectical Reason (1960), critical nonfiction by Jean-Paul Sartre. The author challenges definitions of class and social methods of grouping.

Women, Culture, and Politics (1990), critical nonfiction by Angela Davis. The author discusses her notions of class with regards to minority, working, and gender groupings.

best demonstrate your culture for the new planet. Justify your choices, whether they include foods, arts, writings, technologies, rituals, costumes, or any other elements you think will illustrate your culture, by writing a brief speech that points out each item you collected.

3. How does *The Country and the City* argue in favor of the natural world (country) or the progressive world (city) as vital for a person’s moral growth? What descriptions, scenes, dialogue, or other elements suggest this? What does the comparison say about personal preferences, values, and beliefs?
4. In the early 1970s, Williams focused on his “Welshness.” This increasing interest found its way into his critical works, such as *People of the Black Mountains*, and it appears in his fiction, such as *Border Country*, *Second Generation*, and *The Fight for Manod*. To better appreciate Williams’s persistent “return to Welshness,” consider your own nationality and/or ethnicity for a paper. Make note of all that makes up who you are—including values, orientations or preferences, community concerns, family histories, and anything else that contributes to how you identify yourself.
5. Consider Williams’s comment about King Henry VIII Grammar School for Boys in Abergavenny, found in his *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (1979): “What I did not perceive at the time but I now understand is that the grammar schools . . . in the towns of Wales . . . imposed a completely English orientation, which cut one off

Angus Wilson

thoroughly from Welshness.” With a small group of your classmates, share similar experiences you have had regarding an institution or group that has disturbed your identity.

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Angus Wilson

BORN: 1913, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, England

DIED: 1991, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Hemlock and After (1952)

Emile Zola: An Introductory Study of His Novels (1952)

A Bit Off the Map (1957)

The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot (1958)

No Laughing Matter (1967)

Overview

Angus Wilson was one of the leading British authors to emerge in the post-World War II era. Wilson is best known as a chronicler of the postwar social revolution in England and for his ability to successfully combine the techniques of modernist fiction with the traditional novel.



Angus Wilson © Sophie Bassouls / CORBIS SYGMA

Although often extremely funny, his novels also contain serious critiques of British society. Wilson's subjects are usually failed or wasted lives, individuals whose crises reflect the disintegration of a larger way of life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Isolated Childhood Angus Frank Johnstone Wilson was born in Bexhill, Sussex, a small town on the southeastern coast of England, on August 11, 1913. His father, William Johnstone-Wilson, was of Scottish origin, and his mother, Maude Caney Johnstone-Wilson, was from South Africa. Wilson was the youngest of five sons, thirteen years younger than the fourth child. Consequently, Wilson spent a somewhat lonely childhood with adults as companions, and this isolation from other children was further compounded by his parents' frequent moving. Wilson took refuge in his imagination, in role-playing and reading.

Becoming Politically Active In 1932, Wilson went to Merton College, Oxford, to study medieval history. At Oxford, he met friends with different backgrounds and political ideas. Wilson adopted several left-wing causes and converted to socialism. In the 1930s, such left-leaning political beliefs were popular in Great Britain as well as the United States among those who rejected

fascism and wanted to improve the lives of working-class people through political change.

After graduating, Wilson took a variety of jobs, including tutoring and secretarial work. In 1936, he took a position in the Department of Printed Books at the British Museum, where he worked for almost twenty years. During this period, he was politically active, mixing with intellectuals of the left, who recur in his work. This experience, as well as his education, made him interested in the use and abuse of power.

Affected by World War II In 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany after the Nazis invaded Poland, beginning World War II in Europe. Britain and its allies sought to contain German leader Adolf Hitler's territorial and military ambitions. Germany, however, was able to control much of continental Europe for much of the war, and heavily bombed Great Britain in preparation for an invasion which never happened. Great Britain's casualties reached seven hundred thousand over the course of the conflict.

During the war years, Wilson worked in the Foreign Office doing intelligence work. He had to leave the busy city life and move to a small village where he was housed with a widow and her daughter. His sense of loneliness and alienation at work and at his lodgings, together with an unsuccessful love affair, brought him to the point of a nervous breakdown. Per his therapist's suggestion, Wilson began writing short stories, and during the following seven years, he published two collections of short stories and two novels. His first short-story collection, *The Wrong Set and Other Stories*, appeared in 1949. By this time, he held a new post.

From 1947 to 1955, Wilson was deputy superintendent of the Reading Room, where he was in charge of replacing three hundred thousand volumes lost in the bombings of World War II. His work in the museum and the Foreign Office provided him with important insights into the world of the cultural establishment and into the workings of bureaucratic administration, both of which he frequently criticizes in his stories.

Writing and Teaching In 1955, Wilson resigned his job at the British Library to become a full-time writer. During the next ten years, he produced four novels and one more collection of short stories. Wilson's novels in this time period include *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* (1958) and *The Old Men at the Zoo* (1961). He also became an active reviewer and literary biographer.

From 1966 to 1978, Wilson was a professor in the School of English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, but he continued to travel and lectured extensively all over the world. In 1978, at age sixty-five, Wilson retired from his teaching post, though he continued to take guest professorships at various universities in the United States.

He was knighted in 1980 for both his literary achievements and his contributions to the arts and service

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wilson's famous contemporaries include:

William Golding (1911–1993): Golding was a British novelist and poet best known for his novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): Nixon was an influential American politician and thirty-seventh president of the United States (1969–1974).

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): Hemingway was an American Nobel Prize-winning author, one of the most celebrated and influential literary stylists of the twentieth century. His novels include *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

Irwin Shaw (1913–1984): Shaw, an American writer best known for his novel *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1970), was considered a master of modern short fiction in the years between World War II and the Vietnam War.

Ralph Ellison (1914–1994): Ellison was an American author best known for his novel *Invisible Man* (1953), which won the National Book Award.

Doris Lessing (1919–): Lessing is a British novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007. Her novels include *The Golden Notebook* (1962).

organizations. His last novel, *Setting the World on Fire* (1980), explores the influence of place on human character and is largely constructed of dramatic dialogue. Wilson died of a stroke on May 31, 1991, at a nursing home in Bury Saint Edmunds, where he had spent his last few years.

Works in Literary Context

Wilson's stories fictionalize much of his childhood and experiences during the war. Childhood and the family form the deepest autobiographical layers in Wilson's fiction. In a 1972 interview with Frederick P. W. McDowell, Wilson describes his stories as being "s little bits of my life which I had transformed into stories."s Wilson's work at the museum gave him an understanding of the management of English high culture that also informed and influenced his work. In his stories, Wilson describes and criticizes simultaneously, mixing nostalgia and sarcastic wit. His prime targets are old-fashioned middle-class aspirations and traditional liberal values.

Family Relationships Most of the stories in *The Wrong Set* take place in the 1930s, and Wilson uses jargon and fashions to place the characters and their backgrounds. In Wilson's fiction, language is the most important indicator of a character's sincerity and self-awareness, or lack thereof. Many of the stories focus on

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wilson never preaches or moralizes. Instead, he allows the characters to reveal and condemn themselves. Here are some works that take a similar approach to character development:

Something Happened (1974), a novel by Joseph Heller.

This work is a darkly humorous treatment of the work and home life of a corporate man living the American Dream.

American Beauty (1999), a film directed by Sam Mendes.

This Academy Award-winning film tells the story of a cynical forty-two-year-old man attempting to find meaning and purpose in his life.

The Seagull (1895), a play by Anton Chekhov. The story

centers around the conflicts between four characters working in the theater.

the uncertainties and clashes caused by the postwar unsettling of class barriers. *The Wrong Set* explores the diametrically opposed political and social values that split a family. Wilson's pointed titles are frequently clichés taken from conversations in the stories, as he explains in the interview with Michael Millgate: "I take a platitude—'the wrong set,' for example: the point is that no one knows what the wrong set is, and one person's wrong set is another's right set. And you get the pay-off, which is something I like."

Middle-Class Values In many of Wilson's stories, he interweaves the effects of a shifting class structure with individual hopes. He portrays how "getting ahead" means that sacrifices and compromises must be made. Social and material "success" are bought dearly, at the price of displacement and loneliness. The tone is often somber and disillusioned as characters must sort out the predicament of his society. The old world and its ways are in decline, but there are no new alternatives to replace it.

In *A Flat Country Christmas*, Wilson explores the social problems of the suburbs. The flatness of the landscape is reflected in the dullness of the human life it supports. The new housing estates flatten out class differences and facilitate the gathering of an amorphous collection of people without common values. The two couples celebrating the season are connected only by the men's work, and they adopt party personas in order to get through the evening without dissension and boredom. However, their masks are shattered by a seemingly harmless party game. One of the men confronts his own nothingness in the mirror, yet this vital self-revelation is typically brushed under the rug in order to maintain appearances.

Influence Wilson's influence extends beyond his fiction, for he was a respected critic, reviewer, and biographer. These writings, together with his work as a professor and international public lecturer, have had a profound effect on the shape of English literature from the 1940s onward. Wilson is regarded by many literary historians as a transitional figure from the modernist to the postmodernist era because of his unusual melding of traditional subjects with experimental methods. No other writer at the time so clearly dramatized the collapse of the upper middle class in England, and his social satire opened the way for the works of social protest by the angry young men in the 1950s.

Works in Critical Context

Wilson's position as a major novelist and, perhaps more important, as a distinguished man of letters for the period after World War II, is eminently secure. In *Critical Essays on Angus Wilson*, Malcolm Bradbury called him "one of four or five great English post-war writers," placing him in the company of William Golding, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, and Iris Murdoch.

When Wilson's first stories were published, reviewers were impressed with the technical skill displayed by the fledgling author. They praised his work for its attention to detail, expert mimicry, and accurate representation of the English social scene. While some critics reacted negatively to the violence in his fiction, it was also understood that it reflected the condition of the postwar period. Wilson's reputation grew with the publication of several popular novels, but his experimentation with nontraditional form in subsequent works drew mixed reactions. Some of his later novels were deemed inaccessible, but renewed interest in—and appreciation of—his work was sparked shortly before his death in 1991. At that time, his books began being reissued in paperback. The television version of *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956) put the book on the best-seller lists, where it had never been during Wilson's lifetime.

Hemlock and After When Wilson's first novel *Hemlock and After* was published, it was very well received. Evelyn Waugh wrote in praise of it in the Catholic journal *Month*, noting what he considered its defects but stressing that it was "a thing to rejoice over." The *Times Literary Supplement* gave it a full-page review, praising it highly for its representation of contemporary English life. Even Ernest Hemingway had some good words for it, remarking that Wilson was a writer worth watching. If the novel has subsequently become overshadowed by his other, more ambitious works, it is nevertheless a very significant achievement, revealing Wilson's ability right at the start to handle important ideas and themes in a novelistic way.

Responses to Literature

1. After reading Wilson's work, determine what kind of social observation Wilson is making. In a group, discuss Wilson's view of the working middle class.

2. Read several stories from *The Wrong Set and Other Stories*, noting Wilson's treatment of violence. Write a short critical essay in which you argue whether the violence in the stories is gratuitous or necessary to enhance the theme.
3. Wilson wrote several important literary biographies on authors who influenced his style and themes. Read one of these biographies and write a brief report on the author.
4. Wilson makes use of a mixture of subjective and experimental first-person accounts with more traditional third-person narrative. Write a story that uses both of these narrative techniques.

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Colin Wilson

BORN: 1931, Leicester, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Outsider (1956)

Ritual in the Dark (1960)

Adrift in Soba (1961)

Man Without a Shadow: The Diary of an Existentialist (1963), published in the United States as *The Sex Diary of Gerard Sorme*

Necessary Doubt (1964)

Overview

Colin Wilson shot to fame in 1956 with his first book, *The Outsider*, a lively and wide-ranging survey of social and spiritual alienation. The book quickly became a best seller in Britain and the United States and made its previously unknown author, a self-educated twenty-four-year-old from the English Midlands, into an international celebrity. But Wilson soon fell from grace, and critics savaged his second book, *Religion and the Rebel* (1957). Since then, however, he has produced more than one hundred books on topics such as philosophy, psychology, literature, murder, sexuality, and the occult.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Eclectic Early Years Colin Henry Wilson was the first child of Arthur Wilson, a boot and shoe salesman, and Annetta Jones Wilson. Although he learned to read relatively late (at age seven) and only read a weekly comic until he was ten, he started to read more widely at that



Colin Wilson Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wilson's famous contemporaries include:

- Issac Asimov** (1920–1992): One of the most prolific writers of all time, having written or edited more than five hundred books on a wide array of subjects, especially science and science fiction.
- Tom Wolfe** (1931–): A best-selling American author and journalist who was a founder of the New Journalism movement of the 1960s and 1970s.
- The Beatles** (1957–1969): A rock group from Liverpool, England—featuring Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Ringo Starr, and George Harrison—that became one of the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed bands in the history of popular music.
- John Kennedy** (1917–1963): President of the United States from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. He was the initiator of the Peace Corps and the Apollo space program, and the figurehead (alongside his wife Jackie) of an era that came to be called “Camelot.”
- Neil Armstrong** (1930–): A former American astronaut, test pilot, university professor, and naval aviator. He was the first person to set foot on the Moon.

age, consuming thrillers, science fiction, true crime, romance magazines, and books of science. In his early teens he picked up the classics of English literature. This eclectic mix of reading material was later mirrored by Wilson's wide-ranging choice of subjects to cover in his works. At age eleven, he won a place at the Gateway Secondary Technical School in Leicester, and while he was not an outstanding pupil, he further developed his interests in science and writing.

After a brief stint in the Royal Air Force, Wilson went back to Leicester. He worked at a fairground, at building sites, and on a farm. He then went to Paris for three months. Returning to Leicester, he took an office job in a factory, where he met the company nurse Betty Dorothy Troop, whom he married in June 1951. They moved to London, where their son Roderick was born. Wilson continued to work on a novel, for which he now had ambitious plans: As he wrote in *Voyage to a Beginning*, “[i]t was to possess the power of *Crime and Punishment*, and the length and technical complexity of *Ulysses*.” He would use the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* for a design, as James Joyce had used the *Odyssey* for the design of his novel *Ulysses*. But life in London was often difficult. Wilson went through eighteen months of factory jobs and periods on unemployment benefits, moving frequently; finally, his wife moved back to Leicester, and the marriage effectively came to an end. Having finished

the first part of his novel, he decided to dash off an account of his own ideas; this account became *The Outsider* and changed his life.

Rise and Fall Published in 1956, *The Outsider* was immediately acclaimed and became a best seller, first in England and then in the United States. Wilson briefly became a celebrity intellectual, but his provocative remarks—his assertions of his own genius, his attack upon William Shakespeare as second-rate, his praise of the former British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley—combined with growing reservations among critics about the quality of *The Outsider*. Wilson's critical downfall was hastened by adverse publicity about his personal life that culminated in scandal when the father of his second wife, having received a garbled report of the contents of one of Wilson's journals, tried to horsewhip him. Wilson's next book, *Religion and the Rebel*, which developed the themes of *The Outsider* in relation to religious experience, met a largely hostile response. The collapse of Wilson's reputation was summed up by a caption in *Time* (November 18, 1957): “Egghead, scrambled.”

Such abuse might have broken some writers, but as writer Hilary Corke observed, “Wilson turned out to be a much tougher egg.” The notion that he was destined for recognition had sustained him since the time before he was published. While still in his early teens he had begun to feel superior to the “vegetable mediocrity” of his working-class Leicester background. After settling down in Cornwall, he remained there, apart from lecture tours of the United States in 1961 and of Japan and Australia in 1986 and periods as a visiting professor at various universities.

Works in Literary Context

The Evolution of the Mind Essentially just a single idea drove all of Wilson's work: people can elevate themselves to a new stage of evolutionary development by using their intelligence and willpower to achieve higher levels of consciousness. He believed that his task as a writer was to develop the conceptual and imaginative frameworks that foster this “evolutionary leap.” The novel, Wilson feels, has a vital role to play in this task since it can depict the complexity of experience more fully than abstract philosophy. His body of work includes non-fiction, novels, biographies, plays, and encyclopedic investigations of crime and the occult, but many of his best-known novels fall into the science fiction and fantasy categories, including *The Mind Parasites*, *The Philosopher's Stone*, and *The Space Vampires*. Wilson claimed George Bernard Shaw was an important early influence on his science fiction writing, especially Shaw's long science fantasy play *Back to Methuselah*, which became a mainspring for Wilson's own science fiction works. In *Colin Wilson: The Outsider and Beyond*, Clifford P. Bendau wrote: “The essence of Wilson's position is that

man can and must expand the present modes of consciousness The phenomenon of man's resignation to littleness is used to show the reader that man is perceptually aware of very little; but that man is conscious or unconsciously *choosing* not to be aware."

Views Outside the Mainstream Wilson published *The Outsider* at the age of twenty-four. His writings after that expanded upon the theme he introduced in that work: With the arrival of the Romantic movement in art at the end of the 1700s, there were outstanding writers and thinkers who remained unsatisfied afterwards by the emptiness of scientific and philosophic thought. In his later nonfiction works, including *Religion and the Rebel*, *The Stature of Man*, and *Beyond the Outsider: The Philosophy of the Future*, Wilson posited a kind of "optimistic existentialism" that places importance on intuition and visionary experiences. According to John A. Weigel, Wilson deserves "to be credited with the courage to rebel against deterministic philosophies and to insist that man is free to improve himself and his community *if he wants to*."

Works in Critical Context

Wilson has authored over one hundred books, plus many plays and articles, and he supported himself primarily by writing for over four decades. During that time he maintained a high degree of confidence in his talent and ideas, even in the face of severe criticism. Initially, however, critics gave him reason to be confident. His first book, *The Outsider*, was at first an unqualified success. Only later was there backlash regarding the work and its creator.

Wilson claimed in *Voyage to a Beginning* that after his second book, *Religion and the Rebel*, was "hatched to death" by the critics, his name got mentioned "if someone needed a symbol of intellectual pretentiousness, or unfounded generalization, or an example of how hysteria can make a reputation overnight."

Wilson has continued, without apology, to make the kinds of claims for his own abilities that helped to arouse such hostility at the time of *The Outsider*. In his 1986 interview with Diana Cooper-Clarke, while claiming he no longer cared about his literary reputation, he nonetheless said: "I suspect that I probably am the greatest writer of the twentieth century." This judgment may never be widely shared, but Wilson's novels are a stimulating contribution to postwar fiction, and some of them, especially *Ritual in the Dark*, are likely to endure.

The Outsider *The Outsider* was immediately acclaimed in the Sunday newspapers by the two most influential English reviewers of the day, Cyril Connolly and Philip Toynbee. *Observer* contributor Philip Toynbee called *The Outsider* "an exhaustive and luminously intelligent study of a representative theme of our time . . . truly astounding . . . a real contribution to an understanding of our deepest predicament." Other reviewers offered similar

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wilson believed that people could, and should, develop and sustain an intensity of consciousness to realize their full potential. Wilson was drawing upon Romantic thought, a movement that began around the time of the French Revolution in the 1790s, which emphasized the imagination and the powers of the individual mind. Here are some works that explore similar ideas:

The Prelude (1805, revised in 1850), a poem by William Wordsworth. This long narrative poem focuses on the importance for an artist of sensitivity, memory, and the powers of imagination.

"A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943), a paper by Abraham Maslow. For this influential psychology paper, Maslow studied remarkable people such as Albert Einstein, Frederick Douglass, and Eleanor Roosevelt to determine what makes a person fully "self-actualized," or able to reach their maximum potential.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (1968), a nonfiction work by Tom Wolfe. In this pioneering work of "New Journalism," Wolfe followed the author Ken Kesey and his group of "Merry Pranksters" as they drove around the country in a painted school bus following the band the Grateful Dead and philosophizing about what they considered to be spiritual and philosophic insights through the regular use of LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs.

In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (2005), a philosophical work edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi with a foreword by the Dalai Lama. An overview of the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in India during the fifth and sixth centuries BCE and is recognized by millions around the world as the Supreme Buddha.

praise, and the book achieved best-seller status in both England and the United States.

Wilson, who had long labored in poverty and anonymity, was accorded celebrity status, but the publicity was not always of a positive nature. He was misquoted on several occasions, and a domestic dispute with his fiancée's family provided a scandal that was "of exactly the right palate for the popular Press," in critic and writer Kenneth Allsop's words. Within six months of its publication, critics began to reevaluate *The Outsider* and its author with less-than-flattering results. Wilson was called to task for his excessive quotations from other sources, for his disregard of formal philosophical method, and for the stridency of his assertions. Dismayed by the change in the critical climate, Wilson moved to a cottage in Cornwall and continued to write. Kenneth Allsop described

Wilson's career as having occurred "from out of nowhere (or, to be precise, from out of a sleeping bag on Hampstead Heath) up through a dizzying arc of fame and fortune, with a steep nose-dive into disfavour."

Ritual in the Dark One of Wilson's most enduring novels was called *Ritual in the Dark*. It traced the main character's fascination and partial identification with a killer. The initial reception of *Ritual in the Dark* ran from dismissal to qualified praise. The *London Times* reviewer (March 3, 1960) condemned the book's "nugatory thinking, clumsy progress and unkempt style," and Paul West in the *New Statesman* of March 5, 1960, summed up the novel as a "farrago of vision and vastation, chips and psychopathology, self-regarding sexuality and Victorian earnestness." Both Anthony Quinton in *London Magazine* (May 1960) and Frank Kermode in the June 1960 *Encounter* acknowledged that the novel was "readable," but Quinton found it "written without distinction" and Kermode felt it was held together by "an immature arrogance." A more sympathetic response, however, came from P. N. Furbank in the *Listener* (March 3, 1960); he found the book clumsy but commended its "well thought out and original plot" and its "excellent and subtle dramatic surprises," and observed that Wilson "could one day be a novelist to reckon with."

Responses to Literature

1. Wilson has written fiction, philosophy, true crime stories, books about the occult, and other topics. Do you think it is possible to write equally well on a wide range of subjects and in different styles? Can you think of any examples of an author who does this?
2. If Wilson had never written *The Outsider*, or if he had written it or some of his other books under a different name, do you think the criticism of his later novels would have been so harsh? Why or why not? Do you think it is fair for a critic to judge a writer's work by what he or she says and does outside the work, as well as the content inside?
3. Which, if any, of Wilson's characters live up to the ideals he valued in the real world of the human mind's realizing its full potential?
4. Wilson wrote about the Kabbalah, a brand of Jewish mysticism, which has received much recent attention from singer Madonna and actress Demi Moore. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the Kabbalah and write a paper summarizing your findings.

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Jeanette Winterson

BORN: 1959, Manchester, England

NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985)

Sexing the Cherry (1989)

The PowerBook (2000)

Lighthousekeeping (2004)

The Stone Gods (2007)

Overview

Provocative and talented, Jeanette Winterson has influenced both popular and literary culture in England. Whether writing newspaper articles or novels, she is unafraid of controversy and never apologizes for her moral stances on topics ranging from women's rights to global politics. By challenging such institutions as marriage and family, Winterson aims to transcend established boundaries of gender and sexual identity with her presentation of a feminine perspective of passion, romantic love, and the search for self-knowledge. Inspired by the modernists, Winterson writes fiction that combines intriguing characters with postmodern self-consciousness, at the same time exploring unconventional concepts of reality and dimension.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Adoption and Missionary Training Winterson was born in Manchester, England, on August 27, 1959. Adopted in infancy by Pentecostal evangelists John and Constance Winterson, she grew up in Lancashire, in northern England. Winterson's father worked in a local television factory. Her mother, a religious zealot, oversaw her education, limiting the literature available in their

household to the Bible as she trained her daughter to become a missionary. At the age of eight, Winterson was composing sermons, a practice that sharpened the rhetoric skills she would later use in her career as a writer. During her teenage years, she became a voracious reader when, in a public library, she discovered the wide worlds of literature and history beyond the Bible.

On Her Own: Leaving Home After being scorned by her family and rejected by the church for having an affair with one of its female converts, Winterson left home when she was sixteen, supporting herself by working odd jobs as a makeup artist in a funeral parlor, an ice cream vendor, and an orderly in a psychiatric hospital. During this time, Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of the United Kingdom, a leader not popular among many people in the working class, most particularly for her emphatic stance against trade unions. In 1981, Winterson received a master's degree in English from St. Catherine's College, Oxford. After an editor, who was interviewing Winterson for a position at Pandora Press in 1985, admired her gift for language and storytelling, Winterson began writing creatively.

Reinventing Life in Fiction Winterson began her literary career by reinventing her life in fiction. When *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* debuted in 1985, it was an immediate critical and popular sensation and won the 1985 Whitbread First Novel Award, despite its openly lesbian theme and its controversial view of family and religious values. At once sardonic and comedic, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* remains noteworthy as Winterson's most overtly autobiographical and structurally conventional work.

Although Winterson's second novel, *Boating for Beginners* (1985), a satiric rendition of the biblical story of Noah, was less successful, her next two novels garnered important literary awards: the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for *The Passion* (1987) and the E. M. Forster Award for *Sexing the Cherry*. She also won a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award for her 1990 screenplay adaptation of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Human Possibility and Truth In 1992, a major change in Winterson's writing emerged: She was moving away from magical realism. That year, *Written on the Body* was published. The novel is mostly a plotless narrative that explores gender and sexual identity while addressing the problems involved in conveying a love story without succumbing to romantic cliché. *Art and Lies* followed in 1994. This novel is another deviation from her earlier work in that it uses Handel, Picasso, and Sappho as characters who examine not only sexuality, but also art, music, and philosophy. Winterson's message here concerns the responsibility of art to transcend what is known, thereby revealing human possibility and life's truths.

Although Winterson's next work of fiction, *Gut Symmetries* (1997), contains allusions to such disparate subjects as fairy tales and quantum physics, it defies

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Winterson's famous contemporaries include:

- Deborah Tannen** (1945–): Tannen's linguistic books, such as *That's Not What I Meant!*, focus on everyday conversations and the effects they have on relationships.
- Maya Lin** (1959–): Lin is an American sculptor best known for designing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.
- Annie Dillard** (1945–): Dillard won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, a combination of meditative observations of nature and philosophical explorations that some consider a work of mysticism.
- Angela Carter** (1940–1992): With its blend of fairy tales, parody, myth, and gothic components, Carter's work deliberately challenges the realistic representation of British writing during the 1960s.
- Carol Ann Duffy** (1955–): Duffy is a Scottish-born playwright and poet whose work often deals with time, change, and loss, in addition to social criticism.
- Dorothy Allison** (1949–): Centered around a girl's abuse and molestation by her stepfather, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Allison's semiautobiographical novel, also offers a look at the depth of a dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship.
- Tony Blair** (1953–): Blair, Britain's prime minister from 1997 to 2007, was criticized for his support of President George W. Bush's war on Iraq.

categorization as fantasy or science fiction. Similarly, *The PowerBook* (2002) cannot be considered science fiction, despite delving into the possibilities of technology by investigating the impact of e-mail and the Internet on writers, as well as the whole of literature. In 2002, Winterson adapted *The PowerBook* for the Royal National Theatre London and the Theatre de Chaillot, Paris.

Artistic Versatility and Personal Life An author of many talents, Winterson has also written children's stories, including *The King of Capri* (2003), *Lighthouse-keeping* (2004), and *Tanglewreck* (2006). *The Stone Gods* (2007) is a return to fantasy and science fiction. Currently, Winterson divides her time between a cottage in the woods of Gloucestershire and an apartment in London, located above Verdes, a natural foods shop she owns. In addition to writing regularly for various newspapers in the United Kingdom, Winterson is at work on a series of Internet films with the BBC.

Works in Literary Context

Magical Realism Winterson's early exposure to the stories, characters, poetic rhythms, and morality of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Winterson's novels feature what literary scholars call "unreliable narrators": voices that may or may not be telling the truth. Other authors have used the device of the unreliable narrator to great effect. Their works include:

As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. Written as a series of interior monologues from different characters, this work presents events from a variety of perspectives. The characters, all deeply flawed, often shape their telling of the story to suit themselves.

"My Last Duchess" (1842) and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1842), poems by Robert Browning. In both of these dramatic monologues, the speakers gradually reveal aspects of their true character of which they themselves are not aware.

