**Miracle Plays, Morality Plays, and Interludes** were all types of late medieval drama, written in a variety of verse forms.

The **miracle play** had as its subject either a story from the Scriptures, or else the life and martyrdom of a saint. (In the usage of a number of historians, however, "miracle play" denotes only dramas based on saints' lives, and the term **mystery play** is applied to dramas based on the Old and New Testaments.) The biblical plays originated within the church in about the tenth century, in dramatizations of brief parts of the Latin liturgical service, called "tropes," especially the *Quem quaeritis* trope representing the visit of the three Marys to the tomb of Christ. Gradually these evolved into complete plays which were written in the vernacular, produced under the auspices of the trade guilds, and acted on stages outside the church. The miracle plays written in England are of unknown authorship. In the fourteenth century there developed the practice, on the feast of Corpus Christi (sixty days after Easter), of putting on great "cycles" of such plays, representing in chronological order crucial events in the biblical history of mankind, from the Creation and Fall of man, through the Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ, to the Last Judgment. Each scene was played on a separate "pageant wagon," which was drawn, in its proper sequence, to various fixed "stations" in a city, at each of which the entire cycle was enacted. The biblical subject matter was greatly expanded in these plays, and the author often added comic scenes of his own invention. For examples of the variety, vitality, and power of these dramas, see the Wakefield "Noah" and "Second Shepherd's Play," and the Brome "Abraham and Isaac."

**Morality plays** were dramatized *Allegories* of the life of man, his temptation and sinning, his quest for salvation, and his confrontation by death. The hero represents Mankind, or Everyman; among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices, and Death, as well as angels and demons who contest the possession of the soul of man. A character known as the **Vice** often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic; he is regarded by some literary historians as a precursor both of the cynical and ironic villain and of some of the comic figures in Elizabethan drama, including Falstaff. The best-known morality play is the fifteenth-century *Everyman;* another fine example, written early in the same century, is *The Castle of Perseverance*.

**Interlude** (Latin, "between the play") is a term applied to a variety of short entertainments, including secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious or political point. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these little dramas were performed by bands of professional actors; it is believed that they were often put on between the courses of a feast or between the acts of a longer play. Among the better known interludes are John Heywood's farces, especially *The Four PP* (that is, the Palmer, the Pardoner, the 'Pothecary, and the Pedler, who engage in a lying contest), and *Johan Johan the Husband, Tyb His Wife, and Sir John the Priest*.

See Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933), 2 vols; A. P. Rossiter, *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans* (1950); Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (1955); Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England* (1961); T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (1962); V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (1966); Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (1972). On the relation of the "Vice" in the morality plays to figures in Shakespearean drama, see Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (1958).



**Modern Period.** The term "modern" is, of course, variable in its temporal reference, but it is frequently applied to the literature written since the beginning of World War I in 1914. This period has been marked by persistent and multi-dimensioned experiments in subject matter and form, and has produced major achievements in all the literary genres. The poets include Yeats, Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Auden, Robert Graves, Robert Lowell, and Dylan Thomas; the novelists, Conrad, Joyce, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Vladimir Nabokov; the dramatists, G. B. Shaw, Sean O'Casey, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Samuel Beckett; and the critics, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Lionel Trilling, and the *New Critics*. See *myth critics*, and various types of *Structuralist Criticism*.

**Modernism.** The term is often used to identify what is considered to be most distinctive in concepts, sensibility, form, and style in the literature and art since the First World War. The specific features signified by "modernism" vary with the user, but most critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with the traditional bases both of Western culture and of Western art. Important intellectual precursors of modernism, in this sense, are thinkers who questioned the certainties that had hitherto provided a support to social organization, religion, morality, and the conception of the human self—thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Marx, Freud, and James Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) stressed the correspondence between central Christian tenets and barbaric myths and rituals.

The modernist revolt against traditional literary forms and subjects manifested itself strongly after the catastrophe of World War I shook men's faith in the foundations and continuity of Western civilization and culture. As T. S. Eliot wrote in a review of Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1923, the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarachy which is contemporary history." Like Joyce and Ezra Pound, Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it within a literary work to a lost order that was based on the religion and myths of the cultural past. In *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, Eliot replaces the standard flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substitutes for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a dislocation of parts, in which remote components are related by connections which are left to the reader to discover, or invent. Major works of modernist fiction, following Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and his even more radical *Finnegans Wake* (1939), subvert the basic

conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language. Such new modes of lyric and narrative construction were emulated and carried further by many poets and novelists; they have obvious parallels in the violation of representational conventions in the modernist paintings of Cubism, Futurism, and Abstract Expressionism, as well as in violations of standard conventions of melody, harmony, and rhythm by the modernist composers Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and their radical followers.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon of an **avant-garde** (a military metaphor: "advance-guard"); that is, a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who undertake, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to "make it new." By violating accepted conventions and decorums, they undertake to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and often forbidden, subject matters. Frequently avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; their aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of bourgeois culture.

The term **postmodernism** is sometimes applied to the literature and art after World War II, when the disastrous effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi Totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation and the threat of starvation. Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, carried to an extreme, of the counter-traditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional. A familiar undertaking in postmodernist writings is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the "meaninglessness" of existence and the underlying "abyss," or "void," or "nothingness" on which our supposed security is precariously suspended. In recent developments in linguistic and literary theory, there is an effort to subvert the foundations of language itself, so as to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, to an unillusioned inquirer, into a play of unresolvable indeterminacies.

For some of the more radical modernist and postmodernist developments in literature and criticism, see Literature of the *Absurd, anti-hero, anti-novel, Beat Writers, Concrete Poetry, Deconstruction, Expressionism, new novel, Reader-Response Criticism, Surrealism, Symbolism, Text and Writing*. Refer to: Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (1965); Erich Heller, *The Artist's Journey into the Interior, and Other Essays* (1965); Robert M. Adams, *Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void during the Nineteenth Century* (1966); Irving Howe, ed., *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts* (1967); Renato Poggioli, *The*



(1978); Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (1979).

**Motif and Theme.** A **motif** is an element—a type of incident, device, or formula—which recurs frequently in literature. The "loathly lady" who turns out to be a beautiful princess is a common motif in *folklore*. The man fatally bewitched by a fairy lady is a motif adopted from folklore in Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Common in lyric poems is the **ubi sunt motif,** or "where-are" formula for lamenting the vanished past ("Where are the snows of yesteryear?"); another is the *Carpe Diem* motif, whose nature is sufficiently indicated by Robert Herrick's title, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time." An older term for recurrent poetic concepts or formulas is the **topos** (Greek for "a commonplace"). The term "motif," or the German **leitmotif** (a guiding motif), is also applied to the frequent repetition of a significant phrase, or set description, or complex of images, in a single work, as in the operas of Richard Wagner, or in novels by Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner.

**Theme** is sometimes used interchangeably with motif, but the term is more usefully applied to an abstract claim, or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader. Milton states as the explicit theme of *Paradise Lost* to "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men"; see *Didactic Literature* and *Fiction*. Some critics claim that all nontrivial works of literature, including lyric poems, involve an implicit conceptual theme which is embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery; see, for example, Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947). For a discussion of the critical terms "subject," "theme," and "thesis" see Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (1958), pp. 401–411.

**Myth.** In classical Greek, "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or false. In its central modern significance, a myth is one story in a **mythology**—a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, as well as to establish the rationale for social customs and observances and the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. Most myths involve rituals—prescribed forms of sacred ceremonials—but social anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. If the protagonist is a person rather than a supernatural being, the story is usually not called myth but **legend;** if the story concerns supernatural beings, but is not part of a systematic mythology, it is usually classified as a *folktale*.

Recently the French Structuralist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has departed from the traditional views just described, to treat the myths of a particular culture as

on the model of the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. See Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology* (1968); and refer to *Structuralist Criticism* and *Semiotics*.

A mythology, we can say, is any religion in which we no longer believe. Poets, however, long after having ceased to believe in them, have persisted in using the myths of Jupiter, Venus, Prometheus, Wotan, Adam and Eve, and Jonah for their plots, episodes, or allusions; as Coleridge said, "still doth the old instinct bring back the old names." The term has also been extended to denote supernatural tales which are deliberately invented by their authors. Plato used such myths in order to project philosophical speculation beyond the point at which certain knowledge is possible; see, for example, his "Myth of Er" in Book X of *The Republic*. The German Romantic writers, F. W. J. Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel, proposed that to write great literature, modern poets must develop a new unifying mythology which will synthesize the insights of the myths of the Western past with the new discoveries of philosophy and physical science. In the same period in England William Blake, who felt "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's," incorporated in his poems a system of mythology he had himself created by fusing hereditary myths and biblical history and prophecy with his own intuitions and visions. A number of modern writers have also asserted that an integrative mythology, whether inherited or invented, is essential to literature. Joyce in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Eliot in *The Waste Land*, O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and many other writers have deliberately woven their modern materials on the pattern of ancient myths; while Yeats, like his admired predecessor Blake, undertook to construct his own systematic mythology, which he expounded in *A Vision* (1926) and embodied in a number of great lyric poems.

Myth has become one of the most prominent terms in literary analysis. A large group of writers, the **myth critics**—including Robert Graves, Francis Fergusson, Richard Chase, Philip Wheelwright, Leslie Fiedler, and (the most influential) Northrop Frye—view the genres and individual plot patterns of all (or almost all) literature, including what on the surface are highly sophisticated and realistic works, as recurrences of certain *archetypes* and essential mythic formulas. As Northrop Frye puts it, "the typical forms of myth become the conventions and genres of literature." According to Frye's theory, there are four main narrative genres—comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony (satire)—and these are "displaced" modes of the four elemental forms of myth, associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. (See *Genre*.)

The student should be alert to the bewildering variety of applications of the term "myth" in contemporary criticism. In addition to the meanings already described, its uses range all the way from a widely held fallacy ("the myth of progress," "the American success myth") to the solidly imagined realm in which a work of fiction is enacted ("Faulkner's myth of Yoknapatawpha County," "the mythical world of *Moby Dick*").

On classical mythology see H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (1939), and G. M. Kirkwood, *A Short Guide to Classical Mythology* (1959). Among studies of myths especially influential for modern literature and criticism are Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (rev. ed., 1911); Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920); Jane E. Harrison, *Themis* (2d ed., 1927); F. R. R. S. Raglan, *The Hero* (1936). For the theory and practice of myth criticism see Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater* (1949); Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (1949); Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (1954); Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), and "Literature and Myth" in *Relations of Literary Study*, ed. James Thorpe (1967). This last essay has a useful bibliography both of the theory and history of myths and of the exponents of myth criticism.



**Neoclassic and Romantic.** The simplest use of these extremely variable terms is as noncommittal names for periods of literature. In this application, the "neoclassic period" in England spans the hundred and forty years or so after the Restoration (1660), and the "romantic period" extends from the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789—or alternatively, from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798—through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. (The same terms are applied to periods of German, French, and other Continental literatures, but with individual differences in the historical spans they identify.) Historians, however, have often tried to "define" neoclassicism or romanticism, as though each term denoted a single essence which was shared, to varying degrees, by all the major writings of an age. But the course of literary events has not formed itself around such simple entities, and the numerous and conflicting single definitions of neoclassicism and romanticism are either so vague as to be next to meaningless or so specific as to fall far short of equating with the great range and variety of the literary facts.

