

Literary Movements and Schools of Thought

Aestheticism: A nineteenth-century literary movement that rested on the credo of “Art for Art’s Sake.” One of its dominant figures is Oscar Wilde, who insisted on the separation of art and morality.

Aristotelian: Literally, criticism by Aristotle, or criticism that follows the methods used by Aristotle. Aristotle asserted the value of poetry by focusing on imitation rather than rhetoric. He argued that poetry provides a safe outlet for the release of intense emotions. He also claimed that poetry models the valuable experience of passing from ignorance to knowledge.

Beat Movement: A period featuring a group of American poets and novelists of the 1950s and 1960s, including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who rejected established social and literary values. Using such techniques as stream of consciousness writing and jazz-influenced free verse and focusing on unusual or abnormal states of mind, generated by religious ecstasy or the use of drugs, the Beat writers aimed to create works that were unconventional in both form and subject matter. Kerouac's *On the Road* is perhaps the best-known example of a Beat Generation novel, and Ginsberg's *Howl* is a famous collection of Beat Poetry.

Classicism: Critical doctrines that have their roots in ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, and art. Works associated with classicism typically exhibit restraint on the part of the author, unity of design and purpose, clarity, simplicity, logical organization, and respect for tradition. Examples of literary classicism include the poetry of John Dryden and Alexander Pope, and the writings of J. W. von Goethe and T. S. Eliot.

Cultural Studies: The project of cultural studies is to understand the functioning of culture, particularly in the modern world: how cultural productions work and how cultural identities are constructed and organized, for individuals and groups, in a world of diverse and intermingled communities, state power, media industries and multinational corporations. Cultural studies include and encompass literary studies, examining literature as a particular cultural practice.

Ethnic Studies/Minority Discourse: Examines literature from groups traditionally seen as “marginal” to US culture, such as Native, Asian and Latino, as well as examining literature of groups that became provisionally accepted, such as Jewish and Italian, and/or moved from being perceived as “ethnic” to “white,” such as Irish or Scottish. African-American criticism is often considered a branch of ethnic/ racial studies which shifts from discussing race as an identity to examining race as a cultural construct, it also maintains political commitments, but moves toward coalition models (from “black is beautiful” to “people of color”).

Existentialism: A predominantly twentieth-century philosophy concerned with the nature and perception of human existence. There are two major strains of existentialist thought: atheistic and Christian. Followers of atheistic existentialism believe that the individual is alone in a godless universe and that the basic human condition is one of suffering and loneliness. Nevertheless, because there are no fixed values, individuals can create their own characters — indeed, they can shape themselves — through the exercise of free will. The atheistic strain culminates in and is popularly associated with the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. The Christian existentialists, on the other hand, believe that only in God may people find freedom from life's anguish. The

two strains hold certain beliefs in common: that existence cannot be fully understood or described through empirical effort; that anguish is a universal element of life; that individuals must bear responsibility for their actions; and that there is no common standard of behavior or perception for religious and ethical matters.

Existentialist thought figures prominently in the works of such authors as Eugene Ionesco, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Simone de Beauvoir, Samuel Beckett, and Albert Camus.

Feminist Criticism/Theory: Feminist theorists champion the identity of women, demand rights for women, and promote women's writings as representations of the experience of women. Feminists also undertake a critique of the heterosexual and patriarchal matrices that organizes identities and cultures in terms of the opposition between man and woman. In addition to recovering neglected works by women authors through the ages, feminist criticism has become a wide-ranging exploration of the construction of gender and identity, the role of women in culture and society, and possibilities of women's creative expression.

Formalism: A term applied to criticism that emphasizes the form of artwork, with "form" variously constructed to mean generic form, type, verbal form, grammatical and syntactical form, rhetorical form, or verse form.

Gothicism: In literary criticism, works characterized by a taste for the medieval or morbidly attractive. A gothic novel prominently features elements of horror, the supernatural, gloom, and violence: clanking chains, terror, charnel houses, ghosts, medieval castles, and mysteriously slamming doors. The term "gothic novel" is also applied to novels that lack elements of the traditional Gothic setting but that create a similar atmosphere of terror or dread. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is perhaps the best-known English work of this kind.

Harlem Renaissance: (Also known as Negro Renaissance and New Negro Movement.) The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s is generally considered the first significant movement of black writers and artists in the United States. During this period, new and established black writers published more fiction and poetry than ever before, the first influential black literary journals were established, and black authors and artists received their first widespread recognition and serious critical appraisal. Among the major writers associated with this period are Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Works representative of the Harlem Renaissance include Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem*, Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," and the journals *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, both founded during this period.