Vantage Point (2008), a film directed by Pete Travis. In this movie, five witnesses recount what they saw during an assassination attempt on the president of the United States.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1842), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. The narrator of this tale insists he is not mad, declaring that his calm telling of the story is evidence of his sanity.

Bible has left its mark on her work since the beginning of her career. Even more influential, however, have been literary classics and modernist writers, including T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein, writers whose ideas have motivated Winterson to create new realms for fiction. Winterson's caustic satire is frequently compared to that of Jonathan Swift, her magical realism to that of Gabriel García Márquez, her textual experimentation and adaptation of myth and fairy tale to that of Italo Calvino. Some critics have even attributed Winterson's comedic abilities to the influence of Monty Python.

Supported by a strong narrative drive, works of magical realism blend elements of dreams, myths, or fairy tales with everyday occurrences; what is realistic merges with what is inexplicable. Because of her ability to combine historical events with the mythical elements of fairy tales, Winterson has found a place in the school of magical realism alongside such storytellers as Angela Carter and Jorge Luis Borges. For Winterson, who masterfully manipulates narrative forms and storytelling, play between the fantastic and the real is meant to contradict readers' expectations and reveal the power of imagination. This intention is clear in the "Book of Deuteronomy" in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: "People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which

is fact. They do this so that they know what to believe and what not to believe." By rewriting fairy tales and myths, along with creating new ones of her own, Winterson confronts the absurdity that passes for truth in traditional history.

Literary Legacy Most likely a result of her unwavering belief in the power of literature to transform one's life, Winterson's body of work exhibits many different themes. The nature of love, the discovery of one's sexual identity, the implications of time, the search for self, the functions of art—all are themes that Winterson explores, at the same time continuing to challenge literary and social standards. In her diligent pursuit of new possibilities for the genre of fiction, Winterson reveals a commitment to linguistic and artistic experimentation that will surely benefit generations of writers to come.

Works in Critical Context

Because she is simultaneously one of the most original and controversial voices to have emerged in British fiction during the late twentieth century, Winterson evokes deeply divided critical response. In *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani praised Winterson as a writer who "possesses an ability to dazzle the reader by creating wondrous worlds in which the usual laws of plausibility are suspended." Many critics also commend Winterson's finesse in infusing feminist beliefs into the traditional fairy-tale form. Others, however, consider her to be a writer who lacks the talent to repeat the brilliance of her debut novel. These are the same people who claim that Winterson's subsequent work is self-absorbed and resorts to sentimentality and superficial devices to gain attention.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit Most reviewers agree that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* demonstrates exceptional humor, talent, and skill. Critic Jonathan Keates remarks, "[The] comic detachment with which the narrator beats off the grotesque spiritual predatoriness surrounding her is matter for applause." Certainly, the manner in which Jeanette interacts with her mother is one of deadpan wit. Some critics contend that the humorous parables interjected into the narrative of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* reflect Jeanette's sexual identity crisis and spiritual confusion. As such, the novel is considered a work of unparalleled originality. Others, like critic Lyn Pykett, prefer the "gritty realism" of this work to her later efforts.

Personal Criticism Winterson the individual has earned the same degree of divisive criticism as her work. While many readers regard Winterson to be a fresh, innovative literary voice, detractors believe she is conceited, so much so that her self-importance overshadows her work. Without a doubt, Winterson is proud of her accomplishment and gift for the written word. In fact, she offended many people by nominating herself as the greatest living writer in the English language and by choosing

her *Written on the Body* as Book of the Year in 1992. Because of such hubris, she has been deemed too arrogant and self-aggrandizing for the literary world.

Responses to Literature

1. Many writers have based their fiction on actual events in their lives. Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, for example, wrote confessional poetry that revealed intimacies not previously seen in poetry. What do you think about these writers who “bare their souls” in their work? What is the tradition of this style? How does talk-show television perpetuate the confessional trend?
2. Consider the characters’ perspectives on evolution versus creation in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. What statement do you think Winterson is making about the debate between religion and science? How does this statement relate to religious debate today? In your own belief system, how do you reconcile the fundamentals of religion with scientific advancement?
3. In an interview, Winterson said, “Always in my books, I like to throw that rogue element into a stable situation and then see what happens.” How does having knowledge of this technique affect your reading of Winterson’s work? What are some examples of rogue elements that you might use when writing a short story or novel?
4. The settings for love stories portrayed in Winterson’s novels have ranged from the French Revolution to cyberspace. When you considered her fiction as an ongoing whole, what truth, potential, and resolution do you believe Winterson offers in regard to love?

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■ P. G. Wodehouse

BORN: 1881, Guildford, England

DIED: 1975, Southampton, New York

NATIONALITY: English, American

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

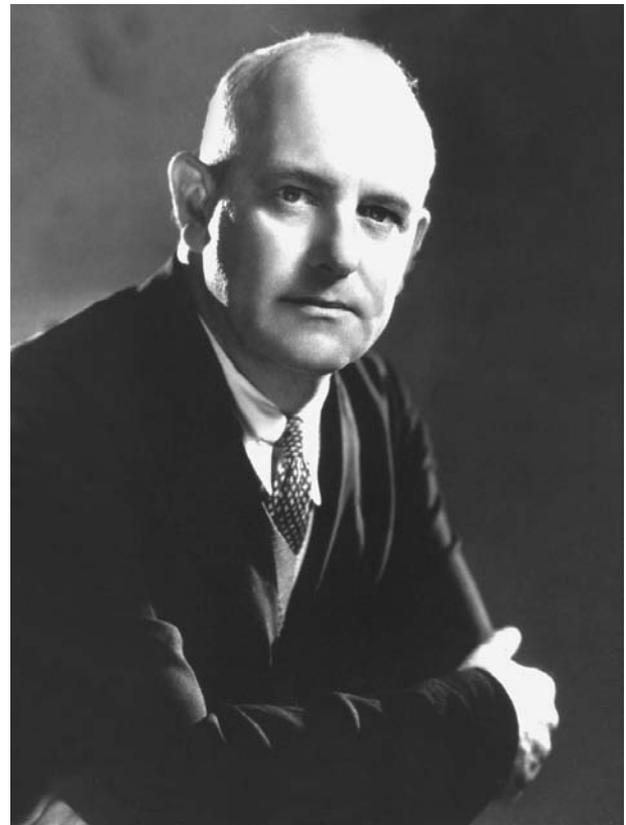
Piccadilly Jim (1918)

Mulliner Nights (1933)

Thank You, Jeeves (1934)

Blandings Castle (1935)

Young Men in Spats (1936)



P.G. Wodehouse Wodehouse, P.G., photograph. AP Images.

Overview

P. G. Wodehouse (pronounced like “Woodhouse”) is an anomaly in twentieth-century fiction. In an age of relentless artistic experimentation, he wrote fiction firmly rooted in the Edwardian world of his childhood. In an age of rapidly changing moral and sexual values, he created characters and situations remarkable for their purity and innocence. In an age of seriousness, he wrote fiction designed solely for amusement. In an age of artistic anxiety and alienation, Wodehouse wrote novels and short stories that succeeded in pleasing his readers, his critics, and himself.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Dulwich Impression Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was born on October 15, 1881, the third of four sons of Henry Ernest Wodehouse, a member of the British civil service in Hong Kong, and Eleanor Deane Wodehouse, the daughter of Rev. Deane of Bath. Sent back to England for schooling in 1884 with his older brothers, Wodehouse began his education at Bath. Wodehouse told *Paris Review* interviewer Gerald Clarke, “I was writing stories when I was five. I don’t remember what I did before that. Just loafed, I suppose.” Wodehouse attended Elizabeth College in Guernsey before enrolling in Malvern House, a navy preparatory school, in Kearnsey. His most important educational experience began at the age of twelve when he began attending Dulwich College, where he studied for six years. During his last year there, he received his first payment for writing “Some Aspects of Game Captaincy,” an essay that was a contest entry published in the *Public School Magazine*. Wodehouse recognized the important influence of Dulwich College on his life and later wrote to friend Charles Townsend that “the years between 1896 and 1900 seem[ed] like Heaven” to him.

Oxford Detour Wodehouse could not proceed to Oxford University—the usual path for a boy of his background—because his father’s pension was paid in rupees, the value of which fell so drastically at the time that the family could not afford another son at the university, even if a scholarship had been available. Wodehouse already knew he wanted to write and suggested that he become a freelance writer, but his father would not hear of such impracticality. Wodehouse became a clerk at the London branch of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, a training post for those to be sent to the Far East. His time as a clerk proved not entirely unproductive: During his tenure at the bank he sold eighty stories and articles, primarily sports-related articles for the *Public School Magazine*.

American Humor Wodehouse always recalled that a “total inability to grasp what was going on made me something of a legend” in the bank, and he soon entered the more congenial profession of journalism. He was first a substitute writer for the “By the Way” column in *The Globe*, and by

August 1903 he was employed full-time by the paper. Fascinated with boxers and wanting to meet James J. Corbett and other fighters, Wodehouse fulfilled a longtime ambition by making his first trip to America, arriving in New York in 1904. After a short stay, he returned to England as editor of the “By the Way” column, but his love for America, and for the possibilities he felt it promised writers, remained with him. In a 1915 *New York Times* interview with Joyce Kilmer, Wodehouse predicted that the years following World War I would “afford a great opportunity for the new English humorist who works on the American plan.”

Wodehouse eventually seized this opportunity and exploited it so well that years later one reviewer of *Young Men in Spats* (1936) remarked that Wodehouse was “the only Englishman who can make an American laugh at a joke about America.” The reviewer reasoned that the real secret of Wodehouse’s American popularity was that he really liked Americans. One American whom Wodehouse particularly liked was Ethel Newton Rowley, a widow with one child named Leonora. Wodehouse had met Ethel on one of his visits to America, and he married her on September 30, 1914.

Minor Hollywood Scandal In 1904, Wodehouse ventured into theatrical writing when Owen Hall asked him to compose lyrics for a song in the show *Sergeant Bruce*. Wodehouse responded with “Put Me in My Little Cell,” sung by three crooks. In 1906 Sir Seymour Hicks hired Wodehouse as lyricist for his Aldwych Theatre shows, the first of which, *The Beauty of Bath*, also marked his initial collaboration with Jerome Kern. When Kern introduced Wodehouse to Guy Bolton in 1915, the three men shared ideas about a new kind of musical comedy and decided to join forces to create what became known as the Princess Theatre shows. The Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse team set new standards for musical comedy.

Throughout the 1920s Wodehouse’s work as a journalist, lyricist, and fiction writer made him increasingly famous and wealthy, and his success inevitably attracted the attention of Hollywood. In 1930, after being subjected to the typically shrewd business negotiations of Ethel Wodehouse, Samuel Goldwyn offered Wodehouse two thousand dollars a week for six months, with a further six-month option. Wodehouse’s contribution amounted to little more than adding a few lines to already-completed scripts, and this caused him to tell an interviewer for the *Los Angeles Times* that “They paid me \$2000 a week—\$104,000—and I cannot see what they engaged me for. They were extremely nice to me, but I feel as if I cheated them.”

Wodehouse’s remarks caused a minor scandal and were said to have caused New York banks to examine studio expenditures more closely. That he actually negatively impacted Hollywood finance seems doubtful, especially since three years after the *Los Angeles Times* interview, he was asked to return to Hollywood. His final film project in 1937 was not a success, and that year

Wodehouse left Hollywood for good. Film scripts constitute the only type of writing Wodehouse attempted without success, but the Hollywood experience did give him abundant material for his later fiction.

The Hollywood experience aside, the 1920s and 1930s were remarkably productive and successful years for Wodehouse. It was also during these years that he wrote some of his best short stories, especially the Mr. Mulliner tales, which are driven by a golf theme and told by “The Oldest Member.” Wodehouse’s best-known short stories, however, are those devoted to his beloved characters Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, his valet. In each of these tales, Jeeves must rescue the ridiculous Bertie from various absurd situations.

American Broadcasts Shortly after Wodehouse was honored by being made a doctor of letters by Oxford University in 1939, he was unable to escape Le Touquet, France, where he was living at the time that France fell to the rapidly advancing Nazi German army. On July 21, 1940, Germany decreed that all male aliens were to be interned, and Wodehouse was imprisoned in Tost (now Toszek), Upper Silesia. In June 1941, when Wodehouse was to be released, CBS correspondent Harry Flannery arranged for Wodehouse to broadcast to America from a script Flannery had written.

It was not long before the German Foreign Office asked Wodehouse to make a series of broadcasts to America using his own scripts. He agreed and broadcast a series of talks called “How to Be an Internee in Your Spare Time Without Previous Experience.” These talks treated his experiences in prison camp with his usual humor, and what he read today seems harmless enough. However, the reactions of British press and government approached hysteria at the time. William Connor of the *Daily Mirror* accused “the elderly playboy” of broadcasting Nazi propaganda, though Connor never mentioned what Wodehouse actually said in the broadcasts. Ironically, the U.S. War Department used recordings of the broadcasts as models of anti-Nazi propaganda in its intelligence school, but members of the British government remained unforgiving.

After this bitter experience, Wodehouse left England for New York in 1947. He seldom spoke of the broadcasts later and, at least publicly, held no grudges. He became an American citizen in 1955 and never returned to England, although he frequently discussed doing so, especially when he was granted a knighthood on New Year’s Day 1975. He remained on Long Island, New York, where he lived a happy life “just writing one book after another.” He was working on another novel, *Sunset at Blandings*, when he died on February 14, 1975.

Works in Literary Context

Comic Wordplay In his school stories, Wodehouse used materials from conventional novels, enhancing his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wodehouse’s famous contemporaries include:

Scott Joplin (1867–1916): This famous American composer was innovative in Ragtime music.

Louis B. Mayer (1882–1957): Mayer, an American film producer, cofounded one of the first film studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM).

George Orwell (1903–1950): This celebrated English author and journalist concerned himself with government, politics, language, and the oppression of censorship.

Frank Sinatra (1915–1998): Sinatra was a popular American singer and award-winning actor known as “Ol’ Blue Eyes.”

James Thurber (1894–1961): Thurber was an American writer, humorist, and cartoonist.

stories with literary allusions and quotations that became characteristic features of his later work. In his work of the 1920s and 1930s, he introduced his most characteristic devices: a mixture of convoluted plots; comic timing; stereotypical characters; and above all, his own invented language. Such language consists of odd personifications, a thorough confusion of vocabulary, an abundance of puns, and wild similes and metaphors that transport both characters and readers far beyond the bounds of logical discourse.

One way Wodehouse manipulates language to achieve comic effect is by adding and omitting prefixes and suffixes. For example, he takes the prefix de-, as in debunk or delouse, and adds it to proper names. The effect is witty and humorous, as seen in *Uncle Dynamite* when Pongo Twistleton gets Elsie Bean out of a cupboard: “His manner as he de-Beaned the cupboard was somewhat distraut.” Another example can be observed in *Jeeves in the Offing* when Bobbie Wickham has left Kipper Herring alone: Herring was “finding himself de-Wickhamed.”

Wodehouse’s use of language to evoke humor can also be seen in the Jeeves and Bertie stories. Even though Bertie is a highly educated person, he has a limited vocabulary and either haltingly tries to remember the “right” word or depends on Jeeves to complete his thoughts for him by providing the appropriate word. For instance, in *Stiff Upper Lip*, Bertie says, “I suppose Stiffy’s sore about this . . . what’s the word? . . . Not vase-line . . . Vacillation, that’s it.” In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Bertie says, “Let a plugugly young Thos loose in the community . . . [is] inviting disaster and . . . what’s the word? something about cats.” Jeeves replies, “Cataclysms, sir?” The results are amusing.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wodehouse's incomparable wit was his trademark. Other works known for their comic appeal include:

Barrel Fever (1994), a collection of stories by David Sedaris. Noted humorist David Sedaris won widespread acclaim and attention with this collection.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. In this comedy of manners, misunderstandings and misinformation create a comic situation akin to Wodehouse's later Jeeves and Wooster tales.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1925), a novel by Anita Loos. This comic novel about the substantial power of a gold-digging blonde was turned into a successful 1953 movie starring Marilyn Monroe.

Influences The enormous influence of Dulwich College in Wodehouse's work has long been recognized. J. B. Priestley voiced the sentiment that Wodehouse remained "a brilliant super-de-luxe schoolboy" throughout his life, a belief that explains the sexless young women, terrifying aunts, and eccentric aristocrats who fill his pages. Another great influence on Wodehouse's fiction, especially his short stories, was his theatrical writing. In *Over Seventy* (1956), Wodehouse names several other humorists he greatly respected, including Alex Atkinson, A. P. Herbert, and Frank Sullivan.

Works in Critical Context

Wodehouse Collaborated Musicals As early as 1935, Frank Swinnerton offered a remark that is surely the best praise a humorist can receive: Wodehouse was so popular because "in a period when laughter has been difficult, he has made men laugh without shame." Wodehouse did not receive much critical attention during his career, and he described himself as "a pretty insignificant sort of blister, not at all the type that leaves footprints on the sands of time," because "I go in for what is known in the trade as 'light writing' and those who do that—humorists they are sometimes called—are looked down upon by the intelligentsia and sneered at." Other writers, however, not to mention millions of readers, have found in Wodehouse's world a wonderful escape from their own. Evelyn Waugh, in a broadcast of July 15, 1961, explained Wodehouse's continuing attraction: "For Mr. Wodehouse there has been no Fall of Man, no aboriginal calamity. . . . Mr. Wodehouse's world can never stale."

The Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse team of 1915 set new standards for musical comedy. The *Oxford Companion to the American Theatre* asserts that Wodehouse "may well

be considered the first truly great lyricist of the American musical stage, his easy colloquially flowing rhythm deftly intertwined with a sunny wit." The Princess Theatre shows, though highly successful and influential in their time, are now seldom-revived period pieces. Their real and lasting influence was not only on audiences but on Wodehouse's fiction, which he subsequently began to structure in the fashion of the musical comedy. According to scholar David Jasen, Wodehouse himself "described his books as musical comedies without the music."

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the roles of household servants to upper-class British families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What roles were fulfilled by such servants as the housekeeper, the butler, and the valet? How many servants did the typical household employ? Do upper-class families in England continue to employ such servants today?
2. Gentleman's clubs feature prominently in Wodehouse's fiction. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about one of London's historic gentleman's clubs and write a short summary of its history.
3. Wodehouse's Jeeves stories were adapted for television in the Independent Television series *Jeeves and Wooster* (1990–1993), which starred Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie. Watch some of the episode of this series. Do you think the television shows capture the humor of Wodehouse's writing? Are the portrayals of antics of British aristocrats affectionate or critical?

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Virginia Woolf

BORN: 1882, London, England

DIED: 1941, Lewes, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Mrs. Dalloway (1925)

To the Lighthouse (1927)

Orlando (1928)

A Room of One's Own (1929)



Virginia Woolf Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

One of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf is chiefly renowned as an innovative novelist. She also wrote book reviews, biographical and autobiographical sketches, social and literary criticism, personal essays, and commemorative articles treating a wide range of topics. Concerned primarily with depicting the life of the mind, Woolf revolted against traditional narrative structures and developed her own highly individualized style of writing.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in an Unconventional and Literary Atmosphere Born in London, Virginia Woolf was the third child of Julia and Leslie Stephen. Although her brothers, Thoby and Adrian, were sent to school, Virginia and her sister, Vanessa, were taught at home by their parents and by tutors. Theirs was a highly literary family. Woolf received no formal education, but she was raised in a cultured atmosphere, learning from her father's extensive library and from conversing with his friends, many of whom were prominent writers of the era.

Formation of the Bloomsbury Group Following the death of her father in 1904, Woolf settled in the Bloomsbury district of London with her sister and brothers. Their house became a gathering place where such friends as J. M. Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, and E. M. Forster congregated for lively discussions about philosophy, art, music, and literature. A complex network of friendships and love affairs developed, serving to increase the solidarity of what became known as the Bloomsbury Group. Here she met Leonard Woolf, the author, politician, and economist whom she married in 1912. Woolf flourished in the unconventional atmosphere that she and her siblings had cultivated.

Financial Need Catalyzes Literary Output The need to earn money led her to begin submitting book reviews and essays to various publications. Her first published works—mainly literary reviews—began appearing anonymously in 1904 in the *Guardian*, a weekly newspaper for Anglo-Catholic clergy. Woolf's letters and diaries reveal that journalism occupied much of her time and thought between 1904 and 1909. By the latter year, however, she was becoming absorbed in work on her first novel, eventually published in 1915 as *The Voyage Out*.

The Hogarth Press In 1914, World War I began, a devastating conflict that involved carnage on an unprecedented scale. It involved nearly every European country and, eventually, the United States. About twenty million people were killed as a direct result of the war. Nearly a million British soldiers died (similar losses were experienced by all the other warring nations). In 1917, while England was in the midst of fighting World War I, Woolf

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Woolf's famous contemporaries include:

Henry James (1843–1916): James was an American-born novelist who became a British citizen and was highly influential in both British and American literary circles.

Sigmund Freud (1858–1939): Freud was an Austrian psychologist who founded the school of psychoanalysis and pioneered theories of the unconscious mind.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Joyce was an Irish writer who is widely considered one of the literary giants of the twentieth century, particularly because of his masterwork, *Ulysses*.

Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923): Mansfield was a prominent New Zealand modernist short-fiction writer.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): Eliot was an American-born poet and dramatist who became a British citizen at the age of thirty-nine. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): Faulkner was an American novelist widely regarded as one of the most influential authors of the twentieth century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): De Beauvoir was a French author and philosopher best known for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, an analysis of women's oppression and one of the most important texts of modern feminism.

and her husband cofounded the Hogarth Press. They bought a small handpress, with a booklet of instructions, and set up shop on the dining room table in Hogarth House, their lodgings in Richmond. They planned to print only some of their own writings and that of their talented friends. Leonard hoped the manual work would provide Virginia a relaxing diversion from the stress of writing.

It is a tribute to their combined business acumen and critical judgment that this small independent venture became, as Mary Gaither recounts, “a self-supporting business and a significant publishing voice in England between the wars.” Certainly being her own publisher made it much easier for Virginia Woolf to pursue her experimental bent but also enabled her to gain greater financial independence from what was at that time a male-dominated industry. Like Woolf, many British women joined the professional work force in an increased capacity during World War I, capitalizing on England's need for heavy industry to support its armed forces.

Successful Experiments This philosophy of daring and experimental writing is shown in her self-published works. While the novel *Night and Day* (1919) is not a

stylistic experiment, it deals with the controversial issue of women's suffrage, or right to vote—a right championed by Woolf. At the time of its publication, English women over the age of thirty had just finally received voting rights; it would still be another decade before women held the exact same voting rights as men. Where Woolf might have had difficulty finding another publisher for a book dealing with such a subject, access to Hogarth Press left her free to deal with whatever subject matter she saw fit.

This freedom expressed itself more in stylistic terms in her following works. The novel *Jacob's Room* (1922), for example, tells the story of a character who is never directly introduced to the reader, but only revealed through the recollections of others. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) takes place over the course of a single day and presents the thoughts of characters in a free-flowing way meant to mimic actual consciousness. This description of her characters's “inner life” continued with *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and both novels earned Woolf the esteem of critics and readers. These novels, despite being experimental in style, directly reflect the author's own literate and well-heeled upbringing in their characters and settings.

Circumventing Censorship in *Orlando* Woolf drew upon her own relationships in *Orlando* (1928) a book characterized by Woolf as a biography but by most readers as a novel. The main character, who does not grow old and changes genders, is directly inspired by the female author Vita Sackville-West, a bisexual member of the Bloomsbury Group with whom Woolf had an intimate relationship. Many scholars and critics have viewed the main character's gender-switching as a clever device meant to suggest—but not directly depict—a lesbian relationship, since such topics were the subject of censorship at the time.

Depression and Suicide Woolf fought an ongoing battle against depression for most of her life. After her mother's death in 1895, she had a nervous breakdown, the first of four periods of depression and emotional trauma. Woolf had a second breakdown nine years later when her father died. A third episode of mental illness began early in 1912, became acute in September of 1913 (when she attempted suicide), and lasted into 1916.

In 1941 Woolf published her last novel, *Between the Acts*. She suffered another emotional breakdown in February of 1941, likely brought on by the escalation of World War II. After the horror of World War I, many people felt there could not possibly be another conflict of that type in Europe. That Europe could descend into violence once again so soon after World War I shocked and saddened Woolf deeply. Fearing that she lacked the stamina needed to weather further bouts of depression, Woolf drowned herself in a pond near Monks House, the Woolfs' home in Sussex, on March 28, 1941.

Works in Literary Context

Stream of Consciousness Woolf grew up in an environment rich in Victorian literary influences. Although she lacked the formal education afforded to men of her day, Woolf acquired extensive knowledge of the classics and English literature in the family's enormous home library. In addition, many influential literary figures visited her childhood house, including George Eliot, Henry James, George Lewes, Julia Cameron, and James Lowell, who was named Woolf's godfather. Proximity to influential writers of her day continued into her adulthood with the formation of the Bloomsbury group and creation of the Hogarth Press. With the freedom to create and publish her own work, Woolf largely avoided traditional narrative structures or plots. Her novels are noted for their subjective exploration of character and theme and their poetic prose. Woolf is chiefly renowned as an innovative novelist and in particular for her contribution to the development of the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique.

The stream-of-consciousness technique is found in much of Woolf's fiction. This technique, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is meant to reflect the way in which a character's thoughts flow freely, often without formal sentence structure or punctuation. Famous writers that popularized this technique included James Joyce and Marcel Proust. Examples of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style can be found in many of her works but are especially notable in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

Writing for "the Common Reader" Woolf also wrote book reviews, biographical and autobiographical sketches, social and literary criticism, personal essays, and commemorative articles treating a wide range of topics. Her essays are commended for their perceptive observations on nearly the entire range of English literature, as well as many social and political concerns of the early twentieth century. She maintained that the purpose of writing an essay was to give pleasure to the reader, and she endeavored to do this with witty, supple prose, apt literary and cultural references, and a wide range of subjects. Aiming to identify closely with her audience, she adopted a persona she termed "the common reader": an intelligent, educated person with the will and inclination to be challenged by what he or she reads.

Influence Because of her importance as an innovator in the modern novel form, and as a commentator on nearly the entire range of English literature and much European literature, Woolf's life and works have been the focus of extensive study. In addition to occupying the attention of scholars, Woolf has inspired experimental works in a variety of artistic genres including author Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Hours* (1998), in which Woolf appears as a character,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Woolf's fiction reveals an ongoing concern with subjective exploration of character and incident, which she accomplishes with frequent use of a stream-of-consciousness narrative style. Here are some other works that are constructed with a stream-of-consciousness style:

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. This work, widely considered to be one of the most important works of modern literature, chronicles its main character's passage through Dublin during an ordinary day.

Steppenwolf (1927), a novel by Hermann Hesse. This work explores the duality of human nature as exemplified by the inner and outer struggles of its main character.

As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. This work tells the story of the death of Addie Bundren from the point of view of fifteen different narrators.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This highly autobiographical work is based on the author's recollections of spontaneous road trips across mid-twentieth-century America.

and playwright Edward Albee's work *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) among many others.

Works in Critical Context

The writings of Virginia Woolf have always been admired by discriminating readers, but her work has suffered, as has that of many other major authors, periods of neglect by the literary establishment. She was, as she herself put it, always a hare a long way ahead of "those hounds my critics." It was difficult to find copies of her books during the 1950s and 1960s, and they were rarely included on syllabi for literature classes. The extensive and serious treatment given Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* in Erich Auerbach's much-esteemed book *Mimesis* (translated into English in 1953), presaged and perhaps helped cause the turnaround.

The advantages of the recent critical and popular attention are manifold. Her novels are now in print again, in a variety of editions, often with introductions in homage by today's writers. They have been translated into more than fifty languages. Her essays, reviews, and short stories have been collected. And then there is the vast delight of the many volumes of letters and diaries, all scrupulously edited, copiously footnoted, and indexed. Even her reading notes are being published.