A more useful undertaking is to specify certain salient attributes of literary theory and practice, common to a number of the important writers of the neoclassic period, which serve to distinguish them from major writers of the romantic period. The following list of ideas and characteristics, largely shared by such authors as Dryden, Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson, Goldsmith, and Edmund Burke, may serve as an introductory sketch of **neoclassic literature**:

(1) These authors manifested a strong traditionalism, which was often joined to a distrust of radical innovation, and was evidenced above all in their immense respect for classical writers (especially Roman writers), who were thought to have established the enduring models, and to have achieved a supreme level of excellence, in most of the major literary *Genres*. Hence the term "neoclassic."

(2) Literature was conceived to be primarily an "art"; one which, though it requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice, and which consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers. The neoclassic ideal, founded especially on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, is the craftsman's ideal, demanding the utmost finish, correction, and attention to detail. Special allowances were often made for the unerring freedom of "natural geniuses," and also for happy strokes, available even to some less gifted poets, which occur without

premeditation and achieve, as Pope said, "a grace beyond the reach of art." But the natural genius like Homer or Shakespeare is a rarity, and probably a thing of the past, and to even the best of artful poets, literary "graces" come only occasionally. The neoclassic writer strove, therefore, for "correctness," was careful to observe the complex demands of stylistic *Decorum,* and for the most part respected the established "rules" of his art. The rules of poetry were, in theory, the essential properties of the various genres (such as epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral) that have been abstracted from classical works whose long survival has proved their excellence. These properties, such as the *Three Unities,* in drama, a number of critics believed, must be embodied in modern works if they too are to be excellent and to survive.

(3) A person, and especially a person as an integral part of an organized society, was regarded as the primary source of poetic subject matter. Poetry is an imitation of human life—"a mirror held up to nature." And by the human actions it imitates, and the artistic form it gives to the imitation, poetry is designed to yield both instruction and aesthetic pleasure to the people who read it. Not art for art's sake, but art for humanity's sake was the ideal of neoclassic humanism.

(4) Both in the subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on what humans possess in common—representative characteristics, and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes. "True wit," Pope said in a much quoted passage, is "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." That is, a primary aim of poetry is to give new and perfect expression to the great commonplaces of human wisdom, whose prevalence and durability are the best warrant of their importance and truth. There was also insistence, it should be noted, on the need to balance or enhance the typical and the familiar with the opposing qualities of novelty, particularity, and invention. Johnson substituted for Pope's definition of true wit the statement that wit "is at once natural and *new,*" and praised Shakespeare because, while his characters are species, they are all "discriminated" and "distinct." But there was wide agreement that the general nature of humanity is the basic source and test of art; and also, that the fact of universal consent, everywhere and always, is the best test of moral and religious, as well as aesthetic, truth. (See *Deism.*)

(5) Neoclassic writers, like the philosophers of the time, viewed an individual as an essentially limited being who ought to address him or herself to accessible goals. Many of the great works of the period, satiric and didactic, attack humanity's "pride," or presumption beyond the natural limits of the species, and enforce the lesson of the golden mean (the avoidance of extremes) and of humanity's need to submit to a restricted position in the order of things—an order often envisioned as a natural hierarchy, or *Great Chain of Being*. In art, as in life, there prevailed the law of measure and the acceptance of strict limits upon one's freedom. The poets admired extremely the great genres of epic and tragedy, but wrote their own masterpieces in admittedly lesser forms such as the essay in verse and prose, the comedy of manners, and especially satire, in which they felt they had more chance to equal or surpass their English predecessors. They gladly submitted to at least some rules and other limiting conventions in their subjects, structure, and diction. Typical was their election, in many of their poems, to write within the extremely tight restrictions of the *closed couplet.* But the essence of the urbane and civilized poetry of the neoclassic period is "the art that hides art"; that is, the seeming freedom and triumphant ease with which, at its best, it meets the challenge set by traditional and drastically restrictive patterns.



Here are some aspects in which romantic ideals and writings in the major innovators during the first three decades of the nineteenth century differ most conspicuously from the neoclassic:

(1) The prevailing attitude favored innovation instead of traditionalism in the materials, forms, and style of literature, without regard to classical precedent. English romantic poetry began with a kind of "manifesto," or statement of revolutionary aims, in the Preface to the second edition of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). This Preface, written by Wordsworth, denounced the *Poetic Diction* of the preceding century and proposed to deal with materials from "common life" in "a selection of language really used by men." The serious or tragic treatment of lowly subjects in common language violated the basic neoclassic rule of *Decorum,* which asserted that the serious genres should deal with high subjects in an appropriately elevated style. Other innovations in the period were the exploitation by Coleridge, Keats, and others of the realm of the supernatural and of "the far away and the long ago"; the assumption by Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley of the persona of a poet-prophet who writes a visionary mode of poetry; and the use of poetic *symbolism* (especially by Blake and Shelley) deriving from a world view in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities. "I always seek in what I see," as Shelley said, "the likeness of something beyond the present and tangible object."

(2) In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth repeatedly described good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." According to this point of view poetry is not a mirror of men in action; its essential element, on the contrary, is the poet's own feelings, while the process of composition, being "spontaneous," is the opposite of the artful manipulation of means to foreseen ends stressed by the neoclassic critics. (See *expressive criticism.*) Wordsworth carefully qualified this radical doctrine by describing his poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and by specifying that a proper spontaneity is the result of a prior process of deep reflection, and may be followed by second thoughts and revisions. But the immediate act of composition, if a poem is to be genuine, must be spontaneous—that is, unforced, and free of what Wordsworth decried as the "artificial" rules and conventions of his neoclassic predecessors. "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree," Keats wrote, "it had better not come at all." The philosophical-minded Coleridge opposed to neoclassic rules, imposed by the poet from without, the concept of the organic "laws" of the *Imagination*: each poetic work, like a growing plant, evolves according to its inherent principles into its final organic form.

(3) To an extraordinary degree external nature—the landscape, together with its flora and fauna—became a persistent subject of poetry, and was de-

scribed with an accuracy and sensuous nuance unprecedented in earlier writers. It is a mistake, however, to describe romantic poets as simply "nature poets." While many major poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge—and to a lesser extent by Shelley and Keats—set out from and return to an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape, the outer scene is not presented for its own sake, but only as a stimulus for the poet to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking. The important romantic poems are in fact poems of feelingful meditation about central human problems. Wordsworth said that it is "the Mind of Man" which is "my haunt, and the main region of my song."

(4) Neoclassic poetry was about other people, but much of romantic poetry represented the poets themselves, either directly, as in Wordsworth's *Prelude* and a number of romantic lyric poems, or in altered but recognizable form, as in Byron's *Childe Harold.* In prose we find a parallel vogue in the revealingly personal essays of Lamb and Hazlitt and in a number of spiritual and intellectual autobiographies—De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* and Carlyle's fictionalized *Sartor Resartus.* And whether romantic subjects were the poets themselves or someone else, they were no longer part of an organized society but, typically, solitary figures engaged in a long—and sometimes infinitely elusive—quest; often they were social nonconformists or outcasts. Many important romantic works had as protagonist the rebel, whether for good or ill: Prometheus, Cain, the Wandering Jew, the Satanic hero-villain, or the great outlaw.

(5) What seemed the infinite promise of the French Revolution fostered the sense in writers of the romantic period that theirs was a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities. Many writers viewed a person as a being of limitless aspiration toward the infinite good envisioned by the poet's faculty of imagination. "Our destiny," Wordsworth says in a moment of insight in *The Prelude,* "our being's heart and home, / Is with infinitude, and only there," and our desire is for "something evermore about to be." "Less than everything," Blake announced, "cannot satisfy man." Humanity's unquenchable aspirations beyond its limits, which to the neoclassic moralist had been its tragic error, now became humanity's glory and triumph over the pettiness of circumstance. In a parallel way, the earlier judgment that the highest art is the perfect achievement of limited aims gave way to a dissatisfaction with inherited rules and imposed restrictions. According to a number of romantic writers, the highest art consists in an endeavor beyond finite human possibility; as a result, neoclassical satisfaction in the perfectly accomplished, because limited, enterprise was replaced by a preference for the glory of the imperfect, in which the artist's very failure attested to the grandeur of his aim. Romantic writers once more entered into competition with their greatest predecessors in audacious long poems in the most exacting genres: Wordsworth's *Prelude* (a re-rendering, in the form of a spiritual autobiography, of the themes of Milton's *Paradise Lost*); Blake's visionary and prophetic epics; Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (emulating Greek drama); Keats's Miltonic epic, *Hyperion;* and Byron's ironic conspectus of all modern European civilization, *Don Juan.*

empty of on self.



See *Enlightenment,* and refer to: R. S. Crane, "Neoclassical Criticism," in *Dictionary of World Literature,* ed. Joseph T. Shipley (revised 1970); A. O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948); James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (1948); W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* (1948); Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961); René Wellek, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History" and "Romanticism Re-examined," in *Concepts of Criticism* (1963); Northrope Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1963); and *A Study of English Romanticism* (1968); M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), and *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971); Hugh Honour, *Neo-classism* (1969), and *Romanticism* (1979), which stress the visual arts. A useful collection of essays that define or discuss romanticism is Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe, ed., *Romanticism: Points of View* (revised 1970).

**New Criticism.** This term became current after the publication of John Crowe Ransom's book, *The New Criticism* (1941). It has come to be applied to a widespread tendency in American criticism, deriving in part from various elements in I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Science and Poetry* (1926), and from the critical essays of T. S. Eliot, and directed against literary critics' prevailing concern with the lives and psychology of authors and with literary history. Notable critics in this mode are Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren; their textbook, *Understanding Poetry,* first published in 1938, did much to make the New Criticism the reigning point of view in American colleges, and even in high schools, for some two decades. Other prominent writers who, despite many individual differences, are often identified as New Critics are Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, and William K. Wimsatt, Jr. An important English writer who shares some critical tenets and practices with these Americans is F. R. Leavis.

The New Critics differ from one another in many ways, but the following points of view and procedures are common to many of them: (1) A poem, it is held, should be treated as such—in Eliot's words, "primarily as poetry and not another thing"—and should be regarded as an independent and self-sufficient object. The first law of criticism, John Crowe Ransom said, "is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object" and shall recognize "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake." (See *objective criticism.*) New Critics warn the reader against critical modes which depart from the object itself as the *Intentional Fallacy* and the *Affective Fallacy;* and in analyzing and evaluating a particular work, they usually eschew recourse to the biography of the author, to the social conditions at the time of its production, or to its psychological and moral effects on the reader; they also tend to minimize recourse to the history of literary genres and subject matter. (2) The distinctive procedure of the new critic is explication, or close reading: the detailed and subtle analysis of the complex interrelations and *Ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the component elements within a work. "Explication de texte" has long been a formal proce-

(1949); M. H. Abrams, "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures," in *English Institute Essays,* ed. Alan S. Downer (1952); and for a more general treatment, Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction* (revised 1973).