Humanism: The new emphasis in the Renaissance on human culture, education and reason, sparked by a revival of interest in classical Greek and Roman literature, culture, and language. Human nature and the dignity of man were exalted and emphasis was placed on the present life as a worthy event in itself (as opposed to the medieval emphasis on the present life merely as preparation for a future life). Humanist thought is represented in the works of Marsilio Ficino, Ludovico Castelvetro, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, Dean John Colet, Desiderius Erasmus, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Matthew Arnold, and Irving Babbitt.

Imagism: An English and American Poetry movement that flourished between 1908 and 1917. The Imagists used precise, clearly presented images in their works. They also used common, everyday speech and aimed for conciseness, concrete imagery, and the creation of new rhythms. Participants in the Imagist movement included Ezra Pound, H. D. (Hilda

Doolittle), Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams.

Lost Generation: A term first used by Gertrude Stein to describe the post-World War I generation of American writers: men and women haunted by a sense of betrayal and emptiness brought about by the destructiveness of the war. The term is commonly applied to Hart Crane, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others.

Magical Realism: A style characterized by the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, bizarre and skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable.

Marxist: Criticism based on the doctrines of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and their disciples. Marxism assumes that independent reality of matter and its priority over mind. It teaches a theory of value based on labor, the economic determination of all social actions and institutions, the class struggle as the basic pattern in history, the inevitable seizure of power through the revolution of the working class (proletariat), the dictatorship of that proletariat and the ultimate establishment of a classless society. In one sense Marxism must be revolutionary. Marxist critics also study whether a work subverts or upholds the current class and/or economic system.

Metaphysical Poetry: The body of poetry produced by a group of seventeenth-century English writers called the "Metaphysical Poets." The group includes John Donne and Andrew Marvell. The Metaphysical Poets made use of everyday speech, intellectual analysis, and unique imagery. They aimed to portray the ordinary conflicts and contradictions of life. Their poems often took the form of an argument, and many of

them emphasize physical and religious love as well as the fleeting nature of life.

Elaborate conceits are typical in metaphysical poetry.

Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is a well-known example of a metaphysical poem.

Modernism: The principles of a literary school that lasted from roughly the beginning of the twentieth century until the end of World War II. Modernism is defined by its rejection of the literary conventions of the nineteenth century and by its opposition to conventional morality, taste, traditions, and economic values.

Many writers are associated with the concepts of Modernism, including Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, D. H. Lawrence, W. H. Auden, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, William Butler Yeats, Thomas Mann, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and James Joyce.

Naturalism: A literary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The movement's major theorist, French novelist Emile Zola, envisioned a type of fiction that would examine human life with the objectivity of scientific inquiry. The Naturalists typically viewed human beings as either the products of "biological determinism," ruled by hereditary instincts and engaged in an endless struggle for survival, or as the products of "socioeconomic determinism," ruled by social and economic forces beyond their control. In their works, the Naturalists generally ignored the highest levels of society and focused on degradation: poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, insanity, and disease.

Naturalism influenced authors throughout the world, including Henrik Ibsen and Thomas Hardy. In the United States, in particular, Naturalism had a profound impact. Among the authors who embraced its principles are Theodore Dreiser, Eugene O'Neill, Stephen Crane and Jack London.

Neoclassicism: (Also known as Age of Reason.) In literary criticism, this term refers to the revival of the attitudes and styles of expression of classical literature. It is generally used to describe a period in European history beginning in the late seventeenth century and lasting until about 1800. In its purest form, Neoclassicism marked a return to order, proportion, restraint, logic, accuracy, and decorum. In England, where Neoclassicism perhaps was most popular, it reflected the influence of seventeenth-century French writers, especially dramatists. Neoclassical writers typically reacted against the intensity and enthusiasm of the Renaissance period. They wrote works that appealed to the intellect, using elevated language and classical literary forms such as satire and the ode. Neoclassical works were often governed by the classical goal of instruction. English neoclassicists included Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Sir Richard Steele, John Gay, and Matthew Prior; French neoclassicists included Pierre Corneille and Jean-Baptiste Moliere.

New Criticism: A movement in literary criticism, dating from the late 1920s, that stressed close textual analysis in the interpretation of works of literature. The New Critics saw little merit in historical and biographical analysis. Rather, they aimed to examine the text alone, free from the question of how external events — biographical or otherwise — may have helped shape it.

This predominantly American school was named "New Criticism" by one of its practitioners, John Crowe Ransom. Other important New Critics included Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks.