Mrs. Dalloway When *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in 1925, Woolf received the immediate critical attention her earlier fiction failed to find. In a review for the *New York*

Times, John W. Crawford wrote that, despite the inventiveness of other contemporary authors, “Virginia Woolf is almost alone . . . in the intricate yet clear art of her composition.” Edwin Muir, in *Transition: Essays on Contemporary Literature*, compares the novel favorably to her earlier *Night and Day*, stating, “[I]t is infinitely more subtle in its means, and it has on all its pages, as *Night and Day* had not, the glow of an indisputable artistic triumph.”

To the Lighthouse The critical success Woolf achieved with *Mrs. Dalloway* raised expectations for the 1927 release of her next novel, *To the Lighthouse*. Critical opinion of the book was mixed, with many noting the author’s obvious skill at turning a phrase and offering credit for the stylistic and structural difficulties she tackled with the work. Edwin Muir, in a review for *Nation and Athenaeum*, states that the book is “difficult to judge” because of this, and he credits Woolf as “a writer of profound imagination.” Muir concedes, “Yet as a whole, though showing an advance on many sides, it produces a less congruous and powerful effect than *Mrs. Dalloway*.” In his review for the *New York Times*, Louis Kronenberger agrees: “It is inferior to *Mrs. Dalloway* in the degree to which its aims are achieved; it is superior in the magnitude of the aims themselves.” Orlo Williams, in a review for the *Monthly Criterion*, offers praise wrapped in criticism: “Her mastery increases with each book, but, I fear, it will always fall short of her vision.” Despite these reviews, modern scholars have devoted much attention to the novel as one of Woolf’s most complex and masterful works.

Responses to Literature

1. Because Woolf and her husband operated a press, she was free to write without worrying about rejection by a publisher. In today’s world, the Internet allows nearly anyone to publish their views easily and cheaply. Does the Internet provide the same kind of freedom that Woolf enjoyed as a writer? Are there differences in the way that online writers make use of their freedom? Do readers today approach online writings differently than they approach printed texts?
2. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf presents the suicidal character of Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked World War I veteran. Veterans of World War I commonly exhibited mental health problems, but they were largely misunderstood by doctors. Today, someone like Septimus Smith would probably be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Using your library and the Internet, research the history of medical treatment for post-combat mental illnesses. Write an essay summarizing your findings.
3. Woolf famously argued in her long essay *A Room of One’s Own* that in order for women to succeed as writers of fiction, they needed to have a reliable

means of income and a private space in which to work. Why do you think having “a room of one’s own” would be important for women writers of the early twentieth century? In your opinion, are these still important factors for allowing women to succeed as writers? Why or why not? Do these same prerequisites also apply for male writers? Why or why not?

4. Woolf frequently employed a stream-of-consciousness narrative style to explore the inner lives of her characters. Write a short story or essay using the stream-of-consciousness style.

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William Wordsworth

BORN: 1770, *Cockermouth, Cumberland, England*

DIED: 1850, *Ambleside, England*

NATIONALITY: *English*

GENRE: *Poetry, nonfiction*

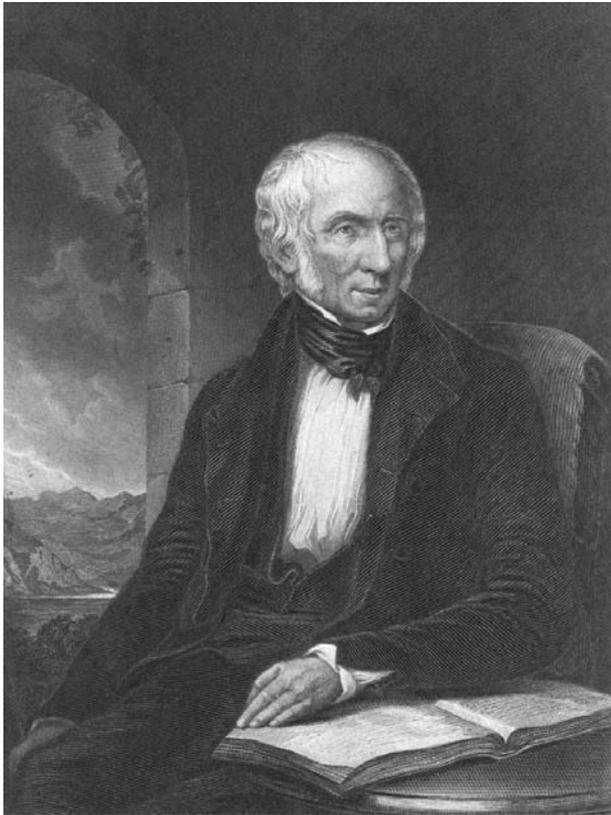
MAJOR WORKS:

Lyrical Ballads (1798)

Poems (1807)

The Sonnets of William Wordsworth (1838)

The Prelude (1850)



William Wordsworth *Wordsworth, William, photograph.*

Overview

Asserting in the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should comprise "language really used by men," William Wordsworth challenged the prevailing eighteenth-century notion of formal poetic diction and thereby profoundly affected the course of modern poetry. His major work, *The Prelude*, a study of the role of the imagination and memory in the formation of poetic sensibility, is now viewed as one of the most seminal long poems of the nineteenth century. The freshness and emotional power of Wordsworth's poetry, the keen psychological depth of his characterizations, and the urgency of his social commentary make him one of the most important writers in English.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Tranquility, Tragedy, and Revolution William Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, England, the second son of John and Anne Cookson Wordsworth. An attorney for a prominent local aristocrat, John Wordsworth provided a secure and comfortable living for his family. But with his wife's death in 1778, the family became dispersed: The boys were enrolled at a boarding school in Hawkeshead, and Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, was sent to live with cousins in Halifax. In the rural surroundings of Hawkeshead, situated in the lush Lake District, Wordsworth early learned to love nature, including the pleasures of walking and outdoor play. He equally enjoyed his formal education, demonstrating a talent for writing poetry. The tranquility of his years at Hawkeshead was marred by the death of his father in 1783. Left homeless, the Wordsworth children spent their school vacations with various relatives, many of whom regarded them as nothing more than a financial burden. Biographers have pointed out that Wordsworth's frequently unhappy early life contrasts sharply with the idealized portrait of childhood he presented in his poetry.

After graduating from St. John's College in Cambridge in 1791, Wordsworth lived for a short time in London and Wales and then traveled to France. The French Revolution was in its third year, and although he previously had shown little interest in politics, he quickly came to advocate the goals of the revolution. Along with a heightened political consciousness, he experienced a passionate affair, the details of which were kept a family secret until the early twentieth century. During his stay in France, he fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon, and in 1792, they had a child, Anne-Caroline. Too poor to marry and forced by the outbreak of civil war to flee France, Wordsworth reluctantly returned alone to England in 1793.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wordsworth's famous contemporaries include:

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): German composer and virtuoso pianist who, despite his eventual loss of hearing, became famous for his concertos, symphonies, and chamber music.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821): Famous general during the French Revolution who eventually became ruler of France.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834): Wordsworth's longtime friend and author of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan."

Jane Austen (1775–1817): English realist novelist famous for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

Writing Habits and Lifelong Friends Following a brief sojourn in London, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown in 1795. Living modestly but contentedly, he now spent much of his time reading contemporary European literature and writing verse. An immensely important contribution to Wordsworth's success was Dorothy's lifelong devotion: She encouraged his efforts at composition and looked after the details of their daily life. During the first year at Racedown, Wordsworth wrote *The Borderers*, a verse drama based on the ideas of William Godwin and the German Sturm und Drang writers, who emphasized emotional expression in their work. The single most important event of his literary apprenticeship occurred in 1797 when he met the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The two had corresponded for several years, and when Coleridge came to visit Wordsworth at Racedown, their rapport and mutual admiration were immediate. Many critics view their friendship as one of the most extraordinary in English literature. The Wordsworths soon moved to Nether Stowey in order to be near Coleridge. In the intellectually stimulating environment he and Coleridge created there, Wordsworth embarked on a period of remarkable creativity.

In 1802, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson. Realizing that Wordsworth now required a more steady source of income, Coleridge introduced him to Sir George Beaumont, a wealthy art patron who became Wordsworth's benefactor and friend. Beaumont facilitated the publication of the *Poems* of 1807; in that collection, Wordsworth once again displayed his extraordinary talent for nature description and infusing an element of mysticism into ordinary experience. Always fascinated by human psychology, he also stressed the influence of childhood. Most reviewers singled out "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of

Early Childhood" as perhaps Wordsworth's greatest production.

Later Life The remaining years of Wordsworth's career are generally viewed as a decline from the revolutionary and experimental fervor of his youth. He condemned French imperialism in the period after the revolution, and his nationalism became more pronounced. The pantheism of his early nature poetry, too—which celebrated a pervasive divine force in all things—gave way to orthodox religious sentiment in the later works. Such admirers as Percy Bysshe Shelley, who formerly had respected Wordsworth as a reformer of poetic diction, now regarded him with scorn and a sense of betrayal. Whether because of professional jealousy or because of alterations to his personality caused by prolonged drug use, Coleridge grew estranged from Wordsworth after 1810. Two works, *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems* (1835) and *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth* (1838), received critical accolades upon their publication and evoked comparisons of Wordsworth's sonnets with those of William Shakespeare and John Milton. In 1843 he won the distinction of being named poet laureate. After receiving a government pension in 1842, he retired to Rydal. When he died in 1850, he was one of England's best-loved poets.

Works in Literary Context

Romantic Movement Wordsworth was a quintessential Romantic poet. The Romantic Movement in literature, which began in the late eighteenth century, was a reaction against what was seen as the cold rationality of the Enlightenment period. During the Enlightenment, developments in science and technology ushered in the massive social changes in western society. The Industrial Revolution brought about population explosions in European cities while the works of political scientists and philosophers laid the groundwork for the American and French Revolutions. The Romantics viewed science and technology skeptically, and stressed the beauty of nature and individual emotion in their work.

Works in Critical Context

Critics of Wordsworth's works have made his treatment of nature, his use of diction, and his critical theories the central focus of their studies. Early response to his poetry begins with Francis Jeffrey's concerted campaign to thwart Wordsworth's poetic career. His reviews of the works of the Lake poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey—and of Wordsworth's poetry in particular, were so vitriolic that they stalled public acceptance of the poet for some twenty years but brought many critics to his defense. To Jeffrey, Wordsworth's poetic innovations were in "open violation of the established laws of poetry." He described Wordsworth's stylistic simplicity as affectation. Like Jeffrey, many readers may have believed Wordsworth "descended too low" in his writing,

as an advertisement printed with the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 warns. The advertisement recognizes that the familiar tone Wordsworth uses may not be what poetry readers prefer and tries to frame Wordsworth's poetic inclusion of ordinary language as an "experiment" that attempts "to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." Despite this public hesitation, Wordsworth's poetry eventually gained acceptance. By the 1830s, Wordsworth was England's preeminent poet.

The Excursion In 1978, Annabel Patterson wrote in a journal called *The Wordsworth Circle* that *The Excursion* "has a history of disappointing its readers." Patterson goes on to describe how Wordsworth's literary contemporaries reacted negatively to the volume and expected far more. Yet other critics have viewed *The Excursion* like other Wordsworth works, as poetic song or even a "song of daily life," in the words of scholar Brian Bartlett. Bartlett remarks on Wordsworth's distinct combination of "man's music and nature's music." William Wordsworth is considered the preeminent poet of nature, though he claimed his main subject was "the Mind of Man—/ My haunt, and the main region of my song." Wordsworth portrays suffering humanity in many of his poems, showing a variety of causes: poverty, separation, bereavement, neglect. As Geoffrey Hartman has written, "those famous misreaders of Wordsworth who say he advocates rural nature as a panacea should be condemned to read *The Excursion* once a day."

The Prelude Wordsworth's *The Prelude* was published shortly after his death. Begun some fifty years earlier, the poem was completed in 1805 and then drastically revised over time. Greeted with uneven praise at its first appearance, the poem is now hailed as Wordsworth's greatest work. Scholar Alan Richardson notes that because of the work's autobiographical slant, many literary critics view *The Prelude* through a variety of lenses, particularly psychoanalytic. Wordsworth, or the poet, becomes the subject, while the critic becomes amateur analyst. At the same time, some critics tend to explore the poem through historical criticism, preferring, as David Miall suggests, to see how "Wordsworth engages with contemporary events . . . at the local level and . . . on a broader canvas." In this vein, scholars like to analyze the way Wordsworth may "position himself as a historical figure." In general, critics laud *The Prelude's* blending of autobiography, history, and epic, its theme of loss and gain, its mythologizing of childhood experience, and its affirmation of the value of the imagination.

Responses to Literature

1. Wordsworth was good friends with the poet Samuel Coleridge. Write a one- to two-page essay that describes their friendship as illustrated in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wordsworth was keenly interested in depicting idealized portraits of rural people. Here are some other works that champion or examine "common" rural, hardworking lives:

So Big! (1924), a novel by Edna Ferber. Ferber's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel shows a moral contrast between the hardworking farm woman and her city-dwelling architect son.

The Grapes of Wrath (1939), a novel by John Steinbeck. This novel set during the Great Depression follows Tom Joad and his family on their journey to the promised land of California.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941), a book by James Agee with photographs by Walker Evans. Agee and Evans photographed and detailed the real lives of sharecropper families in the U.S. South. Their portraits are a far cry from Wordsworth's idealized visions.

2. Read a selection of Wordsworth's early poems. Write an essay on how these poems demonstrate how Wordsworth was influenced by the French Revolution.
3. Research the literary movements of naturalism, realism, romanticism, and transcendentalism. Make a chart that describes each movement in detail. Then write a paragraph about which literary style you think Wordsworth followed and why.
4. One of Wordsworth's most quoted lines is "The world is too much with us." In an informal essay written from a first-person point of view, explain how the title statement might apply to today's world.
5. Compare Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up" with Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." With a classmate, discuss how the language and imagery might reveal that one poet is from England and one from America.

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▣ Judith Wright

BORN: 1915, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia

DIED: 2000, Canberra, Australia

NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Moving Image (1946)

Woman to Man (1949)

The Gateway (1953)

The Two Fires (1955)

The Other Half (1966)

Overview

While Australian poet Judith Wright may be recognized nearly as much for her passionate involvement in social and environmental causes as she is for her literary work, that should not be seen as mitigating the importance of her contribution to Australian letters. One of the country's most celebrated poets, she has been lauded by even the notoriously difficult-to-please poet and critic Robert Lowell and is a significant influence on the contemporary generation of Australian poets.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Raised by the Land Judith Arundell Wright was born on May 31, 1915, at Thalgaroch Station near Armidale, New South Wales, to pastoralist Phillip Arundell Wright and Ethel Mabel Bigg Wright. Ethel became an invalid after the birth of the second of Judith's two brothers, and she died when Judith was twelve. Often left to her own devices, young Judith spent much of her time outdoors. The land became for her a presence that was almost maternal; that land also became the primary source of her poetry.

Wright was educated first at home and then as a boarder at the New England Girls' Grammar School, where her English teacher recognized and encouraged her talent. A serious riding accident kept her in the hospital for three months during her last year at school and pre-



Judith Wright Wright, Judith, photograph. Coward of Canberra Photography. Reproduced by permission of Judith A. Wright.

vented her from matriculating at Sydney University, but she went on to the university after a year at home—supported by a legacy from her grandmother. There she followed her interests, studying English, history, philosophy, and anthropology and spending time in the library reading widely to prepare herself for a writing career.

World War II and the Birth of a Frightened Patriotism In 1937, with the last of the legacy from her grandmother, Wright went to England, where she met some of her relatives. She then toured Europe, witnessing Nazism firsthand in Germany. On her return to Australia, she settled in Sydney. Not long afterward, World War II broke out in Europe. Two years later, in 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and rumblings throughout Southeast Asia brought the threat dangerously close to home. Wright returned to New South Wales to help her father run the family properties while her two brothers were in the army. On the train trip there she became “suddenly and sharply aware” that Australia was “my country” but now in a different, more threatened, way.

When her elder brother was released from the army after the Allied victory in the Pacific Theater had been achieved—to some extent through the humanitarian catastrophe of the U.S. bombing of the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic weapons—Wright went north to Brisbane to work as an unpaid secretary for

C. B. Christesen, at his newly founded literary magazine, *Meanjin Papers*. At one of Christesen's gatherings in 1945, she met Jack Philip McKinney. Wright found in McKinney an integrity, a "certainty, passion and peace" she had not encountered before, and he became her partner—and, in 1962, her husband.

Poetry of Power Wright's reputation was made by a series of poems about the land and the people who pioneered it—which she published first in the *Bulletin* and *Meanjin Papers* and later collected in her first volume, *The Moving Image* (1946). These poems transformed the bush tradition of rural Australia, even as she wrote about and from within it.

Wright's second work, *Woman to Man* (1949), celebrated the power of womanhood; it was to become for critics one of her most profound works. Her next two collections—*The Gateway* (1953) and *The Two Fires* (1955)—moved away from personal and anecdotal material toward more metaphysical and universal subject matter. Amidst such solemn works, Wright also produced *Birds* in 1963, a collection of poems that commented on the characteristics of Australia's winged wildlife. In her next collection, *Five Senses* (1963), human figures returned, and the poems, less impersonal, again expressed Wright's feeling for and delight in the earth.

Working and Writing to Empower Wright returned to metaphysical issues in many of her poems written in the mid-1960s, with *The Other Half* (1966) addressing the mystic relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind—despite the fact that her energies were increasingly taken up by activist concerns. At this time, Wright was heavily involved with lectures and critical writing, and was also making great efforts to save the Australian rain forest. More and more of her time and energy also went into battles to save the Great Barrier Reef; to oppose the new supersonic aircraft, the Concorde (because of the threat it posed to the environment); to preserve the rain forests; and, increasingly important, to support the aboriginal people of Australia in their struggles for recognition and restitution. Like the Native Americans in the United States, the aboriginals in Australia had been systematically stripped of their land and their customs, even of their language. Thousands of aboriginal children had been kidnapped and forced to live with white families of European descent, in an effort to assimilate them into the dominant white culture. As in the U.S., where the situation is in many ways even more grim (still today), aboriginal peoples lived, at best, in colonial relationships to the Australian government; a good part of Wright's energy was devoted to helping aboriginals change this situation.

Losing McKinney and Leaving Queensland When McKinney died in 1966, Wright's poetic output reflected her grief; *Collected Poems, 1942–1970* (1971) includes poems devoted to her love for her mate and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wright's famous contemporaries include:

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): A Russian author and dissident famous for his novels depicting the harsh conditions in Soviet labor camps.

Heinrich Böll (1917–1985): A German author who was respected for his post–World War II writings as much as for his successful resistance to joining Hitler's Youth.

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997): An American avant-garde writer known as one of the central members of the Beat generation.

Edith Piaf (1915–1963): A French songstress who was so popular that, when she died, the streets of Paris closed down, and thousands upon thousands mourned her passing.

Frank Sinatra (1915–1998): The American popular singer and award-winning actor known as "Ol' Blue Eyes."

her pain at losing him. Many of the poems in the "Shadow" section of the book describe McKinney moving away from her as he grew increasingly frail with age and illness; but they also celebrate the journey she and her husband had made together.

As an activist elated by the 1972 electoral success of the Labor Party under Gough Whitlam—which led to a government that seemed to be concerned with the same issues about which she felt passionately—Wright decided to leave Queensland. She moved south to a block of land she bought near the Shoalhaven River in southeastern New South Wales, where she built the house in which she hoped to spend her last years in the midst of nature. *Alive: Poems, 1971–1972* appeared in 1973. This collection continued her emphasis on the natural beauty of her Queensland home, however, contrasting that with urban ruin—using this comparison to comment on the destruction of the Australian wilderness.

The Conscience of the Nation After a lengthy break from publishing poetry collections, Wright published *Phantom Dwelling* in 1985. Also in 1985, on her seventieth birthday, she announced that she would write no more poetry, instead focusing on the causes in which she so passionately believed. When she died on June 25, 2000, at the age of eighty-five, she was not only arguably Australia's best-known poet but had also come to be regarded by many as the conscience of the nation.

Works in Literary Context

In her earliest years it was Miles Franklin's novel *My Brilliant Career* (1901) that inspired Wright's determination to become a writer. In turn, it was her fascination

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wright was particularly concerned with the issue of identity for those from whom identity had been systematically stripped: in Australia, the aboriginal people. Here are a few works by writers who also focused on themes of authentic identity for indigenous peoples:

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton. In this acclaimed novel, South African apartheid is encroaching—against the social protests of select individuals and subcultures.

Once Were Warriors (1990), a novel by Alan Duff. Later adapted into a power film, this novel closely examines Maori cultural struggles in the setting of urban New Zealand and by way of the impoverished, undereducated Heke family.

Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel is the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture.

The World of Malgudi (2000), a collection of novellas by R. K. Narayan. In this collection, the author expresses the values and mores of domestic life and explores what it means to be (East) Indian in modern times.

with Jack McKinney and her desire to partner and have children with him that inspired poems such as “Woman to Man” and “Woman to Child,” collected in *Woman to Man* (1949). And it was the influence of such esteemed writers as William Blake and T. S. Eliot that informed Wright’s works such as *The Gateway* (1953)—in its consideration of love, creation, and eternity. But it was her childhood at Wallamumbi, her family’s sheep ranch in New South Wales, that drove Wright’s interest in the Australian land itself. At one point, Wright explained this influence, saying, “As a poet you have to imitate somebody, but as I had a beautiful landscape outside that I loved so much and was in so much . . . it was my main object from the start.”

Identity and Power In works as late as *Phantom Dwelling* (1985), Wright brings new light to bear on the themes that dominate so much of her poetry, particularly humanity’s relationship with nature and death. Wright also depicts nature and birth: she portrays pregnant and birthing mothers as elemental forces like floods, fires, and droughts—all of which figure as the enemy in the bush tradition. Such poems, expressions, and images also establish the woman as a figure of power, however. This power extended to Australia’s people and land as well; it was of major importance to Wright to make her people indigenes—natives—to give them their rightful connection to their true history. Poems in several vol-

umes address this focus, with themes on the struggle to attain permanence and security and the need to overcome transience through love. Ultimately, for Wright, poetry was “a means of regaining faith in man” as well as “a way of finding a difficult balance” between internal and external reality.

Works in Critical Context

With few exceptions, critical response to Wright’s poetry has been positive. From her first two collections onwards, she was almost invariably lauded for her fresh treatments of the subject matter with which she dealt.

The Moving Image (1946) In this first collection, Wright uses lucid, graceful lyrics to evoke a mythic dimension in her subjects. In the process, she conveys a vivid sense of the landscape and history of the New England region of Australia. Appraising *The Moving Image*, Vincent Buckley argues that “Judith Wright surpasses all other Australian poets in the extent to which she . . . reveals the contours of Australia as a place, an atmosphere, a separate being.” Such praise was echoed by many other critics, as *The Moving Image* established Wright as one of Australia’s major poets.

Woman to Man (1949) Wright’s second volume of verse is a celebration of womanhood. Often regarded as her most profound work, critics have found *Woman to Man* notable for its striking imagery and focus on love and chaos, and they credit Wright with giving a uniquely female perspective to poems dealing with love, creation, and the universe. Elizabeth Vassilieff, an activist in the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW), contends that with these poems Wright exhibits “the ability to re-create the meanings of common words with every new usage; to refresh, deepen and invigorate the language. . . . And in this power I think she has no equal among Australian poets.”

On the collections published after *Woman to Man* the critics are divided. Many contend that her increasingly metaphysical focus and her forays into rather literal protest poetry dilute her ability to draw universal and poetic images from common events. Her departure from the more traditional style of her early verse has also been scorned by some observers. Others, however, have characterized her politics and mysticism and her stylistic experiments with free verse as the explorations of a serious poet, who, not content to rest on her laurels, continued ever to redefine herself and her subject matter as she matured. Nela Bureu, for example, describes Wright’s poetry in its style and content as a “deep meditation on the meaning and value of life.”

Responses to Literature

1. Investigate Australia—its history, geography, culture, and people. Where is Australia prominent in Wright’s poetry, and what differences do you find between her

treatments of “different Australias” (that is, Australia as a historical state, as a piece of land, as a national idea, etc.)? Structure your thoughts in a thesis-driven essay, explaining your understanding of Wright through detailed analysis of specific passages.

2. While several of Wright’s works push beyond historical fact into the world of myth, her experiences and studies of significant events influenced the poet and affected her poetry.
3. Study the functions of The Department of the Environment in at least four different countries. Analyze how each country’s respective federal agency contributes to the destruction of the environment in some way, even as they also help to protect it. Write a protest poem modeled on Wright’s later work that addresses this situation at large or some particular environmental issue.
4. In her preface to *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* Wright comments that “the true function of an art and a culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and society in which we live.” Consider what this means by regarding several forms of art in your own culture—pottery, sculpture, painting, poetry, a television program, or Internet medium. How does each help (or fail to help) you to interpret who you are? What does each tell you about the culture you live in?

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William Wycherley

BORN: c. 1640, Hampshire, England

DIED: 1715, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Love in a Wood (1671)

The Country-Wife (1675)

The Plain-Dealer (1677)

Miscellany Poems: as Satyrs, Epistles, Love-Verses, Songs, Sonnets, etc. (1671)



William Wycherley *Wycherley, William, photograph.* © Michael Nicholson / Corbis.

Overview

One of the foremost dramatists of the Restoration period, British author William Wycherley combined irreverent social satire and complex verbal wit to create comedies of lasting interest and appeal. His comedies ridiculed the manners and morals of sophisticated ladies and gentlemen who delighted in illicit intrigue. Wycherley's plays have attracted much controversy over the years for their candid treatment of moral—particularly sexual—attitudes and behavior, with the result that Wycherley has been alternately hailed as a force for moral regeneration and denounced as a purveyor of moral indecency.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Social-Climbing Father Wycherley was born in Hampshire, England, c. 1640, into an established Shropshire family. His father, David Wycherley, was a steward and deputy for a local aristocrat, and he spent his entire adult life hoarding money, trying to climb the social ladder, and entering into lawsuits. Such activities became prime targets of his son's satire in later years, and Wycherley was believed to have modeled several unattractive characters after his father.

Royalist Exile Less than two years after Wycherley's birth, the English civil war began. Oliver Cromwell led a coalition of Puritans and supporters of parliamentary rule against the forces of King Charles I. At issue were the questions such as the king's right to sole autocratic power and the position of the Anglican church as the official church of England. Cromwell's victory was complete in 1649 when he proclaimed himself Lord Protector for Life and had Charles I's head cut off at the guillotine. Before his death, Charles wisely had his son, also named Charles, sent out of the country to France, where he received support and recognition from the king and aristocratic families there.

France became a safe haven for "Royalist" families such as Wycherley's who supported the king and his dynasty. At the age of fifteen, Wycherley was sent to Angoulême where he began his remarkable education. Wycherley became associated with the brilliant intellectual Julie d'Angennes, the wife of the province's governor, who was at the center of a fashionable group of writers and thinkers who demonstrated "la préciosité": exquisitely refined manners, morals, and verbal elegance. One of their codes was that passionate love refines the soul and lifts it above the constraints of marriage. (At the time, marriages were usually arranged for financial advantage among the aristocratic class or those who aspired to it). This theme appears often in Wycherley's works, although sometimes in a bawdy comic form that is anything but "précieuse."

Return to England There is little evidence of Wycherley's activities between the ages of fifteen and thirty. All we know for sure is that he, along with many

other Royalists, returned to England in 1660 when Parliament—the same group who fought with Cromwell to depose King Charles I—tired of the restrictions of Puritan rule and voted to invite Charles's son back from France to claim the English throne as King Charles II a few years after the death of Cromwell. Wycherley had converted to Roman Catholicism while he was in France, but after he had begun studying at Queens College, Oxford, he converted back to Protestantism. In November of 1660, Wycherley enrolled as a law student in London, but it is doubtful that he ever completed his training or practiced law. It is more likely that Wycherley took some part in the naval battle against the Dutch in 1665, and it is certainly true that throughout his writing career he associates aristocratic bravery with heroism at sea.