**Poetic Justice** was a term coined by Thomas Rymer, an English critic of the latter seventeenth century, to signify the distribution of earthly rewards and punishments at the close of a literary work in proportion to the virtue or vice of the various characters. Rymer's assumption was that a poem (in a sense which includes dramatic tragedy) is a realm of its own, and should be governed by its own high principles of *Decorum* and morality, and not by the way things work out in the real world. Few major critics or writers since Rymer's day have acceded to this principle; it would, of course, destroy the possibility of tragic suffering, which exceeds what the protagonist has merited by his *tragic flaw.*

See Introduction to *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer,* ed. Curt A. Zimansky (1956); M. A. Quinlan, *Poetic Justice in the Drama* (1912).

**Poetic License.** Dryden defined poetic license as "the liberty which poets have assumed to themselves, in all ages, of speaking things in verse which are beyond the severity of prose." In its most common sense the term is confined to *diction* alone, to justify the poet's departure from standard prose in matters such as grammar, word order, the use of archaic or new-coined words, and the conventional use of "eye rhymes" (wind–bind, daughter–laughter). The degree and kinds of freedom allowed to poets have varied according to the conventions of each age, but in every case the justification of the freedom lies in the success of the effect. The great opening sentence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* departs from the colloquial prose of his time in the choice and order of words, in idiom and figurative construction, and in grammar, in order to achieve a distinctive mode of language and grandeur of announcement commensurate with his great subject and the epic form.

In a wider sense "poetic license" is applied to all the ways in which a poet is held to be free to violate the ordinary norms of speech and of literal truth, including the use of meter and rhyme and the use of fiction and myth. A special case is **anachronism**—the placing of an event or person or thing outside of its era. Shakespeare dressed his Cleopatra in corsets and used a clock to stroke the time in *Julius Caesar.* Another case is the poet's departure from geographical or historical fact, whether from ignorance or design. It does not diminish our delight in the work that Shakespeare attributed a seacoast to Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale,* or that Keats, in writing "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," ignorantly made Cortez instead of Balboa the discoverer of the Pacific Ocean.

**Point of View** signifies the way a story gets told—the mode or perspective established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting, and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction. The question of point of view has always been a practical concern of the novelist, and there have been a number of scattered observations on the matter in critical writings since the eighteenth century. Since Henry James's Prefaces to his various novels, however—collected as *The Art of the Novel* in 1934—and Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1926), which codified and expanded upon James's comments, point of view has become a dominant concern of modern theorists of the novelist's art.



Authors have developed many different ways to present a story, and many extended works employ several ways within the single narrative. The simplified classification below, however, is widely recognized and will serve as a useful preliminary frame of reference for analyzing traditional types of narration. It establishes a broad division between third-person and first-person narratives, then divides third-person narratives into subclasses according to the degree and kind of freedom or limitation which the author assumes in getting the material of his story before the reader. In a **third-person narrative,** the **narrator** is someone outside the story who refers to all the characters in the story proper by name, or as "he," "she," "they." Thus Fielding's narrator begins *Tom Jones:* "In that part of the western division of this kingdom which is commonly called Somersetshire, there lately lived, and perhaps still lives, a gentleman whose name was Allworthy. . . ." In a **first-person narrative,** the narrator speaks as "I," and is himself a character in the story. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* begins: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll really want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap. . . ."

(I) Third-person points of view:

(1) The **omniscient point of view.** This is a common term for the *Convention* in a work of fiction that the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents and events; that he is free to move as he will in time and place, and to shift from character to character, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their speech and actions; and also that he has privileged access to a character's thoughts and feelings and motives, as well as to his overt speech and actions.

Within this mode, the **intrusive narrator** is one who not only reports but freely comments on his characters, evaluating their actions and motives and expressing his views about human life in general; ordinarily, all the omniscient narrator's reports and judgments are to be taken as authoritative, hence to establish what counts as the facts within the fictional world. This is the fashion in which many of the greatest novelists have written, including Fielding, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Hardy, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. (In Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* the intrusive narrator goes so far as to interpolate essays suggested by the subject matter of the novels.) Alternatively, the omniscient narrator may be **unintrusive,** or **impersonal,** or **objective:** like Flaubert in *Madame Bovary,* he for the most part describes, reports, or "shows" the action in dramatic scenes, without introducing his own comments or judg-

ments. Examples of the unintrusive narrator, who gives up even the privilege of access to inner feelings and motives, are to be found in a number of Hemingway's short stories; for example, "The Killers," and "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." (See *showing and telling,* under *Character.*) For an extreme use of impersonal showing, see the comment on Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy,* under *Novel.*

(2) The **limited point of view.** The narrator tells the story in the third person, but confines himself to what is experienced, thought, and felt by a single character, or at most by a very limited number of characters, within the story. Henry James, who refined this narrative mode, described such a selected character as his "focus," or "mirror," or "center of consciousness." In a number of James's later works all the events and actions are represented as they unfold before, and filter to the reader through, the particular consciousness of one of his characters; for example, Strether in *The Ambassadors* or Maisie in *What Maisie Knew.*

Later writers developed this technique into *Stream of Consciousness* narration, in which we are presented with outer observations only as they impinge on the current of thought, memory, and feeling which constitutes the observer's total awareness. The limitation of point of view represented both by James's "center of consciousness" narration and by the "stream-of-consciousness" narration sometimes used by Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner, and others, is often said to exemplify the "self-effacing author," or "objective narration," more effectively than does the use of an unintrusive but omniscient narrator. For in the latter instance, the reader remains aware that someone, or some outside voice, is telling us about what is going on. However, the alternative mode, in which the point of view is limited to the consciousness of a character within the story itself, aims at giving the reader the illusion that he participates in experiencing events that simply evolve before his eyes. For a subtle analysis, however, of the way even an author who restricts himself to a single character as his center of consciousness manifests his own judgments on people and events, and also controls the judgments of the reader, see Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors;* An Explication," reprinted in James' *The Ambassadors* (Norton Critical Edition, 1964).

(II) First-person points of view:

This mode, insofar as it is consistently carried out, naturally limits the point of view to what the first-person narrator himself knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters. We distinguish between the narrative "I" who is a fortuitous witness of the matters he relates (Marlow in *Heart of Darkness,* and other works by Conrad); or who is a minor or peripheral participant in the story (Ishmael in Melville's *Moby-Dick,* Nick in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*); or who is himself the central character in the story (Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* Dickens' *Great Expectations,* Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). For a special case of first person narrative, see *epistolary novel.*

Two other frequently discussed narrative tactics, which cut across diverse points of view, need to be mentioned:



The **self-conscious narrator** is one who shows himself to be aware that he is composing a work of fictional art and takes the reader into his confidence about the various problems involved, or in some way flaunts the discrepancies between its artifice and the reality it depicts. This can be done either seriously (Fielding's narrator in *Tom Jones* and Marcel in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*) or for comic purposes (Tristram in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and the narrator of Byron's *Don Juan*), or for purposes which are not clearly either serious or comic (Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus,* Nabokov's *Pale Fire*). See Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (1975).

The **fallible** or **unreliable narrator** is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he narrates do not coincide with the implicit opinions and norms manifested by the author, and which the author expects the reader to share with him. Henry James made repeated use of the narrator whose excessive innocence, or oversophistication, or moral obtuseness, makes him a flawed and distorting "center of consciousness" in the work. The result is an elaborate structure of ironies which, in some instances, frustrate the reader because he lacks sufficient clues to determine what the author intended as the facts of the matter, and standards by which these facts are to be interpreted and judged. (See *Irony.*) Examples of James' use of a fallible narrator are his stories "The Aspern Papers" and "The Liar." *The Sacred Fount* and *The Turn of the Screw* are works by James in which the clues for correcting the fallible narrator seem inadequate, so that the facts and evaluations intended by the author remain problematic. See, for example, the extraordinarily diverse critical interpretations collected in *A Casebook on Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw,"* ed. Gerald Willen (1960), and in *The Turn of the Screw,* ed. Robert Kimbrough (Norton Critical Edition, 1966). The critic Tzvetan Todorov, however, has classified *The Turn of the Screw* as an instance of **fantastic literature,** which requires the reader to remain in a state of uncertainty as to whether the events are to be explained by reference to natural or to supernatural causes. (*The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* translated Richard Howard, 1973.)

See *Fiction* and *Persona, Tone, and Voice.* On point of view, in addition to the writings by James and Lubbock mentioned above, refer to: Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," *Publications of the Modern Language Association,* LXX (1955); Leon Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (revised 1964), Chaps. 3–4; Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); Franz Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel,* translated James P. Pusack (1971); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1980).

**Pre-Raphaelites.** In 1848 a group of English artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Millais, organized the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." The aim was to replace the reigning academic style of painting by a return to the truthfulness, simplicity, and spirit of devotion which these artists found in Italian painting before the time of Raphael (1483–1520) and the high Renaissance. The ideals of this group were taken over by a literary movement which included D. G. Rossetti himself (who was a poet as well as a painter), his sister Christina Rossetti, William Morris, and Algernon Swinburne.

of in Latin, produced under the auspices of the various trade guilds, and acted on stages set outside the church. The miracle plays written in England are of unknown authorship. In the fourteenth century there developed in cities such as York and Chester the practice, on the feast of Corpus Christi (sixty days after Easter), of putting on great "cycles" of such plays, representing crucial events in the biblical history of mankind from the Creation and Fall of man, through the Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ, to the Last Judgment. The precise way that the plays were staged is a matter of scholarly debate, but it is widely agreed that each scene was played on a separate "pageant wagon" which was drawn, in sequence, to one after another fixed station in a city, at each of which some parts of the cycle were enacted. The biblical texts were greatly expanded in these plays, and the unknown authors added scenes, comic as well as serious, of their own invention. For examples of the variety, vitality, and power of these dramas, see the Wakefield "Noah" and "Second Shepherd's Play," and the Brome "Abraham and Isaac."

**Morality plays** were dramatized *allegories* of a representative Christian life in the plot form of a quest for salvation, in which the crucial events are temptations, sinning, and the climactic confrontation with death. The usual protagonist represents Mankind, or Everyman; among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices, and Death, as well as angels and demons who contest for the prize of the soul of Mankind. A character known as the **Vice** often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic; he is regarded by some literary historians as a precursor both of the cynical, ironic villain and of some of the comic figures in Elizabethan drama, including Shakespeare's Falstaff. The best-known morality play is the fifteenth-century *Everyman*, which is still given an occasional performance; other notable examples, written in the same century, are *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Mankind*.

**Interlude** (Latin, "between the play") is a term applied to a variety of short stage entertainments, such as secular *farces* and witty dialogues with a religious or political point. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these little dramas were performed by bands of professional actors; it is believed that they were often put on between the courses of a feast or between the acts of a longer play. Among the better-known interludes are John Heywood's farces of the first half of the sixteenth century, especially *The Four PP* (that is, the Palmer, the Pardoner, the 'Pothecary, and the Peddler, who engage in a lying contest), and *Johan Johan the Husband, Tyb His Wife, and Sir John the Priest.*

Until the middle of the present century, concern with medieval drama was scholarly rather than critical. Since that time a number of studies have dealt with the relations of the texts to the religious and secular culture of medieval Europe, and have stressed the artistic excellence and power of the plays themselves. See Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (2 vols., 1933); Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (1955); Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England* (1961); T. W. Craik, The *Tudor Interlude* (1962); V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (1966); Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (1972); Jerome Taylor and Alar Nelson, eds., *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual* (1972), Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play* (1975); David Bevington, *From "Mankind" to Marlowe* (1962).