New Historicism: Tends to be social, economic and political and it views literary works (particularly Renaissance dramas and Victorian novels) as instruments for the displaying and enforcing doctrines about conduct, etiquette and law.

Platonian Criticism: Finds the value of a work of art in its extrinsic rather than its intrinsic qualities in its usefulness for ulterior non-artistic purposes.

Post-Aesthetic Movement: An artistic response made by African Americans to the black aesthetic movement of the 1960s and early '70s. Writers since that time have adopted a somewhat different tone in their work, with less emphasis placed on the disparity between black and white in the United States. In the words of post-aesthetic authors such as Toni Morrison, John Edgar Wideman, and Kristin Hunter, African Americans are portrayed as looking inward for answers to their own questions, rather than always looking to the outside world. Two well-known examples of works produced as part of the post-aesthetic movement are the Pulitzer Prize-winning novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

Post Colonialism: A theory that attempts to understand the problems posed by the European colonization and its aftermath. It examines literature from areas that were formerly colonized and that is created in the language or art forms of the colonizers, literature that has been influenced by the presence of the colonizers or literature that reflects colonization.

Postmodernism: Writing from the 1960s forward characterized by experimentation and continuing to apply some of the fundamentals of modernism, which included existentialism and alienation.

Postmodernists have gone a step further in the rejection of tradition begun with the modernists by also rejecting traditional forms, preferring the anti-novel over the novel and the anti-hero over the hero. Postmodern writers include Thomas Pynchon, Margaret Drabble and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Psychoanalytic Criticism: These critics view works through the lens of psychology.

They look either at the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves, although the former is generally considered a more respected approach. Most frequently, psychological critics apply Freudian psychology to works, but other approaches such as a Jungian approach also exist.

Reader-response: This kind of criticism suggests that a piece of writing scarcely exists except as a text designed to be read; indeed, scarcely exists until somebody reads it. The reader-response approach does not so much analyze a reader's responding apparatus as scrutinize those features of the text that shape and guide a reader's reading.

Realism: A nineteenth-century European literary movement that sought to portray familiar characters, situations, and settings in a realistic manner. This was done primarily by using an objective narrative point of view and through the buildup of accurate detail. The standard for success of any realistic work depends on how faithfully it transfers common experience into fictional forms. The realistic method may be altered or extended, as in stream of consciousness writing, to record highly subjective experience.

Seminal authors in the tradition of Realism include Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Henry James.

Romanticism: This term has two widely accepted meanings. In historical criticism, it refers to a European intellectual and artistic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that sought greater freedom of personal expression than that allowed by the strict rules of literary form and logic of the eighteenth-century neoclassicists. The Romantics preferred emotional and imaginative expression to rational analysis. They considered the individual to be at the center of all experience and so placed him or her at the center of their art. The Romantics believed that the creative imagination reveals nobler truths, unique feelings and attitudes, than

those that could be discovered by logic or by scientific examination. Both the natural world and the state of childhood were important sources for revelations of "eternal truths." "Romanticism" is also used as a general term to refer to a type of sensibility found in all periods of literary history and usually considered to be in opposition to the principles of classicism. In this sense, Romanticism signifies any work or philosophy in which the exotic or dreamlike figure strongly, or that is devoted to individualistic expression, self-analysis, or a pursuit of a higher realm of knowledge than can be discovered by human reason. Prominent Romantics include Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Surrealism: A movement in art emphasizing the expression of the imagination as realized in dreams and presented without conscious control. What seems genuinely "surreal" about surrealism, whether in graphic or literary art, is its habit of lucidly juxtaposing scarcely compatible tokens of potentially symbolic concrete objects.

Symbolism: A literary movement that originated in late-nineteenth century France, in which writers rearranged the world or appearances in order to reveal a more truthful version of reality. The Symbolists believed that direct statements of feeling were inadequate; instead they called for new and striking imaginative images to evoke complexities of meaning and mood.

Transcendentalism: A nineteenth-century movement in the Romantic tradition, which held that every individual can reach ultimate truths through spiritual intuition, which transcends reason and sensory experience. The Transcendental movement gained its impetus in America in part from meetings of a small group that came together to discuss "new thought." The movement was centered in Concord, Massachusetts, the

home of its leading exponents, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The basic tenets of the Transcendentalists were a belief that God is present in every aspect of Nature, including every human being, the convictions that everyone is capable of apprehending God through the use of intuition and the belief that all of Nature is symbolic of the spirit. A corollary of these beliefs was an optimistic view of the world as good and evil as nonexistent.