Wycherley's first play, *Love in a Wood*, premiered in London in 1671 and made him famous overnight. It attracted the attention of Charles II's mistress, the Duchess of Cleveland, who introduced Wycherley to court circles. His second play, a comedy titled *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, was performed later that year, but it was not as well received. Shortly after this, Wycherley probably served as a naval officer in the Dutch War.

Wrote Last Plays *The Country-Wife*, Wycherley's best-known play, was first performed in 1672 or 1673 and centers on the attempts of a jealous husband named Pinchwife to keep his young and naive wife out of society because of his fear that she will be unfaithful. This play was a great success and is still performed today. The next year *The Plain Dealer* was performed with equal success. After *The Plain Dealer*, Wycherley stopped writing for the stage.

Wycherley fell ill in 1678, and Charles II sent him to France to recuperate. When Wycherley returned, the king entrusted the education of his illegitimate son, the duke of Richmond, to Wycherley, but he lost the appointment a year later because of Charles's displeasure at his absence from court. This absence was occasioned by Wycherley's secret marriage to the countess of Drogheda, who died about a year later. Litigation over her estate proved so expensive that Wycherley was imprisoned for debt. About seven years later, King James II secured his freedom, paid his debts, and gave him a pension.

In 1697, Wycherley succeeded to his father's estate. In 1704 he published *Miscellany Poems*, which caught the attention of young Alexander Pope, who later helped Wycherley to revise and edit his poetry. Wycherley died on January 1, 1716.

Works in Literary Context

Wycherley was both a product and an exponent of the "Restoration," a period from 1660 to 1700 marking Charles II's "restoration" to the British throne. After his father was executed in 1649, Charles II left England to be protected in the opulent palace of King Louis XIV of France, where he learned the pleasures of fast living

and enjoyed the attention of fine ladies. When Charles returned to England, the London court culture seemed to explode with new life after a long period of repressive Puritan rule. Cromwell had closed all of the theaters (bringing the rapid advancements that William Shakespeare had introduced to a sudden halt), but under Charles II, they opened with a full agenda of witty, satirical, and highly sexualized plays that seemed designed to offend Puritans as much as possible.

Restoration Themes In his comedies, Wycherley both celebrated the live-for-the-day immorality of aristocratic London society and satirized its hypocrisies and follies. His plays helped to establish the subjects and structures that would come to define “Restoration comedies”: sharp and smart dialogue, elaborate plots full of mistaken identities and overheard speeches, sexual intrigue, and conclusions that often go easy on the villains and ridicule the morally prudent. Another common feature of Restoration comedies was a plot involving a woman forced to disguise herself as a man, as seen in *The Country-Wife*. The Restoration was the first time women were allowed to perform on stage, and a play always sold tickets if the plot gave men in the audience an excuse to leer at women in tight men’s breeches.

Restoration Characters Amply represented in Wycherley’s work are such stock Restoration characters as the roguish wit; the deceived cuckold (a clueless husband whose wife is cheating on him); the conceited, ineffectual fop (or social-climbing, fashion-conscious man); and the falsely pious hypocrite.

Wit Wycherley’s plays are replete with wit, a quality very highly prized during the Restoration. “Wit” meant not just humor or irony but a keenness of perception that recognized the relationship between seemingly dissimilar things, an ability to cut straight to the heart of a matter in an original way, and an ability to express all of this with cleverness and quick improvisation. Such verbal dexterity is a famous feature of Wycherley’s work, and he incorporates it brilliantly into how characters compete with and evaluate one another. Wycherley has even been faulted for being *too* clever, for occasionally sacrificing consistency of characterization for the sake of a witty exchange.

Influence Wycherley greatly influenced other Restoration dramatists as well as a number of British authors who followed him. Later in the eighteenth century, for example, David Garrick adapted his own version of *The Country-Wife* as *The Country Girl* in 1766, which became the preferred version through the end of the nineteenth century. Outside of drama, Wycherley’s young friend Alexander Pope was influenced by his mentor’s verse.

Works in Critical Context

Wycherley’s reputation as a playwright and his place in the literary tradition have always been problematic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Wycherley’s famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): British poet Pope attracted serious critical attention at the age of twelve for his remarkably mature and polished poetry. He continued to refine his art until he was widely acknowledged as the greatest poet of his day.

Oliver Cromwell (1589–1658): British political leader Cromwell was a Puritan who helped raise an army to rebel against King Charles I. He ruled as Lord Protector and engaged in a brutal oppression of the Irish in order to enforce British claims on the island and to stamp out Catholicism.

Aphra Behn (1640–1689): Behn was one of the first Englishwomen to be a professional writer. Her works include the short novel *Oroonoko: Or, the Royal Slave* (1688). She also worked as an actress and as a spy, and spent time in debtor’s prison.

Christopher Wren (1632–1723): Briton Wren was a brilliant architect, designer, engineer, and astronomer whose mark can be seen all over London to this day. In 1666, London suffered a terrible fire that destroyed much of the city. Charles II, who was interested in design and architecture himself, gave Wren free reign to rebuild the city on a more logical and elegant plan.

John Dryden (1631–1700): Dryden was the first poet laureate in England, but long before that honor, he was regarded by other writers of the era as their leader, model, and patron.

because the history of Wycherley studies hinges upon a bitter paradox. In his own day, Wycherley was considered to be a moral satirist of the seriousness and stature of the classical writers Horace and Juvenal. Yet from the nineteenth century to the present, he has been thought successively to be a monster of moral depravity, a writer of artificial comedies of manners, and a writer of mere sex farces. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the history of Wycherley criticism was one long contention between critics who dismissed his best plays—*The Country-Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*—as immoral and those who sought to clear them of that charge. It was not until 1965, in Rose A. Zimbaro’s *Wycherley’s Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*, that a serious, book-length study was devoted to placing Wycherley, the satirist, firmly back into English literary history.

The Country-Wife Wycherley’s reputation as a playwright was immediately enhanced by the production of *The Country-Wife*. It was an extremely popular play in the seventeenth century, deemed a hilarious comedy for its

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Wycherley's work often satirizes the hypocrisies and immoralities of London high society. Here are some other works that poke fun at the rich and mighty:

The Rape of the Lock (1712), a narrative poem by Alexander Pope. Pope was asked by some friends to mend fences between two aristocratic families after a man cut off a lock of hair, without permission, from a young woman he admired. Pope turned it into a mock-epic satire full of sparkling wit, stinging satire, and obvious affection for an elegant society that he could observe but never fully join himself.

Vile Bodies (1930), a novel by Evelyn Waugh. Waugh uses his trademark black humor to expose the shallowness of the "bright young things" of post-World War I British society.

Shampoo (1975), a film directed by Hal Ashby. This satire on the sexual and social mores of the rich in the late 1960s starred Warren Beatty as a hairdresser who makes housecalls, allowing him to use his charms to cuckold all the husbands who are at work earning the money their wives are spending on their selfish pleasures.

jeers at adulterers who claim virtue. By the eighteenth century, changing values and social norms led to censorship of the play as it was judged offensive and dissolute. This trend continued into the nineteenth century as changing views on how drama affects audiences changed the reception of Wycherley's plays. A play that in the eighteenth century exposed audiences to instances of immoral behavior, offering up such behavior to denounce it, was seen in the nineteenth century as providing audiences immoral behavior to emulate. Today, critics remain distressed with the morality of the play, but with different rationale. With central characters that seem to exemplify the vices of lust and hypocrisy, critics question exactly which values Wycherley was condoning at the time of publication and against what the satire is actually directed. Reviewing a 2007 London production of *The Country-Wife*, Lloyd Evans wrote in the *Spectator*, "William Wycherley's 332-year-old sex romp is about as entertaining as I would be if I were 322. The plot is dazzlingly crass... The characters are as crude and oafish as the storyline. Only the elegance of the script delivers the occasional joy."

Responses to Literature

1. In an essay, consider the following questions: Do you think a play is "immoral," if it is trying to

accurately reflect or satirize immoral times? Was the Restoration court under Charles II as "immoral," as it is usually assumed to be?

2. In a presentation, consider the following questions: What is the role of women in one or more of Wycherley's plays? What stereotypes do they embody, or do you think they run counter to stereotypes? How does Wycherley use the plot in order to get his female actors into sexually alluring costumes or provocative situations?
3. Consider the names of some of Wycherley's comic characters. How are they meaningful? Do you think the satire is subtle or heavy-handed? Discuss your opinions in a group.

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Gao Xingjian

BORN: 1940, Ganzhou, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

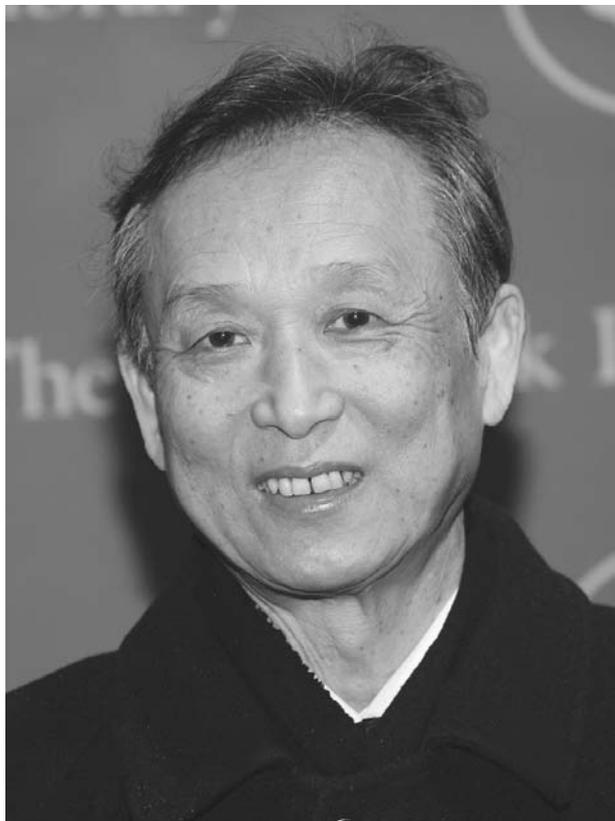
GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Bus Stop (1983)

Soul Mountain (1990)

One Man's Bible (1999)



Gao Xingjian Evan Agostini / Getty Images

Overview

Playwright, novelist, and artist Gao Xingjian was a prominent leader of the avant-garde artistic movement that emerged following the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in China. In 2000 he received the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first winner to write in the Chinese language. Gao is the author of several experimental plays as well as two highly acclaimed autobiographical novels, *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*. Gao's works are banned in the People's Republic of China, and he is now a French citizen.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in a Time of War Gao was born in Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province, on January 4, 1940, during the Japanese occupation of China. This was part of the Second Sino-Japanese War, during which Japan attempted to claim parts of China as its own; this conflict ultimately merged into the greater conflict known as World War II, and it ended with Japan's surrender in 1945. Gao received his formal education in the Communist People's Republic of China, established in 1949. Gao, however, had grown up in a liberal family with a sizable library of Chinese literature, as well as many volumes on Western literature and art. His mother, an

actress in local productions, fostered in her son her love of the arts. Sometimes Gao and his mother staged plays in the house for Gao's father, a banker.

The Cultural Revolution From childhood, Gao wanted to be an artist and planned to enroll in art school after graduating from high school. In Communist China, however, the role of the artist was limited to works that glorified the state and its ideals. When he realized that being an art student would mean painting propaganda posters, he decided to study French at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute. This choice proved a great influence on his development as a writer: As more and more Chinese books were banned by the Communist regime beginning in the 1950s, Gao continued reading his way through the shelves of French works at the Institute library.

Following his graduation in 1962, Gao worked as a translator and editor at the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. He continued reading in French until all books in foreign languages were banned during the Cultural Revolution initiated by Communist Party chairman Mao Zedong. Gao had obsessively kept a diary, and, though he knew such self-expression did not conform to Mao's guidelines, he wrote many works of fiction, though he burned most when he became concerned he would be arrested or imprisoned if his work was discovered.

Freedom and "Spiritual Pollution" In 1970, along with countless other artists and intellectuals, Gao and his colleagues at the press were sent to a rural labor camp for "reeducation." He remained for nearly six years. When he came under investigation for leading a "rebel" group against the "revolutionary pedigree" group that was beating and torturing older workers from the Foreign Languages Press, Gao escaped into the mountains and began living the life of a peasant, working in rice paddy fields. Eventually, Gao was chosen to teach in a village school.

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao's death in 1976. Subsequently, the amount of artistic freedom in China increased. Gao was able to return to his position with the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing and to write openly. His short stories, essays, and literary criticism began to appear regularly in literary magazines. He published a collection of his essays titled *A Preliminary Discussion of the Art of Modern Fiction* (1981), which daringly stressed that effective fiction requires freedom—for the author, the reader, and the characters as well. His argument established his credentials among Chinese intellectuals, but authorities of the state frowned on his embrace of decadent ideas from the capitalist West.

Gao's play *Warning Signal* was staged in Beijing in 1982. The experimental piece challenged decades of established socialist-realist practices in the theater. Gao's innovative techniques, such as flashbacks, different perspectives, and his focus on the psychological dimensions of his characters, were enormously appealing for audiences, but government authorities found the play subversive.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gao's famous contemporaries include:

- Deng Xiaoping** (1904–1997): Leader of the Chinese Communist Party from 1978 to the early 1990s, Deng introduced free-enterprise elements into China's economy.
- Dario Fo** (1926–): An Italian theatrical satirist who is often censured for social agitation, Fo won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997.
- Tenzin Gyatso** (1935–): The fourteenth Dalai Lama is an exiled Tibetan spiritual leader who won the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.
- Jimmy Carter** (1929–): Carter was the forty-ninth U.S. president and is the author of over twenty books that include everything from collections of poems and meditations to discourses on how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem.
- Derek Walcott** (1930–): This West Indian poet and playwright won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992 for work that revolves around myth and culture.

Bus Stop, staged the following year, caused more controversy. The play depicts people waiting at a bus stop, watching buses pass without stopping, as the years pass by as well. Chinese audiences thought the play a refreshing change from the overtly didactic plays of past decades. Authorities shut down the production after three weeks, banned all of Gao's works, and demanded that the playwright apologize in public for his "spiritual pollution." Gao refused to do so.

Soul Mountain During these anxious times, Gao was diagnosed with lung cancer and was convinced his death was imminent. Weeks later, a second X-ray determined that the diagnosis had been a mistake. Gao felt reborn and resolved to be free, defying all authority except his own inner voice. Hearing that the regime intended to incarcerate him again, he took an advance royalty from an editor and fled into the forests of Sichuan Province. During the time he was gone, the Oppose Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983 was born, and Gao was blacklisted for promoting capitalist Western literature.

Gao traveled more than fifteen thousand kilometers along the Yangtze River for five months, observing remainders of early civilization and ancient folk practices that provided material for his reflections on human existence and the function of language, song, and storytelling. The solitude of his long journey also provided time for him to examine his own life, both his present predicament and the fragments of forgotten memories that had surfaced during his confrontation with death. The writing

he did during this time became the basis for his groundbreaking novel, *Soul Mountain*.

At the end of 1983, Gao returned to Beijing, and continued to submit works for publication, despite intermittent campaigns of repression. Even with careful self-censorship, his writings continued to cause troubles for him. His play *Wild Man*, staged in 1985 at the Beijing People's Art Theater, was the last of his plays performed in China. In 1987, the opportunity arose for Gao to travel to Germany. Frustrated by near-constant harassment in his homeland, he remained in Europe and took up residence in Paris. In 1989, following the Chinese government's attack on student protesters in Tiananmen Square, Gao quit the Communist Party and applied for political asylum. He became a French citizen in 1998.

In Paris, Gao completed his novel *Soul Mountain*, a massive experiment in language and narrative form. The novel dramatizes one man's quest to come to terms with nature, society, and the self. Exploring the landscapes and legends in the Chinese hinterlands, the narrator laments the immense destruction wrought by the Cultural Revolution. Storytelling and imagination, including the unfolding of multiple personalities within the individual "I," relieve the narrator from the loneliness of the human condition. Gao's second autobiographical novel, *One Man's Bible*, returns to the years of the Cultural Revolution. Gao depicts the drastic distortion of human behavior created by tyrannical individuals such as Mao Tse-tung and his followers, and insightfully explores the dynamics of power at various levels of all human relationships.

Theatrical Visions and Sudden Celebrity Gao's next major play, *Fugitives* (1990), is a tragic love story set against the backdrop of the Tiananmen Square protests. Chinese authorities published *Fugitives* as a showcase of immoral literature by Chinese living abroad. Starting in the late 1980s, eminent directors have produced Gao's plays on five continents. Gao's play *Interrogating Death* was presented in Marseilles, France as one of the events for "Gao Xingjian Year," declared by the city in 2003.

When Gao received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000, his reclusive life in Paris was suddenly interrupted by publicity. It was the first time that his writings had brought him significant financial rewards. Prior to that, he had supported himself by selling his Chinese ink paintings. No Chinese writer had ever been awarded the prize, and Gao's works were officially blacklisted in his home country. The Chinese government imposed a media blackout on the Nobel ceremonies that year.

After collapsing while directing rehearsals in 2002, Gao underwent two operations for heart trouble. His health has improved significantly since then, and he continues to derive pleasure from writing poetry and painting.

Works in Literary Context

Gao was exposed at an early age to classics of both Chinese and Western literature and recalled reading Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, and John Steinbeck from the shelves of his family home. As a student of French literature, he became even more widely read. His own artistry was particularly influenced by avant-garde European dramatists, such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, whose work he later translated for the Beijing Foreign Languages Press. Elements of surrealism and the “Theater of the Absurd” abound in his works for the stage. At the same time, his drama incorporates traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Tripartite Actor Concerned that theater had lost its appeal, Gao called for a return to what he considers to be the essence of theater: its “theatricality,” the very thing that distinguishes drama from other literary forms. To address modern theater’s deficit in theatrical elements, Gao formulated his idea of the “tripartite actor:” the actor as a person, the neutral actor, and the character. To achieve neutrality, the actor casts his everyday self aside in order to observe his own acting from a distance. Based on his observations, the actor would then modify his acting accordingly. In other words, the actor is asked to identify psychologically with the audience.

Pronouns as Characters One intriguing aspect of Gao’s exploration of individuality is his experimentation with pronouns. Many of his stories alternate between first-person, second-person, and third-person narration. *Soul Mountain*, a novel of considerable length, impressively sustains this technique as Gao uses the pronoun “I” to represent the narrator’s physical journey through China. In his loneliness, “I” creates “you,” who is in fact a reflection of the narrator. Naturally, being a reflection of “I,” “you” also experiences loneliness and creates “she” for a companion. “You” flirts with “she,” who finally succumbs, and the two gratify their lust. Traveling together to Snow Mountain, “you” tells “she” a number of fascinating tales. “She” becomes tired and depressed during the never-ending journey to the mountain, and in a fit of hysteria “she” attacks “you” with a knife, though “you” is able to fend off her assault. “She” finally departs, leaving “you” to travel alone to Soul Mountain. As “you” walks away, the back of “you” becomes “he”. Such shifts in perspective reflect the author’s dissection of the self and its essential multiplicity.

Works in Critical Context

Gao was largely unknown by the world’s reading public until his Nobel selection in 2000. In his home country, his writings have been banned for years, and none of his books was readily available in the United States at the time he received the prize, though that soon changed. He has readers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but few in the West; however, he has a small but devoted following in Sweden. A small scandal broke out among the Swedish

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gao’s controversial plays, such as *Bus Stop* and *Snow*, are influenced by the surrealist tradition in drama, often called the theater of the absurd. Here are some other notable titles in the absurdist genre:

Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921), a play by Luigi Pirandello. In this early exploration of meta theater, the characters appear on stage out of the imagination, all demanding to tell their stories.

The Bald Soprano (1950), a play by Eugene Ionesco. In this play, two families engage in a nonsensical conversation that seems to demolish language itself.

The Birthday Party (1958), a play by Harold Pinter. Influenced by Beckett, this work is an early “comedy of menace” by one of England’s leading playwrights.

Film (1965), a film with a screenplay written by Samuel Beckett. The only work of cinema by the leading absurdist playwright starred Buster Keaton, whose masterpieces of silent film comedy influenced the absurdist genre.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. Two minor characters wander in existential confusion on the outskirts of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Academy when it was discovered that a Swedish translator served on the Nobel selection committee. Although some detractors accused the translator of a conflict of interests the committee refused to deem any of the action involved inappropriate.

Very, Very Average In October of 2000, the Nobel Prize committee awarded its literature prize to Gao for his “oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights, and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama.” Because no Chinese writer had ever received the Nobel Prize in Literature and because Gao was a blacklisted exile, many assumed that his selection was a political gesture intended to rile the Chinese government. (In fact, following the Nobel committee’s announcement, a spokesman for the Chinese Writer’s Association stated that all other Chinese writers found his work to be “very, very average,” according to Jonathan Mirsky in the *International Herald-Tribune*.) However, Gao’s work is more appropriately viewed as individual self-expression rather than political expression. In his Nobel Prize speech, Gao warned that “once literature is contrived as the hymn of the nation, the flag of the race, the mouthpiece of a political party or the voice of a class or a group, it can be employed as a mighty and all-engulfing tool of propaganda.”

The Nobel committee singled out *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible* for particular praise. In the *Wall Street Journal*, Peter Hessler described *Soul Mountain* as “mostly about uncovering layered tales deep in the countryside of the Chinese interior.” It is a far-reaching blend of narratives, styles, and characters, with a constantly changing viewpoint, while *One Man's Bible* is an autobiographical recollection of Gao's years during the Cultural Revolution. When asked if he would go back to China, Gao remarked to Rekdal in the *New York Times Magazine*, “I don't consider myself to have cut myself off from my roots. But China remains an authoritarian state, and I don't plan on returning while I'm alive. That said, China is still in my blood. I have my own personal China; I don't need to go there.”

Western Reach Some Western reviewers have noted that Gao's experiences in the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath may remain beyond the understanding of readers in the liberal West. Overseas productions of Gao's plays, strongly Chinese in their production values, have provoked similar concerns about the difficulties of translating the subtle traditions of an alien culture. Recent criticism, however, has noted Gao's achievements in bridging Eastern and Western elements. By invoking the European techniques of absurdist theater, while grounding his dramas in Chinese aesthetic traditions derived from Taoism and Zen Buddhism, Gao developed a way to surpass the limitations of socialist realism and rejuvenate Chinese literature.

Responses to Literature

1. Gao's writing often seems to be a tool for uncovering past events that have been obscured by political forces, such as the Cultural Revolution. Consider his use of Chinese history and folk traditions in *Soul Mountain*. Would you say that the preservation of the past through art is a driving motivation of the book? If so, why does it matter? If not, then what is Gao's preoccupation with stories of the past, both ancient and recent?
2. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the Taoist philosophy. Do you think Gao's ideas of human dignity and freedom are related to ancient Chinese Taoism?
3. Find out more about China's Cultural Revolution by watching *China: A Century of Revolution* (2007), a three-DVD documentary on twentieth-century China.

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Lu Xun

BORN: 1881, Shaoxing, China

DIED: 1936, Shanghai, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

“Diary of a Madman” (1918)

The True Story of Ah Q (1927)

Selected Stories of Lu Xun (1954)

Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk (1976)

Overview

Chinese writer Lu Xun is widely regarded as the founder of modern Chinese literature. His writings addressed



Lu Xun © Bettmann / CORBIS

important political and cultural issues associated with communism and the modernization of China. His story “Diary of a Madman” was published in 1918, and is one of the more famous stories in the canon of Chinese literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Strong Mother Lu Xun was the pen name of Zhou Shuren, who was born September 25, 1881, into a poor but educated family in the Zhejiang province of China. He and his two younger brothers received a classical Chinese education based on Confucian texts. His family’s financial situation deteriorated during his early years because of his grandfather’s imprisonment for bribery; family resources were exhausted in appeals for clemency for his grandfather. Then his father died during his teenage years. Lu Xun’s mother, educated and independent, held the family together during Lu Xun’s first seventeen years and had a powerful influence on him throughout his life.

Education and Loss of Heart As was typical of many intellectuals of his generation, Lu Xun chose other educational paths after his early grounding in Confucianism. After studying briefly in the Jiangnan Naval Acad-

emy in Nanking in 1898, he transferred to the School of Railways and Mines, graduating in 1901. He then won a government scholarship to study medicine in Japan. After two years of Japanese language study in Tokyo, he entered the Sendai Provincial Medical School in the summer of 1904.

In the early twentieth century, China was a country in the midst of great transformation. Beginning with the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 (in which the peasantry revolted against foreigners), and moving on to the Russo-Japanese War, the Revolution of 1911 (which ended the Ch’ing Dynasty), the New Culture Movement (which spurned traditionalism and embraced social democracy), and the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (which sought national independence and individual freedoms), China was redefining itself in many ways. It was this shifting political and social landscape that inspired and colored Lu Xun’s writing.

Thus, after witnessing the humiliation of China in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, Lu Xun turned his attention to writing as a means of awakening the Chinese people to the need for revolution. The major essays of his early period were published in 1908 in *Henan*. In one essay, he analyzes the rise and problems of the West, drawing conclusions relevant to China’s modernization process. In another he criticizes China’s gentry for blaming the country’s backwardness on the “ignorance and superstition” of the peasants, rather than admitting their own responsibility. *Henan* was banned by the Japanese government at the request of the Qing authorities before Zhou could publish a sequel.

Disappointed by the failure of the masses to respond to his writings, however, and discouraged by the failure of the Revolution of 1911, Lu Xun abandoned his crusade and spent most of the years 1909 to 1919 publishing studies of traditional Chinese literature and art.

Writing Success After Lu Xun’s return to China, he took a job teaching in his hometown. When the 1911 revolution began, Zhou was teaching in a middle school in Shaoxing. He was among the first to realize that though the Qing Dynasty had been overthrown, little else had changed. In fact, warlords, old-style gentry, and opportunists of every sort took over the government at the national and local levels, and the weak, far from being liberated, became victims. He addresses the failure of the revolution in several of his short stories and particularly with the black humor of his novella “A Q zheng zhuan” (1923), translated as “Our Story of Ah Q,” (1941).

In April 1918, Lu Xun began to contribute stories to *Xin qingnian* (New Youth), a liberal magazine with a nationwide circulation; it was a principal mouthpiece of the New Culture movement, which was closely allied with the May Fourth Movement. He first used the pen name Lu Xun for the story “Kuangren riji” (translated as “Diary of a Madman,” 1981) in the May 1918 issue of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Lu Xun's famous contemporaries include:

Zhu De (1886–1976): Chinese statesman who founded the Chinese Red Army.

Hu Shi (1892–1962): Essayist who promoted the Vernacular Chinese style, which made writing accessible to the less educated.

Mao Zedong (1893–1976): Controversial Communist leader of the People's Republic of China.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): Famous American Beat poet who openly idealized China and praised communism.

Xin gingnian. In keeping with the New Culture movement, the short story was critical of traditional Confucian ideas. It was the first significant Chinese literary effort that was written in the vernacular, as opposed to the elevated prose of traditional literature, and for this reason, Lu Xun is regarded as the father of modern Chinese literature.

Impact on China Lu Xun went on to write many more major short stories, essays, poems, and literary criticism in the vernacular style. Among the most celebrated of these were “The True Story of Ah Q,” and “The New Year's Sacrifice,” (1924), which looked at the oppression of women. His influence was such that by the turn of the twenty-first century, Lu Xun's works had been translated into approximately fifty languages and published in over thirty countries.

Lu Xun's politics were decidedly leftist throughout his life, although he declined to ever formally join the Chinese Communist Party. His support for the 1926 Beijing student rebellion forced him to leave the city, and he settled in Shanghai in the late 1920s. There he continued to write and work, while serving as the head of the League of Left-Wing Writers. He founded a magazine, the *Torrent*, in 1928 and edited others. On October 19, 1936, Lu Xun died of tuberculosis, a highly contagious disease that affects the lungs.

Works in Literary Context

Lu Xun wrote poetry, short stories, and essays. While his essays tend to be dry and sardonic, his prose is introspective. In addition to writing about his characters—their appearance, personality traits, and actions—Lu Xun delved into the inner consciousness of his characters. He wrote extensively about what his characters were thinking and feeling. One of Lu Xun's most memorable characters is Ah Q.