**Modernism and Postmodernism.** The term **modernism** is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914–18). The specific features signified by "modernism" (or by the adjective **modernist**) vary with the user, but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general. Important intellectual precursors of modernism, in this sense, are thinkers who had questioned the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality, and also traditional ways of conceiving the human self—thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and James G. Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) stressed the correspondence between central Christian tenets and pagan, often barbaric, myths and rituals.

Literary historians locate the beginning of the modernist revolt as far back as the 1890s, but most agree that what is called **high modernism**, marked by an unexampled range and rapidity of change, came after the first World War. The year 1922 alone was signalized by the simultaneous appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation as James Joyce's *Ulysses,* T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room,* as well as many other experimental works of literature. The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world. T. S. Eliot wrote in a review of Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1923 that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." Like Joyce and like Ezra Pound in his *Cantos,* Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it to a lost order and integration that had been based on the religion and myths of the cultural past. In *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, Eliot replaced the standard syntactic flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substituted for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a deliberate dislocation of parts, in which very diverse components are related by connections that are left to the reader to discover, or invent. Major works of modernist fiction, following Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and his even more radical *Finnegans Wake* (1939), subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness and other innovative modes of narration. Gertrude Stein—often linked with Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Woolf as a trail-blazing modernist—experimented with **automatic writing**

(writing that has been freed from control by the conscious, purposive mind) and other modes that achieved their effects by violating the norms of standard English syntax and sentence structure. Among other European and American writers who are central representatives of modernism are the novelists Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, André Gide, Franz Kafka, Dorothy Richardson, and William Faulkner; the poets Stéphane Mallarmé, William Butler Yeats, Rainier Maria Rilke, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens; and the dramatists August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and Bertolt Brecht. Their new forms of literary construction and rendering had obvious parallels in the violation of representational conventions in the artistic movements of *expressionism* and *surrealism,* in the modernist paintings and sculpture of Cubism, Futurism, and Abstract Expressionism, and in the violations of standard conventions of melody, harmony, and rhythm by the modernist musical composers Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and their radical followers.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon called the **avant-garde** (a military metaphor: "advance-guard"); that is, a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to "make it new." By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of social discourse, they set out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matter. Frequently, avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture. See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968). Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) is a neo-Marxist analysis both of modernism and of its distinctive cultural formation, the avant-garde.

The term **postmodernism** is often applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939–45), when the effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation. Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the countertraditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by recourse to the models of "mass culture" in film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. Many of the works of postmodern literature—by Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, Roland Barthes, and many others—so blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics. And these literary anomalies are paralleled in other arts by phenomena like pop art, op art, the musical compositions of John Cage, and the films of Jean-Luc Godard and other directors.

An undertaking in some postmodernist writings—prominently in Samuel Beckett and other authors of the literature of the *absurd*—is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying "abyss," or "void," or "nothingness" on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended. Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with the movement known as poststructuralism in linguistic and literary theory; poststructuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous inquirer, into a play of conflicting indeterminacies, or else to show that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the ideology, or of the relations and constructions of power, in contemporary society. (See *poststructuralism.*)

For some postmodernist developments in literature, see literature of the *absurd, antihero, antinovel, Beat writers, concrete poetry, metafiction, new novel.* On modernism and postmodernism, refer to Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (1965); Robert M. Adams, *Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void during the Nineteenth Century* (1966); Irving Howe, ed., *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts* (1967); Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (1968); Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (1969); Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight* (1971); Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (1971); David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (1976); Clement Greenberg, *The Notion of Post-Modern* (1980); Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (2d. ed., 1982); J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (trans., 1984); Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism* (1985); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (1991). On modern and postmodern drama: Austin Quigley, *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds* (1985); William B. Worthen, *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theater* (1992); Debora Geis, *Postmodern Theatric(k)s* (1993).

**Motif and Theme.** A **motif** is a conspicuous element, such as a type of incident, device, reference, or formula, which occurs frequently in works of literature. The "loathly lady" who turns out to be a beautiful princess is a common motif in *folklore,* and the man fatally bewitched by a fairy lady is a motif adopted from folklore in Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1820). Common in lyric poems is the **ubi sunt motif,** the "where-are" formula for lamenting the vanished past ("Where are the snows of yesteryear?"), and also the *carpe diem* motif, whose nature is sufficiently indicated by Robert Herrick's title "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time." An **aubade**—from the Old French "alba," meaning dawn—is an early-morning song whose usual motif is an urgent request to a beloved to wake up. A familiar example is Shakespeare's "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings."

An older term for recurrent poetic concepts or formulas is the **topos** (Greek for "a commonplace"); Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953), treats many of the ancient literary topoi. The term "motif," or else the German **leitmotif** (a guiding motif), is also applied to the

*Forms of Ruin* (1981); Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760–1830* (1982); Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (1983); Marilyn Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (1988); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (trans., 1988); Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (1990). Hugh Honour, in his books on *Neo-classicism* (1969) and on *Romanticism* (1979), stresses the visual arts. A collection of essays that define or discuss romanticism is Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe, eds., *Romanticism: Points of View* (rev., 1975). In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), Stuart Curran stresses the relationship of innovative Romantic forms to the traditional poetic genres.

**New Criticism.** This term, set current by the publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, came to be applied to a theory and practice that was prominent in American literary criticism until late in the 1960s. The movement derived in considerable part from elements in I. A Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) and from the critical essays of T. S. Eliot. It opposed the prevailing interest of scholars, critics, and teachers of that era in the biographies of authors, the social context of literature, and literary history by insisting that the proper concern of literary criticism is not with the external circumstances or effects or historical position of a work, but with a detailed consideration of the work itself as an independent entity. Notable critics in this mode were the southerners Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, whose textbooks *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) did much to make the New Criticism the predominant method of teaching literature in American colleges, and even in high schools, for the next two or three decades. Other prominent writers of that time—in addition to Ransom, Brooks, and Warren—who are often identified as New Critics are Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, and William K. Wimsatt.

A very influential English critic, F. R. Leavis, in turning his attention from background, sources, and biography to the detailed analysis of "literary texts themselves," shared some of the concepts of the New Critics and their analytic focus on what he called "the words on the page." He differed from his American counterparts, however, in his emphasis on the great literary works as a concrete and life-affirming enactment of moral and cultural values; he stressed also the essential role in education of what he called "the Great Tradition" of English literature in advancing the values of culture and "civilization" against the antagonistic forces in modern life. See F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936); *Education and the University* (1943, 2d ed. 1948); *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); also Anne Sampson, *F. R. Leavis* (1992).

The New Critics differ from one another in many ways, but the following points of view and procedures are common to many of them.



(1) A poem, it is held, should be treated as such—in Eliot's words, "primarily as poetry and not another thing"—and should therefore be regarded as an independent and self-sufficient verbal object. The first law of criticism, John Crowe Ransom said, "is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object" and shall recognize "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake." (See *objective criticism.*) New Critics warn the reader against critical practices which divert attention from the poem itself (see *intentional fallacy* and *affective fallacy*). In analyzing and evaluating a particular work, they eschew reference to the biography and temperament of the author, to the social conditions at the time of its production, or to its psychological and moral effects on the reader; they also tend to minimize recourse to the place of the work in the history of literary forms and subject matter. Because of this critical focus on the literary work in isolation from its attendant circumstances and effects, the New Criticism is often classified as a type of critical *formalism.*

(2) The principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language whose attributes are defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of practical and logical discourse, and the explicative procedure is to analyze the meanings and interactions of words, *figures of speech,* and *symbols.* The emphasis is on the "organic unity," in a successful literary work, of overall structure and verbal meanings, and we are warned against separating the two by what Cleanth Brooks has called "the heresy of paraphrase."

(3) The distinctive procedure of a New Critic is **explication,** or **close reading:** the detailed analysis of the complex interrelations and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work. "Explication de texte" (stressing all kinds of information relevant to the full understanding of a word or passage) has long been a formal procedure for teaching literature in French schools, but the kind of explicative analyses of verbal interactions characteristic of the New Criticism derives from such books as I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929) and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

(4) The distinction between literary *genres,* although acknowledged, does not play an essential role in the New Criticism. The essential components of any work of literature, whether lyric, narrative, or dramatic, are conceived to be words, images, and symbols rather than character, thought, and plot. These linguistic elements, whatever the genre, are often said to be organized around a central and humanly significant *theme,* and to manifest high literary value to the degree that they manifest *"tension," "irony,"* and *"paradox"* in achieving a "reconciliation of diverse impulses" or an "equilibrium of opposed forces." The form of a work, whether or not it has characters and plot, is said to be primarily a "structure of meanings," which evolve into an integral

and freestanding unity mainly through a play and counterplay of "thematic imagery" and "symbolic action."

The basic orientation and modes of analysis in the New Criticism were adapted to the **contextual criticism** of Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger. Krieger defined contextualism as "the claim that the poem is a tight, compelling, finally closed context," which prevents "our escape to the world of reference and action beyond," and requires that we "judge the work's efficacy as an aesthetic object." (See Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry,* 1956, and *Theory of Criticism,* 1976.) The revolutionary thrust of the mode had lost much of its force by the 1960s, when it gave way to various newer theories of criticism, but it has left a deep and enduring mark on the criticism and teaching of literature, in its primary emphasis on the individual work and in the variety and subtlety of the devices that it made available for analyzing its internal relations. *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism,* ed. Chavira Hošek and Patricia Parker (1985), is a collection of *structuralist, poststructuralist,* and other essays which—often in express opposition to the New Criticism—exemplify the diverse newer modes of "close reading"; some of these essays emphasize that competing forces within the language of a lyric poem preclude the possibility of a unified meaning.

Central instances of the theory and practice of New Criticism are Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), and W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (1954). The enterprises of New Criticism are privileged over alternative approaches to literature in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3d ed., 1964), which became a standard reference book in the graduate study of literature. Robert W. Stallman's *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920–1948* (1949) is a convenient collection of essays in this critical mode; the literary journal *The Explicator* (1942 ff.), devoted to close reading, is a characteristic product of its approach to literary texts, as are the items listed in *Poetry Explication: A Checklist of Interpretation Since 1924 of British and American Poems Past and Present,* ed. Joseph M. Kuntz (3d ed., 1980). See also W. K. Wimsatt, ed., *Explication as Criticism* (1963); the review of the movement by René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism,* Vol. 6 (1986); and the spirited retrospective defense of New Criticism by its chief exponent, Cleanth Brooks, "In Search of the New Criticism" (1983), reprinted in Brooks, *Community, Religion, and Literature,* 1995). For critiques of the theory and methods of the New Criticism, see R. S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern* (1952), and *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (1953); Gerald Graff, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1993); Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges* (1997).