The Everyman Ah Q is a peasant who views himself as a winner. He is a new Everyman, an international symbol of human folly whose penchant for self-delusion is evident: Whenever he is humiliated by a rival, he quickly turns the experience around in his mind and imagines himself to have come out on top. “The True Story of Ah Q” is often read as a national allegory, though when it was published, several individuals thought themselves to be the butt of the satire; some wrote letters to the newspaper in protest.

Tradition and Superstition In “The New-Year Sacrifice,” (1981), Lu Xun confronts the May Fourth movement, which rejected traditional literature and applauded modern prose. The narrator is an intellectual who has come home for a visit and worries about a peasant woman, a widow whose son was carried off by a wolf. She presses the narrator with the question, “When people die, do their souls live on?” Not knowing the context of her question and hoping to comfort her, he suggests that there may, indeed, be life after death. The answer only increases her anxiety. The story ends with a passage describing the narrator's reaction to the Lunar New Year celebration immediately after her death.

Much of the story has to do with the narrator's inability to communicate meaningfully with the townspeople; thus, it encapsulates the tragedy not only of the peasant woman but also of China's modern intelligentsia and their inability to change, or even influence, conditions in the country.

Works in Critical Context

Lu Xun's initial fame rested on a series of sometimes bleak, sometimes humorous, often satirical short stories written in the modern Chinese vernacular. He gained renewed fame and influence as a master of the feuilleton, which he wielded as a rhetorical dagger first against the warlord government in Beijing in the late 1920s and then in the 1930s against the Nationalist Party. He was not afraid to use his pen against oppression and express his ideological concerns.

Commenting on the author in a *Xinhua News Agency* article, Kitaoka Masako noted: “Without a thorough understanding of Lu Xun, it's impossible to know about China.” In the same article, Maruyama Noboru commented that “The works of Lu Xun and the spirit they carried have transcended every impediment on ideology and last far beyond his age.”

“Diary of a Madman” Lu Xun's first short story, “Diary of a Madman,” was written in modern Chinese. This groundbreaking story is considered one of the first Western-style stories in China. The story established the theme with which Lu Xun became identified by most of his Chinese readers: the denunciation of traditional ethical codes as hypocritical cant formulated by the oppressors to justify an inhumane order that permits the strong to prey on the weak.

A contributor to the Pegasos Web site noted: “The narrator, who thinks he is held captive by cannibals, sees the oppressive nature of tradition as a ‘man-eating’ society.” The writer added that the author’s “tour de force helped gain acceptance for the short-story form as an effective literary vehicle” in China. Lu Xun later wrote that he had used cannibalism in this story as a metaphor for exploitation and inhumanity.

“*The True Story of Ah Q*” Lu Xun’s most famous story, “The True Story of Ah Q,” tells the tale of a poor, uneducated farm laborer who not only suffers but seems to readily accept a series of humiliations that finally end in his execution during the 1911 revolution. Throughout his ordeals, the protagonist blames himself for his troubles or holds on to a misguided belief that it all must be for the better. “It is a mentality that people recognize as universal,” commented Sue Fan in an article by Sandy Yang in the *Daily Bruin* of the University of California at Los Angeles. “By looking at human nature, we all have our way of rationalizing our actions. It is a survival mechanism to look at the brighter side of things even when you’re being humiliated.”

In a critical essay in *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, Rujie Wang called the tale “a brilliant satire” and went on to note: “In Lu Xun’s text, everybody, Ah Q as well as the villagers of Weizhuang, prefers existing knowledge to anything new and original. No one in the village is bothered with finding the truth of what really goes on.” Wang added, “As an absurd hero whose tragedy has absolutely no redeeming qualities, Ah Q exists to ridicule the views and values the anti-traditionalist intellectuals have gladly declared bankrupt, values which have been affirmed in the past by many tragic heroes confronted with similar calamities.”

Responses to Literature

1. Compare and contrast “Diary of a Madman” and “Upstairs in a Wine Shop.” In your analysis, consider how traditions and modernism are viewed by the characters. Explain the meaning of Lu Xun’s line “Save the children.”
2. After reading “The True Story of Ah Q,” discuss Ah Q’s view of his situation. What message do you think the author is making about Chinese traditions?
3. Lu Xun often chose to write satirically. Discuss why satire is a suitable approach when writing about politics.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Lu Xun wrote much about communism. Though he did not agree with the entire philosophy, he saw virtue in some of the political ideals it espoused. Here are some other works that explore the successes and failures of communist philosophy.

The Battleship Potemkin (1925), a film by Sergei Eisenstein. This silent film details the mutiny of a crew of Russian sailors.

The Master and Margarita (1941), a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. Satan wreaks havoc in Stalin’s Soviet Union in this political satire.

“America” (1956), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. In this poem, written during the cold war, Ginsberg’s speaker openly admits his affiliation with and admiration of the Communist Party.

Reds (1981), a film by Warren Beatty. This movie is about the short life of an American journalist who covered the Russian Revolution.

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■ Koizumi Yakumo

SEE *Lafcadio Hearn*

William Butler Yeats

BORN: 1865, Dublin

DIED: 1939, Roquebrune, France

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, plays, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Wind Among the Reeds (1899)

The Wild Swans at Coole (1917)

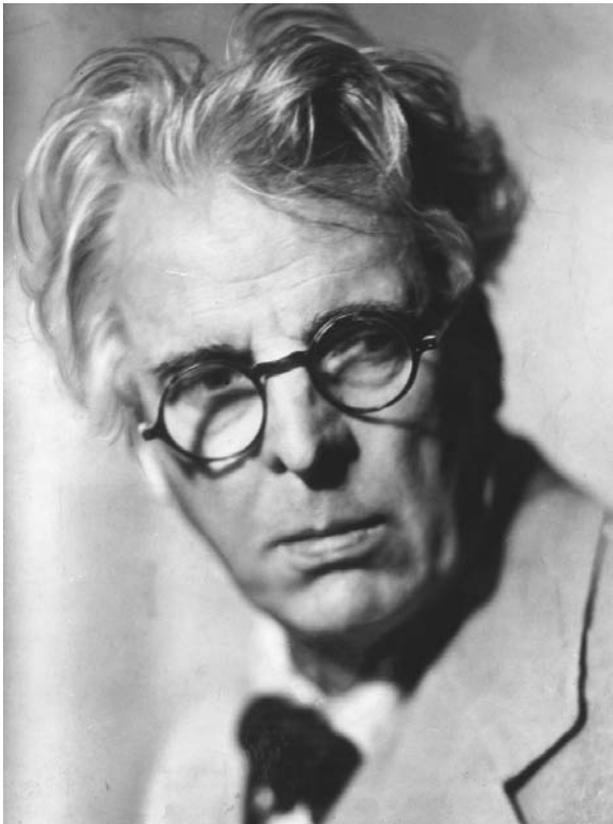
A Vision (1925)

The Tower (1928)

*The Winding Stair and
Other Poems* (1933)

Overview

William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet and playwright closely associated with Irish nationalism. He received the 1923 Nobel Prize in Literature “for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation,” as the citation read.



William Butler Yeats Howard Coster / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Anglo-Irish Protestant Upbringing Yeats belonged to the Protestant, Anglo-Irish minority that had controlled the economic, political, social, and cultural life of Ireland since at least the end of the seventeenth century. Most members of this minority considered themselves English people who merely happened to have been born in Ireland, but Yeats staunchly affirmed his Irish nationality. Although he lived in London for fourteen years of his childhood (and kept a permanent home there during the first half of his adult life), Yeats maintained his cultural roots by featuring Irish legends and heroes in many of his poems and plays. He was equally firm in adhering to his self-image as an artist.

Yeats was born in the Dublin suburb of Sandymount on June 13, 1865. He was the oldest of the four surviving children of the painter-philosopher John Butler Yeats and his wife, Susan Pollexfen Yeats. The poet was proud to belong to the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority in both strains of his blood. His mother's family were ship owners and millers in and about Sligo. The hills and lakes and fens about the busy West of Ireland seaside town became Yeats's spiritual home in childhood and remained so all his life. The young Yeats was dreamy and introspective but by no means housebound. He rode about the Sligo countryside on a red pony and began to immerse himself in the fairy lore of the local peasants. His formal education, however, was not so enriching. He was so slow in learning to read that he was thought to be simple

The Influence of Maud Gonne on Yeats's Nationalism and Spiritualism The year 1885 was important in Yeats's early adult life, marking the first publication of his poetry (in the *Dublin University Review*) and the beginning of his important interest in the occult. At the end of 1886, Yeats moved to London, where he composed poems, plays, novels, and short stories—all with Irish subjects, characters, and scenes. In addition, he wrote book reviews, usually on Irish topics. The most important event in Yeats's life during these London years, however, was his acquaintance with Maud Gonne, a beautiful, prominent young woman passionately devoted to Irish nationalism—the establishment of an Irish nation independent of British rule. Irish nationalism had grown in fits and starts since 1800, when Ireland was forcefully joined with Great Britain in the British Act of Union. In the 1880s and 1890s, Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell managed to introduce two bills on Irish Home Rule in British Parliament, but both were defeated. It became clear to the Irish that they would not find independence through negotiation alone.

Yeats soon fell in love with Gonne and wrote many of his best poems about her. With Gonne's encouragement, Yeats redoubled his dedication to Irish nationalism and produced such nationalistic plays as *The Countess Kathleen*,

dedicated to Gonne, and *Cathleen ni Houliban* (1902), which featured Gonne as the personification of Ireland.

Gonne also shared Yeats's interest in occultism and spiritualism. In 1890 he joined the Golden Dawn, a secret society that practiced ritual magic. The society offered instruction and initiation in a series of ten levels, the three highest of which were unattainable except by magi, who were thought to possess the secrets of supernatural wisdom and enjoy magically extended lives. Yeats remained an active member of the Golden Dawn for thirty-two years and achieved the coveted sixth grade of membership in 1914, the same year that his future wife, Georgiana Hyde-Lees, joined the society. Yeats's 1899 poetry collection *The Wind Among the Reeds* featured several poems employing occult symbolism.

The Abbey Theatre The turn of the century marked Yeats's increased interest in theater, an interest influenced by his father, a famed artist and orator. In the summer of 1897, Yeats enjoyed his first stay at Coole Park, the County Galway estate of Lady Augusta Gregory. He, Lady Gregory, and her neighbor, Edward Martyn, devised plans for promoting an innovative, native Irish drama. In 1899 they staged the first of three annual productions in Dublin, including Yeats's *The Countess Kathleen*. In 1902 they supported a company of amateur Irish actors in staging both George Russell's Irish legend *Deirdre* and Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houliban*. The success of these productions led to the founding of the Irish National Theatre Society, of which Yeats became president. With a wealthy sponsor volunteering to pay for the renovation of Dublin's Abbey Theatre as a permanent home for the company, the theater opened on December 27, 1904, and featured plays by the company's three directors: Lady Gregory, John M. Synge (whose 1907 production *The Playboy of the Western World* would spark controversy with its savage comic depiction of Irish rural life), and Yeats, who opened that night with *On Baile's Strand*, the first of his several plays featuring the heroic ancient Irish warrior Cuchulain.

The Easter Rising While Yeats fulfilled his duties as president of the Abbey Theatre group for the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, his nationalistic fervor waned. Maud Gonne, with whom he had shared his Irish enthusiasms, had moved to Paris with her husband, exiled Irish revolutionary John MacBride, and the author was left without her important encouragement. His emotion was reawakened in 1916's Easter Rising, an unsuccessful, six-day armed rebellion of Irish republicans against the British in Dublin. MacBride, who was now separated from Gonne, participated in the rebellion and was executed afterward. Yeats reacted by writing "Easter, 1916," an eloquent expression of his feelings of shock and admiration. The Easter Rising contributed to Yeats's eventual decision to reside in Ireland rather than England, and his marriage to Georgiana Hyde-Lees in 1917 further strengthened that resolve. Once married, Yeats traveled

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Yeats's famous contemporaries include:

Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891): A world-renowned psychic medium, Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society.

Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852–1932): Lady Gregory was one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre, as well as Yeats's lifelong benefactor.

John MacBride (1865–1916): This Irish Nationalist married Maud Gonne, the love of Yeats's life, and was executed for his part in the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

John Millington Synge (1871–1909): Synge was an Abbey Theatre playwright who wrote *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907).

James Joyce (1882–1941): A famous Irish novelist, Joyce is most known for the modern epic *Ulysses* (1922) and the autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

with his bride to Thoor Ballylee, a medieval stone tower where the couple periodically resided.

In the 1920s, Ireland was full of internal strife. In 1921 bitter controversies erupted within the new Irish Free State over the partition of Northern Ireland and over the wording of a formal oath of allegiance to the British Crown. These issues led to the Irish Civil War, which lasted from June 1922 to May 1923. Yeats emphatically sided with the new Irish government in this conflict. He accepted a six-year appointment to the senate of the Irish Free State in December 1922, a time when rebels were kidnapping government figures and burning their homes. In Dublin, where Yeats had assumed permanent residence in 1922, the government posted armed sentries at his door. As senator, Yeats considered himself a representative of order amid the new nation's chaotic progress toward stability. He was now the "sixty-year-old smiling public man" of his poem "Among School Children," which he wrote after touring an Irish elementary school. But he was also a world renowned artist of impressive stature; he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

Old Age and Last Poems The poems and plays Yeats created during his senate term and beyond are, at once, local and general, personal and public, Irish and universal. The energy of the poems written in response to these disturbing times gave power to his collection *The Tower*, which is often considered his best single book. Another important element of these later poems is Yeats's keen awareness of old age. His romantic poems from the late 1890s often mention gray hair and weariness, though those poems were written while he was still a young

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Yeats's ideas and themes, while varied, were mired in his love for Ireland, and his imagery was often centered around Irish landscape and folklore. Here are some other works with significantly nationalistic themes.

Dr. Zhivago (1956), by Boris Pasternak. This torrid love story is set during the turbulent Russian Revolution of 1917.

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), by Gabriel García Márquez. Set in the fictional town of Macondo, this novel is an extended metaphor about Colombian and South American history.

The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970), by Margaret Atwood. Chronicles the trials and tribulations of a woman living in the Canadian wilderness in the late nineteenth century.

Disgrace (1999), by J.M. Coetzee. The protagonist of this novel set in Cape Town must confront a number of difficult issues in post-apartheid South Africa.

man. When Yeats was nearly sixty, his health began to fail, and he faced what he called “bodily decrepitude” that was real, not imaginary. Despite the author’s keen awareness of his physical decline, the last fifteen years of his life were marked by extraordinary vitality and appetite. He continued to write plays, including “The Words upon the Window Pane,” a full-length work about spiritualism and the eighteenth-century Irish writer Jonathan Swift. In 1929, as an expression of thankful joy after recovering from serious illness, he also wrote a series of brash, vigorous poems narrated by a fictitious old peasant woman, “Crazy Jane.”

Yeats faced death with a courage that was founded partly on his vague hope for reincarnation and partly on his admiration for the bold heroism that he perceived in Ireland in both ancient times and the eighteenth century. He died, after a series of illnesses, in 1939, and after a quick burial in France, was exhumed and reburied in his beloved Sligo. His epitaph, one of the most famous of tombstone inscriptions, comes from his own poem “Under Ben Bulbin”: “Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!”

Works in Literary Context

Yeats was, from first to last, a poet who tried to transform the concerns of his own life by embodying them in the universal language of his poems. His brilliant rhetorical accomplishments, strengthened by his considerable powers of rhythm and poetic phrase, have earned wide praise from readers and from fellow poets, including W.H. Auden (who praised Yeats as the savior of English lyric poetry),

Stephen Spender, Theodore Roethke, and Philip Larkin. It is not likely that time will diminish his achievements.

Ireland's Writer In 1885 Yeats met John O’Leary, a famous patriot who had returned to Ireland after twenty years of imprisonment and exile for revolutionary activities. O’Leary had a keen enthusiasm for Irish books, music, and ballads, and he encouraged young writers to adopt Irish subjects. Yeats, who had preferred more romantic settings and themes, soon took O’Leary’s advice, producing many poems based on Irish legends, Irish folklore, and Irish ballads and songs. He explained in a note included in the 1908 volume *Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats*: “When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance, but presently I convinced myself... that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own, and I think that I shall hold to that conviction to the end.” Indeed, Yeats turned almost exclusively to the folklore, culture, history, and landscape of Ireland for his inspiration.

Works in Critical Context

For many years, Yeats’s intent interest in subjects that others labeled archaic delayed his recognition among his peers. At the time of his death in 1939, Yeats’s views on poetry were regarded as eccentric by students and critics alike. This attitude held sway in spite of critical awareness of the beauty and technical proficiency of his verse. Yeats had long opposed the notion that literature should serve society. As a youthful critic he had refused to praise the poor lyrics of the “Young Ireland” poets merely because they were effective as nationalist propaganda.

In maturity, he found that despite his success, his continuing conviction that poetry should express the spiritual life of the individual estranged him from those who believed that a modern poet must take as his themes social alienation and the barrenness of materialist culture. As Kathleen Raine wrote of him: “Against a rising tide of realism, political verse and University wit, Yeats upheld the innocent and the beautiful, the traditional and the noble,” and in consequence of his disregard for the concerns of the modern world, was often misunderstood. As critics became disenchanted with modern poetic trends, Yeats’s romantic dedication to the laws of the imagination and art for art’s sake became more acceptable.

Indeed, critics today are less concerned with the validity of Yeats’s occult and visionary theories than with their symbolic value as expressions of timeless ideals.

The Winding Stair and Other Poems *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) includes sixty-four poems in a wide range of form and tone. The volume opens with the beautiful romantic rhapsody “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz,” addressing the horse-riding Gore-Booth sisters of his Sligo youth, remembered as “Two girls in silk kimonos, both / Beautiful, one a gazelle,” but now “withered old and skeleton-

gaunt” with time and political passion. The poem ends in an ecstasy of acceptance and defiance of tragic reality in which Yeats does not separate his own history from theirs.

The emblems of the tower and Sato’s sword keep recurring in this volume. In the tiny poem “Symbols” the tower carries its usual connotations of withdrawal, contemplation, and arcane study, and the sword blade is violently active, “all-destroying.” Yeats is both the tower’s “blind hermit” and the “wandering fool” who carries the sword. But the tower is also the house of the marriage bed, and the phallic sword’s housing is the feminine “gold-sewn silk” of the scabbard. So the final couplet couples the coupling of all the emblems: “Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade / Beauty and fool together laid.”

In “Blood and the Moon” Yeats abruptly alters the symbolic value of the tower, making it “my symbol” and emblematic of a self that is specifically Irish, involved in historical time and in the conflicting spiritual values that divide real personalities. “Quarrel in Old Age” of this volume describes Dublin offhandedly as “this blind bitter town,” and “Remorse for Intemperate Speech” puts in capsule form the compacted bitterness that Yeats had long seen as genetic in Irish character: “Great hatred, little room, / Maimed us from the start.” In “Blood and the Moon” his scene is contemporary Ireland, against which he erects his roofless tower: “In mockery of a time / Half dead at the top.” Yeats’s verse swoops and soars with his mind: “I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare / This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair; / That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled there.”

“*The Second Coming*” Based in part on his ideas in *A Vision*, “The Second Coming” has resonance today. The poem moves with a confident mastery, but here the vision is sweeping and apocalyptic, the rhetoric formal, grand, full of power, the structure that of two stately violent blank-verse paragraphs. In it, Yeats dramatizes his cyclical theory of history: that whole civilizations rotate in a “gyre” of about two thousand years, undergoing birth, life, and death and preparing all the while for the life of its opposing successor. The critical period of the “interchange of tinctures,” when one era struggles to die and its “executioner” struggles to be born, will be violent and dreadful. Yeats’s poem remembers war and revolution and inhabits an apocalyptic climate in which man has lost touch with God, with any center of order.

Essayist Joan Didion borrowed from the poem the title of her 1968 collection *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and this is generally regarded as one of Yeats’s most important and most widely anthologized poems.

Responses to Literature

1. Study Yeats’s “The Second Coming” and construct a version of his gyres for today. What sorts of events and people do you think might be caught in the inter-

secting cones? If Yeats were alive today, which political events do you think he would choose to include?

2. Read W.H. Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” and connect this eulogy to any five of Yeats’s poems. Do you think Yeats would have felt “honored” by Auden’s poem?
3. Read “Adam’s Curse,” “No Second Troy,” and “When You Are Old” and determine 1) why you think these poems could be about Maud Gonne specifically and 2) whether Yeats was truly in love with her or merely obsessed with the idea of her.

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■ A. B. Yehoshua

BORN: 1936, Jerusalem, Palestine (now Israel)

NATIONALITY: Israeli

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Over against the Woods (1968)

Three Days and a Child (1970)

Between Right and Right (1981)

A Late Divorce (1983)

Five Seasons (1989)

Overview

A. B. Yehoshua is one of Israel's foremost contemporary fiction writers. He is a member of "the generation of the state," the first generation to come of age after Israel was proclaimed an independent state in 1948. One of Israel's most important social critics, his political and social commentaries appear both in his fiction and as essays in Israeli newspapers and magazines. Yehoshua's works have been translated into numerous languages and eight of his works have been adapted for film and television.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in the New Jewish State Abraham B. Yehoshua was born on December 9, 1936, in Jerusalem, Palestine, to Yakov and Malka Rosilio Yehoshua; he was a member of the fifth generation of a Sephardic Jerusalemite family. A child during World War II (1939–1945) and the Nazi-directed Holocaust of six million Jews throughout Europe, he was eleven years old when the nation of Israel was formed from a portion of what had



A. B. Yehoshua *Yehoshua, A.B.*, photograph. AP Images.

once been Palestine, an event that both fulfilled Jewish dreams of a permanent homeland and brought resistance from Arab Muslims. The largely Muslim Palestinians had fought for independence of these same lands from Turkish rulers three decades before. This led to decades of conflict between Israelis and their Arab neighbors, conflict that remains far from resolved; it is this tension more than any other that has shaped the work of Yehoshua and other Israeli writers of his generation.

A Background in Hebrew Literature and Philosophy After serving in the Israeli Army as a paratrooper in the Nachal unit from 1954 to 1957—during the Suez Crisis of 1956, in which Britain, France, and Israel fought to eject Egyptian forces from the Suez Canal region, which Egypt had decided to nationalize—Yehoshua attended the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There he studied Hebrew literature and philosophy. He graduated in 1961, a year after marrying Rivka Kirsninski, a psychoanalyst, on June 14, 1960. They had three children: Sivan, Gideon, and Naum. Yehoshua then began a high school and university teaching career, starting in Paris, where he lived and worked from 1963 to 1967. In 1972 Yehoshua took a position with the University of Haifa in Israel, where he is currently a professor of literature.

A "New Wave" Writer Yehoshua began publishing fiction after his military service. He gained his first critical attention with short-story collections such as *The Death of an Old Man* (1962) and *Over against the Woods* (1968) and an early novella, *Early in the Summer of 1970* (1972). By the early 1970s he had become a notable figure in the "new wave" generation of Israeli writers and had collected several awards to testify to this—including the 1961 Akum Prize, second prize in the 1964 Kol-Yisrael Competition for his radio script *The Professor's Secret*, the 1968 Municipality of Ramat-Gan Prize for his short-story collection *Over against the Woods*, and the 1972 Prime Minister Prize. Yehoshua also earned a University of Iowa fellowship in the international literature program, which he took in 1969. Throughout this period, Israel was periodically at war with its neighbors—Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, especially—and much of Yehoshua's fiction includes responses to this state of near-perpetual war, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict.

Multiple and Prestigious Literary Awards Yehoshua's first novel, *The Lover* (1977), was controversial in Israel because of its criticisms of Israeli society, but this was not representative of the author's reception at home. Yehoshua's second novel, *A Late Divorce* (1982), was praised for its critical depiction of a Jew who leaves Israel to start a new life in America. That same year Yehoshua was awarded the Brenner Prize by the Hebrew Writers Association. A year later, Yehoshua was awarded the Alterman Prize (1986), and a year before he was to receive the Bialik Prize (1988), he published his third novel, *Five Seasons* (1987; published in the U.S.A. in 1989). The work was

equally well received, while his next novel, *Mr Mani* (1990), earned the author one of England's highest accolades as it was named Best Novel of the Year.

The 1990s continued to prove successful for Yehoshua: As he garnered ever more accolades for his writing in both reviews and honorifics, he moved away from political and social morality issues and looked to history in *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* (1997), a historical novel set in the year 999. With *A Late Divorce* Yehoshua told the *New York Times Book Review's* Laurel Graeber that he had "wanted to understand the present by digging through the layers of the past." With *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* he uses an intricate tale of a medieval merchant's travels and marriages to illuminate a rich moment in Jewish history.

A Controversial Success Yehoshua has continued to publish novels and short-story collections in the 2000s. His 2006 novel *A Woman in Jerusalem* won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize of the same year, but has also attracted much criticism for its controversial message that the only authentic Jewish identity to be found today must be found in Israel and in Zionism, in the promise and practice of a Jewish state. He also continues to teach and to write from his home in Haifa—to the pleasure of readers, critics, and scholars alike. According to the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, his 1989 novel *Five Seasons* is one of the ten most important books since the creation of the State of Israel.

Works in Literary Context

Influences According to David Wiley at the *Minnesota Daily*, Yehoshua names Shmuel Yosef Agnon, William Faulkner, and Franz Kafka as his influences. It therefore makes sense that he is described by the *New York Times* as "a kind of Israeli Faulkner," and that critics have compared him with Franz Kafka—because of the abstract nature of his stories.

Abstract Fables? Many of Yehoshua's stories—such as *The Death of an Old Man* (1962) and *Over against the Woods* (1968)—are modern fables that are not necessarily set in any particular time or place; instead Yehoshua uses allegory to comment on contemporary Israel and humanity in general.

For example, *A Late Divorce* (1983) concerns an Israeli who has immigrated to the United States and later returns home to obtain a divorce. The man finds his family in a state of decay, which some critics considered a symbol for the decline of Israel. Yehoshua explained, "I don't claim the family is a symbol of Israel, but there is a layer of allegory—the imbalance between the father and mother, which does not create proper relations for the health of the family. Like the father, who gives up his responsibilities and goes to America, Jews who leave Israel for America are escaping their responsibility."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Yehoshua's famous contemporaries include:

- Shirley Bassey** (1937–): A Welsh singer best known for her performances of James Bond movie theme songs.
- Warren Beatty** (1937–): An American actor and director famous for his portrayals of characters as diverse as Clyde Barrow and Dick Tracy.
- Václav Havel** (1936–): The Czech writer and dramatist who was the ninth and final president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic.
- Barbara Jordan** (1936–): An African American congresswoman who has served in the U.S. House of Representatives, has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the United States Military Academy's Sylvanus Thayer Award, and has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.
- John Updike** (1932–): An award-winning U.S. novelist, essayist, and literary critic who is often recognized for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

Jewish and Generational Themes Yehoshua's fiction treats concerns that have arisen in his generation: such political problems as the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict; such moral dilemmas as the danger of clinging to the Zionist dream without facing the reality of Palestinian demands; and such social issues as the emigration from Israel of the younger generation and its loss of faith in the Zionist ideology that created Israel. For instance, for the story "Facing the Forests," which appeared in *Three Days and a Child* (1970), scholars and critics have offered a variety of interpretations. A frustrated and disaffected Israeli graduate student takes a job as a forest ranger. He ultimately acts as a silent accomplice when an Arab burns down the forest that had displaced his village. In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the story has been seen as an illustration of the younger generation's ambivalence and lack of faith in Israel. On a more universal level, the story has been interpreted as a commentary on humanity's tendency toward unmotivated evil and isolation.

Works in Critical Context

Critics of Yehoshua's early story collections such as *The Death of an Old Man* (1962) and *Three Days and a Child* (1968) compared him with Franz Kafka because of the abstract or surrealistic nature of his stories. And such novels as *A Late Divorce* (1983)—a family saga that employs a series of different narrators to explore psychological and moral questions—they compare to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). And though

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although much of Yehoshua's work is centered on Israeli concerns, certain characteristics give his fiction universal significance: his underlying theme of the alienation and isolation of humankind and the careful development of the psychological state of his characters, for example. Here are a few works by writers who have also concerned themselves with the psychology of the alienated or isolated human:

Man's Search for Meaning (1946), a nonfiction work by Viktor Frankl. In this powerful work, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist retells his experiences as a Holocaust survivor, putting forth a philosophy of alienation and suggesting a therapy of existential healing.