**New Historicism,** since the early 1980s, has been the accepted name for a mode of literary study that its proponents oppose to the *formalism* they attribute both to the *New Criticism* and to the critical *deconstruction* that followed it. In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. This is not simply a return to an earlier kind of literary scholarship, for the views and practices of the new historicists differ markedly from those of former scholars who had adverted to social and intellectual history as a "background" against which to set a work of literature as an independent entity, or had viewed literature as a "reflection" of the worldview characteristic of a period. Instead, new historicists conceive of a literary text as "situated" within the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes.



What is most distinctive in the new mode of historical study is mainly the result of concepts and practices of literary analysis and interpretation that have been assimilated from various recent poststructural theorists (see *poststructuralism*). Especially prominent are (1) The views of the revisionist Marxist thinker, Louis Althusser, that ideology manifests itself in different ways in the discourse of each of the semi-autonomous institutions of an era, including literature, and also that ideology operates covertly to form and position the users of language as the "subjects" in a discourse, in a way that in fact "subjects" them—that is, subordinates them—to the interests of the ruling classes; see *ideology* under *Marxist criticism.* (2) Michel Foucault's view that the *discourse* of an era, instead of reflecting preexisting entities and orders, brings into being the concepts, oppositions, and hierarchies of which it speaks; that these elements are both products and propagators of "power," or social forces; and that as a result, the particular discursive formations of an era determine what is at the time accounted "knowledge" and "truth," as well as what is considered to be humanly normal as against what is considered to be criminal, or insane, or sexually deviant. (3) The central concept in *deconstructive* criticism that all texts involve modes of signification that war against each other, merged with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic nature of many literary texts, in the sense that they incorporate a number of conflicting voices that represent diverse social classes; see *dialogic criticism.* (4) Recent developments in cultural anthropology, especially Clifford Geertz' view that a culture is constituted by distinctive sets of signifying systems, and his use of what he calls **thick descriptions**—the close analysis, or "reading," of a particular social production or event so as to recover the meanings it has for the people involved in it, as well as to discover, within the cultural system, the general patterns of conventions, codes, and modes of thinking that invest the item with those meanings.

In an oft-quoted phrase, Louis Montrose described the new historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history." That is, history is conceived not to be a set of fixed, objective facts but, like the literature with which it interacts, a text which itself needs to be interpreted. Any text, on the other hand, is conceived as a discourse which, although it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called **representations**—that is, verbal formations which are the

when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy." Two of Ruskin's examples are the lines

> The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould
> Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold,

and Coleridge's description in "Christabel" of

> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can.

These passages, Ruskin says, however beautiful, are false and "morbid." Only in the greatest poets is the use of the pathetic fallacy valid, and then only at those rare times when it would be inhuman to resist the pressure of powerful feelings to humanize the perceived fact.

Ruskin's contention would make not only his *romantic* predecessors but just about all poets, including Shakespeare, "morbid." "Pathetic fallacy" is now used, for the most part, as a neutral name for a very common phenomenon in descriptive poetry, in which the ascription of human traits to inanimate nature is less formal and more indirect than in the figure called *personification.*

See Josephine Miles, *Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century* (1942); Harold Bloom, ed., *The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin* (1965), Introduction and pp. 62–78.

**Pathos** in Greek meant the passions, or suffering, or deep feeling generally, as distinguished from **ethos**, a person's overall disposition or character. In modern criticism, however, pathos is applied in a much more limited way to a scene or passage that is designed to evoke the feelings of tenderness, pity, or sympathetic sorrow from the audience. In the *Victorian* era a number of prominent writers exploited pathos beyond the endurance of many readers today—examples are the rendering of the death of Little Nell in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* and of the death of Little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* (See *sentimentalism.*) To many modern readers, the greatest passages do not dwell on the details of suffering but achieve the effect of pathos by understatement and suggestion. Examples are the speech of King Lear when he is briefly reunited with Cordelia (IV. vii. 59 ff.), beginning

> Pray, do not mock me.
> I am a very foolish fond old man,

and William Wordsworth's terse revelation of the grief of the old father for the loss of his son in *Michael* (1800), 11. 465–66:

> Many and many a day he thither went,
> And never lifted up a single stone.

**Periods of American Literature.** The division of American literature into convenient historical segments, or "periods," lacks the degree of consensus among literary scholars that we find with reference to English literature; see *Periods of English Literature.* The many syllabi of college surveys reprinted in *Reconstructing American Literature* (ed. Paul Lauter, 1983), and the essays in *Redefining American Literary History,* ed. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward (1990), demonstrate how variable are the temporal divisions and their names, especially since the recent efforts to do justice to literature written by women and by ethnic minorities. A number of recent historians, anthologists, and teachers of American literature simply divide their survey into dated sections, without affixing period names. A prominent tendency, however, is to recognize the importance of major wars in marking significant changes in literature. This tendency, as the scholar Cushing Strout has remarked, "suggests that there is an order in American political history more visible and compelling than that indicated by specifically literary or intellectual categories."



The following divisions of American literary history recognize the importance assigned by many literary historians to the Revolutionary War (1775–81), the Civil War (1861–65), World War I (1914–18), and World War II (1939–45). Under these broad divisions are listed some of the more widely used terms to distinguish periods and subperiods of American literature. These terms, it will be noted, are diverse in kind; they may signify a span of time, or else a form of political organization, or a prominent intellectual or imaginative mode, or a predominant literary form.

**1607–1775.** This overall era, from the founding of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the American Revolution, is often called the **Colonial Period.** Writings were for the most part religious, practical, or historical. Notable among the seventeenth-century writers of journals and narratives concerning the founding and early history of some of the colonies were William Bradford, John Winthrop, and the theologian Cotton Mather. In the following century Jonathan Edwards was a major philosopher as well as theologian, and Benjamin Franklin an early American master of lucid and cogent prose. Not until 1937, when Edward Taylor's writings were first published from manuscript, was Taylor discovered to have been an able religious poet in the *metaphysical* style of the English devotional poets Herbert and Crashaw. Anne Bradstreet was the chief Colonial poet of secular and domestic as well as religious subjects.

The publication in 1773 of *Poems on Various Subjects* by Phillis Wheatley, then a nineteen-year-old slave who had been born in Africa, inaugurated the long and distinguished, but until recently neglected, line of **Black writers** (or by what has come to be the preferred name, **African-American writers**) in America. The complexity and diversity of the African-American cultural heritage—both Western and African, oral and written, slave and free, Judeo-Christian and pagan, plantation and urban, integrationist and Black nationalist—have effected tensions and fusions that, over the course of time, have produced a highly innovative and distinctive literature, as well as musical forms that have come to be considered America's unique contribution to the Western musical tradition. See J. Saunders Redding, *To Make a Poet Black* (1939; reissued 1986); Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Black Literature in America* (1971); Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987); Henry L. Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black* (1987) and ed. *Black Literature and Literary Theory*

(1984); also Henry L. Gates Jr., Nellie Y. McKay, and others, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* (1997).

The period between the Stamp Act of 1765 and 1790 is sometimes distinguished as the **Revolutionary Age.** It was the time of Thomas Paine's influential revolutionary tracts; of Thomas Jefferson's "Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom," "Declaration of Independence," and many other writings; of *The Federalist Papers* in support of the Constitution, most notably those by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison; and of the patriotic and satiric poems by Philip Freneau and Joel Barlow.

**1775–1865.** The years 1775–1828, the **Early National Period** ending with the triumph of Jacksonian democracy in 1828, signalized the emergence of a national imaginative literature, including the first American comedy (Royall Tyler's *The Contrast,* 1787), the earliest American novel (William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* 1789), and the establishment in 1815 of the first enduring American magazine, *The North American Review.* Washington Irving achieved international fame with his essays and stories; Charles Brockden Brown wrote distinctively American versions of the *Gothic novel* of mystery and terror; the career of James Fenimore Cooper, the first major American novelist, was well launched; and William Cullen Bryant and Edgar Allan Poe wrote poetry that was relatively independent of English precursors. In the year 1760 was published the first of a long series of **slave narratives** and autobiographies written by *African-American* slaves who had escaped or been freed. Most of these were published between 1830 and 1865, including Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

The span 1828–1865 from the Jacksonian era to the Civil War, often identified as the **Romantic Period in America** (see *neoclassic and romantic*), marks the full coming of age of a distinctively American literature. This period is sometimes known as the **American Renaissance,** the title of F. O. Matthiessen's influential book (1941) about its outstanding writers, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne (see also *symbolism*); it is also sometimes called the **Age of Transcendentalism,** after the philosophical and literary movement, centered on Emerson, that was dominant in New England (see *Transcendentalism*). In all the major literary genres except drama, writers produced works of an originality and excellence not exceeded in later American history. Emerson, Thoreau, and the early feminist Margaret Fuller shaped the ideas, ideals, and literary aims of many contemporary and later American writers. It was the age not only of continuing writings by William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper, but also of the novels and short stories of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the southern novelist William Gilmore Simms; of the poetry of Poe, John Greenleaf Whittier, Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and the most innovative and influential of all American poets, Walt Whitman; and of the beginning of distinguished American criticism in the essays of Poe, Simms, and James Russell Lowell. The tradition of *African-American* poetry by women was continued by Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, and the African-American novel was inaugurated by William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853) and by Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859).



**1865–1914.** The cataclysm of the bloody Civil War and the Reconstruction, followed by a burgeoning industrialism and urbanization in the North, profoundly altered the American sense of itself, and also American literary modes. 1865–1900 is often known as the **Realistic Period,** by reference to the novels by Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James, as well as by John W. DeForest, Harold Frederic, and the *African-American* novelist Charles W. Chesnutt. These works, though diverse, are often labeled "realistic" in contrast to the "romances" of their predecessors in prose fiction, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville (see *prose romance* and *realism*). Some realistic authors grounded their fiction in a regional milieu; these include (in addition to Mark Twain's novels on the Mississippi River region) Bret Harte in California, Sarah Orne Jewett in Maine, Mary Wilkins Freeman in Massachusetts, and George W. Cable and Kate Chopin in Louisiana. Chopin has become prominent as an early and major *feminist* novelist. Whitman continued writing poetry up to the last decade of the century, and (unknown to him and almost everyone else) was joined by Emily Dickinson; although only seven of Dickinson's more than a thousand short poems were published in her lifetime, she is now recognized as one of the most distinctive and eminent of American poets. Sidney Lanier published his experiments in versification based on the meters of music; the *African-American* author Paul Laurence Dunbar published both poems and novels between 1893 and 1905; and in the 1890s Stephen Crane, although he was only twenty-nine when he died, published short poems in free verse that anticipate the experiments of Ezra Pound and the *Imagists,* and wrote also the brilliantly innovative short stories and short novels that look forward to two later narrative modes, naturalism and impressionism. The years 1900–1914—although James, Howells, and Mark Twain were still writing, and Edith Wharton was publishing her earlier novels—are discriminated as the **Naturalistic Period,** in recognition of the powerful though sometimes crudely wrought novels by Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, which typically represent characters who are joint victims of their instinctual drives and of external sociological forces; see *naturalism.*

**1914–1939.** The era between the two world wars, marked also by the trauma of the great economic depression beginning in 1929, was that of the emergence of what is still known as "modern literature," which in America reached an eminence rivaling that of the American Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century; unlike most of the authors of that earlier period, however, the American modernists also achieved widespread international recognition and influence. (See *modernism.*) *Poetry* magazine, founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912, published many innovative authors. Among the notable poets were Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and e. e. cummings—authors who wrote in an unexampled variety of poetic modes. These included the *Imagism* of Amy Lowell, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle),

and others, the metric poems by Frost and the free-verse poems by Williams in the American vernacular, the formal and typographic experiments of cummings, the poetic naturalism of Jeffers, and the assimilation to their own distinctive uses by Pound and Eliot of the forms and procedures of French *symbolism,* merged with the intellectual and figurative methods of the English *metaphysical poets.* Among the major writers of prose fiction were Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and John Steinbeck. America produced in this period its first great dramatist in Eugene O'Neill, a well as a group of distinguished literary critics that included Van Wyck Brooks, Malcolm Cowley, T. S. Eliot, Edmund Wilson, and the irreverent and caustic H. L. Mencken.