"The Metamorphosis" (1915), a short story by Franz Kafka. Kafka's classic investigation of man as an alienated being is conducted through the person/bug of Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman who wakes one morning to find he cannot move because he has turned into a giant cockroach in the night and is stuck on his back in bed.

"A Rose for Emily" (1930), a short story by William Faulkner. In this story, Emily Grierson is alienated from her immediate society and is isolated in her aging, eccentric, and "spinster" years.

The Stranger (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. In this existentialist novel, the protagonist, Meursault, is less than sympathetic from the start as an alienated, damaged soul.

the extensive use of symbolism in Yehoshua's works is a characteristic some critics have found overwhelming, critical reaction as a whole has often focused more on the ideas Yehoshua presents than on his literary style.

Between Right and Right While being commended for his storytelling abilities, the psychological depth of his characters, his precise and evocative use of language, and for his structural innovations, Yehoshua is also acknowledged as one of Israel's most important social critics. Eminent literary critic and scholar Harold Bloom, describing *Between Right and Right* (1981) as "a polemic against the Diaspora," asserts that the essays within are important "efforts to reformulate the terms of identity, Jew, Zionist, Israeli." As the Jewish Virtual Library recounts the comments of *The Village Voice*, "Yehoshua's stories find their way right into the unconscious. Nobel prizes have been given for less."

Responses to Literature

1. In several of his stories Yehoshua positions one generation against another; for example, in "The

Lengthening Silence of a Poet," from his *Three Days and a Child* (1970), he portrays the impotence of the older generation and the lack of inner resources of the younger one. Consider one or more works by Yehoshua that reveal a commentary on the generations as contrasting groups. To what extent is each to blame for the problems faced by both?

2. Of Yehoshua's works critic Jerome Greenfield writes, "In the existential despair, the pessimism, the sense of dislocation and alienation that pervade his work, Yehoshua establishes a bridge between modern Israeli writing and a dominant stream of some of the best Western literature of our age . . . without abandoning . . . the everyday reality of Israeli life." Search the Internet for examples of everyday Israeli life—considering the culture, religion, government and politics, science, medicine, education, or other components. Then, find evidence of this "everyday reality" in one or more of the author's works. Does Greenfield's depiction ring true, based on your research?
3. In an effort to gain understanding of one of Israel's greatest political problems—the Arab-Israeli conflict—create a time line of events in Israeli history. Pick three of these events and discuss Yehoshua's response to these in two or more of his works, supporting your arguments with detailed analysis of passages from his writings.
4. Yehoshua's early short-story collections, such as *The Death of an Old Man* (1962) and *Three Days and a Child* (1968), have been labeled "modern fables." What does it mean for a fable to be "modern," and is this an appropriate description of Yehoshua's work?

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☒ Yevgeny Yevtushenko

BORN: 1933, *Stanzia Zima, Siberia, USSR*
(now *Russia*)

NATIONALITY: *Russian*

GENRE: *Poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

The Apple (1960)

Babi Yar (1961)

Wild Berries (1984)

Almost at the End (1987)

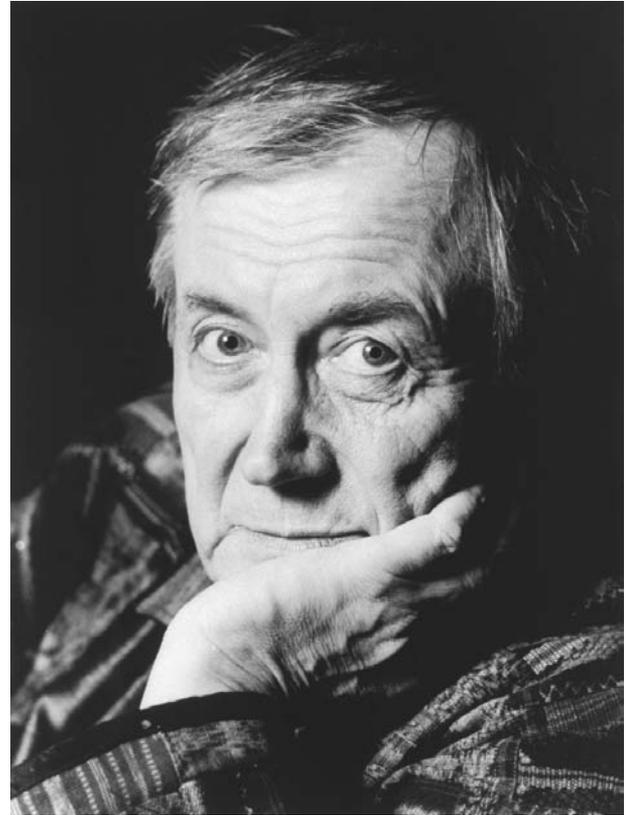
Don't Die before You're Dead (1995)

Overview

Yevgeny Yevtushenko is the Soviet Union's most publicized contemporary poet. He became the leading literary spokesman for a generation of Russians in the post-Stalin era, and he is often considered one of the first dissident voices to speak out against Stalinism. His 1987 prose and poetry collection *Almost at the End* established him as a prominent spokesman for Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost campaign of political liberalization.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born under the Sign of Stalin Yevgeny Yevtushenko was born on July 18, 1933, in Stanzia Zima, Siberia. His father Gangnus was a geologist, and his mother, Zinaida, was also a geologist, as well as being a singer. Yevtushenko's family was of mixed Ukrainian, Russian, and Tatar heritage. His maternal grandfather, Ermolai, was a Red Army officer during the Russian Revolution and the civil war; both Ermolai and Yevtushenko's paternal grandfather were accused of being “enemies of the people” and were arrested in 1937 during Stalin's purges. Estimates of the number of deaths associated with the Great Purge, the most significant of these, range from the official Soviet number of 681,692 to close to 2 million.



Yevgeny Yevtushenko Yevtushenko, Yevgeni, 1994, photograph. AP Images.

Spokesman for a Liberal Youth Yevtushenko began writing early, and crafted his first verses and song lyrics by the time he was seven years of age. After his parents divorced in the early 1940s, the young Yevtushenko spent his early childhood in Moscow with his mother and sister, Yelena, and in the late 1940s traveled with his father on geological expeditions to Kazakhstan and Altai, Siberia.

Yevtushenko was attending Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow when he published his first volume of poetry, *The Prospectors of the Future* (1952). Following the Twentieth Communist Party Congress of 1956—during which Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev publicly enumerated the crimes of former leader Joseph Stalin—Yevtushenko emerged as a prominent spokesman for Russian youth and for the new regime's commitment to more liberal policies. At about the same time he published his next work, *Winter Station* (1956), a highly acclaimed long poem first published in the Soviet journal *Oktiabr*.

Political and International Attention In 1955, his third poetry collection, *Third Snow*, was published, followed by *Highway of the Enthusiasts* in 1956, *Promise* in 1957, and *The Bow and the Lyre* in 1959. During the late 1950s, Yevtushenko emerged as a leading nationalist proponent of the Cold War “thaw” between the Soviet Union and the United States. This thaw was envisioned

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Yevtushenko's famous contemporaries include:

- Sawako Ariyoshi** (1931–1984): A Japanese novelist whose works concern significant social issues, such as environmental pollution and treatment of the elderly.
- Jean-Luc Godard** (1930–): A French/Swiss filmmaker best known for being one of the pioneers of the French New Wave in film.
- André Previn** (1930–): A German-born American award-winning pianist, composer, and conductor known for such film scores as *Porgy and Bess*, *Gigi*, and *My Fair Lady*.
- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** (1918–2008): A Russian author and dissident famous for his novels depicting the harsh conditions in Soviet labor camps.
- Mikhail Gorbachev** (1931–): The final leader of the Soviet Union, who partially engineered its collapse in 1991 and who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

as a way for the two cultures to better the chances of a peaceful future through cultural exchanges with one another. Granted permission by government authorities to deliver poetry readings in both countries in 1960, Yevtushenko soon became Russia's best-known living poet.

While new volumes of his verse—including *The Apple* (1960), *Tenderness: New Poems* (1962), and *A Wave of the Hand* (1962)—appeared in the Soviet Union, Yevtushenko's early verse was introduced to English readers through such collections as *Selected Poems* (1962) and *Selected Poetry* (1963). In one of his most controversial poems of this period, "Stalin's Heirs," Yevtushenko describes a fictional reawakening of Stalin following a brief interment in the tomb of Communist leader Vladimir Lenin, implying that Russians should beware the reemergence of Stalinism. Such a warning was not entirely without merit, as the rise to power of Leonid Brezhnev signaled a movement away from the reforms of his predecessor, Khrushchev, and the reconstitution of a Stalinesque authoritarian state (culminating first in the crushing of the anti-Soviet Prague Spring in 1968 and then in the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979).

Russian Reprimand While Yevtushenko was on tour reading from his latest works, the publication in France of his *A Precocious Autobiography* (1963) was arranged without Soviet permission. With this volume—combining his political views with memoirs of his youth—Yevtushenko was reprimanded for his personalized interpretation of Russian history. He was, however, permitted to continue publishing, and he again attracted

international recognition for his next volume, *New Works: The Bratsk Station* (1965), in which the poet praises Russian workers by contrasting them with earlier, ancient civilizations. That same year Yevtushenko received the USSR Commission for the Defense of Peace award.

Diversified Work Yevtushenko's poetry of the early 1970s was collected in several books, including the particularly successful *Stolen Apples* (1971). It was also in these years that Yevtushenko began working on plays. His drama *Under the Skin of the Statue of Liberty* (1972), a series of revue sketches set in the United States, was originally produced by Yuri Lyubimov, a leader in the Soviet avant-garde theater. *Under the Skin* achieved popular success in Russia, though it was faulted for Yevtushenko's inability to impart his concerns to Western audiences.

Yevtushenko followed his dramatic work with two more poetry collections, *The Face behind the Face* (1979) and *Ivan the Terrible and Ivan the Fool* (1979). In 1979 he also expanded his repertoire to include acting for the cinema. He appeared in such Soviet films as *Take-Off* (1979) and *The Kindergarten* (1983). In the early 1980s, Yevtushenko gradually moved away from poetry to experiment with various prose forms, including *A Dove in Santiago: A Novella in Verse* (1982).

A Celebrated Novelist, a Politician, and a Traveling Poet-Teacher Yevtushenko's first novel, *Wild Berries* (1984), was originally published in 1981 in the Soviet periodical *Moskva*, and is likened to an American thriller with its emphasis on action, sex, and exotic locales. Despite that work's mixed reception—Soviet critics faulting it for focusing on war miseries instead of triumphs; Western critics praising its sincerity—*Wild Berries* made Yevtushenko a 1985 finalist for the Ritz Paris Hemingway Award for best 1984 novel published in English. That same year also saw him receiving the esteemed USSR state prize and publishing his second novel, *Ardabiola*.

In the waning moments of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Iron Curtain (under Gorbachev), Yevtushenko served from 1988 to 1991 in the first freely elected Russian parliament since the revolution, where he fought against censorship and other restrictions. Yevtushenko's more recent works, both then and in the post-Soviet era, have focused on problems in human interaction with the natural environment; but he has—to the surprise and chagrin of many observers—been less than critical of autocratic president Vladimir Putin. Today, Yevtushenko divides his time between Russia and the United States, teaching at both the University of Oklahoma at Tulsa and at Queens College of the City University of New York. He has also served as an artist in residence at a number of other institutions. His more recent works include the film *Stalin's Funeral* (1990) and the novel *Don't Die before You're Dead* (1995), which is a satirical retelling of the 1991 events that ended the Soviet Union and lifted Boris Yeltsin to power.

Works in Literary Context

Lyrical Style for Political and Personal Themes

Long prescribed by scholars of Russian poetry is a favoring of emotion over principles, and it is a prescription Yevtushenko follows. He makes use of a lyrical style that many critics have compared with early twentieth-century poet Vladimir Mayakovsky for its rage against hypocrisy and passivity. In all of his works Yevtushenko presents nationalistic and critical views on political, civic, and personal themes.

The long poem *Winter Station* (1956) is Yevtushenko's attempt to resolve personal doubts as well as moral and political questions raised by Stalin's regime. In the title piece of *New Works: The Bratsk Station* (1965), Yevtushenko contrasts the use of slaves to construct the Egyptian pyramids with the willingness of Russian workers to build a hydroelectric complex in Siberia. In his drama *Under the Skin of the Statue of Liberty* (1972), Yevtushenko condemns American violence while praising the idealism of the nation's youth. In *Ivan the Terrible and Ivan the Fool* (1979), he returns to nationalistic concerns to contrast the abused working class with the dreaded autocrat who transformed Russian culture and society during the sixteenth century. In *Ardabiola* (1984), composed of chapters written in diverse styles and combining elements from several genres, he takes the opportunity to satirize Soviet culture and government and to address the influence of American materialism on Russian youth. And *Almost at the End* (1987—and it came indeed almost at the end of the Soviet Union) features as its centerpiece the poem "Fuku," a long work in which Yevtushenko uses a cinematic style and combines traditional poetry, free verse, and prose to comment on such characteristic concerns as history, tyranny, and justice.

Works in Critical Context

Eastern-bloc and Western critics alike have often vacillated in their opinions of Yevtushenko's work, in part because he tends to embrace opposing ideologies and he tends to alternately celebrate and censure elements of both Communist and capitalist approaches to civilization. Yet his poems are often commended for their political significance, optimism, and explosive use of language. Representative of the wide array of criticism are responses to two works, *Babi Yar* and *Wild Berries*.

***Babi Yar* (1961)** Originally published in the periodical *Literaturnaya gazeta*, *Babi Yar* garnered international acclaim. The title of this long poem refers to a ravine near Kiev, where historians estimate that between thirty-four thousand and one hundred thousand Jews were massacred by the Nazis during World War II. *Babi Yar* was ridiculed by many Soviet critics for its accusation that many Russian people harbor anti-Semitic sentiments—a claim that, Yevtushenko asserted, was corroborated by public indifference to erecting a memorial on the site. Contemporary critics have often read Yevtushenko through the lens of Holocaust studies, as seen

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In its way, Yevtushenko's work is concerned not only with depicting, but also with understanding, the working of politics in culture. Here are a few other works by writers who have addressed the cultural impacts of politics in their writing:

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia (1992), a political study by Peter Hopkirk. This nonfiction survey closely considers the "great game" played between Tsarist Russia and Victorian England for supremacy in Central Asia.

Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography (1994), a cultural history by Mourning Dove (Christine Quintasket). In this sprawling narrative, the Native American author recounts life with the Colville Confederated Tribes of the Pacific Northwest at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Red Azalea (1994), a memoir by Anchee Min. In this autobiographical work the author recounts her biggest challenge, in which she was forced to choose between self-will and the will of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Republic of Poetry (2006), a book of poems by Martín Espada. These poems explore the politics of Latin American loyalty and freedom.

This Earth of Mankind (1991), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Indonesian political dissident Toer offers an intriguing story of love and colonialism in turn-of-the-century Java.

in historian Dagmar Herzog's argument that Yevtushenko's political victory with the poem *Babi Yar* "was a hollow one," because the memorial erected after the poem's success refers to those massacred not as Jews but simply as "citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war."

***Wild Berries* (1981)** Yevtushenko's first novel, *Wild Berries*, is said to celebrate Russian philosophy and existence but at the same time is similar to an American thriller. The book was faulted by Soviet critics for its emphasis on the miseries of war rather than past military triumphs and for its treatment of Stalin's deportation of the kulaks (landowning peasant farmers) in the 1930s. *Wild Berries* was praised by many Western reviewers for Yevtushenko's sincerity of purpose. Critic Susan Jacoby further expressed the multiple views on the author when she commented, "In American terms, [Yevtushenko] might best be imagined as a hybrid of Walt Whitman and Norman Mailer—with all the extravagant enthusiasms, risk-taking, self-promotion, blundering and talent that might be expected from such a creature."

Responses to Literature

1. According to Russian writer and fellow dissident Andrei Sinyavsky, Yevtushenko seeks in his work "to

communicate the experience of the modern age and to connect this with the experience of the past, with Russian history.” Consider how one of Yevtushenko’s works seeks to connect past with present, structuring your thoughts as a thesis-driven essay.

2. In 1952, Yevtushenko joined the USSR Union of Writers, also known as the Union of Soviet Writers. What differences do you find in his writing from after this time. Does this joining appear to have had a significant impact on his style? Why or why not?
3. In 1957 Yevtushenko was expelled from the Literary Institute for displaying “individualism.” Research different definitions of “individualism.” Why do you think Yevtushenko’s brand of individualism was seen as a threat to Soviet culture? Support your position with detailed analysis of passages from his work.
4. With the novel *Ivan the Terrible and Ivan the Fool* (1979), Yevtushenko returned to nationalistic concerns: he contrasts Ivan the Fool, the ill-used but unstoppable working-class folk hero, with Czar Ivan the Terrible, the autocrat who oversaw extensive changes in Russian culture and society during the sixteenth century. Do a Web search for background information on Ivan the Terrible (Ivan IV). Summarize the leader’s personality and how he came to earn the “terrible” moniker. Then, consider how he is contrasted with the working-class citizen in the novel.

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Charlotte Yonge

BORN: 1823, Otterbourne, Hampshire, England

DIED: 1901, Otterbourne, Hampshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Heir of Redclyffe (1853)

The Little Duke; or, Richard the Fearless (1854)

The Daisy Chain; or, Aspirations (1856)

Aunt Charlotte’s Stories of English History for the Little Ones (1873)

The Pillars of the House; or, Under Wode Under Rode (1874)



Charlotte Mary Yonge Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Overview

British author Charlotte Mary Yonge may be placed in literary history as the leading novelist of that Anglo-Catholic revival known as Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement. However, this classification cannot explain why her domestic novels have always been enjoyed by many readers to whom her religious views are a matter of indifference or even hostility. Firmly opposed to crudely didactic fiction—especially for children—she had the ability to extract dramatic tension from almost any family situation and relationship and to develop it with delicate moral and psychological notation.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life Spent in Otterbourne Yonge was born in Otterbourne, England, in 1823, and she lived all her life in the village of her birth. Her father, William Yonge, had sacrificed his military career, his beloved Devonshire home, and many of his artistic tastes in order to gain the consent of his mother-in-law, a woman considered narrow by her own contemporaries, to his marriage to Frances Mary Bargus. He and his wife settled down on Mrs. Bargus's small estate in Otterbourne, near Winchester.

Here, he made a new life for himself out of village interests, church building, and the education of his daughter. He and his wife taught her Latin, French, German, history, and mathematics, in addition to giving her religious instruction. In the nineteenth century, there were limited educational opportunities for young girls in Great Britain. Few schools focused on such academic topics, and many girls were educated in some fashion at home. At the age of seven, Yonge attended the Otterbourne Sunday School. She went on to teach in the school, seldom missing more than a few weeks each year, until her death seventy years later.

Religion and Friendship In 1836, John Keble became rector of the neighboring parish of Hursley and would be, after her father, her greatest influence. In preparing Yonge for confirmation, he recognized her brilliant mind and passionate love of history. She absorbed all he had to teach her about the doctrine of the Church of England, and in her later life, neither the claims of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand nor the prevalence of religious doubt on the other seemed ever to have troubled her faith. Keble's support of her intellectual interests was unusual in this time period. In nineteenth-century Britain, women were treated as inferior. Stereotypes and prejudices portrayed women as weak and incapable in most areas. Most professions and occupations were closed by statute to women, and the only professions that were socially acceptable were those of teacher, secretary, or homemaker.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Yonge's famous contemporaries include:

Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892): The poet laureate of the United Kingdom wrote melancholy verse about issues of mortality. His narrative poems include *Idylls of the King* (1885).

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): This British poet and artist was a founding member of the pre-Raphaelites, a group of artists who emphasized ingenuity and natural expression. His paintings include *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850).

William Morris (1834–1896): This artist, poet, and socialist was a member of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and admirer of Yonge. His poetry collections include *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858).

Henry James (1843–1916): This American writer and critic moved to England and became a fan of Yonge's writing. James' novels include *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

Yonge's circle also included the family—which eventually numbered fifteen children—of George Moberly, headmaster of Winchester College. The Kebles, Moberlys, Yongses, and the Yongses' Coleridge relations formed a close circle of mutual interests and stimulation. In 1850, Marianne Dyson, an invalid friend, suggested that Yonge develop a story that would contrast two characters, the essentially contrite and the essentially self-satisfied. The result, finished late in 1851, was *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). Shortly after the publication of *The Heir of Redclyffe* in January 1853, Yonge found herself famous. Her family initially had disapproved of her desire to become a writer, as it was considered socially improper for a woman to profit from her own labor. They only agreed to let Yonge continue as long as the proceeds were contributed to missionary activities.

Continuing Success While working on *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Yonge was also writing her best children's book, *The Little Duke* (1854), about the tenth-century Richard of Normandy, and beginning two series, *Cameos from English History* (1868–1899) and *Conversations on the Catechism* (1859). All three were serialized in the magazine she founded in 1851 and edited until 1894, the *Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Members of the Church of England*. The magazine, which probably never had more than fifteen hundred subscribers, was thoroughly an expression of her personality and interests: fiction, history, literary history, theology, and botany were the leading subjects. Later, more scientific material

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Throughout her life, Yonge was concerned with issues of spirituality and faith. She attended church regularly, and emphasized loyalty to God in her works. Here are a few other works that deal with issues of religion.

Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1918), a poetry collection by Gerard Manley Hopkins. This posthumous collection is concerned with God's presence.

Siddhartha (1922), a novel by Herman Hesse. This novel centers around the worldly and spiritual trials of a man named Siddhartha, who may or may not be the Buddha.

Four Quartets (1943), poems by T. S. Eliot. This book of four poems uses mysticism, Hindu philosophy, and Christian imagery to get its message across.

was added, and British author Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland*, 1865) contributed some mathematical puzzles.

After the death of her father, Yonge and her mother moved in 1858 to the nearby Elderfield Cottage, which remained Yonge's home until her death. The 1860s were a difficult time in Yonge's life. Both of the Kebles died in 1866, and the Moberlys left Winchester the next year. Her mother began a decline into senility, possibly through a series of small strokes, which Yonge found all the more difficult to bear because she and her mother had been such inseparable companions. Her novels of this period share a depressed tone, but her output remained as high as ever.

Old Age The early 1870s saw Yonge at the height of her powers. In addition to beginning the series of "nursery histories" known as "Aunt Charlotte's Stories" and a series of religious pamphlets to be used in preparing young people for confirmation, she serialized in the *Monthly Packet* her tribute to John Keble. In 1870, she also began to serialize in the *Monthly Packet* a novel called *The Pillars of the House* which, along with *The Daisy Chain*, represents the summit of her achievement as a domestic novelist.

Yonge was occupied with her writing and her village pursuits until March 1901, when she was overtaken by bronchitis and pneumonia. She died on March 24, 1901.

Works in Literary Context

In her writings, Yonge was greatly influenced by her faith and religious beliefs as a member of the Oxford Movement. Her life in the village of Otterbourne as well as her intellectual grounding in history also informed her works. In addition, Yonge reflected the Victorian era in which she lived by exploring the middle-class domestic life she

knew so well. She was personally mentored by her father and Keble in her literary pursuits.

Women in Society The religious, moral, educational, and social standards Yonge sets for her gentlewomen are so high that only superior men could surpass them. She inveighs against the double standard because she believes that men and women should be equally chaste. Women should work outside the home only when they must and be always "strong-minded," to speak out against improprieties at home and evils abroad. That the married woman's noblest role lies in making her home a center of refuge, repose, and stimulation for her family is a conventional view of the time; but Yonge also insists that the unmarried woman has a vital role to play in society, provided she does so as a "daughter of the Church."

Struggles with Spirituality Like Flora May's in *The Daisy Chain*, Philip's punishment for his worldliness in *The Heir of Redclyffe* is the attainment of his wishes: a seat in Parliament, the Redclyffe estate, and marriage to his cousin Laura. Like Flora, the self-righteous Philip has a harsh measure of mental and spiritual suffering meted out to him because Yonge sees in him the ability to benefit and change. The spiritual awakening of Philip, with his self-deception, his thwarted career, and his despair at the self-inflicted poverty that makes him an ineligible suitor for his cousin, reflects Yonge's need to chronicle the destiny of her characters. She drew into *The Heir of Redclyffe* characters she would use in varied forms throughout her works: the ineffective father who must nonetheless be obeyed, the invalid, and the pert younger sister. As one anonymous reviewer for *Fraser's Magazine* reported: "When we bid her characters farewell, it is ever hereafter to recall them to our affectionate remembrance as friends whom we have known and loved on earth, and whom we may hope to one day meet in heaven."

Influence Yonge's domestic novels and family sagas influenced at least two generations of girls and young women about their roles in life. Authors like Christabel Coleridge, Florence Wilford, and Frances Peard followed in Yonge's footsteps by being submissive and writing for children. In later decades of the twentieth century, Yonge's early Victorian-focused message came to seem outdated as society's attitude towards women—and their education—changed.

Works in Critical Context

In Yonge's time, her domestic novels were admired by novelist Henry James, poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, and a wide public of discriminating reviewers and readers. In the twentieth century, her enormous output of over two hundred books—historical novels; histories; biographies; children's stories; tales of village life; and volumes on religion, geography, and names—tended to be held against her. Despite her varied career, her claim to importance rests on her domestic fictions. In those long

chronicles of large, middle-class Victorian broods, family life is presented, in the phrase of her admirer C. S. Lewis, as an “arduous vocation.”

The Heir of Redclyffe An oblique retort to Queenie Leavis’s charges that doctrinal rigidity and provincialism are the dominant qualities in Yonge’s domestic novels comes from Kathleen Tillotson. Writing in 1953 for a centenary broadcast on the BBC about *The Heir of Redclyffe*, she claims that “the moral content of *The Heir of Redclyffe* is easily disengaged from the social content and is not seriously out of date.” After praising Yonge’s use of symbols in this novel, Tillotson notes that the final chapters trace the progress of the heroine after Guy Morville’s death; “It was, I think, Charlotte Yonge’s keen sense of [domestic] life that kept her from vapid sentimentality . . .” Also contributing to the argument, Barbara Dennis asserts that Yonge’s work is weakened by “her inability to come to terms with the movement of mind in the nineteenth century” and the lack of sympathy she displays toward manifestations of religious doubt.

Among the best-known admirers of *The Heir of Redclyffe* were William Morris and his friends, the artists Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. They appreciated Guy’s love of the Middle Ages and Malory, of English cathedrals, and of de La Motte-Fouqué’s romance *Sintram* with its hero’s appreciation of the value of symbols. The reviewer for the *Times* remarked of Guy that “never before did the beauty of holiness appear more beautiful or more winning.”

Responses to Literature

1. Write an essay explaining what is meant by a “domestic” novel. Describe, using examples from Yonge’s work, how Yonge’s writing fits into this category.
2. Lead your class in an exploration of Guy Morville in *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Is he admirable? What are his faults?
3. Create a poster or electronic presentation in which you compare Yonge’s children’s fiction with C. S. Lewis’s *Narnia* series. Why do you think the latter was more successful?
4. With a small group of your classmates, discuss what might be the best way to present a doctrine of religion or ideology to children. What would or wouldn’t you want to hear or read? Come up with a brief proposal to present to the rest of your class.

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Marguerite Yourcenar

BORN: 1903, Brussels, Belgium

DIED: 1987, Mount Desert Island, Maine, United States

NATIONALITY: Belgian, French, American

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Alexis (1929)

Fires (1936)

Coup de Grâce (1939)

Memoirs of Hadrian (1951)

Dear Departed (1974)

Overview

Marguerite Yourcenar was the first woman elected to the prestigious Académie française. A self-taught scholar, novelist, poet, dramatist, essayist, and translator, widely traveled and well read, Yourcenar brought a broadly based sensibility to her literary work. Her writings treat the dawn of time and the future; the physical and the spiritual worlds; characters ranging from peasants to emperors, courtesans to Hindu gods; nature and civilizations; and the arts and religion. Although she frequently ignored or defied literary styles, the advice of critics, and the conventions of Parisian literary life, Yourcenar managed to reach and appeal to a wide audience in France and throughout the world. A woman who worked for conservationist and ecological causes, consumer



Marguerite Yourcenar DEA Picture Library / drr.net

protection, and civil rights, as well as a writer whose scholarship, command of her craft, and far-ranging knowledge in many fields were very striking, she occupies a privileged place in twentieth-century letters.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Life without a Mother, but in a Lovely World Marguerite Antoinette Jeanne Marie Ghislaine Cleene-werck de Crayencour was born on June 8, 1903, to a French father, Michel, and a Belgian mother, Fernande de Cartier de Marchienne, both of whom came from old and influential families in Belgium—from Flanders and the Walloon section of the country, respectively. Because of her mother's wish to be near her relatives, Yourcenar was born in Brussels, although she was immediately registered as a French citizen.

Following her mother's death (ten days after Yourcenar was born), Yourcenar was brought to Mont-Noir, the ancestral home of the Crayencour family, where she spent the summers during her childhood; winters were spent in Lille for the first two years and afterward in the south of France. At Mont-Noir Yourcenar made contact with the land, with country people, and with animals—all of which

had an influence on her life. When she was nine, Yourcenar and her father moved to Paris, where the world of books, museums, and art expanded her environment.

Fleeing War, an Invitation to India, and the Death of Her Father Yourcenar's first contact with war and exile came in 1914 when, while visiting Ostende, Belgium, she and her father had to flee from the advancing German armies across the channel to England. There, they lived for a year before making their way to southern France for the remainder of World War I (1914–1918) and beyond. During these years at Aix-en-Provence, Yourcenar completed her early education. By the age of sixteen, she had already begun to write. Her first publication, privately printed, came in 1921, and for it she and her father invented the pen name Yourcenar, a near anagram of Crayencour. *The Garden of Chimeras* proved her able to interpret and expand myths in order to express her own views. This work shows the aspirations of a young person, as Icarus is drawn to Helios, in contrast to the archetype of the wise old man, Daedalus. The volume had a certain caché, attracting the attention of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote to the young poet, inviting her to visit him in India.

In 1929, three events occurred that would alter the course of Yourcenar's life. The first, in January, was the death of her father after a long illness. The second was the Wall Street crash, which caused Yourcenar to lose most of the fortune she inherited from her mother and signaled the approaching end of the privileged existence she had enjoyed. The third, and perhaps most important, was the publication of her first novel, *Alexis*; in desperate times, she had been confirmed as a member of that mythical tribe: she was a writer.

The Touch of Grace and a New Life in the States The 1930s were the period in which Yourcenar's life and talents took on new dimensions and found new means of expression. During this decade Yourcenar, although in the orbit of Paris as much as any young French writer, spent much of her time living and traveling in Italy, Germany, and, especially, Greece. This was a time of challenge, a time to try new methods, to publish what she had already written, to discover herself as she discovered the world she had loved in books.

In 1939, Yourcenar completed her novel *Coup de Grâce*, considered by many to be among her finest, but when World War II (1939–1945) began, she once again found herself trapped. Low on funds, unable to find a position, and prevented from returning to Greece as she had planned, she accepted the invitation of her American friend and translator Grace Frick to join her in the United States. Although Yourcenar would subsequently travel abroad for periods as long as two years, she established her permanent home in the States at that time.

The break with her past around 1940 was profound. Not only did she suffer, as did many exiles, from a forced separation from the places and people that had been part

of her life, but she was also obliged for the first time to earn a living, taking jobs in journalism and commercial translation before accepting a position as a part-time instructor at Sarah Lawrence College in 1942. In 1947 she became an American citizen and, at the same time, took Marguerite Yourcenar as her legal name. This shift in identity was further reinforced in 1950 when she, with her long-time partner Grace Frick, moved to Mount Desert Island in Maine, where she lived until her death.

Finding a Home in Activism In 1951, the publication of *Memoirs of Hadrian* brought unexpected international success and served to establish Yourcenar firmly in the line she would follow over the next decades. During this decade also, Yourcenar became ever more concerned about social evils and involved herself in groups and programs aimed at combating them. She joined both American and European societies fighting for civil rights, world peace, protection of the environment, endangered or mistreated animals, and consumer protection, as well as groups against nuclear proliferation and overpopulation.

Following the death of Grace Frick in 1980, Yourcenar embarked once more on her world travels, this time accompanied by Jerry Wilson, an American. She traveled often: to France, England, the Low Countries, Denmark, North Africa, Spain and Portugal, Italy, Egypt, Greece, Canada, Japan, Thailand, India, and Kenya, visiting some more than once. Throughout these travels, she was ever concerned with the plights of the oppressed, and her contact with different cultures broadened the scope of her social concerns.

Struggling against Illness, for Justice During a stop in Nairobi in 1983, the year after Yourcenar was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she and Wilson were hit by a police car. The next year the flu interrupted her work for a considerable time. In 1985 Wilson was diagnosed as having tuberculosis, and, in September, Yourcenar suffered a heart attack, necessitating surgery. She recovered, but Wilson died of viral meningitis in February of 1986.

Yourcenar maintained her activist and scholarly interests to the end. In the last three months of her life she gave two speeches, one in Canada on “superpollution” and one at Harvard on Jorge Luis Borges. She had planned to travel to Paris and from there to India and Nepal, but on November 8, 1987, she suffered a stroke, which led to her death on December 17. Her grave, near the memorials to Grace Frick and Jerry Wilson, is in the cemetery at Somesville, Maine, close to the first house where she lived on Mount Desert Island.

Works in Literary Context

The Many Forms of Love *Fires* (1936) illustrates or underscores most of Yourcenar’s themes. It was written in part to get over an unhappy love affair with the nameless “man I loved.” Passages from her diary alternate with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Yourcenar’s famous contemporaries include:

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): A Russian American novelist most famous for his extremely controversial novel *Lolita*.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): A Chilean poet and writer and political Communist; his 1971 receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature caused much controversy.

Erich Fromm (1900–1980): A renowned German American social psychologist.

René Magritte (1898–1967): A Belgian surrealist painter known for his plays on words and pictures, particularly *The Treachery of Images*.

James Baldwin (1924–1987): An African American writer who lived in France and explored issues of homosexuality and politics; Yourcenar translated one of his plays into French.

prose poems whose protagonists are primarily mythical women. Mary Magdalene goes beyond physical love to a love for Christ, while Antigone devotes herself to an ideal. Sappho closes this collection, and she is saved from her suicide attempt by the safety net of her art. Her lover, Attys, leaves her; and she begins to prefer a young man, who has just enough feminine qualities to be attractive. This blend of the sexes is very common in Yourcenar’s work and may reflect Yourcenar’s own romantic experiences.

History Rewritten *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951) is an imagined first-person narrative in epistolary, or letter form, written by the Roman emperor Hadrian shortly before his death, when action has had to yield to contemplation and analysis of his accomplishments. Yourcenar’s attempt to “redo [history] from within” shows Hadrian primarily as good; his meditations on classical art, dreams, destiny, religions, women, freedom, and so forth make him an extremely well-rounded character. Similarly, the events of his life in politics, love, and war are documented, chronicling the self-improvement that allows him to realize his own potential and his plans for the Roman Empire.

Yourcenar frequently used historical or legendary events and figures as the basis for her creative works. This is also seen in *Fires*, which includes figures such as the ancient poet Sappho, and *The Abyss* (1968), a tale that takes place in sixteenth-century France.

Works in Critical Context

Despite Yourcenar’s prediction that *Memoirs of Hadrian* would find an audience of “a few students of human

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Yourcenar draws on history to add density to her works. With the help of actual events, her fiction becomes richer and more complex. Here are a few other works that use real occurrences to emphasize their central themes and embellish their characters:

A Tale of Two Cities (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. Beginning with 1775, this novel explores the events leading up to the French Revolution.

The Name of the Rose (1980), a novel by Umberto Eco. Set in a monastery during the middle ages, this story, in which a murder takes place and must be solved, is among Eco's most famous.

The Remains of the Day (1989), by Kazuo Ishiguro. An English butler struggles to maintain his professionalism at the expense of his humanity in this novel set during the tense times prior to World War II.

Braveheart (1995), a film directed by Mel Gibson. Set in the thirteenth century, this film focuses on William Wallace, a Scot who attempted to overthrow King Edward I of England.

destiny," it is her best-known work. But for several reasons, recognition as one of the leading figures of modern French literature was a long time coming for Yourcenar. She refused to be lionized; she lived from 1939 until her death in 1987 in the United States and ignored popular trends in order to write about what seemed important to her.

Dear Departed A series of autobiographical books published by Yourcenar focus less on herself than on her family. *Dear Departed* (1974) chronicles the story of Yourcenar's mother, Fernande de Crayencour, and her family, tracing them back over several centuries in Belgium. Of her effort, Harold Beaver writes in the *New York Times Book Review*: "Anyone who has ever tried to sort out boxes of family effects will be astounded at what Yourcenar has achieved. For she reoccupies the past, as it were, nourishing it with her own substance to bring it alive once again." But for *New York Review of Books* contributor John Weightman, the series is disappointing in its lack of information on Yourcenar herself. He concludes, "In her family saga, she traces the strands which crisscrossed to form...her unique identity and then, almost perversely, leaves that identity unexplained, presumably for all time."

Memoirs of Hadrian In the *Spectator*, Miranda Seymour calls *Memoirs of Hadrian* "arguably the finest historical novel of this century." Likewise, *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* contributor Geoffrey Bruun notes

that *Memoirs of Hadrian* "is an extraordinarily expert performance... It has a quality of authenticity, of verisimilitude, that delights and fascinates." Mavis Gallant feels that Yourcenar "stands among a litter of flashier reputations as testimony to the substance and clarity of the French language and the purpose and meaning of a writer's life." The author continued to write, travel, and contemplate historical and philosophical issues central to the human condition into her eighties. In his *Saturday Review* essay, Stephen Koch concludes:

As an artist and thinker—for Yourcenar's novels must be regarded as simultaneously art, scholarship, and profound philosophical meditation—Marguerite Yourcenar writes squarely in defense of the very highest standards and traditions of that enlightened humanism which Hadrian promulgated for an empire and to the agonized rebirth of which her Zeno dies a martyr. It is, to say the least, heartening to find a writer so deeply committed to that humanism who is producing major art at this moment in our own history. It is, in fact, inspiring.

Responses to Literature

1. Yourcenar was the first woman to be in the Académie française. Research the institution and explain why you think she, unlike any women writers before her, received this honor.
2. Yourcenar lived in and traveled to many different places. How do these different landscapes show up in her works? Does she seem attached to any one sort of place?
3. Yourcenar spent many years working on *Memoirs of Hadrian*. What can this fictional treatment of history tell us about history itself? Are there ways in which fiction can communicate more truth than nonfiction? If you think so, how and why? If you think not, what is the value of doing historical research to write fiction? Or is this valuable? Support your position with detailed analyses of specific passages from *Memoirs of Hadrian*.
4. Consider Yourcenar's treatment of her family in *Dear Departed*. What stylistic techniques does she use to evoke an emotional response from readers, and what is that response? How does this emotional charge affect the overall message of the work itself?

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■ Tao Yuanming

SEE *T'ao Ch'ien*

❑ Émile Zola

BORN: 1840, Paris, France

DIED: 1902, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Markets of Paris (1873)

Germinal (1885)

The Masterpiece (1886)

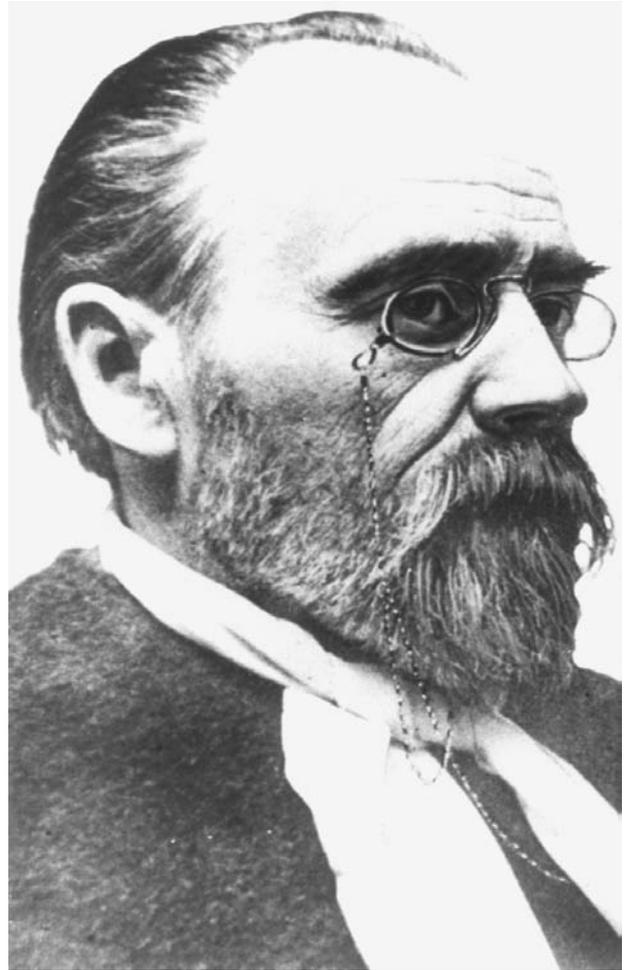
The Earth (1887)

Overview

Émile Zola is one of the most important nineteenth-century French novelists, along with Stendhal, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, and Gustave Flaubert. *The Rougon-Macquarts*, the series of twenty novels that Zola published between 1870 and 1893, is a major monument of French fiction. Zola also wrote short stories, plays, and opera librettos and had already established himself by the age of thirty as one of France's leading literary figures.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years and Paris Émile-Edouard-Charles-Antoine Zola was born in Paris on April 2, 1840. His father, Francesco Zola (originally Zolla, meaning in Ital-



Émile Zola Zola, Emile, photograph. AP Images.

ian "a clod of earth"), developed pleurisy and died when Émile was just six years old, leaving his wife and son with debts of more than ninety thousand francs. The family moved a total of five times in ten years, always to cheaper quarters, ending up in two sordid rooms on a street inhabited by poor working-class people. Although his mother and her aged parents did everything possible to shield Émile from the effects of these misfortunes, the boy was affected by them as he grew older. They help explain his lifelong compassion for the poor, his longing for social justice, his rejection of what usually passes for charity, and his hatred of middle-class hypocrisy, cupidity, and pride. His fictionalized portrayals of Aix (represented in his novels by the town of "Plassans") teem with scheming, avaricious middle-class characters reminiscent of those who had stolen his mother's and his inheritance.

In many respects, however, Zola's childhood years in Aix were among the best of his life. He, Paul Cézanne (the future painter), and another schoolmate, Baptistin Baille, made frequent excursions into the countryside—reflected in Cézanne's idyllic Provençal landscapes and

portrayals of bathers as well as in some of the most delightful pages of Zola's novels. During these jaunts Zola acquired the love of nature and respect for the forces of life that pervade his writings.

Zola's grandmother Aubert died in the fall of 1857. Once again, the boy, temperamentally somber, nervous, high-strung, terrified even by thunder, had to face the awful reality of death—which would turn, as the years passed, into one of his most obsessive literary themes. Then misfortune struck another blow. The family's increasingly desperate financial situation forced them to move to Paris, where Zola's mother would be in a better position to try to enlist the support of her husband's powerful friends. She managed, with help from one of them, to obtain a scholarship for Émile at the Lycée Saint-Louis.

French Idealism Zola wrote during the intellectual and spiritual crisis brought on by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the rise of modern science. Zola's Paris, like the Roman Empire in the first century, was a boiling cauldron of philosophical and religious ideas. Like thousands of other thoughtful mid-nineteenth-century Frenchmen, the young writer spent hours wrestling with great eternal questions about the nature of reality, the problem of evil, and the meaning of life.

By January 1866 Zola could often be observed meeting with a group of young revolutionary artists, including several of the future impressionists, at the Café Guerbois. Cézanne, Camille Pissarro, and Claude Monet showed up occasionally. The author, then in his late twenties, rightly sensed that the time was ripe at last to write his masterpiece, *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Throughout 1868 he spent every moment that he could working on his plans for his magnum opus, which, as it turned out, would largely take up the next twenty-five years of his career. Consisting of twenty novels (instead of the ten he had originally foreseen), the series studies human nature through the Rougons, a wealthy family, and their illegitimate, less affluent counterparts, the Macquarts. The epic cycle spans from the reign of Napoleon III (in the 1850s) through the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871.

Death and Political Conflicts 1880 was the year of one of Zola's greatest literary triumphs, but also a year of bereavements. His friend Louis Duranty, an older writer who had been one of the leaders of the realist school in the 1850s, died that April. A month later a telegram arrived from Guy de Maupassant announcing Gustave Flaubert's death. In October, Zola's mother died. Zola tried to suppress his sorrows by working, but he was continuously haunted by the specter of death. In October 1882 he had a nervous breakdown. He longed vainly for the comfort of the old religion and mumbled prayers despite his skepticism.

During the final period of Zola's life, he became caught up in "The Dreyfus Affair," which divided French

society into two violently opposed camps. In December 1894 Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was convicted by a court-martial of having sold military secrets to Germany and was imprisoned on Devil's Island. At first Zola paid scant attention to the affair, but finally, convinced by his conversations with Dreyfus's defenders that the man was innocent, he decided to intervene. Persuaded that a direct challenge to the government and military authorities was necessary to keep Dreyfus's case alive, he published in a Parisian newspaper an instantly world-famous open letter to the president of the republic. A tremendous uproar ensued, and Zola became a spokesperson for legal justice. After creating what historian Barbara Tuchman referred to as "one of the great commotions of history," Zola was arrested for libel.

In a celebrated trial conducted by a biased judge, Zola was found guilty and sentenced to a year in prison and a fine of three thousand francs. He promptly appealed. A second trial took place but he fled to England without waiting for the result. The verdict this time would have been without appeal. He remained in England, writing *Fecondite*, until 1899, when, having heard that there was to be a review of the first Dreyfus trial, he returned to Paris.

On September 28, 1902, Zola and his wife Alexandrine took up their autumn and winter quarters on the Rue de Bruxelles. It was chilly, so a fire was lit in their bedroom. It burned badly, and the room filled with carbon monoxide while they slept. The next morning one of the servants, after knocking repeatedly on their bedroom door, became frightened, broke it down, and found Alexandrine lying unconscious and Zola dead. The public mourned the death of Zola at an enormous public funeral held on October 5, 1902. On June 4, 1908, Zola's coffin was removed from its tomb in the Montmartre Cemetery and transported to the Paris Pantheon, the resting place of some of France's greatest heroes. After a second funeral, his remains were placed close to the sarcophagi of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They are still there today, sharing a small vault with the remains of Victor Hugo.

Works in Literary Context

Impressionism Zola spent much of his childhood in the countryside and was friends with many impressionist painters. His third novel of the *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, *The Markets of Paris*, is set in the picturesque central food market of Paris, and is the object of powerful descriptions that recall impressionist paintings. Zola intended the market to stand for the belly—the belly of Paris, the belly of humanity, and, by extension, the belly of the empire. Though the novel was often distasteful to middle-class readers—for the middle class is reviled for their imperial allegiance throughout the novel—critics of the time praised the work highly. This fusion of

impressionist aesthetics with liberal politics would become Zola's stylistic trademark.

Pieces into Wholes The overall structure of Zola's fiction largely resulted from the interplay of opposing forces. In terms of aesthetic ideas, Zola championed unity, clarity, and simplicity. However, he also wanted to burst through the bounds of the novel, and transform traditional literary genres: the realistic novel, tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrama, epic, idyll, biography, history, scientific dissertation, and other forms. He aspired to be both realistic and visionary at the same time. He wanted his novels to reflect his centerless, chaotic vision of reality—hence his tendency to group his novels together into series rather than independent works. He built frames within frames, complex structures in which everything—a character, a setting, an action—represents the larger whole of which it is a part: the working class, the priesthood, capital, humanity, or life itself.

Works in Critical Context

During much of the early twentieth century, Zola was relegated to a kind of critical limbo. The public at large continued to read his works, but literary critics who had positive things to say about his writings were few and far between. On July 17, 1932, André Gide noted in his journal that he considered the discredit of Zola at that time as a monstrous injustice that said little for the literary critics of the day. Since the 1950s, however, Zola has been the object of a new critical reevaluation. Between 1952 and 1980 alone, more than twenty-six hundred new books and articles about him were published. His works lend themselves extraordinarily well to most of the new critical approaches that have flourished since the middle of the twentieth century. The old myths and prejudices that blinded many earlier critics have been largely dispelled.

L'Assommoir *L'Assommoir*, Zola's first great international success, has lost none of its influence more than a century after it was written. In its own day it was also one of the most controversial of Zola's works. Its impact is due in part to its sociological subject: working-class reality. The French bourgeoisie eyed the novel with a mixture of curiosity, contempt, guilt, and fear. Hugo and other Romantics had written novels about the suffering of the poor of their day, but their depictions had been sentimental and, by realistic standards, quite false. Zola, who knew the Parisian working class as well as any other author of his time, made no attempt to idealize it. On the contrary, he was the first major French author to portray it comprehensively. Henry James, in his *Notes on Novelists, with Some Other Notes*, writes, "*L'Assommoir* is the nature of man—but not his finer, nobler, cleaner or more cultivated nature; it is the image of his free instincts, the better and the worse... The whole handling makes for emphasis and scale, and it is not to be measured how, as a picture of conditions, the thing would have suffered from

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Zola's famous contemporaries include:

Victor Hugo (1802–1885): A French writer known for his compassion for characters of all social classes. Like Zola, he is also remembered for the epic scope of novels such as *Les Misérables*.

Gustave Flaubert (1820–1880): French novelist famous for *Madame Bovary* and for his obsessive struggles with wording.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906): French post-impressionist painter and childhood friend of Zola.

Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935): The French Jewish military officer at the center of the famous court case that divided French society in the 1890s. After the exposure of widespread political scandal, Dreyfus was acquitted from charges of treason and went on to serve as a lieutenant colonel in World War I.

timidity." James also asserts about Zola's personal vision, "Of this genius *L'Assommoir* is the most extraordinary record."

The Earth By the time Zola's novel *The Earth* appeared in 1887, a negative reaction to naturalism, which had begun several years earlier, was rapidly gaining strength in the younger generation. Even some writers, including Maupassant and Huysmans, who had fought alongside Zola in his campaign to promote Naturalism, were now heading in new directions. Zola's own fame, however, continued to grow, and it was clear that he had lost none of his creative power. *The Earth* sold thousands of copies when it first appeared, and it has remained one of Zola's most popular and highly regarded novels. While some critics immediately sensed the work's greatness, many others were rudely shocked. All aspects of life, no matter how revolting or horrible, are recounted in Homeric detail. The widely respected novelist Anatole France accused Zola of trying to exploit a perverted popular taste for obscenity in fiction. A group of five younger writers, Paul Bonnetain, J.-H. Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte, and Gustave Guiches, took advantage of the occasion to fire off a long, indignant, and highly scurrilous attack directed not only at the novel but also at Zola. Accusing him of moral depravity, they violently and publicly rejected him as their literary master.

Responses to Literature

1. Zola is perhaps best known for his treatment of the working class within his novels. What do you think Zola achieved by using naturalism to describe the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

As a result of growing up in the French countryside and surrounding himself with impressionist painters, Zola's work is rich both in descriptions of rural life and landscapes. Here are some other works that depict seemingly idyllic European countrysides and the people who populate them:

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. In this novel Charles Bovary, a simple man from a small town, is threatened by the sensuality and greed of his wife, Emma.

My Life as a Dog (1985), a film by Lasse Halström. In this film, a young boy is sent to live with relatives in rural Sweden, where he develops canine behaviors.

Manon of the Springs (1986), a film by Claude Berri. The Provençal countryside is the backdrop for this seemingly simple story about a village that suffers from a life-threatening water shortage.

conditions of the poor? Can you compare his methods to those of other authors that write about similar subjects, such as Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens?

2. Why do you think Zola made his famous series twenty novels long? How does the concept of time function in this series?
3. Research Zola's interest in the Dreyfus affair, and read the open letter that was published under the headline "J'accuse!" Why do you think Zola championed Dreyfus with as much zeal as he did?
4. Explain this quote from Henrik Ibsen, the playwright, with a specific reference from one of Zola's works: "Zola descends into the sewer to bathe in it, I to cleanse it."
5. How is naturalism different from realism? Explain this using examples from both Zola's work and the works of other authors of the time period.

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Mikhail Zoshchenko

BORN: 1895, Poltava, Ukraine

DIED: 1958, Leningrad, USSR

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Stories of Nazar Ilich, Mister Sinebriukhov (1922)

Youth Restored (1933)

Before Sunrise (1943, 1972)

Overview

Mikhail Zoshchenko is relatively unknown outside of Russian literature, but he was the most popular satirist in the Soviet Union from the early 1920s until 1946, when he was expelled from the Union of Russian Writers and his works banned. Zoshchenko incisively examined the cultural confusion that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, using a traditional Russian literary technique known as *skaz*, which establishes a comic narrator distinct from the author. Central to Zoshchenko's satire was the singular language his *skaz* narrators employed, blending slang, Marxist jargon, and humorous distortions of common usage.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Privileged Upbringing Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko was born on July 28, 1895, in Poltava, Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire. His father, Mikhail Ivanovich Zoshchenko, was a painter and landowner, while his mother had been an actress and had published a few short stories. He was drawn to writing at a young age, composing poetry by 1902 at the age of seven and



Mikhail Zoshchenko akq-images, London / RIA Nowosti

attempting his first prose in 1907, the year his father died. At seventeen, he began studying law at the University of St. Petersburg.

A Soldier during World War I When World War I began, Zoshchenko abandoned his studies and joined the Imperial Army. World War I began when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a terrorist in Sarajevo, Serbia, in June 1914. Austria-Hungary soon declared war on Serbia and its allies. Entangling alliances brought nearly every European country into the conflict. Austria-Hungary allied with Germany, Turkey, and, until 1915, Italy, against France, Russia, Great Britain, and, after 1917, the United States. Zoshchenko became a lieutenant in the grenadiers and was decorated twice for bravery. During the war, he suffered gas poisoning, which left him in chronic ill health.

As World War I was being fought, Russia was facing internal challenges. During the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, which began in 1894, numerous opposition groups formed that opposed the autocratic nature of his rule. Such groups gained power when the tsar's forces were

defeated in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. While Nicholas tried to hold on to power by allowing elected Dumas (legislatures), he allowed only limited reforms while retaining control of the government. Further defeats in World War I to the Germans led to the end of Nicholas's reign. He was forced to abdicate in March 1917, leading to another conflict over who would run the country. The Bolsheviks (Communists), led by Vladimir Lenin, ultimately emerged victorious in 1918, and Lenin immediately agreed to a peace treaty with Germany.

Soviet Russia's Best-Selling Humorist After the Russian Revolution, Zoshchenko held a number of different jobs, from bootmaker to patrolman. He briefly joined the Red Army, though he never joined the Communist Party and in fact remained politically uncommitted throughout his life. He settled down in St. Petersburg (then called Petrograd), married and had a child, and began his first serious efforts at writing. He helped found a group called the Serapion Brothers, who were mostly socialists but opposed restrictions on artistic expression. His first *skaz* sketches assumed the voice of a poor soldier named Sinebriukhov, who narrates his mishaps in a nonsensical mishmash of slang, dialect, and bureaucratic jargon. The first collection of Zoshchenko's stories, *The Stories of Nazar Ilich, Mister Sinebriukhov* (1922), was an instant success. Twenty more followed over the next four years, selling millions of copies and quickly establishing him as the most popular humorist of the time.

The Sinebriukhov stories gave Zoshchenko his signature style. His narrators took on various pseudonyms, but his work was instantly recognizable by its uniquely zany diction and its tragicomic portrait of Soviet society. Satirizing the everyday hardships facing the Soviet citizen, he avoided the romantic or grandiose tone of many of his peers. To him the new society was nothing heroic or inspiring but instead a series of petty frustrations and defeats.