The literary productions of this era are often subclassified in a variety of ways. The flamboyant and pleasure-seeking 1920s are sometimes referred to as "the Jazz Age," a title popularized by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922). The same decade was also the period of the Harlem Renaissance, which produced major writings in all the literary forms by Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, and many other *African-American* writers. (See *Harlem Renaissance.*)

Many prominent American writers of the decade following the end of World War I, disillusioned by their war experiences and alienated by what they perceived as the crassness of American culture and its "puritanical" repressions, are often tagged (in a term first applied by Gertrude Stein to young Frenchmen of the time) as the **Lost Generation.** A number of these writers became expatriates, moving either to London or to Paris in their quest for a richer literary and artistic milieu and a freer way of life. Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T. S. Eliot lived out their lives abroad, but most of the younger "exiles," as Malcolm Cowley called them (*Exile's Return,* 1934), came back to America in the 1930s. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* are novels that represent the mood and way of life of two groups of American expatriates. In "the radical '30s," the period of the Great Depression and of the economic and social reforms in the New Deal inaugurated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, some authors joined radical political movements, and many others dealt in their literary works with pressing social issues of the time—including, in the novel, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Thomas Wolfe, and John Steinbeck, and in the drama, Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, and Maxwell Anderson.

**1939 to the Present,** the **contemporary period.** World War II, and especially the disillusionment with Soviet Communism consequent upon the Moscow trials for alleged treason and Stalin's signing of the Russo-German pact with Hitler in 1939, largely ended the literary radicalism of the 1930s. A final blow to the very few writers who had maintained intellectual allegiance to Soviet Russia came in 1991 with the collapse of Russian Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For several decades the *New Criticism*—dominated by conservative southern writers, the **Agrarians,** who in the 1930s had championed a return from an industrial to an agricultural economy—



typified the prevailing critical tendency to isolate literature from the life of the author and from society and to conceive a work of literature, in formal terms, as an organic and autonomous entity (see John L. Stewart, *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians,* 1965). The eminent and influential critics Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling, however—as well as other critics grouped with them as the **New York Intellectuals,** including Philip Rahv, Alfred Kazin, and Irving Howe—continued through the 1960s to deal with a work of literature humanistically and historically, in the context of its author's life, temperament, and social milieu, and in terms of the work's moral and imaginative qualities and its consequences for society. See V. B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties,* 1988, chapter 4. (For a discussion of radically new developments in American literary theory and criticism in the 1970s and later, see *poststructuralism.*)

The 1950s, while often regarded in retrospect as a period of cultural conformity and complacency, was marked by the emergence of vigorous anti-establishment and anti-traditional literary movements: the *Beat writers* such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac; the American exemplars of the literature of the *absurd;* the **Black Mountain Poets,** Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan; and the **New York Poets** Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and John Ashbery. It was also a time of *confessional poetry* and the literature of extreme sexual candor, marked by the emergence of Henry Miller as a notable author (his autobiographical and fictional works, begun in the 1930s, had earlier been available only under the counter) and the writings of Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, and Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita* was published in 1955). The **counterculture** of the 1960s and early '70s continued some of these modes, but in a fashion made extreme and fevered by the rebellious youth movement and the vehement and sometimes violent opposition to the war in Vietnam; for an approving treatment of this movement, see Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969), and for a later retrospect, Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (1978). See *modernism and postmodernism* and for radical developments of this era in African-American literature, see *Black Arts Movement.*

Important American writers after World War II include, in prose fiction, Vladimir Nabokov (who emigrated to America in 1940), Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, Bernard Malamud, James Gould Cozzens, Saul Bellow, Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, E. L. Doctorow, and Cynthia Ozick; in poetry, Marianne Moore, Robert Penn Warren, Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, Richard Wilbur, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, A. R. Ammons, and John Ashberry; and in drama, Thornton Wilder, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and a number of more recent playwrights, including Sam Shepard, David Mamet, Tony Kushner, and Wendy Wasserstein. Many of the most innovative and distinguished literary work of the latter decades of the twentieth century have been written by writers who are often identified as belonging to one or another "minority," or **ethnic** literary group. (An "ethnic group" consists of individuals who are

distinguishable, within a majority cultural and social system, by shared characteristics such as race, religion, language, cultural modes, and national origin.) There is, however, much contention, both within and outside these groups, whether it is more just and enlightening to consider such writers simply as part of the American mainstream or to stress the identity of each writer as a participant in an ethnic culture with its distinctive subject matter, themes, and formal features. This is the era of the notable *African-American* novelists and essayists Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Albert Murray, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison; the poets Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou, and Rita Dove; and the dramatists Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson. It is also the era of the emergence of such prominent minority novelists as Leslie Marmon Silko (Native American); Oscar Hijuelos and Sandra Cisneros (Hispanic); and Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan (Chinese American). See Houston A. Baker, ed., *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian-American Literature for Teachers of American Literature* (1982).

The contemporary literary scene in America is crowded and varied, and these lists could readily be expanded. We must await the passage of time to determine which writers now active will emerge as enduringly major figures in the *canon* of American literature.

**Periods of English Literature.** For convenience of discussion, historians divide the continuity of English literature into segments of time that are called "periods." The exact number, dates, and names of these periods vary, but the list below conforms to widespread practice. The list is followed by a brief comment on each period, in chronological order.

450–1066 Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) Period
1066–1500 Middle English Period
1500–1660 The Renaissance (or Early Modern)
  1558–1603 Elizabethan Age
  1603–1625 Jacobean Age
  1625–1649 Caroline Age
  1649–1660 Commonwealth Period (or Puritan Interregnum)
1660–1785 The Neoclassical Period
  1660–1700 The Restoration
  1700–1745 The Augustan Age (or Age of Pope)
  1745–1785 The Age of Sensibility (or Age of Johnson)
1785–1830 The Romantic Period
1832–1901 The Victorian Period
  1848–1860 The Pre-Raphaelites
  1880–1901 Aestheticism and Decadence
1901–1914 The Edwardian Period
1910–1936 The Georgian Period
1914– The Modern Period
  1945– Postmodernism



The **Old English Period,** or the **Anglo-Saxon Period,** extended from the invasion of Celtic England by Germanic tribes (the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) in the first half of the fifth century to the conquest of England in 1066 by the Norman French under the leadership of William the Conqueror. Only after they had been converted to Christianity in the seventh century did the Anglo-Saxons, whose earlier literature had been oral, begin to develop a written literature. (See *oral formulaic poetry.*) A high level of culture and learning was soon achieved in various monasteries; the eighth-century churchmen Bede and Alcuin were major scholars who wrote in Latin, the standard language of international scholarship. The poetry written in the vernacular Anglo-Saxon, known also as Old English, included *Beowulf* (eighth century), the greatest of Germanic epic poems, and such lyric laments as "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "Deor," all of which, though composed by Christian writers, reflect the conditions of life in the pagan past. Caedmon and Cynewulf were poets who wrote on biblical and religious themes, and there survive a number of Old English lives of saints, sermons, and paraphrases of books of the Bible. Alfred the Great, a West Saxon king (871–99) who for a time united all the kingdoms of southern England against a new wave of Germanic invaders, the Vikings, was no less important as a patron of literature than as a warrior. He himself translated into Old English various books of Latin prose, supervised translations by other hands, and instituted the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a continuous record, year by year, of important events in England.

See H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (1912); S. B. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (1965); C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (1966).

**Middle English Period.** The four and a half centuries between the Norman Conquest in 1066, which effected radical changes in the language, life, and culture of England, and about 1500, when the standard literary language (deriving from the dialect of the London area) had become recognizably "modern English"—that is, similar to the language we speak and write today.

The span from 1100 to 1350 is sometimes discriminated as the **Anglo-Norman Period,** because the non-Latin literature of that time was written mainly in Anglo-Norman, the French dialect spoken by the invaders who had established themselves as the ruling class of England, and who shared a literary culture with French-speaking areas of mainland Europe. Among the important and influential works from this period are Marie de France's *Lais* (c.1180—which may have been written while Marie was at the royal court in England), Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (1225?–75?), and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* (the first Arthurian romance, c.1165) and *Yvain* (c.1177–81). When the native vernacular—descended from Anglo-Saxon, but with extensive lexical and syntactic elements assimilated from Anglo-Norman, and known as "middle English"—came into general literary use, it was at first mainly the vehicle for religious and homiletic writings. The first great age of primarily secular literature—rooted in the Anglo-Norman, French, Irish, and Welsh, as well as the native English

literature—was the second half of the fourteenth century. This was the age of Chaucer and John Gower, of William Langland's great religious and satirical poem *Piers Plowman,* and of the anonymous master who wrote four major poems in complex *alliterative meter,* including *Pearl,* an elegy, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* This last work is the most accomplished of the English *chivalric romances;* the most notable prose romance was Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur,* written a century later. The outstanding poets of the fifteenth century were the "Scottish Chaucerians," who included King James I of Scotland and Robert Henryson. The fifteenth century was more important for popular literature than for the artful literature addressed to the upper classes: it was the age of many excellent songs, secular and religious, and of *folk ballads,* as well as the flowering time of the *miracle* and *morality plays,* which were written and produced for the general public.

See W. L. Renwick and H. Orton, *The Beginnings of English Literature to Skelton* (rev., 1952); H. S. Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (1947); Edward Vasta, ed., *Middle English Survey: Critical Essays* (1965).