Reflection of Changes in Society Zoshchenko's humor captured the social chaos in Russia after 1917. The collapse of the monarchy and aristocracy brought acute disruption and dislocation. Public discourse was suddenly full of a strange Marxist vocabulary—language itself had undergone a revolution. Massive literacy campaigns produced millions of newly educated readers. Zoshchenko spoke to them, ironically contrasting revolutionary ideals with the reality of Soviet life, in prose that replicated oral storytelling. In "The Woman Who Could Not Read," for example, a woman fails to respond to the party's literacy drive—until she finds a scented letter in her husband's pocket.

Some of Zoshchenko's stories underscore the deprivation and hardship of contemporary life. The much lauded introduction of electric light, in the story "Poverty" (1924), only reveals how poorly the people truly live. Zoshchenko's narrators typically live in collective apartments, divided among several families who share

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Zoshchenko's famous contemporaries include:

- Mikhail Sholokhov** (1905–1984): This Soviet novelist wrote *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1928–1940). He was the winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Isaac Babel** (1894–1984): This Jewish Soviet journalist, playwright, and short-story writer published such books as the short-fiction collection *The Odessa Tales* (1927) and the play *Zakat*.
- Nathanael West** (1903–1940): This American author, screenwriter, and satirist was best known for his darkly humorous *The Day of the Locust* (1939).
- Robert Benchley** (1889–1945): This American humorist was known for his work as a newspaper columnist, film actor, and member of the Algonquin Round Table.
- Aldous Huxley** (1894–1963): This English novelist, essayist, poet, and short-story writer is best known for his 1932 classic *Brave New World*.

the kitchen and bathroom. In “The Crisis” (1925), a man and his wife live in a bathroom, giving their newborn a bath every day, while their thirty-two roommates also want to use the facilities. A series of longer, darker stories, collected as *What the Nightingale Sang: Sentimental Tales* (1927), plays on literary conventions as well as motifs from classic Russian works, such as those of Nikolai Gogol and Aleksandr Pushkin.

Youth Restored Zoshchenko, as well as Soviet society as a whole, faced challenges in the mid-1920s. After the death of Lenin in 1924, a power struggle ensued for control of the Communist Party. By 1928, Joseph Stalin had eliminated all his rivals and achieved full power. His rule was harsh and included forced industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. During Stalin's so-called Cultural Revolution on the establishment, Zoshchenko felt pressure to bring his work into line with more orthodox Soviet literature. The gray area in which uncommitted artists could work was closing. At the same time, Zoshchenko had a personal impulse to clarify his writing. His health had become an obsession that soon overshadowed his work. Zoshchenko was a hypochondriac and chronically depressed. At the end of one severe bout of ennui in the early 1930s, he felt he had found the secret to health and longevity, which he set out to share with his readers. The result, a novella called *Youth Restored* (1933), became Zoshchenko's most controversial work.

What Zoshchenko envisioned as a straightforward, didactic work came out as something quite the opposite. The story of *Youth Restored* concerns an aging, depressed professor who embarks on a rigorous program of self-help,

which succeeds to the point where he courts and marries his neighbor's nineteen-year-old daughter. In the margins of this ludicrous *skaz* narrative, however, one hundred pages of footnotes present Zoshchenko's newfound views on wellness. The juxtaposition creates an unsettling experience for the reader: Is this a sophisticated satire, an earnest self-help treatise, or could it conceivably be both?

Survival without Ambiguity The intentions of his next work, *The Blue Book* (1935), were similarly opaque. It also blends fiction and documentary, parody and ideological correctness. *The Blue Book* surveys human history, with dramatized historical episodes or concise bulletins of facts linked by a common theme. Confounding critics, the work could be seen as either a simplistic historical romp or a clownish mockery.

Producing such unorthodox literature was risky under Stalin. In the later 1930s, after socialist realism had become the official doctrine for Soviet literature, Zoshchenko modified his style. In his short pieces, the language is demonstrably clearer, and the narrator has a clear grasp of the story and the lesson to be drawn from it. Several documentary works seemed to demonstrate his ability to write without irony or ambiguity. If the world Zoshchenko created in the 1920s was chaotic and frustrating, now it was relatively efficient and welcoming. Because of the manifest changes in his work, Zoshchenko's official standing reversed itself. Stalin's purges claimed the lives of millions and devastated the ranks of experimental writers, but Zoshchenko was not subject to persecution nor was his work suppressed.

Wrote Before Sunrise During World War II (a global military conflict involving sixty-one countries that ultimately left 55 million people dead), Zoshchenko contributed antifascist propaganda work, as did nearly all Soviet writers. He also completed his most ambitious and autobiographical work, *Before Sunrise* (1943).

Denounced and Silenced Zoshchenko's message was too idiosyncratic and egocentric for Stalin's Soviet Union. Publication of *Before Sunrise* was interrupted after the first half appeared in the journal *October*. The second half would not see print until 1972, long after Zoshchenko's death. The censorship of *Before Sunrise* crushed Zoshchenko.

Two years later came a worse blow. In 1946, one of Zoshchenko's stories for children was republished in an adult periodical, and out of context it seemed provocative and politically suspicious. Andrei Zhdanov, the leading literary hatchet man of the Stalinist era, heaped devastating criticism on Zoshchenko, calling his writings “rotten, vulgar, and empty.” Zoshchenko was kicked out of the Writers' Union, deprived of his ration card, and even forced to return to shoemaking. His career as a satirist was essentially over, his long contribution to Soviet literature dismissed. The cultural thaw following Stalin's death did not restore his reputation. His health deteriorated, and he died in Leningrad in 1958.

Works in Literary Context

Zoshchenko's satirical prose is often compared with that of the nineteenth-century Russian master Nikolai Gogol. Zoshchenko shares with Gogol a highly inventive verbal expressiveness and a similar trajectory from ironic humor and absurdism to attempts to write highly didactic texts. Some critics also believe that Zoshchenko's humor was influenced by two other Russian writers, Nikolai Leskov and Anton Chekhov. In addition, Zoshchenko's writings were affected by the challenges of day-to-day existence in the Soviet Union.

Skaz Gogol was also one of the most notable practitioners of the *skaz* technique, whose most recognizable feature is the oral quality that the written text exhibits. A *skaz* author seems to have turned over the storytelling to a newcomer, often a barely literate one. Zoshchenko exploited the comic potential of this device, often to absurd effect, thereby increasing the ambiguity inherent in any *skaz* text. Since the author openly passes responsibility to a fictional narrator, the question is always open as to whether the narrator's comments reflect the character's ideas or those of the author. Thus, Zoshchenko's use of *skaz* created a certain anonymity, which vexed those Soviet critics who judged literature purely on ideological grounds. The technique won him a notable degree of free expression.

Class Conflict and the Party Line In terms of content, Zoshchenko's stories belonged to a rich satirical tradition that played up the petty foibles of daily life in Soviet society. His fresh, modern subject matter seemed in tune with the revolutionary spirit of the times. He adopted the viewpoint of the newly triumphant proletariat, yet often mocked notions of class conflict. In "Philistines" (1926), the narrator is outraged when a fellow worker is tossed off a tram for improper attire, when in truth, the worker had entered the tram covered in wet paint. His protagonist usually aspires to cultural sophistication while behaving in ways that undermine his pretensions. His satire extends to Communist Party doctrine. Typically his narrator would faithfully express the party line but in an ignorant or farcical way. No subversive views would appear in the text, but astute readers could enjoy the parody.

A Hornet's Nest of Language Zoshchenko's narrators speak in an unforgettable jumble of slang, working-class idiom, Bolshevik lingo, and sheer nuttiness. The brilliance of this verbal humor is difficult to capture in translation. Passages take dizzying, unexpected twists as language escapes the narrator's control. Tangled in a snarl of words, the moral of the story eludes the narrator or gets turned on end, delightfully frustrating the reader's expectations for a clear-cut, didactic tale.

Influential Comic Master Despite Zoshchenko's detours into the self-help genre, and his subsequent trou-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Zoshchenko was one of the first to satirize life in the new Soviet society. Here are some other works sending up Soviet socialism:

Heart of a Dog (1925), a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. In this banned Soviet novel, a professor implants human organs into a dog, who grows into a version of the "New Soviet man."

The Twelve Chairs (1928), a novel by Ilia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov. In this book, a confidence man and a dispossessed aristocrat pursue some contraband jewelry hidden in a dining room chair.

Ninotchka (1939), a film directed by Ernst Lubitsch. This comedy starring Greta Garbo contrasted the dull gray of Soviet life with the romantic decadence of Paris.

Animal Farm (1945), a novella by George Orwell. The most famous allegorical satire of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin.

Moscow 2042 (1986), a novel by Vladimir Voinovich. Time travel reveals the bleak future of the Soviet Union, in a dystopian parody written during the glasnost (openness) period.

ble with the regime, his popularity with readers has ensured his lasting influence. His contributions to Russian literature, in terms of humor, language, narrative persona, and the genre of the short story, cannot be denied.

Works in Critical Context

Zoshchenko wrote for the "mass reader" with great success. By virtue of his popularity, he could be considered among the most democratic writers in Soviet history. Furthermore, his appeal bridged normally distinct readerships, since it could be read and appreciated at different levels. The virtuosity of his comic language, and the humanity that shines through his work, have won many admirers.

Shifting Reception His critical reception in the Soviet Union, however, was politically fraught. As his popularity peaked in the 1920s, the critical establishment viewed him suspiciously: some found his work too grim and pessimistic, even anti-Soviet. In the 1930s, as he trimmed the ambiguity from his stories and clarified their edifying intent, he gained more critical acceptance. At the same time, critics reevaluated his earlier work, reaching consensus that Zoshchenko should be seen as distinct from the proletarian narrators he created. The critics, in effect, had finally caught up to the readers in their judgment.

Before 1946, Zoshchenko's name was generally unrecognized outside the Soviet Union. Upon his persecution, Western scholars promoted him as anti-Soviet, placing him in the canon of dissidents who bravely told the bitter truth of Soviet life. Ironically, a contrary process took place in the Soviet Union after his death. He was rehabilitated, and collections of his stories were republished, though carefully edited on ideological grounds. In the 1970s, three critical books resurrected his standing as a pro-Soviet satirist, generally on the same terms he enjoyed in the 1930s. With the fall of the Soviet Union, he came to be seen as a martyr, and his works gained still further attention and appreciation.

The Blue Book Zoshchenko's largest work *The Blue Book* received a mixed response from critics from its first serial publication in *Krasnaia nov'*. This story features a tour through human history that focuses on four constants—money, love, treachery, and misfortune—balanced by a section titled “Amazing Events,” which highlights revolutionaries and the achievements of the Soviet Union. Depending on which section or narrative voice a critic focused on, *The Blue Book* could be seen either as an optimistic, albeit simplified, survey of history or a ludicrous, clownish mockery. In *Pravda*, Aron Gurshtein dismissed the book as a cheap vulgarization that suffered from the very present authorial “smirk” whether topics were tragic or uplifting. Alternately, Aleksandr Dymshits in the proletarian journal *Rezets* praised Zoshchenko for producing a book which was strong and optimistic.

Responses to Literature

1. Write an essay comparing Zoshchenko's use of *skaz* narrative with the comic writings of Nikolai Gogol.
2. In a presentation, address how the *skaz* technique allowed Zoshchenko an expanded freedom of expression.
3. Write a research paper on how Zoshchenko's lifelong health concerns affected his literary career.
4. Make a careful study of the types of verbal humor in Zoshchenko's stories and in a detailed essay describe

as precisely as you can the elements that make his work funny.

5. Based on his short fiction, how would you summarize Zoshchenko's attitude toward the Soviet revolution? Was he pro-Soviet, anti-Soviet, or does neither label apply? Share your opinions in a small group setting.

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Glossary of Literary Terms

The glossary contains terms found in various entries throughout the *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature*. This glossary includes: terms for various literary components or techniques relevant to the work of the authors; terms for important artistic movements or groups discussed in relation to the authors; and terms for social, political, or philosophical ideas that profoundly impacted world literature. Definitions for more basic literary terms, such as “figurative language,” have not been included.

ACMEISM: A Russian literary movement in which writers focused on concrete imagery and description of the physical world. Acmeism (derived from “acme,” a Greek term meaning “peak”) was seen largely as a reaction to Russian Symbolism. Acmeist writers mentioned in this encyclopedia include Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova.

ALLEGORY: A work in which the entire narrative serves as a symbol for something beyond the surface-level story. For example, George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), aside from being a tale about a group of farm animals revolting against their master, is acknowledged by the author to be a criticism of Stalinist Russia in which each animal represents a real historical figure.

ANACHRONISM: A thing or idea mentioned in a work of art that occurs outside its normal place in time. In William Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, for example, the author mentions the striking of a clock to indicate time passing—even though no such clocks existed in ancient Rome, the time period in which the play is set.

ANGRY YOUNG MEN: A group of British writers in the mid-twentieth century defined by their expression of discontent for traditional social and political institutions. Writers associated with this loosely-defined

movement include Kingsley Amis, Harold Pinter, and John Osborne.

ANTI-HERO: A main character in a literary work whose actions and ideals would not generally be regarded as heroic, though the character may still be portrayed sympathetically by the author. Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment*, is an example of an anti-hero.

AUTOMATIC WRITING: A method of writing, often employed by Surrealists such as André Breton, in which the hand is allowed to write freely without being guided by conscious thought. The novel *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) by Breton and Philippe Soupault was reportedly written using this technique.

AVANT-GARDE: Meaning “advance guard” in French, a term used to describe artists or artistic works that are considered innovative or pushing the boundaries of tradition. The term has been applied to writers of all manner of literary movements, including Surrealism, Expressionism, Symbolism, and Futurism.

BALLAD: A poetic work written in the form of a traditional song that commonly relates a folk tale, myth, or legend. Ballads are often written in four-line stanzas with alternating lines of eight and six syllables,

in which the lines with six syllables contain end-rhyme. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a famous example of a ballad.

BILDUNGSROMAN: Taken from a German term meaning “novel of formation,” a novel that documents the maturation of the protagonist. The bildungsroman is also commonly known as a “coming of age” novel.

BLANK VERSE: A type of poetry which follows a set pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line, but does not feature consistent rhyme. Playwrights William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson created many of their works in blank verse, as did poet John Milton.

BLOOMSBURY GROUP: A group of London artists and intellectuals formed in the early twentieth century, named after the central London area in which many of them lived. Notable members included Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster.

CLASSICAL UNITIES: A set of parameters for drama, originally derived from Aristotle and followed by neoclassicists, that were believed to be necessary for creating ideal dramatic works. According to the classical unities, a play should: focus on a single story (unity of action); take place in a single location (unity of place); and cover a period of time no longer than twenty-four hours (unity of time).

CLASSICISM: A term applied to several artistic movements in which the artists emphasized structures and styles similar to those found in ancient Greek and Roman art. For literature, this included an emphasis on the observable world and aesthetic beauty.

CLOSET DRAMA: A dramatic work that is not meant to be performed on stage. Closet dramas may be read aloud among a small group, or may be read silently as with non-dramatic literature. *Samson Agonistes* (1671) by John Milton is a famous example of a closet drama.

COMEDY: In classical Greek drama, a play that ends happily for its major characters; many ancient comedies poked fun at political figures or cultural stereotypes, which inspired the laughter modern audiences now associate with the term.

COMEDY OF ERRORS: A dramatic work in which the characters are subject to misunderstandings and coincidences that lead to humorous conflicts, but which are ultimately resolved without tragic consequences. William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1596) is an example of a comedy of errors.

COMEDY OF MANNERS: A dramatic work that points out the unique behaviors of a certain social class or group

in order to derive humor at their expense. Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is an example of a comedy of manners.

COMMEDIA DELL’ARTE: Meaning “comedy of artists” in Italian, a type of street drama that relies heavily on improvisation and physical comedy built around a traditional storyline.

DADAISM: A European artistic movement that flourished during World War I and was characterized by opposition to the war, as well as a rejection of logic and traditional definitions of art. Poet and playwright Tristan Tzara was a key figure in Dadaism.

ELEGY: A written work, generally a poem, that expresses mourning over the death of a person or some other profound loss. Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem “Adonais” (1821) is an example of an elegy.

ENJAMBMENT: In poetry, the splitting of a continuous phrase or sentence into two or more lines. The result is that a single line may appear to express an incomplete thought, though the work as a whole is afforded a more complex rhythm and structure. William Shakespeare made frequent use of enjambment in his later plays.

EPIC: A literary work, originally a work in poetic form, that focuses on large-scale events and themes, and often takes place over a long period of time. *The Odyssey*, an ancient Greek epic by Homer, is one of the earliest examples.

EPIGRAM: A short, clever statement—often in the form of a couplet—intended to impart humor and insight.

EPISTOLARY NOVEL: A novel in which the story is told through letters written by one or more characters. Samuel Richardson was an early practitioner of the epistolary novel, with works such as *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748).

EXISTENTIALISM: A philosophical movement that gained popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, thanks to literary works by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, among others. Existentialism is characterized by the idea that life does not have a greater meaning or purpose beyond that which people choose to create for themselves.

EXPERIMENTAL NOVEL: A work which defies the traditional structure or subject matter of a novel, and emphasizes style or technique over content. Though the term can be used to describe any number of non-traditional works, Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) is an oft-cited example of an early experimental novel.

EXPRESSIONISM: An artistic movement characterized by an emphasis on expressing emotion and psychological states instead of objective realism. Playwright August Strindberg is often considered one of the first to bring Expressionist ideas to drama.

FABLE: A short tale whose purpose is to impart a message or lesson, usually featuring animals as characters. “The Tortoise and the Hare” is a well-known example of a fable.

FARCE: A dramatic work characterized by characters being put into comedic situations that are unlikely or improbable, as in Georges Feydeau’s *A Flea in Her Ear* (1907).

FLASH FICTION: Short fiction, usually under one thousand words, that despite its length contains all the traditional elements of story such as a protagonist and conflict that is somehow resolved.

FRAME NARRATIVE: A literary device in which the main story being told to the reader is presented as a story being told by one of the characters within the work, such as in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad. Frame narratives often contain several stories and multiple storytellers, as in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (written in the fourteenth century).

FUTURISM: A literary movement of the early twentieth century, primarily in poetry, meant to express the dynamic nature of the modern world. Futurist poetry was characterized by onomatopoeia, unusual word order, and unexpected juxtaposition of objects and images. Vladimir Mayakovsky was one of the best-known Russian Futurists.

GENERATION OF '27: A loose collective of Spanish poets and artists active during the 1920s who became known, despite their differing styles, for their avant-garde approach. The Generation of '27 included members such as Federico García Lorca, Luis Cernuda, and Jorge Guillén.

GENERATION OF '98: A group of Spanish writers active during and after the Spanish-American War, known for their interest in forging a Spanish cultural identity. Members of the Generation of '98 included Antonio Machado and Ramón del Valle Inclán.

GOTHIC FICTION: A literary sub-genre that emerged in the last half of the eighteenth century and was characterized by eerie atmosphere, melodrama, mystery, and romance. Ann Radcliffe was an important figure in the development of Gothic fiction.

GRAND GUIGNOL: A French theater founded in 1894 and known for its plays depicting horrifying and graphically violent events, most of which were written by André de Lorde; the term “Grand Guignol” is still used to describe tales of grisly horror.

GROUP 47: A German literary group established to cultivate and advance German literature in the wake of World War II. Though membership was often private and ever-changing, notable members included Günter Grass and Heinrich Böll.

HAIKU: A Japanese poetic form whose English equivalent consists of only three lines, the first and third containing five syllables and the second containing seven. Matsuo Bashō was an early master of this poetic form.

HEROIC COUPLET: An English poetic form which consists of a rhyming pair of ten-syllable lines. Geoffrey Chaucer and Alexander Pope were both known for their use of the heroic couplet.

HUMANISM: A philosophical notion that emphasizes the inherent goodness and rationality of all people, as well as the encouragement of artistic creation among people of all levels of society. François Rabelais and Thomas Mann were both notable supporters of humanism.

IMAGISM: A poetic movement of the early twentieth century that emphasized direct expression through concise imagery and non-standard structure. Ezra Pound was instrumental in the development of the Imagist movement.

IMPRESSIONISM: An artistic movement that emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and focused on artistic impression over realistic representation. In literature, impressionism was characterized by a focus on the depiction of the interior, mental landscapes of characters, and was associated with other literary movements such as Symbolism.

IRONY: A literary device in which a character’s perception of reality differs from actual reality, or in which a character’s words do not express their true feelings. Sarcasm is a well-known form of irony. Dramatic irony occurs when an audience is given information that is not known by one or more characters in the play.

LIBRETTO: A text for the vocal portion of an opera or other musical work, often written in verse form. Famous composers frequently employed well-known

poets to write libretti for their works, and writers such as William Congreve, Victor Hugo, and Gertrude Stein have worked as librettists.

LOST GENERATION: A term used to describe a loosely defined group of American writers who spent time in Europe—especially Paris—following World War I. These writers, including Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Sherwood Anderson, were notable for themes of disillusionment in their works.

MAGIC REALISM: A literary style developed primarily in South America in which fantastic or supernatural elements are woven into otherwise realistic tales. Writers commonly associated with magic realism include Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes.

MASQUE: A theatrical pageant performed for royalty and nobility during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Masques were generally written and performed for special occasions. Ben Jonson and Sir Philip Sidney were well-known writers of masques.

MELODRAMA: A literary work which contains heightened or exaggerated emotions from the characters. The term originally applied to theatrical productions in which music (or melody) was used to accentuate the drama occurring on the stage.

MODERNISM: An artistic movement during the early twentieth century influenced by the rapid industrialization, scientific advancements, and devastating warfare of the time. Modernist writers were noted for their radical departure from traditional literary forms, with notable Modernist works including T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" (1922) and James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922).

NATURALISM: A literary movement from the late nineteenth century that focused on realistic portrayals of people and situations, and specifically dealt with the effects of heredity and environment on a character's personality and development. Émile Zola is widely regarded as a Naturalist.

NEOCLASSICISM: A literary movement during the first half of the twentieth century that marked a movement away from romanticism and sought inspiration in ancient Greek and Roman art.

NIHILISM: A philosophical movement that first appeared in the nineteenth century and is characterized by the belief that life has no objective purpose, moral

code, or value. Writers associated with nihilism include Ivan Turgenev, whose novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) described the Russian Nihilist movement and popularized the concept.

NOUVEAU ROMAN: Also known as an "anti-novel" (the term itself is French for "new novel"), a literary work in which traditional storytelling elements are absent or altered, so that the reader cannot determine with certainty the correct order or reality of events depicted. Alain Robbe-Grillet was instrumental in defining the *nouveau roman*.

PARABLE: A short tale meant to impart a message or lesson to the reader. Parables are similar to fables, but do not include supernatural or fantastic elements such as talking animals.

PARODY: A literary work designed to mock or criticize another, usually well-known literary work or genre. An early example is *Shamela* (1741), Henry Fielding's parody of the successful Samuel Richardson novel *Pamela* (1740).

PASTORAL: Literature that depicts rural life, nature, and the people of the region in a highly idealized way. *Eclagues* (c. 40 B.C.E.) by the ancient Roman poet Virgil are among the oldest examples of pastoral poetry.

PICARESQUE: A type of novel first developed in Spain that focuses on the adventures of a rogue, or clever anti-hero. Among many others, George MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman* novels exhibit the key traits of the picaresque.

POSTMODERNISM: A post-World War II literary movement characterized by nonlinearity, or a non-standard narrative timeline, as well as metafiction, in which the author shows awareness of the story as a work of fiction and may even appear as a character within it.

PSEUDONYM: An alternate name used by a writer, often to hide the writer's identity. For example, Charles Dodgson used the pen name Lewis Carroll when writing *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871).

PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL: A type of novel in which a great deal of attention is paid to the thoughts and feelings of the characters, as opposed to external action. Stendahl's 1830 novel *The Red and the Black* is often cited as an early example of the psychological novel.

REALISM: An artistic movement characterized by a desire to portray characters and environments as objectively, or as close to reality, as possible. Realism relies heavily upon physical descriptions, and Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* (1856)—with its almost grotesque precision to detail—is considered a landmark work of realism.

ROMAN À CLEF: A literary work containing fictionalized depictions of real people and events. The work may be autobiographical, as in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), or it may refer to thinly-disguised versions of well-known figures, as in George Orwell's depiction of Stalin and other Soviet politicians in *Animal Farm* (1945).

ROMANTICISM: An artistic and philosophical movement that developed throughout Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Romantic literature is notable for its expression of powerful emotions and use of natural settings. Poets associated with the Romantic movement include Lord Byron, William Wordsworth, and John Keats.

SAMIZDAT: A secret distribution method used by Soviet dissident writers for literary works that could not be published within their own country. *Samizdat* involved the manual copying of manuscript pages to be distributed among small groups of readers who could be trusted not to reveal the source of the work. Writers whose work appeared in *samizdat* form included Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky.

SATIRE: A type of literature intended to attack a person, group, institution, or idea through parody or irony. Very often, the satirist exposes the shortcomings of its subject by ironically expressing a position in support or praise of the subject. A famous example of satire is Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," (1729) in which he skewers England's mistreatment of Ireland by enthusiastically proposing to the Irish that they sell their children for food.

SERIAL PUBLICATION: The printing of consecutive portions of a novel or other lengthy work of literature in successive issues of a periodical. Serial publication was especially popular in England during the nineteenth century, and many of Charles Dickens's novels were first printed through serial publication.

SOCIAL REALISM: An artistic movement of the nineteenth century defined by sympathetic yet realistic depictions of the working class and the poor conditions in which they lived.

SOCIALIST REALISM: The official art style of the Soviet Union of six decades, socialist realism was defined by its glorification of the working class and Soviet leaders, as well as its depiction of common scenes and avoidance of fanciful subject matter. Artists and writers who did not fit this style were typically deemed unproductive or disruptive, and sent to one of many government-run labor camps.

SONNET (ELIZABETHAN): A poetic form popular in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I), typically consisting of fourteen ten-syllable lines and an alternating rhyme scheme. William Shakespeare is perhaps the most famous practitioner of the Elizabethan sonnet.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A literary technique meant to emulate the flow of thought in a character's mind. This is sometimes expressed through disjointed or run-on sentences, repetitions of words or phrases, or tenuous associations between different subjects. Notable works that use the stream of consciousness technique include *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf and *Finnegans Wake* (1939) by James Joyce.

STURM UND DRANG: A German artistic movement that arose in the late eighteenth century and was characterized by free expression of emotion—often negative emotion such as torment or greed. Literary works of the *Sturm und Drang* movement often end tragically or violently for their characters. Writers associated with the *Sturm und Drang* movement include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller.

SURREALISM: An artistic movement of the early twentieth century noted for its embrace of the irrational. Surrealist literary works often contained jarring juxtapositions of unrelated things, seemingly random or nonsensical phrases, and dreamlike situations. Poet André Breton was a founding figure in Surrealism.

SYMBOLISM: A late nineteenth century artistic movement noted for its rejection of realism and description of the physical, in favor of using words to evoke the metaphysical, emotional, and spiritual. Maurice Maeterlinck was a key figure in the development of Symbolist drama.

THEATER OF CRUELTY: A view of theater conceived by playwright Antonin Artaud in which audiences are exposed to painful truths by being centrally involved in the play's action.

THEATER OF THE ABSURD: A dramatic movement linked with Existentialism in which characters often find themselves at the mercy of an incomprehensible universe. A rejection of realism and typical story

structure, Theater of the Absurd dramas often had no discernible purpose or message.

TRAGEDY: In classical Greek drama, a play that focuses on themes such as love, fate and betrayal, does not end happily for one or more of the main characters. The play *Antigone* (c. 442 B.C.E.) by Sophocles is a typical Greek tragedy.

VERNACULAR: The casual and natural speech of a group of people or culture. Up until the Middle Ages, European literature was typically written in Latin instead of the commonly spoken language of the region; the development of literature written in the vernacular allowed audiences of almost any social level to enjoy such works.

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