The **Renaissance**, 1500–1660. There is an increasing use by historians of the term *early modern* to denote this era: see the entry *Renaissance.*

**Elizabethan Age.** Strictly speaking, the period of the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603); the term "Elizabethan," however, is often used loosely to refer to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, even after the death of Elizabeth. This was a time of rapid development in English commerce, maritime power, and nationalist feeling—the defeat of the Spanish Armada occurred in 1588. It was a great (in drama the greatest) age of English literature—the age of Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, and many other extraordinary writers of prose and of dramatic, lyric, and narrative poetry. A number of scholars have looked back on this era as one of intellectual coherence and social order; an influential example was E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943). Recent historical critics, however, have emphasized its intellectual uncertainties and political and social conflicts; see *new historicism.*

**Jacobean Age.** The reign of James I (in Latin, "Jacobus"), 1603–25, which followed that of Queen Elizabeth. This was the period in prose writings of Bacon, John Donne's sermons, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy,* and the King James translation of the Bible. It was also the time of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and tragicomedies, and of major writings by other notable poets and playwrights including Donne, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, Lady Mary Wroth, Sir Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, John Webster, George Chapman, Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger, and Elizabeth Cary, whose notable biblical drama *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Faire Queene of Jewry* was the first long play by an Englishwoman to be published.

See Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (1934); Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (1945); C. V. Wedgewood, *Seventeenth Century English Literature* (1950).

**Caroline Age.** The reign of Charles I, 1625–49; the name is derived from "Carolus," the Latin version of "Charles." This was the time of the English



Civil War fought between the supporters of the king (known as "Cavaliers") and the supporters of Parliament (known as "Roundheads," from their custom of wearing their hair cut short). John Milton began his writing during this period; it was the age also of the religious poet George Herbert and of the prose writers Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne.

Associated with the court were the **Cavalier poets,** writers of witty and polished lyrics of courtship and gallantry. The group included Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, and Thomas Carew. Robert Herrick, although a country parson, is often classified with the Cavalier poets because, like them, he was a **Son of Ben**—that is, an admirer and follower of Ben Jonson—in many of his lyrics of love and gallant compliment.

See Robin Skelton, *Cavalier Poets* (1960).

The **Commonwealth Period,** also known as the **Puritan Interregnum,** extends from the end of the Civil War and the execution of Charles I in 1649 to the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660. In this period England was ruled by Parliament under the Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell; his death in 1658 marked the dissolution of the Commonwealth. Drama almost disappeared for eighteen years after the Puritans closed the public theaters in September 1642, not only on moral and religious grounds, but also to prevent public assemblies that might foment civil disorder. It was the age of Milton's political pamphlets, of Hobbes' political treatise *Leviathan* (1651), of the prose writers Sir Thomas Browne, Thomas Fuller, Jeremy Taylor, and Izaak Walton, and of the poets Henry Vaughan, Edmund Waller, Abraham Cowley, Sir William Davenant, and Andrew Marvell.

The **Neoclassical Period,** 1660–1785; see the entry *neoclassic and romantic.*

**Restoration.** This period takes its name from the restoration of the Stuart line (Charles II) to the English throne in 1660, at the end of the *Commonwealth;* it is specified as lasting until 1700. The urbanity, wit, and licentiousness of the life centering on the court, in sharp contrast to the seriousness and sobriety of the earlier Puritan regime, is reflected in much of the literature of this age. The theaters came back to vigorous life after the revocation of the ban placed on them by the Puritans in 1642, although they became more exlusively oriented toward the aristocratic classes than they had been earlier. Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve, and John Dryden developed the distinctive comedy of manners called *Restoration comedy,* and Dryden, Thomas Otway, and other playwrights developed the even more distinctive form of tragedy called *heroic drama.* Dryden was the major poet and critic, as well as one of the major dramatists. Other poets were the satirists Samuel Butler and the Earl of Rochester; notable writers in prose, in addition to the masterly Dryden, were Samuel Pepys, Sir William Temple, the religious writer in vernacular English John Bunyan, and the philosopher John Locke. Aphra Behn, the first Englishwoman to earn her living by her pen and one of the most inventive and versatile authors of the age, wrote poems, highly successful plays, and *Oroonoko,* the tragic story of a noble African slave, an important precursor of the *novel.*

See Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (1934); L. I. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* (1932).

**Augustan Age.** The original Augustan Age was the brilliant literary period of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid under the Roman emperor Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14). In the eighteenth century and later, however, the term was frequently applied also to the literary period in England from approximately 1700 to 1745. The leading writers of the time (such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Joseph Addison) themselves drew the parallel to the Roman Augustans, and deliberately imitated their literary forms and subjects, their emphasis on social concerns, and their ideals of moderation, decorum, and urbanity. (See *neoclassicism.*) A major representative of popular, rather than classical, writing in this period was the novelist, journalist, and pamphleteer Daniel Defoe. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a brilliant letter-writer in a great era of letter-writing; she also wrote poems of wit and candor that violated the conventional moral and intellectual roles assigned to women in the Augustan era.

**Age of Sensibility.** The period between the death of Alexander Pope in 1744, and 1785, which was one year after the death of Samuel Johnson and one year before Robert Burns' *Poems, Chiefly in Scottish Dialect.* (Alternative dates frequently proposed for the end of this period are 1789 and 1798; see *Romantic Period.*) An older name for this half-century, the **Age of Johnson,** stresses the dominant position of Samuel Johnson (1709–84) and his literary and intellectual circle, which included Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, James Boswell, Edward Gibbon, and Hester Lynch Thrale. These authors on the whole represented a culmination of the literary and critical modes of *neoclassicism* and the worldview of the *Enlightenment.* The more recent name, "Age of Sensibility," puts its stress on the emergence, in other writers of the 1740s and later, of new cultural attitudes, theories of literature, and types of poetry; we find in this period, for example, a growing sympathy for the Middle Ages, a vogue of *cultural primitivism,* an awakening interest in ballads and other folk literature, a turn from neoclassic "correctness" and its emphasis on judgment and restraint to an emphasis on instinct and feeling, the development of a *literature of sensibility,* and above all the exaltation by some critics of "original genius" and a "bardic" poetry of the sublime and visionary imagination. Thomas Gray expressed this anti-neoclassic sensibility and set of values in his "Stanzas to Mr. Bentley" (1752):

> But not to one in this benighted age
> Is that diviner inspiration given,
> That burns in Shakespeare's or in Milton's page,
> The pomp and prodigality of Heaven.

Other poets who showed similar shifts in thought and taste were William Collins and Joseph and Thomas Warton (poets who, together with Gray, began in the 1740s the vogue for what Samuel Johnson slightingly referred to as "ode, and elegy, and sonnet"), Christopher Smart, and William Cowper. Thomas Percy published his influential *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), which included many *folk ballads* and a few medieval metrical romances, and James Macpherson in the same decade published his greatly doctored (and in considerable part fabricated) versions of the poems of the Gaelic bard Ossian (Oisin) which were enormously popular throughout Europe. This was also the period of the great novelists, some realistic and satiric and some "sentimental": Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne.

See W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* (1946); Northrop Frye, "Toward Defining an Age of Sensibility," in *Fables of Identity* (1963), and ed. *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1965); F. W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, eds., *From Sensibility to Romanticism* (1965).



**Romantic Period.** The Romantic Period in English literature is dated as beginning in 1785 (see *Age of Sensibility*)—or alternatively in 1789 (the outbreak of the French Revolution), or in 1798 (the publication of William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*)—and as ending either in 1830 or else in 1832, the year in which Sir Walter Scott died and the passage of the Reform Bill signaled the political preoccupations of the Victorian era. For some characteristics of the thought and writings of this remarkable and diverse literary period, as well as for a list of suggested readings, see *neoclassic and romantic.* The term is often applied also to literary movements in European countries and America; see *periods of American literature.* Romantic characteristics are usually said to have been manifested first in Germany and England in the 1790s, and not to have become prominent in France and America until two or three decades after that time. Major English writers of the period, in addition to Wordsworth and Coleridge, were the poets Robert Burns, William Blake, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Walter Savage Landor; the prose writers Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Leigh Hunt; and the novelists Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, and Mary Shelley. The span between 1786 and the close of the eighteenth century was that of the *Gothic romances* by William Beckford, Matthew Gregory Lewis, William Godwin, and, above all, Anne Radcliffe.

**Victorian Period.** The beginning of the Victorian Period is frequently dated 1830, or alternatively 1832 (the passage of the first Reform Bill), and sometimes 1837 (the accession of Queen Victoria); it extends to the death of Victoria in 1901. Historians often subdivide the long period into three phases: Early Victorian (to 1848), Mid-Victorian (1848–70), and Late Victorian (1870–1901). Much writing of the period, whether imaginative or didactic, in verse or in prose, dealt with or reflected the pressing social, economic, religious, and intellectual issues and problems of that era. (For a summary of these issues, and also for the derogatory use of the term "Victorian," see *Victorian and Victorianism.*) Among the notable poets were Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, and Gerard Manley Hopkins (whose remarkably innovative poems, however, did not become known until they were published, long after his death, in 1918). The most prominent essayists were Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Arnold, and Walter Pater; the most distinguished of many excellent novelists (this was a great age of English prose fiction) were Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth

Gaskell, George Eliot, George Meredith, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, and Samuel Butler.

For prominent literary movements during the Victorian era, see the entries on *Pre-Raphaelites, Aestheticism,* and *Decadence.*

**Edwardian Period.** The span between the death of Victoria (1901) and the beginning of World War I (1914) is named for King Edward VII, who reigned from 1901 to 1910. Poets writing at the time included Thomas Hardy (who gave up novels for poetry at the beginning of the century), Alfred Noyes, William Butler Yeats, and Rudyard Kipling; dramatists included Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, James Barrie, John Galsworthy, George Bernard Shaw, and the playwrights of the *Celtic Revival* such as Lady Gregory, Yeats, and John M. Synge. Many of the major achievements were in prose fiction—works by Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and Henry James, who published his major final novels, *The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors,* and *The Golden Bowl,* between 1902 and 1904.

**Georgian Period** is a term applied both to the reigns in England of the four successive Georges (1714–1830) and (more frequently) to the reign of George V (1910–36). **Georgian poets** usually designates a group of writers in the latter era who loomed large in four anthologies entitled *Georgian Poetry,* which were published by Edward Marsh between 1912 and 1922. Marsh favored writers we now tend to regard as relatively minor poets such as Rupert Brooke, Walter de la Mare, Ralph Hodgson, W. H. Davies, and John Masefield. The term "Georgian poetry" has come to connote verse which is mainly rural in subject matter, deft and delicate rather than bold and passionate in manner, and traditional rather than experimental in technique and form.

**Modern Period.** The application of the term "modern," of course, varies with the passage of time, but it is frequently applied specifically to the literature written since the beginning of World War I in 1914; see *modernism and postmodernism.* This period has been marked by persistent and multidimensioned experiments in subject matter, form, and style, and has produced major achievements in all the literary genres. Among the notable writers are the poets W. B. Yeats, Wilfred Owen, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Robert Graves, Dylan Thomas, and Seamus Heaney; the novelists Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, and Nadine Gordimer; the dramatists G. B. Shaw, Sean O'Casey, Noel Coward, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, Brendan Behan, Frank McGuinness, and Tom Stoppard. The modern age was also an important era for literary criticism; among the innovative English critics were T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, Virginia Woolf, F. R. Leavis, and William Empson. (See *New Criticism.*)

This entry has followed what has been the widespread practice of including under "English literature" writers in the English language from all the British Isles. A number of the authors listed above, were in fact natives of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Of the Modern Period especially it can be said that much of the greatest "English" literature was written by the Irish writers Yeats,



Shaw, Joyce, O'Casey, Beckett, Iris Murdoch, and Seamus Heaney. And in recent decades, some of the most notable literary achievements in the English language have been written by natives of recently liberated English colonies (who are often referred to as "postcolonial authors"), including the South Africans Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, and Athol Fugard; the West Indians V. S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott; the Nigerians Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka; and the Indian novelists R. K. Narayan and Salman Rushdie. See *postcolonial studies.*

The **Postmodern Period** is a name sometimes applied to the era after World War II (1939–45). See *modernism and postmodernism* and for recent innovations in critical theory and practice, *poststructuralism.*

**Persona, Tone, and Voice.** These terms, frequent in recent criticism, reflect the tendency to think of narrative and lyric works of literature as a mode of speech, or in what is now a favored term, as *discourse.* To conceive a work as an utterance suggests that there is a speaker who has determinate personal qualities, and who expresses attitudes both toward the characters and materials within the work and toward the audience to whom the work is addressed. In his *Rhetoric* (fourth century B.C.), Aristotle, followed by other Greek and Roman rhetoricians, pointed out that an orator projects in the course of his oration an *ethos,* that is, a personal character, which itself functions as a means of persuasion. For example, if the impression a speaker projects is that of a person of rectitude, intelligence, and goodwill, the audience is instinctively inclined to give credence to such a speaker's arguments. The current concern with the nature and function of the author's presence in a work of imaginative literature is related to this traditional concept, and is part of the strong rhetorical emphasis in modern criticism. (See *rhetoric, rhetorical criticism,* and *speech-act theory.*)

Specific applications of the terms "persona," "tone," and "voice" vary greatly and involve difficult concepts in philosophy and social psychology—concepts such as "the self," "personal identity," "role-playing," and "sincerity." This essay will merely sketch some central uses of these terms that have proved helpful in analyzing our experience of diverse works of literature.

**Persona** was the Latin word for the mask worn by actors in the classical theater, from which was derived the term **dramatis personae** for the list of characters who play a role in a drama, and ultimately the English word "person," a particular individual. In recent literary discussion "persona" is often applied to the first-person speaker who tells the story in a narrative poem or novel, or whose voice we hear in a lyric poem. Examples of personae, in this broad application, are the visionary first-person narrator of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (who in the opening passages of various books of that epic discourses at some length about himself); the Gulliver who tells us about his misadventures in *Gulliver's Travels;* the "I" who carries on most of the conversation in Alexander Pope's satiric dialogue *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot;* the genial narrator of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones,* who pauses frequently for leisurely discourse with his reader; the speaker who talks first to himself, then to his sister,

constitute both the interpretation and evaluation of literature have been determined by a reader's *ideology* and by built-in biases about race, class, or gender. See Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation,* 1987; and for *feminist* emphasis on the male biases that affect the responses of readers, Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader* (1978); and Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio Schweikart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (1986).

A survey of a number of reader-response theories of criticism is included in Steven Mailloux's own contribution to this mode in *Interpretive Conventions* (1982); another survey from the point of view of deconstructive theory is Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (1987). Anthologies of diverse reader-response essays: Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman, eds., *The Reader in the Text* (1980); Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism* (1980). Important early instances of a criticism that is focused on the reader: Walter J. Slatoff, *With Respect to Readers* (1970); Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978); Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (trans., 1979).

In addition to the titles mentioned in this essay, the following are prominent exemplars of reader-response criticism: Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967) and *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1972); Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968) and *Five Readers Reading* (1975); Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). For critiques of Fish's "affective stylistics": Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981); Eugene Goodheart, *The Skeptic Disposition in Contemporary Criticism* (1984); M. H. Abrams, "How to Do Things with Texts," in *Doing Things with Texts* (1989).

**Realism and Naturalism.** **Realism** is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways: (1) to identify a movement in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century that included Honoré de Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America (see *realistic novel*, under *novel*), and (2) to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature.

Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. The *romance* is said to present life as we would have it be—more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality; realism, on the other hand, is said to represent life as it really is. This distinction in terms solely of subject matter, while relevant, is clearly inadequate. Casanova, T. E. Lawrence, and Winston Churchill were people in real life, but their biographies demonstrate that truth can be stranger than literary realism. It is more useful to identify realism in terms of the effect on the reader: realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen. To achieve such effects, the novelists we identify as realists may or may not be selective in subject matter—although most of them prefer the commonplace and the everyday, represented in minute detail, over rarer aspects of life—but they must render their materials in ways that make them seem to their readers the very stuff of ordinary experience. For example, Daniel Defoe in the early eighteenth century dealt with the extraordinary adventures of a shipwrecked mariner named Robinson Crusoe and with the extraordinary misadventures of a woman named Moll Flanders; but he made his novels seem to readers a mirror held up to reality by his reportorial manner of rendering all the events, whether ordinary or extraordinary, in the same circumstantial, matter-of-fact, and seemingly unselective way. Both the fictions of Franz Kafka and the present-day novels of *magic realism* achieve their effects in large part by exploiting a realistic manner in rendering events that are in themselves fantastic, absurd, or flatly impossible.

Russian *formalists*, followed more systematically by *structuralist critics*, proposed that both the selection of subject matter and the techniques of rendering in a realistic novel depend on their accordance with literary *convention* and codes which the reader has learned to interpret, or *naturalize*, in a way that makes the text seem a reflection of everyday reality. (See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *French Literary Theory Today,* ed. Tzvetan Todorov, 1982, and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics,* 1975, chapter 7, "Convention and Naturalization.") Some theorists draw the conclusion that, since all literary representations are constituted by arbitrary conventions, there is no valid ground for holding any one kind of fiction to be more realistic than any other. It is a matter of common experience, however, that some novels indeed produce on the reader the effect of representing the ordinary course of events. Skepticism about the possibility of fictional realism is not an empirical doctrine which is based on the widespread experience of readers of literature, but a metaphysical doctrine that denies the existence of any objective reality that is independent of altering human conventions and cultural formations. (For philosophical discussions of conventionality and reality, see the essays by Hilary Putnam, Nelson Goodman, and Menachem Brinker in *New Literary History,* Vol. 13, 1981, and Vol. 14, 1983.)

**Naturalism** is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection of subject matter and a special way of rendering those materials; it is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis. This thesis, a product of post-Darwinian biology in the nineteenth century, held that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher-order animal whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment. A person inherits compulsive instincts—especially hunger, the drive to accumulate possessions, and sexuality—and is then subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class, and the milieu into which that person is born. The French novelist Émile Zola, beginning in the 1870s, did much to develop this theory in what he called "le roman expérimental" (that is, the

novel organized in the mode of a scientific experiment on the behavior of the characters it depicts). Zola and later naturalistic writers, such as the Americans Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, try to present their subjects with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation, sometimes including an almost medical frankness about activities and bodily functions usually unmentioned in earlier literature. They tend to choose characters who exhibit strong animal drives such as greed and sexual desire, and who are helpless victims both of glandular secretions within and of sociological pressures without. The end of the naturalistic novel is usually "tragic," but not, as in classical and Elizabethan *tragedy*, because of a heroic but losing struggle of the individual mind and will against gods, enemies, and circumstances. Instead the protagonist of the naturalistic plot, a pawn to multiple compulsions, usually disintegrates, or is wiped out.

Aspects of the naturalistic selection and management of subject matter and its austere or harsh manner of rendering its materials are apparent in many modern novels and dramas, such as Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, 1895 (although Hardy largely substituted a cosmic determinism for biological and environmental determinism), various plays by Eugene O'Neill in the 1920s, and Norman Mailer's novel of World War II, *The Naked and the Dead*. An enlightening exercise is to distinguish how the relation between the sexes is represented in a romance (Richard Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, 1869), an ironic comedy of manners (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813), a realistic novel (William Dean Howells' *A Modern Instance*, 1882), and a naturalistic novel (Émile Zola's *Nana*, 1880, or Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, 1925). Movements originally opposed both to nineteenth-century realism and naturalism (though some modern works, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, 1922, combine aspects of all these novelistic modes) are *expressionism* and *symbolism* (see *Symbolist Movement*).

See *socialist realism*, and refer to Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953); Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957); Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1960); Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (1963); René Wellek, "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship," in *Concepts of Criticism* (1963); J. P. Stern, *On Realism* (1973); Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England* (1975); George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (1981); Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (rev., 1984).

**Reception-Theory** is the historical application of a form of *reader-response* theory that was proposed by Hans Robert Jauss in "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" (in *New Literary History*, Vol. 2, 1970–71). Like other reader-response criticism, it focuses on the reader's reception of a text; its prime interest, however, is not on the response of a single reader at a given time, but on the altering responses, interpretive and evaluative, of the general reading public over the course of time. Jauss proposes that although a text has no "objective meaning," it does contain a variety of objectively describable features. The response of a particular reader, which constitutes for that reader the meaning and aesthetic qualities of a text, is the joint product of the reader's own "horizon of expectations" and the confirmations, disappointments, refutations, and reformulations of these expectations when they are "challenged" by the features of the text itself. Since the linguistic and aesthetic expectations of the population of readers change over the course of time, and since later readers and critics have access not only to the text but also to the published responses of earlier readers, there develops an evolving historical "tradition" of critical interpretations and evaluations of a given literary work. Following concepts proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (see under *interpretation and hermeneutics*), Jauss represents this tradition as a continuing "dialectic," or "dialogue," between a text and the horizons of successive readers; in itself, a literary text possesses no fixed and final meanings or value.

This mode of studying literary reception as a dialogue, or "fusion" of horizons, has a double aspect. As a **reception-aesthetic**, it "defines" the meaning and aesthetic qualities of any individual text as a set of implicit semantic and aesthetic "potentialities" which become manifest only as they are realized by the cumulative responses of readers over the course of time. In its other aspect as a **reception-history**, this mode of study also transforms the history of literature—traditionally conceived as an account of the successive production of a variety of works with fixed meanings and values—by making it a history that requires an "ever necessary retelling," since it narrates the changing yet cumulative way that selected texts are interpreted and assessed, as the horizons of successive generations of readers alter in the passage of time.

See Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), and *The Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982); and for a history and discussion of this viewpoint, Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1984).

**Refrain.** A line, or part of a line, or a group of lines, which is repeated in the course of a poem, sometimes with slight changes, and usually at the end of each stanza. The refrain occurs in many ballads and work poems, and is a frequent element in Elizabethan songs, where it may be merely a nonverbal carrier of the melodic line, as in Shakespeare's "It Was a Lover and His Lass": "With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino." A famous refrain is that which closes each stanza in Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion" (1594)—"The woods shall to me answer, and my echo ring"—in which sequential changes indicate the altering sounds during the successive hours of the poet's wedding day. The refrain in Spenser's "Prothalamion"—"Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song"—is echoed ironically in Part III of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), where it is applied to the Thames in the modern age of polluted rivers.

A refrain may consist only of a single word—"Nevermore" as in Poe's "The Raven" (1845)—or of an entire stanza. If the stanza-refrain occurs in a song, as a section to be sung by all the auditors, it is called the **chorus**; for, example, in "Auld Lang Syne" and many other songs by Robert Burns in the late eighteenth century.